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# **BAPTIST MINISTERS' JOURNAL**

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# Editorial

The negative observation that a certain church was “full of little old ladies” has often been overheard. Clearly, it makes a value judgment about the quality of fellowship of the church in question: there cannot possibly be any ‘life’ there, any movement, any potential. It is a judgment which is carried over uncritically from society at large and is difficult to square with Kingdom values where ‘ageism’ has no place.

It represents the converse side of the cult of youth which now prevails, though ironically not in the Southern Hemisphere where in many countries half the population can be under 16. There age is not a crime and one is shaken by the care and consideration, even honour, given to the elders in the community. Rather than a burden upon society, they are valuable as repositories of wisdom and experience; they provide roots, depth and coherence.

Frequently it is asserted that the measure of any civilisation is how it treats its most vulnerable members, notably the old. This becomes even more of an issue when you take into account the prediction that the boom generation in the U.K. of the future will be pensioners, hastened by better health care and the static birth rate. Already companies are gearing up to target the once untouchable ‘over 50’s’, simply in order to staff adequately. What are the implications for the Church of such demographic changes? In general, a revaluation, so that the elderly are not simply tolerated (and patronised?), but given the same high profile as everyone else. Secondly, our church programmes may well have to be revised, if they have not already been so, to take into account the senior citizen bulge. And thirdly, approaches to mission will require to be sensitive to their special needs and characteristics. An ageing Europe presents us with a fine opportunity of valuing people for what they are and have been, not simply for their future potential.

In Eastern Europe it is largely the old who treasured the light of the gospel during the darkest days of state oppression when overt evangelism was prohibited. That the Church survived at all in many of those countries is a reflection of their faithfulness. Oliver Szebeni, Chair of the Historical Commission of the Baptist Union of Hungary, paints an informative picture of Baptist life in his country from before WWII to the present day. Following this, another international contributor, Ronald Ham of Australia, analyses the inner dynamics of the mystery of preaching.

The new Chair of the B.M.F., George Neal, presents in a third article a passionately argued case for the distinctiveness of the ordained ministry, in the light of current trends and perspectives. We are grateful to him for undertaking the office which reflects his care and concern for the Ministry. Lastly this time, John Munsey Turner, a Methodist colleague, leads us on the last excursus into the implications of Dissent Today. He calls for creative thinking in those heirs of the dissenting tradition.

The last word must be about the title of our journal. For most of this century it has been known as “Fraternal” (formerly “Fraternal and Remembrancer”). But times have changed and so has the character of the Baptist Ministry. Sensitive to the gender-bias of “Fraternal”, we have decided to rename our journal. We are sure that readers will appreciate the need for this course of action and continue to identify with the work of the B.M.F. through this publication.

# Through Trial and Tribulation: Baptists in Hungary

Religious freedom depends on the tolerance of the majority church or the government in Hungary. It seems that the framing of rights is always more favourable to such a church than to a Free-Church, certainly from 1895 to the last constitution.

## Before the Second World War

The mission work of the Baptists in Hungary started in 1846. A few young handicraftsmen came from Hamburg, Germany, where they had been converted by the Word of God, preached by "our dear brother Johann Gerhard **Oncken**". He had sent them to organise churches in their native land, Hungary. They had gone "with Christian love and zeal to preach the gospel"; one of them, János **Rottmayer** (1817-1901), did it in his joinery workroom every evening. After the Hungarian War of Independence (1848-1849), the Austrian military tribunal dealt with some of "Christ's successors" (Nachfolger Christi), considered to be more than a hundred. The early Baptists were scattered and it was hard to prove the existence of a Baptist congregation on the territory of today's Hungary after 1866.

A new era opened with the arrival of a German Bible colporteur, Heinrich **Meyer** (1842-1919), who began the work in Budapest in 1873. He founded the first Baptist church, above all for German people, in 1887. During his life, through his unflagging zeal, he won many souls, and baptised them, as many as thousands. One of his famous co-workers and simultaneous Bible colporteurs of the British and Foreign Bible Society was Mihály **Kornya** (1844-1917), the most fruitful peasant-prophet, who alone baptised about 11,000 people in the territory of the eastern part of the Hungarian Lowland and of Transylvania. Mostly, it was Romanians who were baptized by Kornya. The Hungarian Baptists were organized from 1893 by Attila **Csopják** (1853-1934), Lajos **Balogh** (1863-1919) and András **Udvarnoki** (1865-1945). During that time, these last two brothers received theological education in Hamburg. They requested public recognition, and received it after the law of religious freedom in 1895. This step divided the Baptists into two branches, from 1905-1920, fundamentally on linguistic distribution, but also on the issue of public recognition (staatliche Anerkennung). The President of the Baptist World Alliance, John Clifford (1836-1923) and his co-workers, took pains to encourage unity between the two Unions.

In the meantime, brother Kornya carried the gospel to new regions, persuading Hungarians and Romanians to become believers in Jesus Christ. How great was his impact on his contemporaries nothing shows more than that the Baptists are called "Kornyists", and their Union the (unrecognised) "Union of Kornya".

After the First World War the greater part of the Baptist congregations belonged to the so-called "successor states" (Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia). The rest, remaining in Hungary, was about 7000, only one third of the previous total.

God sent into Hungary new pioneers in the north-eastern counties, and the membership doubled from 1918 to 1939. We could single out many of the leaders from this era, Mihály **Baranyay** (1888-1980), Dr Imre **Somogyi** (1894-1951), Dr Béla **Udvarnoki** (1897- ). These people completed their theological education in the United States.

We may recognise that the majority churches and the so called "Christian course" have not considered the Baptists more than a sect. despite the public recognition of 1905. Imre Somogyi discussed this issue many times with the authorities, and wrote many treatise about the emancipation of the Baptists, protecting them from heartless and grave attacks.

### **During the Decades of Fighting and Struggling**

After the Second World War the Baptists lost many rights again, but their inclination to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ was undaunted. In the year 1948, they commemorated the mission work of 75 years, counted from Meyer's time, in Budapest.

The period following, 1949-1989, when the "State Office for Church Affairs" was liquidated, was the heaviest forty years in the history of Hungarian Baptists. Yes, there was religious freedom in the whole country, and it was more favourable perhaps in this state than in the other countries in Eastern Europe. But religious freedom meant no more than freedom of liturgy. Otherwise, everything else was rigorously controlled by the party, authorities and offices. The right of publication was governed by the state. The church could not buy properties without permission. It was forbidden to baptize in free waters and to distribute religious writings on the streets. The pastors could not travel to any other congregations without permission, and they could not go abroad, even to see their own children. In general, the pastors were considered unreliable persons. According to the party vocabulary, they were unschooled, retrograde and superstitious people. The evangelising was to "stupefy the people". Many of the Hungarian Baptist pastors were punished for these reasons. Nobody justified the reasons for "administrative arrangements" executed by the authorities on the innocent and well-disposed people.

The Hungarian Baptists received much assistance from the Southern Baptists of America. A new building was bought as a gift, located on the right bank of the Danube, in front of the picturesque spectacle of the Hungarian Parliament. This building and Bible-school was destroyed by the bombs during the war. Later, the state expropriated it and did not give permission to reconstruct because of the construction of a new road they wanted. Therefore the church bought a new one on Benczur Street, being big enough a place for 20 students, four classes, library and apartments for three teachers' families. After a year, this was expropriated again for the North Korean Embassy, and the Theological Seminary was squeezed into the central Office of the Union. Thanks to our Lord, they were able to continue the teaching and the Seminary did not close, as happened in Prague. After that the Baptists bought a building on the elegant Rose-Hill, and started a dialogue about right of use with the party leaders residing in the neighbourhood. The new building to the Lay Academy was finally built here, after a long literary feud.

In the beginning of 1956, the year of the Hungarian National Revolt, the Hungarian Baptists entered into the WCC, at first from the various national Baptist Unions. A good collaboration came into being among the protestant churches and the Hungarian Baptist Union. This enterprise was initiated by Dr Josef **Nagy** (1915-1985) and Dr Alexander **Haraszti** (1920 – ).

