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A CRITICAL LOOK AT PRESENT BAPTIST PRACTICE REGARDING CHILDREN AND WORSHIP IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT THINKING ON CHRISTIAN NURTURE.

1. A dilemma arises for Baptists out of the basic historic position that the church is "The Gathered Fellowship of Believers" where the "belief" is a personal confession of faith after repentance of sin, symbolised by baptism, normally by immersion. Baptists have never argued much about the amount of water, sprinkling is and was practised, but immersion is normal. Baptism was for the Particulars essentially a profession of faith, the motif being death and resurrection. With the General Baptists the stress was more on initiation. By and large Baptists stress both these elements, but some still consider the former more important, Church Membership being optional. For Baptists it is the profession of faith which is more important than any ceremony hence the very large number of open membership churches. Indeed I have heard it said by one of our General Superintendants that we need to stress more and more Baptism as the expression of conversion rather than joining the church. Baptists say that children are not ready for repentance and faith and baptism and therefore not counted as members of the church.

2. Baptists take the Bible as the sole authority for all matters of life and faith. Early writings about children are scarce. References to children are related to the Baptist polemic against Baptising infants, the main "error" of this being "it's not biblical". Contrary to the Lutheran principle that something is permitted unless scripture forbids it, Baptists would say unless scripture permits it is not done. Therefore children are not to be baptised. Of course there is a blockage here, because "Sole authority" has lead:-

- a) to the search for chapter and verse for everything,
- b) confusion over the place of tradition with the Bible.

Thus for many Baptists the crucial issue in critical openness is how open is open, and how critical is critical and what place does the Bible have. As far as children in worship are concerned, the stress for Baptists in worship has been the reading and proclamation of the biblical word. Children are nor ready for this, therefore they are separated. The expectation is that they will be given "Bible Teaching", but at their own level. Again, as with Baptism, *understanding* is the key element.

3. A number of issues have been raised, because into the framework of the traditionally historic position, has been the slowly growing practice of Family Church. Baptists have responded enthusiastically to Family Church, as many others, and then realised that in some ways it poses a threat to the traditional position.

a). Many Baptists recognised that Family Church is a sociological phrase and neither theological in their traditional understanding, nor biblical as they see it. This means that Baptists are trying to sort out the relationship between Family Church and the Gathered Church Principle. Many on the

evangelical wing have been concerned to define what is a (true) Christian, and who are the saved. One solution to the problem is to talk about the church (the saved), and those in fellowship with the church. Children are included in the latter. Some have tried to resurrect the "catechumenate" but without success.

b). Some Baptists see the dilemma caused by "going public". The issue is whether the worship of the gathered church on the Lords Day should ever be "public worship", or whether it is for believers only, for such the church is.

4.

Traditionally Baptist theology is governed by "*a conversion model*" - the child like the unbelieving adult is to be lead/prepared (even educated) for the day when he opts into the faith and the church, freely and voluntarily, and is willing to lead the life of faith, to appropriate the benefits of the death and resurrection of Christ, and to take his place in the councils of the church. I believe the Baptist response to the Sunday School Movement was energetic and serious because they saw it as a means to the conversion of children. As far as worship was concerned it would be at a child's level hoping thereby "to win him". Baptists have always been serious about the Great Commission of Matthew 28. Critical openness posits the integrity of other models. The challenge of the "Nurture Model" is what to make of the child who has not experienced the paradigm of the conversion pattern. Many Baptists are confused because other models have crept into the work of children and youth, not least *educational models*, which have made many Sunday School Departments into miniature Day Schools. Again liturgical models have appeared to suggest that worship is the name of the game, and to give children a children version or a juvenile distortion of the real thing is to deny the real thing, because a children's version would be untrue. The liturgy, in particular the communion, is the real thing, is the place of encounter with God, suggesting a case for the presence of children.

5.

Nowhere is this issue more acute for Baptists than at the Lord's Supper. Traditionally to be present at communion was to communicate. The communion service was separate from the main service, and held usually twice a month. (It's significant to note that by and large the morning communion was introduced in war-time because of the demands for blackouts in the evenings!) For most Baptists, communion is for believers only, and in some instances baptised believers only. The invitation is "to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth", but the assumption is that those who respond to this are those who have publicly professed their faith, or are willing to do so. However, Baptists welcome ALL believers, hence an "open" communion table. So by and large only the committed stay to communion and certainly not the children, because they are not ready i.e. they are not committed. The norm for Baptists is first Baptism, then communion. However, the presence of children at communion is being talked about by Baptists for the following reasons:-

a). where a programme of Christian Education demands that children should have some experience of what communion is,

- b). parents who value the presence of their children with them at communion as part of their family identity.
- c). the acceptance by many Baptists of certain liturgical insights which have integrated communion into the main service, there being no "break", and suggestion that communion should be weekly, and the main service.
- d). this has led to a discovery of the essential nature of the Liturgy. The concern for everyone is that they shall respond to the Call and Claim of God and commit their lives to Him. Although the call, claim and commitment to God can come at many points for it is beyond human control, clearly confrontation with God is the corporate worship of the Church. The confrontation takes place through the biblical tradition - Word proclaimed in scripture and sermon. In addition praise and prayer seek the presence of God and in sacrament it is expected and anticipated.

It is for this that the child is being prepared, as are we all. It is IN THIS that the child and all of us are prepared. Why the eagerness to remove the child from the place of encounter? Now of course, there is more to be said. There are many practical considerations: the children are bored (whose fault is that!?) they won't understand the language and images - they fidget - they are not "ready" to understand the body and blood, (what price readiness here? intellectual - spiritual - emotional.....Do any of us understand the mystery?). The issue raised is one of consciousness and whether this is the determinative factor. Yet it would seem possible that given the new definition of education and given the meaning of worship here hinted at, then the Liturgy is the Education. Children should be present in the Liturgy, a Liturgy aimed at presenting the tradition demanding a response from the claim made. The children will respond appropriately. It would seem reasonable to go on to affirm that the children should be present at the Communion.

e). The argument is valid and powerful: the Liturgy does not act merely at the conscious level. All participants are acted upon by the Tradition. All are exposed to its influence. The Liturgy has the effect of bringing us back to ask for more, and to ask for something more fully and complete than we can, at the present level of experience, appreciate. Again this is true for everyone. The child is no exception. So he is present with everyone in the full Liturgy and exposed to its force. To bring a child from earliest years into contact with the throb of the church's worship and the focus of its family celebration is to offer him the greatest gift of the Church. Again it is churches like the Baptists who take a "middle view" that have the greatest difficulties here. If participation in Communion is restricted to the baptised then there is no problem.

If baptism is administered at an earlier age and confers membership of the Body of Christ, again, no problem. The problem lies with the in between. Two possibilities emerge: either withhold the bread and wine from the child, or offer him a fitting substitute. To include children regularly in the celebration and withhold the sacraments of bread and wine is odd, since the whole activity is aimed at communicating viz, participating. To speak of spiritual communion is odd since if a person is able to communicate spiritually then presumably they are able to do so "actually". On the other

hand is a pat on the head a worthy substitute as is the case in some churches?

f). "Fencing the table" with such statements as "in love and charity with your neighbour - resolve to lead a new life etc....." only makes it worse. What are the conditions for admission to communion? And who decides?

g). The importance of understanding, described earlier, has tended to limit Baptists to a view of learning in terms only of the cognitive. This has led to a denigration of the "adult service". and especially the Communion, as being inadequate for learning because its fixed and final and not free and active enough for children.

