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

Editorial

Today, it is not at all uncommon to find Baptists studying St John of the Cross, finding an echo in Celtic worship and enjoying Taize chants. One of the most significant developments in our era is surely the breaking down of the water-tight compartments which, traditionally, kept the various strands of spirituality apart. Some may bemoan the resulting lack of distinctiveness, the blurring of the spiritual parameters, but this greedy plundering of the total wealth of the Church can only enrich us all. Christian spirituality has become a "free trade area"

Yet even more significant is the adoption of the concept of "spirituality" in the world at large. No longer does it belong exclusively to Christianity, or even to religion as such. Now it is being used to define the thoroughly secular individual, who lives his or her life without the presupposition of God. Used in this sense it describes the controlling centre of a person's being: the mix of convictions, values and beliefs which ultimately guide and control them: the touchstone.

Such a development is intensely interesting. For one thing, it represents a re-evaluation of the materialist view of the human species: that we are essentially "naked apes", driven by mechanistic forces. And for another, while it may not in itself provide a bridgehead over which the gospel may travel, it could well offer the possibility of dialogue. When two people have what Paul Tillich calls "ultimate concern", something beyond the material, then there is common ground. "Spirituality" may no longer be the exclusive domain of card-carrying Christians, but if it helps us to make contact across the void, it is a welcome development indeed.

Chris Barter, a guest writer, has chosen the avenue of "spirituality" to approach the issue of HIV and AIDS. Earlier contributions have concentrated on the medical and the pastoral aspects. Conscious of our own frailty, we are invited to see AIDS sufferers through new eyes. Every year Christmas comes earlier, hastened by a joint contribution from Larry Kreitzer and Richard Hoskins: a study of the "Herod" motif in Luke and the importance of reading biblical narrative contextually. Clive Doubleday follows this with a plea for long-term commitment to our brothers and sisters in the former Soviet bloc. Remembering them when they were persecuted, will we forget then now that they are free?

The decline in influence of Karl Barth, "the greatest theologian since Thomas Aquinas", has been rapid in recent years. So it is helpful to be reminded of his stance on Christian baptism. Paul Rowntree Clifford is our interpreter. The pastoral responsibility of guiding those who feel called to missionary service is great. Ron Armstrong provides some helpful pointers in evaluating the "call." Today "rites of passage" services offered by the Church resonate less and less with the unchurched. Paul Sheppy discusses the theology behind the funeral service and how it might be shaped. Finally, Paul Henstock describes the work of the Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Society; a veritable God-send to many.

Towards a New Spirituality?

The early 1980's, for me, represent some of the most active years in terms of medical advances. Much more was being learned about many diseases - cancer was no longer the taboo subject it had been, as many more successful treatments were evolving; and we were rapidly moving towards conquering death, or so it seemed! Certainly, with increased longevity and health generally improving, we were subliminally being encouraged not to consider death. It was something that didn't need to be faced. No wonder, when it did come, we weren't prepared, and the shock and devastation caused seemed unbearable. We thought we were invincible! And so it seemed that God too, was being relegated to a back seat. We had become our own little gods - what need had we of a higher deity?

Then all that suddenly changed, as, in the middle 1980's, we realised that we were being faced with a catastrophe the likes of which we hadn't seen since the black plague engulfed Europe several hundred years ago. A small, fragile virus had crept into the human blood stream and suddenly our invincibility came crashing down, and we were being not just faced, but aggressively confronted, once more, with death! And it was a "double whammy"; for not only was death firmly back on the agenda but we were - and still are - being faced with it among people who are, in the main, in the prime of their lives. This virus was and still is predominant among the 18 - 24 age group; and particularly among young gay men!

What was this disease that was being unleashed on an unsuspecting world? And why 17 years (at least) down the road are we only now beginning to acknowledge its effects and the fact that it is rapidly becoming the biggest health issue of the 20th century, and probably the 21st century too? We have had to face our mortality with new thinking, for we haven't had anything since the end of the Second World War that has threatened our young people in the way that this disease, HIV/AIDS, now does. How will we cope? What is the future to be? Where will it all lead?

The Vision of Wholeness

As I try to address these questions, I realise that we have still some way to go to get a clearer vision of the way ahead. There has been much confusion and the waters have been muddled by those who think they have the answers. And the answers have generally been unhelpful based, as some have been, on judgements of people and their behaviour. I continue to be hurt and concerned by my fellow Christians who still talk about AIDS as being "God's punishment on gays and drug addicts."

I know of a young man whose parents, supposedly Christian, said, in reaction to the news that their son had contracted HIV, "you've got what you deserve!" Fortunately, they have since changed their views through becoming better informed about HIV and now support their son in his need, as he does them! Indeed, it is his greatest wish to know that his parents will have all the support they need not only to cope with his death but also to cope in the days, months and years afterwards with their loss.

Much of what has been said around HIV/AIDS has come through ignorance and fear and there is a real need for a concerted programme of education in our communities, especially -and I feel ashamed to have to say this - in our Church communities. Some of the strongest condemnation, judgement and criticism has come from Christians - that is frightening and unacceptable. But why is it that Churches have often been amongst the most vociferous in "negativity" around HIV/AIDS?

I think there are several reasons First the main group affected have been gay men

- but far from exclusively so. There is still too much thinking and prejudice around AIDS = GAY! Second, the Church, as never before, has had to face issues around sex and sexuality: as Christians we have never been good at discussing anything below the waist. Third, we have a very distorted view of ourselves in terms of wholeness, in terms of the "components" which go to make up that whole - often listed as body, mind and spirit or body and soul. The trouble is we list these "components" as if they could exist apart from one another, when in fact they are interdependent and inseparable.

The Church is having to deal afresh with these issues, and the one good thing I see coming out of AIDS is that it is making us look at ourselves as whole human beings, who are, without exception, made in God's image. We were made to be whole people! We often talk about the brokenness of individuals or of God's world. We are not broken, the world is not broken - damaged and dented maybe-but not broken. To be broken we need to have known wholeness first and the truth is that none of us have. We do not know wholeness, but it is something that, falteringly, we strive towards. It is one of the reasons that we cannot make judgements about others. Until we have straightened out the dents and repaired the damage, we cannot know wholeness and when we do we shall look at others - the likes of those who are just as damaged - and see in them the potential for wholeness and embrace them with God's love, be they people living with HIV/AIDS, drug addicts, alcoholics, abused children, battered wives, single parents or anyone who is marginalised. In the wholeness for which we inwardly yearn, we will come to see those who are excluded as fellow human beings and, if we are truly Christian, we will want to help them realise their own potential.

But how do we achieve that wholeness? One thing that has been highlighted by the whole HIV/AIDS pandemic is that of "spirituality" - an interesting outcome! And it is not the Church that has highlighted this but the medical world. Some research has been done in the United States of America into the Spiritual Well-being (SWB) of individuals. This has come in the wake of much medical research and perhaps a little late! But it has highlighted this issue of wholeness: to treat an individual not just physically but spiritually and psychologically as well. With the lack of a cure in sight, carers have discovered the need to shift their priority to caring, and caring in the long term. Such a shift in thinking requires a transformation in the carers, since the tools are no longer medicines and miracles of medical technology but "rather the use of self to communicate acceptance of the sufferer, to provide emotional support through the dying process, education about the disease and its course, exploration of ways to improve quality of life, and existential support as the sufferer struggles to find meaning and purpose in his or her life."

