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# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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

# Editorial

This is volume 250 of the *Baptist Ministers' Journal*. For this special issue we have commissioned five people to write articles from their various viewpoints but relating to a common theme:

## **Christian Ministry: Perspectives and Critique**

This journal is, of course, mainly read by ministers, and is always intended to be helpful and interesting to ministers, but usually has a wide subject matter. Theological and biblical matters are discussed alongside various aspects of church life, worship, pastoral care and evangelism. There are reports on Christian life in other countries and from different contexts within this one. There is reflection on contemporary social issues, ethical questions, and cultural developments; New Age thinking, management theory, and Post-modernism have all featured in recent issues. Ministers, after all, are a diverse group of people, and our calling brings us into contact with people and issues of many sorts. The area of relevance to us is vast.

So it is interesting that an issue entirely devoted to the subject of ministry is neither narrow and inward, nor repetitive, but shows much of the usual diversity. Our writers consider a single topic, but from their different angles they develop it in divergent ways. This, it seems, is a subject which does not confine, but offers a versatile starting point.

Perhaps we should not consider ministry to be a subject as such - an area that can be defined - but a point of focus. The ministry we and all Christians share, then, would not be a particular set of tasks, but a way of engaging in an almost limitless number of possible tasks. Ministry would be a style, or method rather than a job in itself.

Seen in this way, the need for constant reflection as well as action, for a continuing process of ministerial formation, appears essential. Another, better known, BMJ serves the medical world. The task of medicine seems a fairly well defined one, but knowledge grows and expertise is reassessed and health professionals must keep up with these developments. For ministers, matters are rather more urgent. It is not that ministerial techniques are advancing and we have to keep up to date with the latest. Ministry actually **is** the business of living and working in the light we discover by our theological reflection on the range of tasks we find to do. This is never something that we can do alone- always we need the community of the Church to check, challenge and inspire us. Always we need those traditions which the Church has shaped and which have shaped the Church, above all the Bible.

We hope that, over the years, this lesser BMJ has helped ministers to have this creative contact with the wider Church, and so to reflect more fruitfully on the tasks to hand. We hope that this issue and those to follow will do the same, and so make ministry, not easier, but more faithful to God and the world he loves.

# Developing Patterns of Ministerial Training

The last 15 years have seen great changes in the nature of pastoral training with the development of church-based courses, first at Northern Baptist College and shortly after at Regent's and then at Spurgeon's. This has involved an integration of theory and practice with constant reflection on the nature of pastoral ministry and community life. Alongside these developments, the last couple of decades have seen a growing development of inductive approaches in theological education. Such an approach is epitomized by Thomas Groome's<sup>1</sup> five stage process of theological education: 1) naming and expressing our present *praxis*; 2) engaging in critical reflection on present *praxis*; 3) encountering the Christian story and vision; 4) Creative dialogue between current *praxis* and the Christian tradition; and 5) invitation to renewed *praxis*. Laurie Green's<sup>2</sup> four "A"s model of Anecdote, Analysis, Application and Action, is similar. This reflection approach has been developed in pastoral and clinical theology with the use of *verbatim* reports and role play to understand pastoral situations<sup>3</sup>.

But, we must ask if these changes have had a significant effect on patterns of ministerial training. Peter Brierley<sup>4</sup> observes that "the priority of theological colleges in UK is not the training of leaders for the church of the future, but the spiritual development of the student. Unlike training for most other professions, that of Christian leaders tends to concentrate on the theoretical rather than the practical aspects of the job. "We may not be training leaders capable of animating the life of a local church".

## The Current State of Training

A survey of 87 colleges or courses offering training for ministry was conducted by Ian Bunting in 1988,<sup>5</sup> which although strongly Anglican, included responses from the Irish, Northern, Regent's, South Wales and Spurgeon's Baptist Colleges. He noted that greater emphasis was placed on theoretical tasks of interpreting the faith than on the skills needed in day to day leadership. In spite of emphasis on mission and cultural awareness, placements were predominantly in the context of churches rather than within the community outside of the Church. Amongst his key findings, Bunting says: The Christian minister is mostly seen as a preacher and teacher of the faith and this is given priority in training; the practical roles of church builder, manager and therapist are subsidiary to theoretical models of ministry; and Pastoral studies are taught chiefly in the context of the classroom and the local church placement. He believes that the doctrines of incarnation and crucifixion should impel us to pay greater attention to the Church as servant and sacrament in God's world. As the Church comes to terms with the challenge of plurality and the "global village", cross-cultural communication, apologetics, mission and evangelism must be essential components of the syllabus. There must also be a greater practical emphasis on leadership skills, in which contextual learning is essential, and where trainers should help students to understand the Church as community rather than as institution.

Our Baptist Colleges incorporate a wide variety of learning experiences within their training to provide the resources for the personal, professional and theological development of ministerial students in order that churches might be equipped for

God's mission in the world through their leadership. Tuition is drawn from a variety of social, racial, cultural and denominational backgrounds, and employs a range of learning methods with an emphasis on interaction and participation rather than passive instruction. Students are encouraged to recognise that each of their colleagues in training as well as church members and indeed non-members have a contribution to make; all have different experiences of life. The development of new post-graduate MTh degrees in Applied Theology are giving the opportunity for continued theological reflection on pastoral practice, particularly for serving pastors.

But while this kind of reflection and integration will always play an important part in ministerial formation, is this enough? We may still be in danger of continuing the divide between informed clergy and passive laity. Jane Thorington-Hassell <sup>6</sup> is concerned that Baptists are failing to produce practical theologians and enablers of others in the Church's mission. She states that most ministers have said that their training did not prepare them to work in urban priority areas or inner cities in general. In reviewing the various forms of training she dismisses both university and seminary courses as having too strongly academic contexts. She would advocate distance learning believing that it encourages an integrated theology, is less trainer controlled and erodes the distinction between so-called professional and other ministries. While I feel that this view is over-optimistic, she is correct in recognizing that congregation-based training provides a better opportunity for contextual and integrated theology.

### **The Present State of the Church**

The late David Bosch in his seminal work *Transforming Mission* argues for a new mission paradigm in a Post-modern world<sup>7</sup>. Over the 2,000 years of Church History the missionary idea has been profoundly influenced by the cultural context. Today we live in tension between the Enlightenment and Post-modern paradigms. The narrow Enlightenment perception of rationality has been found to be an inadequate cornerstone for life. Third World Christianity is growing with an interest in "narrative theology" - symbol, ritual, sign - and we must recognise that true rationality involves experience. The Church must recover its role as the Body of Christ building community.

Bosch is correct to argue for a new missionary paradigm, for a move from "church-centred mission to a mission-centred church". The people of God are a pilgrim church; a church for others; a sign and sacrament for the world; and a community of the Spirit, in which the local church is the primary agent of mission. Eddie Gibbs rightly states<sup>8</sup> that there needs to be a restatement of the centrifugal motion of mission, which entails going into all the world, as against the centripetal dynamic of attraction to a centralized church programme. Such journeying involves crossing cultural as well as geographical frontiers.

The first priority must be for some serious research. John Finney <sup>9</sup> made this point, when he concluded that evangelism needs to be founded upon fact rather than fantasy. While many industrial companies spend 15-20% of their turnover on research and development, churches spend less than 1 per cent. As a result, money is wasted, the time of Christians is squandered, and most important of all, people do not hear the good news of God in Christ in a way they can respond to. The need for a spiritual basis for our nation is too urgent to be left to the latest bright idea or the preferences and drive of a few individuals. Michael Fanstone's survey <sup>10</sup> of 500 people, who had returned to church after a period of absence, showed that 62% had left over issues of relevance - the world of work and the world of faith were

# 250

- the number of editions  
of Baptist Ministers' Journals  
*Congratulations!*

# 250

- just over the number of  
churches helped by a  
Home Mission grant

# 250

- four fifths of the total  
number of grants given  
in 1995

# 250

- the number of pence  
required from each Baptist  
member every six weeks

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- the number of Baptist  
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**THE BAPTIST UNION**  
OF GREAT BRITAIN

worlds apart; 44% over personal issues - there was a lack of care, support or help offered by the church; 27% over issues of leadership; and only 7% over issues concerning God. If our ministry concentrates on doctrines of God and Church, we may well find that we are scratching where very few folk are itching!

