

# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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# Editorial

“Disestablishment by stealth” is how the Archbishop of York described the proposal that leaders in the Church of England should be selected and appointed without reference to the government of the day. One wonders whether, if that were to happen, to what extent it would bring about a significant change in that leadership: “It (still) seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”? For most of this century, as secularisation has continued apace, there have been calls, more or less clarion, to cut the Gordian knot which has bound church and state together. But the increasing strains imposed upon the Tudor Settlement have resulted in disestablishment becoming an almost weekly clamour.

It is interesting to compare and contrast here the Anglican view of the Church with that of the perceived view of the Free Churches. One of the great fears, frequently expressed, is that disestablishment would turn the C of E, pejoratively, into “just another sect”. For some Anglicans this fear might be related to a loss of national prestige. But a more serious objection is that the principle of comprehensiveness would be sacrificed, expressed as it has been for generations by the parochial system, ensuring a Christian presence in every locality, irrespective of size of population. Germane to this is the sense of responsibility for the total life of the community, only a fraction of whom might ever deign to worship in their local parish church.

By contrast, the Free Churches are viewed as ministering, first and foremost, to the gathered minority. Our brief is perceived as much more limited and much more local, so that someone has characterised us as largely “chaplains to the suburbs”, where success is more likely. It is refreshing, therefore, to read someone of the Anglican stature of Lord Runcey observing no less a concern for national life and society in the Free Churches than in that communion for which he was once chief shepherd. And this harmonises with an increasing trend among us to feel a Kingdom responsibility for the community at large, resulting in many new and innovative social outreach programmes - and not as a front for some covert evangelistic agenda! It represents another expression of the wholistic application of the gospel, which has radically renewed the evangelical tradition in a generation and is one of the brightest stars in the present firmament.

“Wholeness” is also represented by the Celtic branch of Christianity which, in our tradition, is being fruitfully mediated by Roy Searle from Cuthbert’s misty Northumbria. He recounts the positive value of this strand of spirituality. The fact that U.K. Baptists have been ordaining women for over sixty years has not ameliorated the pain many of them still feel, more often caused, one suspects, by insensitivity than deliberate intent. Ruth Gouldbourne tells of the series of ad hoc consultations which have heightened awareness of some of the issues and brought a measure of change.

Alastair Campbell completes his two-part article on Romans by dealing with the real issue, for long obscured by Reformation theologies. He closes with some searching questions in the light of his exegesis. Our mission series, timed to coincide with the BMS BiCentenary, concludes with Donald Elliott’s observations on the possibility of integrity in mission in a world like ours. Finally, responding to Stuart Jenkins’ article on “Sunday School” in the January issue, Brian Wilson questions the status of children in the light of our theology of baptism. Does that baptism, in affirming the faith of the candidate, reflect back negatively upon the standing before God of the child? And what ministry is appropriate for our children?

# Exploring the Celtic Tradition

## Introduction

When we first moved into our new house in Wooler, we discovered in the attic a wooden chest full of memorabilia: clockwork railway track and carriages, alas no engine!, tins soldiers, metal Dinky cars. For my children it was the fascination of discovery and exploration of things new, but for me it was the recovery and renewal of things known years ago. For both father and children, it was a fascinating experience.

To explore the Celtic tradition is for many a totally new experience. For those of us in the so-called 'Celtic fringe', Northumbria, the influence of our Celtic forefathers lives on and is currently experiencing a renewed interest. In the Celtic monasteries a fire was kept burning as a sign of God's presence. While the rest of Europe was entering a dark period characterised by unrest, conflict and warfare, Northumbria was witnessing the light of the gospel spreading abroad and touching the lives of Celtic people. Thousands were coming to a new found faith in Christ, many becoming 'monks and missionaries, poets and pilgrims, ablaze with the love of Christ'. Today we are witnessing a renewal of things Celtic. The roots of the Christian church in Britain are found in the soil of the Celtic tradition and the faith that was expressed in the Celtic culture in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries was a vibrant, contemplative, charismatic and missionary movement that has much to teach the contemporary church scene today. Engaged in mission to a dying culture, with all the characteristics of despair and hopelessness, the Celtic Church brought the light and hope of the gospel to bear on individuals and communities. Challenged by the pagan deities and occult practices, the Celtic missionaries confronted the powers of darkness with the light of Christ. Bathed in the supernatural, the Celtic Church had little difficulty in comprehending the unseen world in its ministry and mission. Undivided evangelical, catholic and charismatic, the Celtic Church provides a model of hope and renewal for today's church.

Yet we must be careful not to romanticise our Celtic heritage. It amuses me to see the proliferation of things Celtic that are twee, which have about them an unworldly, benevolent and gentle tolerance which bear little resemblance to the rugged, down to earth spirituality of our Celtic forebears. The rediscovery of 'Celtic spirituality' is becoming quite a bookish affair as writers and readers are taken up by the romanticism that surrounds the Celtic legends. Few detail the less congenial aspects of the Celtic tradition, eg. the cursing of the water beast on Loch Ness or the painful penitentials such as the crack of the whip or being made to stand in the North Sea for a period of prayer and fasting. As Professor Donald Meek of Edinburgh University observes: "Few of the movement's advocates have yet taken to living on Rockall or the Old Man of Hoy, although such eremitic sites offer stacks of potential, in keeping with the aspirations of several Celtic saints".

## Background

Whilst the earliest evidence of Christianity in Britain is in Southern England, and the Council of Arle held in 314 mentions the Bishops of London, Lincoln and York as participants, the gospel had little impact in Roman Britain. Where the gospel did take root it was either among Roman colonists or Britons who had adopted Roman attitudes and customs. However, to the Celtic people, Christianity was rejected as the religion of oppression, and when the Roman Empire fell, the faith virtually disappeared from these shores.

Yet, by the early part of the fifth century, a new missionary movement had been born and enjoyed quite spectacular success, reaching into areas of Britain which had never fallen to Roman conquest. The gospel, carried not by wealthy, authoritarian governors on horseback, but by barefooted monks, was reaching thousands of Celts. Two significant figures are Ninian and Patrick. The first, born close-by Hadrian's Wall, travelled in the fourth century to Gaul where he was profoundly influenced by Martin of Tours. On returning, he established his own monastery, patterned on Martin's, which itself was based upon that of the ascetic Desert Fathers. This became a prototype for many others, from which missionaries went out, winning thousands to faith in Christ. The foundation of the Welsh Church was similarly influenced by the monastery at Tours: here David was trained as an evangelist. The second figure is Patrick who, in the same period, evangelised the Irish. Though he shared with Ninian the influence of the Desert Fathers, he was also shaped by Roman attitudes and ways, the fruit of which was powerful bishops, ornate cathedrals and strict moral discipline. In his last years he faced Celtic opposition by those who rejected the authority of powerful priests, preferring monks who taught by example in simple surroundings.

Though the monastic ideal was rooted in prayer, it was thoroughly mission-oriented, Celtic monks travelling far and wide to share the good news of the gospel. They embraced the *pro Christo perigrinati*; the willingness to journey anywhere out of love for Christ. This sense of adventure, openness to possibilities and abandonment to God pervaded our Celtic forebears.

## Monastery

At the heart of Celtic Christianity was the monastery, often established by a hermit to whom others came, until a community gathered. This, in turn, would spawn new communities, as in today's church-planting strategy.

A wooden framed oratory would be at the centre with individual monks and families living in cells around it. The community would come together for prayer and they lived under a simple Rule. Each person and family was responsible for their own lives and had to seek God for themselves. Where Abbots were appointed their task was one of spiritual director from whom advice was sought, rather than a ruler to whom slavish obedience was owed.

