

# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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

# Editorial

It distressed him deeply. The incident occurred during Harold Wilson's premiership, when he had been invited to speak in church. He was shouted down by members of the congregation antagonistic to his policies. The treatment he was used to in other contexts, and indeed expected, was unthinkable in the rarefied atmosphere of a Christian church. This episode helps to remind us, for whom preaching is stock in trade, that the pulpit is one of the few places these days commanding respect. For this reason it is a place of privilege not to be presumed upon.

Yet, in an age of dialogue and debate, such a dominant monologue seems anachronistic: an antediluvian survivor of a by-gone age, when "authority" went unquestioned. It seems like that in parts of the Church too, so that the traditional sermon has given way to "more culturally relevant communicators". What Phillips Brooks described as "truth through personality" no longer exists as of right, neither in the world nor in the Church. So it is significant that *The Times* has initiated *The Preacher of the Year* competition, now in its third cycle. Those who question the means applaud the aim: to heighten the importance of preaching in our national life. This may not restore the queues outside the local church, but it may just remind people that something deep and desperate is going on, Sunday by Sunday, which alone puts the mundane into an eternal context.

Recently, Alex Gilmore published *Preaching as Theatre*, reviewed in the last edition. We have invited him to reflect further on the aspects of life situations and the creative role of the imagination in preaching. Secondly, Tony Cross shares his deep concern about the mutual care of each other in ministry. In the light of increasing numbers of casualties, he suggests ways of increasing support networks. Textual criticism is not something features every day in our publication, so Mike Smith's excursion into the now famous "Matthew" fragments housed in Magdalen College, Oxford, is an event. His conclusion on their early dating resurrects the *Griesbach hypothesis*, questioning the priority of Mark.

Due to a late inclusion of the questionnaire in the last edition, Clive Doubleday's article on Eastern Europe had to be omitted. We apologize for this, trusting that you will find his contribution challenging in the light of the economic and spiritual plight of the post-Soviet era. So far we have received two responses to Philip Cooke's April article, arguing for a central denominational stipend. They come from Sue Thompson and Jim Pollard. Further responses are welcome. The final contribution comes from Paul Ballard, in which he invites us to recognize how social and ecumenical realities can influence understanding of the significance of baptism.

Since this is the last issue under the present editorship, thanks are expressed to you all for loyal support over 11 years, and to the many writers of articles and reviews who have rarely failed commissions. It has been a satisfying ministry indeed to serve you. In the new year we welcome Gethin Abraham-Williams, who will look for the same quality of cooperation.

# Preachers Are Of Three Kinds

After some years of preaching less and listening more I find Baptist preachers are of three kinds, typified by three examples, though admittedly with a little poetic licence.

The first preacher was a lecturer in a theological college, so it was reasonable to expect something special. For 20 minutes (which seemed like 30) he read his script with the accuracy and precision, dullness and detachment of a 1930's BBC news reader.<sup>1</sup> The theme was fine. The underlying theology sound. The relevance to daily Christian living (for those who could spot it!) unquestioned. But had the script been taken away it is doubtful whether he could have remembered a sentence let alone a paragraph, and few members of the congregation could have summarised any of them afterwards.

It was rather like a professional gardener, trying to hold the attention of a bunch of amateur gardeners whose main concern was producing lovely blooms, rich fruit or fresh vegetables for a healthy life, whilst all the time talking about the chemistry of the soil instead of the ground, climate and meteorology rather than watering, and seed and plant mutation rather than variety of plant and crop. At no place did you actually see what you were interested in and never once did the mouth water for the end product even if you knew what it was.

This is the preacher who revels among the theological roots in the underground, if not the undergrowth, with all the theory on all the right issues but shows little understanding of why the audience is there, what they are looking for and what they are capable of doing with it when they get it.

The second preacher knew the congregation well. Not personally! Just any congregation. He told us stories. His first had little or nothing to do with what he was going to tell us, but it got a laugh. By the end we knew about his wife, his family and his neighbours, where he had been in the last month, and the names of a few people he had met. There were anecdotes to illustrate the obvious, interesting allusions to the irrelevant, and not a little that needn't have been there at all.

It was like a greengrocer with no fresh flowers, fruit or vegetables in his shop, who wouldn't know what to do with them if he had, and didn't seem to have any notion that some people might actually want them. Instead, what he offered was light and airy as a soufflé. Every mouthful palatable. It almost left you wanting more, or at least it would have done if the first helping had been smaller. But when you were asked afterwards what you had been given it was difficult to say. What difference did it make? Not much. Would it matter if you never had it? Probably not.

This is the preacher pre-occupied with consumerism. What matters is that it looks attractive, people want to buy it, enjoy it and come back for more. Whether it is good for them, whether it is nutritious and whether it ought to be on offer at all are not questions he wants to ask. It is like candy floss for children - only possible at all if you never stop to ask what it does for their teeth.

The third preacher was different. He began the service with a clear theme, irritatingly intriguing to some if blindingly obvious to others, which whetted your appetite and made you wrestle a bit with the hymns and prayers to find a line or spot a connection. You then listened more carefully to the children's bit because you felt he would give you a clue - a simple statement, a 'taste' of what was coming

(rather like a starter or an appetiser which some people always said was the best bit), and a stimulus to prepare you for the main dish. By now you were part of the action.

All the same, when he started the sermon you wondered where he was going, after ten minutes you were still trying to piece it together, after fifteen you thought you began to see a light, and within another three or four minutes at most he surprised you by stopping. Some people felt better. Some people felt worse. Some were encouraged. Some were hurt. But only those who couldn't be bothered went away without a question which they knew would take a bit of working out.

This is the preacher whose roots grow deep and who knows how to draw on them. But he won't worry the congregation with them because it is fruit he wants to offer. Equally, he knows how to touch the depths in his congregation - to strike a chord, 'to play the music' - to feed them! And though they will no more know what is going on inside than they understand the process of digestion, they will at least know it was palatable and that, long-term, it is the sort of preaching that keeps them healthy.

Discerning listeners will have several tests which tell them whether the experience has been worthwhile. One, were they still arguing about it over the Sunday dinner or still sorting it out when they went to bed? Two, were there moments later when they realised that something has stuck? Three, were there happenings during the week (in the press, on television or in their personal life), which called the sermon to mind, so that they then saw in the sermon something which they had missed at the time, and appreciated in 'the happening' something they would have missed altogether had it not been for the sermon?

As a listener, I don't want too much of the first because I want to distinguish preaching from a theological lecture or a technical dissertation. I don't want the second at all because I want preaching to be more than entertainment. But I *need* the third. He is the one who can draw on the depths and riches of Scripture and Christian experience over the centuries, mingled with his own personal experience, observation and knowledge of my needs, to touch my heart, re-direct my thinking, change my behaviour and even my life.

No preacher, of course, belong wholly and exclusively to one category, but we all have a natural habitat. Nor does any preacher pass all those tests every time, any more than a professional batsman hits a century every innings, but a preacher who can do it more often than not is one worth going to church for.

Most preachers, in my experience, would like to think that is what they are doing, and probably, at some point, most of us are. But how can we hit the target better and more often? One or two suggestions.

### **Allied Disciplines**

We can learn a lot by observing professionals in allied disciplines.

Journalists have to make their stories such that people actually want to buy them and find them readable in the train or over their breakfast, and because they have no fixed audience, they have to work hard to maintain their market without sacrificing their integrity. At least once a month it is worth studying several papers and observing how the writers choose their stories (or develop issues they are given, either by an editor or by the daily news) but then make them relevant, interesting and meaningful to their readers. How do they begin? How do they end?

