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# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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# Editorial

Rarely has a book provided so much food for thought as Adrian Hastings' *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1990*. It clearly illustrates the cyclical nature of the Church's life and, more alarmingly, how closely that life shadows the current mood in society. So the radical twenties mirrors the radical sixties and the conservative fifties the conservative eighties. It seems we cannot step outside our social conditioning, which begs the obvious question, how does this relate to the Holy Spirit?

Within his book, Professor Hastings puts his finger deftly upon a number of key issues likely to affect the future health of the Church, indeed its very survival. One is that of theological reflection: "It is no refutation of their work (Nineham, Hick, Cupitt) to say that there is simply no future for a Church which can produce no reasoned expression of its faith stronger than what the dominant theologians of the seventies were able to muster. Maybe there is none. In which case the Church will certainly shrivel rapidly enough, which is, of course, what many an unbeliever expects to be the case".

But how is theological thought to be expressed and conveyed? The reaction to the pronouncements of the out-going Bishop of Durham has indicated that talk of *myth* and *symbol* and *metaphor* is met with apparent incomprehension in the pew (Does this reflect a loss of nerve on the part of the pulpit?). And there has always been in England an aversion to theology anyway. So is there any way left of presenting Christianity meaningfully?

One strong contender is currently *the gospel as story* and a moving away from propositional statements, so beloved of the Church since Paul. That which Mark and his imitators eventually found to be necessary, telling the story, is precisely the theme of the moment. A guest writer, Simon Reynolds, shares his enthusiasm for this approach and how we, as pastors, might use *story* to enhance the effectiveness of our proclamation.

From time to time we include an article written to the title *A Personal Pilgrimage*. On this occasion Ray Vincent shares his experience of the years and what they have yielded of Christ, ending on a note of great reaffirmation. Following this, Larry Kreitzer offers some material suitable for Bible study, drawing an interesting parallel between Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and the eighties' film *The Mission*. Lastly, growing anxiety about ministerial casualties prompts Philip Clements-Jewery to offer some constructive and strength-bearing proposals for continuous appraisal and support.

# Once Upon A Time: The Gospel as Story

These are interesting times for theologians, pastors and psychologists. Our *Lingua Franca* has changed. Systematic argument is out; bed-time stories, reminiscence in the pub, and tales about the "one that got away" are in. Whether we seek to articulate faith in contemporary society, or attempt to discover something about our human origins and motivations, "Telling my story" is *de rigueur* in many human activities.

## Telling a Story Today

Psychologists and pastoral counsellors tell us that, when something is deeply wrong with us, it is helpful to take a trip down memory lane, to tell the story of our life's journey as a way of facing what we might have forgotten - or even swept under the carpet - in order to find healing and renewal. When we join a church activity for the first time or attend a conference, it is largely assumed that, before we can forge credible relationships with others, there must be some sharing of our personal history. Commerce and industry, as it interviews prospective employees, now gives almost as much emphasis to personal awareness and the ability to articulate personal experience as it does to any record of past employment and qualifications.

Human experience is rooted in events and places, and the process of recounting those events, along with the places where they happened, enables us to perceive their significance, to get a grip on the deeper reality which lies behind them, and the reason for their occurrence. From the very beginning, human beings have "told stories" as a way of articulating experience, explaining our environment, or giving verbal expression to divine activity. It's no accident, therefore, that the Bible, Christian credal formulae, and the liturgy are all characterized by narrative forms. And, in an age when society's mode of communication is concrete rather than conceptual, the Church is beginning to realise the value of stories as a vehicle for communicating faith to a secular society. This has significant bearing upon the way we understand the Gospel as literature and *kerygma*, the manner in which we use it in mission, and its place in the growth and nurture of the gathered, worshipping congregation.

## Using the Tools of the Trade

The Enlightenment brought the tools of biblical criticism on to the open market, as well as creating the possibility for new implements to be added to the range already on offer if - and when - the advances of science and society required their use. The resulting merchandise has long been resident in the theological garden shed; but the frequency with which each tool has been used varies greatly according to the environmental conditions of the time. We have long worked with the redaction rake and the source spade; but only begun to get to grips with the nuts and bolts of narrative and learn something of its many uses.

The essence of narrative criticism has long been used by other literary disciplines. Put simply, it is a way of demonstrating the unity of a literary work, as well as the potential impact that the content and arrangement of the material has upon the reader. It is the antithesis of much inherited biblical criticism, where a primary

emphasis is given to historical sources, the desire to establish the theological position of the author, or the scrutiny of *pericopii* as a means of establishing the "message". A whistle-stop tour of the Marcan gospel may help to demonstrate this difference.

### Telling it Mark's Way

As John Fenton<sup>1</sup> has noted, Mark wrote as an evangelist, not as an historian. As such, he was primarily interested in telling the story of "Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mk 1:1), rather than simply being the editor of the most reliable sources about the life of Jesus, and arranging them in chronological sequence. Character analysis (particularly of the disciples), repetition, suspense, a varied pace and the deliberate placing of people and events in the development of the narrative are Mark's stock in trade. The first part of the Gospel moves rapidly through a scene with the Baptist, and on to a series of callings, healings and teachings. Yet, amid such speed, Mark comments on features that are of no historic interest, but which give vitality to the narrative: a cushion in the stern of the boat (Mk 4:38); the colour of the grass (Mk 6:39); Jesus' indignance (Mk 10:14), as well as the mention of "evil spirits" eight times in the first chapter. The two accounts of the feeding of the multitudes (Mk 6:30-44; 8:1-13), for example, serve to illustrate something of the developing attitude of Jesus and his disciples, rather than to raise questions about the dating and source of each version of the incident.

The focus of the narrative changes on arrival at Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:27). With a new location comes new additions to the vocabulary, different emphases in Jesus' teaching, all designed to alert the reader that a major corner has been turned. For example, Jesus is called "Christ" for the first time (Mk 8:29); Peter is not affirmed for his flash of theological insight but told to be secretive (Mk 8:30) and Jesus' impending death is signalled for the first time (Mk 8:31). Even the account of the Transfiguration (Mk 9:2-13) is used as a "trailer" (and notice the description of Jesus' clothes in v3: what a pity that there were no washing powder advertisements in those days!)

A new destination brings further developments in the plot: "They were on their way up to Jerusalem" (Mk 10:32). The misunderstanding among the disciples increases and Jesus becomes more preoccupied with secrecy. After the triumphal entry into the city, you can feel the increasing pressure in the narrative, helped by the position of the cleansing of the Temple (Mk 11:12-19). The thrust of Jesus' teaching is now centred upon self-loss and humiliation, rather than the healing and deliverance which characterized the earlier chapters, and an eschatological note is introduced for the first time (Mk 12:18-27, 13:1-37). When the trial gets under way, the deliberate characterization of the narrative is most revealing, when the disciples turn from being simply ignorant men into fearful men who all take flight, and Jesus is left to go it alone. We are not given any psychological insights into Jesus' loneliness (apart from the typically brief mention of the agony in the garden) because it was not Mark's purpose to tell what anyone "felt": it was *who* and *what* they did that mattered most.

The climax comes sixteen verses before the end, with the phrase "Son of God" which is carefully placed (and spoken, interestingly, by a Gentile) to describe the dead Jesus as he hangs on the cross. The fulfilment of the announced intention of the gospel (Mk 1:1) is heralded by the subtle use of vocabulary and characterisation. The aftermath events, which bring the Gospel to its breathless conclusion, return

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the reader to the feeling of confusion, misunderstanding and suspense (Mark 16:8).

If Mark had written as an historian, his account of the resurrection might have been different as he sought to provide the most reliable historical source; incidents may have appeared in a different sequence in order to reflect a historical chronology. But that would have frustrated his task as an evangelist. He simply wanted to tell a story to demonstrate who was Son of God, what that ultimately involved, and to *share* that truth in as engaging a way as possible with his audience.

Such a brief tour of the gospel has inevitably left gaps, but it may illustrate the narrative form of the gospel, along with the *emphases* of narrative criticism. The principles could equally be employed on any narrative form in the Bible.

### **Story-telling as Evangelism**

Understanding the gospel as story has consequences for the manner in which it is used by the local church. As mentioned already, contemporary society's mode of communication is based on experience rather than theory. Tabloid styles of journalism are giving more *detail* the competition for "good stories" in the news industry is cut-throat; the public has become accustomed to hearing more stories and more details, where political and ethical emphases are subtly woven into the "facts". Against this background is a realisation, particularly in some areas of the human sciences, that stories are basic to human experience, with their complex mixture of physical placement, relationships, emotions, etc. We relate to the world and each other in terms of what we experience *now*, what we have experienced in the past (memory), and what we expect to happen in the future.