Nurture stresses the *affective* dimension of learning and suggests that although cognition may be difficult for children at Communion (and many adults!) yet emotions can be engaged, and so learning take place.

6.

The challenge has come to some Baptist churches where they find themselves in a geographical location where they are "the Parish Church", e.g. on a municipal housing estate where a local authority has nominated one site for one church only and the Baptists have built. Baptists have had to widen their frame of reference from their historic position, in order to be the church. Hence they find themselves attracting people from other traditions and their traditional position is re-shaped in an ecumenical setting.

7.

Nurture provides an understanding of *personhood* in which all (children and adults) are in preparation for growth as continuous, there being no fixed and final state called adulthood. In this process there are many decisions. Baptists will defend "personal decision for Christ", but which decision is the Baptismal one? Baptists have stressed what children must receive, but are challenged to consider what children can give. Nurture is concerned about context as much as content. Baptists must ask what is the context of worship, education, conversion, etc? Is it sufficient to leave the children in the Sunday School? Is that the context? This is new to many Baptists especially in the evangelical persuasion, where the stress has been right doctrine. Again Baptists must consider the implication of an understanding of nurture which stresses the importance of understanding and living within a relationship which begins from earliest days, rather than "preparation for a day". The other issue within the nurture process is the concept of *readiness*. What is readiness for worship/Baptism/Membership? Is readiness intellectual, cognitive, emotional, ethical, age?

8.

By and large Baptist worship has been essentially non-sacramental, apart from the great moments like Baptism, though even this is still talked of as an ordinance. The dominant model for the Lords Supper is "Memorial". Baptist worship has been essentially "Word" (reading and exposition) and Prayers (again words). Gradually (in some cases reluctantly) music has been added, and ministers robed. If nurture demands that children be present in worship with adults, this being the rightful context, then the style must change. The images communicated in traditional Baptist worship are verbal, abstract, heavily dependant on words, and demanding a high degree

of attentive listening. Clearly, not only is there more to the human person than listening, but also its obvious that children are not capable of sustaining such engagement and therefore will not receive those images. Many Baptists are suspicious of movement, ceremony, colour, lest this detract from the Word as they have traditionally understood it. It's curious to me, that the one bit of ceremony that children do share is the taking up of the collection (that's what Baptists call it, or perhaps offertory). If the collection is the response of careful personal stewardship of income, then children, who have no income, should not be associated with this!

The big issue is that slowly growing practices e.g. families associating with Family Church, demand adequate theologies. Its painful when such a demand seems to threaten or even change a historic position. Baptists still have one asset, I believe, namely, the freedom and autonomy of the local church to experiment. I'd like to think that Baptists could redeem the time and experiment imaginatively in worship and in community life with the nurture model.

David Tennant

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

The remarriage of divorced people presents the church in this country with an urgent challenge. It is urgent because Christians are so evidently unsure and divided on the point. It is urgent too because marriage is one of the few points where the church and society are still in contact, and where society still cares one way or the other about what the church says and does. In the face of this challenge the churches are confused and often appear to the world to be lacking in understanding and charity at the very point where they might be expected to make forgiveness real in word and deed.

All Christians, and the vast majority of non-Christians, deplore divorce. Some Christians actually believe it to be impossible because marriage is 'indissoluble', but most accept it as a regrettable necessity where the marriage has 'died'. The really hot issue is remarriage. Some Christians believe it is always wrong and that the church can have nothing to do with it. Others, like myself, accept it as permissible and offer the church's ministry through the marriage service to those who ask for it. Still other Christians, including I believe a lot of Free Church ministers, have as little as possible to do with the problem and hope it will go away.

A Baptist minister asked if he will remarry is likely either to say, 'No. Jesus forbade it', or to wring his hands and say, 'Yes, in certain circumstances, so long as it doesn't become a habit.' The impression given is of moral and intellectual weakness rather than conviction, which we are only allowed to get away with because we are not often asked to marry people anyway, and some ministers and churches only expect to marry their own members, among whom divorce and remarriage has happily been less common.

However, our churches are increasingly coming to be known as places where divorced people may be able to have a Christian marriage service,

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and those of us who do welcome divorced people to church have a duty to say why. This is first because our Anglican and Roman Catholic friends think it is because we have lower moral standards than they do, and secondly because the Anglican church in particular, which up to now has led the country in its thinking about marriage, is in total disarray on the issue. I believe Free Churchmen have a real contribution to make here, and this article aims to outline that contribution.

Anybody who proposes to remarry divorced people in church is bound to say how he understands the teaching of Jesus about divorce and remarriage. For the moment we do not need to go into the complicated problems of precisely what Jesus said, and whether or not the Matthaen exception is authentic or not. Christians cannot be expected to find their moral conduct on variant readings, majority verdicts of scholars and probable reconstructions of the ipsissima verba of Jesus. The plain fact is that Jesus in our gospels strongly condemns divorce and brands remarriage as adultery. The only question is not what he said, but what we ought to do, and it is, I believe, a real question.

Several considerations should make us cautious about jumping from agreeing that Jesus spoke against divorce and remarriage to excluding divorced people from the possibility of a church wedding.

First, as Franklin Duley says (1) "There are not many moral issues on which the New Testament offers concrete guidance in terms that appear directly applicable to a current situation. Divorce is one of them." Surely this very fact should make us suspicious? When the application of Jesus' words is usually so open to the interpretation of the individual conscience, did he really legislate on this one issue? Pacifists, of course, would maintain that his teaching on retaliation offers another equally clear application, but a majority of Christians have not agreed that it is that simple. I suggest this is a fair parallel.

Second, it seems to have been Jesus' habit to present God's will and man's duty in absolute terms to shock people into seeing how far short they fall of the glory of God. This is not to say that he is not to be taken seriously, but that he often speaks in the black and white of the prophet rather than the grey of the legislator. If anyone doubts this, let him ask himself whether he has given up all his possessions as a literal interpretation of Jesus' words would require. Again it is a fair parallel, and shows that it is easier (but very dangerous) to apply Jesus' words literally to others than to oneself.

Third, Jesus was particularly severe on people who made God's law into an intolerable burden for other people's backs, making of the law a yoke that people must be made to fit. The changed social conditions and attitudes of today make the legalist interpretation of Jesus' words an increasingly heavy and badly fitting burden leading men and women to reject the church that imposes it as once they rejected the synagogue.