And so on.

Broadcasters have the added constraint of time and language. A three-minute slot is a three-minute slot! So a five-minute script must be cut by 40 per cent and the result is often an improvement. Unlike reading, the listener can never go back to check anything, so everything must be clear first time round. And since listeners may have to pop out to check the toast or answer the door, they must be able easily to pick up the thread when they return. What does that say to a preacher?

Playwrights have to develop a different medium. In a couple of hours they can develop themes in a more intriguing way, but their medium is not words and arguments carefully arranged or information attractively transferred, but pictures, people and action. Their job is not to talk about it but to do it. To put it on. To make it live. If it is good, by the time the curtain comes down some people will have learned something; some will have felt something. If it is really good, something may have happened which was beyond the control of the playwright, the director or even the audience. It may have touched their soul. It may have touched their life. All this has something to say to the preacher as well.

### Life Situations

Baptist preachers have always used life situations - snippets of conversation in the bus queue, a bit of TV drama, a scene from a 'soap', an incident from a novel or drama. But mostly we use them as illustrations. Having decided what we want to say, found a theological idea or a Bible passage, we then scratch around for similar events and stories saying the same thing, sometimes just to make it palatable and sometimes because we fondly imagine that our congregations won't be able to understand it unless we do.

But even if we succeed in getting it across (and we may not do that as often as we think!), we then leave them to work it out. Like sending them home with a run down on Spanish dishes, a list of ingredients for a paella, and a few vague cooking instructions. 'Fine', says the listener, 'but what do I do with it?' "Don't tell me. Show me". Congregations don't want to know what we think is the voice of God for today, with a few hand-picked illustrations of where we think we hear him. They need to hear that voice of God for themselves, and we need to use our life illustrations in such a way that they might.

For example, I sit in a crowded train one morning and sense the unease around me. People can't have their usual seat. The 'regulars' are not there. Two middle-aged women get in, have to stand, and their conversation sums up the irritation, confusion and anxiety which so many are feeling. Nothing is as usual, and they don't know why, until suddenly one passenger emerges from behind his *Readers' Digest* and says, 'I'm afraid the train's back to front'.

How we respond to the change is the issue. But then, instead of making a beeline for the Bible to see what it says, working out the message and fitting in the train incident, we can use the life situation to latch on to similar experiences.

Move from the passengers' confusion to people whose countries gained independence overnight, to victims of change in Eastern Europe or Hong Kong. Paint a picture. Pick up similar but different experiences from the week's news or pastoral practice. Explore the feelings of the Jews in Babylon (Psalm 137) or Thessalonica (Acts 17:6) where a pleasant and well-established life-style is being disturbed by a handful of revolutionaries. Work out what their experience says to us about the changes we accept and the changes we resist and why. And so on.

From what I have read, David Hare's latest play, *Amy's View*, explores some of the same themes. Read it if you cannot see it. Reflect on its insights, put them alongside the other material and let them speak to each other, because it is when our minds and hearts are open that God has an opportunity to speak to us, and through us.

## **Imagination**

Using imagination is not new either. It's just that some of us have been blessed with more than others and if you are expected to turn out two sermons every Sunday you have to be a bit of a genius if imagination is to shine in every utterance. But perhaps we could all do better.

We are all familiar with coming at a Bible story from an unusual angle - the Elder Brother, or the Father, rather than the Prodigal, the Good Samaritan with the emphasis on 'the Samaritan' rather than neighbourliness, and the Grand Assize with the emphasis on the 'surprise' rather than caring for the sick, etc. But there are other possibilities.

Try interpreting the Talents without assuming western culture and you find yourself asking a different set of questions, like why five for one, two for another and one for another? Why better to gamble with something than to take care of it? When you have done nothing wrong with what you were given, why lose it to someone else? Or use your imagination to identify the characters. Who is the master? A dictator in a military regime? A landlord? A managing director, a dean or a bishop? Or is he the personification of 'the system'? Who are the five-talent people, and so on? And how does the interpretation change according to the identification?

Feminist, Third World, Liberation, Narrative and Sociological Readings of biblical material can all be very creative and stimulating, and there is an increasing number of books to get you going.

Or carefully choose words which can mean and suggest different things to different people in different circumstances.

Shortly before the General Election sleaze was high on the agenda. Politicians of principle versus politicians of expediency. The price one MP would pay for an affair. The price another would pay to cover it up. And so on. And into that arena stepped Peter Hall at the Old Vic with Granville Barker's *Waste*, written in 1907, revised in 1926 and highly successful in the 70s, using a collation of the 1907 and 1926 versions.

It proved incredibly relevant. Might almost have been written yesterday. All the laughs in the right places. But when Granville Barker wrote it theatre goers would have been recognising A J Balfour (Premier 1902 - 05) in the character of Horsham and the 1902 Education Act in proposals for the creation of an educated democracy. No names and no references, but the allusions transcended time and derived their value from what their very suggestion called forth in the audience.

A preacher who can do that is using his imagination to good effect.

## **A Way Forward**

Perhaps Fraternals could work more at preaching so that we learn from one another. What we all lack is informed criticism, cut and thrust, and the ability to handle it. Authors have to contend with book reviews, theatre and television shows

with critics, and journalists have to stand up alongside reports by other professional journalists on the same subjects. But after the last college Sermon Class most of us have to endure nothing more than the words of appreciation in the porch.

Maybe sermon class *was* too negative. But it needn't have been. Sharing ideas, interpretations, experiences and stimulating one another must surely be good for the body ecclesiastical. Provided, of course, you really believe that preaching is important.

*Alec Gilmore*

Footnote:

<sup>1</sup> Not all my preachers are male but in such a male-dominated denomination the male pronoun helps to conceal the anonymity.

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## When Praying Is Not Enough

It is written down in black and white. **“BMF seeks to encourage Ministers in their varied work:**

**by asking that members pray for one another each Sunday Morning..”<sup>1</sup>**

So there you have it. That's what we should do! And of course we do! “Lord, bless the ministry of my fellow brothers and sisters today... amen”. Well, perhaps not quite in those words, but does it work: does it have any effect?

### **Casualties**

A few years back I sat in the Baptist Assembly noting the names of those who had completed their probation and were received by the President. It's always an impressive occasion but I was struck by the numbers: 30, 40, perhaps 50 men and women of various ages and locations. This was just one year's harvest, so to speak. I got to thinking - how many will still be in ministry 10, 20 years from now? We all know the wastage is phenomenal. Just as well, for if each year added 50 to the list without some departures, the problem of over supply would have overtaken us many years ago.

It's a brutal system that teaches people to swim by throwing them over the side into 100 fathoms of water, accepting that 50 per cent won't survive! Our system doesn't quite match that, but the philosophy appears to be that those genuinely “called” are the ones who survive. The cost in human suffering is enormous. Most of us know people who didn't survive. For them, at least, the prayer didn't seem to work!

Lest I become the latest casualty by being struck off for faulty theology (and that would be a novelty!), let me stress that I am not questioning the efficacy of prayer, only the effectiveness of our praying for each other on a Sunday Morning or any other time of the week, if that is **all** we do.

Can we pray meaningful prayers for people we do not know? Can I pray for over 1,000 people, most of whom I don't know? In one sense, I can; but for most my prayer is going to be pretty basic along the lines of “..bless the ministry..” That may not be much, but it is certainly better than nothing. If we adapt Paul's prayer for the Church in Eph. 3 and pray for each other's spiritual enrichment, that could be better! Of course, God hears our prayers. But would it have been enough to save

even a half of those casualties we all know?