Many monasteries became centres for learning, study and training. In every monastery the Celtic Ruine of Hospitality was exercised with cells available for the sick, travellers and those seeking refuge. The dominant themes of worship and mission, prayer and action, contemplation and participation were evidenced throughout the Celtic Monastic movement. Far from being mutually exclusive, contemplation and mission were powerful partners in the spread of the gospel, an issue surely to be affirmed again in today's church scene. The renewal of monasticism has profound implications not only for the contemplative tradition of the Church but for mission in contemporary society. Monasteries were centres of mission and training schools of evangelists. Armagh in Ireland, Iona in Scotland, and Lindisfarne off the Northumbrian coast, were mission bases to reach the nations. The year 597 witnessed both the death of Columba on Iona and the arrival of Augustine, who had been sent by the Pope, to Canterbury. The Celtic Church had consistently refuted the authority of Rome and asserted that each individual be answerable to God. This smacked of the Pelagian heresy to the Roman church and Rome consequently tried in vain to bring stubborn and rebellious Celts under its rule. Without consulting the Celtic Church, Pope Gregory appointed Augustine bishop of the entire British Isles, charged with the task of 'instructing the unlearned, encouraging the weak and correcting the obstinate'. His task

bore little fruit in this respect and relationships between the Celtic and Roman traditions became hostile. It was the Celts themselves who, through their naivety and generosity of spirit, undermined their cause. Allied to this, their lack of ecclesiastical power and procedure undermined their case in the famous 664 synod of Whitby which ruled in favour of Rome. Celtic spirituality waned and though not extinguished, its fire has burnt low for centuries since. Had the decision been Celtic rather than Roman, things may have been very different. Today, with the resurgence of interest in Celtic spirituality, we see something of a rekindling of the Celtic Fire and with it the hope that the Celtic model of life, ministry and mission be embraced in contemporary culture. For in the Celtic tradition are key characteristics that have real prophetic and meaningful significance for the Church and society today.

### **Characteristics of the Celtic Tradition**

Apart from the dominant monasticism already noted certain other characteristics pertain:

**The Sacramental Principle:** This declares that nothing is secular because everything is sacred. The Celtic Church made no distinction between the sacred and the secular, or between the spiritual, physical, psychological and supernatural elements of life. Their theology was greatly influenced by their love of John's Gospel and the symbol of that Gospel is the eagle. The eagle, believed to fly higher and see further than any other bird had the visionary ability to look deeper and to see beyond others, to see what for others was invisible. "The vision of the Celts was sacramental rather than mystical; they saw God in and through things rather than by direct visions...The Celt says we must take time to learn to play the 'five- stringed harp', that is, to use our five senses". (David Adam, Eye of the Eagle)

There is something challenging and attractive in the Celtic Church's ability "to see in the visible things those things which are invisible". They perceived signs of God's presence and activity in ordinary ways, in everyday happenings, for their vision of God as Creator permeated every area of life. No sacred/secular divide. Consequently, Celtic spirituality is very down to earth; pomp and ceremony, superficiality, pretence and artificiality have little place in the Celtic tradition. Their prayers are very "earthy", rich in praise but lacking in pompous piety. Their petitions are about everyday things; milking cows, lighting fires, getting on with the neighbour who's a nuisance!

The implications of this very down to earth spirituality is that it was accessible to ordinary folk, who didn't have to climb some ecclesiastical "church wall" to hear or see the faith communicated. Their ability also to convey biblical truth in story-telling was a powerful means of communicating the gospel. Today's society cries out for good story-tellers!

**Contemplation and Mission:** The place of the prayer cell and the oratory were foremost in the Celtic believer's life. High value was placed on learning to listen: to others, self, nature, circumstances, in order to discern what was of God, self or the enemy. The true heroes as far as the Celts were concerned were not those up front in the public arena but rather those who went off to the 'secret places', the places of solitude, to seek God and hear His heart for the world. Journeying by boat to Inner Farne seeking the Lord had burned into his heart a great love of the gospel and back on the mainland he desired to share it wherever he travelled, proclaiming it in word and demonstrating it in works. So Cuthbert was both a contemplative and evangelist. For the Celtic Church mission was not an optional extra for the keen to engage in, but rather a way of life for those who loved the Lord. What was said of Aidan was true to the Celtic missionary spirit: "Aidan stopped and spoke to whoever he met, both rich and poor! If

they were heathen, he invited them to embrace the mystery of faith and be baptised; and if they were already believers, he strengthened their faith”.

**Social responsibility:** was something that the Celtic believers saw as flowing out of a life of prayer. They held no distinction between what was of spiritual and physical concern. Many acts of mercy are attributed not as noble feats but illustration of a heart-attitude that permeated the Celtic Church. The embracing of a chosen poverty by many of the monks gave them an identity with, and commitment to, the poor. Their lifestyle challenges the belief that civilization and some degree of poverty cannot exist together.

**Creation:** In contrast to post-Enlightenment man who has tried to dissect creation and explore it scientifically within the context of human reasoning, the Celts sought to observe, listen and reflect upon the world order as that which bore the hallmarks of its Creator God. There was a spirituality that embraces the natural order, kindling a respect for what God has created. It is this dimension of their love for creation that has been a significant factor in the New Age Movement attraction to the Celts. New Agers who try to hijack Celtic Spirituality as their own confuse the issue and do an injustice to Celtic Christians' affirmation of Trinitarian faith and their constant pronouncing on the supremacy of Christ over all pagan deities. The Celtic Church was far from being pantheistic. Some of the most noble descriptions of spiritual warfare are chronicled in the Celtic Church's opposition to druidic practices and priests.

Patrick's Breastplate is an example of the stance and protection Celtic believers sought against the evil of divination, incantation, heresy and magic spells prevalent in their society. In those days the Celtic monks were in constant conflict with the Druids. They were powerful men of God and the mistake the Church has made is to put down to legend and myth some of the great things that happened through them. With many folk embracing the magic arts in today's society, the Church is often impotent in knowing how to deal with them and needs to grow in its understanding of spiritual warfare, not as a novelty to be played with, but as a reality to be entered into seriously. For the monks, even the sign of the cross was a very powerful spiritual weapon whereby they invoked the power of the protection of the Trinity. The Celtic Church broke the druids' hold on Celtic society and overturned druidic culture which pervaded at that time.

**Church Government:** Essentially monastic in form it was very simply ordered with humble, non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical leadership who shunned power. Inevitably the freedoms, simplicity and spontaneity of the Celtic spirituality led at times to disorganisation, particularly when compared to the ways of Rome. Yet in the simplicity and, at times seeming naivety, lay great power and effectiveness in relation to the kingdom of God.

The role of the Abbot and Bishop was interesting. In the monastery the Bishop was under the Abbot, whilst out of the monastery the Bishop exercised authority and responsibility for the Church in its mission. Therefore there was built in mutual accountability in the relationship that existed between believers. It is also interesting to note that the monastic communities contained men and women, single folk, and families. They were often ruled over by women, for example Hilda at Whitby and Brigid at Kildare.

Doctrinally, the Celtic Church was identical with the rest of Christendom. They enjoyed meeting together to worship God and their sessions were long! Their love of poetry and music allied to a love and appreciation of the scriptures led to many a lengthy worship time, ordered and spontaneous, as well as teaching, proclamation and explanation of the scriptures!

The whole ethos of the mission from the monastery was on the principle of establishing "Church without Walls". Consequently believers shared open relationships with unbelievers. Christianity was transparent to the world around. In our own Community Rule we describe it like this: "If the church walls come down we will be known for who we are and if that is not the presence of Christ to all around, then it is time we got sorted out so it can be". The Celtic Church took risks, lived openly in what was a very pagan environment, and yet built, through humility, relationships with unbelievers over which many travelled into the kingdom of God.

**Charismatic:** Signs and wonders, healings, prophecies, words of knowledge were part of the Celtic believers' experience. Bede, accounting the lives of the Celtic saints like Cuthbert, tells of remarkable signs and wonders that accompanied the proclamation of the gospel. People healed of illness, demons cast out, miracles of deliverance and provision were normative rather than the exception when the Celtic believers were engaged in mission.

A word of knowledge led to Patrick escaping as a slave from Ireland. Years later while praying 'in the spirit', he heard God's call to return with the gospel to Ireland. What impact might there be if many more could share such experiences of prayer that the Spirit might lead us to God's initiatives not man's in the challenges of mission facing us today.

## **Conclusion**

### **The Celtic Tradition is a Rich Treasure Chest Worthy of Exploration.**

Born in Northumbria I can at least make some claim to Celtic ancestry with Scottish forebears. Whether the blood runs in my veins or not, the Celtic fire has been lit upon my heart. May it light other's hearts!