Fourth, a rigorist interpretation of Jesus' words led our ancestors quite logically to exclude divorced and still more remarried people from communion, on the grounds that they were living in open sin. Nearly everyone, including those who still wish to deny divorcees a church wedding, now think it is wrong to exclude them from communion. Is this because we

think it right to admit adulterers to communion, or is it not really because we do not in our hearts believe they are committing adultery? If the latter, then the open and shut case against remarriage collapses. (Incidentally, it is worth remembering that the gospels provide not one line about admitting people to communion or to a marriage service. **All** our church rules are a matter of secondary interpretation).

And finally, it is a plain fact that to marry again after a divorce just does not of itself seem to most people, Christian and otherwise, immoral in the same way that adultery always does. This may seem a dangerous argument, but while it is quite common for the actions of the church to offend the common conscience of mankind, it is very rare for the teaching of Jesus to do so. Men and women outside the church often have a sharper nose for what is really wrong than do ecclesiastical lawyers.

III.

How then are we to understand the teaching of Jesus on divorce and remarriage? I suggest we may deduce the following points.

1) Jesus reaffirms the Creator's intention for man. Marriage should be a life-long bond. Human happiness and fulfilment lie that way. Divorce, in the light of this, is always a falling short, and action making divorce inevitable or more likely is utterly wrong. However, this is not to say that divorce is **impossible**. There would be no point in Jesus forbidding something that was actually impossible. There is no sense in declaring impossible what is plainly only too impossible. The view that marriage, or indeed sexual intercourse (2), creates an 'ontological' bond between two people which **cannot** be broken proves too much. It would necessitate the church recognizing the marriage only of virgins.

2) Jesus acknowledges that in a sinful world laws are needed to contain evil. Moses permits divorce because people's hearts are hard, but that is no reason for self-congratulation. Jesus does not contradict Moses at this point, but he points behind him to God's true and highest purpose.

3) In a situation where divorce was easily granted at the wish of the husband, Jesus condemns legalised wife-swapping for the adultery to which it is equivalent. In so doing he taught that a husband could be guilty of adultery against his wife as surely as she would be if she went with another man. A piece of paper may make a situation legal: it cannot make it right. That is to say: Jesus is not legislating (providing detailed guidance for ecclesiastical lawyers or civil administrators). What he says about divorce in the Sermon on the Mount (3) can as little be taken as immediately applicable law as the paragraphs that precede and follow it. Throughout the fifth chapter of Matthew Jesus shows the true meaning and intention of the commandments. Hatred and abuse can be as wrong as murder; lustful looks are equally guilty as adultery; broken promises are reprehensible whatever the form of words; God's law is not perfectly fulfilled by just retribution, but by non-retaliation and returning good for evil. This is what it means to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. But none of this can be made the subject of legislation. As well refuse marriage to a person who looks at a woman lustfully as to one whose previous marriage ended in divorce. The

purpose of this teaching is to empty men of all ground of boasting and to bring them face to face with God's perfect will that they may hunger and thirst for this and not be satisfied with a purely legal righteousness.

It follows that Jesus' harshest condemnation falls on the person who breaks up a marriage because he or she wants a change of partner. A certificate of divorce does not change the immorality of such an action, although it legalizes it. It by no means follows that both partners are equally guilty, as the church's refusal of remarriage has implied. However, the question of guilt properly belongs to God to determine, and to the individual conscience to recognize. Jesus nowhere authorises his church to pass judgment on individual cases. Moreover, simply because in the light of Jesus' teaching a person's conduct can be shown to be wrong it by no means follows that the church is bound to refuse him help for the future.

4) We need to give due weight to the actions of Jesus as a clue to the meaning of his teaching. There is no doubt that his table fellowship with sinners was also a powerful sermon, understood as such by friend and foe alike. We must not divorce the words of Jesus from their context in the life that interprets them, and so we need to look at how he treated the individual sinner as opposed to how he challenged the complacency of the righteous. I have no doubt that the story of the woman taken in adultery provides a reliable clue. Of this woman's guilt at least there is no doubt: she had been taken in the very act of adultery. Yet to her Jesus says, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go, and do not sin again.' For the judge and legislator these words are a scandal (Did Jesus not know that it was his job to uphold the sanctity of marriage etc, etc?), but for the pastor they are a great encouragement. In the case of the remarriage of a divorced person I suggest that these words absolve us of all need to establish guilt or innocence, and encourage us to give all the help we can to ensure that the future is better than the past.

IV.

It is time to look at the marriage service, and to ask first of all, *What does a marriage service do?* One suspects that the unacknowledged assumption in many people's minds is still that people who are married in church are married in the sight of God in a way that others are not, or that the promises so made are somehow more binding. A moment's thought will show that that is nonsense. Marriage is marriage, however entered into. It belongs to the human race by creation, and not to the church. Civil marriages no less than church marriages are true marriages in the sight of God (and so, one might add, are polygamous marriages. However far short of God's ideal our human institutions fall, this fact does not absolve us from keeping our promises as we may.) Similarly, a promise is a promise whatever the form of words. God does not need to be invoked for a promise to be binding (4). All this is to say that the church by conducting a marriage service is not *making* that marriage, nor is it conferring on that marriage a status that the civil power cannot confer.

If the church is not making the marriage, is it placing a seal of approval on it? This is the view of those in the Church of England who wish to refuse remarriage. To quote from the report 'Marriage and the Church's task' (5) "At the heart of their case (sc. for refusing remarriage) is the belief that the

refusal by the church to give its public seal of approval to any marriage after divorce is essential if the church's witness to marriage as involving an unconditional commitment is to be maintained." I believe this must be challenged head-on.

There is no warrant in Scripture for the church setting its seal of approval on some marriages, or indeed on any marriages. The church has become accustomed to arrogating to itself authority it does not have, and setting itself a task it has not been given (viz. maintaining standards or witnessing to truths at the expense of people). Moreover, nothing in the wedding service supports the view that the seal of God's approval is given to the marriage. The minister or priest pronounces the couple to be man and wife, but in this he is acting as a representative of the state or community in the same way as earlier in the service (or in calling the banns) he has established that there is no *legal* impediment. He is not required to say that the marriage is advisable or morally right, only that the couple have satisfied the legal conditions for contracting a marriage valid according to the law of the land, and that God recognizes such marriage too. There are many reasons why a particular marriage may not be the will of God, but the marriage service says nothing of this. It would help us to recognise this fact. We are not giving a seal of approval. We are not responsible for the future and we are not concerned to judge the past. In his preparatory talks with the couple the minister will *for their sake* try to determine that the marriage has a chance of success, but he is not called upon to approve it, or judge it advisable, or likely to succeed, nor is he called on to delve into the past and to play the judge, determining the guilt or innocence of the parties to be married. Some ministers take too much on themselves.

What then is our job and the function of the service? First of all it is a legal transaction; it is the making of a solemn promise which will bind the partners by law to one another. In addition to the human witnesses God is invoked as witness of the promises made. Secondly, the marriage service is a pastoral tool. By it the couple and their friends are reminded of the will of God concerning marriage, both in the words that introduce the service, the terms in which the vows are made and recognised and in the prayers and the address. By this service, too, God's help is sought. The hymns, the prayers and the presence of the couple in church alike express our need of God's help to live together in love, and the minister gives the couple God's blessing - not in the sense in which we sometimes loosely use the phrase to mean approval, but in the sense that they having sought God's help on the road that rightly or wrongly but legally they have chosen to walk the minister assures them that God has heard their prayer. So understood, the marriage service and the minister conducting it have a humbler but much more precious role to play, not to give seal of approval but to offer the couple all the help they will accept on their chosen path.