I wish to argue that this is not enough. We do know **some** ministers better than others. For these we can pray more specifically and probably do. But how many do we know and how well? We have seen the "fraternal" decline in importance and support. Many fraternal, when they do meet, are based on quite superficial relationships.

We are busy with our management style courses, our strategic planning, even with our appraisal models, but do not have time for one another. If we really take ministry and ministers seriously, don't we owe it to one another to be responsible for one another? If I consider just the casualties I know, to what extent are they my responsibility and not just the "system"? Problem! (there is always a problem.) I can't be in relationship with people who do not have time or don't want a relationship with me. I observe that a large number of ministers feel they do not need a supportive fraternal or similar body and therefore opt out. These are often the first casualties but that is not quite the point. When I feel vulnerable, it's the strong I need to support me. The learner swimmer does not want another learner to jump in alongside him but someone on the side, on dry land, ready to throw a life-buoy.

These days there is much talk of professional standards in ministry; of looking to the business and professional worlds to learn about how we could be better ministers. I do not want to knock this approach for we could learn a great deal from it. Ironically, it's the accountability and the supervisory aspects of these worlds that we shy away from, preferring to keep our independence. We prefer to agree with Cain that we are **not** our brother's keeper. If that is so, then all that BMF stands for is nonsense. Does not our concept of being a Ministers' Fellowship argue for mutual support? Is not inter-dependence vital?

If we are serious about professional standards in ministry we will want to develop responsibility for one another. We will want to see that professionalism means being in inter-dependent relationship with other ministers for mutual support and encouragement. We will see the fraternal ( or whatever name it has) as of high priority. We will want to see it as an opportunity to share joys and sorrows; pleasure, problems and pain. We will be willing to listen to others without jealousy or cynicism. Most of all we will be honest.

So to pray is good but not enough. We need to be committed to know more about others (and consequently to be known) so that we can pray informed prayers. We also need to be willing to develop relationships that are supportive. When we can do this, we can seriously address issues of supervision and appraisal. Until we do, there will still be those who drown before they learn to swim.

### **Support Strategies**

What practical steps can be taken?

First of all, ministers who accept BU Accreditation need to accept that part of ministry today demands that we are in relationship with other Christian leaders in a way that enables mutual support and accountability. This relationship will usually require that the members are not in the same church, i.e. we can't just rely on fellow team members - supportive though they may be.

Fraternal need to be places where such relationships can be developed. That takes time. I would suggest that a regular meeting of one hour every fortnight is a minimum. This meeting should be a high priority - at least as high as our sermon

preparation. We would expect to attend and for other members to attend except in very exceptional circumstances. This would mean, of course, that having fixed times to meet we turn up. Now, I find, people often agree a time and then don't attend!

The form of the meetings may need to change. If they are infrequent and members do not regularly attend, they will be taken up with the formalities of introduction - who we are, what we do, the issues our churches face. My experience of a "good" fraternal<sup>2</sup> demonstrates that getting beyond this takes time and commitment. We took a lunch time every two weeks. People usually attended and we were strict about the time - spending most of it eating our lunch and talking, praying for the last ten to fifteen minutes. It lacked a more experienced minister (we were all about the same in experience and church setting) but we all found it very supportive.

Once the meeting has got beyond these formalities of introduction we can start to say what is good and bad about our situations - being honest. We all have some good things that are happening (I hope!) and some areas for concern. When we know one another and can be trusting of confidentiality, we can begin to share what is on our heart and mind.

For this to happen ministers need to work on themselves. This will be the hardest part. We are not always good at listening to others as we think - especially fellow ministers. We are inclined to rejoice at failure, dismissive of the weak, and think too highly of ourselves. Worst of all, we are inclined not to notice these failings in ourselves, only in others. Accepting our own vulnerability may be the hardest step of all. Then we may be able to receive help and so begin to understand the kind of help that needs to be given.

How can this way of thinking be got across? Do colleges encourage it? Do our Baptist structures? What prominence is given to it in Baptist publications? Perhaps those in this kind of relationship should be given opportunity in Ministers' conferences to share the value and importance of these relationships so that others will begin to get the message. Of course, the problem is that the self-sufficient, disaster-about-to-happen minister rarely attends a fraternal or a conference and certainly doesn't read the *Baptist Times*!

This is, as always, our major problem - our independence. No one dares tell Baptists what to do. Our concept of what it means to be Christian and Baptist doesn't seem to include caring a jot for other Christians or Baptists unless it shows as a credit in our own accounts. Those who feel otherwise do not seem to be getting their message across! Until they do and until ministers develop inter-dependent relationships there will continue to be human casualties and some tragedies.

**Tony Cross**

Footnote:

<sup>1</sup> BMF Application Form

<sup>2</sup> I use the term for need of a suitable alternative. I hope that we can accept that the term might mean a meeting of people in supportive relationship, rather than a strict "brotherhood" which excludes "sisters". I am sure that my women colleagues will accept this.

# The Magdalen College “Matthew” Fragments

The Magdalen College fragments of Matthew’s Gospel (P64) were originally dated to the 4th century AD by Hunt soon after their discovery. However, in 1953, C.H. Roberts (the discoverer of the famous Rylands papyrus of John) took a second look at the fragments. By then, much more was known about papyri. One of the reasons for dating the fragments so late had been shown to be invalid. Hunt had thought that the codex had not come into use until the 4th century. Many earlier examples had now been found, and Roberts proposed a new dating, in the late 2nd century. (Article in Harvard Theological Review, 46 (1953) pp233-7) His reasons were as follows.

First, the fragments were from a codex, but this could now allow an earlier date. In his article he points out how Grenfell and Hunt dated some of the Oxyrhynchus papyri far too late, just because they were written in the codex form.

Secondly, Roberts gave a careful reappraisal of the handwriting of the fragments. From this, he suggested a date in the late 2nd century. Experts like Skeat, Bell and C.H. Turner concurred. And the Magdalen College fragments assumed their place as the earliest known fragments of Matthew’s Gospel (P64)

## Radical Reappraisal

This was the current state of play until 1995, when Carsten Thiede, a German papyrologist, gave a fresh look to these fragments, and shook the scholarly world by suggesting that they were written in the 1st century! Thus making them the earliest known piece of the New Testament.

Naturally, Thiede’s dating was vigorously attacked. A thorough appraisal and refutation has been published by Graham Stanton (*Gospel Truth?*). However, it has to be said that Stanton’s criticism is not as strong as it could be.

He begins by hoping to discredit Thiede’s judgment because of another controversial identification he has upheld. A small Greek fragment from one of the Qumran caves (7Q5) had been identified by Thiede as coming from Mark’s Gospel, and dating from about 50ad. This identification may or may not be correct. I myself have reason to believe that it is correct. But just because a scholar makes one mistake, it does not mean that all his other judgments are flawed.

Stanton’s other objections to Thiede’s dating consists of gathering the opinions of various experts: an appeal to “authority” which seems faintly mediaeval. He criticises Thiede for not referring to standard works on papyrology, but gives no detailed assessment of the hand used to write the Magdalen College fragments.

So perhaps we need to return to C.H. Roberts’ assessment of the papyrus in 1953, and see if it requires any emendation.