**Roy Searle**

**For Further Information** about the Northumbria Community and the facilities and programmes run at and from its base at the Nether Springs please write to:

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# Identity and Pain: Women's Consultations, 1987-92

To write the history of a series of meetings, the obvious place to start is with the minutes and the committee involved. To write the history of the series of consultations of women in the Baptist ministry and in training for that ministry, cannot be approached in this way for the simple reason that there are no formal minutes, no elected committee and no constitution. This is not an example of incompetence or mismanagement, but rather a reflection of the meetings themselves, and the way in which women in the Baptist ministry view ourselves. We are not a body separate from our brothers in ministry, so we do not want to set ourselves up in a form of organisation that suggests we are. On the other hand, we do not always fit the categories that have evolved around an overwhelmingly male ministry, and there are times when it is life-giving to be reassured that our oddities are not something peculiar to an individual, but have to do with the structures and forms within which we have been called to serve.

Given this understanding of ourselves, it is appropriate that we should meet, when we do, in what appears to be a rather anarchic and haphazard way. In fact, the three meetings we have had since 1987 have been neither anarchic nor haphazard - unless you are an historian.

## The Genesis

Our first meeting was a day held at Harborne Hall in May 1987, and was called by Jane Hassell after an article dealing with women in the ministry, and pointing out the low numbers, had appeared in the Baptist Quarterly. Ideas for such a meeting had been floated before, but this was the first time that such ideas had been put into practice on this scale. Since nobody knew quite what to expect from such a meeting, plans were fairly fluid and adaptable. As one who was just into my training at that stage, and feeling very isolated, my impressions of the meeting are vivid, and I understand, similar to the impressions of many others. Firstly, there was the sense of relief of finding that there were other people like me - people who wore skirts when preaching, and people who were fed up with the constant struggle of trying to justify our calling. To discover that my oddities were not oddities but the common experience of many others as well was a very positive experience. The other main impression that was brought away from that meeting by many of us was the sense of deep anger and frustration that many of our colleagues were feeling. As well as the positive discovery that we were not alone, there was the depressing discovery that we all faced the same problems and they seemed to be getting worse rather than better.

But Harborne '87 was not simply a time when we sat around bemoaning our fate and becoming depressed. We took up several issues that were of particular importance to many of us there, and deputed some of our number to follow them up. The main issue was that of the training offered in our Baptist colleges, and this was followed up in two ways. A group was invited to the Tutors' and Principals' Conference to raise the issues that were believed to be important, and another group was charged with looking at how the areas we believed were missing in our training could be covered and developed.

The deputation to the Conference was warmly received and from their meeting the Colleges' Statement of Intent was produced. This document affirms the ministry of both women and men; acknowledges the fact that training does not always have a pattern which reflects this affirmation, commits the Colleges to a more positive attitude towards women in their training; acknowledges the particular difficulties which do still face



women both in training and afterwards; and undertakes to look at ways of improving the female input and support in College life.

The other group produced a paper looking at issues of theological feminism (as opposed to feminist theology!), with the aim of providing suggestions about how to integrate the suggestions throughout the curriculum, rather than hiving them off into a specialist interest area.

Reports of both these activities were circulated to all those who had expressed an interest in keeping in touch, and plans began to be made for a second meeting.

## **A Gathering Momentum**

This was held, with the backing of the Ministry Office, in May 1988 at Church House in London. Reports were made of what had happened since the previous year, and there was also discussion of a proposal regarding guidelines for ministers and churches during pregnancy. The group was pleased with these suggestions, and they were forwarded to the Ministry Office, and are now included in the Guidelines for Settlement. It was apparent at that meeting that there was a good deal of anxiety about settlement and the procedures, and this began some hard thinking.

Again the meeting is best remembered for the opportunity to meet with other women in similar situations, and to be reassured that the anger and pain that was very real for some of us was not necessarily our own fault, nor were we unusual or weak in feeling it. For a significant number of those who came, this was the only opportunity to meet other women in the Baptist ministry, and if for no other reason, this made the meeting worthwhile. We spent a lot of time discussing the issues of training and where we had felt it was good and where bad. We were delighted with the Colleges' Statement, and were glad to see that issues we felt were important were being taken seriously.

There was then a long wait before our next meeting. Having no committee, no constitution and no formal structure, no meeting happens until someone feels moved to organise it! This happened at the end of 1991 and the meeting was held in Birmingham in March 1992. Since we were not following closely on a previous meeting, it was decided by the ad hoc organising group, that this should be a listening rather than an input meeting, in line with what was going on throughout the denomination! Accordingly, it was structured to allow as much talking as possible, with plenty of space for people to raise the issues that were felt to be particularly important. The main issues that came up on that day were settlement, the procedures of MR Committees, forms and patterns of ministry, the need for networking, the needs faced by all in the ministry, but which are not often faced head-on, and a request for a review of the Colleges Statement. To take some of these issues further, a group asked for a meeting with the Superintendents, and was invited to attend an afternoon session of their monthly meeting. At that meeting the issues that were felt to be most pressing and causing most distress were raised - particularly the questions of settlement, of appropriate questions at MR Committees and of the active support of the Superintendents when women in their areas face hostility and ostracism from their male colleagues. Other issues were brought to the attention of the Ministry Office, and were acknowledged by them.

## **Who Will Speak For Us?**

It became obvious at that meeting that there was a desire for these gatherings to continue, possibly on a more predictable basis. There was some discussion about organising a more formal group, and appointing a committee. A follow-up questionnaire looked for reactions to the suggestions of a longer meeting, a newsletter, making the gatherings open to all, women and men, and various other issues. We have got as far

as planning another meeting this year. We have been exploring ways of keeping in touch, and of finding an authoritative voice - the organising group at the moment is self-appointed. On the other hand, as I said at the beginning, we do not want to be a separate group, seen in distinction from our male colleagues - the point we are most often dealing with is the wish to be seen in the same ministry, and given the same opportunities and responsibilities. There are several women who have not wanted to come to our meetings or be associated with us in any way, because they fear we are setting up a separatist body which is unhelpful in the carrying out of the ministry of the One Church. At the moment, it looks unlikely that we will form ourselves into a constituted group with affiliations, membership and a committee - but who knows? We do not want to become something separate and different. As was said at our last gathering, ninety-nine percent of the time, we are carrying out our ministry just like our male colleagues, dealing with the joys, pains and frustrations that come to us all as we serve Christ in this particular way. On the other hand, there are issues that are particular to women in the ministry, and if the women facing them do not bring them to the attention of the denomination and the churches, how can we expect others to do so? There are also questions about the nature of ministry itself which women can often face more easily than men since we generally do not fit the traditional categories anyway. I believe that it is vitally important that women find their way of ministering that is appropriate and is not necessarily the same as the pre-existing male model. For these reasons, I believe that the gatherings of women in ministry that take place are important, not just for the women who attend, but also for our denomination. The anarchic nature of these gatherings, the lack of an on-going responsible structure and the fluid and responsive ways in which things happen, while being very frustrating for the chronicler or historian, is integral to the nature of these gatherings and part of the way in which God is working through them.

**Ruth Gouldbourne**

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# Romans Through New Eyes:

## Part 2: The Real Issue

In the first part of this article I began a survey of Paul's letter to the Romans in the light of "the new perspective" on Paul that has enjoyed popularity with students of the New Testament in recent years. We have examined Romans 14-15 and seen in them the clue to the purpose of the letter as a whole, and now we turn to the beginning of the letter and find we are able to read it with new eyes.

### The Separate Table Option

We notice at once the prominence of the phrase "To the Jew first and also to the Greek". With our "Reformation spectacles" on we gloss over this, or we see it as declaring the universal sinfulness of "Man" before God, but in context it must have sounded a much more militant note. What is being steadfastly denied in these early chapters is not that Man can save himself by his "good works", but that Jews have any special privileges before God. What is being asserted in chapters 1 and 2 is the impartiality of God. His wrath is revealed from heaven against **all** ungodliness and wickedness of men (1:18). The Jewish reader (and indeed the Christian reader) is assured that God will render to every man according to his works (2:6). Possession of the law is no protection to those who do not keep it, and the "works of the law" by which no human being will be justified (3:20) are not that patience in well doing that we are assured will be rewarded by eternal life (2:7), but just those practices required by the Jewish religion - circumcision and table separation, for example - that were the focus of Jewish national pride and ensured that the people of God were confined to one nation and to those willing to join it. The famous words of Paul, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" now have a much more particular content, being not so much the major premiss of a syllogism designed to convince any individual of his sin and the need for a saviour, but a call to his Jewish readers to see that they no less than the Gentiles depend on Christ for salvation, and as they are not justified by their membership of the Jewish nation so Gentiles do not need to be enrolled in that nation in order to be saved.

