

# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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

# Editorial

If it is ever suggested, during college training, that you will experience the God of Christ differently in the pastorate, the suggestion would fall on deaf ears. For this is one of those aspects of ministry for which one can never be adequately prepared in advance. The unquestioned assumption is that one's spirituality will never be less personal than it is now and, in the light of the great calling, will only be deepened and enriched with the years.

The actual experience may well be different. For the duo, I and Thou, becomes a trio, I and Thou and Them. That which, formerly, God was to *me* becomes what God is to me *for them*. And so the spiritual disciplines benefit me only in order that they benefit those to whom God has called me. The spiritual life now takes on the character of a *via media* in which all that comes to me passes through me in order to enrich them.

The positive aspect is that because the pastor knows that he or she is living for others, the impulse to a disciplined life is enhanced. It probably saves us from some of the pitfalls which beset our people. The negative aspect is that spirituality itself becomes professionalised. It is something which becomes ever so slightly detached from us, no longer life and breath, but the means by which we carry out our ministerial duties. And perhaps our people suspect it of us, though they would never say so. For this reason Paul's warning about calling others to the contest while we are in danger of being disqualified, haunts relentlessly the corridors of the mind.

It is this area which exercises Susan Stevenson, and in particular the frenetic activism which characterises many of us, the fruit of which is superficiality and a dangerous egotism. The second contribution is for the purposes of response from the readership. All organisms evolve; this is no less true of *The Baptist Ministers' Fellowship*. The question is, are we evolving in the right direction in the light of the needs of our colleagues in ministry, whose interests we exist to serve? Please tell us. After this we travel to Austria, with Hans Sinning as our guide. It is instructive to have insight into one of the smallest of our Baptist communities: 1,050 out of a world total of some 39 million.

Fourthly, in the novelist Anthony Trollope's picture of the foibles of Victorian Evangelicalism, Michael Ball detects parallels today. It is just that the cultural clothes are different. Next, we include a basic reading list on counselling, compiled by Tony Noles. In the plethora of books on this subject, it may well help in selection. The second part of Michael Goodman's study of Baptist responses to the 1930s deals with the issue of numerical decline. Was the priority to be Church or Kingdom? Now, as then, the jury is still out. Finally, coming new to the office of BMF Secretary, Jonathan Edwards has taken a perspective on the Fellowship's work over some 20 years. It clearly reveals the range of important issues tackled on behalf of the membership; our *raison d'être*, should any doubt it.

# Spirituality and Ministry: An Impossible Dream?

“What difference has it made to you, since you became a Christian?” The question, posed during a service our young people took a few months ago, drew an immediate response: “Well, I’m a lot more busy!” And as I sat there in the pew, I could not help but wonder whether what I was hearing was an embryonic call to Ministry because, surely, one thing every Minister is - at least the ones I know - is busy! It is almost part of the job description. And there is nothing wrong with being busy. However, I want to ask here some of the questions I so often ask myself:

- about why I am so busy
- about what I am so busy doing
- and about how to cope with the busyness of life as a Pastor.

I write as someone who has been a Baptist Minister in a local church for six years, but who, before that, for 11 years, was a Minister’s wife. When I was ordained, I was determined to hold on to the insights and perspective I had gained, sometimes painfully, as someone who was “alongside” a Minister, from where, I would suggest, the issues are often seen more clearly. It worries me that, in practice, I have not effectively held on to those insights. It worries me that the pressures of “the Ministry” are so strong that they are squeezing me into its mould.

## Egocentricity

I love being a Minister. It is what God called me to be; it is what God has made me for. I could not be doing anything else or living any other life. Being a Minister is the one single thing, humanly speaking, that most provokes me to grow in my relationship with God. Yet being a Minister is also the thing that poses the greatest threat to my relationship with God, and that is always in danger, against my deepest desire, of turning my personal relationship with God into a business relationship. And that worries me.

I worry about the selfishness of Ministry and the cost, not that I pay, but that others pay. It worries me that I so often end up thinking about what “I” have to do, which is obviously so much more important than what anybody else in my family has to do. There is a potential arrogance and self-centredness in that, which sets the alarm bells ringing.