## Textual Detective Work

The standard work on Greek Literary Hands has also been produced by Roberts (hereafter referred to as GLH). It is copiously illustrated, and forms the basis for my article. All the examples that Roberts gives are on papyri that can be dated. However, virtually all are on rolls which have subsequently been re-used for documents in a cursive script. It remains to be asked if the same rules apply to

documents written on codices. And bearing in mind the expensiveness of ancient books, some scrolls might have had a very long life before being used for another (usually ephemeral) document. So it could well be argued that Roberts' dating of some of the hands is a little later than they should actually be.

The first thing that strikes you about Greek Literary Hands is their variety. They range from the beautifully statuesque to the positively scruffy. Neat hands are not necessarily either later or earlier than untidy ones.

Secondly, Roberts, in his introduction, cautions people against using single letters as positive indications of date. Any dating must be a cumulative process, with many comparisons. And this is the method that Roberts uses when redating our papyrus to the late 2nd century.

The first criterion that he used to rule out a 3rd century date is the size of the omicron. In many 3rd century manuscripts this is minute, far smaller than any other letters. However, since Roberts did this redating, minute omicrons have turned up in late 2nd century manuscripts (e.g. the Bodmer papyrus XIV of Luke/John known as P75), and even as early as the mid-2nd century (Pap Oxy 1:26 - 19a in GLH). The full-size omicron in our fragments would therefore tend to push the date back towards the first century.

The other criterion against a 3rd century date is what Roberts call the "flat omega". This means that the middle stroke of the omega is far smaller than the two outside ones. A tall stroke can be used as some kind of indication of an earlier date. Roberts does give one example of a tall omega as late as 206AD (GLH 20b), but most of his examples are from the earlier part of the 2nd century (GLH 18a, 13b, 12). Before this date you again find varied examples.

One slight peculiarity of the omega in the Magdalen College fragments is that the middle stroke seems to have a backward serif on the middle stroke. The only example of this in GLH is Pap. Fayum 110, dated at 94AD, although there is something slightly similar on Pap Oxy 1:20 (GLH 12) from the first half of the 2nd century.

Other letters which Roberts finds significant are alpha, epsilon, upsilon and mu.

The alpha is an angular letter done without lifting the pen from the papyrus. This seems to be mainly a 2nd century feature, especially with an angular end on the left-hand side (GLH 15c, 16a and 16c). But there are also possible similarities with GLH 11a and 11b, both of which date from the late 1st century. There is also some usage of this form even earlier.

The epsilon is very odd. Roberts states, in GLH, that back in the 4th century BC the epsilon was one of the letters that showed clear trace of having been copied from inscriptions. It was a square-backed letter, still keeping noticeable features from its carved form. In the Magdalen College fragments, the epsilon sometimes has a curved back, but more often it has a straight back. The bottom stroke is short (which is unusual), and the centre stroke is fully attached. The best comparison is Pap. Lond II 141 (GLH 12a), which dates from 88AD. Is this form of the epsilon a conscious archaism on the part of the scribe?

The Upsilon and mu do not need any mention, as they do not compel any reappraisal of dating. Roberts had many more examples of papyri to compare than I have, but many more, including P75, were not available to him in 1953 when he made his dating. However, on the basis of what I have seen, a date between 100 and 150 AD would seem most likely, with the balance tipping towards the earlier date.

However, before making a final judgment, perhaps the Magdalen College fragments should be compared with the Rylands fragment of John (P52) and the Egerton Harmony of the Gospels. The Rylands fragment can be dated by handwriting to a period between 81 and 127 AD. The Egerton Papyrus is traditionally dated c. 150AD. These are both codex-written works, whereas all the examples in GLH are written on scrolls. The semi-official codex, as opposed to the "official" scroll, has a rather more cursive look to it, with little hooks on such letters as alpha and delta. The alpha is rounded, not angular, and the proximity to ordinary handwriting is closer. Similar forms, although even more cursive, occur on the Egerton Papyrus. Here there are even traces of joining-strokes. The Magdalen College fragments are far neater, but they do have traces of cursive, especially in the letter delta.

The hooked delta occurs in both Rylands and Egerton, but the Egerton also has a form where the top stroke protrudes but does not curl. Roberts has examples of the hooked delta from the late 1st century (GLH 11a, 12). The protruding but not hooked form comes earlier (GLH 9a, 10c) (dated to 7BC and 66AD respectively), but both forms occur together in an early 2nd century document (GLH 13b).

Neatness is no good indication of date. The fact that the Magdalen College fragments are as neat as the scrap of Appian found at Dura-Europos (dating from before 256AD, but how long?) only goes to prove that there were neat scribes around at various periods. The very cursive form of the Egerton Harmony may well prove that it was a private exercise not done for official church use. The slightly more formal, but still cursive form of capitals of the Rylands fragments may provide an intermediary stage, but the difference may well be social, rather than indicating difference in dating. The person who had the Magdalen College fragments written may just have been lucky enough to have had the services of a good scribe.

A few further points might also be noted. Both the Magdalen College fragments and the Ryland and Egerton fragments use the abbreviations known as the "nomina sacra". It is not possible to determine if the Rylands or Egerton fragments had indented paragraphs; The Magdalen College fragments do have them, as does the Bodmer Papyrus P75. But they are not in the Chester Beatty Papyrus of Paul's letters (P46) which is traditionally dated c 200AD, so this may not be a significant dating point. Punctuation is probably in Magdalen and Egerton (certainly), but not (as far as we can see) in Rylands. Breathings are in Egerton and Rylands, but not in Magdalen.

### **Verdict on the Matthew (P64) Fragments**

C.H. Roberts and his fellow papyrologists in 1953 dated the Magdalen College fragments to the late 2nd century (not 200 AD as some handbooks suggest). I would respectfully suggest that this is somewhat too late. From the evidence that I have seen, a date in the early part of the 2nd century is far more likely, with the Magdalen College fragments standing alongside the Rylands fragment as the earliest known pieces of the New Testament (if one discounts 7Q5). A date in the last decade of the 1st century is not impossible, though perhaps slightly less likely.

However, allowing time for transmission and circulation in Egypt, an early 2nd century date would perhaps rule out some of the outrageously late dates proposed for Matthew, even if they were not already totally unsafe because of such works as 1 Clement and the Didache. I have not been able to see Pap. Oxy II 246, which Thiede says is "a dated papyrus resembling it(P64) almost like a twin". This dates from 66AD (Jesus Papyrus p111). Dating by handwriting, when there is no archeological context, is always slightly subjective. Nevertheless, with the Magdalen

College fragments dating from the very early 2nd century, the most justifiable scenario would seem to be for Matthew to have written his gospel just before 70AD, to allow time for dissemination and copying in upper Egypt.

**Mike Smith**

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## **The Transformation of Eastern Europe**

Over the past seven years, the world has witnessed a radical transformation throughout Eastern Europe, which has had a profound effect upon every area of its society - politically, economically, socially and, not least, spiritually. To deduce that, due to the collapse of Communism, there has been merely a political change in Eastern Europe would be a gross understatement. The advent of Gorbachev led to hopes that the attitudes of the East European satellite governments would soften with time, but the general opinion was that things would only change when the present generation of hard-liners, the old guard, had died or retired.

### **Instant, Un-Coordinated Response**

In 1989 the face of Europe changed forever, as government after government collapsed like a house of cards under the brave pressure of the people's revolution, demanding that democracy replace dictatorship. This domino effect swept through Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania. The following year the fight for freedom behind the Iron Curtain spread to Albania, Yugoslavia, Russia and the former Soviet Union satellite countries.