It was a privilege of brother Nagy to receive permission to issue the newspaper, which had been prohibited up to 1957. This newspaper was established by A. Udvarnoki in 1895. This periodical, entitled *Peace Herald*, (Békehirnök), appears weekly with a circulation of 5,500.

The Hungarian Baptists are very thankful that only occasionally were churches closed at this time, despite the indirect persecution. Thanks to God, nobody was killed in Hungary, like many from the leaders of the party. Five pastors were imprisoned without any legal proceedings, but they were let free not much later.

### **Towards New Tendencies**

The situations of the churches and especially the Baptists are steadily improving and from the time of Billy Graham's first preaching in Hungary, in 1977. That was his first time in an Eastern European country. The state leaders were seeking some new opportunities of collaboration with the churches. The Baptists established an asylum for neglected youth, the World of Life bought a home for the mission to youth, and some Baptist pastors joined with them.

The so called "Houses of Prayer" were built between the two World Wars. The Buda Baptist Church suffered a bombing attack. The state put an end to the orphanage adjoining. The little congregation applied vainly for building permission. The pastor, Dr Imre **Szakács** (1923- ) obtained some aid from the Baptist World Alliance and therefore was regarded with suspicion, such that the State Office has taken away his identity card. The first year of the new House of Prayer is the beginning of a new era: to reconstruct the old buildings. About 50 houses and parsonages were built up to 1988. Some of the congregations involved in building schemes were as small as 6 members.

Brother Haraszti, who is living in the U.S.A., initiated a mutual exchange scheme for Hungarian pastors between the old and the new homeland of the Hungarians. More of the younger pastors from Europe involved in this program received doctorates in American universities and returned; they became good workers of the Hungarian home-mission. One of them is Dr János **Viczián** (1932- ), the President of the Union, who served in Canada as first pastor from Hungary.

Miss Kamilla **Füredi** has the possibility of undertaking mission work in Africa through EBM/MASA, the first from a state belonging to the Warsaw Pact, in 1987.

### **Full of Hope**

The social change in Hungary is not a revolutionary step, but a gradual growth, from 1977-1989. A significant turning was in 1989 when the State Office came to an end. It was the first time that a little increase has shown itself statistically, but the Christians in the whole country were very thankful to our Lord God for this increase. At the end of 1990 the membership is 10,910; an increase of 268

believers. There are 104 congregations; pastors are needed in 16 districts and number 86 in total; a guest-worker from America is active. The number of local churches has increased with 14 new ones.

The Southern Baptists are going to initiate a "Partner Mission" treaty which will promote the Hungarian Baptists. There are no more obstacles.

During the forty years of the suppression, it was a strange thing to use western language, most of all English. But now there are 21 missionaries teaching the language from America. Many young people are now studying. In every congregation the services are increasing in attendance. The Sunday Schools, youth groups and missions are regularly held, whether inside or outside of the church buildings. In the *Peace Herald* they can report informations about baptisms weekly. Nobody protests against it, as readers have done in the past under party instructions. The famous Hungarian church choirs and orchestras are in action every Sunday in the large churches of the capital. Many of the laymen are also active in the services, never using identity cards as was compulsory before.

The Baptist Theological Academy, active from 1906, was established at that time as a Theological Seminary by Andras Udvarnoki. The government has never restricted the number of students in Budapest, and many are currently in the school. The candidates are deferred military service and the pastors have permanent exemption.

The one concern of the Hungarian Baptists is to have equality of opportunity with other Christian churches in Hungary.

**Oliver E. Szebeni**

## **Preaching and the Development of a Man and Woman of God**

Those who believe in the importance of preaching need to be careful in defending it because they may defend it for the wrong reasons. Preaching which feeds the preacher's ego is indefensible; preaching which gives the preacher a love of power over those who hear, which is merely clever and manipulative, is indefensible. The preaching which is defensible is that which bears the word of God to people from its basis in Scripture and in its application to life. This is the kind of preaching which develops men and women of God

Preaching involves more people than the preacher. For that reason a discussion of preaching may usefully attempt to understand it from both the preacher's and the listeners' point of view. Without the participation of both parties no real preaching can take place. Both preacher and listeners should also realise that in discussing a sermon they are not discussing a lecture nor considering a form of communication which has as its main purpose the giving of information. To require that of a sermon would be to ask it to supply what it may not be able to deliver and to make it rapidly lose its sermon character. Wrong expectations like

these inevitably lead both preacher and listener to disappointments because their expectations remain unfulfilled and preaching appears more and more irrelevant.

Such a limitation need not exclude from church services some special kinds of communication. The stated intention of a service may be apologetic, or a Bible Study, in both of which some elements of a lecture are deliberately used, but if these forms become the only diet of a congregation, preachers are ignoring a special gift of God to his Church which comes to expression in preaching.

### **Preaching: its Setting**

Consider the setting for preaching. Normally regular services of worship are the preaching context. Occasionally there are other contexts such as special evangelistic services or meetings wider than a particular church congregation, and special occasions in denominational life, but the gathered local congregation is the most common setting. With some exceptions, as when children leave the service, the worshippers usually will be from a wide age range and from different educational and social backgrounds. They are present not because someone is preaching on an advertized subject, but because they have come to worship God. There will be eager listeners who are accustomed to offering themselves to God and expecting that he will address them in the total worship, including the sermon. Others may come because they know people in the congregation and feel at home, or enjoy the singing, or habitually come with the family; they will be pleased if the sermon contains something special for them, but if it does not they may not worry so long as they find the atmosphere and people congenial. Almost certainly there are other reasons and expectations in those who come and who, being there, hear a sermon.

Worship and sermon, since they are for such a mixed company, would be the despair of a lecturer on a specialised topic. This gives preaching a unique character and presents the preacher and the listener with an experience not found in other forms of public communication.

One helpful description of preaching is that it "is an event in which an individual and a community are confronted with the Word of God. It is a mystery in which human words, in tones and overtones of contemporary speech, become the vehicle of the living and eternal Christ"<sup>1</sup> David Read, who gives this description, also describes preaching "as a sacramental mystery in which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the 'bread and wine' of the everyday speech of very ordinary mortals become the vehicles for the Real Presence of Christ".<sup>2</sup> Much earlier than that Thomas Cranmer, the father of English liturgies, had used the sacramental image and claimed that preaching "putteth Christ into our ears" just as the Eucharist "putteth Christ into our eyes, mouths, hands and all our senses".

Howard Williams makes a similar claim for what God does through preaching. He says that the pulpit is not the place for a display of academic knowledge. "The sermon is justified only if it brings a word from God. There are other forms of instruction which are beneficial, though unable to make this outrageous claim. But the sermon makes this claim and it does so not as a boastful aside but as the very reason for its delivery"<sup>3</sup>



## **Preaching: its Uniqueness:**

This leads us to the uniqueness of preaching. Preaching involves God, a preacher and listeners. Preaching is not merely a man or a woman passing on information to others as in a lecture, nor is it merely an attempt to persuade by presenting facts and arguments as in a debate or the speech of a politician, nor is it offering entertainment as in an after-dinner speech. Preaching may give information, may seek to persuade and may be (certainly should be) interesting even if not principally entertaining and humourous, but none of these things describes the uniqueness of preaching. The uniqueness of preaching is that God makes it an event in which he comes to those who hear the sermon.

The preacher speaks for God; that puts preachers in their place and should govern their preparation and delivery. The preacher will learn that God turns a sermon into an event sometimes in ways the preacher hoped for, but also sometimes in ways, and for people, the preacher never dreamed possible. Listeners for their part may judge the sermon for its content, its form, the skill of its delivery, but sometimes those aspects will be forgotten in the surprise of God's presence meeting them there in joy, hope, guidance, rebuke or invitation.

This description of preaching may lead the cynic to say that it is special pleading to try and revive a dying or dead cause. The cynic, whether a Christian who wants to replace preaching or a non-believer who thinks of Christian communication as naïve, is entitled to that opinion. Preachers should listen to such serious criticism and question their preaching in light of it. The purpose of this essay is to present an understanding of preaching which may begin to provide some answer for those who entertain doubts about preaching.

The idea of preaching as a unique form of communication, communication in and through which God is active, has special significance for the development of men and women of God in both pulpit and pew.