There is, of course, a place in the Christian life for sacrifice. As Christians, we know that the way to find life is to lose it for the sake of Jesus Christ and the Gospel, and many of us share our lives with partners who are willing to make real personal sacrifices. However, we also know that the heart is deceitful above all things. And my fear is that what we assume to be *selflessness* may actually be *selfishness* in disguise.

It was Nikolai Copernicus, back in the 16th century, who turned his world upside-down by daring to suggest that the Earth was not the centre of the Universe. He had the audacity to suggest that, far from the Earth being the centre, the Sun was the true centre. The Earth was only a minor planet circling the Sun. It was a painful struggle for 16th century men and women to come to terms with the fact that their world was not the centre of everything. It is just as painful a struggle for human

beings to realise sin and evil, and all without my being around to help.

Of course, we do not believe that it all depends on us but perhaps at times we live as if we do. We rush in where angels fear to tread, and try to make up for what we feel God is not doing. Rather than stopping and looking for what God is doing, rather than daring to "wait for the Lord", we act. Then the tragedy is that, while we are dashing around, trying to do God's work for Him, we are so often getting in His way, and preventing Him from doing the far more significant thing He wants to do. We are called not to be the Messiah, but rather to be midwives of the Kingdom.

## Iron Rations

Another of the things that I am haunted by is the idea that churches grow to become like their leaders. If we do not get it right, we are in danger not only of getting it wrong for ourselves, but of leading others up blind alleys too. That for me is a powerful incentive.

I see so many good, committed Christians wearing themselves out. Recently someone said to me that there are more committed Christians outside the Church than inside it - Christians who have been exhausted and burnt out by being part of the Christian Church. Even if that is an exaggeration, there is probably truth at the heart of it. Undoubtedly, there are Christians, inside as well as outside the Church, who are burnt out. They may be physically present but have had the heart and life drained out of them.

Robert Warren, in his book: *Being Human, Being Church*<sup>1</sup>, talks about ring doughnut and jam doughnut churches. A ring doughnut church is one where there is an emptiness at the heart of the activity, a jam doughnut church is one that has discovered a spirituality that sustains its activity, which has a value in and of itself, and which is a foretaste of the coming Kingdom. As churches, we need to rediscover a spirituality that sustains. For that to happen, Ministers and Christian Leaders need to discover that sustaining spirituality for themselves.

Back in 1993, I was one of a number of people who received a questionnaire from Bernard Green, the fruit of which has since appeared in *Travellers' Tales*, and about which John Rackley wrote in the last edition of *The Journal*. Two of Bernard Green's questions particularly struck me.

The first:

"Are we overlooking basic spiritual simplicities by which Christian faith and ministry need to be maintained?"

The second:

"Would a disciplined life of inner obedience to Christ answer many of the problems which beset us in our ministries? Or is that too simplistic?"

My suspicion is that there is more truth in a positive answer to both those questions than many of us would like to admit. It is not that the diagnosis is too simplistic, but that the implications are so huge.

Earlier this year, having struggled unsuccessfully for five years with over-busyness, and having realised that I do not respond to subtlety in this area, I put a notice on the board above my desk which said: "Overwork is Sin". I did it somewhat tongue in cheek, and probably out of all sorts of mixed motives. However, the more I think about it, the more I am coming to see that it is true. We all come to different conclusions about what constitutes "overwork", but "overwork" is sin, and as

serious as any other form of sin.

It was Richard Foster who wrote:

“Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people”.<sup>2</sup>

It is that need to go deeper that is at the heart both of the renewed interest in classical spiritual disciplines and also of many people’s experience of charismatic renewal. We are in danger of spiritual anorexia. We desperately need to drink deep of the living water of God’s Spirit, be it in the quiet of a Retreat House, or flat on our back on some church floor.

The question is one of “inner obedience to Christ”. It really will not do to say “I know I should make more time to pray, but I’m just so busy”. We have to order our life according to the pattern of Christ - or what are we doing? My notice was right, overwork *is* sin.

I wrote that notice in yellow fluorescent pen, and, six months later, the notice has faded and gone, and my life is still a quagmire of over-busyness. Why? Partly, I think, because spirituality can never be purely an individual affair, and ministry is still doggedly individualistic. Perhaps we all need some sort of voluntary accountability that can help unmask the tyrant self, and at the same time allow our Trinitarian God to heal more of His image in our lives.