It seems to me that this method of approach in caring has a lot to do with helping the sufferers to be in touch with themselves, to develop a sense of "the other" - to find that non-tangible part of themselves which Christians would call "spirituality". It is a huge part of all of us and yet one so often ignored and neglected.

For those with HIV/AIDS, it also means a re-think. Instead of viewing themselves as "victims," they are encouraged to see themselves as survivors; from dying of AIDS to living with AIDS. People with HIV/AIDS who have gone through this transition attribute the change to participation in "spiritual activities". Activities such as prayer, imagery, visualisation and meditation have all been identified as ways of fighting back and recommitment to a life that seemed threatened and vulnerable. "It may just be that, if we are prepared to admit it, those with HIV/AIDS who have gone

through this transformation have something to teach those of us who claim a life-long allegiance to Christianity. Certainly with modern medicines, good dietary and exercise habits and time for self-reflection through meditation and the like, life expectancy has increased - adding more to the idea of "living with AIDS" rather than the negative "dying of AIDS".

Standing Against or Standing with

How far has the Church helped in this process? There is a new awakening but also a lot of past hurts that have had to be healed both within the Church and beyond its "doors". What sort of Church is it that has encouraged the marginalised and more particularly those living with AIDS to think so negatively of themselves. One account I read was of a young gay man in his early 20's whose parents discovered a note, after he had died, in which he said, 'I am going to burn in hell, it is what I deserve!' His parents were naturally distraught, but it transpired that whilst in hospital he had been visited by a minister, who, having discovered the lad's illness told him he would go to hell if he did not repent and confess his sins for the abominable acts he had done. The lad had been very ill and close to death and had not had the strength to seek further counselling or consolation and certainly not the opportunity to do as he had been bidden. Where was the Church's compassion and understanding? If people have not known or discovered wholeness or even the path to it - how can they discover anything through the sort of ministry this young man had received!

Another account was of a man who having received his diagnosis and subsequently developing Kaposi's Sarcoma lesions all over his body, was given six months to live. He accepted the prognosis and began to prepare for his own death. In his words, "It was as if I was programmed to die, I had no hope." Shortly after this diagnosis the man encountered a friend who told him that death was not inevitable and that he could at least take steps to change the prognosis. He was introduced to a variety of techniques including imagery, eradicating negative emotions, improving nutrition, engaging in exercise, using humour, nurturing faith, and most important of all, developing an attitude of love in place of hostility. His six months prognosis expanded to another two years (as at 1992), and his physician remarked that he hoped that he would be an inspiration and example to others living with HIV/AIDS.

Of course, as each year passes so longevity and quality of life increases. Instead of diagnosis of six months to two years we now see people living 10, 12 or 14 years or more. A combination of new drugs and the activities, both physical and spiritual, are changing life for so many.

In 1975 (before the known advent of HIV) the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging (USA) defined spiritual well-being (SWB) as 'the affirmation of life in relationship with God, self, community and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness.' It is this concept of wholeness that the Church has to learn and to grasp with both hands.

For me, and my involvement with HIV/AIDS, I have seen at first hand people living with HIV/AIDS whose attitude, when diagnosed, goes in one of two directions. Either they give up and die quite quickly (these are the minority) or they face life afresh, learning to live one day at a time, developing an environment for themselves that is stress-free (stress being one of the biggest dangers for someone with HIV), living positive lives with exercise and good eating and in many cases learning about that non-tangible bit of themselves - their psyche, conscience, spirituality - call it what you will - but get in touch with it they do, and quality of life takes an upward turn as

they begin to realise their potential for wholeness; the sort of wholeness only Christ knew for he was at one with the Father. We all need to learn to be in touch with ourselves which comes from being aware and in touch with those around us, and becoming aware and in touch with God in the 'here and now'; a sort of 'Sacrament of the Present Moment'.

If the image I've painted of the Church and its response to HIV/AIDS seems very negative and one sided then, of course, let me say straight away that I am fully aware of much that is being done by the faith communities (not just Christian) to bring a sense of understanding, love and care into the HIV arena; all of which points to the fact that the spiritual well-being of individuals is seen as important. The holistic approach is becoming the focus and I believe that the Church and medical world can work in partnership to bring about not only a change in attitudes but a real improvement in the physical and spiritual well-being of those living with HIV/AIDS not only to those infected but also those affected, be they parents, partner, wider family, friends, lovers etc.

Slowly and perceptibly, these changes are coming about and those in the Church who think they can avoid facing up to the issues raised for them because they think a cure may be just over the horizon or feel that it is not an issue for them, are not only deluding themselves but are in denial of the facts of the Gospel and the way that Jesus would have responded. I am sure I have milked dry the story of the woman taken in adultery as an example of how Jesus treated people holistically, but it seems to me there are many lessons to be learned from this story.

First: Jesus wouldn't allow scape-goating. He wouldn't allow her accusers the luxury of carrying out the stoning before they had first looked at themselves.

Second: He expects us all to accept responsibility for our own lives.

Third: He doesn't condemn - He sees the potential for wholeness in us all.

Fourth: He doesn't condone sin nor sweep it under the carpet. He faces it head on, deals with it and then allows people to get on with their lives by affirming them where they are.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that people whose lives Jesus touched often went away, jubilant and rejoicing, for they had met with someone who recognised human frailty and strengthened it, recognised the potential for wholeness as he pointed them towards God, accepted people where they were and empowered them to move on in their lives through the taking away of their burden of sin not, - as sadly so often happens - rubbing their noses in it.

The Christian Church can also help people in positive ways by affirmation and encouragement, by acknowledging our own weaknesses and making ourselves right with God, by bringing strength and healing in any way we can through God's Holy Spirit, then we can move on towards a new and inclusive Spirituality that puts us all in touch with a creative, caring, and loving God.

Chris Barter

Footnotes:

1. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, Vol. 8 No. 4, 1992, p210
2. Op. Cit
3. Op. Cit

King Herod: The “Bad Boy” of the Christmas Story

Several terms ago one of the more enterprising students I was tutoring in a New Testament option on Luke-Acts, opted for one of the less frequently selected essay titles in the course. I have within the course syllabus an option entitled ‘John the Baptist and King Herod: the Supporting Cast’, and it was this option which was selected. The idea behind the essay is to invite an exploration of these two figures within the larger context of Luke-Acts itself; both John the Baptist and King Herod have important roles to play within the narrative of Luke’s two-part effort and both offer surprising insights into theological themes central to the work. Richard Hoskins, the aforementioned student, tackled the subject with admirable enthusiasm, surprising himself (and me!) in the process. He quickly discovered how significant the character of King Herod is within the composition of Luke-Acts and rightly noted that, for Luke, (the author of the work) Herod symbolizes the power structure which is opposed to God’s activities. More strikingly, it matters little whether it is Herod the Great, or Herod Archelaus, or Herod Antipas who is being described in any particular scene. Come to think of it, perhaps neither of us should have been so surprised for the same holds true for us today. I rather suspect that the average congregation member could not tell you which Herod is involved in which dastardly incident recorded in the NT; having said that, I wonder how many of our pastors could really tell us which Herod is involved at what point in opposing God’s purposes. But this ought not to worry us overmuch; it simply illustrates Luke’s purpose at large, namely that King Herod (whichever one!) is the ‘Bad Boy’ of the NT. What made this particular tutorial encounter one of the more memorable in my career at Regent’s Park is the supportive story which Richard was able to bring to the discussion. He was drawing on his experience with the Baptist Missionary Society stationed in Zaire (1986-1992) for the story, but it is one that illustrates nicely some of the considerations which must be kept in mind when interpreting the gospel accounts. Together, we thought it might be something that others might like to consider as the run-up to Christmas approaches, and we all face the difficulties and challenges of making the timeless Christmas story relevant for the late 1990’s. Richard entitles the Zairian episode “An Alternative Nativity;” I think you will enjoy it.

