

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Fraternal / Baptist Ministers Journal* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bmj-06.php



The Baptist Ministers' Journal

January 2005

Vol 289
ISSN 0968 - 2406

Editor: HAZEL SHERMAN

Contents

Editorial	2
Enabling Christians to Forgive John Weaver.....	3
Can Baptist Christians get on? Barrie Smith	10
From the Guest House of Benevolence Gethin Abraham-Williams	16
'Outside the Box' Michael Cleaves	22
J-mail Bob Allaway	27
Holidays 2005	27
Review Section.....	28
Of Interest to You	32

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

*Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled...*

It's only a few weeks since churches and shopping malls everywhere were ringing with such hopes. Quite apart from the tired conversations about the commercialisation of Christmas, we might very well want to ask what such a message of reconciliation might mean again now that Christmas is over for another year.

We carry around with us aspects of former conflicts unacknowledged, or recognised but unresolved. This is a fact of life. Behaving as if saying "OK" to "I'm sorry" wipes out the wrong may work in cases of slammed doors or treading on toes, but we know very well that this is utterly inadequate when it comes to the rawness of being misunderstood or hurt by those whom we think ought to know us better, or when the fragile fabric of community is ripped apart by escalating suspicion and blame. Two rather different but complementary articles this January seek to highlight deeper understandings and draw out some practical implications.

I was particularly interested to read the impressions reflected by Gethin Abraham-Williams on his return from a visit to China. Some years ago, I listened intently and with great interest to a representative of the Chinese church at an international symposium. This soon turned to alarm at my own naivety when, after her departure, others more aware than I of some of the church-state tensions of that time, cast doubt on the value of much she had said. Such stories as emerge from 'the guesthouse of benevolence' later in this Journal highlight both some of the hope and some of the tension emerging in the church as it takes varying form in China today. To learn to listen critically, though not negatively, is a lifetime's learning curve – and to seek to let that listening inform our own attitudes is a challenge we can't avoid if we are serious about the notion of Christian Unity and interdependency.

This year, the Week of Christian Unity takes as its theme Jesus' peace-prayer for his disciples (John 14: 23-31). The churches of Aleppo in Syria have been responsible for the material which will be used in many churches throughout the world. We read, in the introduction to the theme:

"For the churches of the Middle East today, living side by side as a minority within their culture, with their multiplicity and their many mixed marriages, the work of ecumenism is not an abstract ideal but a vital need. Only through fostering an ecumenical spirit are they able to exist meaningfully. Unity and peace are their most heartfelt concerns, their paramount and all pervasive dream. A common struggle has brought them together and a vision of the future serves to unite them. Peace is their daily worry, their abiding hope."

There are no watertight compartments. Larger questions of what reconciliation *means* are bound up with the possibly tongue-in-cheek "Can Baptist Christians get on?" Peace for us will not come apart from peace for our world, and peace for our world may not come apart from the quest towards unity - and when we experience or explore Ministry as Chaplaincy (intentionally or not) in ways like those described by Michael Cleaves we are back in the listening business again, discovering points of connection between all these things. **bmj**

Enabling Christians to Forgive

John Weaver, South Wales Baptist College, suggests that by acting as if forgiveness and pardon were equivalents, Christians risk missing the deeper dynamic of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Introduction:

Whoever plans revenge should dig two graves (Chinese proverb)¹

Forgiveness is a major sticking point in pastoral ministry, because, depending on the seriousness of the offence, people generally find it difficult, if not impossible, to forgive. The words of Jesus, read or preached, often produce a negative or angry reaction:

*For if you forgive others, when they sin against you,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you.
But if you do not forgive others their sins,
your Father will not forgive your sins.* Matthew 6:14-15

But when I have spoken with some of my congregation who have reacted against such a text, I have discovered that they have misunderstood the meaning of forgiveness and the reconciliation that lies as its goal. We need to correct the belief that forgiveness means that everything is alright; a "happy ending" that leaves the wronged person feeling cheated. To offer forgiveness is a statement that something is wrong: what you said to me, thought about me, or did to me, is wrong. The act of repentance is similar: I recognise that what I did, said, thought, is wrong.

In discussing the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, John de Gruchy states that we must never deny the reality of what people have experienced. He goes on to ask: Are we speaking about reconciliation in order to forget the past, or in order to deal justly with its legacy? Dare we proclaim such a message if in doing so we reinforce structures of injustice and undermine the will to resist and transform? How dare we speak of reconciliation in a world in which there is little justice for the victims of oppression, an immodest haste to forget atrocities and forgive perpetrators of their crimes?²

A military chaplain described a discussion that developed during his work. "During a recent presentation of the Just War theory to a group of soldiers, one of them asked, 'How can justice have value in a country full of hatred like Northern Ireland?' The soldier went on to question the idea of forgiveness within the Province and the contribution the church can make to the process."³ (Northern Ireland has witnessed over 3600 killed in the last 35 years, mostly civilians, and suffers over 1800 unsolved murders.)⁴

What is true of divisions between people groups is true of relationships within families and within the church.

As part of a first year course in Practical Theology at Cardiff, I spent two hours exploring some of these issues and feelings with a group of eleven Anglican, Baptist and Methodist ministerial students. The following are some of the thoughts that developed from our discussions.

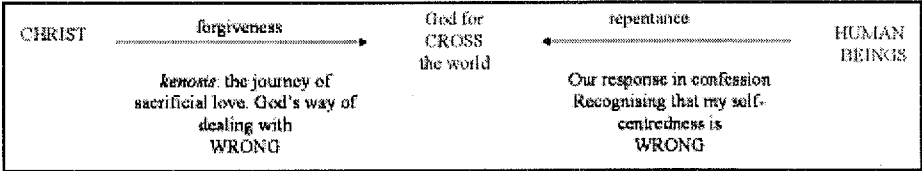
Understanding forgiveness and reconciliation:

We took as our starting point Paul Fiddes’ exploration of the Christian idea of Atonement in *Past Event and Present Salvation*. Jesus’ death for the world is expressed in terms of forgiveness. While some people speak of the Cross as God’s pardon for the condemned prisoner, we realise that a pardon does not necessarily change the prisoner’s attitude to the judge, the victim, or to their offence. Fiddes states that forgiveness is a shattering experience for the one who forgives as well as for the one who is forgiven. “This is because forgiveness, unlike a mere pardon, seeks to win the offender back into relationship Reconciliation is a costly process because there are resistances to it in the attitude of the person who has offended; the one who sets out to forgive must aim to remove those blockages and restore the relationship. Forgiveness then involves an acceptance which is costly.”⁵

We recognised that forgiveness in seeking to create a response would always be a time-consuming, expensive effort, involving difficult and painful emotions and attitudes of the will. While the refusal of a royal pardon would seem to make no sense, a human lack of response to the grace of God in Christ is not so surprising when we realise that we are talking of forgiveness. It is hard to accept forgiveness, as this requires a personal response, which necessitates repentance.

In exploring repentance we recognised that this also included emotional and volitional energy and pain.

We produced a provisional diagram with two equal and opposite journeys, one of forgiveness and one of repentance, both of which declared the same message, namely, that what had occurred was wrong.



Fiddes, in his careful exploration of forgiveness and reconciliation helpfully draws out the implications for us:

We notice that in any act of forgiveness there is a change that takes place in both the participants, in the forgiver as much as in the one who is forgiven. For true reconciliation there must be a movement from both sides. Naturally the offender has to move in sorrow and repentance towards the person he has hurt, but the forgiver also needs to move and experience change within himself, even when he has been totally willing to forgive.⁶

Forgiveness is an act that enables people to be fulfilled, an empowering of life in its God-given fullness (John 10:10). This is God's act in Christ. From this position we began to explore the model of forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation exemplified in God's act of grace through the Cross, and our response.

The basis of forgiveness in atonement:

The Gospel is about overcoming alienation and estrangement between us and God, and between each other. Reconciliation includes justice and has to do with the healing of relationships. The doctrine of Atonement is an important basis for developing forgiveness and reconciliation in pastoral relationships, through our understanding of God's act of forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ, which is of a different dimension to that between sinners. Guthrie clearly focuses our understanding:

The biblical doctrine of the atonement teaches that it is God who initiates and fulfils the reconciliation between sinful humanity and God. God is the subject, not the object, of what happened on Good Friday.

And he goes on to emphasise that

It is not the guilty but the injured party who acts to restore the broken relationship ... it is not God who is reconciled to us but God who makes peace with us. This is what the death of Jesus is all about.⁷

de Gruchy notes that in the NT the words for "reconciliation" are compounds of the Greek *allasso*, to exchange, and this in turn is derived from *allos*, meaning the other. "The words thus carry with them the sense of exchanging places with 'the other', and therefore being in solidarity with rather than against 'the other.'"⁸ This accords with the Gospel, which has representation at its heart. de Gruchy maintains that it is when we recognise the "other" we hopefully come to know the "other." The next step is a willingness to listen to the other's story. The critical step in reconciliation is to put ourselves in the place of the "other."

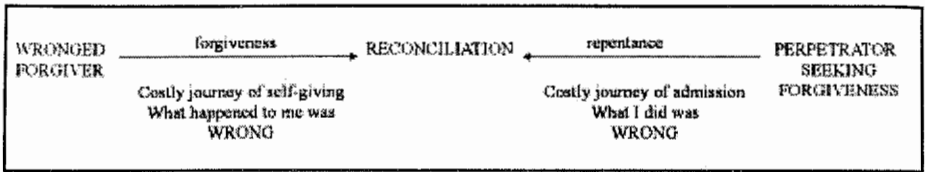
Reconciliation is always located in the particular. He suggests that

there comes a point in the process when reconciliation becomes a reality, when the conversation reaches a new level of commitment, embrace and shared hope. This is the point when marriage partners are able to heal their failing relationship, and a country decisively breaks with its oppressive and divisive past and embarks on building a new future.⁹

However the seriousness of sin cannot be overlooked, for to do so would deny our God-given free will, which is able to respond to God's love. de Gruchy rightly states that

the reality of the world reconciled by God in Christ does not mean that the world has become good, that all evil has been eradicated, or that the reign of God has come. Quite the contrary, for the world remains the world because it is the world which is loved, condemned and reconciled in Christ.¹⁰

At this stage we attempted to explore forgiveness through a second diagram, which focused on our forgiveness and reconciliation with God through the Cross of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:20).