Moving on in our overview of the letter, we see immediately why a chapter needs to be devoted to Abraham "our forefather according to the flesh". Abraham, who was the patron saint of Jewish particularism, to whom the covenant of circumcision was given, must be detached from the side of Paul's opponents and made to serve the interests of the law-free gospel. Paul stresses that Abraham received God's promise before he was circumcised, and that his significance lies not in being the father of the Jewish nation but in being the father of many nations, and the father of us all (4:16f). The universal significance of Jesus is then made plain in chapter 5 by showing that he is the new Adam, a figure with representative significance, not just for Israel but for the whole world.

But, Paul's Jewish friends would have said, if you abandon the works of the law in this way, what is to prevent wholesale moral breakdown? Won't people take advantage of your gospel to lead lives of sinful self-indulgence? This is the meaning of the question at the beginning of chapter 6. It is not being asked by a wrong-headed Gentile convert, not even by a hypothetical straw man, but by concerned conservative critics who need reassuring that Paul has not gone soft on sin. His reply is that this is to forget the decisive break made by those who have been baptised into Christ, a break that is not merely inward and spiritual but outward and social. Like defectors from East to West, they have

left one society to join another; they have burned their boats, and there is no going back to the ways that won applause in their former manner of life. It is also to forget the moral resources put at their disposal by God's gift of the Spirit, by which a person is enabled to put to death the misdeeds of the body. (8:13) God has abated nothing of his moral demand on Jew and Gentile alike nor of his purpose to bring all alike out from under the service of sin and death to eternal life in fellowship with Jesus Christ our Lord. To that purpose the law has nothing to contribute because the weakness of human nature apart from God's grace has turned it into a source of national pride.

If we have correctly followed the argument so far, chapters 9-11 can be seen not as a parenthesis, or a departure from the mainline of the argument, which is what they have always seemed to the reformation tradition, but as the heart of the matter. If you are right, Paul, his critics must have said, then you have turned your back on your own people and your missionary strategy denies Israel any place in God's purpose, in contradiction to everything we have always believed. This in turn must mean that God's word has failed (9:5), and that God has rejected his people (11:1). That this posed a difficult problem for Paul is seen by the difficulty of understanding his reply, but in essence what he does is to make three points in these chapters. First, it depends what you mean by Israel. Second, if anyone has failed it is Israel and not God. But third, the present rejection is not total and need not be final. For a brief moment Paul turns from addressing Jewish Christians to warn the Gentiles in turn against taking pride in their election, but then Paul concludes that, "God has consigned all men to disobedience that he may have mercy on all" (11:32). The repeated word "all" in the closing verses of this chapter, like the "all" who have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, has in view not so much every individual, but the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike.

With this theological grounding, Paul is ready to turn to the problems of working out what it means in practice to be one people of God, worshipping together and eating together at one table, valuing one another's gifts, living at peace so far as possible with their non-Christian Jewish neighbours who blame them for bringing trouble upon the whole Jewish community in Rome, making sure so far as they can that they attract no unfavourable notice from the authorities. It is this social background that threads together the apparently diverse instructions on Christian living that occupy chapters 12-15, and which close, as we have seen with the specific issue of table-fellowship and the need for mutual acceptance in one congregation.

It was said of the 1987 Labour Party Manifesto that it was the longest suicide note in history. Romans on this reading turns out to be one of the longest pleas for unity in history. For all its complexity, its arguments are all marshalled in the service of "One Church, One Faith, One Lord", but once again we should note the basis of this unity. The conservative Jewish-Christians would also have been very happy to see One Church, so long as it was united in keeping the Law. That was a prescription for unity, and must have seemed a very logical and scriptural prescription; but it was both false and impracticable, offering unity in theory but withholding fellowship from the great majority of Gentiles in practice. Alternatively, Paul might have opted for unity in diversity, separate tables for Jews and Gentiles, separate meetings worshipping God in different ways while claiming all to be part of the people of God (a solution familiar enough to us from our own denominationalism). But this was apparently Peter's solution at Antioch, and Paul will have none of it. The Gentiles are not to be excluded by the impossibly high tariff barriers of a Jewish demand that he dismisses as essentially cultural, nor is it tolerable that each shall pursue their own way in separation. Rather the width of God's love is to be expressed in the openness of his church's welcome and the fewness of his church's ritual and social demands. Accept one another is the true climax of the message of Romans, an acceptance grounded not in a love of peace and quiet, but in

an intolerant concern for God's truth which tolerated division denies. Patience and forbearance will be needed to establish this in practice, but this is temporary. In the long run there will be one church based on one gospel, and the gospel will be Paul's.

## Conclusion

1. It might be thought that if this interpretation of Paul and of Romans is right that the Reformation doctrines of **sola fide** and **sola gratia** are founded on a misunderstanding and are even illegitimate. Such a conclusion would be intolerable to people like ourselves who owe our whole understanding of God to this tradition and know in our bones that it is truth. Luther may have been mistaken in believing that first century Judaism believed in salvation by works, but he was not wrong to see that late-mediaeval Catholics so believed, nor was he wrong in seeing that the arguments Paul had marshalled against Jewish nationalism could legitimately be used against the Catholic errors of his own day. Recently this has been recognised by two of the leading "new perspective" scholars. Ziesler speaks of Luther doing something **analogous** to Paul<sup>1</sup>, and Watson distinguishes between an interpretation that is an **imposition** on the text, from an interpretation that can be seen as an **extension** of it<sup>2</sup>. Luther on this basis is simply doing what all of us must do with the Bible, asking, "If this was the word of God to them there, what is it to us here?", an approach which rescues the Bible from being frozen in the past while maintaining safeguards against arbitrary exegesis. But recognizing this enables us to see Luther's (or anyone else's) interpretation for what it is: an application of the original word to a situation far removed from its first context and something distinguishable from the original meaning of the text as defined by the author's intention. This will encourage us to go back behind Luther to Paul himself, so that a fresh understanding of what Paul was originally trying to do may allow us to see fresh extensions of the text for our own day.
2. The Christian message is a message about bringing down barriers. This has its roots in the table-fellowship of Jesus with sinners, and Paul's disputes with conservative Jewish Christians are simply the projection onto the wider screen of the Hellenistic world of a conflict that started in the synagogues of Galilee. So the unity of all Christians around the Lord's Table is not an option, but something integral to the Christian message as such. The ground for this unity is God's will to save all people and make them his own people. The threat to this unity comes whenever Christians deny membership of God's people to those who do not do as they do. This is particularly likely to happen when we confuse with the gospel itself matters of Christian behaviour that are merely cultural traditions of our own, or things which were the means of grace to people in former generations but can be so no longer today. It follows that the price of unity may in fact be a certain principled intransigence leading on occasion to separation, so that, as Paul put it in writing to the Galatians, "the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you", ie. for those not present within the fellowship of the church.
3. This leads to a third conclusion that will have to be in the form of an open question. So long as the discussion is limited to ways in which churches in one country or culture must avoid exporting their own cultural baggage together with the gospel to the churches of other lands, there is today likely to be little dissent. Equally there is likely to be little dissent if we point the finger at denominations, including our own, that so exalt secondary convictions, whether relating to baptism or ordination, to the point where Table fellowship with other Christians is denied. But I want to ask a more disturbing question. If Paul, while acknowledging all the God-given benefit of the old covenant, could nevertheless conclude that a person does not need to become a Jew in order to be justified, in what sense does he today need to become a Christian? I

do not mean to deny the enduring truth of the gospel as God's holy word any more than Paul denied the enduring validity of the Law as the expression of God's holy will. But Paul denied the necessity of the **works** of the law. How about the works of Christianity, meaning by that not just its lifestyle or its rituals but even perhaps some of its culture-bound credal baggage as well? This is not a new problem. By the third century one of the Fathers was to say: He cannot have God for his Father, who will not have the Church for his Mother, which Augustine paraphrased more bluntly: **Salus extra ecclesiam non est** Do we not still at heart operate with the same assumption? Meanwhile millions of people remain "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12), not because there is anything wrong with the gospel (Rom 1:16), but because institutional Christianity seems such an alien and oppressive thing.

**Alastair Campbell.**

#### Footnotes

1. Ziesler, *Justification by Faith, Theology*, 1991, pp 188 - 194.
2. In an unpublished paper given at King's College, London, May 1991.