Such a context provides a focus for the *genres* of the Bible, Christian doctrine, and worship to connect with current modes of human exchange. Christianity is an historical religion: its past practice has a direct bearing upon what we proclaim and believe, today. Yet, as Gordon Wakefield<sup>2</sup> has noted, many "new Christians" come into the Church, with little sense of the struggles, controversies and joys that have made it (locally, historically, and globally) what it is, today. The importance placed upon the personal story of conversion needs to be balanced with an over-arching sense of the corporate tradition, particularly in a culture that is deeply suspicious of "history", if a fully synoptic vision of what it means to belong to the Church is to be achieved. Archbishop Michael Ramsey<sup>3</sup> diagnosed such a need nearly twenty-five years ago:

*However contemporary we may try to be, our authority rests upon an old, old story...amidst a generation for whom the sense of the past is very faint.*

### **Stories in the Street and the Sitting Room**

Narrative theology, with its concern for vocabulary, characterisation, sequence and timing, has a positive contribution to make in the day-to-day struggle of all Christians who want to tell the "old, old story" in their particular context.

Christianity is littered with metaphors and symbols which no longer communicate with a society for whom the customs of the Ancient Near East are totally alien. Although we live in an age when blood sacrifice is no longer part of the (public or legal) landscape, and where public execution has all but gone, we still come face to face with vivid images of violence and destruction on our television screens. A rigorous attention to vocabulary, of using language to formulate *contemporary* metaphors which appeal to the imagination and the senses, could bring a fresh

perspective to the story-telling process. The vivid use of the Jewish Holocaust, and its place in post-war German consciousness, by Jurgen Moltmann<sup>4</sup> in his work on the atonement, is one example of the way in which Christian truth can be communicated afresh by re-interpreting and distilling the vocabulary and images of an unfamiliar culture. He also uses the piercing, double-sided experience of parental bereavement and orphaned children as metaphors for a *Trinitarian* understanding of the Cross.

In a similar way, members of churches should be given every encouragement to find language which arises out of their *own experience* of faith. Too often, Christians have used language, culled from the Bible or church tradition, without any attempt to root it in contemporary events and experience. "I have been washed in the blood of the lamb" may express something about the core message of the New Testament, but it fails to connect with the cultural and social values of those for whom the shape of Scripture or the symbols of biblical language are alien. If, however, we can acknowledge the value of finding a new and subtle language to tell the story of God working in *our* lives, the "old, old story" can become a "new story" if others can begin to see it working in my life, and can see the potential for it to take root in their lives.<sup>5</sup>

The activities which fall under the umbrella of pastoral care involve people in the ordinary process of talking and listening. The regular round of "visiting" undertaken by ministers, the requests for counselling, as well as the occasional caller, all call for a narrative mode of communication. Few of us are ever likely to describe our personal or spiritual anxieties in conceptual terms; rather, we instinctively opt for concrete, experiential vocabulary, articulated as a story. The task of the minister is to listen to the individual's story, to discern the wounds and injuries, as well as the areas of recovery and growth, and demonstrate how that experience is part of the on-going story of the redeeming love of God.

## Telling the Story in Church

Finding the right words is only part of the process. Actions, symbols and values tell a story just as effectively as words - particularly in a society that has become distrustful of words that are not supported by actions. The Gospel *kerygma* needs to find expression in the worship and service of the gathered Christian community. Here, a varied group of human beings, some of whom are fulfilled in their life and work, and others who have been battered and bruised by it, come with their shared and individual stories, and seek to discover how *their* story can connect with the story of God's love. Through the proclamation of the Word and pastoral ministration, the gathered Church is in the business of loving people into wholeness and guiding them along the road towards the kingdom of God.

How this happens in detail depends upon where you are placed, for, as Neville Clark<sup>6</sup> has reminded us, where *context* changes *text* changes too. A few pointers (along with a worked-out example) may act as a springboard for local discussion:

1. The choice of Scripture readings in worship can often be crucial in enabling worshippers to make the connection between their story and the story of the Bible. This is often helped by the use of a lectionary - though it is important to use the right one! The Joint Liturgical Group's two-year *Lectionary*, with its heavy emphasis on themes, provides a selection of disjointed which are heavily didactic and conceptual. The recently published three-year *Revised Common Lectionary*, by contrast, seeks to provide more readings from narrative literature, and provides the Gospel

reading<sup>7</sup> from one Synoptic Gospel each year. This enables worshippers to engage with the development of the gospel narrative, and to link this to the Christian year.

2. Worshippers need to know *what* they are actually listening to when Scripture is being read, and to develop a “discriminate” sense of hearing. It is unhelpful to listen to narrative in the same way that we listen to apocalyptic, or to listen to an epistle in the way we might listen to poetry. Many worshippers, however, listen to Scripture with one “set of ears”, and assume that, because it’s the Bible, there is a uniform message and a uniform mode of communication, without taking account of the symbols, metaphors or literary devices. Adding the phrase, “This is the word of the Lord” to the end of readings often does much to further this misunderstanding.<sup>8</sup> A more helpful step might be to preface the reading with a brief introductory synopsis; or to say, “Listen to the word of God in this reading from...” which at least puts some responsibility on the listener!

3. The public reading of Scripture seems to be undertaken all too lightly at the moment. If a congregation needs to know what it is listening to, then the reader must help by sounding the right note. It is no help to read a piece of narrative as if it were a chapter of the book of Proverbs! Yet many people (lay and ordained) adopt a uniform tone which destroys any impact upon a listening congregation. There’s no reason why a piece of narrative shouldn’t be treated just like a bed-time story (within reason!), or poetry shouldn’t be read as if it were Eliot’s *Journey of the Magi* being given its annual airing in the school carol service.

4. Preaching has the greatest potential when it comes to “telling a story”. The narrative forms of the Bible provide an ideal blueprint for the crafting and delivery of a sermon by their use of language and metaphor, sense of pace, and the devices used to draw an audience into the plot. Some of the most penetrating sermons I have heard were those in which I felt as if I was being taken on a journey, or discovering something about the text coming alive in a community or another person’s life, and being invited to get involved myself. The use of imagery which stimulates the imagination, picture language, stories from real life which give the biblical narrative an immediate, contemporary parallel, all contribute to the process.

5. The narrative style of the liturgy can become a powerful tool for communication, growth and mission. The Lord’s Supper tells a story by use of words, symbols and actions, and has a deep historical perspective which can help to articulate the relationship between the past, present and future, between heaven and earth. It carries with it, too, values about the nature of community and relationships. Baptism is characterized by the connection of stories (Scripture and testimony) and by dramatic action. The visual and *aural* effect of a baptismal candidate being immersed into deep water and emerging again, for example, has the power to articulate going down into death and rising with Christ far more sharply than words ever can. It might also be helpful if baptismal candidates were encouraged to explore the narrative forms of the Bible as a new, creative approach to the giving of testimonies.

### **And They All Lived..**

The current pace at which narrative approaches to the Bible are developing, and the increasing scope for their various applications, leaves me reluctant to provide a conclusion to what has been little more than a scant introduction. The next suitable port of call might be two small volumes by Gerd Theissen: first *The Shadow of the Galilean* (SCM Press, 1987), is an engaging search for the historical Jesus

in narrative form; the second *The Open Door*, is a collection of sermons which demonstrate how narrative forms can be used in preaching (the one for Christmas is exquisite!).

Simon Reynolds

### Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> John Fenton: *The Passion Narrative in St Mark's Gospel in The Reality of God: Essays in honour of Tom Baker, Dean of Worcester, 1975-1986*, ed James Butterworth (Severn House, 1986)
- <sup>2</sup> Gordon Wakefield, "The Church: Community of remembrance, forgetfulness and hope" in *The Methodist Recorder* (4 November 1993)
- <sup>3</sup> Michael Ramsey: *The Christian Priest Today* (SPCK, 1972)
- <sup>4</sup> Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, (SCM Press, 1979)<sup>5</sup> The research undertaken by John Finney in *Finding Faith Today* (Bible Society, 1993), provides much invaluable information about the circumstances and modes by which people come to Christian faith. A companion resource, *Journeys into Faith*, by John Young, is also published by the Bible Society.
- <sup>6</sup> Neville Clark, *Preaching in Context* (Kevin Mayhew, 1991)
- <sup>7</sup> *The Revised Common Lectionary*, ICET, (published in the UK by the Canterbury Press, Norwich, 1993). Over a three-year cycle, this lectionary broadly appoints a Synoptic evangelist to each year (Matthew for year 1; Mark for year 2; Luke for year 3) with excerpts from the Fourth Gospel used to punctuate the year at festivals (eg. the post-resurrection appearances on the Sundays after Easter in some years)
- <sup>8</sup> Tom Baker offers a most helpful critique of this practice (along with some useful observations about lectionaries) in "This is the Word of the Lord" in *Theology* (SPCK, May/June 1990)

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# A Personal Pilgrimage

The “rock from which I was hewn” was in the valleys of South Wales. We Welsh people- especially when we no longer live there! - have an awful tendency to romanticise the chapel life of the valleys, so I will try to be honest for a change! The chapels were well past their heyday by the time I came into the world. There were still some great preachers around, and some wonderful hymn-singing, but the days when “you had to come early to get a seat” were something my grandparents’ generation talked about. I grew up in a tradition that was dying. Nevertheless, it was a glorious tradition, and even the tail end of it has enriched me beyond measure. There was a warmth about it that helps me now in relating to some of the Caribbean churches in London. It was a strongly working-class church life, with deacons who worked in the mines and ministers whose background was the same. The feeling so prevalent today that “the churches are middle-class” would never have occurred to me in my youth.