What, however, has been the response of western churches to this new open door of opportunity? The primary response has been a reactive one, as, initially, individuals, churches, associations and unions rallied to transport aid to these desperately needy families and churches in the East. In 1990 it seemed that all roads led to Romania. Undoubtedly, many mistakes were made due to lack of co-ordination and, indeed, co-operation between independent and insular churches and organisations. It was not uncommon for trucks loaded with aid to arrive in Romania without any contact or true destination point for their precious cargo. Naively, some aid was off-loaded at the front door of orphanages and immediately disappeared out of the back door on to the black market to earn the leaders and staff of the orphanage a handsome profit, without the children ever seeing one item of aid. Fortunately, these reports were not as common as the media would have us believe, and most of the aid was gratefully received, checked, lists made and distributed carefully and wisely, particularly if the recipient was a pastor of a local church.

During those early euphoric months of freedom in 1990, I recall the wonderful time of fellowship one enjoyed amongst the fraternity of truck drivers into Romania or whilst staying in the large city hotels (courtesy of the Romanian Government) with hundreds of aid workers, reporters, TV crews and medical teams. Whilst waiting at the Hungarian/Romanian border, it was not uncommon to be in a queue of one or two hundred lorries waiting for documentation approval, whilst the trucks

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were being guarded by machine-gun-carrying Romanian soldiers. The unique international fellowship amongst Christians from Sweden, England, France, Switzerland, America and every western country imaginable was as rewarding as the fellowship enjoyed with our East European Christian brothers and sisters.

It is amazing to realise that over a period of two years (while still a full-time student at Spurgeon's College) I had the joy of being involved in delivering £1m-worth of donated aid to Baptist pastors and churches, who distributed it to the needy. Similar expeditions and trips in subsequent years have been made to Albania, Bulgaria, Poland, Russia and, more recently, former Yugoslavia.

### **Long-term Commitment**

After seven years the world's focus and spotlight have moved on to other countries and crises, and much of the reactive aid support has long since ceased. Today there is a very small percentage of Christians, churches and missionary organisations supporting our East European brothers and sisters. The long-awaited change in Eastern Europe has not brought the economic rebirth and instant relief to poverty which was hoped for, and this has resulted in much disillusionment and despondency among the once-hopeful East Europeans. Many young people throughout Eastern Europe dream of amassing a sufficient amount of American dollars in the hope that they may travel to the West for education, employment and eagerly sought after wealth. What the East needs now is equipping, encouraging and enterprising projects, both socially and spiritually. The old premise still applies, "if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day. If you teach a man how to fish, you feed him for life." Those tireless and determined individuals, churches and missionary organisations who have been faithfully committed in their equipping and encouraging programmes are to be commended.

It is an important fact to remember that over two-thirds of European Baptists are to be found in Eastern Europe, and our brothers and sisters in the East still desperately need our encouragement, as they seek to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to their fellow countrymen. Throughout Eastern Europe, at present, there is a tremendous battle for the mind and soul, as every modern religion and cult can be witnessed selling its beliefs and prescription for happiness and meaning to life. Theologically trained pastors and church leaders need to be equipped in the handling of God's Word to enable the amazing growth and church planting that has taken place throughout Eastern Europe to be sustained in the decades and centuries that lie ahead. Creative Christian social, medical, educational, employment and child care enterprises are to be encouraged, as churches and people alike equip themselves for the future. It is important to recognise that throughout any workable relationship there needs to be integrity, accountability and mutual respect for any east/west project to be successful. As the West gives of its wealth and abundant experience, may we be willing to receive lessons in spiritual fervour, commitment, humility and insight from our long-suffering brothers and sisters in Christ. There is, indeed, a Gospel to preach and a world to reach. May we as partners in Christ, in both East and West, work together for the glory of God and the furtherance of His Kingdom.

"But encourage one another daily as long as it is called today." Hebrews 3 v.13

**Clive Doubleday.**

**THE BAPTIST INSURANCE COMPANY PLC  
1 MERCHANT STREET · LONDON E3 4LY  
Telephone No. 081-980-9411**

**An Important Announcement to the Readers of the Baptist Minister's Journal**

Summer holidays are now over, harvest celebrations have finished, and those hot humid days and equally uncomfortable nights are now just a memory. I assume your preparations are well underway for the Christmas activities and there is much to be done. Consequently, it is not surprising if insurance matters are pushed into the background, only to be addressed when there is a loss.

Could I therefore ask that you take just a few minutes of your time to have a word with the person specifically responsible for the insurance arrangements for your Church. It would be a good idea to ask them whether they are satisfied that the cover is fully up to date, having been reviewed within the last twelve months. If this is not the case it is highly likely that the cover does not meet the present needs of the Church which could lead to problems in the unfortunate event of a claim.

My staff are always more than willing to provide help and advice over the telephone to assist the review being completed. We can also provide a pro-forma "tick-box" review form.

Our lo call telephone number is 0345 697 414

Yours in His Service

T E Mattholie

# Reader Response to: *A Central Stipend Fund: Impossible Dream*

by Philip Cooke (BMJ, Vol 258, April 1997)

We have received two responses to date in the light of the above article. First, Sue Thompson focuses on the issue of lack of equity resulting from our Baptist polity, in terms of access to ministry. Then, Jim Pollard roams more widely, indicating how a genuine interdependence, expressed through a central stipend scheme, would strengthen our Baptist life and mission.

## Why Do Poor Churches Have to Have Cheap Ministers?

Imagine the scene...

It is Sunday. The congregation are gathering for worship. They come in, young and old alike, some with joy and expectation in their hearts, some with faces lined with fatigue and shoulders hunched against the daily battles with making ends meet. Life treats them hard and faith is a refuge, even an escape. Sunday worship is a renewal of their strength for another week of vandalism, joy-riding, arson and burglary.

Perhaps more than most churches, this group of faithful people needs a minister. They do not have natural leaders within the congregation. There are no confident Bible-study leaders, no experienced Junior Church helpers prepared to deal with the large numbers of unchurched children who flock in. There is no-one for whom writing minutes or doing accounts comes naturally, no-one for whom administration is merely an extension of the skills of daily working life. Yet despite generous help from Home Mission, they will struggle to afford a full-time minister. For this is a poor church in a poor area. There are no wage-earners in this congregation. Most, except for the minister, are on basic pension or benefit.

And the minister's heart aches, thinking of the large churches abounding in gifted people who, nevertheless, feel they need a second minister.

There is only ministry here at all because the present minister comes cheap, having a spouse in a well-paid job, who is willing to subsidise the church.

But is this really right? Is it really right that poor churches have to have cheap ministers? Shouldn't they too have access to the full range of ministers which is available to the rest of the denomination?

Other denominations seem to recognise their responsibility for each other in that their ministers are paid centrally. They may moan at the level of assessment or quota which is expected from each church, but at least they are secure in the knowledge that a needy church will have just the same access to ministry as a wealthy one, that mere lack of money alone won't prevent a deserving, thriving church, which is rich in potential, from having a minister.

....And the minister wonders who is going to make the words of the Magnificat come true.

**Sue Thompson**

The article *A Central Stipend Fund: Impossible Dream?* by Philip Cooke in the April edition of *The Journal* dismayed me and discouraged me, although as an historical survey of the matter, it was good.

'I fear that this lack of concern for sister churches and brother and sister ministers will be the undoing of our beloved Union' wrote Mr Cooke. Will be? No, Sir. It is already the undoing of the BUGB.