Eddie Gibbs has sought to address these issues in his study of nominalism in the UK Church. He identifies three contextual factors which provide the ministry, and therefore training, context in which the Church's re-evangelizing strategy must be developed: urbanization; secularization; and religious pluralism. Many people cannot live with the double standards of Church and world. "The tragedy is that for the majority of those individuals, the Church provides no adequate support to work out the implications of the gospel in their particular context in order to face the pressing trials and seductive temptations which are relevant in their working environment"<sup>11</sup>. The central claim of secularism is that the Christian faith is not credible as an explanation of the world in which we live. The Church is perceived as a private club with its own private set of beliefs, which the rest of the world finds unacceptable.

Having discussed the problems of buildings and styles of worship, Michael Fanstone details the problems over leadership, which tends to be academic and male dominated. He emphasises the need for leaders to be possibility thinkers and to be servants who lead by example rather than exhortation. Eddie Gibbs believes that leaders are intimidated by a secular and pluralist society and as a result the Church becomes insular. He states that if church leaders are not adequately trained to operate on the frontiers of faith in an unchurched mission environment, they are ill-prepared to equip people to operate outside the church context. They opt, therefore, to educate and train their people to work within their own sphere of operations. Leaders must provide support systems to facilitate witness within society - incarnation - a community of witness. They must recognise that contextualization of biblical and theological insights is an area where lay people are the experts. The way forward is to start with small groups of committed people, who wish to explore the relationships between faith and life.

### **Future Patterns of Training**

The late John Robinson, then Bishop of Woolwich, writing in April 1963 in the *Daily Mirror* about his book *Honest to God* said:

What drove me to write my book was that what matters to most people in life seems to have nothing to do with 'God'; and God has no connection with what really concerns them day by day ... The traditional imagery of God simply succeeds, I believe, in making him remote for millions today.

What I want to do is not to deny God in any sense, but to put him back in the middle of life - where Jesus showed us he belongs. For the Christian God is not remote. He is involved; he is implicated. If Jesus Christ means anything, he means that God belongs in this world ... Let's start from what actually is most real to people in everyday life - and find God there.

I have expressed my belief, elsewhere<sup>12</sup>, that John Robinson may well have been ahead of his time, or perhaps the Church was simply unable to hear. Whatever the reason, I believe that his words still speak to us today, and that it is time for a radical rethink. David Bosch reminds us that mission is God's mission, the mission of a missionary God. Mission mediates salvation; it is a quest for justice - the kingdom is God's promise to the poor; it is contextualized; it is liberation -

political action as soteriology rather than as ethics; and it is ministry by the whole people of God - an organic view. There must be dialogue with others - not salesmen but ambassadors of the Servant Lord. Missiology challenges theology in its reflection on faith, in its journey through the world. Missiology challenges the aims, pattern and methods of our training.

A number of recent pieces of work have pointed us in this direction. David Clark's survey of about 400 Christians, mainly engaged in the professions or as managers, carried out in the UK in 1992-1993 has revealed some challenging results for the churches<sup>13</sup>. They recognised the need for daily work to be valued in the worship, preaching and teaching programmes of the Church. They placed the following as priority issues for those programmes: ethics, care, management, employment, ambition, wealth creation, justice and fair trading. Parish priest, John Reader encourages us to see that doing theology should become a shared local activity, encountering people outside the Church. He suggests tackling community issues by; listening to the local stories; drawing on contemporary analytical frameworks such as sociology and psychology; drawing on Christian sources; and then direct engagement with those needs<sup>14</sup>. Stephen Pattison, in his consideration of the area of mental illness<sup>15</sup>, its care, its institutions and the role of the Church, has recognised the need for political involvement and a prophetic voice. He advocates Liberation Theology, which is practical, contextual and action guiding, rather than remote, theoretical and academic.

There have already been some Baptist initiatives in this area. The Midland Urban Mission Programme, set up and funded by West Midlands Association, Birmingham Baptist Inner City Project, and Regent's Park College, Oxford included a three year part-time course to promote theological and biblical reflection on urban issues. In 1994 the decision was taken to bring the project to an end. Chris Walton, the programme's director, noted that the programme's ability to be in touch with large numbers of urban Christians had proved to be limited and the grand ideal to train the ordained leadership of the Church together with lay-membership was elusive. Elsewhere in 1994, Andy Bruce (West Midlands Association Missioner) did establish a "community of learning" for Baptists in the Potteries, which sought to provide opportunities for individuals to explore their calling further, and at the same time release new resources for mission and ministry. This community of learning has been based on the pattern of action/reflection using facilitators and group discussion.

## **Conclusion**

Along with Paul Mortimore I believe that if we agree that training, equipping and supporting the people of God for their ministry in the world is an urgent responsibility laid upon us, then certain implications will follow. We will need to ensure that teaching will equip people for their life in the world. That there is a recognition that all God's people are called to the task of "doing theology"<sup>16</sup>. He recognises that this will involve a shift of power that will be painful for those who have traditionally controlled the theological agenda; that pastoral ministry will "involve helping believers understand and interpret the biblical text in ways which resonate with their daily experience, helping believers bring their successes and failures, ambiguities and insights into the life, worship, care and support of the gathered community".

Ministerial training will have to equip enablers and trainers, who will be able to mobilise the Church. Such ministers will themselves need to be trained to reflect

theologically and to value the experience of others. We cannot emphasise too strongly the importance of placements in the community, as well as in the Church. We must develop creative programmes that will help all God's people to discover the value of their own experience and learn to relate their faith and life. Most Christians experience a dichotomy between the "Sunday world" of faith, which tends to be black and white, and the "Monday world" of real life and work, which tends to be various shades of grey. Michael Williams comments that "the Church preaches well about individual and family matters but leaves the rest untouched."<sup>17</sup> Students in training can also fail to connect their theology and life. Professionalism on the part of the clergy is responsible for placing a barrier between the lay people and a working out of theology in their own lives. The western theological approach of theory and practice also has a tendency to lead to a separation of theology and lived faith. We need to learn from the experience and approaches to theological education that we find in the "Two Thirds World". Pastoral theology has sought to apply theology to pastoral situations, but the realities of life precede theology.

If we take *praxis* seriously we will place doing at the centre of learning. Many of our church activities will need to be examined in the light of this perspective. The challenge of pastoral training is to link the always-relevant Jesus event of 20 centuries ago, to the future of the promised reign of God, for the sake of meaningful initiatives in the present. The mission of God is what constitutes the Church. It constantly needs renewing. It is love incarnate, in community for the world.