When religion is so important to the community, the other side of the coin is that all the faults of the community come into the life of the church. As my family was very active in the church, I probably grew up with more of the “inside story” than most children. However that may be, I certainly got the impression that the church was riddled with quarrels, under-currents, family rivalry, hypocrisy and, from time to time, out-and-out scandal. And still I was called to the ministry!

“And still” is probably not the right expression. As a student at Regent’s Park College, I was surprised to find how many of my fellow-students came from small and sometimes unhappy churches, and how few of them came from really “good” churches. In fact, of course, there is a natural explanation. In a very large church everything is properly organised by highly qualified people, and the ordinary member can sit back and let it happen. In a small church everyone is needed, and if you have any ability or enthusiasm at all, you are trained for ministry from an early age. The same is true of churches with problems. In an unhappy church, a sensitive young person may come to feel more intensely than ever the gap between what the church is and what it is really *meant* to be, and out of this can grow a strong sense of call to help close that gap.

## Commitment in My Own Way

The Welsh chapel tradition was biblical and evangelical, even fundamentalist in a way, but Conservative Evangelical theology of a clear-cut, militant kind was not a natural part of it. I was first exposed to this kind of Christianity in my teenage years, first through a local campaign organised by some students, then by the nationwide impact of Billy Graham’s first Crusades in Britain. I was dragged along to evangelistic meetings, but I never once “went forward” or had the experience of “being saved”. I had an awful dread that unless I had this magic experience I could die and go to hell at any moment, but I still had enough doubt to hold me back. The anguish I suffered through all this at a very vulnerable age has given me a life-long distaste for this kind of evangelism.

At the age of 17 I did come to a firm, joyful faith of my own, but through different means altogether. The major influences were the poetry of Robert Browning, and especially G.K. Chesterton’s interpretation of it, which made me see that there was another, more real and very exciting way of looking at such things as the

Incarnation and justification by faith. Then I read a little book by Bruce Barton, an American journalist, called "The Man Nobody Knows", and was drawn to this new version of Jesus as a real, dynamic human being. The film "Quo Vadis" fired me with a sense of the radical message of the Kingdom of God. It was things like this - not preaching or campaigns - that got me really started on the Christian pilgrimage.

As time went on I of course acquired a fuller, more balanced view of the Christian faith, first through reading C.S. Lewis, and then through ministerial training at Regent's Park College. The Bible-centred nature of the Oxford theology degree, the discipline of sermon class with its constant exhortation to "expound the text in its context", and the enthusiasm of Henton Davies's dramatic bringing to life of the Old Testament, taught me a love of the Bible that embraces every part of it - yes, even the genealogies! - and which has been the major framework of my preaching ministry ever since.

### **Disturbances**

Towards the end of my college days the complacency of my "theological position" - non-fundamentalist but biblical and evangelical - was severely shaken, again through a secular experience. I spent a year studying in Germany, at the University of Göttingen. This was a part of my career which was academically a disaster, but in terms of life experience and the shaping of my ministry very significant. From the very pleasant but rather over-protected environment of a theological college, I was suddenly thrown out into a secular student hostel with no religious tradition and none of the culture of mutual pastoral care which I had taken for granted for the past few years. I learned how brutal life can be outside the Christian fellowship, where we are at least polite to each other and try to be kind! Yet at the same time I made friends with some very nice people who had no particular faith, or interest in any faith. This was new to me, and the question "What have these people *not* got that Jesus Christ can give them?" became an urgent and puzzling one. Moreover, in this alien atmosphere, my own prayer habits were becoming difficult to maintain, and my hot-house-grown "spiritual life" was rapidly evaporating.

It was then that a German friend lent me his copy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "Letters and Papers from Prison" and urged me to read it. I knew virtually nothing of Bonhoeffer, and started reading the book somewhat reluctantly. But as I read on and came to the passages about "religionless Christianity", I began to see that here was the answer to a lot of the uneasiness I had been feeling. Here too was a whole new avenue of thought to explore. I came back from Germany with a more subdued faith, less inclined to pontificate, feeling that there was a lot of play-acting about much of our preaching and holding of "theological positions", more prepared to be agnostic about many things, and yet feeling there was a lot more to discover about God. Strangely, when I got back to Regent's, I found that some of the other students too had "discovered" Bonhoeffer. Even more strangely, about a week later "Honest to God" was published, and the whole nation was arguing about those very issues. I have always felt that this, along with some other experiences I have had, says a lot about the deep mystery and paradox of God. I was being led to question all my traditional Christian beliefs, to question God himself, by a chain of coincidences that I could only describe as "providential".

## Experience of Ministry

The next act of Providence was that my first post in the ministry was to involve working closely with Howard Williams at Bloomsbury. On the day I was ordained I was not quite sure whether I believed in God - only the fact that I have survived thirty years in the ministry gives me courage to admit that now! But in the months that followed, sitting in the congregation at Bloomsbury, I found a new edifice of positive faith being erected on the ruins of the old. Howard Williams at that time was at the peak of his profile as a controversial Baptist. He was a radical with an honesty that I have often wished I could emulate. You didn't know what outrageous things he would say next, but you knew that whatever he said he *really* believed. There was a preacher you could truly respect, and his preaching enabled me once again to be positive and enthusiastic about the Gospel - a Gospel not of certainty but of adventurous faith, not clinging to the fixed forms and doctrines of the past but straining forward to see God creating the future. My "pilgrimage" ever since has really been a development of that vision.

The other thread of ministry that I can trace back to that time is that of the "open church". Howard Williams had a vision for Bloomsbury as a place of welcome and friendship in the heart of London, a church open to the world, not too fussy about its boundaries, but declaring in the midst of life the good news that God is here. I was ordained in the basement while the church upstairs was being renovated, and left Bloomsbury just before that basement became the "Friendship Centre" we had been dreaming of.

I lived for part of that time in London Central YMCA, and became acquainted with that organisation, with its aim of being a Christian movement which is not just for Christians, nor just about trying to make people Christians. After Bloomsbury I went on to work for the Student Christian Movement, which also is dedicated to the principle of "openness". It is a risky and often confusing principle, as SCM was to learn to its cost in those turbulent years around 1968. However, that vision of the open church has never left me, and now in Leytonstone my congregation and I are experiencing a wonderful opportunity of expressing it in practice.

As a united Baptist/URC church, we have been able to dispose of spare buildings and land and invest in a completely new church building. We planned it from the start to be an open church. It is easily accessible through glass doors from the pavement. The windows in the sanctuary come right down to ground level, so that as we worship we can see out and passers-by can see in. It is also built as a resource for the whole community, a place where all kinds of activities can go on. We are determined that it should not be just a church and a community centre existing alongside one another, but that every booking of a room by a secular organisation should be another "brick" in the building of a community in this multi-cultural neighbourhood, an open community with the loving heart of Christ beating at the centre of it. It is demanding work, but we are experiencing blessing beyond our expectations - and incidentally, more people are coming to church too!

## So Much More to Say

It is very hard to sum up in an article of this length all the threads that have gone into the tapestry of one's ministry. I have not had space to say anything about my involvement in Christian Aid, the World Development Movement, ONE for Christian Renewal, and the Joppa Group, or about the challenge of ministry in a multi-racial and multi-faith neighbourhood, the thrill of developing fresh ways of worship, my

renewed confidence in the Church, and my re-discovery in middle age of the value of personal prayer. There has not been space to mention most of the books that have changed my life or the people who have inspired and encouraged me. One very happy and rewarding pastorate has been omitted altogether. I only hope that what I have written - whether you are encouraged by it or provoked! - may prompt you to reflect on your own pilgrimage and be moved, as I am, to say "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" and "the best is yet to be".

Ray Vincent

## Release from the burden of Sin: Two Complementary Images

What is it that characterizes the essence of our Christian experience of redemption? If asked, what is it that we would say is foundational to our experience of salvation in Jesus Christ? Is it not the release from the burden of sin and the new life lived in His name? Surely we would want to describe such a release as lying close to the heart of our Christian experience. Yet how do we communicate something so dramatic, so vital, so revolutionary? This is one of the dilemmas facing all of us as ministers of the Gospel.