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# Overseas Mission in an Ecumenical Age

David Coffey recently participated in a Britain and Irish churches' visit to Mozambique. It was part of an initiative by the churches to embark on a fresh journey of understanding and challenge with the churches of Africa. David returned speaking of the desire of the African churches to enter into a "faith partnership" with churches here as a complement to the "aid partnership" now so evident.

This seems to me a useful summary of what mission overseas can be about today: a partnership in faith and aid.

The "aid partnership" is utterly necessary given the history of exploitation of Africa by the European powers, an exploitation which has brought sub-Saharan Africa to its present economic marginalisation. The problem with the "aid partnership" is that it tends to reinforce European feelings of self-sufficiency, or worse, African feelings of dependency. It is, however hard we try, an unequal partnership. And that is not Gospel.

## Faith Partnership

"Faith partnership", on the other hand can be quite different. For Africa (and the South generally) is rich in faith and spirituality, while Europe struggles. In a partnership of faith, as St Paul showed in his famous letters and as Desmond Tutu and Mother Theresa have shown on television, there is enormous scope for mutual challenge, inspiration and comfort.

Such partnership is essentially person-centred rather than project-based. It requires Gospel people to meet and communicate. It requires, in short, missionaries. Some of these missionaries will be "2-week" missionaries, as with these visit programmes. Some will be "2-month" missionaries, as with some short-term training exposures. Many will be "2-year" missionaries, entering into another place as servants of the church in some depth. And some (though fewer) will be "2-decade" missionaries, becoming virtually part of the other place, while still retaining lively links back home.

The last point is, of course, critical. For faith partnership to work, a missionary today must be a person who crosses frontiers both ways. She is essentially a cross-fertiliser, carrying the Gospel experience of her native people with her to elsewhere, listening, learning and serving there, then returning from time to time, carrying back home something of the Gospel experience of the other people.

This piece is headed "overseas" mission, but crossing frontiers is not the prerogative of those who cross oceans with the Gospel. There are cultural frontiers within Britain, and not only between England, Scotland and Wales! More significant today are the religious and racial frontiers within the cities of England. There are age barriers. And there is also the difficult-to-define frontier within our own "Western" culture and therefore within our very selves, a culture penetrating world-wide, yet apparently indifferent to the Gospel.

Those who travel as Gospel-bearers across these various divides (or through those open doors, as they sometimes are) are surely every bit as much missionaries in my book as those who fly inter-continentially.

## Foreign

As is well known, the 1990 Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches had as its theme "Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation". The report speaks of the need for

Christians to study again what the Bible says about our relationship with creation and drew attention to the then forthcoming Earth Summit held last year. It continues with this highly significant declaration:

“There is an urgent need today for a new type of mission, not into foreign lands, but into “foreign structures”. By this term we mean economic, social and political structures which do not all conform to Christian standards...The churches have to make a great and continuous effort in morally equipping their people for their missionary work in the foreign structures of our time”. (Report of section I).

I believe that this is a valid Gospel challenge, and is related to the difficulties within our culture. It requires new and creative energies, not least in the field of education for mission. A new missionary training is implied. And so new missionaries.

In this ecumenical age, as the church grows apace in the South of the world and places like San Salvador, Seoul and Pietermaritzburg become recognised as key centres of theological prowess, missionaries of all kinds will be coming here (Some are already here). They will come not only to minister to “ethnic minorities”, such as Koreans staying in Britain, or Hindus domiciled here, but to the British and the Western mind-set. But it will not be easy. The learning curve for everyone concerned will be increasingly steep.

## **Ecumenical**

The mission of Christ was, of course, from the start, ecumenical. Our Lord's vision was of people (or perhaps peoples) coming from East and West, North and South to enjoy table fellowship in the kingdom of God (Matthew 8:11, Luke 13:29). The church which arose quickly recognised the miracle of its own universality, and dared to believe that in Christ given for all, God was intent on gathering up all the broken pieces of humanity and making it whole (eg. Ephesians 1:10, Colossians 1:19,20). Moreover, these passages suggest the greatest imaginable ecumenism: the unifying of everything and everyone in Christ as one inter-dependent whole, the sense of which we are only just beginning to recover in the crisis of ecology today.

The gift and challenge of ecumenism have come afresh in our century. And at root they have been driven primarily by missionary experience. Contemporary ecumenism owes its inward drive to the evangelistic motive that was given institutional expression at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference in 1910. As is well-known, at that moment the Western churches and missionary agencies recognised three things: the whole of humanity was being thrown together willy-nilly by modern communications in an unprecedented way; the unifying Gospel of God's love could now be articulated everywhere; and the existing competition, distrust and disunity between Christian bodies was a serious obstacle to that articulation.

Accordingly, the thrust of missionary concern in the 20th century has been both to evangelise among every “unreached” people and at the same time to seek ways to unify Christians and their churches. According to this, in obedience to the Gospel, mission and unity obviously embrace each other.

As we approach the end of the 20th century, we see that much embracing has been going on. Great ecumenical and evangelistic movements and institutions are in place. Yet perhaps we are more aware of how far we refrain from embracing. On both mission and unity, there remain wide differences as to what is implied by each. So for some, based on Scripture, Mission = Proclamation to the Lost, and all else is but preparation for the hearing of the Gospel. For others, based on Scripture, Mission = Empowerment



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I have not met this problem and policies issued by the Company have no such exclusion. A Policy condition does state that all reasonable steps will be taken to safeguard the property, and we would expect doors and windows etc to be left secure. Break-in and theft causes inconvenience and distress; it is clearly in the interest of both insurer and client that sensible steps are taken like stopping the newspapers and asking a friend or neighbour to keep an eye on the house during a holiday absence. If the house is to be left for longer than the usual holiday - say over a month - we should be informed.

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M.E. Purver

of the Poor and all else is "religion". I caricature, of course, but the polarities obstinately remain. This is also true for the inter-church project, with some coalescing around the slogan "spiritual unity", and others "visible unity".

For my part, I am clear that the mission of God is prior to both projects of mission and unity. Both the missionary impulse and the urge for Christian unity derive from the divine mission of love revealed in Jesus Christ and energised by the Holy Spirit. Happily, there has been considerable convergence and dialogue going on, as instanced by the Ecumenical Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism by the World Council of Churches of 1982 or the 1989 "Manila Manifesto" of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation.

Perhaps it would be helpful to see mission and unity as the two feet of the missionary movement. At times, it is the foot of evangelistic zeal that must set the pace; at other times, it is the foot of unity in Christ that leads. The missionary movement proceeds with poise when it moves on both feet one after the other. Hopping about on one foot, however vigorously, only brings clumsiness and downfall!

### **Servants in Style**

The style of the missionary is all-important. At the 3rd Latin American Congress on Evangelisation which I attended in Quito last year, the plea from those on the receiving end of missionary work sponsored in the North was for an "incarnational" style. The strong desire was repeatedly expressed for the development of models of evangelisation free from the taint of five centuries of northern domination since Columbus. This was particularly sharply put by voices from indigenous Indian people of South America. Thus Fernando Quicana, speaking on the Gospel and the culture of the Andes, told of the way in which the missionaries had dismissed the insights of his people and imposed the divisiveness of denominations. Privatisation of property had broken up the sharing spirit of his people. Western technology was endangering stewardship of the natural world. What is more, there had been no recognition of either the aboriginal creation theology (Pachakamaq), or of the existence of basic moral codes governing families and wider groupings.

Evangelisation thus practiced, said Fernando, had resulted in the Indian people developing a low self-esteem, the mirror image of missionary projections of superiority. Such missionaries were characterised as "anti-septic", afraid to get their hands dirty. As someone else said, yesterday's Catholic sword of conquest had merely been replaced by today's Protestant computer of domination!

Over against this model, the Congress tended to pit the self-emptying model of Christ, the servant missionary of God, who became flesh in our flesh, inculturated in first century Palestine. Sidney Rooy of Argentina instanced Cornelius in Acts where, he suggested, the conversion of Cornelius to Christ required also the humbling conversion of Peter who was made to recognise the acceptability to Christ of the Roman *in his own culture*.

This suggests in turn the necessarily dialogical character of Christian missionary activity. Christ, I suggest, made the Gospel more a matter of conversation and storytelling than of proclamation. It is chiefly through the meeting of eyes and minds that we see Christ winning hearts and souls.