God, in Christ has made the painful and costly journey of forgiveness, encountering us with the offer of acceptance, mercy and love. The focus of this offer of forgiveness is seen in the Cross. The Gospel is not sentimental words of forgiveness but has the cry of the Cross, the abandonment of Christ by God, and the descent into hell in order to redeem the world. There is no cheap grace here.

For reconciliation to take place we must make the painful and costly (in terms of self-denial and admission of guilt) journey to the Cross in repentance. The journey of Christ to the Cross is a statement that our way of life is not as God desires, it is wrong. Our journey of repentance is the confession that we know that much in our lives is wrong.

Fiddes expresses something of the enormous depth of God’s grace as demonstrated by the following:

Though himself living in tune with the Father’s mind, he [Christ] consents to participate in the alienation which is the lot of humanity which has lost communion with God. He stands with the guilty under the weight of the verdict which God passes upon rebellious human life the plea ‘Father forgive them’ does not conflict with the awful cry ‘My God why have you forsaken me?’ but brings out its meaning, since forgiveness is nothing less than a voyage into the dark void of the guilty life.¹¹

Human alienation and broken relationships are taken into the very being of God and addressed through *kenosis* and sacrificial love. There are enormous pastoral implications and applications here, especially as a challenge to all our relationships and the way in which we view forgiveness.

There are now two further dimensions to consider, for it is in the Cross that our relationship with God is restored and our relationship with others is challenged. As Paul expressed to the Corinthian church, we who have found reconciliation now offer reconciliation to the world (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Christian reconciliation has an eschatological dimension, recognised when we speak of God in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:19)

The Eucharist as a place of reconciliation:

In the OT the focus was on the Passover, the celebration of the old covenant, where the ideas of redemption and purification are also present – Exodus 12:24-27; 24:6-8. In the NT the focus moves to the new meaning that Jesus gave to the Passover - the new covenant in the death of Christ – 1 Corinthians 5:7; John 1:29; Hebrews 10:12. The cross of Jesus was the decisive act of God in dealing with the problem of human sin, and for the church of Christ the focus moves to the Lord’s Supper and Baptism.

Helpfully, de Gruchy states his view that

the sacraments are communal acts of remembering and representing the Gospel narrative through dramatic actions, using material signs and symbols – water, bread and wine, and acts of peacemaking and reparation. The sacraments rightly understood and practised within the worship life of the Church play a central role in shaping Christian community and its witness to God’s reconciliation.¹²

We recognise the sacraments as a means of grace for healing and transformation, and for creating community.

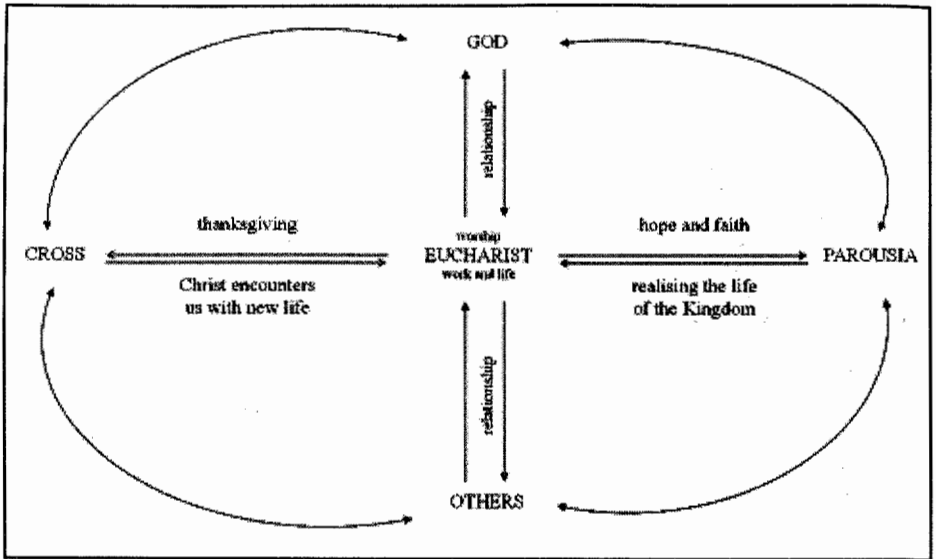
In her work, *Communion shapes Character*, Ellie Kreider¹³ explores this aspect of the Eucharist. She asserts that communion is Christ’s gift to the church, so that through it the great story of incarnation and salvation may be told and retold. She maintains that churches will be renewed when the Lord’s Supper, graced by God’s presence and Word, orientated to the living Lord and empowered by his Spirit, is fully restored to the place it had in the early centuries of the church. It is in the supper that God, who is Spirit, reaches out to communicate with us through this eucharistic service of bread and wine. We receive forgiveness, joy, healing and reconciliation - the fruit of our loving relationship with God. The meaning of the cross is clearly seen as our worship proclaims the Lord’s death. Christ’s own self-giving is mirrored in relationships within his church.

Jesus’ challenge to his disciples of drinking the cup that he must drink (Mark 10:38) is worked out in our new creation “in Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Christ who is our peace, has brought a new humanity into being, breaking down the walls of enmity through his death on the Cross. He has reconciled people to God and to each other. (Ephesians 2:11-22) Kreider maintains that reconciliation is at the heart of the Gospel, and warns that

When gospel and peace are pulled apart, terrible things can happen, as we have seen in countries where Christians have preached a personalised salvation and have not emphasised that the gospel has everything to do with how to live out national or clan identity.¹⁴

She stresses that it is important that “forgiven people are empowered to live as forgiving people, passing on good news of freedom from the compulsions and domination of sin.”¹⁵ The Eucharist combines forgiveness, reconciliation and fellowship. Kreider therefore urges us to recognise that how we take communion makes a difference, because we act out our communion theology. Do we express our fellowship in Christ or are we merely a group of individuals who have happened to gather for this meal. She believes that “dead ritual” is easy to spot. A moribund rite is no substitute for reality, for example, the breaking of bread and pouring of wine in a congregation of people whose lives are in no way broken for the world or poured out in love for their neighbours.¹⁶ It is in confident hope that we receive forgiveness and the daily bread for our life, which are the unmistakable signs of the kingdom coming. We covenant together and become reconciled in the name of Jesus, and then we turn outward to the task of reconciliation that God has given us.

From this understanding we constructed a third diagram, which brings together our models of Cross, reconciled relationships with God and with each other, and the eucharistic meal, where this may take place. We can interpret the sharing of “the Peace” in this way – reconciled with God and with each other.



Conclusion:

There is a clear need for forgiveness and reconciliation in our world, within our church fellowships and in our personal relationships. Christian reconciliation is founded on God's pattern – "The Word became flesh." It is not an abstract philosophy, a doctrine, or some utopian thought, it is grounded in historical reality, as Fiddes emphasises in *Past Event, Present Salvation*. As de Gruchy says, "Reconciliation is an event, a praxis, a process and celebration, before it becomes a doctrine or a theory." ¹⁷ The infant church embodied reconciliation (Acts 2:42-47; c.f. Ephesians 2:11-16), which is not to say that the early church did not have its rifts and divisions, as we see in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church. He encouraged them to rediscover the meaning of healing divisions through the Eucharist, when celebrated aright (1 Corinthians 11).

Reconciliation cuts through all the divisions that society creates, for the infant church it included the Gentiles. The church is to be an example of a reconciling community (2 Corinthians 5:11-20). Reconciliation is eschatological and is part of a future hope in which all will be one in Christ. It involves letting go of the past and embracing God's future. The Christian faith sets up signposts of reconciliation and the Church is God's agent of reconciliation in the world.

But whatever its failures the Church is the body of Christ, and it is the Spirit of Christ that constantly challenges the Church to break free from its captivity to the selfishness and self-centredness that divides.

When we fail to strive for forgiveness and reconciliation we run the risk of marring our life on earth and our eternal destiny. We recognise the damage and bitterness when people find it impossible to forgive, for whatever reason. Arnold quotes William Blake's poem *A Poison Tree*¹⁸, the first verse of which expresses a truth about unforgiveness:

I was angry with my friend:
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe:
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

The bitterness of an unforgiving heart can destroy someone so that their personality becomes distorted and unattractive. But as de Gruchy concludes, "covenanting to restore justice, covenanting together as a people reconciled to God and one another, covenanting to restore relations with the "other", requires then a commitment to live and work in anticipation of what God promises."¹⁹

Our Baptist forebears spoke of 'walking together and watching over each other in love.' We covenant together as fellowships of God's people, we seek to be reconciled with each other in Christ, and we offer each other the sign of the Peace. These are the marks of a church who celebrate the Lord's Supper at the heart of their worship.

- 1 Quoted in Johann Christoph Arnold, *The Lost Art of Forgiving* (Plough Publishing, 1998) p.15
- 2 John W de Gruchy, *Reconciliation. Restoring Justice* (SCM, London, 2002) p.16
- 3 from an MTH essay, Cardiff University, June 2004, by Revd Christopher Broddle, used with permission
- 4 A great deal of theological exploration has been carried out by ECONI (Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland) as demonstrated in their pack, *Forgiveness Papers*; Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*; Mark Amstutz, John Brewer, Cecil McCullough, Duncan Morrow, *Forgiveness: making a world of difference* (ECONI, Howard House, 1 Brunswick Street, Belfast, BT2 7GE, 2002)
- 5 Paul S Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation. The Christian Idea of Atonement* (Darton Longman & Todd, 1989) p.16
- 6 Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, p.173
- 7 S.C.Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, revised edition (Kentucky, Westminster John Knox, 1994) pp. 258-9
- 8 de Gruchy, *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice*, p.51
- 9 de Gruchy, *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice*, p.154
- 10 de Gruchy, *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice*, p.72
- 11 Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation*, p.175
- 12 de Gruchy, *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice* p.96
- 13 Ellie Kreider, *Communion shapes Character* (Scottsdale, Herald Press, 1997), reprinted in UK as *Given for you: A fresh look at Communion* (IVP, 1998)
- 14 Kreider, *Communion shapes Character*, p.109
- 15 Kreider, *Communion shapes Character*, p.120
- 16 Kreider, *Communion shapes Character*, p.153
- 17 de Gruchy, *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice*, p.75
- 18 Johann Christoph Arnold, *The Lost Art of Forgiving*, p.76
- 19 de Gruchy, *Reconciliation, Restoring Justice*, p.213J-Mail

Can Baptist Christians get on?