An ‘Alternative’ Nativity”

It is Christmas Morning. The Church, which always seats a thousand, is today bursting at the seams. Aisles are filled with jostling figures. All the large alcove windows are blocked with people sitting, crouching and standing. Benches have to be placed outside for overflow. The whole village is either here or at the Roman Catholic Church. If Archbishop Carey called for a Church without walls: this is surely it.

The heat inside is intense; the anticipation as great. This is one of the big occasions of the Church year; probably the occasion. This is the moment everyone has looked forward to: this is the Nativity play of the Zairian Baptist Church. But this is no ordinary Nativity play, not, at least, by white, western, standards. In the first place, it is not entrusted to the smaller children, but is the responsibility of young adults. This is no meek and sweet panegyric. It is at once political, revolutionary, profoundly and disturbingly challenging: in fact like the gospel. And the key to this

play is, of course, Herod.

The pageant opens with the said Herod in Jerusalem gnashing his teeth with political vexation, surrounded by military advisors, and with numerous bodyguards. He and they wear dark glasses (when available), and the soldiers carry guns; and all are portrayed as thoroughly obnoxious and obstructive. Here we recall that this is a nativity pageant born in the years of an oppressive military dictatorship in Zaire; just as Luke's gospel germinated in an oppressive regime and is also, at once, political.

When the three Magi arrive on the Jerusalem scene, one of the key features of the pageant concerns Herod's anger, and the terror he portrays in his extermination of the young boys of Bethlehem on discovering that he has been double-crossed. Audience participation at this point, in heckling and abuse, reaches its zenith. Anger is a heinous sin in Zaire; as serious as adultery.

Herod continues to dominate the proceedings: appearing in the warning dream to the Magi, and again (the same) Herod becomes the warning to Joseph on return from a flight into Egypt. The 'nativity' play reaches its climax; and the undoubted centrepiece of the play, for which the packed congregations have been waiting, is the judgement on the malicious Herod who has, meanwhile, been persecuting the early church. Having pronounced himself to be a god, to the gasps of all present, Herod, this same Herod, is eaten by worms and dies. The death scene is usually protracted, ridiculously over-acted, yet cathartically beneficial for all concerned. On his death the angels of God, who have for the most part hitherto been kept waiting in the wings, are sent upon the scene and the Nativity play closes with heaven and earth praising God for his gift of the death of Herod! Immediate reaction to such a portrayal of Herod (let alone the 'nativity!') is apt to be critical. But reflective and considered appraisal may lead us to conclude that, actually, the Zairian Nativity pageant holds many vital lessons for us in the west in our anaesthetized Christianity. And not only is this true of the political portrayal. Admittedly, in the Lingala Bible all the Herodians of Luke - Acts share the same name, 'Herod'; yet may it not be that theologically it is the Zairian interpretation with four historical Herods all rolled into the one character, which captures something of the Herod motif in the Gospel accounts?

Christmas in Context

It often comes as a surprise to Christians to learn that, text critically, shepherds and kings do not belong together at Christmas. Search for chapter and verse which places three kings in a manger, together with shepherds and it will be a lengthy process. Indeed, 'the three kings' is a later interpretation of Matthew's description of 'magi' (possibly 'astrologers' or 'wise men'); the number three being 'adduced' from the number of gifts presented to the infant Jesus (Mt. 1:2f).

If we treat the Gospel birth narratives as fact we are at best mistreating the texts, at worse abusing the Bible. Behind these narratives lies a vital lesson for us all to learn; namely that the authors shaped and moulded their telling of the story of Jesus Christ to highlight on occasions some aspects of Christ above others. Different emphases at different times weave in and out of the stories. In other words, our Gospel writers are, above all, story tellers. And always hanging over the Gospels there lies the spectre of the Roman empire; whilst beyond even that there lies the shaping of history for theological purposes (known technically as theologoumenon).

In reality, the account of Matthew is very distinctive compared to Luke. In Chapter

One of Matthew the Lukan story of John the Baptist (annunciation to Zechariah by Gabriel, birth, naming, growth) is absent. According to Matthew, Jesus' family actually live at Bethlehem at the time of conception and have a house there (2:11), whilst in Luke they live at Nazareth. In Matthew Joseph is the chief figure receiving the annunciation, whilst in Luke it is Mary. The visitation of Mary to Elizabeth in Luke, together with the great Lukan canticles of the Magnificat and Benedictus, are absent from Matthew. In Matthew, at the time of the annunciation, Mary is detectably pregnant, whilst in Luke the annunciation takes place before the conception. In Matthew chapter two he describes a star, visit of the magi to Herod at Jerusalem, and then to the family home in Bethlehem, a flight to Egypt, Herod's massacre of the children, the return from Egypt, and the family move to Nazareth for fear of Archelaus; and not one of these events is recorded by Luke. Instead, in Luke, we have the story of a census, the absence of which from Matthew is significant because it provides the sole reason in Luke for getting Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus there. In addition, in Luke, we discover Jesus born in a manger or crib in Bethlehem because there was no room in an inn; angels reveal news of the birth to shepherds in a field; we are told of the purification of Mary and presentation of Jesus in the temple and the prophecies of Simeon and Anna, the former issuing in another Lukan canticle (the *Nunc Dimittis*); the family return peacefully to home in Nazareth; and finally we are given a story about Jesus aged twelve in Jerusalem.

Theology in this world is always contextual: in other words it always has a setting in life. The theology surrounding the Incarnation is no less contextual than any other; indeed it is of the very essence of the Doctrine of the Incarnation that Jesus was born into a cultural, political, social, and religious milieu. Rather than take this as a threat, it can be tremendously liberating to discover that the gospels too are contextual; and that there exists a dialogue between the two. There is often more going on in, and behind, texts than we at first glance realise. Dig a little deeper and we come to appreciate the greater riches of the way stories were handled and set down in context. For example, Matthew writes the story of the star and the visit of the Magi, as well as the story of the flight to Egypt and return to Nazareth under the influence of the Old Testament (Numbers 22-24 for the former, and the story of Moses certainly for the latter). In the infancy narratives, Matthew has moulded Old Testament passages around a story about the birth of Jesus in order to make a clear Christological statement about Jesus. As Davies and Allison assert, these narratives "are not the stuff out of which history is made." Rather, as we have seen, Matthew wrote his infancy narrative for Christological purposes. He was trying to affirm a truth which the Church saw in the person of the risen Jesus of Nazareth: that here, indeed, was the Christ. The narratives contain truth about Jesus and about God irrespective of their historical basis; and here we should recall that these birth and infancy narratives arose near the end of the first century, and as the culmination of trying to understand the identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

This Christmas, try to dig a little deeper into the texts and you may discover that far from being an ethereal story of history simply told, they are, in fact, pregnant with political, economic, social, meaning. I remember once an evangelical preacher proudly proclaiming that he, 'never preached politics from the pulpit.' But not only does this defy the Gospel of the Incarnation, it also belies the fact that there he stood: white, western, middle-class, and evangelical, and his Christianity (though he doubtless failed to realise it) reflected that context. To appreciate this should not be a threat, but enable us to discover with freshness the wonder of the Son of God

incarnate. What is inadmissible is to take the story of such an incarnation and attempt to de-contextualise it: to make it into a bland truism for today devoid of social, economic, and political punch. To do that would be to end up with a Christmas rather like the one which exists in most British evangelical churches. The early writers contextualised the story, embellishing it where necessary to prove their point; and so must we whilst we try to stay true to their intent. So, by all means put the kings and shepherds together in a crib, and make the most of a Herod-motif in the story. Christmas remains true despite, not because of, Matthew and Luke. The main message of the Christmas story is theological, not historical. It is, perhaps, those who put kings and shepherds all together in a crib scene who have, whether unwittingly or not, caught the real meaning of Christmas. Matthew and Luke would approve of those crib scenes and Christmas cards, for they capture just what they were trying to say. But at all costs do not so devalue the Christmas story that you turn theology into history, and in so doing reverse the Gospel.