I covet a group, a fraternal or whatever, where relationships can develop to the point where we can honestly share the struggle, where we can so accept and affirm one another that we can speak the truth in love, where there can be some sort of mutual accountability as we seek to live lives which express the life of Christ. We need cells of loving defiance, groups of people who will encourage one another to stand against the pressures to conform to the superficiality, and to the disobedience inherent in so many of our lifestyles.

I am very aware that all I have written says far more about me than about anything else. However, my plea is for honesty, believing that honesty leads to greater truthfulness, and that honesty and truthfulness move us in the direction of the Truth that sets us free.

**Susan Stevenson**

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> *Being Human, Being Church* Robert Warren, Marshall Pickering, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard J. Foster, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1978.

# Options for the Future Role and Functions of the BMF and its Committee: A Background Paper.

*It was agreed at the September meeting of the Committee to include this article in the January 1996 Journal. In this way, we hope to make the Fellowship aware of our current plans and thinking, prior to the April 1996 AGM.*

## **Introduction**

For some time now the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship Committee (BMFC) has been aware of being in a process of significant development, one which affects, especially, our own role and function within the denomination. In many ways this process culminated in an important meeting, in September 1994, with the Union's Senior Management Team (SMT). At that meeting the SMT asked us to clarify our own function and role for the future. This we have been seeking to do in several subsequent Committee meetings. We are now in a position to seek the wider views of the Fellowship on our conclusions to date. At our AGM, during the 1996 Blackpool Assembly, it is our intention to produce a Mission Statement expressing something of these developments for comment and, we hope, approval. It seems to the Committee that there are at least three options for our Fellowship as we also move Towards 2000.

## **A. A Benevolent Fellowship**

On this model we would revert to being principally a benevolent organisation. Encouraging Sunday prayers for Ministry. Organising subscriptions and the Annual General Meeting. Retaining oversight of the Journal. Maintaining contact with Ministers all over the world through the correspondent network. Making confidential gifts, given limited funds, to Ministers known to be in need. Considering key denominational papers and policies that affect Ministers. Appointing a Committee at the AGM to meet twice a year in March and September to hear reports, oversee the above, and discuss occasional issues or mutual concerns that arise. It seems clear to the BMFC, however, that, for many years now we have, in fact, been moving beyond model A towards a broader model. That of:

## **B. A Pro-active Fellowship**

This model loses, we believe, none of the strengths of A but rather adds to them. The BMFC has, in fact, become in recent years more of a pressure group for reform and change whilst stopping short of becoming a professional organisation. The Committee is encouraged by this evolutionary process and, indeed, wishes to both clarify and affirm that this has been happening. As examples of this development in recent years we would cite our:

- informing of members about important issues of concern through the Journal and AGM.
- speaking or writing on behalf of some Baptist Ministers who are members.
- maintaining contact with the SMT at Didcot and with the Ministry Office
- highlighting of deficiencies in the provisions made for Ministers and our seeking of improvements.

- lobbying for earlier retirement pension options and for adequate retirement provision generally.

We would further cite:

- the attention we have drawn to stress among Ministers and the need for appropriate action.
- our expressions of unease with the current settlement system, not least for women and for those in their 50's.
- our general concern about current stipend level.
- our highlighting of the need for more effective networks of support / advocates for Ministers at vulnerable or critical periods of ministry.
- our concern about the relevance of the syllabuses of our Colleges and the need for more post-ordination training.
- our pressing of the urgent need for an acceptable appraisal system.
- our preliminary work on a Code of Conduct for Baptist Ministers.
- our request that our Union find ways to improve the education of churches on their responsibility for those they call, and on ministry matters generally.
- our concern about accurate advice and help for Ministers on housing matters.

There is a further model.

### **C. A Professional Association**

This model would include, but also go beyond, those concerns highlighted in A and B above. It would also involve:

- a significantly higher subscription fee\* provision of legal protection and advice
- drawing up a code of conduct to be adopted by all joining
- providing a support network for Ministers going through difficulties
- making an advocate available to mediate or be present at key meetings
- changing the *Journal* to cater for more specialized papers and articles
- appointing at least one full-time member of staff and preferably two - for the North and the South

### **Appointments**

Whatever the AGM decides about the revised Mission Statement, it is also clear to the Committee that we need to rationalise the current BMFC appointment system. This is haphazard at present, partly done at the AGM and partly by (some) Area Superintendents. To be effective, options A/B or C need at least two representatives from each of the 12 Areas of the Baptist Union, in addition to the AGM appointed officers. Some overlapping of roles with those appointed by the Areas should be possible. We hope to work towards this rationalisation after the April 1996 AGM.