Barrie Smith, Heart of England Baptist Association, asks not only 'if', but also 'how', patterns of conflict resolution may help congregations in their aim to live well together for the sake of Christ in the world.

An aspect of Church life that has proved to be a challenge throughout our history is the amount of conflict that exists. Conflict can be defined as a setting in which two or more ideas are clashing with each other. A measure of conflict is normal and sometimes necessary if there is to be change and growth. It is when conflict prevents positive movement forward that we have a problem. In this paper I intend to concentrate on conflict between Ministers and their Churches that becomes destructive and to ask the question "Can Baptist Christians get on?"

Ministers and Churches in conflict

The issues over which Ministers and Churches fall out vary considerably. Often there is a presenting issue such as leadership style. However there could be allegations of misdemeanour or broken relationships or some other Church based issue. There can also be matters to do with the life of the Minister or another Church Member. However even the most mundane events can be overlaid by matters of Biblical interpretation and theological stance. Then the matters achieve seemingly eternal significance. In such circumstances many Ministers resign before the Church seeks termination.

Biblical Material on Relationships and Conflict

There is quite a lot of material in the Bible about conflict. The command of Jesus "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"¹ may have been given in that context. The type of love referred to here is the disinterested love that seeks the well being of the other party. This is what John Marsh² describes as the love that mirrors the relationship that Jesus had with his followers in which the leader is the servant.

The writers of the New Testament could remember Jesus speaking about

loving one's enemies³. It was one thing to note that these enemies were to be found outside of the Church. It was quite another to discover that there were enemies within the Church as well.

The Church soon devised models of decision-making that involved everyone. Acts 15, 1-35 tells of the Church deciding that uncircumcised males could become members of the Church. It is possible to identify a process as L T Johnson has.⁴ First God's activity is observed. That information is formulated into a statement about God's activity. That proposition is then tested against the known activity of God. Then it is established that this is what God had declared would happen. Finally the Church enters into a process of debate as God's will is discerned, culminating in the statement "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ..."⁵. The objective is consensus.

In the example of conflict between Members, Matthew records the teaching of Jesus on conflict within the Church⁶. It is Ulrich Luz⁷ who points out that the church is a community that has to live with the tension of being forgiven and therefore of forgiving. As such there will always be those who are offending within its membership. If such offences are pointed

out and repentance follows all is well, but if no repentance is forthcoming action must follow. Each Member is expected to point out to the offending party when they have been offended against. If there is no positive outcome then a larger group is called until eventually the whole Church decides. The potential sentence being, to be treated as a "pagan or a tax collector"⁸. To be such is to be outside of the Kingdom but to be loved back into the Kingdom⁹. The process therefore is about restoration to full fellowship.

This becomes clear when Paul writes about Euodia and Syntyche¹⁰. They appear to be in conflict and are encouraged to "agree together in the Lord". P O'Brien¹¹ points out that this means to have the approach that treats the other person as Jesus would treat them. This is the servant nature that plays down personal preferences in favour of the other party. Paul has done this in 1 Corinthians 9, 12 "But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the work of Christ". Paul was prepared to deny his own preferences out of regard for others and Euodia and Syntyche should do the same. If they cannot do so others should become mediators between them.

The Christian Community should deal with its disputes within its own ranks, especially when those disputes are a matter of doctrine or practice, because it ultimately shares with Christ the function of being the standard against which the whole world will be judged¹². It would be self-defeating for the Church to be unable to resolve its own conflicts

Towards a theology of conflict resolution.

V N Redekop¹³ has developed an understanding of conflict that provides a framework for reconciliation. He draws

attention to the way in which Jesus offered an alternative to the violence that imitates the violence that was offered to him. Such a tendency should be replaced by seeking the well being of the violent perpetrator¹⁴. This can be achieved by recognising that God sent Jesus to suffer the violence of others while refusing to retaliate in kind¹⁵. This suggests that God was in Jesus showing a way without violence¹⁶ and modelling a new kind of lifestyle to which God later gave his vindication in the Resurrection of Jesus.

Others appear to respond warmly to Redekop's view. Arnakak¹⁷ points out that there is an Inuktitut term "asasiniq" that refers to an unbalanced relationship. He sees the value of Redekop's view as being located in the re-balancing of relationships where unbalancing violence has been shown. By the refusal to imitate violence a rebalancing occurs.

If it is true that God loves the world¹⁸ that must include all the created order¹⁹ and that in turn includes all the people. So the predisposition of God is for love. The lack of awareness of God or rebellion against God means that people do not love God, do not live in his way and become destructive of themselves and each other²⁰. The possibility before God is for reconciling people to himself so that people will return God's love and live in a way that pleases God and makes for human community²¹. Therefore in Jesus God provided an example of how to concentrate on the good of the other person. Jesus showed that he did this because God inspired it and he relied upon God to sustain him and eventually to receive him into paradise²². This is the Gethsemane experience of Jesus when he declared his obedience to and dependance upon God. His own preference would have been for another way forward, but he was willing to proceed

on the basis that this was the Father's will. The clear implication is that Jesus becomes the model of self denial and obedience and dedication to God which in turn is the goal for us but only possible in reliance upon God. In this way we can all become reconciled to God and each other as Jesus was because God proved he approved of Jesus in the resurrection.

Models of conflict resolution

A branch of the Church that has taken conflict resolution seriously is the Mennonites. They have established Peace Centres in a number of places around the world, one being the London Mennonite Centre. This is the London Mennonite Trust and is a registered charity²³. Their work is based on the belief that conflict exists wherever ideas are clashing and that this can be a good thing. Bad conflict exists where there is no mechanism for handling that clash.

Conflict has a number of locations – people, process and problems²⁴. The Mennonite model of mediation focuses on issues. Often what happens is that issues recede as intensity of conflict increases. More people become involved and the objective of each party becomes ultimately the destruction of the other party. As each seeks some social change the issues are not addressed. The Mennonites suggest that issues must be dealt with at early stages, because if they are not it becomes increasingly difficult to deal with them²⁵. As such they offer a model built on the principle that "Mediation is a voluntary process which facilitates negotiations between people who on their own are unable to reach a satisfactory solution to their differences"²⁶

Conflicting individuals are brought together with a mediator who seeks to enable each person to describe the effects of the actions of the other upon themselves. Each takes turns to hear the

story and then to reflect back what has been heard and understood. Apologies may be offered and accepted and then the issue itself is considered with solutions being offered before eventual agreement is reached on both the issue and the procedure by which conflict over such matters can be avoided.

A similar approach is advocated by Speed Lees²⁷ who identifies levels of conflict. At Level One there is simply a problem to solve and people are comfortable in each other's company. At Level Two people become more concerned with self-protection. At Level Three the objectives of the parties have shifted to winning. At Level Four the objective of the parties becomes wanting to hurt the other. At Level Five the objective is to destroy the other party.

He points out that the relationship between conflicting persons is key to the likelihood of a positive outcome. At levels one and two the parties should be able to sort out their difference themselves. At levels three and four the input of an external mediator is desirable. However at level five the matter cannot be handled by mediation. This is because at this level "the costs to society, truth and God of withdrawal from the fight are perceived as greater than the costs of defeating the others even through prolonged conflict"²⁸ Mediation as a process therefore seems to depend upon the willingness of all parties to engage with it early.

For this reason ACAS the conciliation service has developed a system of advice that runs through several stages²⁹.

- 1 Conciliation: A conciliator to help the parties reach a settlement through discussion and negotiation.
- 2 Arbitration: A team of arbitrators to hear both sides of a dispute and make a decision which resolves it. Both sides

agree to accept the arbitrator's decision.

- 3 Mediation: A team of mediators to make recommendations as to how a dispute might be resolved rather than give decisions. The parties agree to consider the recommendations but are not bound to accept them.
- 4 Pendulum arbitration: An arbitrator makes a straight choice between the final position of the sides in a dispute who have agreed in advance to accept the decision.

It is interesting that the ACAS model accepts that there are times when agreement is not possible. Therefore as a dispute rises to level five in Speed Lees' definition they would be able to call on another level of input to bring about a solution. The advantage is that a solution is achieved. The disadvantage is that the parties have not achieved it themselves. Therefore no learning has taken place on how to resolve matters and further disputes have not been made less likely.

Conflict resolution in Church practice

Some Baptist Associations have devised programmes of Mediation that are made available to Churches in conflict. Often these are based on the Mennonite model and offered by a Team who have taken the initial training and committed themselves to continual upgrading of that training and a mentoring relationship with other mediators. However, the Churches are reluctant to call upon such a facility because it forces them to admit that they are in conflict. The result is that the facility is frequently not called upon until the level of conflict is too high for its effective use.

In an occasion of its use the presenting issue was a decision of a Church Meeting. A questionnaire was used that revealed a list of issues; some related to current Church Members, others to previous

people. No one wanted any personal mediation work done, but some wanted to arrive at better ways of decision-making. Eventually a series of sessions was devised that helped people learn their personal style³⁰ so that they could value the styles of others and recognise the different settings in which each style is preferable. Then a series of models of decision-making were learned. Finally the whole was concluded by an act of worship when it was agreed that a line could be drawn beneath past conflicts and a new future be entered.

There were a number of lessons to be learned from this use of the system.

1. A reference group should be established to monitor the process and ensure that the mediators deal with the right people and assess the progress that is being made.
2. A firm timetable should be established so that the whole Church is aware that a momentum for change has been built up.
3. A programme of Sunday preaching or mid-week study group topics could be devised to provide the background on which a mediation package can operate.
4. The system can only operate when there is a desire for everyone at the outset to find a better way forward.