V.

Finally let me say how this can work out in practice. A couple come to see me. It soon transpires that they are not Christians, but they want to be married in church because they sense that there is a dimension to life to which the register office does not do justice. They are very imprecise about

this, but as a Christian I am not surprised to find those whom God has made are feeling after him, and I accept with joy the opportunity to declare to them the God whom they worship in ignorance. It also frequently transpires that one or both have been married before. I ask them to tell me about it, and here we run into our first problem. As long as they think or I imply that I will only marry people in certain circumstances, that is if they can show that they were the 'innocent' party, it is obvious that all those who come will make out their innocence. And I am in no position to verify a single one of their statements. This simple fact rules out all halfway positions on remarriage. The recent Anglican report, for example, proposed that remarriage might be permitted by the bishop after careful investigation, but, as the dissenting minority of that commission pointed out with devastating force, the bishop is in no position to discover the facts and that successfully to combine the functions of pastor and judge is impossible. It is worth adding that very few couples would admit the bishop's authority to conduct any such investigation. The case against *selective* remarriage is unanswerable at this point, and it applies with equal force to Free Church ministers who set out to satisfy themselves that the person they are remarrying is 'clean'. It is a fool's errand because impossible to determine, and besides flies in the face of all we know of marriage breakdown. Quite simply, there are no innocent parties, and we would save ourselves a lot of heart-ache by saying quite openly, 'Only guilty parties accepted'.

Instead of seeking to determine blame, I will invite the person concerned to tell me about their experience and what they have learnt from it for the future. This will blend in with the advice and teaching I will give them on the nature of marriage and the conditions of its success. Normally I see a couple three times: a preliminary interview, and then two sessions, one on marriage and one on the wedding service, which leads quite naturally into a sharing of the gospel as we consider what it would mean for God to 'bless' a marriage.

I am still thinking about appropriate ways in which penitence can be expressed and forgiveness received. I don't believe this can fittingly be done by the couple in the actual wedding service. The association of ideas is just wrong. However, we (i.e. I and the couple to be married) acknowledge that this is a second marriage in the following ways: in the opening Declaration of Purpose I may add the following paragraph:

'Life-long marriage has always been the Christian ideal, and we all affirm it here today. By this service we express no judgment on anything that may have happened in the past nor a desire to lower God's perfect standard. Jesus Christ affirmed life-long marriage to be God's will when he said, 'What God has joined together, let not man put asunder'; but he also said to one who had not been able to keep that standard, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more'.

This paragraph can be added conveniently either to the order of service found in Micklem's 'Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship', which I use most often, or to the longer preface found in the new Anglican series 3, which I have recently taken to using. Secondly, when it is the bride who has been married before, I do not ask the question 'Who gives this woman to be married to this man?', because the parental bond can only be broken once.

Thirdly, I phrase the prayers to take account of circumstances, and may say something like: 'And now we pray that you will forgive them for every way in which the past has fallen short of the best, and enable them to forgive where either has been hurt.' Couples continue to express gratitude for their wedding service, which suggests that what I am doing may not be too wide of the mark.

Such is my practice and the thinking behind it. I think it matters enormously that the church gets its thinking right on this subject and there is room for a booklength treatment of the subject for ministers and also for literature to be given to people needing pastoral help, both written from this 'permissive' point of view. I offer this article as first sketch of what such a book might look like and I would be grateful for the critical comments of readers on the arguments I have put forward and advice on what such a book should contain to be of most use.

Notes:

1. 'How Christian is Divorce and Remarriage?' Franklyn Dulley. Grove Booklet.
2. 1 Corinthians 6.16 is usually cited.
3. Matthew 5.31-32 cf Mark 10.2-12 and par.
4. Matthew 5.33ff
5. 'Marriage and the Church's Task' C.I.O. 1978

R. Alastair Campbell

Responses to Signs of Hope

Signs of Hope is as near a complete review of Denominational life as we are likely to get for some time. The brief given to the Group made it difficult for us to know where to begin or end, and the same might be said of those now asked to make their response. Hopefully, however, this task has been made easier by asking different parts of our constituency to major on specific issues in the Report, and by the helpful framework for responses sent out to Churches, Fraternals and Associations.

The object of the exercise is not only to ask for comments, criticisms and suggestions, but to attempt a summary of all these in the form of a strategy for the 1980's. Some will say that we are asking David Russell to perform the impossible; others will not place much faith in strategies anyway. Fair enough, but it is difficult to see how *Signs of Hope* can be worthwhile, unless some attempt is made to relate its findings to the future of the Denomination. We were asked to analyse the present situation, and bring recommendations for future action.

The concern, voiced by Douglas McBain at the 1977 Nottingham Assembly, led to the setting up of the Group. The Report is now in the hands of our people. Responses are asked for by mid-November so that guidelines for the future may be presented to the March Council and discussed at Nottingham 1980. This seems a commendable way of trying to understand what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Indeed, if the whole exercise leaves us floundering, we shall have some hard thinking to do relative to the

guidance of the Holy Spirit toward the people of God.

In *The Story of the Baptists*, Ernest Payne reminds us of the gibe that "a Baptist is a person of the opposite opinion". No doubt there have been, and still are, occasions when we ought to live up to that label, but the contrary nature can be a weakness as well as a strength. *Signs of Hope* will provide us with a significant opportunity to come to broad general agreement on the observance of distinctive priorities. The Report regards this as being vital for a healthy church, and surely the same thing applies to the Denomination.

This Report came about because of deep concern expressed about the decline of the Baptist Denomination in this country. Of course, those who do not share our faith, and many who do, have little or no interest in denominational labels. Nevertheless, we cannot have it both ways. If we share the concern about decline and want to see it reversed, we are saying that we want to see more Christians being added to Baptist churches. If the signs of hope indicated in the Report are genuine, then all traditions within the Christian church will ultimately benefit from them, but to lament a decrease in denominational statistics says something significant about denominational loyalty. Because the Spirit of God knows no frontiers it is sometimes thought inappropriate for ministers to promote the interests of the denomination in our churches. Each minister must decide where his responsibilities lie in these things, but *Signs of Hope* may help us to see that God can renew denominations as well as churches. David Russell has written, 'This Report could mark the beginning of a new day for our denomination if we are prepared to submit ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit'.

Another plus, if we tackle the Report constructively and with enthusiasm, could be some clearer indication as to how we can avoid authoritarianism without denying ourselves leadership. Our leaders are uncertain as to our desires in this respect. They are well aware of our fears, but ill-informed as to our expectations. It has been said that the only way to lead Baptists is to find out which way they are going, and run around and get in front. This assumes that all Baptists are moving in the same direction, and that they have some idea as to where they are going. There are opportunities offered by *Signs of Hope*, which, if accepted, could indicate some clear, broad lines of advance, along which we may be led into the next decade or two.