**John Weaver**

**Footnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (Harper & Row, 1989)
- <sup>2</sup> Laurie Green, *Let's Do Theology* (London, Mowbray, 1991)
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, Joe Gross, *A Model for Theological Reflection in Clinical Pastoral Education* (Journal of Pastoral Care, volume 48, 1994, pp131-4)
- <sup>4</sup> Peter Brierley *Act on the Facts - Information to steer by* (London MARC Europe, 1992) p190-1.
- <sup>5</sup> Ian Bunting, *The Places to Train - a survey of theological training in Britain* (Kingham Hill Trust and MARC Europe, 1990)
- <sup>6</sup> Jane Thorington-Hassell, *Urban Ministry* (Mainstream Newsletter, No 49, 1994) pp7-11.
- <sup>7</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission - paradigm shifts in theology of mission* (New York, Orbis, 1991)
- <sup>8</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Winning Them Back - Tackling the problem of Nominal Christianity* (Tunbridge Wells, MARC, 1993)
- <sup>9</sup> John Finney: *Finding Faith Today - How Does it Happen?* (Swindon, Bible Society, 1992) p110.
- <sup>10</sup> Michael Fanstone, *The Sheep that Got Away - why do People Leave the Church?* (Tunbridge Wells, MARC, 1993).
- <sup>11</sup> Eddie Gibbs, op cit p230.
- <sup>12</sup> John Weaver, *Editorial - The Church Isn't!* (Mainstream Newsletter, No 49, 1994) p2.
- <sup>13</sup> David Clark, *Christians at Work* (Birmingham, Westhill College, 1993)
- <sup>14</sup> John Reader, *Local Theology: Church and Community in Dialogue* (London, SPCK, 1994)
- <sup>15</sup> Stephen Pattison, *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- <sup>16</sup> Paul Mortimore, *The Worldly Church*, (Baptist Union paper, 1993) pp40-46
- <sup>17</sup> Michael Williams, *The Dichotomy between Faith and Action: towards a model for "doing theology"* in Paul Ballard, ed. *The Foundations of Pastoral Studies and Practical Theology* (University College, Cardiff, 1986) pp39-52.

# A Perspective on Ministry

Virtual reality has this problem: it is relative to the mind-set and abilities of the programmer. So a perspective on ministry must be read with a constant eye towards the by-line. It is essentially personal and shaped by the perceptions and experiences of the writer. This is written from a desk in Didcot and is shaped to a large extent by the present experience. Yet before this chair was occupied, the pointed questions of a theological college had, like a scalpel, dissected the really formative period of life in three very different churches.

## Retrospective

Through thirty years of serving in different kinds of ministry one of the constant issues has been living with change. This challenges and shapes what we offer to God each day. The dynamic of the charismatic life is encountering God in and over against the events and relationships that make up our experience. Drawing attention to differences between the beginning and end of a period of time is like comparing snapshots in a family album. Pointing the camera into the Church today might be like recording a period play that stands out against the real world.

## Context

In the young world around us it is quite acceptable to be religious, since doing your own thing is what life is about. Ministers are encouraged by statistics that affirm the religiosity of the British population. The current snapshot is very different from the one taken in the sixties, when the Church was under popular attack. However, the battle for the mind is still not won. The Church has followed the world in its stress on experience over against a thoughtful and consistent philosophy of life. A Christian apologetic has still to capture the mind of the nation. Those in ministry who struggle at this frontier are often marginalised within the Church.

If we applied the same rigor of thought to the issue of debt as once we engaged with gambling, ministers would not drift so readily into some of the inconsistencies of the present. We do agonize over issues of sexuality, but mostly from a pragmatic stance that struggles to come to terms with the givens of the gospel and past clear interpretations of Scripture. The Church is constantly in danger of letting the social context shape our thinking as well as our practice.

## Attitudes

One of the most striking changes has been in the expressed attitudes of ministers towards the churches and the relationship between servant and congregation. This may be a whinge about whinging or a defence of ineffectual pressing for the care of ministers by the Union. There is, nevertheless, a great amount of asking for rights and claiming of privileges. The fact is that ministers have never been as well off in material terms and are generally better provided for in resources beyond money. The problems arise when an attempt is made to draw comparisons between the ministry and other callings. The contrast is always with another profession and seldom with a tradesperson. Besides housewives or househusbands, there is no other group of workers who can have as much contact with their own children. Good time management makes this possible, but the repeated story is how manse families suffer because the minister-parent is never

available. This attitude arises because neither the distinction between the minister and their work has been drawn nor the separate identity of spouses established.

### **Insecurity**

The similarity between the snapshots of ministry taken in the sixties and the nineties will focus upon a sense of insecurity. Questions about the nature and role of the ministry within the Church act like a sounding board for the accusations of irrelevancy hurled from beyond the Christian community. Ministers are no more sure today of their identity or role. Reaction to this insecurity takes some into claims of authority with suspicion of any who ask questions. Others retreat into consensus and little initiative taking. So church life becomes dull and passionless. Image and profile raising is in danger of becoming the motivation that makes us do things in order to gain a hearing from others. The methodology of the world hides our uncertainty about the task we are called to fulfil.

### **Needing a Structure for Life**

Against this retrospective view there is a need to establish structures that will enable ministers to find a new sense of their calling and a deeper contentment in being a servant.

### **Walking with God**

A keel on a sailing boat does not just provide weight low down to aid stability. It checks leeway; drifting with the wind. Experiencing God in the present, like a keel, is necessary for ministers if we are to live with assurance while content to be and to feel vulnerable. The dread of not being on top, not winning and achieving at the surface level of life needs the counterbalancing of intimacy with Christ in the depth of our being. Sustaining life in the Spirit of Jesus requires serious attention to the inner self in order that the fullness of Christ is what others encounter in our serving.

Like all human beings, ministers need support to find and sustain this way of life. At different levels and in differing degrees, the servant of God will thrive when strength is renewed and energy found in dependence. A child is confident outside the family when it is affirmed in a trusting relationship with parents and other intimate contacts. In such bonds, identity and worth are found and energy to face the world beyond is generated.

Paul's primary injunction to the Ephesians elders, in whatever role they were serving (see Alastair Campbell's timely book) was to give serious attention to themselves. The bread and butter business of developing discipleship, within the ministerial calling, calls for structuring time and energy use in ways that promote life and growth in the Spirit. Each person will need to be aware of how best they experience help in devotions. This is not the same as that which emotionally satisfies. It is rather that which issues in holy living in the world. Biblical understanding of human personality requires that inner and outer life are congruent. So the journey of faith concerns the struggle to match our nature to that of our divine companion, Jesus Christ.

### **Companions**

Support comes more readily from the closest human relationships. At this level fear of being dependent feeds a need for personal autonomy. The distortion and denial of both disables the delicate and delightful balance in human personality in

which wholeness is expressed by “being-in-relationship”. Ministers, like all humans, need to cultivate supportive relationships that thrive in harmony and not unison. Such relationships grow through challenge, rather than conformity, as the starting point when issues need facing.

The threat to intimacy sometimes makes it difficult for spouses to be spiritual guides and counsellors to each other. For this and many other reasons the patterns of ministry that make a couple the chief and only source of support at depth are fraught with dangers. The public acknowledgement of this significant relationship at ordinations and inductions is one thing. To lay hands on a spouse and separate them to ministry in the same context can confuse the Church and feed a fusion of personality that is precisely what “one flesh” does not mean.

Whatever is the Baptist equivalent of a spiritual director, ministers need it. One who will accompany the pilgrim along the way, who will hold and confront in the light and darkness, is necessary. Most often ministers will need to go and find such a person for themselves. Frequently the person will change. Sometimes a group can fulfil this role provided there is a deep and covenantal commitment to its life by all its members. Ministers’ meetings have not delivered such support and are usually too large a gathering for the kind of intimacy that such journeying requires. Freed from other responsibilities a superintendent might be in the ideal position to serve in this ministry. This would require many adjustments to current practice and a reduction in the size of the area they are expected to cover.

### **Polarisation of Understandings**

Changing tack, to take up the nautical metaphor again, the comments on the role of superintendents brings the current issues on the Union’s agenda into view. The role of ministers and understandings of ministry feature in at least three papers before the Council. “Understandings of Ministry”, “Towards a Theology of the Assembly”, and the Review of the Superintendency will demand much time and reflection from all committed Baptists. Because all are involved in these issues, they are emotive and the outcome could so easily be a polarisation within our fellowship.