There must be a desire to find a balanced solution. Without that prior commitment the model cannot work. That commitment should be present in every Church context because of the command of Jesus for his Church to love each other³¹.

It is also necessary to recognise that while mediation can be effective in resolving interpersonal conflicts, in practice

such exercises may reveal pastoral issues that were at the root of the conflict and that remain with the individuals concerned. These issues need to be addressed and sometimes the mediation can only be regarded as complete when all the background issues have been resolved.

In practice high-level Church conflict is often overlaid by issues of ultimate truth. The remarriage of divorced people or the acceptance into the church of homosexual people or not is problematic because these issues strike people at deep levels. Here matters become more complex because they affect what an individual believes as well as what they do. This can escalate to a statement that not only is the person's behaviour unacceptable but the person is unacceptable as well. It can even be the case that some believe that an offending person is not acceptable to God.

It would appear that where matters are purely social, models of mediation can handle them. However where they become theological they cannot. At that level they are to do with a person's standing before God and are of ultimate significance. These issues affect the individuals directly involved, and in as much as they are perceived to affect those who surround them as well, the purity of the group becomes a primary concern.

In a secular context the approach developed by ACAS would appear to be sensible because it provides a solution. But it does so against the background of a purely social issue within a context from which people can walk away. In a Church environment the differences may be social and can be treated in that way, but they may also assume ultimate significance. When those differences cannot be reconciled division takes place.

The cost of not resolving conflict

The cost of not resolving conflict in a Baptist Church is high. There is the tragedy of individuals who live with the bitterness of knowing that they are opposed to or by someone else. This can rise to wishing to harm the other person and to believing that they are outside of the scope of God's love.

To the whole Church there is the danger of ongoing suspicion between Church fellowships and even denominations. This damages the individuals as they use energy in competing with each other. It also damages the Church in that it fosters a reputation of being fractious.

There is a financial cost to models of mediation. The Mediators must be paid and their costs met. To some fellowships this is a disincentive. However those costs must be put alongside the financial loss of those who stay within the fellowship but withhold their offerings and others who leave and take their offerings with them. Either way the remaining unreconciled Church is less well resourced than it was.

It is also detrimental to wider society because it obstructs the Mission of the Church to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. This is both in terms of the Great Commission³² to make disciples and the Nazareth Manifesto to proclaim the arrival of the Kingdom³³. The result being that the whole of the created order does not receive the benefits of that Kingdom.

Conclusion

So can Baptist Christians get on? The answer would seem to be that they could get on if they would learn to handle their disagreements at an early stage and then live with the new patterns of co-existence that emerge from the process.

Bibliography

- Advisory Handbook – The A-Z of Work. <http://www.acas.co.uk/publications/H03.html> 22/03/2004
- Arnakak, A review of “From Violence to Blessing V.N.Redekop” <http://inuucqatigiitforum.com/main/reviews/index.html> 25/03/2004
- Ballard and Pritchard *Practical Theology in Action*. (London, SPCK 1996, this edition 2001) p87ff
- Johnson L T *The Acts of the Apostles* (Minnesota, The Liturgical Press. 1992)
- Lassetter V and Whalley E *Journeying Through Conflict* (Didcot, BUGB 2004)
- Lederach, J P. “Understanding Conflict: The Experience, Structure and Dynamics of Conflict”. *Mediation Skills Training Institute* (USA, Lombard Mennonite Peace Centre. 1999)
- Lees, S *Moving your Church through Conflict* (USA, The Alban Institute 1985, This edition 1998)
- Marsh J *Saint John* (England, Penguin Books Ltd, 1968)
- O'Brien, P. *Commentary of Philippians* (Michigan, Eerdmans 1991)
- Redekop, V. N. *From Violence to Blessing* (Canada, Novalis, Saint Paul University 2002)
- Staffordshire County Council, www.staffordshire.gov.uk 7 April 2004
- U Luz *Matthew 8 – 20 A Commentary* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress 2001)

-
- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 John 13, 34. | 23 The London Mennonite Trust – Registered Charity number 227410 |
| 2 J Marsh <i>Saint John</i> (England, Penguin Books Ltd, 1968) p 496 | 24 Lederach, J.P. “Understanding Conflict: The Experience, Structure and Dynamics of Conflict”. <i>Mediation Skills Training Institute</i> (USA, Lombard Mennonite Peace Centre. 1999) pA-1 |
| 3 Matthew 5, 43 | 25 Lederach, J.P. “Understanding Conflict: The Experience, Structure and Dynamics of Conflict.” <i>Mediation Skills Training Institute</i> (USA, Lombard Mennonite Peace Centre. 1999) pA-2 |
| 4 L T Johnson <i>The Acts of the Apostles</i> (Minnesota, The Liturgical Press. 1992) p271 | 26 Lederach, J.P. “Understanding Conflict: The Experience, Structure and Dynamics of Conflict.” <i>Mediation Skills Training Institute</i> (USA, Lombard Mennonite Peace Centre. 1999) pA-3 |
| 5 Acts 15, 28 | 27 Lees, S <i>Moving your Church through Conflict</i> (USA, The Alban Institute 1985, This edition 1998) |
| 6 Matthew 18, 15-19 | 28 Lees, S <i>Moving your Church through Conflict</i> (USA, The Alban Institute 1985, This edition 1998). p22 |
| 7 U Luz <i>Matthew 8 – 20 A Commentary</i> (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress 2001) p461-2 | 29 <i>Advisory Handbook – The A-Z of Work</i> . http://www.acas.co.uk/publications/H03.html 22/03/2004 |
| 8 Matthew 18, 17 | 30 Lassetter V and Whalley E <i>Journeying Through Conflict</i> (Didcot, BUGB 2004) p5 |
| 9 Matthew 9, 10-13 | 31 John 13:34 |
| 10 Philippians 4, 2-3 | 32 Matthew 28:19 |
| 11 O'Brien, P. <i>Commentary of Philippians</i> (Michigan, Eerdmans 1991) p479 | 33 Luke 4:18-19 |
| 12 1 Corinthians 6, 1-6 | |
| 13 Redekop, V. N. <i>From Violence to Blessing</i> (Canada, Novalis, Saint Paul University 2002) | |
| 14 Redekop, V. N. <i>From Violence to Blessing</i> (Canada, Novalis, Saint Paul University 2002) p317 | |
| 15 Mark, 10:45 | |
| 16 Redekop, V. N. <i>From Violence to Blessing</i> (Canada, Novalis, Saint Paul University 2002) p320 | |
| 17 Arnakak, A review of “From Violence to Blessing V.N.Redekop” http://inuucqatigiitforum.com/main/reviews/index.html 25/03/2004 | |
| 18 John 3:16 | |
| 19 Genesis 1:31 | |
| 20 Romans 1:18-32 | |
| 21 Genesis, 1: 26-28 | |
| 22 Matthew 26:39 and John 17:1-5 | |

From the Guesthouse of Benevolence

Gethin Abraham-Williams, Cytûn1, (Churches Together in Wales), Cardiff

'The first thing (Andrew) did was to find his brother Simon. ... He brought Simon to Jesus

...

- John 1: 41, 42 (NEB)

LET ME INTRODUCE to you three people I met on a recent visit to China, and one person we were meant to meet! I was part of a delegation of eighteen – Anglican, Free Church and Roman Catholic; women and men, lay and ordained, three of whom were Chinese speakers – organised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) to express solidarity with the Church in China - Protestant and Catholic, and to share experiences and learn from them.

Over ten days we visited five provinces around China's North Eastern seaboard. We smelt the smog in Beijing, we breathed the pure air of the Yellow Mountain in the spectacular Huang Shan region, and we whizzed through the Forbidden City and Tian-anmen Square, like American Tourists on roller skates!

We were also taken to lots of official banquets which, apart from being very enjoyable, made us question whether our ways of entertaining foreign delegations in Britain and Ireland is always as generous as it should be. And, indeed, some of our most revealing insights came while dipping with our chopsticks into dishes of stewed shark's fin or braised abalone and eating a consommé of bamboo pith!

Apart from the value of visits like ours to those at the receiving end in terms of friendship and encouragement, there is also the challenge from Churches in other parts of the world to how we live the faith in these islands.

The last emperor

The first person I want to introduce to you is Mr Wang Zuo An. He's not a Christian. He's a senior member of the Chinese Communist Party, and in our terms the equivalent of a Minister of State in, say, the

Home Office. His department is responsible for regulating the practice of religion in China.

On a delegation to the UK a few weeks prior to our visit, Mr Wang had unexpectedly admitted at a reception hosted by CTBI that religion will continue to exist in China when the Communist Party is no more. Now he was returning the courtesy by receiving us in his new offices in Beijing. These were located in the palace belonging to the last emperor's father. And as we sat on leather settees sipping green tea from rather fine lidded mugs, I must admit my mind wandered a bit as I imagined the two year old emperor, Pu Yi, playing hide and seek in the courtyard outside!

Pulling myself together I asked Mr Wang what changes in religion he'd detected in his ten years in office. 'After the cultural revolution' (which lasted some ten years and was brought to an end with Mao's death in 1976) 'people are now allowed to practice their faith openly,' he told us. Then he added this, 'Now the challenge is to explore how religion can contribute to the culture. Maybe the Church needs to research this,' he suggested, 'and to present some proposals to be discussed with government.'

It's a reply that reveals two things: on the one hand, the changing attitude of the Party to Religion. It is no longer seen as the opium of the masses, but as something with positive social consequences. And on the other, it invites Christians to become more involved in their society, and not to regard their faith as a purely private matter, which was quite a challenge coming as it did from a mouthpiece of an officially atheistic state!

Of course, we were under no illusion that this meant a relaxation of government control, or that it was more prepared to countenance dissent. But it was an indication that those in power in China today are interested in working more constructively with the Church and other religions than has been the case in the past.

And if there's a word here for us, maybe it is that with our almost unlimited democratic freedom we too do not fail to take up the challenges thrown our way by government.