When all is said and done, there ARE "Signs of Hope". The Report is accurately titled. We are not whistling in the dark. After all the facts of decline have been gathered, sifted and faced up to, there are undoubtedly hopeful signs among our churches, whatever shows up in next year's statistics. It may take some time before they come through in terms of numerical increase, but this may follow in God's good time. The Report is an honest attempt to tell it as it is, "... neither to whitewash the past, nor to encourage euphoria on slender evidence." Facts are facts, and some make depressing reading, but others show that the Spirit of God is moving among His people in Baptist churches.

Having examined things as they are, let us use the Report wisely. As in so many other things, ministers are the key people here. Each of us can surely find a section or two which will provoke a lively and constructive discussion among our people. The Report offers no easy answers, but the recommendations are worth applying to each local situation, and there are

challenges to be faced by many constituent parts of the denomination. We have had a number of Reports to deal with lately. This self-examination and introspective tendency may itself be characteristic of a group of people declining in numbers and influence. If, under God, *Signs of Hope* helps to bring us into an era of expansion and growth, we might even get to the end of the century blessed of the Lord and bereft of Reports.

W.C.R. Hancock

I join in the welcome that is widespread within the denomination for this document, so packed with careful research, analysis and guidance for every section of our constituency. Here at last is the evidence of some constructive thinking for our future, free from the doom-watch mentality which has influenced our life far too much in recent decades. There is much to ponder here. Indeed one of the primary challenges is that of disentangling the various parts so that we can carefully think through what is immediately relevant to our own position.

Having expressed general approval, it would not be in keeping with the quality of the report if this was not suitably hedged by my personal reservations at a number of points. Do we now have in our hands the first instalment of the rigorous intellectual and spiritual catalyst that is required to produce the results that all would agree are desirable? Over half our candidates for the ministry today would describe themselves as charismatic. Why are the positive contributions of this admittedly somewhat intangible movement not given much more than dismissive patronage? Most important of all we must be asking ourselves whether this report will encourage us into the classic pitfall for politicians, that of mistaking words for deeds. Does this report generate the kind of spiritual activism through which Pastors, Churches, Associations, Colleges and our Union Council itself will move reformingly? We are dealing with an interim statement. Much more work remains to be done, and the one thing of which we can be certain is that the new work will be more complex and demanding than all that has been accomplished so far.

Without forgetting these questions I want to reflect on some of the ideas that arise from what is said here about our life together as a Union. We are a Union of churches that are essentially independent in tradition and ethos, and evangelical in theology and character. For such a body of Christian people it is plain that expensive central offices in prestigious buildings are not of the essence of our being. We enjoy these facilities together with the skilled and dedicated folk who work in them, for only one reason, and that is to help us to do collectively and together those things which we cannot do individually and apart. As we remind ourselves frequently, our Council with all its departments and staff exists to serve the constituency. What could be a greater priority for us than to discover "The Strategy of Faith" to which the report refers (5/4/3 and 8/10). It is the very admission of the absence of this which is the greatest single cause for shame at the present. It is the expression of the desire to discover this that is the single most positive sign of hope for our future.

If we are to find this central strategy our Council must begin to move and I

THE BAPTIST INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED

4 Southampton Row, London, WC1B 4AB.

Telephone No. 01-405 4084

To the Readers of the Fraternal.

Dear Friends,

"A" is for Average.

This alphabetical series commences with an insurance technical term which raises some important points for readers who have to be concerned with the insurance of Church buildings.

Against the besetting problem of inflation, the sum insured on buildings should represent the cost of rebuilding in the event of total destruction. With rising labour and material costs this figure needs regular upward revision. No problem arises when the buildings are modern and, if destroyed, would be rebuilt in the same form. However, often our clients point out their buildings are too large for their needs and constructed in a style which would not be repeated if they were to be rebuilt. Modern buildings would be less expensive and more practical. The difficulty is that total losses happily are rare and the diaconate are much more likely to face a situation where as a result of fire, storm or some other insured eventuality, substantial repairs have to be effected. If the insurance has been arranged for a figure which provides only for a smaller modern building, there may be insufficient money to pay for the total replacement of a roof or substantial portions of the building, which will have to be in the existing style.

Your Insurers too, have a problem because premium rates assume that property has been insured for the cost of rebuilding. In the circumstances outlined above, they may be asked to pay the full sum insured for only a partial loss. For Commercial risks Insurers have endeavoured to correct this inequity by embodying in the insurance terms an AVERAGE Clause. This provides that if the sum insured represents less than the full rebuilding cost, then claims for partial losses will be reduced in proportion. Thus, if a building would cost £300,000 to rebuild but is insured for only £150,000, a claim for partial damage of £50,000 could be reduced to £25,000. Many Insurers now apply an Average Clause to Church buildings. *Your* denominational Insurers have avoided the general application of Average to the insurance of Church buildings used wholly and mainly for public religious worship including halls used primarily in association with such buildings. Our ability to continue to do this depends on our clients insuring on a proper basis as outlined above. Buildings should be insured for the cost of rebuilding adjusted only for wear and tear, depreciation etc. Otherwise an unfair burden is borne by those clients who do insure properly.

Insurance can be arranged on a Reinstatement as new basis, when no adjustment is made for wear and tear etc., but more on this later - "R" is still a long way off!

Yours sincerely,
M. E. PURVER,
General Manager.

want to suggest some steps to be taken by each of the main departments. It is surely important for the Administration people to start looking at the problem of poor communication within the denomination (Appendix II 2/10/3). Clearly this is no new issue, but it does point up a major difficulty related to which is the need for a greater sense of participation within our midst. On occasions our Council has been shown to be lamentably out of touch with our constituency. If the hope expressed in the carefully worded conclusion of 4/7/2 that in fact the average age of our membership is getting less, then we must make sure that our growing youthfulness is expressed at the place of decision making. I suggest that we should consider a limitation on the number of consecutive terms Council members should serve. Indeed, when Anglicans have accepted the need for setting limits to the duration of the Primacy, and Romans consider doing no less for the Holy Father would it not be a good idea for Baptists to gently put out to grass those who have served the Council for many long years, in order to allow fresh members in?

I must comment on matters relating to the Mission and Ministry departments, both of which clearly have their work cut out too by the report. We did ourselves great harm when we allowed the united social concern expressed by the work of the Haven just to peter out. By the same token we would do ourselves great good if the Mission department would set itself the task of identifying the social concerns for which our people could make their own distinctive healing contribution. We are not lacking in possibilities here. There are problems to be faced in today's ministry through the sheer mobility of our population. We are told that one out of three families in which the husband is under the age of 35, move every year. The Ministry department, together with the colleges must consider how we can cope with the consequences of this in many of our churches. Through these departments we need to consider not only how to implement some of the principles of the church growth teaching to which reference is made, but also the role of our Superintendency as growth comes. In the situations in which there is movement and growth I doubt whether bland assurances that the Superintendent's function is mainly pastoral are at all adequate. We need only to look at the proliferating para-church organisations to see the point. For the fact that stands out a mile from organisations like One Step Forward, the Bible Society, the Fountain Trust and the like is that if the local church is to optimise on its potential when things begin to move, some help is required from outside in order to make this possible. How much healthier then, if we can conceive and bear our own team to co-operate with the Superintendents in order to give that help. If such a scheme is God's will for us we dare not dodge it because of the cash costs involved.