Within this article I would like to call attention to but one simple, but effective, image which might help us as we attempt to portray this wonderful truth of redemption. To do so I would like to point out two particular aids, one taken from the literary world and one taken from the cinematic world, which so captivates our contemporary society. Together these two sources provide an important means of expressing the truth of redemption from sin which is found in Christ. They also provide an interesting opportunity of reflection on these matters within a small-group study; and it is for such a setting that this short piece is offered. Some questions for use within the small-group setting will be included at the end of the article.

### A. John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*

One of the most enduring classics of English literature is John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegory depicting the journey of Christian life through the various trials and tribulations which need to be confronted by the believer. The believer is represented by the central character Christian, who moves from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, as the story is told.

*The Pilgrim's Progress* was first published in 1678, having been composed during Bunyan's intermittent imprisonment (from 1660-1672) in a Bedford jail. He was sentenced for publicly preaching his faith, and we Baptists have long claimed him as one of the prominent figures in our denominational heritage.<sup>1</sup> This imaginative story is set within a dream which Bunyan had during his imprisonment, which is, incidentally, alluded to by the reference to "the den" in the opening paragraph of the book.<sup>2</sup> *The Pilgrim's Progress* quickly became a bestseller, reputedly selling in excess of 100,000 copies during Bunyan's own lifetime. Now it is deemed a classic of English literature and has over the years provided some of the most enduring expressions of theological truth set into symbols. As one recent biographer of Bunyan put it, the general population immediately took to *The Pilgrim's Progress*

because through it the author “gave them theology in a digestible form”.<sup>3</sup>

The work contains one of the most powerful and memorable images of Christian redemption ever written: the release of the central character, Christian, from the burden of sin, symbolized by the burden which he carries on his back as he journeys through life toward the Celestial City. Early in the story Bunyan writes of Christian and his struggle with this burden of sin, a struggle from which he is released only by means of the Cross of Christ. Bunyan writes of his release, and the effect it has upon the joyful Christian in this way:<sup>4</sup>



Now, I saw in my dream that the highway up which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall that was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but now without difficulty, because of the load on his back.

He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, “He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by His death.” Then he stood awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the water down his cheeks.

At the same time it is important to recognize that the image of a “burden of sin” is also one based upon Bunyan’s own spiritual pilgrimage.<sup>5</sup> In his autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, first published in 1666 but written earlier during the turbulent 1650’s, Bunyan describes himself as one who “had a great burden on my spirit”, and notes that “I was both a burden and a terror to myself”.<sup>6</sup> The struggle with inward guilt is often associated with the imagery of bearing a burden, as Bunyan reveals:



Sometimes I should lie under great guilt for sin, even crushed to the ground therewith.<sup>7</sup>

The character Christian is thus, to some degree at least, a cipher for Bunyan himself. Christian’s encounter with the graciousness of God in the form of the Cross of Christ is indicative of Bunyan’s own spiritual experience, and beyond that, of Christian experience generally. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the highly

charged image of Christian's burden of sin tumbling down the hill into an open grave is immediately followed by a marginal note in which Bunyan applies the truth to every Christian:

When God releases us of our guilt and burden, we are as those that leap for joy.

There is little doubt that the central message of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is one based upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The cross is foundational to the story as a whole and that is why the description of release from the burden of sin is placed so early within the narrative. In short, it is impossible to over-estimate the Christ-centred nature of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, even though the body of the story is much more personally directed, concentrating on the joys and difficulties of Christian living itself. As Geoffrey Nuttall puts it:

The book is certainly a work of supreme imaginative genius; but its power is as a book of 'the way': the way to Christ, the way of Christ and the way with Christ. This is its theme, the manifold reality of Christian experience.<sup>8</sup>

It is hardly surprising, given the tremendous power of the story of Christian being delivered from the burden on his back, that the image is itself often used as a visual summary of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Numerous sketches, engraved plates and paintings of Bunyan turn to this imagery at the beginning of the book and use it as a way not only to summarize the story but to honour its author. A good example of this is the stained glass window honouring Bunyan which is found in the west aisle of the north transept of Westminster Abbey. Dedicated in 1915, the window was designed by Sir Ninian Compton and depicts, among other scenes, Christian losing his burden at the foot of the cross of Christ. Nor is it surprising to find that many subsequent generations of Christians found the scene one with which they could readily identify. The Baptist preacher C.H. Spurgeon, for example, records in his autobiography:

I love that picture of dear old Christian. I know, when I first read *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and saw in it the woodcut of Christian carrying the burden on his back, I felt so interested in the poor fellow, that I thought I should jump with joy when, after he had carried his heavy load so long, he at last got rid of it; and that was how I felt when the burden of guilt, which I had borne so long, was for ever rolled away from my shoulders and my heart.<sup>9</sup>

Appropriately enough, the image of Christian losing his burden at the foot of the cross was also chosen as one of the images to adorn Bunyan's tomb. He was buried in the Bunhill Fields cemetery in London, resting place for many famous Non-Conformists, including Daniel Defoe (author of Robinson Crusoe), Susannah Wesley (mother of Charles and John), the hymnwriter Isaac Watts and the Baptist leader William Kiffin. Bunyan's tomb has pride of place within the cemetery, being centrally located and having many of the pathways through the cemetery converging at it. It is a massive stone monument surrounded by an iron rail with a carved recumbent representation of Bunyan on its top, designed and executed by E.C. Papworth. The tomb bears a simple five-line inscription on the east side:

John Bunyan  
Author of The  
Pilgrim's Progress  
Ob. 31st August, 1688  
Aet 60

The northern and southern panels of the tomb are the most interesting from the standpoint of our concern in that they offer representations of the character Christian from *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The northern panel shows him weighed down by the burden on his back, leaning wearily upon a staff as he walks along his journey (Photograph 1). In the southern panel we see Christian at the cross of Christ with the burden loosed from his back and falling toward the sepulchre (Photograph 2). We turn now to consider a similar, cinematic representation of redemption from sin.

## **B. Roland Joffe's *The Mission***

In 1986 one of the most powerful films of the decade was released: *The Mission*, directed by Roland Joffe and based on a book of the same title written by Robert Bolt (who, incidentally, was also responsible for the screenplay of the film). Bolt had long before distinguished himself as a writer who was well able to deal with theological subjects, as his involvement with the award-winning films about the life of Sir Thomas More. *A Man For All Seasons* (1966), and T.E. Lawrence, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) demonstrated. Here, too, in *The Mission* is the clash between the demands of church and state provocatively explored.

*The Mission* stars Robert De Niro and Jeremy Irons as two men caught up in the turbulent 1750's, when South America was being introduced to European life and thought, including Christianity (through the agency of Catholic Jesuits). The story is set in the borderlands of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, much of it amidst the jungles of the region. The drama of the film is framed by opening and closing scenes focusing on a Papal representative, named Altamarino, as he files a report to His Holiness the Pope about the situation there. Effectively Altamarino, played by Ray McAnally, functions as a narrator throughout the film. Through him we learn of the nationalist and commercial interests of Spain and Portugal in the region and how they threaten to destroy a native culture. We also discover that the competing claims make it unclear what precisely the Church's role is in such a missionary context. It is against this backdrop that the narrative pulse of *The Mission* is to be felt.

The two main actors played characters of opposing temperament and convictions and much of the drama is an out-working of the inevitable clash between their respective values. De Niro portrays Captain Rodrigo Mendoza, a mercenary and slave-trader, who ruthlessly exploits the native indians of the area, the Guarani of the Upper Paraná, capturing them and selling them to greedy proponents of "civilization". Irons portrays a Father Gabriel, a Jesuit priest and missionary, who is responsible for the spiritual life of the Guarani and is attempting to build a new mission for them in the remote area of the jungle in which they live, high above the Iguazu Falls.

We see the two principle characters first encounter one another as Mendoza captures five of the Guarani for the slave-trade, killing one other in the process. He is heartless, a violent man who is proud and self-reliant, seemingly void of any conscience. This is all soon to be overturned, however, as Rodrigo kills his own brother Felipe in a fit of anger over the love of a woman. The beautiful Carlota, espoused as Rodrigo's woman, falls in love with Felipe and the inevitable duel between the two brothers takes place. This causes a spiritual crisis in the life of Rodrigo, he cannot seem to forgive himself for his fratricide and appears only to want to die. It is into this situation that Father Gabriel now steps, bringing with him

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

**To the Readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal**

This letter will appear in the journal after my retirement as General Manager of your insurance company on 5th March. Since I was appointed in 1978 I have written 59 of these letters.

I followed the tradition of my predecessor of using this advertising space to highlight some aspect of insurance which was important to our churches or which I felt could be explained to advantage. I realise that many of the letters would be of more service to church officers than to the Minister, but I know that ministers passed on the information to the church treasurers and secretaries. Also it is clear from my correspondence over the years that many ministers are closely involved with the day to day administration of church business affairs.