**Let us consider first the man or woman of God who is a preacher.** The fact that God makes preaching an event does not relieve the preacher of hard work and preparation. Lack of hard work is one reason why preaching is so often in bad shape. While every preacher occasionally discovers that a poorly prepared sermon comes alive because God makes it his event, most preachers do not presume upon this, but rather are made humbly grateful by the experience and vow to work harder at their sermons in future.

Umberto Eco, author of the remarkable medieval murder mystery, *The Name of the Rose*, has written a small book, *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, in which he discusses how and why he wrote his novel. Eco reminds us that even when an author claims he wrote in the grip of inspiration, he is lying. "Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration". Then Eco illustrates this from the poet Lamartine who, "speaking about a famous poem of his said that it had come to him in a single flash, on a stormy night in a forest. When he died, the manuscripts were found, with revisions and variants; and the poem proved to be the most 'worked out' in all of French literature."<sup>4</sup> Preachers might keep this in mind as they prepare their sermons!

The fact of God active in preaching does not mean the preacher is merely a mouthpiece with God as the ventriloquist and the preacher as the doll. Sermons arise from a preacher's knowledge of Scripture and of life. Knowledge of Scripture does not consist in simply choosing an interesting or unusual text, and developing it under three or four headings each illustrated by a story from a well-indexed book of illustrations. Scripture does not as easily yield its meaning, especially its meaning for the present day. A sermon which gives accurate historical background to the life and times of the text may be correct and interesting, but the preacher may fail to connect it with the life of the teenager, the widow, the executive, the sportsman, the divorcee and all the others who are listening.

Fred Craddock has made an interesting contribution to this aspect of preaching by writing about what he calls "the exegesis of the hearers". He claims that it is no less important than the exegesis of the text and that without it one can hardly expect a genuine and realistic intersection of text and listener with the sermon.<sup>5</sup> Every preacher will benefit from reading Craddock's book, *Preaching*, and particularly chapter 5 on the Listeners.<sup>6</sup>

The book on preaching by Henry H. Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching*, comes out of the Black preaching tradition and is a fine exposition of the importance of the preacher's link with the culture of his hearers. Mitchell believes that "the person who would preach with power must speak in the cultural terms which have the power to communicate with every sector of the human consciousness. In this sense, the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus the Christ must be rooted in the culture of the folk...The deepest and most meaningful cultural heritage of persons must be identified, respected and built upon."<sup>7</sup> Mitchell is worth reading because he illustrates his claim from the rich Black tradition of preaching which should help us to read the signs coming from our own cultural setting.

Preachers are in a sense mediators. While they move in the Scriptural context, they also live in this year and wrestle with being a Christian in this year, and they should know the people listening to the sermon. That presumes a heavy responsibility of pastoral care and involvement in the life of the world without which preaching can hardly touch ground. Preachers bring Word and life together in their preparation and pass on what they see and hear.

Even when the preacher knows these things, there remains the work of crafting Word and life into a sermon to be preached. Here each preacher's gift varies. When we read the sermons of Spurgeon and Fosdick, to take two quite different preachers (and do not let us forget that reading is a poor substitute for hearing because preaching is to be heard), we will realise that they and all "great" preachers have a gift which sets them apart. The way each of them puts a sermon together to express the idea which has gripped him is unique. Other preachers can learn from them but never equal them, but that should not discourage other preachers. God has called each preacher and given each gifts which he or she is to discover and develop. Too often preachers give up the hard work of study, of writing and honing their sermons, and never set free the gift they have. Giving up too soon seems to confirm that preaching is no longer relevant. But persistence aided by God's grace will silence that doubt.

Preachers need to hear other preachers whenever possible instead of always giving out and not receiving, and they should read books about preaching. No preacher should ever stop developing skills and one way of achieving this is to listen to tapes of their own sermons so as to sit where their listeners sit. They will be surprised at how irritating their own voice mannerisms may be, how uninteresting some of their sermons may be; they may also find encouragement at how clearly some sermons come across and be moved by the way God has helped their preparation. Most important of all is the realization that, they having done everything possible themselves, God takes this human work regularly presented in worship and makes it into an event of his presence to preacher and listeners. That undergirds all the preacher's work and hope, and the knowledge of it develops the preaching man and woman of God.

**Let us consider, second, the man or woman of God who listens in sermons.** Any discussion of preaching is inadequate if it ignores the responsibility of those who hear the sermon. The burden of preparation rests heavily on the preachers but what is prepared is no sermon if no one receives it.

Listeners to sermons will not come always prepared to receive the sermon, or other parts of worship either. God may speak to listeners by his coming to them in a service whether they are prepared or not, but if it is irresponsible of a preacher to prepare badly and leave everything to God, so the listening Christian is irresponsible if he or she comes unprepared to the preaching. Ill-prepared listeners may develop that way because they have had a bad experience of preaching. Robert Browning describes what he found when he sheltered in a church one stormy night while a service was in progress. He describes the scene as "that placid flock, that pastor vociferant", and the flock sitting there "divinely flustered". Browning says of the sermon, "What a mingled weft of good and ill," and he writes of the "provings and parallels twisted and twined... in the natural fog of the good man's mind".<sup>8</sup> Browning probably has many friends who are weary of bad sermons!

Another reason why some listeners may not prepare is that they may not realise they have a responsibility in the sermon, although they do not preach the sermon, they do need to receive it. That takes concentration, expectation, openness and obedience. If a congregation is not receiving a sermon offered, the preacher will almost certainly struggle. A good listener is not necessarily the one who can leave a service and recall the whole content of the sermon, including its structure. Many preachers who signal where they are going with numbered and labelled points and sub-points which are extremely clever may distract the hearers rather than help them. The preacher must have a clear structure by which he develops the insight which God has given. Drawing attention to that structure can sometimes aid listeners to follow the preacher but it may be unnecessary if the sermon leads people along by its own inner movement. The preacher may erect a scaffold while he builds his sermon, and take the scaffold away when the sermon is complete. What matters for listeners of sermons is that the preacher's insight should become their insight whether they know how they got it or not.

Most often unconsciously, but sometimes consciously, the preacher is helped by the receptiveness of his hearers. This is especially clear when there is a constant preacher-congregation relationship. Black congregations in many parts of the world demonstrate their receptiveness vocally and the preacher is taken

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## **A RE-AWAKENING .....**

Many Baptist churches are re-discovering the benefits of an active Men's Fellowship. It provides a stepping-stone for uncommitted men to enter the Church; it provides fellowship and friendship for men in the church; and it provides opportunities for local, national and international outreach.

The Baptist Men's Movement is in the forefront of this renewed activity. It can provide:

- assistance in forming new men's groups;
- participation in auxiliary activities in relation to local and world needs through Tools with a Mission, Operation Agri, Tapes for the Blind, etc.;
- personal membership and direct links with other Baptist men;
- regular regional and national conferences on key topics.

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along by a tide of support. Our white western congregations are rarely vocal but where they bring together a well-prepared and devoted preacher and an expectant, prayerful congregation, vocal responses may not come but responses there will be.

Every worshipper, just as every preacher, would do well to realise that a sermon may become, under God, "an event in which an individual and community are confronted with the Word of God". There is little value in strenuously asserting that Jesus in his earthly life awakened hope and faith in people he met, nor in dogmatically repeating that the power of the Spirit was evident through Peter's preaching at Pentecost if we do not expect that God still has power to do the same. Perhaps the greatest contribution the people of God can make to preaching is their expectancy and obedience in worship. God for his part is always at work, creating moments in which he addresses us. If we do not acknowledge our part in expecting and responding to those moments we should not blame the preacher, the service, or God when the blame is with us. To be ready to receive the word preached is a duty laid upon us.

We could learn from two Quaker elders of the old school who were travelling to a rural meeting; their carriage went into a snow bank and they had to spend the night in an icy attic at a farm house. The elder of the Elders stripped to his underwear and jumped into a feather bed pulling the blankets over him. The younger Elder, feeling a bit embarrassed, said, "Excuse me, friend, but does not thee think we ought to say our prayers before retiring?". The other Elder stuck one eye from under the cover. "Son", he said, "I keep prayed up ahead for just such situations as this and so should thee!"<sup>9</sup>

If we preachers and listeners took a leaf out of that Quaker Elder's book, we would rejoice more often in the preaching event because we would be prepared (and 'prayed up'). It would not matter then if sometimes the preacher ran into a cold patch or his listeners were in a dull slump. We would be ready for just such situations because we had learned to know that God never loses his ability to make an event out of our non-events. That is how preaching develops men and women of God in pulpit and pew.