A report from the November 1996 BU Council revealed that the largest number of ministers being removed from the BUGB Accredited list was 104. And the reason? "Not in qualifying positions!" Would somebody at Baptist House have the courage and honesty to break this number down and tell us just how many of these came off via the dole queue?

Take this another step. The latest count I have heard of Ministers and students seeking change of pastorate or a first pastorate is 170, with a mere 70 churches seeking Ministers. No wonder we are finding out now of people such as Paul Williams (letter, *Baptist Times*, 10th April) being on the dole. Each time the Standard Stipend increases (as it needs to), the number of churches unable to raise even the qualifying amount for a Home Mission grant will increase and the number of Ministers on the dole will also increase.

Philip Cooke wrote to the *Baptist Times* (30 November 1995) what I wish had come from David Coffey or Keith Jones: "move with the financial times and shut up the nonsense about "Independence being threatened" and talk about and act upon "Interdependence", so that all may share the common fund and the larger churches aid the smaller churches".

Consider a Central Stipend Fund:

- i) Each church would pay £a per member as published in the current BU Directory
- ii) Each minister would receive £b
- iii) Our membership rolls would be cleaned with a quite remarkable speed and, incidentally, reveal our true numerical strength - or weakness.
- iv) Regardless of the number of members, any church able to prove its need of a minister would be able to have one.
- v) The 'big' churches would have a minister paid the same stipend as the 'smaller' churches. This would also remove a legitimate cause of discontent amongst ministers and members of smaller churches.
- vi) As with Methodist Chairmen of Districts, our Area Superintendents would receive the same basic stipend as all other ministers but, as with Methodist Chairmen, receive additional amounts to cover their extra responsibilities and outgoings.
- vii) Probationers would receive possibly 25 per cent less, and then the full stipend on accreditation. Similarly, churches accustomed to paying double the Standard Stipend would pay their quota and then simply double the monthly amount paid to their minister.
- viii) Very importantly, older Ministers and their experience and ability would be used.

Permit a few final considerations:

- a) Instead of David Coffey verbally agreeing with the Churches Report on

Unemployment, please would he act about unemployment among our own Ministers.

- b) 'Fellowship'/'Brotherhood of the ministry' were much vaunted high concepts stressed when I set out long years ago. They would begin to make a comeback and actually be put into practice.
- c) Baptists would have a spelling lesson: 'that' word is spelt 'INTERdependence'. Not before time.

If our selfish independency continues, then we shall self-inflict fatal injuries to the BUGB, and death will follow quite speedily.

**Jim Pollard**

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## **Baptists and Baptism: A Socio-Ecumenical Issue**

The churches that are part of the Welsh Covenant are presently engaged, as part of their shared pilgrimage of exploration, in responding to the Commission's document, *Christian Baptism and Church Membership*. This means that the dozen or so Baptist churches in the Covenant have to grasp the nettle of baptism seriously. This paper is offered as part of this discussion, both to those Baptists concerned with the ecumenical issue, whether in the Covenant or not, and to those of other churches who may be glad to have some further appreciation of "where Baptists are at", and some possibilities of moving forward together. It is at this point that Baptists can be thought of as the odd ones out; so it is of added importance that both Baptists and others listen loud and long to each other.

The search for ecumenical agreement must be properly understood. It is wrong to expect some kind of final and binding solution to this or any other issue. Rather, the search for unity is a process that is forever moving on. At any given point it is possible to see strands coming together, as separate histories are recognised to become a common story and shared experience. The Covenant and the particular discussions it sparks off can be seen as one of those historical foci that bring together the member churches into closer fellowship. At the same time, any agreement will indicate the common ground that all share and the remaining differences in such a way that each can affirm the integrity of their own tradition without undue compromise. And this within the possibility of that unity which is presently available. But any such exploration and agreement is but a further covenant to move forward together, recognising that we do not yet know where the path of common obedience will take us or what form Christian practice will take in the future. There is only faith that God can use even us in his purposes.

That ecumenical relationships, including theological understanding, is an historical reality suggests that it is important to recognise the importance of tradition and the way in which the circumstances of witness have moulded perception and belief. Hence this paper looks at the issues from a socio-ecumenical point of view, asking that social, historical and psychological factors be given real

weight in the discussion. So the paper is in two parts: the first tries, necessarily in a sketchy way, to suggest the way Baptist belief and practice has been moulded; the second takes up some of the issues central to the discussion but sets them in the contemporary pastoral context.

## 1. Baptist Practices Today

The Baptist tradition has, broadly, two main sources: British Puritanism within the Reformation and eighteenth and nineteenth Pietistic Evangelicalism.

1. Doubtless the Baptist tradition was not unaffected by the kind of European Anabaptism represented by the Mennonites and others, perhaps more especially among the smaller General Baptist strand. However, the primary context of the emergence of the Baptist churches was the Puritan demand for full reformation in the Church of England that led some to separate into independent congregations, some of whom practised believers' baptism. There were two strands to this faith: i) the notion of the Gathered Church, separate from civic structures and ideally comprising all believers in a region or community. This was highly compatible with the small town / village structures of the time. And ii) their obedience, as they read the New Testament, to the command to baptize believers only. This was a very high doctrine of the Church. All Christians were to be found in a congregation, initiated by baptism, and the congregations were to be united through the Associations and eventually, Union. Baptism, in the Particular, Calvinistic tradition, was the mark of the sign of God's prevenient and sovereign grace at work in the soul, whereby the elect was publicly joined to the community. Most Baptists were Strict Baptists in membership and communion, although there were always those who, like Bunyan's church in Bedford, allowed infant and believers' baptism in the same congregation. However, it should be noted, as soon as baptism was linked to discerning the signs of the work of the Spirit in the heart, the emphasis could begin to shift from the action of God and the faith of the Church to the worthiness and experience of the individual.

2. It was this that opened Baptists to the influence of the revivalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which was to become the hallmark of Anglo Saxon Protestantism. By 1800, this tradition, whether in its liberal or conservative form, had become normative. Pietistic Evangelicalism is really the Christianity of the Enlightenment in its pragmatic form. i) There is an almost exclusive emphasis on the individual. Faith becomes a personal response to God's call; salvation is given in conversion; discipleship is commitment. ii) The obverse is a low view of institutions and structures and sitting lightly to tradition. Thus it was possible to argue that common experience and shared commitment bridged the gaps that separated denominations. Differences could be set to one side as matters of indifference. Trans-denominationalism flourished, for example, through the Evangelical Alliance, missionary bodies or the Keswick movement.

This had a double effect on Baptist practice. Because Baptists could only accept believers' baptism, yet wanted to recognise the real faith of those in other churches, baptism increasingly became viewed as one of those accidental causes of division, a matter of comparative indifference. This allowed congregations, especially at a time of growing cooperation among the Free Churches, right up to our own time, to admit into membership on confession of faith without raising the issue of baptism. While this allowed members of other

traditions to join Baptist churches without apparent compromise or undue controversy, it meant that baptism, in many cases, was not a prerequisite for membership. Baptism, rather, was increasingly regarded as a personal act of discipleship, obedience and witness, a declaratory act of faith that expressed outwardly that conversion which was the only essential prerequisite for becoming a Christian.