This "mission in Christ's way" respects the "selfhood" of the other. With John's Gospel, it assumes that the Word, as well as sin, is already at work in the lives of all people. It expects "theology" to be present in some form or other. So it is delighted, though not surprised, when the "foreign" culture already has inklings of Christ, already has some half pre-disposition to the Gospel, finding it fresh but strangely familiar.

Dialogue also implies that we ourselves will probably be further converted (like Peter) in the process.

## The End

As we approach the end of the Christian second millenium, we cannot dodge the question of eschatology or what salvation moves towards. In a short essay, I can do no more than suggest that here there are real decisions to be made. Marc Spindler of the Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research at Leiden, opines that some Christians tend towards the view that the kingdom of God "is not so much another name for the world to come; it is more or less the ideal image of a new world order which is to take shape on this earth". For others, the kingdom of God is other-worldly, coming from outside, rather than growing within, human history.

My point in raising this is that how you see God's future makes a huge difference to how you understand and undertake missionary activity. It colours your idea of salvation, and thus of what evangelisation is about. Back behind the difference is, of course, the old question of the character of Scripture. How far is the framework of the Bible story to be taken mythically, and how far literally? (I am trying to use neither adverb pejoratively). How far can we line up the "common sense" of our culture with the Biblical faith? These are, I submit, missionary questions. Which is why I am committed to the aims, if not to all the pre-suppositions, of The Gospel and Our Culture project associated with the name of Lesslie Newbigin, himself, of course, a seasoned missionary.

## Conversion

A recent issue of the *Missionary Herald* struck me as something of a *tour de force*. The linking of mission issues in Brazil, Mizoram and Nepal with those in Europe and Britain exemplified so much of what I wanted to say in this article.

This linkage (or faith partnership) is becoming much more commonplace. But it is still very exciting. Two excellent examples are before me. One is the booklet by Clodovis Boff OSM entitled "The Way Forward for the First World Church", first published in 1986 but still available from the Catholic Insitute for International Relations, 22 Coleman Fields, London N1 7AF. The other, hot off the press, is Margaret Hebblethwaite's "Basic is Beautiful" (Fount Paperback) in which she applies the experience of the Base Christian Communities to the missionary situation of local churches in Britain. I have myself compiled a bibliography of 're-reading' the Bible from the Churches of the South (available from CCBI Bookroom, 35-41 Lower Marsh, SE1 7RL).

Boff and Hebblethwaite both highlight the Catholic experience in Latin America. Let me close with a quote from the same sphere:

"Not only from a Christian point of view but simply from a human standpoint, changing a heart of stone into a heart of flesh, conversion, is a fundamental problem for the first world. And this is what the third world offers it as a possibility. Above all the third world portrays in its own flesh the existence of an immense sin, which brings slow or violent death to innocent human beings. And to express it in inescapable terms, it holds the power of conversion. Or, in another way if entire crucified continents do not have the strength to convert hearts of stone into hearts of flesh, we must ask ourselves, what can? And if nothing can, we must ask what kind of future awaits a First World built - consciously or unconsciously - upon the corpses of the human family. There can be no reason for living if we live this way.

(Jon Sobrino SJ of El Salvador, 1992)

**Donald Elliott**

# The Fellowship of Believers and the Status of Children

Does the Baptist doctrine of the Church throw light on Sunday School and similar organizations? This article is a rejoinder to the eleven reasons to abolish Sunday School presented by Stuart Jenkins<sup>1</sup>. The aim is not to produce a twelfth reason, but to make a basic theological point.

## Baptism and the Child

In denominations which accept infant baptism, Christian parents are expected to make a request for their infants to be baptized. The understanding given the parents is that children who have been baptized are in some sense different from those who are unbaptized. The effect of baptism on infants is variously understood by paedobaptists. In general, however, they hold that baptized infants are either members or quasi-members of the Church. On this view, the baptism of infants is the sign of their entrance into the Church. Paedobaptists hold that baptized children are in some sense Christians and members of the Church in a way in which unbaptized children are not<sup>2</sup>.

Sunday Schools were started towards the end of the eighteenth century by Robert Raikes and Hannah More. Both were paedobaptists, belonging to the Church of England<sup>3</sup>. Sunday Schools were founded on the paedobaptist understanding of children and the Church. They assume that the children attending have been baptized as infants, are already Christian in some sense, and therefore need to be taught how to grow in the Christian life. On this view it is perfectly acceptable to tell Sunday School children: "You should read the Bible in order to grow as Christians". This understanding of children and the Church is also built into the structure of Boys' Brigade Bible Class, Family Church, Junior Church and similar organizations. The assumption is that 1) the children who attend these organizations are already accepted by the Church as in some sense Christians and members of the Church and 2) that the organizations exist to help such children grow as Christians.

According to our Baptist understanding, the Church is the fellowship of those who believe in Christ. Every Christian is a personally-committed disciple of the Lord Jesus. The apostle Paul wrote, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). These words are the heartfelt cry of every Christian. The Church is the fellowship of such believers<sup>4</sup>.

For this reason we baptize believers only. Since baptism is the outward sign of membership of the Church, and since the Church is the fellowship of those who have a personal faith in Christ, we maintain that Christian Baptism is only for those who believe. Being born into a Christian family is not a sufficient qualification for being baptized, however committed the parents, and however Christian their concern for their child. Neither is being a member of a state which aims to promote the Christian religion, however Christian the laws and traditions of the state concerned. We ask the baptismal candidate alone, "Do you make profession of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ?" "I do", is the candidate's own answer. We inquire of the individual candidate, "Do you promise, in dependence on divine grace, to follow Christ, and to serve him for ever in the fellowship of his Church?" Again, the candidate in person responds, "I do". If the Church is the fellowship of believers, then Christian Baptism is the baptism of believers.

Baptists, therefore, disagree with paedobaptists on the doctrine of the Church and

the status of children in relation to the Church. For us, since Christian Baptism requires profession of faith by the candidate, the baptism of infants cannot be Christian Baptism. Baptizing an infant may well be an act carried out by Christians at the request of Christians. Paedobaptists may well believe in Christ. We do not un-church any fellowship of believers in Christ. To do so would be a contradiction of our own basic position. Where the fellowship of believers in Christ is found, whether or not they call themselves "Baptist", there is the Church of Jesus Christ. If we are to be true to this understanding of the Church, however, we must insist, in Christian love, that the baptism of infants is a sad misunderstanding of what faith in Christ is about. From our view of the Church, it follows that since infants cannot have a personal faith in Christ, infant baptism cannot be Christian Baptism. We disagree with paedobaptists when we affirm, "Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father the Son and the Holy Ghost, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who 'Died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day'<sup>5</sup>." For us, a child baptized as an infant, even if at the request of Christian parents, and even if baptized by a Christian, is no different from an unbaptized child. To us, infant baptism is an irrelevance. A child who has been baptized as an infant is no more a member of the Church than an unbaptized child. At this point, therefore, we disagree with the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church, and others.

### **What Shall We Do With the Children?**

What, then, does the Baptist view of the Church imply about Sunday Schools and similar organizations? It seems to me that here most Baptists have failed to appreciate the logic of their own position. One question arises in particular. We live in a society which shrinks from saying anything about children which might seem uncharitable. Even to consider the question may be a cultural shock to us. There is no escaping it, however: are the children in our Sunday Schools Christians? in other words, are Sunday School children in some sense believers in Christ and therefore members of the fellowship of believers, the Church? The answer is very straightforward. They are not. The children in our Sunday school, Family Church, Junior Church, Boys' Brigade Bible Class, etc, are non-believers. Their status is the same as that of any non-believer. They have not "professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ". They therefore do not belong to the fellowship of believers, the Church. They are not Christians.

We deceive ourselves if we object that the question is not answerable in this way because it is difficult in practice to draw the line between believers and nonbelievers. For, if someone asks to be baptized, the Church has to make a practical decision. Is the applicant a believer, or not? To say we could never decide would mean that we would baptize no-one as a believer. If we accept the applicant for Christian Baptism, we have concluded that he or she is a believer in Christ. In practice, the line is drawn, and the objection fails.