## **Ronald N. Ham**

### **Footnotes**

This essay originally appeared in *A Man of God*, Essays in honour of Principal Ron Rogers of Morling College.

1. David H.C. Read, *Sent From God*, (Abingdon Press, New York, 1974), p31
2. David Read, p14
3. Howard Williams, *My Word*, (S.C.M. Press, London, 1973), p56
4. Umberto Eco, *Reflections on The Name of the Rose*, (Secker and Warburg, London, 1984), p11
5. Fred B. Craddock, *Interpretation – The Commentary in the Service of the Sermon*, October, 1982, p387

# English Churches Housing

## APPEAL FOR HELP

This page used to be headed Baptist Housing Association Limited. On 1st July BHA merged with Church Housing Association to form English Churches Housing Group. That of course is a fairly drastic change, but it does not change the fact there are over one hundred properties between Falmouth and Preston which were built on Baptist property with the active help and encouragement of Baptist churches. This also does not change the fact that we still need volunteers to help run those Local Management Committees who are, by their work for those less fortunate than themselves, expressing in the most practical way their love of God and man.

If one of these properties is near where you live, and you are willing to help, please either contact the Local Management Committee, or write to the Deputy Chief Executive of English Churches Housing Group at the address below. If you don't know where the properties are, we can send you a list of them all.

English Churches Housing Group Limited  
Sutherland House  
70-78 West Hendon Broadway  
London NW9 7BT

6. Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching*, (Abingdon, 1985)

7. Henry H. Mitchell, *The Recovery of Preaching*, (Harper and Row, New York, 1977), pp 28,29

8. Robert Browning, *The Poems and Plays of Robert Browning*, The Modern Library, New York, 1934), pages 490ff. The poem is "Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day".

9. Quoted in *Context*, 15.9.87. (A commentary on the intersection of religion and culture prepared by Martin H. Marty).

## No Greater Calling: Honour It!

It was with a deep sense of privilege that I accepted the Chair of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship. I have served on the Committee for many years and have grown to appreciate the contribution our Journal is making increasingly to ministry.

Over the years some have questioned the role and usefulness of the BMF; perhaps this hesitancy was once justified, but no longer! It is not easy to define our role. We are not a trade union; nor a professional body – although some aspects of both of these must be part of our function.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, we are still playing a useful role in areas of ministry that is assisting its function and status. Quite recently our Secretary outlined some of that activity in this journal.<sup>2</sup>

### Cause for Concern

While in office I intend to do all I can to further the work of the BMF – not for the sake of the BMF per se, but in order to extend the impact of our mutual ministry. This, not to glorify us as ministers, but among other things, through reminding you of the grateful pride you should have in your high calling, to deepen commitment which, in turn, will lead to a more effective ministry for the Christ who called you and sustains you. It is **The call** that adds the status and dignity to that office which we belittle at our spiritual peril and to the detriment of the whole church. My concern is that for some of our younger ministers this "mystic" sense of call to be a minister is lacking, even suspect, and what I have said so far will seem almost alien and exaggerated! I think that part of the reason they react so is due to certain ideas they hold, and even more, a misunderstanding of passages in the New Testament and certain theological truths which leads them to see their function in the church as little different from other members. Such views are debilitating for ministers; for if they do not know what their role or status is how can they hope to fulfil that role effectively or help the layfolk to discover theirs? I do not think it leads to clarity in understanding the role of ministers if the difference is ignored; or defined in such a way that the only difference seen is that one is full-time, paid, and the others not. The fact that the minister is "full-time, paid, ordained" and in addition has been specially trained, and after testing has been accredited by the Baptist Union and found acceptable to churches, does emphatically declare that such a person **is** different and has a **special** role! Why go through all that distinctive and "separating" Ordination procedure if nothing special has occurred? The misunderstandings to which I referred earlier and which lead to a depreciation of Ministry are three in number:

they stem historically from the Protestant Reformation and later Free Church interpretation or wider application of these concepts.

They are the following: 1) **The Priesthood of All Believers** enlarged in recent times by the addition of 2) **The Charismata of the Whole People of God** and 3) **the Authority of Scripture** which has been unnecessarily interpreted in either a strong fundamentalist way or even an insistence that it must mean inerrancy. I cannot deal with all these at length in one article, but I want to reflect on each one and show that these doctrines need not lead necessarily to a denial of a sacramental view of ministry.

**The Priesthood of All Believers:** This says nothing against an ordained ministry. Luther stressed this doctrine in order to oppose the sacerdotalism that was prevalent in the Roman Catholic church at the time. In stressing that all Christians were equal before God and there was no essential hierarchy in the Church (the priest being at the top and the laity on the bottom) and **all** believers had direct access to God, he in no way implied that there was no place for an ordained full-time ministry with a different role to the laity.<sup>3</sup> His instructions to Pastors make it clear he expected from them profound dedication, and insisted they made much of their office. He does not want the ministry unduly exalted but he does insist: "The ministry is not to be degraded and made common. The office of the Word and sacrament not only lends dignity and authority, but also makes exacting demands. ...He must stand before his people as one of them, a fellow sinner, and yet in the full dignity and authority of his office.... the high estimate the laity puts upon the office is not to be disappointed". Again: "Who can tell of all the glory and the virtue that a real and faithful pastor has in the eyes of God. There is no dearer treasure, nor any more precious thing on earth or in this life than a real and faithful pastor and preacher".<sup>4</sup> So one could go on. There is no way, therefore, why a strong belief in the priestly rights of the congregation need belittle the exalted calling of the ordained ministry. If Luther, who promulgated the doctrine of the Priesthood of all Christians, yet stressed the necessity, dignity and divine calling of an ordained ministry, saw no problem here, why should those who profess to follow Luther do so?

Here we see what is a common feature in religious history: people adopting practices and embracing doctrines which are supposed to have their origin in eminent theologians whom clearly they have failed to understand. I think that some over-enthusiastic Free Churchmen make claims relating to Reformation principles that both Luther and Calvin would declaim responsibility for.

**The Charismata of the Whole People of God:** All members are grace-gifted through a "manifestation of the Spirit"<sup>5</sup>. The Protestant Reformers have things to say about this; but again in no way are led as some of our modern Charismatics, to such an emphasis on "Body Ministry"<sup>6</sup> that the ordained ministry becomes almost an embarrassment! Again there is no reason why an emphasis on the Gifts of the "Body", so that the members share in the work of liturgy and proclamation of the Word, need lead to the prime place for the Minister in these functions being relegated so that the laity take over. The leading of liturgy is the main work of the minister and no-one else!

It is illuminating how, for many "Charismatic" Christians, First Corinthians, selectively interpreted, has become the Canon of Authority. It is a selectiveness



of passages which supports a theological viewpoint and which reveals the practice of having a **Canon within the Canon**.<sup>7</sup> Thus many Christians insisting they base their theology on the Bible, in fact, base it on the parts which suit and become authoritative for that particular doctrine. They are, that is, narrowly selective. However, for all Christians, the witness of the **Pastorals**<sup>8</sup> cannot be ignored, especially by those who have a high view of Scripture; the Pastorals are Scripture and their understanding of Church and Ministry has a claim on our obedience. And, of course, it is in the **Pastorals** that one finds a strong plea for a more ordered and structured type of worship with far less freedom for the individual member to take his share of church life, and little or no emphasis on "gifts". There is also clear evidence of a special office of ordained ministry – even a bishop or elder who had responsibility for a wider area than the local church!