3. In the twentieth century, and increasingly in recent decades, a third influence has been felt. Despite widespread suspicion, the Ecumenical Movement has left its mark. This has a two-fold pattern. i) Baptists have shared in the common life of scholarship, ecumenical study and shared witness and practice. This has clearly widened horizons and deepened understanding in many and subtle ways. ii) Baptists have rediscovered their own tradition, not least in recognizing the importance of their roots in the Reformation. As a result, many Baptists have drawn from the various patterns of renewal, not least in liturgical and sacramental practice, and discovered a greater sense of the corporate nature of the Church as the People of God.
4. History, of course, is not a series of discreet eras but of continuities and complex layers of tradition. So, out of this story, it is possible to discern a number of baptismal practices among Baptists which are not always mutually exclusive but which interweave with each other, even within the same congregation.
  - i) The Strict Baptist tradition is now very much on the decline, though it must be remembered that it was normative among Welsh Baptists until very recently and is the dominant pattern in many parts of the world. This would insist on believers' baptism as necessary for membership (and sometimes for participating at the Lord's Supper). Since this is the only mode of baptism there is no such thing as re-baptism. While other Christians are recognized, clearly order is important here, making cooperation that much more problematic. A half-way house is sometimes offered by those congregations that welcome members from other traditions but only into associate membership.
  - ii) Open Membership is probably dominant with English Baptists, though certainly present both in Britain and elsewhere. As already indicated, membership is open to all who profess faith. Baptism is not a pre-requisite, though most congregations will encourage believers' baptism as the norm. Others will stress open access to all. This allows people to cross denominational barriers without denying one's previous pilgrimage or denying the practice of believers' baptism. This has been the favoured way of dealing with the problem of population mobility, of Free Church presence on modern housing estates, of people moving across denominations in search of a "conductive" fellowship. In such a context re-baptism is not demanded. Where it happens it is usually because it has been requested, whether enthusiastically encouraged or reluctantly undertaken as a pastoral measure.
  - iii) The "Ecumenical response" is far less frequent, but it has begun to take root. Where Baptists are formally part of a Local Ecumenical Project, the baptismal issue has to be faced, as it has in the United Reformed Church and in other union churches where believers' baptism has been practised in one of the participating churches. This may vary from formally retaining separate congregations within a single structure to adopting patterns of baptism acknowledging both rites. Even within congregations which may

formally be open or strict there can be de facto acceptance of the baptism of other traditions and a refusal (or connivance only for pastoral reasons in extreme cases) of re-baptism. Not so far as is known in Britain, but certainly in Australia and elsewhere, there are churches that have written into their constitutions the acceptability of members of other traditions.

From these notes it can be seen that the Baptist position is by no means monolithic. Each of the main strands identified arises out of a genuine engagement with the Gospel in historical circumstances. But Baptists, like everyone else, are caught up in the ambiguities of history. They are perforce a pilgrim people and need ever to seek afresh the path of obedience.

## **2. Contemporary Directions**

It remains, therefore, to see how the Baptist story relates to the current debates on baptism. The debate is well rehearsed. Here we can only fasten on three threads that would seem to relate most strongly to contemporary social pressures.

1. It is now widely accepted ecumenically that, whatever other factors divide Christians, we all share in the one baptism. This is the visible sign of unity which enables Christians to acknowledge each other, at least in a preliminary but also real way. Thus, for example, Vatican II can call all those baptised into Christ "separated brethren", whatever other barriers there may be to full unity.

This is a fact that Baptists have hardly begun to take on board. Baptists have, in Britain at least, largely argued for the recognition of Christians across denominational boundaries and have, therefore, practised open communion, but have so often been repulsed. Now, at the point of mutually recognised baptism, it would be ironic if it were the Baptists who would be the divisive element. It behoves Baptists to ask again about baptism; not to deny believers' baptism but to recognise that behind what may appear to be decisive differences there are clearly shared intentions: the declaration of God's grace, the welcoming faith of the Church, the fellowship of service and witness, faith and responsibility, the growth in grace and love, incorporation into Christ. It is necessary to beware the way that differences of practice can become the cause of an assumed dichotomy of understanding. Too easily a symbolic mode can become a dogmatic gesture, shutting out the other meanings that are also inherent and vital.

2. It is also true that all churches practise believers' baptism for those who enter the Church on profession of faith. Some, like the United Reformed Church, have both forms of baptism side by side. Moreover, more and more, there is a fundamental recognition that the baptismal "package" is normatively represented by believers' baptism. This is the position taken by the Enfys document. But baptism is more than, though focused on and defined by, the act of washing in the name of the Trinity. Thus it is properly set in the Eucharist and includes the proclamation of the Gospel as its foundation, the profession of faith, the promise to seek God's calling, the incorporation into the fellowship and care of the Church, sending out to witness in the world. The baptised are caught up into the drama of salvation with all God's People.

Infant baptism emerged, not as a perverse distortion, but as a response to the historical context of Christian obedience. Where Christianity is the faith of the home, of the village (as in India) or of the society (as in medieval Europe) children are in a real sense part of that community. Infant baptism marks that

covenant reality and first steps of pilgrimage, and declares God's prevenient grace that is given to all his creatures. The baptismal process has been, as it were, extended: a movement that starts at birth and moves through to the consummation of the Kingdom. There may be many stages, each appropriately marked - but faith is a journey.

Baptists need to take this perspective seriously. The emphasis on personal faith can mean that other dimensions are underplayed. It becomes an exclusive, once and for all event that has to carry too much weight. Part of the weakness of the Commission's document is that it rightly stresses the process of continuous initiation but then isolates water baptism from other practices. The equivalent to infant baptism for Baptists is the Presentation of Infants. There have been interesting signs that greater recognition is being given to the initiative and corporate significance of this act of thanksgiving and commitment. At the same time, there are inevitable problems concerning the preparation and readiness for baptism. What is an adequate faith: at what age: for whom? It is noticeable that the age of baptism tends to be lower where faith is a common heritage than where it is a personal decision in a more hostile environment. Moreover, scant attention is given in most traditions to the need to mark the onward journey or the restoration of the lapsed. Methodism provides, in the annual Covenant Service, a basis for developing a liturgy for Christian growth. There are also other models for devising occasional rites (alongside the rites of passage) to celebrate personal events and corporate affirmations of faith.

3. But the Churches exist together in the modern world, a society that is increasingly pluralistic and secularised, in which the Church is a minority interest. In this post-Christendom situation the theological and social base for infant baptism is being rapidly eroded. It is increasingly argued that such baptism can only be legitimately given to those within the community of faith. Some, with reason, argue for open baptism (rather than indiscriminate baptism). More and more, however, it is accepted that the practical norm for baptism will be believers' baptism. What will happen is anybody's guess: a move away from paedobaptism altogether or a settling down into a mixed practice. The main point is that this tradition is also in transition and is not monolithic. The most creative situation will be for there to be a mutual recognition of the common problem and then together, steadily and responsibly, to work through the inevitable transition. There are resources in the various traditions. But the process has to take time. For a period, even generations, matters will be untidy. All that is demanded is faithfulness in common obedience to the Gospel.

### **3. Conclusions**

Indeed, that willingness to live with the interim and yet to mark each step along the path with joy, affirmation and hope, is the mark of ecumenical commitment. But each stage requires three things. First of all, it is a sign of recognition that there is indeed a coming together. There would be no desire to explore our shared faith unless circumstances, faith, the Gospel had not called us closer. So in the baptism question, are there not enough signs to believe that, despite real differences, it is possible to work together, to enter into shared sacramental practice and to recognise gladly each other's members?

Secondly, "the pressure of our common calling" can make it possible to come to some realistic agreement, however partial, whereby we can each, without undue

compromise, bring into the common pool the experiences, insights, treasures of our own traditions in such a way that they can fertilise each other.