### **Conclusion**

**The BMFC does not wish to rule out model C as a future option but judges that the time is not now right for such a transition. It is the unanimous view of the BMFC, meeting in September 1995, that our Fellowship needs to become still more a blend of models A and B as we move Towards 2000.**

Michael Bochenski and Stuart Jenkins for and on behalf of the BMFC.

*Fellowship members* are invited to respond to any or all of the above by writing either to the authors or to Alison Fuller or Ian Furlong by Thursday 29th February please. Our addresses can be found on the inside covers of this issue of the *Journal*.

# Austria: A Nation Between Secularism and Spirituality

Recently, a German magazine gave three reasons why Germans like to spend their holidays in Austria. First, because Germans don't need to learn or speak a foreign language when they visit Austria. Second, Austria is, nevertheless, different from Germany: it is somehow 'exotic'. And, thirdly, the average German doesn't feel threatened by the Austrian, because no Austrian will question or dispute his German efficiency.

When people think of Austria, they associate it with mountains, lakes, cow bells and...lots of snow. For most people, especially in Britain and the USA, Austria rings like a 'sound-of-music'.

But Austrians don't just run around in 'lederhosen' and 'dirndl', communicate by yodelling and love good food. Austria belongs to one of the richest nations in the world. Its economic and social stability is very high, and its political neutrality gains high respectability in the East and the West.

The same counts for the image of Austria being a religious nation. Despite the fact that the country is full of all sorts and shapes of shrines and crosses along the roadsides and on top of the mountains; despite the fact that more than ten religious holidays throughout the year give reason enough for various religious processions and traditions, churches on both sides of the Reformation show a yawning emptiness on most Sundays. The Roman Catholic Churches as well as the Lutheran Protestant Church have suffered a severe drop-out rate of Church members in recent years. The reasons for this exodus are manifold. For some it is simply to save paying Church-taxes. Altogether one can say, that both Churches in their traditional form have ceased to provide any valid answers to the questions asked by the majority of people today. It is evident that more and more people are becoming increasingly unhappy and dissatisfied with the traditional answers to their questions, especially in regard to sexuality and moral attitudes. Various scandals in this area, within the Church hierarchy, have reinforced this dissatisfaction.

## A Quest for a New Spirituality

A high standard of living and almost unlimited possibilities of choices in every form have, so it seems, extinguished all religious needs and opened the road towards secularism. But this is not so.

A research on the religious and ecclesiastical attitude of Young Austrians has proved that while Church attendance as an objective manifestation of a religious attitude has, in recent years, drastically dropped, a subjective self-assessment of one's religiosity and prayer-life has stayed the same. It seems that the process of secularization with its emphasis on humanity's rational sphere of understanding, has left some kind of vacuum, that needs to be filled.

This may be a general phenomenon of the Western world, as sociologists explain. But I see three specific reasons for the Austrian nation. First, the uncertainty caused by the dangers of war in neighbouring former Yugoslavia has had a greater impact on the people than recognized. The fear of uncertainty and an insecure future causes people to think. As a result an increase in all kinds of neuroses and psychoses has emerged. Second, while the sexual moral standard has always



been rather loose, marital crises and breakdowns have caused a loss of meaning and reality, especially among young people. Thirdly, as Schillebeeckx rightly states, 'in our welfare society, increasing rationality of the means clearly goes together with a loss of meaning and an obscurity of the ultimate values, thus with a decreasing rationality and a diminishing vision of the deeper, really meaningful human aims' (*God and the Future of Man*, p 63)

In recent years, a new yearning for transcendentalism and spiritual experiences has emerged. The disappointment about traditional forms of religiosity have led to a new way of escapism. As people are confused about the number of alternative forms of spirituality, they try and live their religious life in anonymity. 'What I believe is of no concern to you.'