This brings us face to face with the central problem we face which limits so much of our effectiveness through the supposed lack of financial support for our work together. I would like to see a bold faith principle in our financial affairs being applied in order to facilitate change. In my observations it seems that this is the principle upon which local churches work most effectively for God. Simply put, it is that money is no real problem in the work of God and that if there is a problem here then that is

symptomatic of other problems at other points which must be put right first if the finance is to be sorted out. We must remember that the report tells us that we are actually increasing our membership in areas renowned for their southern aspects and their comfortable middle-class status. This fact must cause us to reflect on the adequacy of our urban evangelism, but at least it means that it is not unreasonable to assume that all the money we need is within our bank balances somewhere, and mainly in the south! If we cost out a programme of healthy expansion and make it plain how the money will be applied, I am sure that the confident presentation of this would in itself cause the cash to flow in, which would make many new plans possible. So let us start planning financially on this kind of basis.

It would indeed be tragic if the value of the work done so far was lost through ecclesiastical inertia. I have only commented on a few of the immediate issues that come to mind in one aspect of the report. All of us have the chance of digesting the whole report and making our own submissions in the light of this. The book of Proverbs tells us that it is deferred hopes that make for sick hearts. The next step, then, should be for us to confer together on the recommendations as they emerge. This must mean a special conference on this, certainly a special debate at the Assembly, as a result of which we set both the immediate and the long-term goals for our life together. In so doing, with openness of heart towards each other, and simple trust in the Lord, I am convinced we will not be disappointed.

Douglas McBain

In the 1930s, in Germany, exciting things seemed to be happening in the Churches. One of Hitler's men had said that 'the National Socialist Party did not wish to save the fatherland without the co-operation of the vital forces of the Church', and local Churches experienced the invasion of Party demonstrations, overflowing from the market place. Many sincere believers thought that this time of revolution might also be a time of revival, an opportunity not to be missed, but to be welcomed with enthusiasm. Was it worth making an issue over the Aryan clause, which forbade all of Jewish descent holding State office, even within the Church, when so few individuals were concerned, and what was at stake was the status of the Church as an influential, evangelising body?

A very few Christians, with their notable leader Bonhoeffer thought it did matter, and I quote this situation as a general warning against narrowing down our interests within the Church to our own "success" and numbers. Our concern must be primarily with the Kingdom of God, and there are times in history when faithfulness to that cause means we turn our back on numbers. Jesus refused to become king of popular acclamation, and doubtless forfeited considerable numerical support (John 6:15). Sometimes all depends on a very small, faithful remnant. Generally speaking, such growth as we are seeing in our denomination is among the comfortable, educated, middle classes. In recent months, we read in our *Baptist Times* of the pathetic response to the invitation given by London Churches for Christians to visit inner city churches, to see their problems and share in their life. If the Kingdom is our criterion, there may be signs of hope, but as the report makes clear there are not yet grounds for euphoria.

Churches may decline for opposing reasons. It may be by failing to challenge people with the Gospel — who is going to respond to the challenge of preserving ancient cultic forms and buildings, and the vested interests of existing power-holders within the Church? But a Church may also decline because the challenge of its Gospel is too strong for a day when the social and cultural pressures against real discipleship are too powerful, while another Church which accommodates its message to what is acceptable or seems desirable may flourish! A religious reflection of the spirit of the age, or an apparent antidote or protection from its ills, has its attractions. The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa has been strong, powerful and influential in that country, because its racialist gospel is sweet music in the ears of many Afrikaaners. Nearer home, did the late Victorian “success” of our Churches depend on their reflection of optimistic evolutionary progress, based on confidence in the stability of the British Empire? If so, it provided no emotional, mental or spiritual preparation for the events of 1914 and the 1920s and 30s, and the causes for our years of decline must be partly within our years of “success”. We rejoice with our brothers who are seeing their Churches grow, but some of us wish to know more about the patterns of discipleship within them.

One very significant feature of the report, revealed also by Dr Beasley Murray’s investigations, is the relationship between theological stance and growth. By and large, growth is happening in churches which are conservative (though not by any means in all of them). Now the liberal-conservative polarity is a hot potato on which our denomination has burned its fingers more than once, and as a result, many have a neurotic fear or more blisters! But we cannot ignore the issue in this instance. The simplistic inference would be that the liberals have no gospel, so God is not blessing their work, while those who preach the true faith once delivered to the saints are seeing the fruits of God’s harvest. However, considerably more caution is needed in interpreting the facts.

There are two strategies by which Christians have sought to work for the kingdom, both with Biblical justification. Some have aimed to save individuals, calling them to personal allegiance to Jesus Christ and personal salvation. By the transformation of individuals, the world is ultimately transformed — “new men for a new world”. Others have seen that the social, political and economic powers which affect men corporately must be challenged by Christ directly. A starving man’s most pressing need is bread for his belly. Let the conservatives who are seeing growth be quite sure that their new strength is being channelled into service and not introspective and narcissistic spiritual selfishness. Much is expected from those to whom much is given. Let them also beware lest their growth stems from a religious pandering to the spirit of the age. Western civilisation is experiencing some flight from rationality at present (not the same as a flight from rationalism, which we may welcome). Technology with which we live, e.g. computers, is so far beyond the comprehension of Mr Average, that it looks like magic. The problems we face, such as whether or not to commit ourselves to nuclear power for the future, are so complicated, with so many relevant factors to weigh, that we are tempted to give up thinking and opt for intuition. Science, by definition a patient, careful, logical enterprise cannot solve all our problems, and leaves us with terrible ones like nuclear weapons and pollution. So our culture turns to fringe medicine, to the

instinctive, the emotional, the hunch, that which is incapable of rational investigation or proof, to the guru with his unshakeable convictions based on a confident certainty of a hot-line to the supernatural. The Churches overall in the West continue to decline. When one theological party start to increase, it may be because they have the truth, but they would do well to ask themselves very searching questions.

Let the liberals also question deeply whether their cherished strategy really works. Unless we can increase the number of Christians, then any Christian influence we can exert must diminish in strength, and probably effectiveness. If it is our faith which motivates us to speak and act on matters of racial equality, ecology, world development, industrial relations and unemployment, we are failing the world and being dishonest if we do not try to spread our motivation, as well as our willingness to act for others! If God calls us primarily to a social gospel, let us be sure that our strategy for bringing Christian insights to bear on society is a sound one. Faith must be a matter of action, not words, and propagating a resolution at an assembly, attending a quarterly meeting of the Association social responsibility committee and mentioning the latest fashionable concern from the pulpit are not enough — except perhaps to salve our consciences.