This discussion is meant to support the legitimacy of my making a very strong appeal for the ministry. I long to persuade you all to recapture that high sense of call that should have been with you from the first and to build on it so that you will persist in giving the very best of your time, talent and energy, believing it to be one of the great callings in history. If you do not have this sense there is no way you can give to the Church the dedication, skill and hard work that is required. The higher the sense of vocation, and the greater the sense of awe and privilege you feel at being called, the deeper the thrill and the greater the achievement. If you do not think it the greatest **call** alive then I beg you to resign and find one that is, otherwise you will never know the deep joy and satisfaction the ministry can give. No other "profession" can offer such opportunities for service to the deepest needs of mankind. If all this seems too much, continue to reflect on what a minister's **call** involves when undertaken with dedication.

You offer people redemption, comfort in sorrow, hope in despair, power in weakness, life for death, wholeness instead of incompleteness, power for weakness, joy, peace, purpose and a thousand things besides. In other words, you offer God! To this you are **called** - how can you belittle such a unique vocation or let another take your place? You older ministers, turn again to those great books on preaching and ministry that so thrilled and stimulated you when you first heard the great call. Reread your Stewart, Black, Sangster, Coggen, Farmer, Neill, etc.<sup>9</sup> if you wish to recapture the thrill of those early days of great idealism and expectancy and be reminded of the sacramental nature of both preaching and ministry, read especially your P.T. Forsyth in his two great books: *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* and *The Church and the Sacraments*. What a high view of preaching and ministry! He was a profound believer in both the Bible and the Church. He wanted to encourage the Church and Ministry to hold as near as high a concept of the ministry as the Roman Catholic held without the sacerdotalism that went with it. In other words, he held a sacramental view of Church and Ministry. It is the same with his view of Scripture. He believed in the historical critical approach to it and yet he desired the same reverence for Scripture the fundamentalist professed to have without the inevitable superstition and unscientific attitudes that fundamentalism was seen to engender, and sadly still does, especially for the unscholarly. Feel again what it means to realize that **Preaching as well as Baptism is sacramental** – what a difference that makes to one's expectancy as to its effects! All these scholars made one feel that to be chosen by God for the ordained ministry in order to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments was to be on holy ground and to want to remove one's shoes in awesome gratitude.<sup>10</sup>

You younger ministers, especially those of you who do not feel the same exalted things about ministry as some of us older ones, look out some of these works and see what they have to say. Try and look into the roots of Baptist origins and theology and find more secure foundations on which a more profound sense of call can be sustained. Do not do with ministry what many of you are doing with hymns – concentrating on contemporary songs, ignoring at least three hundred years of fine hymnody. Who says that Christianity and sound hymn writing only began in the seventies? Who says that anything in liturgy and theology written before the 1970's is not spirit filled? To eschew centuries of tradition in worship, hymnody, Biblical exegesis and to imagine that the deep vocational understanding of Ministry is misguided, as if the Holy Spirit stopped inspiring Christ's Body before you entered the ministry, is not only sheer ignorance, it is blind folly and will lead ultimately to an utter collapse of anything truly Christian within a generation; because all religious practice must have firm foundations rooted in both biblical and theological principles. The Bible and theology were here before you and me.

### **Authority of Scripture**

This leads smoothly into the matter of the understanding of the nature of "gifts" and of the **Authority of Scripture**, for much of the misunderstanding of "gifts" and ministry and who should do what in the Church, is due to a misunderstanding of how the Bible should be interpreted. It is an hermeneutical question!! Holding the Bible to be inerrant too often leads to the insistence that what Scripture said was done by Christians at Corinth has to be done in the same way today. Here there is no allowing for the pressure of extant ideas or attitudes. For example, it is difficult to believe that Paul thought that all he said "off the cuff" to deal with **ad hoc** situations in a local church would become enshrined later as inerrant Scripture! Paul was a man of his time. Making, for example, 1 Corinthians the eternal paradigm for how gifts are to be used or understood is to imprison oneself in a time capsule as though what was done and said then is infallibly true and the Word of God for every age and place. This ignores the sociological human side of both Scripture and man's understanding of God's will.

When Paul wrote about gifts at Corinth he was dealing primarily with matters relevant to that time; not the second or the twentieth century! When you read about that highly charged, emotional, semi-pagan community of Corinth we need to remember the setting. See how hesitant Paul was about so many of the things they were doing, and pay due heed to his strictures and warnings. This is something our Charismatic friends do not always do! Do you recall the 'betting odds' Paul placed on the respective values of Glossolalia and Prophecy – something like a thousand to one!, and yet how many earlier neo-pentecostals stressed both this particular gift and the other more spectacular manifestations of the Baptism in the Spirit. I think an honest reading of St. Paul in this whole area leads to the conclusion that Paul reveals a strong sense of ambivalence. He values 'gifts' highly, but he sees how misused, abused, and misunderstood they could be. What was true then is still true today! Certainly as St. Paul wrote about the 'gifts' open to any to whom God wished to manifest them, he did not deny in any way his own Apostolic right or authority to command them over the matter. What applied to Paul, I believe, can be applied to us who follow in the steps, if not of Paul, at least of Timothy and Titus! For Evangelical Christians, and I do claim such in the deepest sense of that word, the authority of Scripture holds a high

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place; but if it is interpreted wrongly and too narrowly it can cause grievous harm to the Church.

When I was ordained I felt called to a holy task that I believed God Himself had laid upon me and that only He could sustain. That task was summed up in the fact that I was **called** to preach the Word of God from Scripture, to lead the worship of Christ's Church, to administer the Sacraments and to be a faithful pastor of the people and to do the work of an evangelist.<sup>11</sup> I also accepted that my ministry was "a gift of God to His Church and its authority the authority of Christ Himself through His Church".<sup>12</sup> I have never seen any reason to renege on that call nor to delegate the heart of that responsibility to anyone else.

That does not mean that I do not share worship, I do. Nor does it mean I do not share some of the pastoral work; but it does mean that I refuse to leave the bulk of it to others lest I despise that divine **call**. Take heed, those who now delegate much of the worship and pastoral care to others, that you are not doing it to avoid the cost of taking your ministerial responsibilities seriously. It is very demanding to be a true Preacher and Pastor and some find it so challenging that they try to avoid the full responsibility week by week. This is especially true of the pastoral side of ministry. Hence, although it seems a strong statement, I think some ministers have, unconsciously perhaps, found in the idea of Pastoral Teams a "legitimate" way of avoiding the too costly task of visiting people in their homes. Added to this is the setting up of an office where they can be found if an appointment has been arranged. I know of churches where this is the only way to be certain of seeing your minister. I have been personally in touch with situations where a young child and a middle-aged man, both suffering cancer, were not visited in their homes by a minister, only the pastoral team visited. To see the minister, a visit to the "surgery" was required! How common is this these days? All this often under a genuine, though I believe misguided, desire for "Body Ministry". Be careful that this is not a rationalization, a way out of a costly, heart-rending bearing of another's deep questions and even deeper pain for which you have no answer but only a shoulder to cry on, a hand to hold, and a willingness to bear curses if necessary. It is the gift of ministry that can bring the love, grace and comfort of God into that situation of deep need.

## Ultimate Privilege

There is, surely, nothing more thrilling and spiritually satisfying than leading worship, offering the Sacraments and preaching His living revitalizing Word. And to do it for those you know intimately because you constantly visit them, praying for them without ceasing – those with whom you've shared some of the most joyful and also the saddest times in their lives. You have also shared great moments when together you have found God was never far away all the time they felt so alone. To want to delegate this to others seems to me not only incredible, but almost a dereliction of duty and a denying of oneself of some of the great joys of the Ministry. My fellow Ministers, be proud of your calling; but be humble in its fulfillment. You were not called to be served but to serve – but you **were** called. Exalt your **calling**, not to exalt yourself, but to make sure that

because you esteem the office an unspeakable privilege, you will give to it your very best so you can do it well for your people and, yes, for the God who called you.

Do not let either yourself, your flock, or your God suffer neglect by doubting or belittling your high **calling**. One day the Great Shepherd of the Sheep will want an account from his under-shepherds. Then, although you will meet your Lord with awe and much hesitancy, you will meet Him knowing that you did your best to be as faithful a Servant and Minister as you could – it won't clearly be a perfect offering; but it will be a humble-proud honest one, and even God can ask no more. You have been **called** – live up to the **call**; let **no one** take it from you!