### **The Emergence of a New Baptist Identity**

This is the situation the Evangelical Churches are faced with. But it is also their great chance. According to a survey (1991) 71 per cent of the population belong to the Roman Catholic Church, 5 per cent are Lutherans, 2 per cent are Moslems and 0.1 per cent confess Mosaic belief. According to the statistics 9 per cent are without 'confession', and this number had increased by around 50 per cent since the previous survey in 1981. Under these 9 per cent without 'confession' are counted most 'Free Churches' (such as the Baptists) because they are not a 'state recognized' denomination. It is true that the Baptists, with their 1,000 members, are still a small minority. But they are a growing movement and in the two years I have been in the ministry here in Vienna, I have noticed a new and growing understanding of a Baptist identity.

For many years the Baptists in Austria have suffered under a 'minority complex'. This was fed by the low number of believers and the powerful and dominating Catholic majority. To be a Baptist meant to belong to a 'Sect', and even worse: an 'American' sect. This feeling was fed by the fact that after World War II, the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention especially not only supported the work financially but also sent a large number of American missionaries, who did a great deal of the home mission work.

### **A New Image of the Church**

This has changed gradually since the beginning of the 80s, but especially in the last five years. Since the opening of the former Eastern Bloc countries, more and more Mission Societies are dropping out. The Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention not only struggles with the weak dollar but also with the fact that Austria has always been regarded as a difficult Mission Field and a 'graveyard for missionaries', where the number of converts per year could easily be counted on one hand. They see the great spiritual needs in the new countries and are encouraged by the potential rapid Church growth. The same counts for the Swedish Baptists who feel closer to the needs in the Baltic states and in Russia, which leaves only the German Baptists. And even they have both hands tied with the work in former East Germany. This has led to the fact that Austrian Baptists had to learn to take responsibility for themselves.

It is true that, officially, Baptists are still regarded as a 'sect', although even the Catholic Church admits that Baptists must not be thrown in the same pot as Jehovah's Witnesses or similar groups. But, since I returned to Austria, I have certainly noticed a positive process of shaking off their 'back-yard-complex'. One

sign of this is the determination to make their church buildings more attractive and modern. So, for instance, the Baptist Church in Graz has invested a large sum of money and has built an attractive 'Community Centre'. The Baptist Church in Essling, too, situated in a fast growing suburb of Vienna, still meets in an old and insignificant looking house that includes the Pastor's Manse (four small rooms with only slanting walls under the roof), already far too small on Sunday mornings and also during the week for all its activities. The Church has recently passed a resolution to erect a new and attractive building, possibly before the year 2,000. This is a gigantic step of faith for a small church and will only be possible with generous help from larger churches in Austria and in other countries.

### **New Ways of Evangelism**

Hand-in-hand with overcoming the 'back-yard-mentality' goes the search for new ways of evangelism that take into account these facts. So, for instance, forms of mass evangelism and crusades, where people are confronted with a message and then called forward to 'accept and believe in Jesus in order to get saved' don't work. They have never really worked in Austria, because they go against the Austrian mentality. Rather, people need to experience 'salvation' in order to find faith in Christ. The 'Home-Mission-Concept 1995', a guideline for future evangelistic work for Baptist Churches in Austria, therefore states four possibilities of reaching people:

- a) by creating opportunities where people can experience fellowship and friendship and love and security in a generally isolated and distanced world.
- b) by helping people in a social and practical way (diaconal evangelism)
- c) by pastoral care and counselling on a Biblical basis (pastoral evangelism)
- d) by getting engaged in questions, which people refer to as 'Survival questions' (e.g. is there any hope after a possible nuclear disaster? Fear of unemployment etc)

The Essling Baptist Church has worked on a Purpose Statement since the beginning of this year. Since we are a relatively small church, with a membership of 40 and an average Sunday Service attendance of about 50, we have to step according to our facilities. This is what we came up with:

As a Church we believe that GOD has called us to be

- a **Centre for Worship and Praise**. We want to meet regularly in order to praise and thank and worship God. We want to accept His word with open hearts and a commitment to obedience.
- a **Life-saving station**. We want to help people to find release from their prison of an impoverished life through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We want people to experience salvation and wholeness and therefore we offer pastoral counselling for marriage, bringing up children and other questions of life.
- a **Centre for a fuller life**. We want to give every member in the Church the possibility to grow in wholeness. We want to help each other to find, develop and use all our gifts (including our spiritual gifts) to the glory of God. Therefore every week we run courses in water-colouring, guitar lessons, aerobics as well as tough Bible study.
- a **Community centre**, where we learn and practice the techniques of living

together in the forgiveness, love and mutual bearing as Christ has taught, lived and commanded us.