My allocation of words is exhausted, Mr Editor, and I have not even mentioned some of the issues raised by the report — the training of ministers, the corporate strategy of our denomination for mission and growth, (the arrival of the immigrants in the British Isles has shown beyond all doubt that the B.U. — B.M.S. polarity is meaningless, damaging and probably actively wicked), the place of education in our Churches, the ecumenical factors, and the overall mysteries of numbers within the Church in a historical perspective. Most important of all, if some of us have discovered God's ways of mission for today, how can we get the message over to our brothers and sisters, and motivate and help them to do likewise? Are our Association and Union structures adequate and appropriate for the task?

Michael Ball

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George Neal asks that any books due back

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Bristol College — Retrospect and Prospect

This article is an attempt to reflect on the history of Bristol College and to ask what it may be saying to us as we face the future.

1. A layman values education

Edward Terrill was an educated layman, an elder of his church, who was anxious that Baptist Ministers should be as well educated as their Puritan forefathers. The minister of the Word needs to be well-skilled in Biblical disciplines. Terrill and his contemporaries resisted the “charismatic” emphasis of those who claimed that “human learning” is unnecessary, and may be of a hindrance to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Today a considerable proportion of our members have enjoyed higher education and presumably expect their minister to be well educated.

The dissenting academies in the 17th and 18th centuries developed a broader educational system than that provided at Oxford and Cambridge Universities, from which dissenters were excluded. The aim of the academies (of which Bristol College was a more specialised example) was to equip students to take their place in a world in which intellectual horizons were rapidly expanding. Bristol did not take up the suggestion of Dr. Andrew Gifford that it should apply for a charter as a University; it preferred to remain a College to prepare Baptist ministers. But it had a broad curriculum, which included the sciences, classics and philosophy etc. About forty students proceeded to Scottish Universities for more advanced study.

The College quickly responded to the opportunities provided by the foundation of the University of London and full advantage was taken of classes at University College, Bristol, from 1876. When Bristol received its charter (1910) the Congregational and Baptist Colleges provided theological teaching.

In parallel ways the other Baptist Colleges in Britain have responded not only to the opportunities in their respective theological faculties, but have provided tutors to contribute to theological teaching at the Universities.

In the past thirty years there has been a rapid development in theological teaching at Universities. No longer do ordinands constitute the majority of the students in departments of Theology and Religious Studies. The influence of the staffs of our Colleges on the curriculum has naturally diminished. Yet for many of our future ministers the wider experience and indeed the ‘radical’ treatment of sacred themes has been a welcome exposure to the outlook of the modern world. Others would have preferred the more sheltered approach of the seminary! Quo vadis?

Previous generations at Bristol appreciated the wider cultural setting into which theological education was set — the ancient classics, English literature, science. The present trend is to devote the whole course to more specialised theological study, it being presumed that wider opportunities of education are now provided at school.

2. Involvement with Churches

Edward Terrill vested his gift in 1679 in a church, Broadmead, Bristol. Undoubtedly this has secured the continuity of this College, in contrast to that of so many Non-conformist academies which later lost their identity.

Terrill also appreciated the value of training for the ministry in a church setting. Indeed the College was really the extended family of the Principal and Tutor, who were also ministers of Broadmead. Later it was deemed expedient to separate the work of the College from that of the pastorate. But successive Principals sought to correct any tendency for College training to become insulated from Church life. One of the enriching experiences of students in all our Colleges has been the sharing of the life of local churches. Ministers and churches have made a significant contribution to the development of the students' outlook. As the conception of the pastoral office has widened, to church experience has been added hospital courses, industrial projects and work in multi-racial areas, etc. How much further can vocational training be extended without endangering academic work? The College tutor has an important role in helping his pupils to think theologically about modern issues. A balance between academic and vocational aspects of training is important.

The Colleges have derived strength from the genuine interest shown by members of the churches. Perhaps one good reason for maintaining as many as seven Baptist Colleges, in different parts of Britain is the strength of local sentiment. Yorkshire folk felt emotionally deprived when "their" Rawdon College moved across the Pennines.

Colleges have also ministered to Churches, and are doing more to provide courses for lay people in the evenings or at weekends.

3. Financial Responsibility

The personal generosity of Edward Terrill and a few others was taken up by a wider circle in 1770 when the Bristol Education Society was founded. Support for the College was now provided by personal subscribers and many subscribing churches. The members of the Society not only gave financial support, they undertook responsibility for guiding the work. On a similar basis of "Societies" Rawdon, Regent's and South Wales Colleges came to birth early in the 19th century, to be followed later by Spurgeon's, Manchester, Bangor and Glasgow. Only occasionally, students were supported financially by their parents, others had grants from the Particular or Bristol Baptist Fund. Most of the cost of maintaining each College (as well as the capital to provide the buildings) came from giving by churches and individuals. A guinea subscription entitled the donor to membership of the Society. In 1812 it was pointed out that a guinea in 1770 was now equivalent to five guineas. What is the financial equivalent today?

Since the second world war it has been government policy to provide educational grants for students. The Colleges have been heavily dependent on this source of income. About half the present cost of maintaining work at Bristol College now comes from such grants, i.e. from the tax payer and the rate payer. About a third of our income is derived from endowments made to Baptist funds or to the College over past years. About 14% is derived from churches and personal subscribers.

What would happen if there was a radical change in Government policy? The present trend is to cut public expenditure, and to reduce income tax. Undoubtedly this will mean some limitation on funds available for discretionary awards (i.e. for students not taking a degree course, and for those who have already received a grant for previous education). For most of us church members the modest reduction of our PAYE assessment, welcome as it is, seems destined to be quickly swallowed up by inflation! But if it in fact represents the transfer of responsibility from the "public sector" to our "private sector" Christian stewardship requires us to re-assess our giving to charitable causes.

Before these recent changes, the Terrill Tercentenary Fund was launched, to help those students in all our colleges who do not receive L.E.A. Grants. Nearly a third of our ministerial students are in this situation. Nearly £20,000 has so far been contributed, and we hope much more is to come. The income derived from its investment will be allocated by the Baptist Union Scholarship Committee, and this will significantly increase the amount available as bursaries. But even so such awards will remain very small compared with the level of L.E.A. grants.

Some churches give help to their students in need, and contribute handsomely to their College fees. Others maybe are hard pressed to meet their own commitments. And others — leave the College to cope. Of course, in these days of mobile population, some students may have only been in membership of their church for a brief period before responding to the call to the ministry. No student is ever refused admission to College because he cannot pay the fees. We live by faith — corporately.

4. Variety of students

Today women as well as men are being educated in our College. There is a wider age range of students, some present students at Bristol are over 40. It is to be hoped that diaconates of a few years hence will not think such ministers are "too old" at 50/55!!

Students have always varied considerably in their background, theological outlook, and intellectual capacity, and the Colleges have the interesting task of helping such diverse people to grow in the Community life.

Some students enter College on 'open option' — not committed to becoming ministers, but seeking the guidance of God as to the appropriate sphere for their Christian vocation. About a quarter of Bristol students are in this category, but it is significant that many of these have decided during their College course, to become Baptist ministers, and are then interviewed by their associations.