Larry Kreitzer and Richard Hoskins

Footnote:

I.W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *The Gospel According to St Matthew* (Volume I) (ICC; Edinburgh; T & T Clark, 1988) p.252



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Barth's Theology of Baptism

Many years ago I set myself the rewarding task of reading the whole 13 volumes of Karl Barth's "Church Dogmatics", and I wondered whether I would live to complete it with the thousands of pages and extensive footnotes which contain much of the treasure of his work. However, I have just finished the last volume which was published as a fragment of the fourth main section he never lived or expected to complete: an example, as he said, of the permanently unfinished task of theology.

Sacrament or Ordinance?

This last volume deals with the theology of baptism which Barth intended to be an introduction to the section on Christian Ethics, so categorized because he came to believe that baptism is the basic step in Christian obedience. The whole volume is a profound treatment of the theology of baptism which modern Baptists cannot afford to neglect unless we are prepared to remain satisfied with a superficial understanding of our own practice and the specific contribution we have to make to the theology of the universal Church.

The first part of the book consists of a detailed argument against interpreting baptism as a sacrament: the retraction of a view he originally held, but reversed as the result of the work of his son, Dr Markus Barth, in "Die Taufe ein Sakrament?," which was published in 1951. Incidentally, the work of "this brilliant son of a brilliant father", as he was introduced when he came to us as a guest lecturer in the Department of Religion at McMaster University in Canada, is not as well known as it ought to be, overshadowed, to the regret of his father, by the latter's own international reputation.

At any rate, Karl Barth confesses that he became convinced that the only true sacrament was the Incarnation of the Son of God, and that Baptism and the Lord's Supper are human responses in obedient faith, to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. "Do this in remembrance of me" is the warrant for both rites, although the specific injunction is applied to the climax of the Agape in St Paul's version of the words of institution; but Baptism is expounded as following in the footsteps of Jesus when he submitted himself to immersion by John in the river Jordan.

This interpretation will be found congenial to those Baptists whose emphasis is on the faith of the candidate rather than on the pledge of the prevenient grace of God in redemption and conversion. Because of this, they will readily respond to Barth's conclusion that infant baptism, in that it is not a response in obedient faith to the finished work of Christ, is an error perpetuated by the Church from early times. But we should not too hastily claim Barth as a convert to conventional Baptist theology; the weight of the "Church Dogmatics" as a whole is a massive challenge to simple fideism and raises fundamental questions about treating the Lord's Supper and Baptism as mere ordinances or human responses to divine commands.

Christ: the Totality of Revelation?

Central to Barth's theology is his conviction that the redemption of all creation, including the whole of humankind, was accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that, therefore, the benefits of his passion are pledged to believers and unbelievers alike. The difference between them is that the former have awoken to their inheritance whereas the latter have not. This was the point at which Barth decisively parted company with Calvin and his doctrine of double predestination.

For Barth, Christian ethics, which begins with obedience to the summons to be baptised, depends on there being no separation between the risen and exalted Lord and those he came to save, 'but only a companionship in which He Himself has set them as the One who has been raised again from the dead and lives, who was and is and will be in the power of the eternal will of God triumphing in his death, the crucified Lord of all men and therefore their Lord, and now their Lord in particular because it is not hidden from them, but revealed to them, that He is the Lord of all men and therefore their Lord.'

This unequivocal emphasis on the universal efficacy of the work of Christ has its negative counterpart in Barth's reluctance to discern the revelation of God anywhere else. It is true that early on in the Church Dogmatics he acknowledged that 'God may speak to us through Russian communism or a flute concerto, a blossoming shrub or a dead dog'. And he adds that 'We shall do well to listen to Him if He really does so', but he qualifies this by saying that the Church is not commissioned to include it in its proclamation.

Consequently, Barth places his main emphasis on the transformation of the human condition by the work of Christ alone, in which human beings have no part to play, whether they are believers or not. The awakening of faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, not a human achievement. As he says in the introduction to the chapter on "The Holy Spirit and Christian Hope", 'The Holy Spirit is the enlightening power in which Jesus Christ, overcoming the falsehood and condemnation of sinful man, causes him, as a member of His community, to become one who may move towards his final and yet also his immediate future in hope in Him, i.e., in confident, patient and cheerful expectation of His new coming to consummate the revelation of the will of God fulfilled in Him'.

Thus, our incorporation into the body of Christ is fulfilled by the Holy Spirit who guarantees to us the redemption once and for all accomplished in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. What place, then, has faith in bringing this to fulfilment? Not as a human achievement, which has so often been presented as such in evangelical circles, but as the acknowledgement of what is already accomplished. This radical objectivism leaves us no part whatsoever to play in our salvation, and human freedom seems to be restricted by Barth to the field of ethics and the exercise of obedience. That is why, I believe, he refuses to allow, that which have traditionally been called "sacraments" in the history of the Church, to be so designated; for "sacrament" has come to be interpreted as an initiative of God whereby he exercises his grace in incorporating men and women into the Body of Christ and sustaining them in their spiritual pilgrimage. According to Barth, God has done everything necessary for our salvation and growth in grace by the representative sacrifice of Christ and by making it effective in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. Nothing else is required for our spiritual growth. The ordinances of the Church, including Baptism, are human signs of obedience, indicating our acceptance of the transformation of the human condition of which we are made participants.

The Waters of Grace and Faith.

It is not surprising that most theologians have not been able to accept Barth's restriction of revelation, particularly as it seems to apply to God's dynamic activity in the world. If God is active throughout his creation, this must surely apply to the Church and its sacraments. Baptism understood as the rite of incorporation into the Body of Christ, cannot be a purely human activity in which God has no direct part. This would be repudiated by Baptist theologians such as the late Wheeler Robinson,

as well as by those representing the traditions which practice infant baptism. A way has to be found of holding together the initiative of God and the response of believers which does not eliminate either from the equation.

Granted the powerful case that Barth makes out and its congeniality to much traditional Baptist teaching, I remain unconvinced that the last word has been said on this subject. As far as Baptists are concerned, can the grace of God be so easily written out of human response as is commonly the case, and is too much reliance being placed on the constancy of faith? As I grow older, I find I place more and more trust in the grace of God and less and less on my own faltering faith: a theme underlined in the last pages of Barth's work.

However, the repudiation of Baptism as a sacrament leads Barth in the second part of the book to the most thorough critique of the practice of infant baptism I have read anywhere. He is particularly hard on Luther's and Calvin's attempts to defend the practice and concludes that the universal Church has been in error since early times in perpetuating it. He looks to the kind of theological critique which he has undertaken to be an essential factor in the continuing reformation to which the Church is summoned.