What Austrian Churches need is encouragement by the larger Baptist family around the world, but especially in Europe. One way would be by partnership, where individual churches make links and adopt each other. So, for instance, a Capital-to-Capital link already exists between the London Baptist Association and the Baptist Churches in Vienna. The Baptist Church in Essling enjoys a close link with Poynton Baptist Church and Chatsworth Baptist Church, London. Various exchanges and visits have taken place over the recent years. Next year a team of young people from London will help our church in street evangelism in Vienna. And these links could certainly be extended.

**Hans Sinning**

## **Holidays 1996**

### **'Seacot' Bungalow, Seasalter, near Whitstable, Kent**

The bungalow, 'Seacot', facing the beach at Seasalter, Whitstable, Kent, is available at advantageous rates, for families of ministers and missionaries from April 18th 1996.

Detached; on private road; overlooking Whitstable Bay and the Isle of Sheppey; large secluded rear garden; near to all Kent resorts; 5 miles to Canterbury. Comfortably furnished; can sleep up to six; centrally heated.

A contribution towards maintenance costs is, for families, including children at school, £54 a week this year. This is completely inclusive of heating and lighting. There are no meters and no extras. There is a small sliding scale for other family members or friends who accompany.

Bookings are from Thursday to Thursday. Bookings or further details:

Sydney Clark, High Meadows, Fernfield Lane, Hawkinge, Folkestone, Kent CT18 7AW. Tel: Hawkinge (01303) 892580.

### **Caravan, Bognor Regis**

For a quiet and inexpensive holiday, the mobile home belonging to the North Downs Baptist Association (formerly S.N.E.H.B.A.) is situated on an orchard site just outside Bognor Regis. It has mains services, sleeps seven and is well equipped. Charges are moderate and vary according to season.

Further details from Mrs Elsie Price, East Horsley - 01483 283905.

### **Mid-Wales Cottage**

The home of alternative technology! "Inglenook" cottage, skirting Snowdonia, north of Machynlleth. By babbling brook, not far from sand and sea. TV. Sleeps 6/7. Tuesday to Tuesday bookings. £115 per week for those in ministry.

Mrs D.F. Abraham-Williams, 13 Millbrook Road, Dinas Powys, S. Glam, CF64 4BZ. Tel 01222 - 515884.

# Anthony Trollope and the Evangelicals

In recent years, Anthony Trollope's reputation has undergone a revival, and a plaque was finally unveiled in his memory in Westminster Abbey in March of 1993. Those who enjoy his novels often value them for their author's sympathy and insight into ordinary human behaviour. One of his less well-known novels is of special interest to evangelicals, firstly because of its provenance, but secondly, because of its contents.

In 1862, the Revd Norman Macleod, a Chaplain to Queen Victoria and a founder of the Evangelical Alliance, invited Trollope to write a novel which would be published in instalments in the E.A.'s magazine "Good Words". Trollope tried to dissuade him by pointing out that he was not really a suitable writer for this magazine, but the Editor persisted and commissioned a book for the payment of £1,000. Trollope, as a good professional, was not prepared to turn business away by refusing to accept the commission.

He produced the novel "Rachel Ray", and Macleod received the completed manuscript in the spring of 1863. He had it set in type, but then changed his mind about its suitability, and returned galleys and manuscript to Trollope with a letter of rejection in which he complained that the author should have avoided anything which might "*pinch, fret, annoy or pain*" his Christian readers. "*You hit right and left - give a wipe here, a sneer there, and thrust a nasty prong into another place, cast a gloom over Dorcas Societies, and glory over balls till 4 in the morning.*" Although he acknowledged that there was "nothing vicious" in the novel, there was sufficient in it to keep Good Words and its Editor in boiling water until either were boiled to death". Trollope and Macleod remained good friends, despite this incident.