Thank you for reading my letters - if you have! Thank you also for your support and many kindnesses over the last 15 years. My successor is Mr T.E. Mattholie who has a wide experience and knowledge of insurance gained over many years and is a deacon of his own church. I wish him a happy career with the denominational company and I am sure his appointment will be of mutual benefit to him and the Churches.

Yours sincerely

M. E. Purver

the challenge of redemption. Gabriel visits Rodrigo languishing in prison, waiting for death, and we have this crucial dialogue within the film:

*Gabriel:* Is this how you mean to go on?

*Mendoza:* For me there is nothing else.

*Gabriel:* There is life!

*Mendoza:* There is no life!

*Gabriel:* There is a way out, Mendoza.

*Mendoza:* For me there is no redemption.

*Gabriel:* God gave us the burden of freedom. You chose your crime. Do you have the courage to choose your penance? Do you dare do that?

*Mendoza:* There is no penance hard enough for me.

*Gabriel:* But do you dare *try* it?

*Mendoza:* Do I dare? Do *you* dare to see it fail?<sup>10</sup>

It is at this point that we are treated to one of the most stunning sequences within the whole film: Rodrigo's spiritual struggle with his sinfulness and guilt, as symbolized by his carrying his burden up the rugged terrain to the top of the waterfall. Although the scene lasts only a little longer than ten minutes, it contains one of the most powerful visual representations of Christian redemption I know. Mendoza gathers together in a bag all of the equipment of his former life, his pistol, musket, armour, poniard and sword, and places them into a rope bag. He then attaches this bag to his own body with a rope as he begins the ascent to the top of the falls lugging this unwieldy baggage behind him. The journey is tortuous, and at one point the rest of the Jesuits in the party try to persuade Father Gabriel to release Mendoza from the burden of hauling this ungainly pack up to the top of the falls. Gabriel refuses, declaring that it is important for Mendoza to resolve the burden in his own way. One of the Jesuits, a priest named Sebastian, takes pity on the plight of Mendoza and cuts him from the burden, only to find that Mendoza follows the burden down to the bottom of the cliff and reattaches himself to it. In the end, Mendoza is only released from the burden by the chief of the Guarani tribe himself. In one of the most dramatically tense moments of the film the chief instructs one of the men of the tribe to go toward the kneeling figure of Mendoza. He does so with a knife in his hand, threatening to kill him (so we think) for his part in the capture of the tribe members and their sale into slavery. Instead, he moves the knife from the throat of Mendoza to the rope which attaches him to this ungainly burden, symbolic of his former life, cutting him free and dumping the whole lot over the side of the cliff into the waters below.

Here is contained a thought-provoking message about the nature of forgiveness; why is it that the Jesuit priest's attempt to loose Mendoza from the burden was rejected? Is there not a lesson here about forgiveness itself? Is it not true that true forgiveness can only be granted by the injured party, in this case the Guarani Indians themselves?

### **C. Questions for Discussion**

The questions below are provided to help stimulate discussion within a small-group setting, perhaps as part of your normal house-group arrangements. Although this study is designed to focus specifically on a short, ten-minute segment of the film *The Mission*, you may wish to make a fuller use of it and watch the whole of the

film as preparation. The film is readily available for purchase and is distributed by Warner Home Video. You may wish to have to hand a copy of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in case members would like to read more within it or discuss it further; many editions will include illustrations of the key scene in which Christian loses his burden. It might also be interesting to compare the film with Robert Bolt's book of the story as there are considerable differences and expansions of the story-line within the novel. The book was published by Penguin Books in 1986.

1. What similarities of expression or detail do you note between the burden-bearing scene described in both *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Mission*?

2. How does the image of the characters Christian and Rodrigo Mendoza being released from their respective burdens strike you? What feelings does it make you experience?

3. How significant is it in *The Mission* that Mendoza is released from his burden not by the Jesuit priests, but by Hucagh, the chief of the Guarani Indians? What lesson does this teach us about how forgiveness operates on the human level?

4. When Mendoza is cut loose from his burden, is he crying or laughing? Does it make a difference? (You may have to watch the whole of the film and/or read Robert Bolt's novel to answer this fully)

5. If you had to compose a symbolic "burden" of your life, what things would it contain? How can you surrender these at the foot of the cross?

6. Can you recall an instance in your life when you were "cut free" from a burden by another person?

**Larry J. Kreitzer**

#### **Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Although the extent of his Baptist commitments has been a matter of some dispute. See, Joseph D. Ban "Was John Bunyan a Baptist?" *The Baptist Quarterly* 30 (1984) pp 367-376, for a discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Bunyan makes this clear by adding the marginal note 'the gaol' in the third edition of 1679.

<sup>3</sup> Monica Furlong: *Puritan's Progress* (Hodder & Stoughton: London, 1975) p. 180

<sup>4</sup> *The Pilgrim's Progress From This World to That Which is to Come* edited by Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edition, 1960), pp 37-38.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Hill: *A Turbulent, Seditious and Factious People: John Bunyan and his Church*, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1988), p214, argues that the image of a 'burden on the back' was a common one of Bunyan's day, implying a social stratification. He notes that the image is not original to Bunyan, citing its appearance in Thomas Taylor's *Highway to Happiness* (1633)

<sup>6</sup> Edited by Roger Sharrock, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1962), p.45

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p.40

<sup>8</sup> *The Heart of Pilgrims Progress*, *American Baptist Quarterly* 7 (1988), p 482. Monica Furlong (op cit), p108, makes the interesting observation that: 'What matters when Christian's burden falls off his back at the sight of the Cross is not the doctrines of justification and forgiveness which it expresses but the actual experience of liberation which makes Christian cry with joy.'

<sup>9</sup> *Autobiography: Volume 1: The Early Years 1834-1859*, (The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1962), p85

<sup>10</sup> In the film the tension between the two characters is downplayed somewhat. In the book it is Carlota who persuades Gabriel, much against his wishes, to see Mendoza. There Father Gabriel loathes Mendoza and wishes to have no part in his absolution. Instead, he suggests that Mendoza go with him to visit the chief of the tribe from which Mendoza has taken his slaves, fully expecting that the chief of the tribe will kill him in retaliation.

# Surviving in Ministry: The Case for Appraisal

The question "who pastors the pastors?" is one that periodically raises its head in the correspondence columns of the (Baptist Times). It is an issue that concerns me, too. The committee of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship, on which I serve as one of the North West Area representatives, has also had the matter on its agenda. This paper is written at its request.

What are the issues which arise in connection with the pastoral care of ministers? We are all ordinary people, subject to all the pains and pleasures, the stresses and opportunities, that being human entails. Today, moreover, there can be no assumption of social stability in the ranks of the ministry as in former generations. For example, ministerial marriages, sadly, can and do break down - in increasing numbers today. Increasingly stress takes its toll: through illness, breakdown, and resignation from ministry, as well as through marital problems. A group I called together early in 1992 to discuss these issues also identified as concerns: crises in mid-ministry, the sense of isolation, inadequate training, loss of the sense of vocation, and uncertainty over role and identity. Added to these there is the present uncertainty and insecurity brought about by problems of settlement, a matter which particularly affects ministers over 50.

It ought to be said at this point that the ministry of our Area Superintendents as **pastores pastorum** is tremendously valued. Nothing that I write in this paper is intended in any way to devalue their ministry, but we all know the pressures under which our Superintendents work and the consequent limitations in the amount of pastoral care they are able to offer to ministers.

## Crisis and Coping

Last year, on behalf of the committee of the BMF, Jack Ramsbottom undertook a survey of pastoral care of ministers in the various Areas and Associations of the Baptist Union. That is to say, in ways other than through official channels. Responses to the need vary from place to place. There appears to be a general concern for the needs of retired ministers. Some Areas and Associations have formal structures or persons appointed to address the needs of ministers and/or their partners and families. There is a feeling that Fraternal (should we find some other, more inclusive name for these meetings?) can and ought to have a role which they do not always at present fulfil. There is also the counselling scheme set up by the Department of Ministry. A further idea as far as crisis intervention is concerned, could be the establishment of a telephone helpline on which the person seeking help could remain anonymous if necessary. I hope that this idea could be given serious consideration by the Department of Ministry.

My own concern, however, is not so much for pastoral care at the level of crisis intervention as for what can be described as on-going support. Crisis intervention is fairly well covered, but there are limitations if this "fire-fighting" approach is the only method of pastoral care for ministers. Issues need to be addressed before the crisis point is reached. The greatest need is for constant, on-going, month-in, month-out pastoral support.

Many of us will create our own pastoral support. the trouble with this is that for

many, this will not go further than our marriage partners. However, there will be times when support for the couple is needed.

Again, some ministers will look for support in soul-friends, spiritual directors, colleagues in ministerial teams, counsellors or psychotherapists. Deacons and church members have their role, although the price of such support is vulnerability, and sometimes, when, for example, relationships in the church are the issue, looking to the church fellowship for support may not be appropriate. Some ministers retain the support of colleagues with whom they trained and will consult regularly with them. It is to be questioned, however, whether relationships formed in college will have a prolonged life under the conditions of separation in the pastoral ministry. We all develop new relationships in whatever place we are ministering.