### **Whose agenda**

It is worth asking how the different issues came to be raised among us. Certainly the basic question of the understandings of ministry among Baptists has been around for years. The Study Group on Ministry asked difficult questions ten years ago and it was felt unwise at the time to set up a major commission. A major factor now, as when the role of the superintendents came into being, is the way we stand alongside other denominations and their patterns of ministry. As most traditions have orders of ministry that are in measure hierarchical, the mutual recognition questions are particularly difficult for Baptists. Many from within other groupings find our ecclesiology such a mind shift that even our questions are unintelligible. Similarly, Baptists’ assumptions about others demonstrate how closely we have stayed within our own patterns of thought. Baptist ways and words must surely be part of the ecumenical debate. Yet they must surely be received as they are and not just fitted to other patterns of thought. If the ecumenical agenda dominates then our self understanding is at risk of distortion.

## **Identity**

Being sure of our own identity and committed to living in that way of being is the only honest approach to ecumenical discussion. Within that identity is the restorationist principle - a search for a radical expression of biblical truth and a readiness to change in the light of new understandings gained. That same principle will cause us to stand apart from patterns of churchmanship that challenge gospel lifestyle. This determination to follow truth makes Baptists into a movement more than an institution. It will also mean that we listen carefully to views that differ from our own and test them respectfully before we separate over interpretation.

This brings us to the issue of distinguishing between the essential truths of church doctrine and those that do not create a different kind of body. Thus our forefathers drew a series of lines through several issues until they found that they joined in a boundary. This boundary defined the community that eventually separated into the newly discovered way of being church. Our history shows how flexible or permeable that boundary was. Today we struggle with this flexibility for it is what defines where we end and non-Baptists begin.

If we harden this boundary and lose its flexibility we will cease to be the movement that we essentially are. We will become bounded by tenet and structure wherever hard lines are drawn and that will institutionalise our life. Polarisation in this process, as it relates to ministry in the current debate, will divide us and knock the life out of a movement that can take the Church to the kingdom frontiers beyond the reach of others.

## **Radical Covenants**

What will bind us together as a movement is not what distinguishes us from others. It will be what we commit ourselves to hold together on the pilgrimage. The practice of covenanting, of agreeing together, is one way in which our identity can be expressed and our nature as movement demonstrated. In relation to ministry this could have a number of outworkings. National recognition would be of those who live in covenant with a pilgrim people. Each induction would be entering into covenant with a local church. Sharing in that ministry is entering the associating covenant with a regional or national grouping.

There is a need to explore the nature of covenants in these different contexts. Just as the paper on the theology of the Assembly makes this word mean a number of different things, so this use of the concept is probably different from the way our forefathers employed it. The mutuality of agreeing to walk together before the Lord asks for accountability that is both demanding and supportive. Like the Roman legionaries' shields joined together in a protective tortoise covenants will make forward movement into enemy territory more possible. Each needs to make the link and walk forward. Covenant is fellowship and mission; they are inseparably joined in the experience of being church. Ministry has its place only in this context.

## **Enabling Structures**

The task of the Union as the national association is to provide the enabling structures through which covenant keeping can find its expression. This focused life is vital and provides the perspective into which ministry and ministers must take their appropriate place. Apart from the churches, there is no ministry, and any structure or view that divides ministers from the people of God engaged in mission distorts the picture and disables the service.

Talk of the Assembly or Council as of the Ministry can only be sensible when the terms include, and in a very real sense are synonymous with, the churches agreeing to walk together and watch over one another in the Lord. A Baptist perspective on ministry requires us to stand among the people and serve them. Any impression that ministers are a different kind of Christian is not in perspective.

**Malcolm Goodspeed**

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## Preaching the Word

'My word...will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it..' Isaiah 55:11

When you preach your finest sermon  
And give your very best,  
But your people are indifferent  
And none seems to be blessed,  
Take heart!

When you preach an earnest sermon  
And you're told its far too long,  
Too dry, too vague, too deep, too dull,  
Too pointed, or quite wrong,  
Take heart!

God's word will not return empty  
But achieve what he desires.

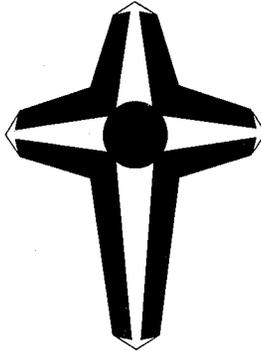
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And your words and your example  
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Your steady, faithful preaching  
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As they practice Christlike values  
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# Ministry in the Local Church

“It is the highest form of ministry”, said my colleague, in a conversation that expressed - more than anything else - companionship. Here she silenced me - and not many people can do that! I do take a very high view of ministry in the local church and community but imagined myself alone in that belief. I am less ready to say so for fear of sounding arrogant or of rationalising my own position. Nevertheless I do believe it and have done so for years.

These days there are many ways of denying the worth of local ministry. For some people, no low paid job commands respect, especially if it is confined to a small area and has no career structure. The greatest danger, however, may well come from within. There has been a significant shift in values. We applaud that which is eye-catching; value that which is attractive to the national media and judge the effectiveness of ministry by the size of the following crowd. Although this comes from a genuine desire to see the word of God published widely, we need to ask serious questions about values which we adopt, apparently without question. Why can't we affirm the worth both of the charismatic public figures and the hidden workers, unknown but equally dependent upon the Holy Spirit? There wasn't a great crowd, you know, at the crucifixion, nor apparently, at the resurrection. The significance of the worth of God is not always to be judged by the numbers of people present.

Why do I take so high a view of local ministry? Because in the pattern of Jesus, it is essentially a service offered to people where they are. No matter how widely it may be undervalued, in the paradox of the ministry of Jesus, it has eternal worth.

The combination of skills required for this ministry is daunting. One is pastor, teacher, carer, confidante, advocate, leader, administrator - that will do for starters. Skills in communication are required, in person to person and group work, in public speaking and the written word. Then there are the elusive 'people' skills - being responsive to need without making people dependent, helping people to be confident without over-praising them, encouraging people to speak for themselves but being advocate when that is not possible, contributing to their healing under God while having enough wisdom to know when professional help is needed, and teaching - well, that's a whole profession in itself.

Then there are the leadership skills, particularly necessary and difficult to apply in the Baptist tradition, I suggest. The word 'minister', meaning servant, is full of meaning for one who follows Jesus and I deplore the loss of the servant ethic in these days. While authority rests with the Church Meeting in Baptist churches, a delicate application of leadership skills will always be required. It is possible both to serve and to lead so long as the leadership does not seek to take power out of people's hands. Somehow it is possible to be challenging, even confrontational so long as this is founded on respect for the people of God, reverence for the Spirit in them and the desire to offer service.

I speak of one who struggles and tries to learn and I do know that this demanding style of leadership can leave the minister exposed and solitary. There is one member of my church who, whenever I visit her, offers prayer for me and always her prayer is that her minister should have courage. I value those prayers and remember them often. With all this, there is required sensitivity to the spirituality of other people and the 'psychological skills' which enable the minister to understand

herself (or himself). Thus we may avoid harming people because of our own insecurities or fears or the inability to cope with change.

Notice that in all of this I have used the word 'skills' not gifts. This is not to deny the importance of the New Testament teaching on gifts, but I fear it has been used too often to opt out of some responsibilities in local ministry. Gifts are complemented by skills which can be learned.

One of the great gifts which we all need is a congregation that will put up with us while we learn and make our mistakes. But what other occupation requires such a combination of skills and abilities?

I would say that in these days, the big unrecognised temptation in the Church is power and the big unrecognised sin is rejection. Power is alluring and addictive and some of those who are most susceptible are those most devout and faithful in church work. Once you have had a place in the Church, you can't do without it; once you have had influence, it's hard to withdraw. Those who fain would serve God best may be most deeply wounded. Unless we recognise this and face up to it, life in our churches may be stifled. I don't describe this as a sin but a temptation for those who are tempted to hold onto power, but certainly didn't begin their service with that motivation. Power is captivating and we must wake up to it.