Our guide

The second person I want to introduce to you is Mr Ma Hong Zhi. He's the Chinese person we got to know best on this visit. Some 30 years of age, married with a three and a half old son, he was our official accompanist and translator. He met us when we arrived in the airport in Beijing, and he stayed with us until he'd waved us through customs at Shanghai.

I warmed to Hong Zhi – or Daniel as he invited us to call him, because I saw him as an example of the new Chinese generation committed to what the state is accomplishing but also willing to make a Christian commitment. So on the third leg of our itinerary, when we'd flown in to the old imperial capital of Nanjing, his home town, and were being bussed to our hotel and not at our most alert because of the lateness of the hour, he decided to share

his testimony with us!

He told us he'd come from a non-Christian background, but as a little boy would go and spend the holidays with his grandmother in the country. When the churches were re-opened after the cultural revolution (and it is hard to imagine the havoc and suffering of that period for millions of Chinese) she started going to a local church, and took her young grandson with her. There weren't many Chinese bibles around in those days (since then 30 million have been printed, and we saw them still coming off the presses in Nanjing at the rate of one every 30 seconds!). Young Hong Zhi would therefore copy out passages of the Bible and favourite hymns for his grandmother, not from the originals, but from copies of copies. In the process he became interested in the Faith. And in 1994, after graduating in economics, Hong Zhi was baptised and made a member of the post denominational Protestant Church.

Now he's an employee of his church in their national overseas relations department in bustling Shanghai with its 16m population, looking after delegations like ours. Because religion is regulated by the state, Hong Zhi therefore works for the state as well as for the church. In his culture, Hong Zhi was maintaining some kind of balance between his faith and his service to the state and his love of country.

In our Western culture it seems to me we sometimes forget that there are young Christians, and not so young, who are also trying to make responsible compromises most days of their working lives. The church needs to be an understanding community that supports and strengthens them in the choices they face.

Re-imagining the Faith

Before I introduce my final witness, this might be an appropriate point to mention

someone we were meant to meet, but didn't. He was K H Ting, the last surviving bishop of the post-denominational Protestant Church. I first came across Bishop Ting in Canberra in 1991 when the China Christian Council joined the World Council of Churches. Our delegation was scheduled to meet him in Nanjing, but unless I'm judging him unfairly, he had a diplomatic illness at the last minute!

Bishop Ting is the grand old man of China's Protestant Church. At 89 years of age, he's lived through many of the upheavals of China's recent history, and even in a culture that's four thousand years old, the twentieth century is regarded by today's Chinese as particularly turbulent.

He's been a formative figure in the 50 year old post denominational church that works on the premise of being independently funded and run, and that handles its own outreach without foreign interference - the so called 'Three Self Movement'. It doesn't, however, bar the Nanjing Amity Printing company from accepting bales of good quality paper from the West for printing Bibles, or the China Christian Council from receiving donations towards church building schemes. Chinese Christians are also proud to emphasise that Christianity in China goes back to the 7th century.

Chinese Christians also honour the memory of the 15th century Jesuit Matteo Ricci, but are more ambivalent about the contribution of more recent protestant missionaries seeing them as imperialist lackeys! The 19th century Welsh Baptist missionary, Timothy Richard, for example, is singled out for opprobrium in their Golden Jubilee album for acting as an interpreter in the negotiations during the Qing dynasty that led to the humiliating Xinchou Treaty of 1900.

Bishop Ding was instrumental therefore in finding ways of living with, and influencing an initially hostile Communist Party, so that today it is prepared to see Christianity, in the words of the Vice-minister of the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), as 'something that can purify people's soul'.

Recently, though, Bishop Ting has been at the centre of a controversial movement that we might term 'Re-Imagining the Faith', or what they call 'Theological Reconstruction' or 'Theological Renewal'. It's controversial because it tries to demonstrate that Christianity is not necessarily inimical to an atheistic state and can therefore safely be taken into the main stream of contemporary Chinese life.

One illustration of this that might seem far fetched to us but is very much at the heart of a restructured theology concerns Chian Kai-shek and Mao Zedong. If you teach that Christians go to heaven, and atheists don't (the doctrine of justification by Faith), it is unlikely to endear you to a state that reveres the atheist Chairman Mao and reviles the baptised anti-communist nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek!

So Ting has been commending what he calls a 'Theology of Love'. Since Christ's love fills the cosmos, runs his argument, Christ's love can go beyond the church to reach those outside it. Moreover, manifestations of the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit can even be seen in the person of atheists. From what we could gather that is the line now followed at the Union Theological Seminary in Nanjing, the Protestant church's principal college. It's impossible for us to judge the merits or otherwise of this approach at this distance, but clearly it's a huge issue for the post-denominational church in China.

THE BAPTIST INSURANCE COMPANY PLC.

Beaufort House, Brunswick Road, Gloucester, GL1 1JZ

Tel: 0845 0702223

100 YEARS OF SERVICE

Early this year Baptist Insurance will reach 100 years "not out" and still going strong. Over the years I have known the worries and concerns of many churches after they have been hit with disaster and Baptist Insurance has brought relief at a time when most needed.

Although during the last century major disasters at Baptist Churches have not happened too frequently they nevertheless do occur and the floods in Boscastle last year reminded me of just one case where I was closely involved.

"At 6pm on 30th October 2000 after days of torrential rain the River Roding in Essex burst its banks with devastating effect on the locality of Broadmead Church in Woodford.

I had reason to be outside the church that evening and was able to experience at first hand the power of a river unencumbered by its banks flooding all the local roads, gardens and buildings within its path. First in line were the church buildings which were quickly encompassed to a depth of some three feet in everything the river could throw at them. There was absolutely nothing anyone could do except flee to safety and pray that the torrents would stop.

The next day the river had not yet receded and I waded thigh high through the flood waters towards the church sympathising with the odd householder here and there. From some of their fairly cheerful responses, considering they were surrounded by water, I got a great feeling that a real community spirit had emerged in their adversity. Nothing was going to get them down!

That same spirit was much in evidence with members of Broadmead Church when it came to attending to their own problems. Their buildings were unusable and all the church contents had been saturated beyond repair. They clearly needed all the help that they could get to supplement their own willing resources.

Baptist Insurance would help to recover their premises but nothing had prepared them for the disruption to all their activities on such a massive scale. Led by their Minister, Ken Hyde, church members set to in seeking somewhere to try and carry on as near normal while restoration work was carried out. Their prayers were quickly answered with suitable accommodation being made available nearby.

The restoration of the buildings presented somewhat greater and longer term problems, not least that the premises needed drying out first! However after what must have seemed a lifetime the church was finally brought back to sparkling newness and I was so pleased to accept the invitation of the church to attend their rededication service."

In these times when companies just come and go Baptist Insurance takes great pride that we are the chosen insurer of the majority of the Baptist Churches in the UK. In the coming months we shall be inviting existing customers to participate in several competitions for valuable prizes as part of our centenary celebrations. To new customers we shall be offering a £100 discount off the first premium should they decide to insure their church with us.

Whether your church is an existing customer or not I hope that you will join us and participate in our centenary celebrations.

Yours Sincerely

Alf Green ACII
ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

I think the lesson for us is that we too have to attempt to 're-imagine' the faith if it's to make sense in our culture and to win a new generation of believers. And the challenge always is how to be true to the Gospel we've received, whilst at the same time touching those chords that resonate with a generation that no longer goes to church.

Walk in the water

The last person I want you to meet is a woman minister in her 40s, the Revd Ma Jianhua, or Pastor Esther. She leads a team of over ten lay leaders in Huang Shan City, Anhui province, skirting one of the two most famous landscapes in the whole of China. In 2004 they celebrated the 10th anniversary of their 1,000 seater church, and the Sunday morning we were there it was pretty full with what seemed to us a good cross section of the community including teachers, doctors, business people, farmers, factory workers and students.

Pastor Ma preached for 40 minutes, supported by numerous Biblical references each of which was eagerly looked up by members of her congregation thumbing through their personal copies of the Scriptures. Though most of our delegation couldn't understand a word of what Pastor Ma was saying, it was spell binding to watch her and to feel the concentration of the congregation because of the quiet intensity and earnestness that came across in her personality.

Pastor Ma (at her own expense, we gathered) gave each member of our delegation a presentation box containing a 5 sq cm finely polished stone seal and wax dip marking the church's anniversary. Mine now has a place of honour in the CYTUN office. The engraving in Chinese characters, proclaiming that 'The Lord is the Living Stone', symbolises to my mind the strength of this church and its leadership. An accompanying leaflet

20

explains that 'everyone needs a personal mark. For Westerners, it's a signature, for Chinese it's a seal, and that seal represents the heart of the giver. For just as no two leaves are the same, no two stones are ever identical. Each is unique.'

In one of the rural branch churches (what they call 'Meeting Places') which Pastor Ma is responsible for, we heard of a poor farmer who'd sold a pig as his contribution towards the new church in his village. Another elderly woman had taken on extra work as a domestic help, and gave all her wages to the new building. In such desperately poor rural communities, we found that deeply moving and rather humbling.

On the Saturday evening Pastor Ma had organised a special Bible Study for some of the locals to meet us. In my group there were two young men in their early 20s from the local university. I discovered that for one of them it was his first time in church. He'd only come because his friend had invited him. It was a pattern we'd heard repeated in numerous places throughout our visit. In a country where you cannot proselytise openly, or distribute leaflets, people are being drawn into the Body of Christ through the witness of a partner, parent, grandparent, child or friend.

We don't find it natural to ask others along to a service. In China that's the way the church is growing.

After meeting her, and staying at her Guesthouse of Benevolence, we could understand why the Protestant Church in particular in China is on the increase. According to one source, 'China is in the process of being Christianized' (David Aikman: *Jesus in Beijing*). And I can believe it, especially as a week earlier I'd had the amazing experience of preaching to a congregation of 800 in the Gang Wa Shi

church in central Beijing, in what was its fourth service of the day! 'At the present rate of growth in the number of Christians in the countryside, in the cities and especially within China's social and cultural establishment, it is possible,' according to this observer, 'that Christians will constitute 20 to 30% of China's (1.3 billion) population within three decades.'