There is also the special role of Senior Friends. Many ministers have found this a valuable support, but frankly it has to be admitted that others have found the experience less satisfactory. Traditionally, the system of Senior Friends operates only during the first years of ministry, while the minister remains a Probationer. There may be a case for extending the scheme to cover one's entire ministry. To have a friendly voice on the telephone every now and again, or to be on the receiving end of a pastoral visit for a change, would be a great encouragement.

Here problems arise. there are difficulties with structures imposed from above (a problem that we shall return to later on in this paper). on the other hand, if the pastoral care of ministers is allowed to remain an entirely voluntary matter, then we will have the situation, existing at present, that those who are aware of their need will seek help and make their own arrangements, while others, perhaps the ones who really need the help, fail to obtain it. So there is the question of educating ministers to accept that asking for help is not to be seen as an admission of failure or loss of sense of call, or as a lack of faith, or as affecting "career development". What is required, I believe, is some sort of safety-net through which no minister would be allowed to fall on account of pastoral need.

So what is required? At the very least, the dissemination of information about sources of help for ministers could be encouraged. This is something that the Department of Ministry could do through its regular mailings. At the end of this paper there is mention of a few organisations working in this field that are known to myself.

### **Enter Appraisal**

Personally, I feel that a safety-net could most effectively be set up through a system of appraisal of ministry. Appraisal, of course, is something that is widely used in industry and commerce. Some will claim that in view of the special nature of the call to ministry such worldly techniques are inappropriate. But without denying that ministry is special, I would still want to claim that insights and skills from the world of business are transferable to the work of ministry. After all, people are people, in industry or in churches. Schemes of ministerial appraisal are already up and running in other churches. In the Anglican diocese of Liverpool, for example, members of the clergy have an appraisal once every three years. Individual ministers fill in a self-appraisal questionnaire which is then discussed in confidence with an area Dean. This interview takes about three hours. Nothing is passed on to "higher authority" except with the agreement of the appraisee.

Rightly used, appraisal is more than a negative tool ("You could have done better there, couldn't you?"). I would see appraisal as a means of identifying gifts and

affirming strengths, as well as pointing out weaknesses. Such positive encouragement would do much to strengthen our ministries.

I understand that the Department of Ministry is presently considering the question of appraisal of ministry, but the only way a system of appraisal could be made to work is by it being a condition of ministerial recognition. That suggestion will have put the cat among the pigeons!

Appraisal would ensure that no minister is left in total isolation. At least every few years or so s/he would receive the support in confidence of a sympathetic appraiser. However, the issue is that the support must not only be available; potential users of that support must be also encouraged to make use of it. That is a process what ought to begin in college. Here, again, we have come up against the problem that those who know their need will seek help and those who don't, won't. The advantage of a universal system of appraisal is that it would help to create an environment or culture in which asking for help was the norm, rather than it being left to individual whim.

### **A Professional Association?**

If I may fly another kite, I believe that consideration should be given to the formation of a professional association for ministers. I have in mind a body whose role might be comparable to that of the BMA among doctors. In other words, a professional association would have the responsibility of drawing up a code of ethics, and would be able to help regulate standards. I see this as being essential and complementary to a system of appraisal.

A professional association could also exercise a mediatory role. I think of the situation where a minister is in conflict with his or her church. In such circumstances, there may be a need for someone to advocate the minister's case from the minister's point of view, i.e. a person who has no conflict of interest or loyalty apart from that towards the minister in question. A professional association would be the body to provide such a service. This is a matter, I believe, that the BMF should place on its agenda.

There is, therefore, a joint responsibility for the pastoral care of ministers. There is much that we can do individually to help ourselves, but there is a role also for the BMF and for the various structures of the denomination over and above what is being done already. We know that a concern exists, and whatever pastoral care that is offered is very much appreciated. But more could be done, in ways I have suggested, and in other ways too.

Through this paper my concern has been to stimulate thought and discussion. It would be good if this article were to provoke an on-going dialogue on these issues in the pages of this journal. It would be even better if some of the suggestions I have made are actively taken up by the relevant bodies. All that remains for me now is to provide a book list and to mention some of the organisations whose ministry is to ministers or whose services might be of help to ministers.

**Philip Clements-Jewery**

### **Book list**

Mary Anne Coate *Clergy Stress: the Hidden Conflicts in ministry.*  
SPCK, New Library of Pastoral Care, London, 1989

Barbara G. Gilbert *Who Ministers to Ministers? A Study of Support Systems for Clergy and Spouses;* Alban Institute (USA), 1987

Michael Jacobs      *Holding in Trust: The Appraisal of Ministry*,  
SPCK New Library of Pastoral Care, London, 1989

John A. Sanford      *Ministry Burnout*: Arthur James. London, 1984

**Organisations** which either minister directly to ministers or provide counselling generally or provide training which may help to foster self-awareness.

**The Society of Mary and Martha**

Information from the Sheldon Centre, Dunsford, Exeter, Devon EX6 7LE. Tel: 0647 52752. Provides events, counselling either in person or on the phone, "12,000 mile service" for ministers, residential facilities and a family holiday for clergy families (highly recommended).

**Bodey House**

Baptist counselling service, training, and events providing opportunity for personal review. Information from Bodey House, Stock Road, Stock, Ingatestone, Essex, CM4 9DH. Tel: 0277 840668

**The Clinical Theology Association**

Training in human relations, pastoral care and counselling.

St Mary's House, Church Westcote, Oxford OX7 6SF. Tel: 0993 830209

**RELATE - National Marriage Guidance**

Counselling in local centres. Training available nationally and sometimes in local areas for groups and organisations. National Headquarters: Herbert Gray College, Little Church Street, Rugby, CV21 3AP. Tel: 0788 573241. See telephone directory for local centres.

**John Mark Ministries**

An Australian ministry, with a particular emphasis on ministry to ex-ministers. Could be unique in this respect. Do any of our Australian colleagues have further knowledge of this organisation that they could share in the pages of this journal? Address: 7 Bangor Court, Heathmont, Australia, 3135.

# Book Reviews

## ***Bread of Tomorrow* ed. by Janet Morley (Christian Aid, 1993, 224pp, £6.99)**

To pray effectively, we need to be well-informed. This book, sub-titled, "Praying with the World's Poor") is both disturbing and challenging in its breadth of subject matter. Praying **with** the poor, is different to praying **for** the poor, and through the thoughts here expressed, from people of many nations and countries, we are confronted with the starkness of the needs of others in lands that suffer from natural disasters, crop failures, political unrest, persecution, the under-valuing of individuals and the vulnerability of the very young and old.

The purpose of prayer is to change things. For the individual, to bring him/her into the presence of a holy God and from there to a changed life and style of life. The words in this book are electric, shaking us from the complacency that our comparative security brings, to the urgency of the needs of others. When we join with our brothers and sisters in China, South Africa, India, South America, Namibia, Eastern Europe and Peru and spend time meditating upon their deep basic needs and cruel experience, we are moved to awe and wonder at the brightness of their hope, through pain.

This book is also invaluable for use in corporate worship. If used with sensitivity and direction, the body of Christ will be encouraged to move as one to speak out and support those who suffer great wrongs at the hands of hardened people. It will also challenge us to a greater awareness of the value of life from pre-birth to old age, and also to respect our world and all life within it.

Finally, if today you sit comfortably with the incarnate Christ, get ready to be disturbed. For a mighty figure walks through these prayers; one whose love is strong, seeking justice for the oppressed, liberation for those who are bound, and dignity for the lowliest and most despised of peoples. May this book be but a stepping stone for all who read it to be able to pray more earnestly and effectively that the world may continue to be changed through Him.

To stimulate your interest I quote:

"If you have come to help me, then you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together".  
(Lilla Watson, Australian aboriginal)

**Jennie Wakefield**

## ***Catching Fire* by E.A. Varley (Bible Society, 1993, 112pp, £5.95)**

The author regards Christian education as an essential part of church life, whether the church is welcoming those who have little personal contact with the Christian faith or seeking to increase the knowledge of more established Christians. Her easy-to-read, yet enthusiastic style, persuades her readers to share her view of Christian education as an exciting adventure.

In her book, subtitled, "Christian Education in the Local Church", she sees it as a sharing experience, in which all should be enabled to participate, and suggests ways in which those who lack confidence can be encouraged to contribute. She believes that in the Christian community much Christian education is provided by some not usually thought of as teachers; in fact "quite a lot of the educating of adults is done by children and even teenagers".

Elizabeth Varley deals imaginatively with the principles of Christian education;

the preparation necessary for effective learning; the involvement of the whole church; the place of church leaders; the opportunities of Sunday worship; the use of christian festivals and the ways of inspiring a genuine love of learning.