A triumphalist Baptist response to this conclusion of Barth's great work would be completely out of place. He is calling for the whole Church - and that includes Baptists - to rethink and deepen its theology in acknowledgement of its inadequacy, leading to an eschatological unity which would make denominations obsolescent. That is where I find I have to take my stand in old age, venturing to call myself a Christian without attaching to it any denominational label.. We are all pilgrims with an inadequate theology, but daring to trust that our Lord will bring us to the fulfilment of hope which he has promised.

Paul Rowntree Clifford

Footnotes:

1. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol IV, part 2, p520 (T & T Clark, 1958)
2. *ibid.*, p.521
3. *ibid.*, Vol 1, part 1. p60 (T & T Clark, 1936)
4. *ibid.*, Vol IV, part 3.ii. p902

Guidelines for Missionary Candidates or Enquirers

This is offered as assistance for those who guide prospective missionary candidates, i.e. for pastors. In my service with BMS and from my experience counselling candidates, I found that a number of ministers felt fairly inadequate to guide prospective missionary candidates. So this is an outline guide for pastors when a member tells him/her that they think God is calling them to Missionary Service.

Questions to be asked or guidance to be offered to the candidate.

1. Check on your spiritual life and condition. Are you really fully committed to the Lord in love, gratitude, obedience? See Romans 12: 1-2. Is Christ really number one in your life? Are you totally committed to Him and seeking NOW to do his

will? Are you prepared before going further, just to quietly recommit your whole will and hand over your life to His claims and service? Its no good going further unless you are willing to do this. **DO IT NOW, MAKE IT A DAILY ACT OF RECOMMITMENT EACH MORNING.** If you are thus yielded, and only want to do God's will, you will know what it is. Trust and obey.

2. Take an Inventory. After prayer and careful thought, jot down what your strong points are; what you have to offer. Also ask God to show you your weak points, and what, if possible, can be done to make amendments. Under these headings, make this assessment; Academic training, Discipleship training, Christian service, Trade or Professional qualifications and/or skills, plus experience and posts held.
3. Prayerfully look at the needs of different Societies - give consideration to BMS as your first choice. When you consider alternative societies, ask yourself, "Do these societies offer scope for the kind of missionary work to which God may call me and for which I have some aptitude and training? Do they also offer scope for a particular country to which I may feel called?" Get relevant information from two or three societies and consider the material carefully; if necessary, write in for answers to questions etc.
4. Once you feel God is pointing you in one direction, at this point (and it may take some time, so be patient), follow these steps: write a letter of enquiry to the Candidate Secretary, to more than one society if necessary; approach your minister for guidance; contact your BMS Area Coordinator. If you wish, discuss this also with one or two mature Christian friends whose judgement you value, and who know you (remember they cannot decide for you, only you can make the decision and it is your responsibility). It may be useful at this point also to seek some personal references (including one from the pastor), and, say, two professional or trade references from people who can pass judgement on your work performance and qualifications.
5. Before a final decision on application, ask for a small group of Christian friends to join you in prayer over a period of weeks.
6. Get a check-up from your doctor and tell him/her what you are considering about Christian work overseas. Ask for his/her opinion on your health.
7. Write to the Missionary Society of your choices and ask for application forms and further information on what is the next step.
8. You may now be invited for informal or even an official interview with the Society's representative and/or a Candidate Board. At that point you should be informed (a) if you are accepted, and, if so (b) what further training might be required. BMS could give help with this.
9. If accepted, you will now need to prepare yourself in various ways, some obvious, others not so obvious. Continue the prayers for guidance and God's further help.
10. If you are not accepted, don't despair. This is not a stigma but a blessing. "No" is an answer to prayer as well as "yes" and one day you could be very thankful that God said "No" because He had some other plan for your life.

No one should seek to be a missionary without a definite Call from God. Thank Him if he has shown you and/or the committee that it is not His will (at least at this point in your life) for you to be a missionary. Continue to seek His will, do the tasks to which He calls in your local church, get more experience and education/training.

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Yours in His Service

T E Mattholie

Some people are being called later in life, some are taking early retirement and are able to give five to ten worth-while missionary years' service. Perhaps God is saying "Yes but not yet". Perhaps he is testing your sincerity and commitment. Walk with the Lord, commit your way to Him, and He will make the Way plain. Proverbs 3.5.

In your reassessment of the situation, if you have been declined, consider, perhaps, that God is calling you to some full-time service, but you have just mistaken what it is. It could be nearer home; it could be with a different Society. Be open to further guidance. The big question is always "Am I AVAILABLE, WHATEVER GOD IS SAYING TO ME? AM I READY?" That is always the basic question every Christian must ask and answer.

Ron Armstrong

A "Good" Funeral: Shaping the Final Exit

This brief essay introduces two questions about funerals:

- * what makes a funeral Christian?
- * how is this expressed in the shaping of the service?

In answering each question, I want to suggest a response which is not customary among Baptists. My first answer will proceed from an understanding about the nature of Christian worship in general. The second answer will be founded upon social, anthropological and contemporary liturgical scholarship. I do not imagine that the answers I give will be congenial to all my readers, but the issues I address are central to the way we approach our pastoral ministry in the time of death and bereavement.

What makes a funeral Christian?

Many ministers find it difficult to take what they call "non-Christian funerals". I find it impossible. However, we are not talking about the same thing, and the phrase "non-Christian funeral" normally means the funeral of a non-Christian. With these I have no problem. Indeed, I have officiated at the funeral of a Chinese Buddhist without any hesitation - although until now I have not gone into print on the matter!

There is, I think, a difficulty with using the phrase "non-Christian funeral" to mean simply the funeral of non-Christians. Funerals are seldom as clearly classifiable as that direct equation suggests. For example, what if the deceased was not a Christian but the immediate family and close friends are - or vice versa? Is the funeral's Christian nature primarily dependent on the mourners or on the corpse?

When we ask the question in this way, we begin to see some of the difficulty. If our answer is that it is Christian faith of the dead person which is the determinative factor, how do we address those who mourn? John Knox is unambiguously clear. We inter the body decently, but our primary concern is the soul. Since the departed person's salvation is secured by their faith in the salvation wrought by God through Christ, we must attend to those who remain. After death comes the judgement, and

it is, therefore, the minister's duty to preach about the certainty of hell for those who do not repent and put their faith in Christ. In these less robust days, I have met no minister who is prepared to do this at the funeral service as Knox would have done. This is not to say that no such ministers exist; I simply have not met them.

Equally, if it is the faith of the mourners that establishes the Christian nature of the funeral, what do we say about the non-Christian deceased? Again, I have met no minister who is prepared to stand before the congregation and say without qualification, "Harry has gone to hell". They may feel it privately - I have met ministers like that, but they feel the pastoral insensitivity of speaking their minds. That genuine concern is often bolstered by the theological justification that judgement belongs to God alone and we have no right to speak in such terms. The difficulty remains, however; our approach to the funeral is dominated by the difficulty of making a judgement, whether of the mourners or of the deceased.

I have already suggested that there may be a different way of talking about the Christian or non-Christian nature of a funeral. It is to this that I now turn, and I wish to do so by asking what it is that we do at a funeral which distinguishes it from a formalised farewell to the dead. What makes our funerals different from a humanist, or pagan funeral, or from the rites of other world faiths? The simplest form of answer is, I suppose, that we commend the dead to the mercy of God in Christ.