## George Neal

### Notes:

1. Some ministers still feel we should at least become a Professional Body with realistic fees. This might give us "teeth". I still don't think this is on – who are we meant to bite?
2. Vic Sumner's article was in the April 1991 Fraternal issue.
3. Anything Luther wrote on Church and Ministry reveals his high evaluation of the Work of Ministry and the office of Pastor.
4. *The Minister's Prayer Book* pp 182, 184.
5. I think it would help many Charismatics to understand what the Gifts of the Holy Spirit is really all about if they read James Dunn on the Charismata according to the New Testament: *passim Jesus and the Spirit* but specifically Chapter 7. For an excellent summary and fine analysis of the whole subject for Baptists, Principal Paul Fiddes' booklet is a must! *Charismatic Renewal: A Baptist Viewpoint*.
6. A failure to take into consideration the Pastorals when considering Body Ministry is not limited to the uninitiated. I would make the same complaint against some of the academics too. e.g. former Vice Principal Mike Nicholls in the *Fraternal*, April 1990. He quotes the three main Body passages and draws conclusions which I do not think necessarily follow and without considering the later passages from the Pastorals which show a different picture of Body Ministry – it is dominated by Ministers etc. The problem with the Pastorals for the more Conservative scholars, of course, is notorious!
7. For this subject read James Dunn: *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* Chapter XIV. I do not think Baptists, especially the more conservative among us, have done justice by any means to the early evidences of "Catholicism" within the New Testament, outside the Pastorals as well as within them! The main problem for the Conservative is the date and authorship of the Pastorals. If Deutero-Pauline the solution is easy, but if not – big problems arise. The spectre of pseudonymity hovers darkly!
8. Vide notes 6 and 7.
9. There are also many recent books which exalt the office and privilege of the Ministry and its work. e.g. Both of R.E.O. White's books are brilliant and so comprehensive – two of the best in recent years!
10. Do not underestimate the inner power released when one believes in the full effectiveness of what one is doing. Do you believe **your** Benediction at the end of service really does something? Do your people?
11. Here any Order of Service book will remind you of how seriously **All** denominations take Ordination whatever the individual Ordinand may feel.

12. This is a short quote from a very good chapter in a first rate book on Baptist Doctrine of Church and Ministry. Every Baptist minister and his deacons should read it: *The Pattern of the Church* Ed. A. Gilmore. Vide also the first rate Baptist History books published by the Baptist Historical Society. The Copy of Baptist Union Documents 1948-1977 which includes the Union's attitude to Church and Ministry is invaluable. I wonder how many Baptist ministers have bothered to read them? Especially those who are so critical of the denomination and accuse it of unorthodoxy. There are so many books on this whole matter – all very good; but for those who wish to understand, even for Protestants, a conception of our work and office that has a strong emphasis on our **Priestly** function, may I highly recommend the following book; the author is American. *Worship and Pastoral Care* by William H. Willimon (Abingdon) 1979 (ISBN 0-687-46389-0)

## Dissent Today (3)

The challenge of a Decade of Evangelism might make those of us in England who are dissenters from the Established Church ask ourselves **why** and **what for**. At the end of the last century A.M. Fairbairn, the Congregationalist Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, said: "We dissent because we believe that the Church of England fails adequately to interpret and realize for the people of England the religion of Christ." Very high minded, but would that be true of many now? Might it not be because we find our church congenial to our temperaments; because my wife is a Baptist; because the Methodists had the best youth club; or the worship at Bethel was livelier than at St. Bartholomew's! I am a Methodist by conviction, but the conviction was the result of a lively local church to which I went as a teenager with my friends, where the Gospel was offered to mind and will as well as heart. In a market economy, religion is inevitably part of that market. Clearly many folk 'shop around', the reasons for choice could include lively worship, warm 'fellowship' and very often 'something good for the children'. Many congregations are now a mix of varied traditions which makes for fun when an earnest minister talks of the 'Methodist Constitution' or 'Baptist principles'. So let's look at Dissent against **that** background, not the outlook of a Fairbairn, writing when dissenters were still seeking equality, when Free Church truculence sometimes did battle with that "effortless assumption of superiority" which so often (even now!) characterizes an Establishment.

### Defending Establishment

I begin with a recent defence of the Church of England's establishment by the Archbishop of York, Dr. John Habgood. I want to submit this to some scrutiny from a dissenting angle and then to suggest **ten** areas of discussion, remembering that Dissent in England (space forbids discussion of Scotland, Ireland and my ancestral Wales in detail, though remember there is now no Nonconformity in Wales since there is no Establishment) must include the Church of Rome and the Black Churches.

The Church of England – still looking back to Richard Hooker's view that church and commonwealth were completely one, if you belong to one, you belong to the other – seeks to minister to all in every geographical parish and is concerned with the whole life of society and nation. A noble conception, though other Christians ('tolerated' since 1689), not to speak of people of other faiths or humanists, may find the claim patronizing or pretentious. Nevertheless there is a difference in conception here compared with the gathered congregation. "The

reality of establishment expresses itself through a sense of responsibility to the nation as a whole and in particular to those whose religion is mostly inarticulate and submerged".<sup>1</sup> This implies a ministry to the "unexpressed, inarticulate but deeply felt religion of ordinary folk who would not usually describe themselves as church-going Christians yet feel themselves to have some sort of Christian allegiance.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Habgood suggests that concern for the whole parish is 'instinctive' to an Anglican. This **could** be seen as sheer pretentiousness by those who have belonged to other communions for generations, a matter admitted by Archbishop Runcie. "If by a national church is meant a church which is concerned for the whole life of the nation and is sensitive to members who are seekers, I observe my Roman Catholic, United Reformed Church and Methodist friends show no less openness".<sup>3</sup> I have never, frankly, found my Anglican colleagues visiting more homes than I do! Added to this is ministry to those who hold power, whose options may well be more limited than meets the eye. "To be close to those in power is to have some first hand knowledge of the complexity of the actual choices facing them. This has a devastating effect on prophetic certainties".<sup>4</sup> The obverse side of this is the Bishop of Durham's admission that the Establishment gives him a platform for 'speaking out', an odd and very conservative argument for privilege.

On the other hand Bernard L. Manning (the Cambridge historian) who saw the establishment of one part of the fragmented unity of medieval Christendom as an affront to the other parts, not to speak of agnostics and other faiths, feared an episcopal disestablished sect, a sentiment repeated by Daniel Jenkins<sup>5</sup> who suspected that the Church of England might sidle quietly out of the responsibility of Establishment. He is backed up by the dissident Roman Catholic Professor Adrian Hastings who suggests an Establishment in England more akin to that of Scotland – recognition without power – a sentiment repeated by the Methodist Free Church Moderator, Dr. William Davies. Dr. Habgood adds that the Church of England could, while acknowledging the complexities of power, also have a concern for the disadvantaged and inarticulate, a matter given enormous 'clout' by the way in which *Faith in the City* has been backed up by the Church Urban Fund. These arguments are weighty but were all made by Bishop Mandell Creighton as long ago as 1900. The great claim for comprehensiveness, too, can be seen as not only theologically hollow but ecumenically disastrous, since the Church of England could not embrace the Methodists (save in creative gestures like the Queen's College at Birmingham) or join in covenant with the URC and the Moravians. Parish churches, too, can be every bit as 'gathered' as a dissenting congregation and often limited to one style of churchmanship and increasingly exclusive in matters of baptismal policy. But we seem stuck with continuing Establishment.

So what for continuing dissent? Some of us believed that organic union was God's will for England and that it was thwarted, but we have to carry on, not to make the best of it, but as a genuine call of God. Proper diversity should not be an excuse for abandoning the goal of one body. I suggest ten areas where Dissent can be of help to the greater church and I would include the Roman Catholics as dissenters, which is both a comfort and a challenge!