Of course there are more overt and organised power struggles in our churches. Most of them carry pious labels but power and influence is what it's all about and there are too many people in our churches who are honourably but unnecessarily wounded.

The big unrecognised sin, in my view, is rejection. I call it a sin because it's what happened to Jesus. My life in a multiracial community and my position as a woman in ministry, have taught me one unpalatable lesson - that if you fail fully to accept a brother or sister in Christ, eventually that non-acceptance becomes a definite rejection. Anyone who is different may suffer rejection. Anyone who is talked about, the subject of gossip, anyone who doesn't fit in with the majority of the congregation; we don't have to throw people out to reject them - simply do nothing to accept them.

The word 'accept' unfortunately has a weak sound but its meaning in Christian terms is strong, positive, active and costly. Oddly enough I would say that the main reason for rejecting people is not a lack of love but a lack of courage.

As I continue with this mixture of reflections, I find myself thinking with concern about my fellow ministers. I want to see more recognition and affirmation of those involved in faithful local ministry. It is so liberating to feel you have the confidence of your peers and those who represent the denomination. I wish the system were less wasteful of human resources. A new minister makes mistakes alone, works things out alone. A Curacy system would surely be less wasteful - though I know we haven't the finances.

Nevertheless, I'll persist in mentioning money - I wish there were more money available for in-service training and retreats. And salaries - it brings no honour to anyone when Baptists are bottom of the list of main denominations in minimum stipend and the argument about average salary only betrays the disparity between the salaries of some and of other. It offends my sense of justice.

When I left teaching (not a well-paid job) to enter the ministry, nearly 30 years ago, I learned a rapid lesson. When you're short of money, it's not what you can't have, but what you can't do that matters. In work that is so demanding, ministers need to be able to do things and go places that refresh their souls and restore their

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This is a further step in our commitment to our customers making it easier for you to contact us.

After one of the wettest Januaries on record, many people have been looking at their insurance cover to see whether the policy on their house, Church, business etc. includes Storm Tempest and Flood. This cover is usually readily available and in fact is automatically included in our Houseowners and Householders policies. However this cover has to be specifically requested for Church buildings and contents. If this cover is not already provided under your Church policy we would be happy to provide a quotation upon request. You can, of course, contact us on the new "0345" number".

Yours in His Service

T. E. Mattholie

sense of worth as human beings. There are still plenty of manses where the family depends on one Home Mission salary.

Something that I want to say to my sisters and brothers in ministry is this - the desert is a valid spiritual experience. It is not as it appears to be, the absence of experience of the Spirit - it is a valid experience in itself. We're all led into the desert at some time and it is not our fault. We have the extra pain, then, of having to contribute to the nourishment of others while suffering from hunger ourselves. It is surely no sin to reach a place of desperation where the only thing you can do is abandon yourself to the promised grace of God whose strength is made perfect in weakness.

Last year I married my brother and sister-in-law - a wonderful joy and privilege. My new sister's family roots are in Jamaica and the marriage crossed barriers and broke them down. The day was filled with love and harmony. For me, that event symbolised all our efforts under God to dispel prejudice within ourselves and to build genuine community. It also symbolised all the joys and privileges of local ministry. We are welcomed into people's lives, there to see God and help people acknowledge God's being in them.

**Carol McCarthy**

## CONGRATULATIONS from an older to a younger brother!

250 issues is a lot of reading matter! We look forward to reading many more in the future. The magazine of the Baptist Men's Movement - WORLD OUTLOOK - has had various formats but is now in its 77th year. Although we haven't counted we believe our July issue will be No. 308.

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# What's Wrong with the Minister?

During my ministry in an UPA Parish in Leeds, I was often confronted with the problem of colleagues who seemed to have “disappeared” for a few months. When I enquired about their absence from Clergy Chapters or Fraternal, I was told, usually in a whisper, that they had “some sort of breakdown” or “were under stress”. It was all rather hush, hush and we were not encouraged to discuss the matter or to enquire further, therefore we were not able to give any practical support. As a Pastor and knowing something of the stresses in the ministry from my own experience, I seek to work and live within a framework of not only coping with stress, but also channelling it into something creative, both for fulfilment in my own life, and I hope, the enrichment of others to whom I minister.

Henri Nouwen in his book, *Wounded Healer*, writes that we need to mobilize rather than escape our pains and transform them from an expression of despair into a sign of hope. What ministers need to do for themselves is what they are called to help others to do throughout their ministries. Ministers need to be able to name and learn to cope with their own stress, in order to effectively enable others to name and cope with theirs. In the introduction to *The Wounded Healer* the writer points out, “The minister is called to recognize the sufferings of this time in his own heart and make that recognition the starting point of his service.”

## The Failure of self-love

Stress builds up within the life of the minister because, traditionally, the emphasis in Christian understanding has been upon the commandments to love God, and love your neighbour. Both commandments are weighty and are responsible for burdens of guilt and failure, when they are not placed alongside the other major part of these commandments, which is to “love yourself”. Loving yourself has often been misunderstood as egocentric, and to do with the sin of pride. There needs to be a reappraisal of the triple command:

“Love the Lord your god with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with your mind ... and love your neighbour as yourself.” Matthew 22:37-39.

Traditional Christian emphasis on sin and unworthiness, and the part this plays in worship, and the traditional understanding of the “calling” of persons to be religious representatives, places undue pressure upon those so “called”. Ministers suffering from stress can both think themselves, and be thought by others as “spiritual failures”. The ‘good Christian image’ is never to be aggressive and angry, and certainly never to be erotic, and to be depressed or afraid is unacceptable. The expectations surrounding ministers do not allow them to be human. They are often under pressure by a false interpretation of the Gospel, to prove themselves and to be loved. The Church itself has been responsible for a great deal of people’s self-loathing. Ideas about the wrath of God (even towards his own son), our wickedness and deserving of the hatred of God, and the need for sacrifice, has been projected back onto ourselves. Religious people and others have found themselves repressed because they know they should love God. This near self-hatred is increased often in the lives of those who feel the weight of being “called” to a holy office in the Church. The “calling” and “holiness” of office bring pressure to bear. Self-accusation is one of the main causes of stress in the minister.

For the minister the obligation placed upon them to love guarantees failure and brings more guilt. Not only will love be expected by others, it will also be self-imposed. To love helps to fulfil our need to be thought of as caring, and may well bring the reward of love in return, but when love is motivated by guilt, then people move from freedom to dependence on others, and other aspects of self-expression become suppressed in the interest of maintaining a loving image. We then move into the area of wearing masks, in order to put up our defences, and to deny our fears and the expression of our true selves. Freud identifies one major defence as projection. When the minister feels guilty about their own feelings of anger, desire or lust, they may disown them, by projecting them on others whom they identify as bad or faithless. At the same time there are those in our congregations whose expectations of the minister are higher than their expectations of themselves, and may project goodness on to them, seeing the minister as one who can do no wrong. Such expectations will produce stress. In both examples of projection it can be seen that people either value or want to see in others what they cannot believe about themselves. This projection is what we might call part of the fight or flight syndrome, when we are unable to flee from what we fear, or unable to face it, and therefore fight it. What we are then left with is a conflict within ourselves. This conflict will produce guilt in the minister, as the expectations surrounding them say that they must not have conflict within, but should be reasonable, peaceable, calm and above all trusting in God! At a time when the minister needs to confide in someone, they may be ashamed to bring themselves to open up to someone; the question needs to be addressed: "Who ministers to the minister?"

When the minister should take time to stop and reflect, and think about themselves and perhaps their family, they often put more energy into their work, in order to be as busy as possible so as not to face up to their inner conflict. As they are already stressed themselves, they often find themselves ministering to others under stress, and therefore they make themselves more vulnerable. Sometimes the levels of stress the minister encounters build up too high, stirring up inner feelings and emotions, which in the end explode, causing a breakdown.