It had been unrealistic of Macleod to expect Trollope to deliver anything which might have been acceptable to the narrow views of the Evangelicals, but we must at least credit him with vision and imagination for approaching a leading writer of his times. We could hardly contemplate anything comparable today. The gap between evangelical Christian culture and mainstream culture is too great. Part of the reason, of course, is the distance our society has travelled away from Christian standards and presuppositions, and this is reflected in the arts, but there is tunnel vision on the Christian side, too.

## Deep Rooted Attitudes

"Rachel Ray" is a short novel by Trollope's standards, and is basically a simple love story concerning very ordinary folk with no substantial secondary plot. Rachel, the heroine, falls in love with a personable young man, Luke Rowan, and her devotion never wavers. Her older sister, a pious young widow called Mrs Prime, strongly disapproves of the young man and any contact with him. Mrs Ray senior, their mother and also a widow, vacillates rather, as Luke's reputation varies in the small town of Baslehurst where the Rays live. In the end, after various trials and misunderstandings, the lovers are married.

It is perhaps a pity that Victorian evangelicals were not given a chance to read the novel. There would have been useful lessons for them to learn, and there are even useful lessons for late 20th Century Evangelicals too.

A pivotal feature of the plot is a ball given at their house by the family which owns the local brewery. The dancing both continues till 4.00am and includes waltzing, to the pious horror of Mrs Prime, even though Rachel leaves before the end with her chaperon. Mrs Prime already disapproved of her sister because she would not join her at her "Dorcas Society". These societies were widespread among evangelical churches. They combined prayer and devotion, with sewing garments for the poor. Sadly, Mrs Prime is not the last Christian to disapprove of a sister who does not share the same priorities in the use of time. There are still churches where people who do not conform by attending the prayer meeting or Bible Study housegroup are made to feel distinctly uncomfortable, unspiritual or second class Christians. When Rachel will not conform to her sister's prescriptions, and stay away from the ball, Mrs Prime leaves home and moves in with Miss Pucker, a fellow pillar of the Dorcas Society. Whether the reference is deliberate or not, part of the parable of the Prodigal Son is played out in reverse as the elder sister leaves her mother's house for a "far country", rather than continue in fellowship with her "reprobate" younger sister!

Some Evangelicals still are prone to withdrawing fellowship from those of whom they disapprove. Whole Churches have left the Baptist Union, for instance, because corporately the Union belongs to a body which also includes the Roman Catholics. I remember the Christian Union at Oxford in my day pursuing a resolute policy of non-cooperation with other Christians, extending even to forbidding prayers for a University Mission led by the then Archbishop of York, Michael Ramsey. Such attitudes can very easily arise from judgmentalism, and they are found in ministers too, including Mrs Prime's favourite evangelical clergyman, Mr Prong, who Trollope describes as follows:

*"But Mrs Prime did love him - with that sort of love which devout women bestow upon the church minister of their choice. Mr Prong was an energetic, severe, hardworking, and, I fear, intolerant young man, who bestowed very much laudable care upon his sermons. The care and industry were laudable, but not so his pride with which he thought of them and their results. He spoke much of preaching the Gospel, and was sincere beyond all doubt in his desire to do so; but he allowed himself to be led away into a belief that his brethren in the ministry around him did not preach the Gospel - that they were careless shepherds, or shepherd's dogs indifferent to the wolf.."*

Trollope also raises what is still a living issue for Christian leaders, namely, where does Christian caring end, and interference or domination take over? Mr Prong errs on the side of interfering, and judges adversely those with different opinions or practice. "Heavy shepherding", known in some charismatic denominations, is nothing new!

*"He (Mr Prong) knew himself to be a shepherd who did not fear the noonday heat; but he was wrong in this - that he suspected all other shepherds of stinting their work. It appeared to him that no sheep could nibble his grass in wholesome content, unless some shepherd were at work at him constantly with his crook. It was for the shepherd, as he thought, to know what tufts of grass were rank, and in what spots the herbage might be bitten down to the bare ground. A shepherd who would allow his flock to feed at large under his eye, merely watching his fences and folding his ewes and lambs at night was a truant who feared the noonday sun...All sheep will not endure such ardent shepherding as that practised by Mr Prong, and therefore he was driven to seek out for himself a peculiar flock. To him these were*

*the elect of Baslehurst...Now this fault is not uncommon among young ardent clergymen.."*

Trollope sees with a very clear eye indeed the failings of some keen Christians, who fall into the trap of forming a kind of mutual admiration society which labels itself as "the true church" or "the real Christians", and feeds off its members' esteem for each other and their leader.