Nor is it a valid objection that if Sunday School is held on Sunday morning in conjunction with the worship of the Church, then the children of the Sunday School thereby have the special status of being part of the life of the Church. For one thing, the Church exists seven days a week, not only during worship on Sunday mornings. The life of the Church extends into the week-day world, and affects many children there who do not attend Sunday School and Sunday morning worship. Being part of the life of the Church, therefore, does not confer special status on the children who attend Sunday School and Sunday morning worship, but applies to many other children, for instance where there are Christian head teachers in state schools, Christian doctors and nurses

in the children's wards of hospitals, etc. For another thing, being part of the life of a group of people is not the same as being a member of that group. The fans at a football match are very much part of the life of their team. The fans attend regularly, observe, support, and even sing hymns, but this does not mean that they are members of the team. Similarly, a child may attend regularly, observe, support, and even sing hymns, in the Sunday morning worship of the Church, but this is not to say that such a child is a member of the Church. The child still has the status of a non-believer.

Therefore, since our Baptist view of the Church as the fellowship of believers implies that Sunday School children are not Christians and are not members of the Church, and since the structures of Sunday School imply that the children who attend must be treated as Christians, and are in some sense members of the Church, we must reject Sunday Schools as firmly as we reject infant baptism. How often have we heard it said to Sunday School children, "You must read the Bible to grow as Christians"? From the Baptist viewpoint, is not such an exhortation terrifyingly misleading? It assumes that children are Christians when they are not. What are these children going to do later in life when they are informed that they are not Christians after all, and need to repent and believe the good news? How can they be told such a thing? Instead of indicating in our Sunday worship that the children present are Christians insofar as they go along with the Church, we should tell them, "You are not Christians. You are non-believers. We hope that one day you will have the joy of becoming believers, but that day has not yet come for you". Do not children admire honesty, especially from adults? Sunday Schools and similar organizations are a denial of the Baptist doctrine of the Church as the fellowship of believers, and hinder young people from coming to personal faith in Christ and membership of the Church. For this reason, Sunday School, Family Church, Junior Church, Boys' Brigade Bible Class, and similar organizations, should be jettisoned.

Instead, we should be pouring our resources and prayers into the supreme task of the Church. This is not to build up "child-Christians" into adult Christians. The Church does not exist for Christians. It exists for non-Christians, non-believers, non-members, the unconverted, the lost, the unrepentant, those who are not "the brethren" or "the saints", in Paul's use of these words, those who are not "in Christ", not "sanctified in Christ Jesus", not "belonging to the Way". The Church exists for those who are not the Church. We need to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him who was and still is, the Friend of sinners and outcasts. We need to communicate the good news to them<sup>6</sup>. This is not primarily a matter of teaching, but of proclamation. It is not the imparting of facts, as a teacher does in Sunday School. It is introducing people to a Person. We desperately need to grasp the radical difference between teaching and proclamation. Perhaps our Sunday morning worship should not be ours, but should be theirs - an occasion for non-believers to receive the good news. In this case our "prime time" of the week would be set aside for proclamation to non-believers - a "Seeker Service". We might need a creche and a youth activities group led by trained youth workers, for children brought along during the "Seeker Service"<sup>7</sup>. The "Believers' Service" with Bible teaching might be held at a different time on Sunday. Whatever the detailed arrangements, however, the main point is that the structure of the organization we create should embody a clear distinction between non-believers and believers. Conversion from non-believer to believer should be celebrated by Christian Baptism.

The Baptist doctrine of the Church implies that Sunday Schools and similar organizations should be closed down. In their place we need an organizational structure which implies that we exist not for ourselves but for communicating the good news to non-believers. "The harvest is abundant but the workers are few. Therefore appeal to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest". (Luke 10:2).

**Brian Wilson**

## Footnotes

1. Stuart Jenkins: "Eleven Reasons to Abolish Sunday School", in the *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, volume 241, January 1993.
2. See entry on "Baptism" in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, OUP 1958
3. See entries on "Sunday Schools", "Robert Raikes", "Hannah More", in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*.
4. See A.C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* London, 1947, PP 41-42.
5. *Constitution of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland*, 111 (2)
6. See Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics* Vol III, London, 1962, p 288.
7. See David Dewey, *Churching the Unchurched*, in *Baptist Times*, May 14 1992.

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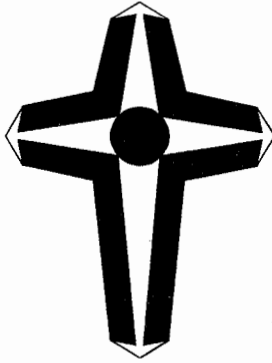
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# Book Reviews

## ***Permission To Be* by Eric Blakebrough (DLT, 1992, 142pp, £6.95)**

In this splendid little book we see a respected colleague wrestling with real issues in contemporary Christian life and ministry with an honesty which is all too rare among us. Here we are allowed to glimpse the depth of spirituality which underlies the mission of the Kaleidoscope Project which Eric has described elsewhere (*No Quick fix*, Marshall Pickering).

The book is easy to read and, although it emerges out of a unique situation, yet I suspect it will find many echoes in the minds of others who minister in widely varying circumstances. It is a book which cries out to be quoted but let me highlight one comment:

“There are too many general purposes churches and all-purpose buildings. Such generalized ministries are often evidence that a congregation has not taken seriously their particular situation or opportunity.” pp39-40

In other words, we have an exercise in contextualization, not simply a contextualization of mission, but of the spiritual life from which all mission must stem.

In several short, pithy chapters the foundations of Christian life in Scripture, worship, sacraments and personal spirituality, are brought into constructive engagement with the realities of life in contemporary Britain. Like others with deep evangelical roots, Eric has discovered fresh winds of the Spirit in the wider experience of the people of God in other Christian traditions, and all of this is forged into an outline of “extrovert spirituality”, that is a spirituality which is relevant to the needs of the real world.

This will necessarily mean the acceptance of a diversity and plurality which Baptists, like others, have seldom found easy. But without it the rich variety of the Kingdom of God will be lost in narrow and self-serving obsession with ourselves as Church. It would be good to see this developed more fully, perhaps retirement may afford the opportunity?

**Nick Wood**

## ***The Truth in Tradition* by Keith W Clements, Rupert E Davies and David M Thompson (Epworth, 1992, 96pp, £6.50)**

For generations it was assumed that authority was derived from scripture alone by the Free Churches. They have always found unacceptable the claim of episcopal churches that authority depends on scripture and tradition and that they alone have faithfully safeguarded authentic tradition.

This book states that all churches cherish truths and customs handed down from the past. Then why have the Free Churches been so silent about the place of tradition in their understanding of Gospel truth?

Keith Clements gives a Baptist view. He sets out the scriptural basis for Baptist principles and raises questions by no means all comfortable for us. The range of issues he covers is wide, including the 4th World Conference on Faith and Order (1963), Vatican II, South African black and white theologies, William Carey's missiology, and feminist theology. I appreciated his warning against claiming finality for tradition or absolutism for scripture, because biblical faith is futuristic, and the church must move forward with the living Christ and the Holy Spirit in the context of mission.

Rupert Davies expounds a Methodist view. He gives an informative account of Methodist doctrine and practice, drawing heavily on John Wesley and the 1920s Deed of Union, and casting doubt on too sharp a distinction between Scripture and tradition.

David Thompson offers a Reformed view, illustrating how the varying emphases of Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and the Churches of Christ merged in the United

Reformed Church. Maintaining that the church is obliged constantly to reinterpret the biblical message, he affirms the value of ecumenical dialogue, since no tradition by itself has the breadth or resources to enable it to progress on its own.

This book demands careful reading and hard thinking. It challenges convictions too easily held. It raises issues which need translating into our worship, preaching, mission, church organisations, and ecumenical partnership.

**Bernard Green**

***The Christlike God* by John V Taylor (SCM Press, 1992, 316pp, £9.95)**

This book is the long awaited sequel to *The Go-Between God* and draws on its author's lifetime of theological reflection, spirituality, and pastoral experience. Its title is inspired by the words of the late Michael Ramsay, "God is Christlike and in him is no un-Christlikeness at all", and invites us to reflect deeply on our human experience of God and its implications for prayer and action.

The central thesis of the book is that Jesus is the true reflection in a human life of the being of God, which is characterised by vulnerability, suffering and the love that persuades and 'lets be' rather than the power that coerces. Taylor covers a broad theological area in a remarkably concise way and yet in prose that is a delight to read and almost borders on the lyrical at times.

For anyone up to date with recent theological trends in reflecting on the being of God there is little here that is startlingly new. The creativity of the book is in the way in which Taylor has drawn various strands of human experience and doctrinal reflection together, and for the flashes of insight which illuminates his argument. He moves from general religious experience of God to explore Classical views of deity, and later in the book illustrates how some of these have adversely affected the Christian understanding and often prevented a more dynamic, biblical and Christ-like God from emerging.