This is not (or ought not to be) an empty formula, as though we were pronouncing some form of abracadabra. All our ministry is exercised in the name of God, empowered by the Spirit and patterned by the high priesthood of Christ. In it is reaffirming this truth that I believe we can begin to see what makes a Christian funeral. It is rooted in the work of the Trinity, and specifically in that work of salvation which we might call "the Easter event" and which liturgists call the Paschal Mystery. A funeral is made Christian by the ministry of Christ - by the death of Jesus, by his descent to the dead, by his resurrection; and these are the sacrifice which he offers to God.

If we begin to describe funerals in this way, we will see why it is impossible for the Christian minister to perform a non-Christian funeral. All our ministry is offered in Christ, whether we serve other Christians or those of other faiths or no faith at all. And we serve them by placing the death which brings us to any given funeral in the context of the death, descent and resurrection of Jesus. The death which Jesus died is "for us" not merely in a substitutionary way; not least because what a substitute does has no direct bearing on the person substituted. Jesus' death does not stop death coming to us all. Rather, it is as our representative that Jesus can offer his death to redeem our dying. I have written else that "Christ's death is an offering for all, making all death an offering to God. His death transforms and redeems what by nature we fear and resent. If in our ministry at the time of death our primary focus is Christological, then our pastoral care is not shaped by our judgement either of the deceased or of the mourners, but by God's saving love.

For some this will be to beg the question. Am I not reducing the love of God to a vague sentimentality? Surely, the love of God does not overlook sin in a kind of non-judgmental relativism? I understand the force of the objection, but I resist it on two grounds. First, the love of God in Christ is demonstrated not in "vague sentimentality" but in the Cross. Second, the Cross is not a judgement which destroys, but a judgement that puts right.

For some this will not be adequate. They will suspect (rightly) a hidden agenda. Protestant theology has generally denied the possibility of salvation after death,

although not all have been so certain. Those who have questioned the matter have gone to the text of 1 Peter 3: 18 - 4:6. In the conservative theology of this epistle we find language which systematic theologians take to indicate that the descent of Christ to the dead was a genuine *kerygma* with all that this implies. New Testament theologians have almost unanimously rejected such a view. Take careful note of that "almost"; it is important. There are voices which suggest that the systematic theologians are correct. I have described that case in detail elsewhere, and I remain convinced that the gospel imperative to follow Christ here and now does not, of itself, eliminate the saving power of God beyond death.

Whatever view we take of this particular issue, the central theological question remains for funeral officiants: "Is our ministry shaped primarily by our private judgement of the situation or by its participation in the great high priesthood of Christ?" For me, there can only be one answer. The Paschal Mystery is at the heart of all our ministry, and it is this factor that drives the second half of this essay.

How is this expressed in the shaping of the service?

In the early years of this century the Belgian social anthropologist Arnold van Gennep wrote his seminal book *The Rites of Passage*. In it he looked at societal rites in which members passed from one status to another. Funerals were a primary example of such rites of passage. He identified three main stages to which he gave two sets of descriptions. The first pattern was based on the idea of passing over a threshold (or *limen*); here van Gennep talked of pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stages. The second pattern described the function of each of these stages: separation, transition and incorporation.

In funeral rites these stages manifest themselves both in the one who is dead and in the mourners. There is an element in which we acknowledge that we separate from one another's world; the dead are no longer part of our world and we are no longer part of theirs. There is a "chaotic" stage in which we have to adjust to the loss we suffer with all the attendant uncertainty which attaches to the separation we are experiencing. Finally, there is an emergence into a new world. If this is the agenda of social anthropology, there is a corresponding matrix which relates to the Paschal Mystery. On Good Friday there is the separation which Jesus experiences in his dying ("My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"). On Holy Saturday there is the transition of the descent to the dead. On Easter Day there is the incorporation of Christ into the resurrection life.

I hope that it will be apparent that this was of describing the rites of passage at death offers us a means of shaping the pastoral and liturgical tasks confronting us in our ministry at funerals. I ought to note at this point that I do not understand the pastoral and liturgical tasks to be different. I would rather suggest that liturgy expresses and patterns the pastoral agenda. "Ritual" is a dirty word for many Baptists. It is frequently linked to the word "empty". In fact, ritual is very rarely (if ever) empty. Ritual is a means by which we arrange personal and social interactions with the unknown. In his book, *The Magic of Ritual*, Professor Tom Driver argues that ritual is what makes us human. It is the means by which we learn language and socialisation. It is the means by which the freedom of the children of God is enacted in holy communion. These are big claims, but the cogency and the clarity with which Driver argues his case demand close attention from us.

In shaping the funeral, we need to understand that one service cannot possibly bear all the burden of bereavement grief and express all the joy of Christian hope.

Nonetheless in the rites we devise, we can rehearse with those who mourn the path that they must tread into God's future. It is important that we do not belittle the reality of the loss that death brings; to do so will be to deny the abandonment of Good Friday. It is important that we do not avoid the sense of numbness and unreality so often experienced in bereavement; to do so will be to ignore the transition of Holy Saturday. It is important that we do not suggest that people will eventually "get back to normal"; to do so will be to miss the resurrection life to which God summons the living and the dead. We are not called to repeat the past; our obedience is to a new order of existence.

What difference does this make? Surely, the real job is to comfort the bereaved. Well, yes and no. If all we do is lay the dead to rest and offer our best graveside manner to the bereaved, then we do no more than any decent humanist would do. We are called to do more. We set the deceased's story within our proclamation of the story of Christ. We speak of Christ's death and this death. We speak of resurrection to new life, the light of Christ which the darkness can never master.

The ordering of Christian funerals is more than the disposal of a body and a thanksgiving service. Too often we move to praise without acknowledging the pain. Am I alone in having to deal with those who have never properly grieved because the funeral of their partner did not rehearse the valley of the shadow of death? Where there has been no death there can be no resurrection. When we deny death's dark hour, we offer a kind of docetism which has no place in the Paschal Mystery which our baptism foreshadows and our death appropriates. I am increasingly convinced that good funeral liturgy is a key factor in Christian pastoral care. Shaping the final exit is a task which the Christian community undertakes with those who mourn in order that together they may know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and the power of his resurrection.

Paul Sheppy

Footnotes:

1. I do not find the anthropological model of body and soul helpful, although I acknowledge its long place in Christian tradition. I have argued elsewhere for a unitary model. Interested readers can pursue the matter in my essay "Towards a Theology of Transition" in *Interpreting Death: Christian Theology and Practice* ed. Peter Jupp and Tony Rogers, Cassells, due for publication autumn 1997.
2. Dorothee Solle argued this very clearly and helpfully in her book: *Christ the Representative; An Essay in Theology after the "Death of God"*, SCM Press, London, 1980.
3. From an introductory note to forthcoming funeral rites to be published by the Joint Liturgical Group in collaboration with the Churches' Group on Funerals and Cemeteries and Crematoria.
4. One consistent proponent of this view has been the Lutheran systematician, Wolfhart Pannenberg. See, for example, *The Apostles' Creed in the Light of Today's Questions*, SCM Press, London, 1972.
5. Cf L. Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1993
6. See, for example, my article, "He descended to the dead" in *Theology Themes*, vol 1, no 2, Autumn 1992, published by Northern Baptist College, Manchester.
7. This was translated unto English and published by Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1960.
8. Published by Harper Collins, San Fransisco and New York, 1991.

The Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Society

The Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Society (RBMHS) was formed in 1975 in response to the difficulty being experienced by many ministers in obtaining suitable housing when the time came to retire from manse life. Judging by the questions I am frequently asked, the work of the Society is still not well known or understood within the denomination. I hope, in this short article to dispel some of the mystique and misconception which surround it.