Our young translator, Ma Hong Zhi, shared a Chinese proverb with us before we left: 'Hold a stone and walk in the water'. He interpreted it for us as recommending you need to have something solid to grasp if you're to maintain your balance in rough waters. Maybe that's the secret of the persistence and growth of China's Christians.

We went to China in friendship and to express Christian solidarity. We came back from China challenged by those we met, to:

- *look again at how we respond to the challenges thrown our way by our own governments;*
- *see whether we can't support people more effectively in the daily compromises they have to make;*
- *be willing to re-imagine the Gospel so that it makes sense to a new generation, whilst also remaining true to its basic credo; and*
- *help people bear personal testimony to Jesus in our culture.*

Don't stay in the dark



Find out all you need to know about the life and witness of Baptists and other Christians by subscribing to the Baptist Times. We'll even let you try it for free over a four week trial period. Send us your name and address and we'll do the rest.

Baptist Times, PO Box 54, 129 Broadway, Didcot, Oxon OX11 8XB
Tel: 01235 517670; Fax: 01235 517678; E-mail: btadmin@bluecom.net

'Outside the box'

Michael Cleaves, Llanedeyrn: studies in Chaplaincy-type ministry from one Minister's experience.

In 2003 the Baptist Union Council approved the appointment of a Theological Work Group to study the theology and praxis of Chaplaincy Ministry, which is the remit of the Sector Ministries Committee. As part of the response document from the group, I prepared case studies as, I hope, a stimulus to reflection across the denomination about the status of Chaplains within the Baptist Union, given the mistaken perception that chaplaincy is 'second-class' to full-time, pastoral ministry and the urgent need to address inequalities in our recognition system.

The following are drawn from real-life, chosen to illustrate how 'chaplaincy' is often exercised away from the Minister's immediate sphere of work. They are not meant to be definitive or normative but intended to illustrate key factors of ministry 'outside of the box' and to raise points for discussion.

Chaplaincy in the car-park

As a Minister who is also a Magistrate, it is never long before one's 'real job' is revealed to fellow JP's. Jane was a vibrant, lively 45 year old mother of a 21 year old daughter, Kerry. Mum was often listed to sit with me in the Youth Court, and retiring room conversations turned surprisingly often to matters of faith. In fact, working in a voluntary capacity in the Courts, as in many other fields, revealed how a very large proportion of those active in public service are Christians. I estimate it is 3 to 4 times the percentage of the population regularly found in church worship.

Jane, a practicing Anglican, was concerned about her daughter's forthcoming baptism. Kerry had turned her back on her roots, and had taken to attending a free evangelical church in the area. I learned of Jane's concern, not in the general retiring room conversation, but in the 'privacy' of standing next to our vehicles in the underground car-park.

'Was this a "real" church?' I was asked. What did Kerry being "baptised again" mean for what her parents had done for her as a child? It was not the case that parent and daughter were at odds over this, and I took this information as a positive sign, encouraging Jane to talk to Kerry about her spiritual pilgrimage and to share with her in an experience which would be challenging for them both, but which would also bring them together. The baptism was due to take place in a matter of weeks.

A second conversation in the car-park revealed how Jane had enjoyed the experience of seeing Kerry take the step of believers' baptism, and brought them together. It had also prompted Jane to do more in her own church. However, this had immediately caused her problems. Her local priest had recognised her renewed commitment and, without consultation, had added her name to the Sunday readers' list. He had also suggested that she allow her name to be put forward for appointment as Vicar's warden, a post about which she had not a clue what the job entailed.

These developments resulted in Jane feeling intimidated and fearful, not up to the tasks involved, but thinking she would let people down if she refused. She had never even read in church before, let alone

anything else. I counselled her to ask for an interview with her vicar, to explore what she had recently experienced and the challenge she felt, though undefined, to 'do more' for her church, and that this should take place before any undertakings were made.

She later reported to me that conversations were 'ongoing' and she would tell me of any developments.

These incidents raised for me the following:

- Do Ministers have a role in society to advise/counsel those who are not of their congregation?
- What considerations of professional etiquette should apply in such a situation?
- Should Ministers keep lines of communication open with those who seek such advice?
- Is a Minister with such a role, e.g. J.P., school governor, local councillor, to be seen as an (at least) informal spiritual resource to the institution, or should he/she avoid being cast in that role?

The one that did not work

The back entrance to the well-known chain store faced the front façade of our Victorian church building. It also meant that pedestrians could walk right through the store from one parallel-running street to another, due to ancient access rights typical of the medieval, midlands town. My predecessor as Minister had been described to me as 'chaplain' to the store. It was assumed, at least by the church, that I would fulfil the same ministry on a few-hours-a-week basis. I discovered, after contacting the store, that there was no agreed basis for the 'chaplaincy' and that my predecessor had visited as and when possible. After meeting the Head of Human Resources, I agreed that I would

visit fortnightly, for 2 hours, and call into the HR office at the start of each visit.

Meanwhile, I picked up on some matters which would be of concern to me in trying to have a working relationship with the store. An arrangement was in existence that, for the facility of 2 free spaces in the store's car-park, the church was the store's emergency assembly area in the case of evacuation. However, no-one in the store could find the church key when such an emergency arose. In addition, agreed use by the congregation of the car-park on a Sunday was being eroded by the often-unannounced occasional Sunday opening of the store. This caused friction between store staff and church attenders, often competing for the reducing number of vacant spaces in the car-park. The situation was not helped by frequent changes of senior staff at the store, from Manager to Head of HR to chief of security. Communication was a major headache, as well as the variously changing attitudes of senior staff to the role and presence of an albeit 'unofficial' chaplain in the store. These ranged from initial suspicion; to great enthusiasm not backed up by co-operation in fulfilling briefing commitments; to hostility from a very career-driven manager; to numerous misunderstandings with 'security' over changes in the use, and locking up, of the car-park. Meanwhile, the shop-floor staff were welcoming and appreciative of the odd 5 minutes visit, often sharing personal issues and at time airing grievances about work conditions, rates of pay, split-shift arrangements and general, staff-management difficulties.

News or rumours of take-over bids, redundancies, senior staff changes, moves to Sunday opening and numerous other commercial pressures caused stress all around, not least to me as to how to minister to a complex organisation which

was often disorganised and where the mood or disposition of senior staff to 'the church' going in was almost always volatile and unpredictable. Ironically the most successful area of chaplaincy, in the midst of what I perceived as a failure, was at the delivery-bay doors of the store. While huge vans parked up to disgorge loads, often causing traffic chaos, the lads (and some lasses) doing all the heavy work, were keen to exchange the time of day, and more, with the bloke they knew as 'the Vicar' from the church opposite, the doors of which they never darkened.

From the above experience, I raise the following:

- Can informal chaplaincy ever be successful, or should terms or guidelines be pre-agreed?
- Is the role of a store chaplain to be pastor to the employees, prophet to the organisation and confidant of both; or do vested interests always clash?
- How can individual chaplaincy work when there is no coordinated, ecumenical body relating directly to e.g. a town-centre management structure?
- What is the role of 'the church', i.e. a local congregation, in sponsoring/supporting stores chaplaincy?
- When 'the world writes the agenda' how should the church respond?

Chaplaincy where ideologies clash

An early ministry took me to a part of Britain with a long tradition of training for the armed forces, the area being full of military hospitals, barracks, naval dockyards, married quarters, etc., etc., as well as being local to one of the IRA's most notorious pub-bombings.

My local church, not previously known for ministry to the military, began to receive numerous families into its worship and weekly activities from the nearby

Army accommodation.

This presented a dilemma for me, as a convinced pacifist with a healthy (?) suspicion of all things military. (By contrast, my predecessor had been 'head-hunted' for the Army Chaplaincy, having attended a conference on it!). As the Army families began to find a home with the church, they became increasingly influential, especially in the conduct and leadership of prayer and Bible-study meetings. My relationship with them was good, though at times I felt inhibited in expressing my own convictions, particularly when Remembrance Sunday came round.

Thankfully, my ideological differences with all things military did not raise major problems with these families and individuals, although their frequent and frank description of the way they were treated by the Army at times caused me alarm and confirmed my prejudices. Here are three illustrations of pastoral issues of chaplaincy to military families 'outside of the box'.

1. Mrs A. was the wife of a Corporal in the army who had been based locally but who was suddenly posted to Northern Ireland at the height of the Troubles. Although not a front-line soldier, Corporal A. would be as at-risk as anyone else caught up in an effectively civil-war situation. The six-month posting was devastating to the A. family, the children showing highly disturbed behaviour both at home and at school. Mrs A., a previously out-going and lively person, became neurotically fearful for her husband's safety, could no longer do her part-time job, and alternated between long times spent in bed (thus neglecting her children's physical and emotional needs), and visiting numerous church members and myself, pouring out her anxiety for many hours.

Eventually, Corporal A. returned unscathed from his posting and proceeded to go about his duties as if nothing had happened to him or to his family.

2. Mrs B. was a timid character, married to Private B. who was on service in Belize. She kept their home as neat as a pin, but was obviously worried. After some probing, I discovered that Private B. had a mistress and was proposing to leave Mrs B. to set up home with her. This meant that Mrs B. was now to be rendered homeless, as her accommodation was entirely dependent on the couple being together. The Army Social Services department had offered little help, except to say they would try to persuade the Army housing office to waive any financial charge for wear-and-tear to the accommodation. Mrs B. was given one week to vacate the property.

After some frantic 'phone calls on my part to various voluntary housing groups, Woman's Aid, etc. Mrs B. was offered emergency housing by the Local Authority, who took a very dim view of the Army's action. She was able in time to start a new life, with a job she enjoyed and growing self-confidence in her ability to cope.