If, however, ministers can learn to love themselves, their own journey of self-knowledge may well minimise the detrimental effects they may have on others, and maximise the positive contribution they want to make. They may even find in their own pain and suffering some reflection of the pain and suffering of others, which will in the end enrich their ministry to other people.

"In some mysterious way it is our wounds which provide the richest resources for our work as helpers and healers" (*Meaning in Madness* p74)

Unfortunately many ministers not wishing to feel guilty, and wanting to hold to their own self-esteem, will refuse to acknowledge another person's anguish, because they fear it will awaken their own fears and weaknesses. But in this denial of other people's needs, our own needs are denied, and it may lead us to treating ourselves as of little real value - even as objects.

### **Depression as Defence**

Just as projection and denial are forms of defence, so is depression. The minister may often find safety in this defence mechanism. They may shut themselves up inside this prison in order to keep out the dangers of reality which would otherwise overwhelm them. Because their work is never ending, their ego may have become exhausted, having expended its quantity of psychic energy.

"It takes energy to contend with rejection, criticism or hostility of people just as it does to please them by doing what they want us to do". (*Ministry Burnout* p8)

Once exhaustion has set in, the harder the minister tries, the more they are pushed down. The further they fall short the more distressed and inadequate they feel. The minister needs help long before this can begin to happen. What are the major stresses in a ministry which bring a minister to this point?

Because the minister has needed to be available, the never ending pastoral work requires long working hours. As there is often a proneness to guilt, owing to certain theological concepts, this makes them vulnerable to manipulation, people that demand constant attention may develop their guilt factors. They cannot afford to make enemies of such people. Often the energy a minister gives out seems to make very little difference, and if there is any feedback at all it is usually critical! The ministers must maintain confidentiality, sometimes under great pressure to do what is right. The minister often acts as a mediator, holding two opposing sides in the Church together. Then there are questions of building, finances etc. Ministers are often so involved in people's lives that they take the blame when things go wrong. They are often changing roles, from bringing comfort at a funeral, to sharing joy at baptisms and weddings.

As ministers we are supposed to pray, read and to study, but pressure of time is always a problem, and we may not always feel like praying! Stress may also be caused by questions of faith, doubt and fear. We are either too conservative or too radical. We are either not giving enough time to our families, or we are not giving enough to the Church.

All this and much more may lead a minister to the 'safety' of depression, breakdown or burnout. This is where they not only share the darkness of others, but are swallowed up in their own darkness. They may feel that to themselves, to God and to others, they have failed and they are no good.

To suggest to such ministers how they can be helped, or how breakdowns can be avoided, is often to lay more guilt at their door. It is of the greatest importance that a minister hold no guilt because they are ill. For many people illness has another significance. It becomes a test of faith, or leads to reward - one day the sick person will see that it is all worthwhile! When a minister breaks down, they may assume that they haven't prayed hard enough, or that they lack faith. Such thoughts are seriously misplaced, and in order to become well they need to be affirmed.

### **The Defeat of the New Beginning**

The minister needs to learn to love themselves. They need to know that they are of great value to God and to others. They are loved, wanted and accepted as they are, unconditionally. They need to be set free from anxiety and guilt, to enable them to rediscover contentment and equilibrium. They need to discover the importance of giving oneself to oneself, before giving oneself to others.

"Love of self calls for a great deal of lucidity, objectivity and courage. To accept oneself is to accept communicating with oneself and to appreciate one's qualities and failings, one's potentialities and limitations. It is to succeed in living without being perpetually relative to someone else or to some rule or other which has more or less internalized. Finally, it is to accept being fully responsible for oneself, one's life and one's choices." (*The Christian Neurosis*, p127)

Ministers need to find their value as people in their own right. They are valuable as persons, irrespective of what they do. We need to accept God's unconditional love, and not to try and prove ourselves worthy of it.

As we mature as ministers, we will find our ministry more, not less, disturbing, and therefore more stressful, but we will be able more clearly to differentiate between creative struggles and stress related struggles, as we find ministry involvement in struggles for justice. Rather than our lives and ministry becoming meaningless, it will take on new fresh meaning.

"As Christians we are greatly privileged to have meaning in life at the most fundamental level. It is one of the most valuable resources we have in managing stress. But because it is so important, it leaves ministers who are going through major doubts, either of their faith or their vocation, especially vulnerable to stress." (*Living with Stress*, p55)

The minister, therefore, may be able to discover this meaning although times of loneliness may be disturbing. It may also be a gift to be protected and claimed as a source of human understanding.

"Making one's own wounds a source of healing, does not call for a sharing of superficial personal pains but for a constant willingness to see one's own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which all men (women) share" (*The Wounded healer*, p88)

Perhaps with the recognition of one's own brokenness and mortality, one's own liberation from stress begins.

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**Stanley Baxter**

# A Dance on some Eggshells: New Millennium Priorities

Having achieved such a distinguished milestone in the publishing of our *Journal*, I am conscious of the fact that we are approaching an even more auspicious turning point with the start of a new millennium just a few years ahead. In inviting my submissions on the theme of the future shape of our ministry, I rather think that the editor must have exceeded his normal quota of sacrificial lambs for this special publication. For when it comes to anticipating the unknown, the line between perceptive guesswork and wild inaccuracy is a fine one indeed. During my recent sabbatical studies which are still incomplete I have discovered that periods such as ours leading to a major calendar change, have always given birth to a rash of weird and wonderful millenarian teachings and I have no desire to feed what is bound to happen anyway in this respect. Hence I don the prophetic role somewhat gingerly and with no intention of filling up the bowls for the wrathful to propel in my personal direction.

## **Some causes for Gratitude**

It has always seemed to be to be sound sense to note that to set the future in context we do well, first, to rightly understand the realities of our present situation, shaped, as they are, by the continuing trends of our increasingly secularised society. Secularism is the major opponent to all forms of spirituality, our own included. Yet, confining myself only to the years in which I have been in ministry, it is obvious that developments from our recent past are by no means to be regarded as unmitigatingly bad news for us. Even Baptist ministers have lived through a period of unparalleled prosperity and progress at a material level. We have enjoyed the fruits of these advances, in our homes, with our cars, and in our general standard of living. Whereas, in the late 50s, it was normal for a minister and their spouse to work full-time for their church on one income, which was seldom much above the Home Mission standard, even in large and prosperous churches, and to provide all the soft furnishings of their manse, including the carpets, these days this only happens rarely. It is normal for the minister's family to enjoy the fruits of two full incomes except for the limited years whilst the manse children are young. Many of our churches now pay generous stipends.

Moreover, these days we have access to many forms of post graduate education. We enjoy swift and relatively safe air travel to any part of the world that takes our fancy. The fabulous growth of the information technology industry has supplied us not only with immediate access by phone with one another, and an increasing selection of alternative TV channels and broadcasting companies, but also with the ubiquitous personal computer on which to write and store our correspondence and to draft our written work. Like the rest of our members, we have our own proper share in the enjoyment of the good things of our Westernised lifestyle.

## **This Present Age**

Yet the secularised culture of our present age is characterised by ways of thinking that are increasingly hostile to the faith we proclaim about Christ and the values we seek to communicate from his Gospel. Let us note the prevalence of three of the most significant elements.

To begin with the most obvious, since **consumerism** reigns supreme in our society, the worth of important social enterprises, and of the individuals who are touched by them, is increasingly calculated by the crudest financial estimates. The centre for our communities has ceased to be the Church, or even the slowly dying High Street, but has become the out of town shopping mall or the new, almost ecclesiastically designed, hypermarket. Attempt to travel through central London, as I do most Sundays of the year to the churches of the metropolitan area, and with more and more of the big stores now open from 10.00am to 4.30pm, the changes here are enormously significant.