The RBMHS is a separate body from the former Baptist (Men's Movement) Housing Association. BHA is now amalgamated into the English Churches Housing Group. We do not purchase surplus church land to build flats, and our clientele is restricted to retired Baptist ministers and missionaries of the BMS, together with their dependant wives or widows. We are a charitable body registered under the Industrial and Provident Society Acts (which precludes additional registration with the Charity Commission).

As a charity, our object is to provide retirement accommodation for ministers etc, who are necessitous. This means that we must establish that applicants do not have access to other accommodation, nor the means to provide housing for themselves. Our rules also stipulate that applicants must normally have served a minimum of 15 years as a BUGB accredited minister, or if not accredited, a minimum of 18 years in BUGB churches. Ministers must have reached normal retirement age, unless they are permanently incapacitated for work. These are the guidelines which are generally followed, although the rules do permit some discretion to the Committee of Management in exceptional cases.

The Committee of Management is elected annually at the Society's AGM, which takes place at the March meeting of the BUGB Council. All members of the Council are eligible to be members of the Society - upon payment of a non-returnable fee of 10p. The Committee of Management comprises up to fifteen people, including the General Secretary and Treasurer of BUGB by right of office. On the present Committee, the Revd Basil Amey represents the interests of the BMS, the Revd Victor Sumner represents the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship, the Revd Geoffrey Hagen is a tenant member, and the Chairman is Mr Barry Wilmshurst, FRICS.

Any minister may make application to the Society, not more than five years before normal retirement age. Provided the requirements for eligibility are met, the applicant will normally be placed on a waiting list and contacted again towards the end of the year prior to that in which retirement age falls. A guarantee of suitable housing cannot be given, but nowadays the Society is usually able to offer some accommodation. We try to house applicants in the area they prefer - perhaps for family or other reasons - although we generally advise against retiring in the place of one's last pastorate.

We have about 150 properties of various types around the country. Many of these have been bequeathed to us, or purchased through bequests and legacies. Without these generous gifts the Society would not be able to function, and we are deeply grateful to all who help in this way.

We try to meet housing needs from our existing property stock. If this is not possible, and provided sufficient funds are available, we seek to purchase a suitable

property, usually of the applicant's own choice. The Society's resources are of course limited, and there has to be a limit on the cost of property purchased. A general maximum applies throughout the country, and currently this is £60,000. Applicants may extend the maximum by up to 25% from their own funds, such additions being treated as interest-free loans to RBMHS, and repayable on termination of the tenancy. Applicants with substantial capital (though not enough to provide their own housing) may be required to make a loan contribution towards a purchase. Tenants with interest-free loans are granted a proportionate reduction in the standard rent, which is currently £22 per week. The Society does not enter into shared-ownership arrangements, which have been tried and found wanting.

Tenancy of RBMHS property operates in a similar way to occupancy of a manse. The Society looks after repairs and exterior maintenance, while tenants are responsible for maintaining the interior decorations and paying all normal outgoings such as Council Tax, water, electricity, gas and telephone bills.

The RBMHS aims to provide permanent homes with assured tenancies, but sometimes circumstances alter and a home becomes unsuitable. In these cases, sympathetic consideration is given to rehousing, if required.

Given an increasing number of ministers with a stake in home ownership, it is often thought that the role of RBMHS must be diminishing. While this may be true in the long-term, there is no sign of a reduction in demand at present, with annual waiting lists of a dozen or so. As it has done since its formation, the RBMHS continues to look to God to enable it to meet the housing needs of his faithful servants.

Paul Henstock

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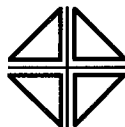
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Book Reviews

***The Doctrine of Humanity* by Charles Sherlock, IVF., £14.99.**

The Psalmist's question "what is Man...?" Is one of the most burning issues facing Christian thinkers and preachers today. Freud, Marx, psychology and psychiatry, medical ethics, politics, economics are all raising challenges to the traditional understanding of the nature of man. Dr Sherlock has written a book which takes many modern doctrines and wrestles with them against the background of scripture.

As a post-feminist, Dr Sherlock questions the use of "man" as a description of the human race. Hence the careful use of the term "humanity" in the title which gives us a clue to the author's basic attitude. The antipodean angle leads to a somewhat racy style, and one wonders whether the attempt to be contemporary might lead to the early obsolescence of the work. Others might find this approach exciting.

The preface expresses the hope that the book will serve the needs of theological students at all levels, ministers and educated lay people. This explains the "scatter gun" approach. Each reader must determine whether the aim has been achieved. It is certainly unusual to find diagrams in a theological book!

The book ranges from anthropology and sport to language-analysis, from Marxism to masturbation, from what it means to be a woman, to pornography, but I was surprised to find traditional subjects like Kingdom of God, eschatology, and conversion, missing from index. An impressive book list includes Kant, Barth, Moltmann, Niebuhr, Jung, Schweitzer, D H Lawrence, Dorothy Sayers etc. all rubbing shoulders with the Fathers - Ambrose, Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin. There is no doubt about the author's erudition and wide reading. This is one of a series, "Contours of Christian theology". Other books in the series cover major doctrines, Providence, Soteriology, Church, and the Holy Spirit. If this book is anything to judge by IVP seems willing to be more theologically adventurous than in my student days. This must be a good thing.

Ron Armstrong.

***Theology Through the Theologians* Colin E Gunton, T & T Clarke. 1996. pp 248.**

Colin Gunton has collected together essays published here and there over the last quarter-century, topped and tailed them to fit together, and produced a book which is a surprisingly consistent whole. In it he develops his ideas about various doctrines (Trinity, Atonement, Being of God, Christology, and others) by consideration of certain theologians. Some are the subjects of chapters - Coleridge, Newman, Barth (3 chapters), Augustin, Forsyth, and others. Many other names can be found throughout the book - Irenaeus, Lampe, Kung, and, ever and again, Barth. I can't give you a worthwhile evaluation of Gunton's theology. Systematic theology at this level is a game few people can play and I am certainly not qualified. My thoughts are those of a jobbing minister with an interest in theology but limited time to read.

Gunton provides an unusual and interesting way into systematic theology. He doesn't spend time expounding the thought of this or that theologian, but homes in on particular ideas. These are developed in relation to the work of various theologians, Gunton comparing and contrasting them. He avoids details and hurries on to make judgements about the figures he is considering. Gunton finds weaknesses here, strengths there, and points the way forward by combining the best of one and

the other. Along the way he reveals powerful ideas in many places, especially in Barth.

I found this approach interesting. It enabled me to see how people, perhaps centuries apart, fit together, and why a new idea grew up to correct a weakness in an earlier theology. Gunton's writing is dense but clear if carefully read, and his easy familiarity with a vast field of theologians is impressive. I did, however, wonder at the supreme confidence of his judgements and his rather superstitious dismissal of those he disagrees with. I struggled, too, to spot the relevance of all this to my preaching and pastoring. In his discussion of Trinity and Spirit I could see the difference it all made. At other times I wanted to ask 'So what?' - a question I believe the working minister has a right to ask of all theologians.

Stuart Jenkins

Preaching as Theatre, Alec Gilmore, SCM 1996 pp150 £9.95

Written by a preacher for preachers, this book has potential to liberate, whilst prompting some irritable sense of inadequacy in the reader. Looking to theatre as that which achieves response rather than simply inviting it, but without being able to predetermine what this will be in each person, Gilmore seeks to learn and practise lessons from this for preaching.