It is evident that earlier generations at Bristol included men who did not in fact become Baptist ministers. Indeed, in the eighteenth century there were 'open option' students. Space would not permit the tale of some who have entered other interesting professions over the years! But the clear aim of the College has always been and still remains that of providing churches with able and evangelical ministers. Flexibility of method and firmness of purpose are assuredly compatible.

Norman S. Moon

WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

409, Barking Road, Plaistow, London, E13 8AL

My dear Fellow Minister,

I should like you to join with us in singing a rousing Doxology! To use the terminology made famous by a certain American evangelist "The Lord is blessing us real good". There are so many ways in which we can discern His hand in and through the work of the Mission. We recently received the news that a major charitable trust has approved a grant of something over half a million pounds so that we can re-build and enlarge our Old Peoples' Home and incorporate a fully equipped Medical Unit for the terminally ill. As if that were not enough, a local business man has promised us a very substantial sum of money for the equipping and running of the Hospice. To cap it all, the same gentleman has offered us the free use of a suite of offices during the period of re-building, thus solving one of the most difficult of our problems.

There is also evidence of God's blessing and guidance in the work at Orchard House, where some fine new members of staff are offering themselves, and at Greenwoods, where the healing work of that community continues to be blessed. "To God be the Glory, great things He hath done".

I hesitate to venture upon what is, for me, the thin ice of scholarship, but I seem to remember from my college days that the word $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$ has another connotation, and that it is related to the Hebrew word $\קָדָשׁ$ which carries with it not only the 'light of glory' but also the 'weight of responsibility'. I want you to realise that the wonderful things that are happening in the life of the Mission, and the resources that are being made available, not only bring us joy, but also make us aware of the great responsibility that devolves upon us. In our planning, our administration, our operations, we need constantly to remember that the resources and the work are of God and for Him, and that we are stewards of His bounty.

There is also the responsibility that devolves on the Churches. The responsibility to continue to pray for us that we might receive the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and to continue to give to us. The latter may seem a little superfluous in the light of my first paragraph, but you will realise that although we are being helped magnificently in capital costs, the new enlarged work which we are undertaking will increase, rather than diminish, our need for financial support from our many friends.

I hope you will rejoice with us in these exciting days. I hope also that you will pray for us so that we might never forget that the Doxology and the responsibility must go hand in hand. May God bless you in all your work for Him.

Yours sincerely,
Trevor W. Davis,
Superintendent Minister.

Book Review

Jesus: God, Ghost or Guru? by Jon A. Buell and O. Quentin Hyder. Probe Ministries International, published in the U.K. by Paternoster Press, £2.40
The Roots of Evil by Norman L. Geisler. Publisher as above £1.95.

These two volumes form part of a series called *Christian Free University Curriculum* which attempt, in the words of the publishers, "in a scholarly but communicable way to touch on the major tension points between Christian and non-Christian world views. The studies are aimed at the unconvinced, the reader with questions about Christian faith and views.....The curriculum is also helpful to Christians for encouragement and for equipping them to dialog with the academic world". (By "Christian world view", we should understand "Conservative Evangelical" or "Fundamentalist" world view).

The volume about Jesus examines the nature of His person and His claims to divinity, and considers at length the "trilemma" posed by C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* - that Jesus was a liar, a madman or telling the truth. Such a trilemma is only persuasive if we are sure that Jesus has been accurately reported by the witnesses, and that we are properly understanding their evidence. In both these areas, this book miserably fails to understand a modern critical approach, let alone to answer it. For instance, in writing of Matthew's Gospel, we are told that "there is strong evidence from tradition that Matthew, the publican-turned-apostle, is the author". As a tax-collector, he would have found it advantageous to "cultivate habits of meticulous record-keeping prior to joining Jesus' company of disciples....It would seem reasonable, therefore, that Matthew would have begun extensive notes during or shortly after Jesus' ministry."

I know of no strong evidence for apostolic authorship, and inference and guess-work about how the Gospel was written is of no value as evidence. At a deeper level, why should an eyewitness with his own (shorthand?) notes copy directly, almost word for word, from Mark, probably a non-eyewitness? What difference does the resurrection experience make to the way our Gospels describe the human Jesus, and to the Christian conception of what is "divine"? What is a "gospel" anyway?

The volume about evil is very clearly and lucidly written and within its limits, not a bad introduction to a philosophical account of evil. But there are many deficiencies. To quote one area only, the treatment of the problem of hell is very shallow. It just will not do to say that when the bad are safely tucked up in hell, evil has been defeated by "being separated and quarantined from the rest of the universe". The question of human love for one who goes to hell is not really answered. In this world, my love for my fellow men is the acid test of the reality of my love for God, in other words, human relationships are part of the fabric of eternity. But when I reach eternity, it seems, some of these relationships must be annihilated, and I must cease loving those I once loved, if they are suffering in hell (otherwise heaven is going to be intolerable).

The danger and tragedy of books like these, is that those who recommend and read them will think they stand firm on a solid rock of Christian thought, the ranks of the Philistines having been thoroughly trounced. In fact, battle has not even been joined, neither the strength of the opposition to Christian thought, nor the richness of Christian responses are to be found here.

Michael Ball

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Ministers' Money Matters

It is not customary to remark on the views of Book Reviewers where personal opinions are expressed but I must challenge certain statements in the review of this publication in your July issue.

I had some small part in preparing this booklet, and in particular the section dealing with income tax. Apart from regretting your reviewer's disdain of the introduction of a little humour into an otherwise turgid subject, many of his observations are incorrect and may cause confusion which this booklet sought to clarify. I will deal with each one briefly.

1. Tax Return

There are numerous types of tax return issued by the inland Revenue to suit specific circumstances and the booklet illustrated the form P1 which is completed by the vast majority of wage earners, including the clerical fraternity. It is up to the local inspector of taxes to decide which should be issued and the form 11 (Clergy) is generally issued to and intended for the use of Anglican priests: for example it contains references to income arising from pew rents, payments in lieu of tithes and income from Glebe property, items not usually encountered by Baptist ministers.

Some Baptist ministers certainly do complete the special clergy return, but in my experience they are in the minority and it is perfectly proper to complete a form P1. Whether or not the gross stipend needs to be declared will entirely depend upon the type of return issued by the Revenue.

2. Expenses

There are complex technical differences between Schedule D and Schedule E. Suffice it to say that Baptist ministers are "office holders" and accordingly must satisfy the stringent requirements of Schedule E, unless claiming certain expenses, fully dealt with in the booklet, which are additionally allowed by statute. Accordingly the phrase "wholly, exclusively and necessarily" is entirely correct within the context. The point about the declaration of the superannuation is taken, and this small point has already been corrected in the second edition.

3. Cars

It is a hazard of publishing any topical book in a period of rampant rising prices to be specific about motoring costs. The authors assume that readers will be aware of this when they read the suggested figure of 10p per mile.

Finally, whilst there is no intention substantially to revise any particular section of the booklet, specific questions and comments are welcomed by the editorial group and will be dealt with individually rather than in the columns of your periodical.

Yours faithfully,
Paul R.B. Barkworth

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