Taylor traces this Christ-like God through the pages of the Old Testament, which leads on naturally to chapters on creation and providence. Interestingly, Taylor does believe in a "special providence" in terms of God "contributing to the network of influences that condition our actions" to bring new and creative possibilities in partnership with us. However, in rejecting crude interventionism, Taylor does not seem to allow for the inexplicable and discontinuous miracle event to take place in this context.

Taylor goes on to explore the possibilities of reflecting the mutual indwelling of the Christ-like God in our relationships with one another, and the book concludes with a moving call to the life of prayer as the most effective way of confronting the powers and ambiguities of a complex world.

**Tony Peck**

***An Easier Yoke? A Perspective on Christian Ministry* by Trevor Rowe (Epworth, 1992, 128pp, £7.50)**

*An Easier Yoke* is a reflection on Christian ministry, particularly, though not exclusively, ordained ministry. It comes from the pen of Trevor Rowe, a Methodist minister who has held Circuit and Divisional Appointments.

His starting point is the high calling given to all Christians to be perfect (Matthew 5:46). How do we live creatively with such a calling, which can, at worst, be burdensome and guilt inducing? In particular, how do ordained ministers live with their calling?

Rowe sees ordained ministers as having particular difficulties to face. These include the conflicting demands made by different groups in the church, financial pressures, and the need to balance home with professional life. Whilst Rowe refers to these and many other problems, he does not pursue any of them in depth. This makes the book at times

a rather irritating read. Similarly irritating is the emphasis on the difficulties of ministry with little said about its joys; a comment I hold to even though the claim is made in the book that its "fundamental perspective is that Christian ministry is a blessing not a burden" (p113). A chapter on grace and appropriate self-love makes our difficulties easier to live with!

The last chapter ("Balance and Blessing") I found more useful. Here Rowe argues for a proper balance in ministry between such things as "evangelism and kingdom-issues....satisfying worship, thoughtful preaching and good pastoral care" (p106). In particular, he is concerned that "ministers...should take the idea of balance between theology and pastoral care and find ways of expressing it in their own situation" (p106). He calls this balance "thoughtfulness in ministry" and exhorts ministers to engage in theological thinking about modern problems, following, however inadequately, the example of such as St Augustine and Thomas Merton. In being thoughtful and theological about what we do, argues Rowe, is the key to achieving a proper balance which will make ministry an easier yoke. This is certainly a plea worth hearing and worthy of consideration.

**Stephen Heap**

### ***Journey Towards Holiness* by Alan Kreider (Marshall Pickering, 1986, 252pp, £4.95)**

Alan Kreider is presently Theologian in Residence at the Northern Baptist College. Earlier, Alan was based at the London Mennonite Centre, where he had responsibility for the teaching programme called "Cross- Currents".

His book is a call to radical Christian living. Use the word 'lifestyle', however, and it can make some people run away screaming, or wracked with guilt. Kreider does neither because his book is both strongly biblical and very readable. At times you might wish he was wrong, but you know deep down he is not.

The problem is that many of us know we are not Christian enough. The veneer is there, but the way we live as individuals, and as a community, is not so very different from those around us who do not worship in church. It is here that the book helps us. Holiness for Kreider calls us to worship God, and then encourages us to live prophetic lives in our communities. He tackles the tough political issues: disarmament, enemy loving, and writes:

"...at a time when our world is spending more on armaments than the entire income of the poorer half of humanity, it isn't enemy loving that sounds absurd".

Those who are converted among us can be told of the lifestyle we think appropriate, we talk much of the personal areas where we rightly need to make victories and grow in grace, and can spend precious little time on the wider crucial areas of living as the people of God in an unjust world.

"How unfair to Jesus, and how dangerous for the whole world, when we see nothing more in Christ-likeness than an attitude that is sweet, strong, and free from alcohol and politics".

The book looks at the span of history covered by the Bible. Imagining we are in a balloon, sometimes soaring high to get the wide view, and sometimes lower down to focus sharply on one event. The Israelites and their use of Jubilee, the risky living in the wilderness where Kreider talks about the two 'manna principles' of sufficiency and equality, 'and the loss of holiness with the coming of the monarchy,' all speak powerfully to us today.

He moves on to 'Jesus - the Holy One':

"One can understand why his contemporaries were attracted to Jesus. Even today,

communicated by the written word, he looks at us and addresses us individually, challenging us to use our imaginations and enter new depths that we previously had hardly known were there”.

But how do we begin? Kreider says we must be open to change; willing to keep on changing; committed to the long journey; and not to travel alone, but to share with others and see what is appropriate for us as a family, or community.

This is a deeply challenging and exciting read, and I would put it very high on the list of books that have proved to be life-changing, so you have been warned.

**David Hoskins**

***Finding Faith Today, How Does It Happen?* by John Finney  
(The Bible Society, 1992, 128pp, £6.95)**

For those who appreciate objective reporting from statistics, on a subject close to a minister's heart, this is a book for you.

The analysis is based on the response of 511 people, new to faith, who completed the comprehensive 22 page questionnaires. The survey sought to research “the spiritual journeys by which people are finding faith in God through Christ at the present” and “to draw conclusions from this research on the comparative merits of different evangelistic methods”.

The 11 chapters cover substantial ground and reveal that the greatest evangelistic tool still at our disposal is personal contact through friendships and relationships. The personal invitation to come to church is evidently still a great motivating factor for many people finding faith, although on average faith takes some four years to find.

On reading the first section of the book, ministers may well be asking the question, “What is my part in all this?” Chapter 5 has the answer, and a very encouraging chapter it is too. “17% said that the minister was the main factor for them becoming a Christian...43% said that he or she was an important supporting factor.” Furthermore, “One of the surprises of the survey is the importance of the personal ministry of the clergy in evangelizing”.

Family situations and roots in the church continue to have some part to play in matters of faith, as do youth organisations. Evangelistic events and rallies have also their part to play, and the findings in this area make interesting reading.

All in all, a readable and stimulating book, which encourages one to think again about methods of evangelism, as many preconceptions are challenged.

**Mick Standbridge**

***Bridge Building: Effective Christian Apologetics* by Alister McGrath  
(IVP, 1992, 288pp, £6.95)**

Apologetic, as a basic element in evangelism, is being re-discovered after many years of neglect. Traditionally perceived as a dry and dusty domain for academics and theological students, its heavy tomes have been intimidating to most people, majoring on the rationality of Christian claims to truth and relying heavily upon the Western philosophical tradition.

But over against this, McGrath believes that apologetics are vital, providing the necessary intellectual integrity and depth to evangelism, undergirding emotional response, and creating an intellectual and imaginative climate for Christian nurture.

He believes it is necessary, in a highly secularised society, for the marginalised

Church to build bridges, recognising that the debating ground has moved from the literary arena to the market-place of ideas: T.V., press, pub and home. Moreover, those outside the faith are not addressed by the arguments of traditional apologetics. Therefore (as recognised in programmes such as AIM and ROOTS), their reasons for staying uncommitted must be identified and effectively addressed.

The author's purpose is to recast apologetics with today's needs and opportunities in mind, doing so with gentleness and respect. We need to know not only Scripture but the questions people are asking. He includes such areas as: the nature of faith, limitations of apologetics, misunderstandings, suffering, religious pluralism, sin and salvation, scientific materialism, feminism and the New Age, concluding with a most practical discussion of "Apologetics in action; from textbook to real life".

One of today's ablest communicators, McGrath has the rare ability to be at once scholarly and intelligible; he has a keen pastoral awareness. Here there is much illumination on modern thought, provoking the mind and stimulating the reader to put what he or she has learnt into practice. Michael Green has described it as "a brilliant book"; a veritable treasure store of much needed practical help for every kind of Christian worker. It cannot be too highly recommended.

**Anthony R. Cross**

### ***Journeys into Faith***

This is a new resource for Christians involved in evangelism. Following the influential research report *Finding Faith Today* - which outlined how and why people became Christians - this new material analyses the report's key findings and then goes on to suggest ways of using this information in day-to-day evangelism and mission.

Written by John Young, a York Diocesan Evangelist and a member of the General Synod, the A4 62 page book also includes questions, checklists and suggestions. It is fully photocopiable, so each church need buy only one copy. It is priced at £8.95 and is published by the Bible Society.

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