He isolates main points of departure for the preacher; those of the Bible (through prophets and stories), life and literature, before going on to provide illustration of how the sermon's path may unfold. This is done in the recognition that there is an intersection of many different worlds in life as in the scriptures and in the arts. An awareness of trends in contemporary biblical and theological studies is brought to bear on the way in which texts may be encountered and explored.

However tempting to the weary minister, this stimulating book should not be used as a repository of illustrations. It is suggestive rather than prescriptive and those who use it as a 'how-to' book will probably stumble. It will be best used in conjunction with a wide range of reading and observation as well as disciplined biblical and theological work, and so challenges preachers in the use of time (hence the irritation and inadequacy!). But it is designed to encourage and will do so if the preacher is prepared to recognise the pulpit not so much as a podium from which people are required to believe certain things because the preacher says so, but rather as theatre in the sense of that "cauldron where things can happen" (page 141). It offers provocation and help in exploring what it might mean not only to believe but really act on the conviction that "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word".

Hazel Sherman

Interpreting Charismatic Experience, David Middlemiss.

SCM 1996 278 pp. £14-95.

The English philosopher Hobbes asks us to consider the difference between two statements, "God spoke to me in a dream", and "I dreamt that God spoke to me". The first claims an encounter with an objective God who communicates with me, but the second is only claiming a subjective experience which includes an apparent encounter with God. The real question is, 'how does a third person distinguish between the two statements?'

If you enjoy such philosophical stretching, then you will find this book a stimulating read. However, the author's purpose is not to solve philosophical puzzles but to record an intellectual journey that all of us who wrestle with the claims and

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counter-claims about charismatic experience would do well to undertake. He is not seeking to give an assessment of charismatic phenomena but rather reflecting on the criteria one could use to assess the epistemological structure of charismatic interpretations of Christian experience. His clear indebtedness to the Enlightenment, and the place of reason in human experience, will automatically rouse the suspicions of others, who have responded to the calls to shake off the Enlightenment world view and the prison house of reason.

Drawing on the work of R. Knox, he makes the link between the contemporary charismatic phenomena and what the eighteenth century rationalist dubbed "enthusiasm". This link is not just phenomenological. We are all used to the kind of historical justification such as-"Wesley noted that people fell - God blessed Wesley, people fall over today, therefore God must be blessing us". Middlemiss argues that the link is deeper and is shaped by the same 'deep rooted and determining feature which is a distinctive epistemology'. Typically, this way of knowing exalts the authority of private revelation over reason, tradition and maybe, in practice if not in theory, over the Bible. The question then becomes a matter of what criteria are relevant to weigh such claims to knowledge.

The author considers the objections to claims to certainty in religious experience, beginning with Locke and Hume and gradually builds up a case that shows well the deficiencies of all one-stranded claims to knowledge. He suggests that only a cumulative case argument which would take account of context, expectations, rival explanations of phenomena and a reasoned basis for faith in its broadest sense, will offer an approach that would lead to a measure of confidence (probability rather than certainty). Similarly, claims that a ministry is authentic just because certain manifestations occur are critically examined.

Racy chapter headings keep the reader's interest, but I guess that some will find the whole process a justification of an anti-charismatic stance. Death to charismatic experience by a thousand philosophical qualifications! However, this would be to misread the author's intention, who is to be thanked for giving us a rigorous and rounded way to approach the relationship between reason and revelation.

The book still leaves the pastor or worship leader in the unenviable position of facing the demand for instant discernment when faced with 'words', 'pictures' or other revelatory phenomena. In these days when certainty, power and immediacy are catchwords, it takes courage to say, "it may be, but I can't be certain!" Even more to ask, "Why would God want to say this in this particular way in the light all we have come to understand about him from the Bible, history and wider experience?" This book gives a good way to think about these issues in general and offers scope for reasoned discussion and study of broader issues amongst those who share leadership in our churches today.

David Richardson

The Coming of God. Christian Eschatology, by Jurgen Moltmann.

SCM 1996. 390 pp. £17-50

With this work Jurgen Moltmann completes his systematic theology which also includes The Trinity and the Kingdom of God, God in Creation, The Way of Jesus Christ, and The Spirit of Life.

In an age when eschatologies abound, Moltmann carefully stresses the distinctive nature of "Christian" eschatology as that for which "the end is the beginning". This is the conviction that led to the title, The Coming of God, rather than a title referring

to the last or end times. "In God's creative future, the end will become the beginning, and the true creation is still to come and is ahead of us." (page xi)

From this positive foundation, Moltmann sets out to examine eschatology from various perspectives, which provide the five main sections of the book. Beginning from a survey of contemporary eschatologies, the opening section provides a good historical survey of major developments in eschatological thought. For many this may prove to be the most difficult section of the book, but the persistent reader will be rewarded.

The following three sections, which form the heart of the work, approach the subject from the personal, historical and cosmic perspective. As he works methodically through these areas, Moltmann explores a vast range of eschatological thinking, providing important background explanation to different strands of belief along with solid critical analysis of them. The final, brief, section approaches the subject from the perspective of the divine, asking what it means to claim that the ultimate purpose of creation consists in the glorification of God.

I suspect few will find they can agree with everything Moltmann says in the course of this book. Like me, I suspect most will find areas both of agreement and of disagreement. Surely all but the most blinkered, however, will find their thinking stimulated. Those who have read Moltmann's earlier works will not be surprised to learn that this book is no easy read. However, as the millennium approaches and apocalyptic pronouncements and predictions proliferate from all manner of sects and sources, I believe this book will prove to be an important work. It provides clear theological thinking in an area where it is often lacking.

Steve Sims

Work Well: Live Well - Rediscovering a Biblical View of Work
by David Westcott. Marshall Pickering 1996. xviii + 251pp. £8.99

This is the ninth volume in the 'handbook of pastoral care' series, designed to aid pastors in assessing the needs of those who come to them for help (xv). The author was, until recently, the UK Head of Personnel at KPMG and has a diploma in pastoral counselling.

He defines work as essential, purposeful activity (p18): a question-begging definition. He acknowledges omissions concerning the day-to-day difficulties of employment and the social, academic and political structures within which work is done, but otherwise covers a lot of ground.

He begins by describing six imaginary people, in different work situations, invited to a meeting by the vicar, and ends with an account of the meeting. In between, after biblical and historical perspectives, the author devotes chapters to motivation, work as choice or calling, stress, identity and self-esteem, redundancy, women and work, and providing pastoral care, using the circumstances of people at the meeting to open up the issues.

Each chapter follows the same threefold pattern: firstly, giving substance to the particular character concerned; secondly, investigating the aspect of work concerned, and thirdly, setting out strategies for pastoral care.

There is evidence of wide reading in spirituality and theology (Ignatius, Baxter, De Mello, Bonhoeffer, Moltmann, McGrath, Stott) but, to this reviewer, his use of the Bible is not always convincing. Men and women were created equal, but with the fall, which he takes literally (p34f), the situation changed (p192). Westcott agrees with

Stott's interpretation that in marriage the man is the head, because he was created first and woman was created from him and for him.

The book gives ministers useful information regarding work and help in pastoring people with work-related difficulties.

John V Matthews

Erratum

In the April *Journal*, in the review of the book *Is the Blessing Biblical?* we referred throughout to the author as "David Poulson". This should, of course, read "David Pawson". We apologise to the author and to the Publishers for this oversight.