1. We need **an ecumenism of differentiation**. All churches should not try to do everything. There must be a mutual trust of one another. In our parish the Vicar has a concern for healing. I have a concern for theological exploration. Fine! The plight of the rural church might be alleviated if Anglicans trusted

Methodists more – even with some of the worship leadership in village churches. The ‘scalded-cat’ mass-priest scurrying from one eucharist to another is little use to anyone! Orthodox Dissenters tend to be middle-class – you, after all, have to pay every pound for your church building and minister! We need not be perpetually guilty about not reaching **all** other strata of the population. Maybe the black-led groups and the Roman Catholics, with Irish history in their bones, can do things others cannot do and reach groups to whom ‘Dissenting’ mores are unintentionally off putting. Swear or drink or gamble in a Free Church and you will get my meaning! This does not let us off the hook of concern for the poor, but could rid us of the guilt which can stultify us.

2. “Christian worship”, said Karl Barth, “is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life.” What have non-established churches now to offer? ‘Catholic Charismatics’ seem to be able to balance ‘charisma’ and ‘enthusiasm’ with high sacramentalism better than others, often avoiding the polarities which have afflicted some other churches. The Free Churches might better come to terms with ‘All age worship’ without denigrating the expository, prophetic style of preaching which was once our glory. There are still people who are grasped by preaching to mind and will as well as heart and who need an articulate faith not aided always by the more ‘charismatic’ styles. But our preaching will need to be much more varied – I find at least three ‘styles’ are now required. An expository, systematic style for the ‘preaching service’ still normative in many Free Churches; a short, sharp style for the sermon in a communion service; a free wheeling participatory style for ‘all age worship’. So much of our preaching is rigid or not imaginative enough. A new generation of creative ‘wordsmiths’ is desperately needed and could well gain a hearing.

3. We must issue the call to full Christian commitment without feeling guilty about raising a church of heroes. Why not encourage small ‘Abrahamic’ communities, which do not normally reflect ‘folk religion’ or ‘civil religion’ but are communities of commitment. The ecumenical possibilities are great. Dr. John Vincent’s plea for ‘inner city’ colonies of new style ‘friars’ and ‘nuns’ pledged to poverty, could be a better mission plunge than whipping up constant guilt about the poor. But where are the takers? Robin Gill’s plea for ‘prophetic individuals’ and ‘prophetic communities’, rather than Conference resolutions which are not representative, could come under this section.<sup>6</sup> Not all prophets will be welcomed, they will be lonely and probably eulogized after their death like Romero of El Salvador who appears in one sermon out of two! But what does creative dissent **mean**, if it cannot include men and women like him?

4. I want to see a conscious attempt to mobilize Christian resources. For thirty years I have dreamed that people across denominations with common concern should meet together – say doctors, social workers, teachers, trade union leaders with a concern for common Christian values. Without censorious pontificating (the churches rather overdid that in the Thatcher decade) policy can be discussed, criticized, improved. In an area like the North West, I am quite sure that there are untapped political and theological resources largely unshared.

5. I was one of the generation of young people who came into Methodism through the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs – its annual assembly in London can still hit the T.V. by its sheer exuberance. I was at the earliest of these extravaganzas! Then at University, the Methodist Society at Cambridge helped



me to a vital faith, evangelical but not fundamentalist, protestant but not uncatholic, which gave me a vision of what the church could be with at its heart the Christ to whom (to quote my old professor, Herbert Butterfield) one could "hold, and for the rest be totally uncommitted", meaning that no other cause or class or party or dogma could undermine Christ's sovereignty. We need to look again at our approach to young adults. Do we challenge them enough or do we simply patronize them? Do we still offer Christian moral values or assume that the values of the 'Permissive Society' have won? Is it the moaning of an elderly man that we have sold the pass? I value still that orthodox Christianity but not the unimaginativeness of fundamentalism. We still have a claim on youth, but it is mighty demanding.

6. The Free Churches have a noble tradition of scholarship often fought for against the odds. The Moultons, P.T. Forsyth, Wheeler Robinson, Newton Flew, T.W. Manson, C.H. Dodd, T.H. Robinson, Vincent Taylor, Gordon Rupp, Morna Hooker, Frances Young, are names to conjure with and the lay scholars like Chales Coulson, T.R. Glover, Herbert Butterfield, Basil Willey showed that the Free Churches were at the centre of intellectual debate. Their very success was a measure of the struggle of the churches which bred them. But the intellectual battles are still to be fought in each generation and are often being fudged. We still have the task of producing a theologically articulate ministry – men and women who are 'folk theologians', who can help the people of God to be theologically aware with a faith which is not a bunch of illusions which the reality of life will blast away. Woe betide us, too, if we allow a generation to arise which does not even know, let alone love, the hymns of Watts, Doddridge and Charles Wesley. It cannot be estimated how much sound theology was 'learned by heart' by ordinary people absorbing Watts and Wesley into their spiritual bloodstreams. Every renewal produces its own poetry and music – and I would affirm new forms of hymnody – **but** a diet of choruses and ephemerata when Wesley is on tap will lead to a downgraded theology and a limited faith.

7. From older Dissent, there are still values we dare not lose. I would cite from the age of Cromwell – Dissent's terrible triumph – the necessity of truth seeking and willingness to wait upon the Lord. "I beseech you in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken", not a sentiment heard often in church, let alone in parliament. There is too, from the Calvinist tradition, an enormous conscientiousness and sense of responsibility which brought much to local and central government. When Lord Reith, agonizing over vocation, said that he had an "inordinate ambition to be fully stretched", he revealed the noble side of Calvinism. We have no business to denigrate it when the pursuit of excellence is so much under a cloud. Integrity in politics – yet also "The art of the possible" and a willingness to compromise. For Oliver Cromwell, the Leveller went too far – a 'militant tendency' we would call it! Which side would you be on when Cromwell shot down the Levellers at Burford? A good litmus test of radicalism! Responsibility and integrity – let those be words we need to remind at every level of our national life. What the Archbishop of York called 'skulduggery' should worry us in state, church and chapel and we have no cause for the smug self-righteousness which was always the danger of the Nonconformist Conscience.

8. From more recent history we can take the idea of being 'Her Majesty's loyal religious opposition'. We are not by nature anti-hegemonic or sectarian but believe rather in what East Germans used to call 'critical solidarity'. This means a church willing to make stringent comment on the society and policies of the day.

We shall remain minorities but we must never take short cuts as if people were mindless.

9. The time is ripe for dialogue with Roman Catholics on moral issues – the fur might fly on abortion or contraception or population control or homosexuality (let's have it in the open!) but we cannot go it alone. We exist in tension with Anglicans and Catholics alike. As the Church of England under Archbishop Carey appears to be recovering from what Daniel Jenkins called being "the domestic chaplain of those who had power together with their retainers...declining into a querulous old age"<sup>7</sup>, so we must see that we are more than groups indulging in pious nostalgia for the time of Clifford, Hughes and Parker. S.T. Coleridge put well the mood which both Catholic and Free Church people might share. "The universal church needs to be the sustaining, correcting, **befriending** opposite of the world, the compensating counterforce to the inherent and inevitable defects of the state"<sup>8</sup>

10. We need to recover a passion for mission and evangelism. We must forge deeper links with the inner city Free Churches whose faces are black and who may reach groups the indigenous churches cannot. When I hear of the work of my friend Kecious Grey, at the Wesleyan Holiness Church in Handsworth, Birmingham, I see a direct ancestry stretching back to Wesley's Orphan House at Newcastle and Kingswood School at Bristol giving little people a sense of their stature before God and therefore before other people. The Free Churches still have to find a way of solving the paradox of their historical existence, combining the 'Koinonia' and sometimes the smugness of the 'gathered church' with a desire to see Christ enthroned at the heart of national life. This includes direct evangelism, the opening of eyes to see the Christ at work now. "I offered Christ to the people" – John Wesley's watchword, is still our mandate. This includes mission alongside Christ's poor, but not in response to guilt but to Gospel. It includes the enormous contribution of the black churches with their life, colour and passion. It includes massive lay contributions – our lay folk express their faiths at every level of our national life. It includes the Roman Catholic's world dimension, a 'worldmanship' which dare not ignore North and South, population explosion, famine, racism and the battle against any form of totalitarianism left or right, white or black.