3. Sergeant C. was an active committed evangelical Christian who saw no conflict between his job and his discipleship of Christ. Having served in various parts of the world, his world-view was of the 'if only all countries were Christian' variety. Conscientious and well-respected by his 'superiors', Sergeant C.'s equilibrium was disturbed when he met members of the crew of the 'Logos' ship and organisation, whose Christian ministry was to distribute Bibles in as many ports-of-call around the globe as possible. He was

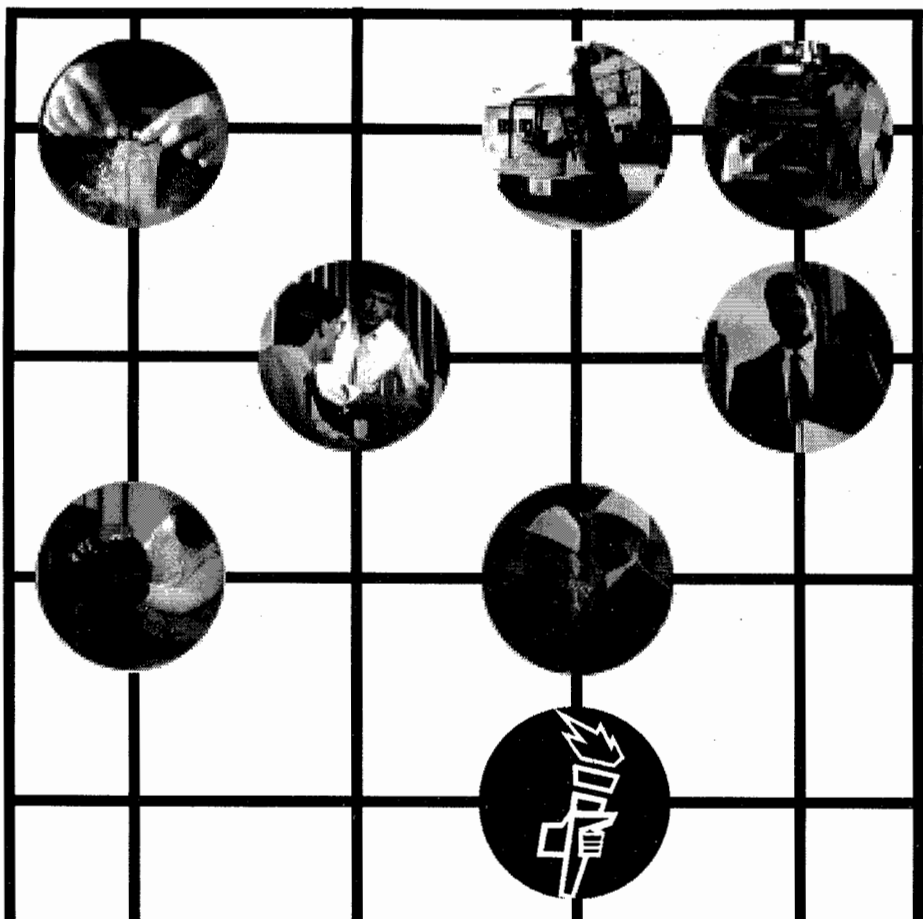
so enthused by this work that he sought my advice as to how he could be involved. In fact, his sense was of a call of God to work with 'Logos', especially as he was a skilled engineer who saw he could turn his skills to ship-repairs. His dilemma was five years short of retirement from the Army, his children were still at school and his wife worked.

Though I might have rejoiced in seeing someone leave the Army to follow a clear calling of God, I saw the wisdom of counselling Sergeant C. to complete his time, get his children through school, etc. and on retirement see if the call was still firm. The last I heard was that Sergeant C. had taken the advice and five years on was training with 'Logos'.

I pose the following issues:

- When Ministers find themselves acting in chaplaincy roles to military personnel, where do the boundaries lie?
- What responsibility do Forces' Chaplains see themselves as having to cooperate or integrate with local churches?
- How accountable are Forces' Chaplains to their denomination of origin, if at all?
- What dialogue exists between faiths/denominations and the Armed Forces, especially on matters of conscientious objection arising during military service, c.f. recent Muslims' objections to the war in Iraq?

As a contribution to the ongoing theological exploration of Chaplaincy, I and the Working Group would welcome any responses from readers to the above case-studies. I can be contacted on email: eirlys@btinternet.com.



**Men –
network your
life skills and
expertise
through the
Baptist Men's
Movement**

*For further information contact
Clifford Challinor, Secretary BMM
Engine House Cottage, Pontesford,
Shrewsbury, SY5 0UQ
Telephone/Fax 01743 790377
Email cchallinor3@supanet.com*

*Visit our website at
www.baptistmen.org.uk*

*Baptist Men's Movement
(Registered charity no 250344)*

In between Christmas and Easter:

aspects of some Revised Common Lectionary passages for Lent.

Ash Wednesday

God, make a fresh start in me,
shape a Genesis week from the chaos of my life.
Don't throw me out with the trash,
or fail to breathe holiness in me.
Bing me back from grey exile,
put a fresh wind in my sails!

Give me a job teaching rebels your ways
so the lost can find their way home....
Going through the motions doesn't please you,
a flawless performance is nothing to you.
I learned God-worship
when my pride was shattered.
Heart-shattered lives ready for love
don't for a moment escape God's notice.

Psalm 51.10-13,16-17

'The Message', © Eugene H Peterson NavPress 1993-96

Companions as we are in this work with you, we beg you, please don't squander one bit of this marvellous life God has given us. God reminds us,

"I heard your call in the nick of time;
the day you needed me I was there to help."

Well, now is the right time to listen, the day to be helped. Don't put it off; don't frustrate God's work by showing up late, throwing a question mark over everything we're doing. Our work as God's servants gets validated – or not – in the details.

2 Corinthians 6.1-3

'The Message'

Second Sunday in Lent

Nick was one of the strict set and a member of the Supreme Council. He called on Jesus after dark. He began by saying, "Sir, you're obviously a teacher sent by God. Your splendid record of good work proves that God is with you." Jesus said "believe me, no one can recognise God's New World without starting life all over again." Nick asked, "How can someone make a new start when they are as old as I am? You may as well ask me to get back into my mother's womb and come out again." Jesus answered, "Believe me, no one can be a citizen of God's New World without being born of water and the Spirit. The waters of birth deliver a physical body, but the Spirit makes you a person. Don't be surprised at me saying "You must start life all over again." Like the wind, the Spirit blows where she chooses, and like the wind, you hear the sound she makes, but you don't know where she's coming from or where she's going. That's what it's like when the Spirit takes your life in a new direction."

John 3.1-8

*'Good as new: a radical retelling of the Scriptures'
from the ONE community for Christian Exploration © O-books, 2004*

The 2005 Whitley Lecture

The Whitley Lecture is a major annual event in the Baptist calendar, delivered by a leading Baptist scholar on a theme relevant to contemporary church life.

Recent lectures have included Stephen Holmes, Nicholas Wood, Anne Dunkley and Keith Jones. The lecturer for 2005 is Andrew Rollinson, Ministry Advisor to the Baptist Union of Scotland. His theme is *Liberating Ecclesiology: setting the church free to live in its missionary nature*. Andrew was educated at Oxford and Newcastle-upon-Tyne universities and trained for the ministry at Spurgeon's College, London. He was minister of Westgate Road Baptist Church in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and of Morningside Baptist Church in Edinburgh before his present appointment. In his lecture he will present the case for a renewal of the Baptist view of the church in order to set us free for the mission of God in today's world.

Lectures will take place at the following venues:

- 26 January at South Wales College (3.00 pm)
- 22 February at Luther King House, Manchester (11.00 am)
- 24 February at Mosswood Baptist Church, Glasgow (7.30 pm)
- 3 March at Spurgeons College London (11.15 am)
- 27 July at the International Convention Centre, Birmingham (4.30 pm) – as part of the BWA Congress.

Arrangements are also being made for the lecture to be given at Regents Park College, Oxford.

The lectures are free and open to all. They will include an opportunity for questions and discussion.

The lecture is being published. Copies can be purchased at the times the lecture is given, or by post from the Baptist Union or the Secretary of the Whitley Lectureship, Peter Shepherd, 166 Broadway, Derby DE22 1BP

j-mail

From **Bob Allaway**, London.
re: Paul Goodliff, BMJ, October, 2004

There is another way of defining Baptist ministry, as well as by function or being. I argued in a paper three years ago that the key thing is sphere of calling. A local church elder and an 'accredited Baptist minister' (or whatever the current term is) may perform exactly the same functions, and the latter has no indelible spiritual status as a result of ordination.

However, the local elder's calling is only from the local church, and they will therefore be subject to a constant temptation to tell the church what they want to hear. By contrast, the accredited minister' also is called by the wider church, and therefore speaks with an authority from beyond the local church. Even if the local church rejects their ministry, they remain a minister, since their calling comes from the wider church, who alone can remove it. This also enables them to exercise ministry at a regional level, or in a chaplaincy, where there may be no local

church to hold them accountable. This distinction can apply to any sort of ministry.

If we accept this view, though, then someone becomes a minister by the wider church recognizing a ministry in the same way that the local church does, not by presenting someone with a series of academic hoops to jump through.

Also, should we not have structures in place for the wider church to maintain accountability for all such accredited ministers?

Paul responds:

Of course, every Baptist minister through their membership of a Baptist church, whether in pastoral charge, retired, in chaplaincy or in translocal ministry, is held accountable in part by their local church, with whom they have entered into covenant relationship though membership. If we truly want an educated and effective ministry, then some form of 'academic hoop' is simply a tool to help us as a wider church, judge that a person has the intellectual capability and discipline demonstrated through study to conduct such a ministry.

Holidays 2005

SPAIN: COSTA BLANCA - CALPE

Well furnished and equipped self-catering two bedroomed ground floor garden apartment in a quiet area, with communal pool. Five minutes by car from beach and shops. Available for both winter (short or long let) and summer. For further details and brochure contact Peter Storey 07973 489412

GLOUCESTERSHIRE: STOW-ON-THE WOLD

Comfortable fully furnished self-catering bungalow, five minutes walk from the centre of Stow but in quiet location.

Ideal for touring Cotswolds. Sleeps 4 (1 double 1 twin beds). French window from sitting room leads to quiet secluded garden. Available all year round. More details and price on application from Mrs J Parnell 01608 684380

CORNWALL

Pretty converted Cornish cottage, sleeps 6, situated on wild and romantic Bodmin Moor! Lovely relaxing rural village setting, but within easy distance of countless Cornish attractions. Contact Hilary Conabeer der@hconabeer.freeserve.co.uk or 07976 626225 for details.