The book is soundly based on Scripture and there are copious Biblical references and illustrations. Each chapter ends with Bible study notes making the book ideal as a text book for House Groups.

The author is an enthusiast, but not an idealist, and recognises the problems that can arise in setting up such a programme where premises may be inadequate and people claim to have too much to do.

The publishers advertise that "the author concludes by exploring ways to open up new possibilities for Christians to come alight with the joy of Christian learning". This is the adventure of which she writes and I warmly commend her book to every church anxious to increase the Christian knowledge of its people.

**Arthur H. Bonser**

***New Testament Commentary Survey* by D.A. Carson  
(IVP, 1993, 96pp, £4.99)**

Experience suggests that the first casualty of a tight book budget in ministry is the commentary. Further, once theological college is behind us, they tend not to be supplemented, so that the particular commentaries on our shelves, with the exceptions of a few classics, date fairly accurately our student years. We pay in the price in terms of depriving ourselves of fresh perspectives and new scholarly insights.

Therefore a survey such as Carson's is most helpful, both to pastors and to students beginning to build a library.

Precisely because he is so comprehensive in his survey the author can do little more, in 96 pages, than mention a book, adding a brief, incisive comment. Significantly, although of American provenance, it does justice to British and Continental scholars, embracing devotional works as well as critical, theological as well as technical, conservative as well as liberal. In addition to publisher and price, Carson also notes where a particular commentary is out of print or likely to reappear. There are also short introductory sections on the characteristics of some commentary series, and NT Introductions and Theologies.

The book's main value lies in mapping out the extent of the terrain; it is certainly no substitute for examining a particular commentary first before purchase. And although the author closes with some "best buys", he concedes that his list is bound to be subjective. Overall, his survey is a major achievement in compression.

**Michael V. Jackson**

***Serving as Senders* by Neal Pirolo. (OM/Emmaus Road International, 1991, 208pp, £3.95)**

Operation Mobilization has done the cause of mission a service in publishing this excellent book by Neal Pirolo. It is aimed at helping those who support missionaries while they are preparing to go, when they are working on the "field", and when they return to their home base. The importance of this support task is emphasized, and rightly so.

The book is American in style and context but the British reader should not be put off by that. What the author is saying can and should be translated into our scene

and taken seriously. The main thesis is that the support of missionaries is a vital part of the missionary task, and needs to be properly organised and taken seriously in every phrase. It needs to be recognized that the thesis is written from the perspective of missionary agencies where the missionary is responsible for raising his/her own support, financially and in other ways. Missionaries serving with our BMS receive much of the support being spoken of here through the Society, though many aspects of the book are still valid for BMS missionary supporters.

All the main aspects of support of missionaries are covered: logistics, finance, prayer, communication and, last but not least, "re-entry" support. There is a challenge in being willing to take on the responsibility that supporting the missionary involves. Each chapter concludes with a case study, with sections for personal action, and group discussion and action. This is a book which can be used in group study, or individually.

Well illustrated from real situations, the advice is practical and relevant. The format of the book is pleasant and the printing good and clear.

I heartily recommend it to those who want to be involved in the missionary task but do not feel called to go. One gets the feeling that the support involvement can be just as exciting as the going.

**David Doonan**

### ***Caring for Creation* by Chris Park (Marshal Pickering, 1992, 192pp, £5.99)**

This book aims to convince doubtful Christians that it is all right to be "green" - indeed, that it is important. It assumes a wary and uninformed readership, and so it starts from basics and is easy to read. The author is a lecturer in Geography at the University of Lancaster.

At the outset, the gravity of the present environmental crisis is brought out. The author states clearly that the book aims to change attitudes. He believes that "the world is God's creation, and He trusts each one of us to look after it on his behalf and to share it amongst everyone else..."(p42). For detailed instructions on shopping or waste disposal the reader is referred elsewhere.

There is a useful section explaining the development of different world views including Primitive mysticism and Judaism. The writer then goes on to summarize the approach of pagan religions such as Taoism and Zen Buddhism, and the rise of the New Age Movement.

It is recognized that Christianity has been under fire for endorsing an exploitive attitude towards nature. The truth of this is carefully examined. There is also a brief attempt at a "Theology of Nature".

My chief unease with this book is the author's stance that "Christians must reclaim spiritual territory now occupied by the greens".(p150) Instead of rejoicing that there is a groundswell of concern for the environment from many sources, there is a feeling that Christianity should go for the green option so as not to lose too many people to the New Age Movement. This gives the book a feeling of ulterior motivation, when surely if it is right to be green, that should be reason enough for the Christian. However, in general, the case is well argued, and could appeal to some Christians normally resistant to the issue.

**Jenny Hills**

# Vacation Term Bible Study: 1994

23 July - 6 August

St Anne's College, Oxford

**Inaugural Address:** 24 July, 5.15pm

Rt. Revd Dr Peter Selby: The Challenge of Rescue

**First Week:** 25-29 July

Course 1: **Selected Issues in Old Testament Ethics**

Revd Dr. Cyril S. Rodd, Editor, Expository Times

Course 2: **Saviour: The N.T. Offer and Today's Need**

Rt. Revd Dr Peter Selby

Three Lectures: **Feminism and the Old Testament**

Feminist Readings: illumination or limitation?

Female Imagery in Perspective

On Winning and Losing: Esther v. Vashti

Dr Grace I. Emmerson, University of Birmingham

**Second Week:** 1-5 August

Course 3: **Social Reality and Ideals of Justice in the Hebrew Bible**

Revd Dr Walter Houston, Northern College, Manchester

Course 4: **The Christian Life in the Gospel of John**

Revd Dr Ruth B. Edwards, King's College, Aberdeen

Three Lectures: **Medical Ethics**

Medicine and Morality

Life and Death

Resources, Consent, Confidentiality

Dr E. David Cook, Director, The Whitfield Institute, Oxford

Hebrew and Greek readings will be arranged both weeks, and there will be classes in Hebrew and NT Greek, at various levels, including beginners', daily, Monday to Friday.

*Chairperson:* Miss Freda Johnson, B.D.

**Further Details and Application Forms:**

Hon Sec. Miss Gloria J. Guest

32 Stanbury Crescent, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 6PD

# Holidays 1994

## **HOLIDAYS**

For a quiet and inexpensive holiday, the mobile home belonging to the Surrey and N.E. Hants Association is very attractive. Situated on an orchard site, just outside Bognor Regis, it has mains services and sleeps seven. School holiday periods are booked up quickly, but if you can go at another time there may well be vacancies - and it is cheaper. For full details contact Mrs Elsie Price, 24 Weston Lea, West Horsley, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT24 6LG (Phone, East Horsley (0483) 283905)

## **Holidays**

Retired Baptist minister desires to exchange house with another minister, retired or working, for holiday purposes. Ideal holiday location.

Please contact Revd J. Mason, 10 Tavershes Close, Exmouth, South Devon, EX8 3LH. Tel: 0395 275106

## **Three double bedroom house near Bournemouth**

Situated in Corfe Mullen, 6 miles from the centre of Bournemouth, 3 miles from Poole and 1.5 miles from Wimborne in Dorset, this family home is available for ministers and their families for either a week, a fortnight or for weekends, from the end of August this year and for the whole of 1995. The cost is £50 per week for the house, (not per person), or £8 per night for shorter periods.

It is also available for sabbatical leave during the late autumn, winter and early spring. Until 8th May this year please write or telephone Valerie and David Reddaway, 15 Violet Farm Close, Corfe Mullen, Wimborne, Dorset, DH21 3DR. Telephone 0202 696085. After 8th May please write c/o Hereford Baptist Church, Commercial Road, Hereford, HR1 2ER.

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# **Ministerial Stress and Settlements - a Contribution to the Debate from the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship Committee (BMFC).**

*This paper was requested by the BMFC at its September 1993 Meeting. A first draft was circulated, during Advent 1993, to Committee Members with the request that suggested improvements or comments be sent in by the end of January 1994. The subsequent second draft was discussed at the March Committee Meeting and was agreed with a few amendments and with remarkable unanimity. We present this paper now as, we hope, a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on these so important issues. Please note that this paper is not intended as a final position paper but as, we trust, a constructive consultation document. At the close of the paper we include a list of those to whom the Committee will be sending it for their comments, responses and - we hope - support.*

## **1. Retirement Age. The BMFC wishes to add its support for an urgent review of the present Pensions provisions for Ministers aged between 60 and 65 years of age. We appeal for more flexibility in settlement 'packages' here.**

We accept that to implement this may mean reduced pension levels and/or death benefits and/or higher levels of contribution and/or changes to the working bases of the current scheme and/or appropriate use of existing assets. We judge this to be a price worth paying for the good, especially of some of our older colleagues. Our ideal would be for all Ministers to be given the option to retire, on an adequate / full pension, at any time between the ages of 60 and 65. This to be voluntary and **NOT** compulsory. Why? For at least four reasons.