Let us throw off the crippling sense of guilt which can weigh us down. We are now what we were – the sociological causes are deep and profound and are no one's fault save perhaps Lloyd George's! New styles are needed for a new generation. The historian, Sir Herbert Butterfield, a paradigm of creative Methodist dissent, was not given to prophecy. But several times in the 1960's and 1970's he stated that secularism and materialism would not give people deep values. Some would revert to "dark astrologies, weird theosophies and bleak superstitions". A clash between the great religions was not unlikely. Look at any large bookshop for the fulfilment of the prophecy. He also said, "I think that the spread of secularism offers Christianity not only its greatest test but also its greatest opportunity that it has ever had in history....the twentieth century seems to me to require what I have called the 'insurgent' type of Christianity, not the kind which binds up its fortunes with the defence of the **status quo**. By 'insurgent' Christianity I mean the kind of Christianity, which instead of merely cherishing tradition and idealising it, is constantly ready to return to first principles, to

make a fresh dip into the Gospels and the New Testament revelation".<sup>9</sup> This is creative dissent.

## **John Munsey Turner**

### **Footnotes**

1. J.S. Habgood *Church and Nation in a Secular Age* DLT 1983, p96  
cf. J.S. Habgood *Confessions of a Conservative Liberal* SPCK 1988, ch3, p37
2. J.S. Habgood *Church and Nation* p.78
3. R. Runcie (Ed.) *Cathedral and City* 1977, pp129-30
4. Habgood op cit p.108
5. B.L. Manning *Essays in Orthodox Dissent* IP 1939, pp122ff  
D. Jenkins *The British, Their Identity and Their Religion* SCM Press, 1975, pp64ff  
A. Hastings *Church and State. The British Experience*, Exeter 1991
6. R. Gill *Prophecy and Praxis*, MMS 1981
7. D. Jenkins, op cit p94
8. Cited in A.R. Vidler *Church in an Age of Revolution* Penguin 1961, p82
9. H. Butterfield *Writings on Christianity and History* Ed. C.T. McIntire, OUP 1979, pp251ff.

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# Book Reviews

**Another Country, Another King** By Richard Holloway (Fount, 1991, 176pp, £5.50)

Richard Holloway has written an enjoyable and very readable book that gives fresh insight and perspective to some of the basic tenets of the Christian faith. Whilst being thoroughly scholarly, the narrative is easy to follow and illuminated by the frequent inclusion of anecdotes and word pictures. The first chapter, for instance, begins with the recounting of part of a Monty Python sketch.

This is a very personal work in that the author lays on the page the fruits of his own study and thinking. Indeed, in the preface he says, "In this book I set out to share my faith". His writing is (to quote him again) "An attempt to wrestle with the mysteries of faith that the (Christian) creed summarizes: God, Christ, The Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, the Church and sacraments, judgement, and the return of Christ".

In the course of dealing with these themes the author also manages to touch on a number of other related subjects: the nature of faith; the human condition; holiness; conflict; and the problem of suffering.

The thread that runs through the whole volume and binds it together is the author's understanding of the nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. He sees in Jesus a God who is "ungrasping" and "self-emptying" – 'The very opposite, in fact, of our insecure attitude to life that forces us to want to be in control.

However, this is not a sentimental book, for the author takes seriously the related subjects of sin and judgement, though dismissing the idea of a God who finds pleasure in punishing the unrepentant in favour of a Creator who unceasingly strives to save us from the otherwise inevitable consequences of our own waywardness.

In a postscript to the book Richard Holloway's humility is evident as he recognises that "the writer who wrestles with the meaning and mystery of God is always defeated". Nevertheless he offers us much food for thought on so many of the great themes of the Christian faith, and in that has wrestled valiantly.

Again in his postscript, the author seeks to sum up the message of his book in three short phrases: "God is for us. God forgives us. God helps us". Amen to that!

## Ian Handscomb

**Preaching in Context** By Neville Clark (Kevin Mayhew, 1991, 96pp, £6.95)

This book reminds one of P.T. Forsyth's *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (1907) both in subject matter and style. It is not an easy book to read. One wishes the language were simpler. The writer's concern is to "restore balance" to preaching, treating it in six areas of context – contemporary society, which is secular and agnostic; liturgy, enacting the drama of redemption in Word and Sacrament; and the Church as congregation and family, in its meaning, world

involvement and need for training. The fourth area is tradition, involving the canon formation and the authority and purpose of Scripture. Fifthly is the problem of modern ethics and our relation to this. Finally the audience itself and the best way to present God's Word in human words.

The purpose and goal of preaching is emphasised as "forming the congregation" so as to bring it to maturity and the Vision of God. Here are 96 pages of concentrated thought, by a theologian and a master of language, on a vitally important subject. Wording is sometimes complex, eg., "The demandingly special and extraordinarily celebratory, irretrievably cheapened by overfamiliarity". Or the Bible as "informative propellant", and "paradigm" which keeps recurring! One needs to ponder each paragraph.

Why is so little place given to the Holy Spirit whose renewal of our preaching power we all need so much? Or prayer, the very breath of the preacher? Or some personal testimony which would lighten the diet? Not a book to inflame emotions, but certainly one to stretch the mind (and the vocabulary!). Practical issues are met head-on and the true goal of preaching is set forth – to deepen the church's experience of the Gospel by clear, deep, biblically-based preaching, and so to form it, that it be brought to the vision of God which is the summum bonum of Christian life.

## **Stanley Voke**

**Evangelism Through the Local Church** By Michael Green (Hodder and Stoughton, 1990, 596pp, £17.95)

"Evangelism to be successful, must be local". This introduction to Michael Green's book is well borne out by the comprehensive scope and treatment its subject receives. It is a manual for "the churches in the West", distilled from the life and experiences of one man in churches doing evangelism "locally".

As a Minister in a "local" church which is trying to develop an "appropriate evangelism", I commend it. Once allowance was made for the slight differences between St. Aldate's, Oxford and a forty-member church in a suburban sideroad, there was a huge amount of material of use to our 'local' scene. The second half tackles methods: preaching; 'person to person'; missions; nurture; and there are appendices by various authors on training, drama, worship, social action, and more.

All this in a pithy style which is deep enough to make you think, light enough to make you want to read. It is an enjoyable book, which pays repeated visits. Chapter bibliographies, accurate section titles, and clear progression of themes makes it a good reference work (though I regret the lack of a subject or author index in a book which bristles with as many quotes and illustrations as this one).

The practical matters occupy the larger part of the book. But perhaps we reach them a little too easily.

The first half seeks to lay a theological ground for the practical – Schaeffer meets Lewis meets Newbiggin meets Bruce. Now this goes a long way towards reconciling poles which are so often far apart, i.e. social action versus evangelism. But here theology is too seamless a garment. Anyone reading this could be

left unaware of some of the theologies far removed from Michael Green's, which have supplied fibres in his coat of many colours, yet which might call for other emphases in evangelism. Feminist theology, for instance, would not settle for Green's conclusion on fallen 'man': a proud rebel.

Michael Green ends: "I am convinced that there is no evangelistic force so powerful as a really loving, outward-looking, local church". If your church is trying to become one, this book will help greatly with the second part of that task. There is plenty of theological work still to be done by all of us.

## **Michael Docker**

### **Lecture offer: *Pilgrims Together – Has Dissent Become Consent?***

The Secretary of the Free Church Federal Council, David Staple, recently gave the Annual Lecture to the Protestant Dissenting Deputies. Copies of this important address are now available from the Free Church Federal Council, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH. Please send a stamped, addressed envelope, not less than 8.5" x 6.5".

## **United Kingdom/New Zealand Holiday Exchange Sought**

David Edwards of New Zealand, former BMS missionary and pastor seeks a three month exchange of house and car, August to October 1992. He would like to be in the U.K. for the BMS Bicentenary.

He would be prepared to occupy the manse and undertake preaching, though he, himself, is not responsible for a church.

Write to him in the first instance at P.O. Box 27, Russell, Bay of Islands, New Zealand.

## **Holidays 1992**

### **Caravan, Bognor Regis**

Bookings are now being accepted for the seven-berth fully equipped caravan on an excellent site near Bognor Regis, belonging to the Surrey and North East Hampshire Baptist Association. Priority and special rates are offered to ministers. Details from Mrs Price, 24 Weston Lea, West Horsley, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT24 6LG. Tel East Horsley 3905.