Add to this the hype surrounding the launching by our present government of the National Lottery, with its weekly concentration on the identities of the lucky winners of millions of pounds of prize money and it appears that we live in a society in which the power of money rules over all. As Leslie Newbiggin has put it, the Descartes dictum, "Cogito ergo sum" has now become "Tesco ergo sum". This love of money is at the root of much more evil, decaying the fabric of many aspects of our society.

The success of the Sunday trading lobby in overcoming the Keep Sunday Special campaign, indicates another fruit of our age that will live on into the future. We have agreed that it is a good thing for everyone to be able to shop where they please and when they wish but we have also agreed to liberalize many other aspects of our lifestyle since **relativism** now rules in the realm of morality and education, with its consequent mistrust of all forms of authority. Truth, like beauty, is only in the eye of the beholder, and lacks any independent identity of its own. So it is increasingly difficult to make moral judgements about what is right or what is wrong. A striking example of this is in the realm of sex education in schools, as shown in a recent complaint furnished by supporters of the feminist movement who would have neither time nor room for religious considerations:

"Bad language and sexual innuendo are no longer the preserve of boys it seems ... By entering the male subculture sexually, girls have turned their back on some important and timeless values ... These include love, of course, as indeed a complex of emotions associated with the female gender and based primarily upon the search for a pair bond. Western society has to some extent been built upon these. It is interesting to speculate what the sociological and psychological spin-offs will be, once these value constituents are no longer there" <sup>1</sup>.

If supporters of feminism are disturbed by the loss of timeless values for sexual relationships like love and bonding, perhaps we may be permitted a certain queasiness concerning the extent to which the onward march of relativism is a mark of real human progress, or otherwise.

But, the third trend is of even greater significance to our ministry today and into the future, since it is already the dominant force in much of our present new evangelical orthodoxy. To consumerism in our society and moral relativism in our schools, we have to add **Theological Pragmatism** in our churches and ministries. The truths we proclaim are assessed in terms of the results they produce. The heart of the Gospel is no longer to do with the gracious action of God in Christ for our salvation, to which our response is to be made with repentance and faith inspired by the Spirit, it is to do with whether our presentation of these truths is effective in the growth of our churches, the planting of new congregations, or the attractiveness of our charismatic ministry. No one doubts the worth of such results, but when we succumb to pragmatism we are in serious danger of concluding that any means that produces these desirable ends are justifiable for us. Thereby hangs a long tale

in the history of the world's most potent evangelical force today, which is pentecostalism, or charismatic, or third wave renewal. In one form or another this ceased to be a minority protest movement in our churches by the early 80s and, today, has grown to a position of dominance and control throughout the whole of evangelicalism. According to David Bebbington, this growth is continuing to spread among the Baptists and he adds:

“Alongside the historic denominations there was the rapid growth of the Restorationists, who by 1985 were guessed to number some 30,000. The charismatic movement was poised to become the prevailing form of Protestantism in twenty first century Britain”<sup>2</sup>.

Being involved in a study of all this at the moment, I have taken careful note of its different stages with their relative strengths and weaknesses in the life of our churches. Much of the fruit of this is of great and transforming positive worth. But, whenever this growth in evangelicalism lacks the anchor points of a sound theological framework and a wholesome liturgy, moral error and spiritual confusion soon manifest themselves and take over. Acts of worship then become parodies of the freedom of the Spirit that they are supposed to demonstrate. Preaching is an art that is treated with scorn. Even the solemn beauty of the Eucharist is lost in anthropocentric displays - as I have, sadly, witnessed during my recent sabbatical. Our age is always attracted by sensationalism and churches that give themselves to producing a fresh new demonstration every week secure the reward of a relatively large response. As Derek Tidball wisely comments on a previous period of rapid growth among evangelicals:

“Positions of strength carry with them the inherent seeds of decline. Perhaps the position of weakness is not such a bad location after all. Evangelicalism at the turn of the twenty first century needs to read its history with care and take note”.<sup>3</sup>

## **Our Proper Priorities**

There is more to be done today than study our history, if we are to address the challenge of such trends as I have outlined. Whilst we take note of the significance of the growth of the charismatically orientated evangelicalism within the church, we have to observe that this development has not halted the decline syndrome away from the Gospel of our generation. So the **Mission Imperative** still demands our response, best undertaken when lively evangelism takes place alongside compassionate service. This has been, and remains, the hallmark of our own contribution to the world Church. We are never nearer our own roots than when we are engaged in such warm-hearted service out of our deep personal love for the Saviour whom we serve. Anything and everything that enhances our devotion to him and our dependence on him, must receive our support.

We also need a fresh recovery of the **Pastoral mode of ministry** in our midst. On a recent preaching visit to Toronto, I learned one lesson whilst having breakfast on the Sunday morning and watching a TV evangelist. I liked his method more than his message. What I observed was his mastery of the art of preaching pastorally whilst ministering to a vast crowd exceeding five thousand. How did he do this? He performed the seemingly impossible task by constant movement but, even more, by maintaining splendid rapport with his listeners in a vast auditorium, always homing in, as it were, on groups of about fifty of his congregation at a time. It was a tour de force and I was captivated by his ability. It reminded me that not only do we need to beware the unseen chains that bind us in our own preaching but, even

more, we need to escape the dreary tedium that makes us cultic professionals for the church more than caring pastors of the people we lovingly serve. The basic motif for our Lord's ministry is that of the Shepherd. We must recover His priority for our own service with the Gospel. For people matter to us because people matter to God.

We need to recapture **The sense of occasion** in our conduct of worship and especially in our celebration of Communion. It is possible for us to maintain sufficient informality to leave plenty of room for unstructured contributions at the leading of the Spirit from even the shyest member. Yet strong praises in easily sung hymns with well remembered tunes, still provide the best framework within which we worship with appropriate decorum. As often, Colin Morris puts it well for us:

"When formal religion is privatized and becomes preoccupied with esoteric imagery and ritual that is inaccessible to the generality of society, a popular piety springs up, searching for other ways of expressing faith. The starved imagination, like the empty belly is remarkably catholic in its tastes" <sup>4</sup>.

Many of our forms of worship these days express privatised religion and esoteric imagery. You can see how inaccessible it is to the secular majority by examining the faces of our children, more exposed to the secular world in their schools and through the media. So add preaching that addresses the relevant issues in life through the exposition of Scripture in the context of wholesome worship. This will draw us back from the bizarre and the boring, and will provide food in the famine for the word of God for those whose inner being is starving. Although there are always plenty of places for special efforts in evangelism, with many contributions from gifted performers of many different sorts, good preaching and memorable worship will remain the most effective methods of Gospel presentation.

To this we must add one last objective for our ministry in the years ahead. It is in the release of the **Prophetic dimension** in our ministry that we will call forth the idealism of personal sacrifice from our people and further stimulating reform within the whole of our denomination. This is the area in which the renewed activity of the Spirit can be most potently demonstrated. It is what happened in Antioch under the ministry of the godly Agabus. (Acts 11:28) Foreign Mission and Christian Aid were born in a Church which received the genuinely prophetic. In our midst not only will this lead to a fresh commitment to the Church in the third and fourth worlds but the call to it will energize our own activities as we strive to transform our somewhat slipshod denominational relationships into a much stronger, more committed and more attractive Union for all baptistic independents.

Pray on the devotion, work on the reforms and roll on the millennium.

**Douglas McBain**

**Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> See Ulanovsky *New Values* 3 (Spring 1990).

<sup>2</sup> *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730's to the 1980's* D W Bebbington p247

<sup>3</sup> *Who are the Evangelicals? - Tracing the Roots of Today's Movements* Derek J. Tidball p230

<sup>4</sup> *Wrestling With An Angel* Colin Morris p175

# Book Reviews

## ***The Wounded Healer* by Henri J. Nouwen (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1994, 118pp, £6.95)**

This, Nouwen's best known work, and now republished, has become a classic in the field of pastoralia. Even those who have never read the book now take the concept of *The Wounded Healer* as their key insight into pastoral ministry. First published in 1979, it reappears in its original form, replete with non-inclusive language and references which were immediate then but no longer so, such as Biafra, student revolt and the nuclear threat. This aside, it is a book which has lost none of its power to appeal to pastors to forsake their protective professionalism and lay hold of their humanity for the sake of those they seek to help.