Book Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

The making of a northern Baptist college.
Peter Shepherd, Northern Baptist College
2004, ISBN 0-9546979-0-1 (available
from NBC) pp.298

Collegial formation has long been the mode of ministerial formation for Baptists. This is the story of one institution. From the founding of the Northern Education Society in 1804, Peter Shepherd tells the story of the various establishments and personalities involved in Yorkshire and Lancashire and the New Connexion College in the Midlands, finally leading to the establishment of Northern Baptist College in Manchester.

In early days the pattern was for a few students to gather around a tutor who was also a local pastor. Subsequently grander buildings housed larger student bodies, although finances and tutors were often overstretched. Making good use of original documents, the author describes the blend of bold steps and practical uncertainties that marked the way, of opportunities grasped and failures as well. The story traces the desire to be true to forming evangelical pastors who were theologically literate and increasingly, since the creative leadership of Michael Taylor in the 1970s, prepared in an ecumenical context. Evolution in training and curriculum reflected a changing church and society context, if not always at the same pace. Whilst mainly concerned with the preparation of men, and latterly women, for pastoral ministry, the book also tells how programmes for equipping church members have been developed.

This story of ministerial formation raises questions about church and ministry and their relationship. What is needed to

prepare women and men? For what pattern of ministry? And how will collegial ministerial formation fare in times of increasing liquidity in church life and denominational identity? The challenge to respond to new contexts cannot be evaded.

Both former students and those with an interest in theological education should be grateful to Peter Shepherd for this bicentennial volume.

Stephen Copson,
Regional Ministry,
Central Area.

Gathering - A Theology and Spirituality of Worship in Free Church Tradition,
Christopher Ellis, SCM Press, 2004 ISBN
0 334 02967 8, 326pp, £19.99

Here is a book that Baptists can be proud of. Amid the multitude of books on worship, most from a developed liturgical standpoint, someone has written seriously about the Free Church tradition of corporate worship and of Baptist worship as a significant partner in it. Ellis gives a very thorough treatment of the subject, drawn from his own contemporary research and historical material.

The opening section very helpfully defines and elucidates the doxological method, worship as embodied theology. In particular Ellis examines the recurring patterns in Baptist worship and from them draws conclusions about "Baptist soul" and its underlying theology. The historical material is carefully explored and a wealth of fascinating material emerges, with substantial quotations from contemporary sources. For lovers of Baptist history there

is great wealth here. The substance of the book covers basic themes of Free Church worship: prayer, preaching, hymn and song, the Lord's Supper and baptism. These are all creatively illustrated from Baptist history and theological conclusions drawn.

Two particular aspects are of note and of practical value. Firstly, Ellis argues for the place and the devotional and spiritual power of freely led prayer in corporate worship. In a scholarly and liturgical climate where such a dimension of public prayer is often ignored we have here a worthy champion arguing persuasively for a long-standing practice. This section of the book may be important for Baptist pastors and leaders of worship as it encourages us to recall and freshly engage with our tradition of leading corporate prayer. Secondly, he stresses that corporate worship is not only about the Eucharist, nor the theology of worship only that of the Eucharist.

The whole book reminds us that Free Church worship includes, but is larger than, sacramental categories. In our church contexts, where often worship consists substantially of these other things, Ellis offers us an opportunity to re-examine and revive a broad theology of worship and strengthen its liturgical consequences.

The book is a clearly written, serious scholarly work, which includes an extensive bibliography and useful index. It is deeply intertwined with Baptist history, but also gives material to stimulate theological thinking which may be worked out in new ways in worship. You could be proud to have it on your bookshelf.

**Chris Voke,
Spurgeon's College**

'Behind the Text' - history and biblical interpretation edited by **Craig Batholomew, C Stephen Evens, Mary Healey and Murray Rae** Paternoster Press 2003. xxii + 553pp. £24.95.

This fourth volume of the 'Scripture and Hermeneutics' seminar, has 19 contributors, almost all English or American, and mostly Protestant (including Stephen Wright of Spurgeon's College).

The cover illustration is a radical 'reworking' of Chagall's 'Exodus' (printed within), though I suspect the contributors would disapprove of people 'reworking' scripture by similarly adding what they regard as appropriate additions!

The introduction indicates the purpose and scope of the book: History has been, and continues to be, a hotly contested area in biblical studies...what lies 'behind the biblical text' will not go away as an important topic for biblical interpretation...in this volume we seek to identify key issues in that respect and to suggest ways forward toward a renewal of the interpretation of the Bible as scripture (page 2) The essays cover Historical Criticism - critical assessments (10 of the 20 chapters), Rethinking History, Tradition and History, History and Narrative, and History and Biblical Interpretation.

Amongst individual contributors, Platina recognises that what the Lord intends to teach us through a passage of scripture may be different from what the biblical author had in mind (page 26f) and Healey argues for approaching scripture with a Christological analogy: just as Christ was fully human but also divine, so scripture is fully human, composed by people within the limitations of their settings, but also able to express the revelation of God in all its fullness (191).

This is a well-produced hardback, with

scripture, name and subject indices that will be useful to those who want a volume that addresses issues of history and interpretation from a conservative position. But a volume embracing diverse views would surely be more interesting.

**John Matthews,
Tilehouse St, Hitchin**

The Right Road: Life Choices for Clergy by **Gwen Wagstrom Halaas**. Fortress Press. 2004. x + 118pp. ISBN 0-8006-3657-0. £11.99

Gwen Halaas is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, a family-practice physician married to a Lutheran pastor and related to several others. As such she is eminently qualified to write on the health and well-being of ministers of religion. Her comments and observations arise directly out of the U.S. context, but easily transfer to these shores. If we're not yet as forgetful as they seem to be about what legs are for, nor quite so lost to obesity, North American lifestyles are creeping up on us.

A study conducted in 1980 on 28,000 male Protestant clergy working during the 1950s found that they lived longer than other males, including other professionals. However, a study of death certificates of pastors from 1982-92 placed them in the top ten occupations to suffer death from heart disease. This regretful change seems to be down to increased stress, unhealthy diet, lack of exercise and workaholic attitudes to ministry.

Using the "Wholeness Wheel" model to balanced health, Gwen Halaas examines how pastors can achieve greater well-being in the physical, emotional, intellectual, social/interpersonal, vocational and spiritual areas of their lives. In her final chapter, she draws all this together with personality, gifts and style of leadership to

ask what makes for good ministry. An appendix provides a "wellness guide" to help the reader both to assess themselves and to monitor subsequent progress.

If we could get all our Baptist ministers first to read this (preferably in company with their spouse or closest friend - and later with their diaconate?) and then take its message and advice to heart, we'd have a lot fewer ministerial breakdowns, premature deaths and losses from the ranks. Our churches would also quickly feel the benefit. Arguably over-priced for its size, nevertheless this book is undoubtedly a valuable resource.

**Ken Stewart,
Bristol Baptist College**

Living Love: Restoring Hope in the Church, **Jack Dominian**,. Dartman, Longmann and Todd, 2004, 202pp + notes. £9.95

Jack Dominian, a Roman Catholic psychiatrist and expert on marriage and sexuality has long had a place in helping us understand more fully what it means to be human, made in the image of God and redeemed in Christ. In this new book, he is directly addressing the falling numbers in the churches, and the loss of faith in the Church among those who would still claim to have a faith in God. At the heart of his argument is the conviction that if the churches begin to put a message about the love of God, and the ways in which this can be explored and expressed through various forms of human love, at the centre of evangelism, then we will have a chance of connecting with those who currently believe that the church has nothing to say to them.

The book really has two strands - an exploration of human love, primarily explored through marriage, and the type of family thereby formed, which is the area in which Dominian is an expert; and a

critique of churches, and in particular the contemporary Roman Catholic church in the way in which marriage, family life and human love has been and still is regarded. With regard to human love, he writes with the insights drawn from his training and experience, and offers many comments, suggestions and affirmations which are useful, though to those not shaped by the religious community to which he belongs - with celibate leaders, for example, much of what he says can seem very obvious.

His critique of the churches is again explicitly shaped by his own religious community, and some of the issues, and indeed his challenges will sound odd to Baptist readers. But his appeal to us all to put convictions and practice centred on the love of God, and expressed through human love at the heart of our evangelism is undoubtedly one we can all share.

**Ruth Gouldbourne,
Bristol Baptist College**

Creation out of Nothing. A Biblical, Philosophical and Scientific Exploration.
Paul Copan and William Lane Craig.
Apollos, Leicester 2004. £14.99

In their production of 'The Works of Shakespeare', this text is undoubtedly one of those discarded by an infinite number of chimpanzees! But they would have enjoyed the account of Hilbert's Hotel: it has an infinite number of occupied rooms, yet the proprietor finds space for an infinite number of extra guests. Or the immortal autobiographer who takes one whole year to record a single day: when will his book be finished? Mind-boggling stuff!

This is an incredibly dense and technical defence of the Christian Doctrine of *Creatio ex Nihilo*. Its chapters on the biblical witness to this doctrine require some Hebrew and Greek. The work on philosophical, scientific and naturalistic

witnesses to this doctrine also demand a knowledge of the field. I did work out what infinite hotels and autobiographies had to do with creation: if talk of infinity can be proved to be absurd, then the universe cannot have always existed; it must have had an origin and (therefore) an originator.

But I was left with some questions. Against what, exactly, are Copan and Craig defending 'creation out of nothing'? There are some hints that Mormons teach a form of dualism (matter has existed eternally along with God). Some cosmologists are also desperate to come up with a model of the universe that requires no beginning. But I still wonder why this book was written. The authors seem to assume that, by proving all other options ridiculously flawed, they can force their critics to accept the equally absurd conclusion (absurd to the critics, of course!) that the universe has a personal Creator.

This book was stimulating, but hard going, and probably only useful for the specialist.

**Marcus Bull,
Trinity Church, Rawden.**