Yet thirdly, the ecumenical pilgrimage not only asks us to value the Gospel as it has been handed down to us but to let it go. There are gifts, not possessions, held on behalf of the whole People of God. To have faith is to believe that God will not destroy that which he has vouchsafed while recognising that he will lead us into new and, perhaps, strange paths. It may be that Baptists, together with others, will find that those truths for which they have stood will appear, reframed, renewed and enriched, in other guises. And Baptists, together with others, can have their own perspective enlarged and enhanced by learning from those from whom they have long differed. Together, the Spirit can forge vehicles for the celebration of faith and obedience that will preserve the essence of the Gospel and yet be appropriate for the unknown world into which we are being called.

**Paul Ballard**

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## Book Reviews

***The Story of the Atonement* by Stephen Sykes. Darton,  
Longman and Todd. 192 pp. £8.95.**

Sykes' aim is to understand the atonement by thinking in terms of story or narrative. He draws on the idea that the New Testament contains "idea complexes", which are story based, such as sacrifice or slavery, which have been explained by later "theories". Within this aim the book is very wide ranging. It discusses "theories" of atonement, the meaning of justification, with a comparison between Jesus, Paul and James; and comments on the Reformation and the question of faith and works, together with reward and punishment. The issues of other faiths, the relation of the sacrament to atonement, eschatology, and the task of evangelism follow on. There are forays into the debate on bodily resurrection, hell, the Church and the benefits of ritual, and even comments on such diverse subjects as the problem of evangelicalism, euthanasia and evolution.

Sykes also draws heavily on literary illustrations, with extended reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a parable in one of Lessing's books and George Herbert's poetry. Covering such a broad range of issues in only 160 pages inevitably leads to difficulties in presentation. His style is not always clear and the book tends to jump between topics. Particularly disappointing was the number of questions or issues that Sykes raised which were never answered or explored. What was gained in breadth was lost in depth. The book sets out to make theological thinking accessible to a general audience. It only partly achieves this since there is theological jargon which is left unexplained and a reasonable amount of theological understanding is assumed. *The Story of the Atonement* is a stimulating book because it raises many issues in a way that leaves the reader with questions. But if a general introduction to atonement is required then there are a number of other books that will serve better.

**Anthony Clarke**

***Fare Well in Christ* by W H Vanstone. Darton,  
Longman and Todd. 1997. 147 pp £8.95.**

This is a gentle book, which is written with great wisdom. Its purpose is to allay anxiety and point the reader to the way of peace in Christ. "The grace of God" is the underlying theme, which is dealt with in five chapters, the first of which has that title.

Chapter 3 "The sign of the cross" is the section which will raise most questions for Baptists, who will instinctively query whether a crucifix or similar symbol can truly signify the real power of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Yet there is much in this book worth reading and pondering and it contains by far the best illustration I have seen about a certain type of evangelist. Equally telling is his interpretation of Paul "It was a matter of urgent concern to St Paul that the joy of the good news should be available to all mankind, unimpaired by requirements that those who received it should commit themselves to abnormal behaviour and associate themselves with social eccentricities."

This book is written by a pastor, and although probably not intended as such contains seed thoughts for sermons and illustrations. It also defines the work of a pastor, in what might be considered as an old fashioned way by some today, as one whose major task is to remind the community of God's presence.

**Glyn P R Prosser.**

***School Assemblies Need You* by Richard Dyter.**

**Monarch Publications. £7.99**

Called a "starter-kit for Christians and churches"; the Foreword suggests this to be a 'unique opportunity to provide necessary resources to present Christian beliefs'.

Part One of the book sets out to answer questions a visitor may have with examples about 'what to say'; 'examples of building confidence'; 'how to approach schools'; 'time given to school assemblies' (based on 60 per cent response to questionnaire); ending with ideas about developing local Christian groups concerned with school assemblies.

Part Two offers examples of assemblies covering Infants, Primary, Primary (older age-groups), Middle School, Secondary, Secondary (lower age-groups), 6th form. These examples cover learning objectives, biblical basis, summary, number of speakers/presenters, equipment and a script, together with the option of a prayer.

Part Three offers lists of resources (Schools Ministry Network emphasised) with 'useful addresses'.

Part Four consists of appendices explaining new jargon in education, where other faiths fit into the picture, an extract from the 1988 Education Reform Act, and how Christian groups concerned with education can apply to become registered charities.

I applaud any attempt to enhance provision for School Assemblies but one must always be aware that the school environment is not the same as that of a faith community. Some concepts and ideas assume too much understanding (a danger highlighted in part one!). There are wise references to the 1988 Education Reform Act and Government Circular 1/94, but I felt that rather than 'broad Christian character' (matters affecting broad traditions of Christian belief) this book is more about 'specific Christian teaching' (too 'confessional'). Also '... Head teachers must take into account the pupils ages, aptitude and family backgrounds'. Is this

true in all examples? The National Curriculum Key Stages could have been included in Part Two and an omission in Part Three is the Christian Education Movement, Royal Buildings, Victoria Street, Derby, DE1 1GW. The book is worth considering, but more for some ideas than as a blueprint or manual.

**Noel Pepper.**

***The Three Pillars of Judaism* by Jonathan Wittenberg.**

**SCM Press. 1996. 135 pp. £9.95.**

This book and its title uses, as its foundation, a well known quote of one of the Jewish rabbis, Simon the Just. 'He used to say, "upon three things the world stands, upon the Torah, upon the Divine Service and upon acts of faithful love." (Sayings of the Fathers 1: 2) Each chapter considers one of these, concluding with a chapter on the 'Hidden God'. In doing so, we are provided with a vivid and a useful read.

It is written by a Rabbi with the Jewish community primarily in mind but it gives an evocative and imaginative account of his own search for God within Judaism and within the traditional disciplines of prayer, Torah, and acts of faithful love. Within the limitations of a short book, this quest gives insights into the traditional understanding of the rabbis given in Talmud and Midrashim. Wittenberg reflects the current conflicts and opinions of contemporary Judaism, particularly in the area of biblical interpretation. It is an accessible book, the majority of the terminology is concisely explained, though a good dictionary and Jewish Prayer Book might be useful.

This book is a pleasure to read. It serves as an excellent introduction to modern Jewish spirituality and its current concerns and provides some stimulating material to work on.

**Sarah Parry**

***More Prayers for Sundays* Ed. Michael Counsell. Harper Collins. £14.99. pp 20.**

This is a collection of worship material collected under 78 themes. Each theme provides a Call to Worship, words for confession, a penitential kyrie, collects, references for a selection of suitable Bible readings, affirmations of faith, intercessions, words for the peace, thanksgivings and blessings. If you are looking for ideas to base a service around one of these themes, the book provides a good starting point.

The real strength of the collection lies in the care that has been given to the indexes. There are three indexes; subjects, sources and scriptures. The only problem with the indexes is that the numbers cited refer to the number of the theme and not to the page number. Each theme is numbered and each prayer item within the theme is given a letter. This system works well once you have got used to it.

There is also an appendix which sets out the Revised Common Lectionary Amended. The book can be used with any lectionary, or none, but is particularly of value to users of the RCL.

As has probably become apparent, the book will be of most value to worship leaders who prefer a fairly structured approach to worship. I have used the book for several weeks and have found value in the prayers of confession and intercession. It is all too easy to bore the congregation, and perhaps God, with the same apologies and requests each week! I have also been pleased to use a number of the blessings.

**John Houseago**