Nouwen wears his learning and wisdom lightly in what is a deceptively easy read. In four brief chapters, using case studies, psychological insight and sensitivity to the human condition, he argues that there can only be healing (salvation) if the Christian Pastor is prepared to face up to his or her own condition and use this as the growing point for the healing of others: "in our own woundedness, we can become a source of life for others". It is not a case of the strong (pastor) standing over against the weak, rather the sharing of a common humanity in which acknowledged brokenness is the necessary condition for new life, according to the pattern of Christ.

On the way to arguing this thesis, he takes us through the peculiar condition of the human species today; alienated, fragmented and without hope - a victim - leading to revolution for some and the mystical search for others. Nouwen is clearly close to young people. The only meaningful ministry here is that which empathises compassionately, giving people courage to see themselves as they really are and the possibility of moving forward together.

He is not unaware of the dangers and risks of this approach for the pastor, nor of ministry becoming self-indulgent introspection. But Nouwen is convinced that authentic Christ-like ministry at the end of the second millennium can only be practised by those who do not despise their humanity but offer it positively, in Christ's spirit, for the healing of others. Many have said this since: Nouwen was among the pioneers.

**Michael V. Jackson**

## ***Operation World* by Patrick Johnstone (OM Publishing, 1993, 672pp, £8.99)**

Beginning as a modest project to inform the prayer life of a particular missionary society, the outcome is a magnum opus of some 670 pages and 332,000 words, covering the geographic, demographic, economic, political and religious vital statistics of 237 countries. One is genuinely impressed by the wealth of material and the sheer hard work of which it is the fruit.

The present volume is the fifth edition and is complemented by a companion volume *You Can Change the World*, written and illustrated with children in mind.

Turn to any of the countries included and you will receive a fairly detailed snapshot of its national character, with the accent on Christian life and activity. The amount of space devoted to each nation state varies, according to size and importance, but even St. Helena and Ascension Islands warrant half a page.

The primary justification for the book is as a prayer resource. Accordingly the countries, in alphabetical order, cover a calendar year. So, in theory, one could pray through the world in a year. Also included are *Special Ministries* and a number of appendices, including statistics of missionary strength throughout the world.

In addition to its prime purpose, *Operation World* is a valuable reference book, a veritable mine of information, to which one could turn time and again and be fairly certain of finding help.

This reviewer has two reservations only. Firstly, written from an avowedly conservative/evangelical position, it lacks sympathy with other legitimate Christian stances and so we find sad references to "dead liberalism" and the like. Secondly, the title does not immediately convey the contents. In view of the book's value, this is unfortunate. A rethink would be advisable.

**Michael V. Jackson**

***Windows on Salvation* ed Donald English  
(Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994, £8.95)**

In his introduction, Donald English states that we need to face the question of how "to understand, interpret and commend salvation today". The work consists of eleven essays, mostly by Anglican and Methodist scholars, approaching the theme from different angles. The strongest impression created on this reviewer was of the strength of reaction against an individual, 'spiritual' and unworldly concept: salvation as addressing the eternal destiny of the individual soul. A quest for an understanding of salvation as relating to the whole person, the whole of life, to the church and to society, to the present as well as the future, is evident from cover to cover.

Readers are likely to close the book keen to pursue many insights in greater depth. However, some may be left uneasy. The emphasis on the social dimension is such that readers may sometimes feel that individual reconciliation with God and communion with him are not worth getting excited about. Furthermore, behind much of what is written lies the (sometimes stated) assumption that, since modern people have no sense of sin, we have no choice but to present salvation in terms of the needs and aspirations of the contemporary world: when does contextualization become capitulation? Some may wish for greater precision regarding the social dimension of salvation. For example, is every amelioration of the human condition an experience of salvation? If so, what does it mean that "there is no other name by which we may be saved", and that salvation is "through faith"? This collection would be enhanced by an in-depth essay dealing directly with the accomplishment of salvation in the incarnation, death, resurrection of the Saviour, laying a foundation for the individual and social experience.

The book leaves us with many loose ends - but hopefully an expanded horizon.

**Mike Thomas**

***Cohabitation and Marriage: a Pastoral Response*  
by Greg Forster (Marshall Pickering, pp182, £8.99)**

More than half of those now coming to be married in Church are already living together. How are we as Christian ministers and churches to respond to this changing social scene? Greg Forster, an Anglican priest in Manchester and on the editorial board for *Grove Ethical Studies*, has produced a book which helps to open up the whole subject in a way that is pastorally sensitive and realistic. He writes very

much as a priest of an established church, and in my view the book would have been more accessible if he could have been more ecumenical! (On A Policy for the Parish or School, for instance, he stipulates that he is writing 'with an Anglican parochial ministry, rather than a narrow congregational ministry, in mind!') Nevertheless, there is an abundance of factual information in these pages - statistical, historical and legal - that should provide ample material for working out one's own approach. He also marshals the Biblical evidence and traces the development of Christian Ideals. He faces up to the questions of what society is to do as well as what the Church is to say. As addenda, he offers discussion material for groups which could be an ideal way of getting a midweek meeting to explore this whole area honestly, and he gives suggestions for shaping the marriage service to cater for different circumstances. The book shows signs of having been produced in some haste, since there are quite a few misprints and the page numbers for chapters don't correspond to those listed in the index! However, these are minor blemishes in a title that tries to tackle a difficult pastoral subject so comprehensively.

**Gethin Abraham-Williams**

***Wisdom in Theology* by R.E. Clements  
(Paternoster Press and Eerdmans, 1992, 18pp, price not stated)**

This book is based on the 1989 Didsbury lectures which focused on the Old Testament Wisdom in relation to the World, Health and Politics. It begins with a splendid introductory chapter which discusses the background, development and distinctiveness of the wisdom tradition in a scholarly but completely accessible way for non-specialists. A section on the relevance of anthropological studies on *rites of passage* and liminality to an understanding of wisdom's religious significance adds a fresh dimension to this discussion. Ron has added two final chapters on Wisdom and the Household and the Divine Realm to provide a more comprehensive picture than in the lectures of the wealth of theological insight this tradition offers.

The world view and nature of wisdom are related to worship and ideas of sacred space in the chapter on the World. Sickness, healing, suffering and associated ideas of life and death are discussed, with close attention to biblical texts, in the light of the cultus' centrality. The chapter on Politics has an international perspective and concentrates on links between divine authority, political order and justice. Wisdom's role in the development of a Jewish political theology able to cope with the dispersion and foreign imperial rule is presented in a way that demonstrates its relevance for contemporary society. The discussion on family, community and the work ethic under the umbrella term 'household' recognises that which threatens to undermine the benefits of these social institutions. Set against a 17th century English Christian perspective this refutes suggestions that this theology belongs to an ancient cultural context. The final chapter may be summed up as focusing on ideas of God and spirituality. It is a fitting end to a book which succeeds in showing the importance of wisdom in any quest to understand how the divine will is revealed through human beings.

**Janet E. Tollington**

# House Exchange

A Baptist minister and his wife who live in a delightful outer suburb of Adelaide in South Australia are willing to make their comfortable home available to a minister and his wife/family from the U.K. in exchange for their accommodation here. Tony and Ann Gates are wanting to come for a couple of months in mid-1996, but timing is flexible at this stage. They love Yorkshire, East Anglia, Sussex and Dorset, but would be open to any offers.

For further details, contact Barrie Hibbert, Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8EL (0171 240 0544)

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