- a) In this way some placements will be freed for other Ministers.
- b) The temptation to 'time-serve', not least because of housing or financial pressures, will be removed.
- c) Stress and related health problems will, we judge, be reduced for some of our older Ministers.
- d) We will also be giving, in this way, helpful 'against the tide' signals to Church and Society about the need for a more flexible retirement scheme - as already obtains in some other EU countries - to emerge in Britain as we move towards the 21st Century.

NB: We have, of course, already been in conversations with Phillip Cooke of the Ministers' Pension Fund Committee and are aware of the technical and financial difficulties involved in such changes. We have at the same time made Mr Cooks aware of the very real pain being experienced by some of our Ministers. We all agree that where there is a will there has to be a way to make progress here. As always we have found in Phillip a listening ear and a pastoral care for us all.

## **2. Ministers in their 50's. We would request that the name of at least one Minister in his or her 50's should be statutorily included in names sent to seeking churches.**

We wish to affirm fully the gifts, experience, ability and usefulness of Ministers of this age! We are saddened by (and indeed angry at) the worrying tendency in some of our

churches not even to consider Ministers of this age for future service among them. We would respectfully suggest that some of our finest Ministries are in fact exercised by Ministers of this age, enriched by many years experience, already, of local church life behind them. We wish fully and firmly to reject, then, this new 'ageism'. This sad feature of our Society - as witness many redundancies - is regrettably one which has also been creeping steadily into our Churches. Who sets the agenda? We accept, of course, that some Ministers have 'lost it' by this age but would argue that some Ministers have done so long before their 50's as well! To target this age group for effective early redundancy is neither wise nor just. We are, of course, fully aware that this suggestion opens up a still wider debate on the Theology of Ordination. We look forward, with others, to the Doctrine and Worship Commission's paper on this in good time. The BMFC will, with others, be making our submission to this process presently.

### **3. Ministerial Support and Appraisal. We request that the whole vital area of ministerial support and appraisal be investigated vigorously and that this be given still greater priority by our Union.**

How do we stop 'it' from getting lost? We want to affirm Ministry Executive work already underway, or established, in this connection, not least the provision for sabbaticals. Much more is now needed however. Some of us would like responsibility for appraisal to be firmly built into the new job description for Area Superintendents when this emerge from the BUGB Council. Others of us would prefer a network of independent trained appraisers to be formed by the Ministry Executive in ways similar to that of the marriage support network. Still others judge that our Colleges and Area Pastoral Committees could and should play a key role here. Partnership between all of these in this process may, in fact, be the way forward here.

The Area Superintendents are among our finest Ministers - which is why they are where they are - and are therefore well suited to do at least some of this task on the Baptist family's behalf. At least one half day a year should be spent with each Probationer Minister in an Area and there should be an at least two yearly meeting (2-3 hours) between the Area Superintendent and all other Ministers in Pastorate / Office in their Areas. Discussing ministerial formation (prayer and study habits, character awareness, stresses, joys and problems) should become - we suggest - a major component of any new job description for Area Superintendents with a corresponding re-allocation of their time.

Whatever structured pattern of ministerial support and appraisal eventually emerges, we judge that there is an urgent need for on-going crisis-free support of Pastors rather than for fire-fighting skills to be exercised later rather than sooner! In this way many Pastorates will be saved and Ministers and their families and churches helped. Appropriate action can thus be advised or taken before and not after a crisis. We appeal for pro-action instead of reaction to become the norm here as we move Towards 2000. We can think of no other person in our Baptist system who would have the authority, the ability and the gifting needed to do this task at a local level. Our Area Superintendents alone - or in partnership with others - need to be set free for this vital role increasingly in the future.

### **4. The Settlement System.**

There has been much debate already in the Baptist family about our present system. Opinions vary from despair about it to the claim that ours is superior to that of other denominations. Several of us have already contributed to the debate. We look forward

to the report of the Superintendency Review Group on this and related matters. We wish now to offer the following observations for consideration in the context of our plea, earlier in this paper, for a strategy of education and consciousness - raising on these issues among our Baptist family.

- 1) The BMFC support the need for a fresh and objective look at the whole process of settlement *including the problems that sometimes emerge only a few months after an Induction Service.*
- 2) We would appeal here for PARTNERSHIP to become the key note of any new patterns that emerge in the future. If Area Superintendents are to be set free among other things for one to one ministerial formation, as we suggest, they will need to be seen to have at best only a partial role in the settlement process in the future. Otherwise they will continue to be perceived, rightly or wrongly, as 'hirers and firers' when it comes to references and names to the churches. The Ministry executive, Colleges, Area Pastoral Committees, the BMFC: all of these, we believe, could and should play a helpful role in this settlement process partnership.
- 3) We recommend careful exploration of the concept of 'Search Committees' being set up in vacant churches. As well as the Members of the local church responsible for seeking a new Minister we suggest that serious consideration be given by the Ministry Executive to recommending that experienced 'outside' help be always offered to such seeking churches - and not just through the possibility of an external Moderator. Local churches would be, of course, free to accept or not such offers of help. Provision to request 1 or 2 places for such experienced people on 'Search Committees' placed in the Guidelines to Seeking Churches could, we judge, save many a Church from serious mistakes, from naivety or from the very common feeling that 'the system' is against them or simply 'not working'. Most Areas would have little difficulty in drawing up a pool of such experienced people we suggest.

## **5. The Colleges.**

We are very pleased indeed to see the growing partnership and consultation between our Colleges themselves and the Union, not least on issues of settlement and on the numbers of students accepted by each and all for training. The BMFC would like to suggest other ways of breaking down the College rivalry and competitiveness that - for all our in-jokes! - continues well into Ministry.

- i) Each student should be encouraged / obliged to undertake a regular visit to at least one other College in the course of his or her training in future. This will vary from a whole term in some cases to several day visits in others. In this way a sense of partnership and mutual friendship will - hopefully! - develop in the C21st Baptist Family.
- ii) Still closer consultation on agreed syllabuses among our Colleges is long overdue, we judge. This need not be at the expense of the diversity on offer through our Colleges.
- iii) There is a need for regular contact with the BMFC on contemporary issues, stresses and needs in ministerial life to guide and improve current training policy and practice. We are, after all, the practitioners.
- iv) We would encourage the Colleges to play an increasingly active role - with the Ministry Executive's backing and resources - in preparing and developing 'Lay' pastoral Ministry in our Churches. We accept that to some extent this is already happening and we are well aware that - sadly - not all such Pastors are willing to be so trained.

## **6. Settlements of Women who are Ministers.**

We accept fully the desire of (most of those) in Baptist leadership among us to improve matters here. We accept also the difficulty of the processes involved. We would plead, however, that more still needs to be done to encourage all churches to consider the skills and abilities of a Woman who is a Minister in the future and to ensure the steady recruitment of such able Ministers to help lead the C21st Church. *We suggest that each 'list of names to the churches' again should always include the name of at least one Woman Minister seeking settlement in the future. This to become a condition built in to the provision of such names to our churches at all.* This would be a small but nonetheless significant way of encouraging necessary change here.

## **7. Education.**

There is considerable pain, hurt and even abuse being experienced at this time in our churches by some of our Baptist Ministers. In this connection, we would plead for a renewed sense of the duty of care for all Ministers in our Baptist Family. A renewed commitment to **mutual** faith, hope and love in Christ. There is, we judge, a pressing need for a major, ongoing education programme on these matters. A regular Ministry Executive publication of the quality, if not the frequency, of Informission would be one possible way of beginning to achieve this.

## **8. The Baptist Ministers' Fellowship Committee.**

May we request, please, that there be significantly more regular contact and consultation with the BMFC from the Senior Management Team and the Union's Executives?

The Baptist Ministers' Fellowship Committee, March 1994.

## **Agreed Procedure**

After the March Committee Meeting this paper - with amendments - is to be published in a final version in the April **Journal** as a BMFC Consultation Document. Views of our Members will thus be sought and requested. Likewise we will be writing to ask for meetings and/or agenda time with, for example, the General Secretaries, the Ministry Executive, The Ministers' Pension Fund Committee, the RBMHS, the Area Superintendents' Board and Review Group, and the Joint Colleges Consultative Committee. The purpose of these meetings will be to explore these issues further. In this way it is hoped that the November 1994 / March 1995 BUGB Council might then be able to take the final decisions on the implementation - if agreed - of at least some of these BMFC recommendations and suggestions on Ministerial stress and settlements.

Written replies and comments should be sent in the first instance either to Revd Michael I Bochenski, The Baptist Manse, 18 Gurney Court Road, St Albans, Herts. AL1 4RL OR to Revd Dr Alison Fuller, 191 Buckingham Road, Bletchley, Milton Keynes. MK3 5JF