Although Mrs Prime sees herself as the true, enthusiastic Christian, this is far from the truth. She is in reality an unattractive, frowsty fanatic. *"Her caps were heavy, lumpy, full of woe, and clean only as decency might require, - not nicely clean with feminine care...She liked the tea to be stringy and bitter, and she liked the bread to be stale...She was approaching that stage of discipline at which ashes become pleasant eating, and sackcloth is grateful to the skin. The self-indulgences of the saints in this respect often exceed anything that is done by the sinners".* Further, she is harsh and judgmental, prone to believe gossip and slander. The real Christian virtues of forbearance and forgiveness are actually shown by her mother. In one scene, Rachel is talking to her mother about her sister.

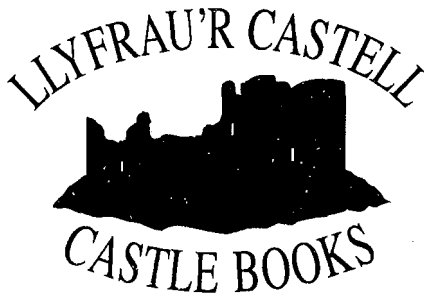
*"Why should she think evil of people? Who taught her?"*

*"Miss Pucker, and Mr Prong and that set."*

*"Yes; and they are the people who talk most about Christian charity!"*

*"But, my dear, they don't mean to be uncharitable. They try to do good..."*

Trollope also perceives the undercurrent of sexuality which can so easily be present in warm Christian fellowship and can sometimes have such damaging consequences when its existence is unacknowledged or denied:



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*"Mr Prong's manner as he bade adieu to his favourite sheep was certainly of a nature to justify that rumour to which allusion has been made. He pressed Mrs Prime's hand very closely, and invoked a blessing on her head in a warm whisper. But such signs among such people do not bear the meaning which they have in the outer world. These people are demonstrative and unctuous - whereas the outer world is reticent and dry. They are perhaps too free with their love, but the fault is better than that other fault of no love at all."*

## **Class and Race**

Trollope is not without his faults too. There was some considerable element of snobbery in his attitude to Evangelicals from humble origins, like Mr Prong, and comparable figures like Obadiah Slope in *Barchester Towers*:

*"He was a devout, good man; not self-indulgent; perhaps not more self-ambitious than it becomes a man to be; sincere, hard-working, sufficiently intelligent, true in most things to the instincts of his calling - but deficient in one vital qualification for a clergyman of the Church of England; he was not a gentleman. May I not call it a necessary qualification for a clergyman of any church? He was not a gentleman. I do not mean to say that he was a thief or a liar; nor to mean hereby to complain that he picked his teeth with his fork and misplaced his 'h's'. I am by no means prepared to define what I do mean - thinking, however, that most men and most women will understand me...to the clergyman, it is a vital necessity."* However, the mainstream Established Church is also pilloried by Trollope for its inconsistency. Rachel's simple-hearted mother had heard her Vicar preach *"with all his pulpit unction"* against the pleasures of the world and the flesh, which should be *"as nothing"* to his flock. However, when she seeks his advice as to whether her daughter Rachel should attend the Ball, she is bewildered by his advice that she certainly should, and that Luke would be a good match for her!

The sad enmity between Dissenters and Anglicans in the mid nineteenth century is only briefly mentioned. Another local Baslehurst vicar is Dr Harford:

*"He had ever hated the dissenting ministers by whom he was surrounded. In Devonshire dissent had waxed strong for many years, and the pastors of the dissenting flocks have been thorns in the side of the Church of England clergyman. Dr Harford had undergone his full share of suffering from such thorns."*

Likewise, the deepest issue in the novel is only touched upon in passing. It is that of anti-Semitism. A feature of the plot is a general election in the town. The liberal candidate is a Jew, and prejudice against him is taken for granted. Trollope describes how, during the course of the electioneering *"...some true defender of the Protestant faith attempted to scare him away out of the streets by carrying a gammon of bacon up on high."* Mrs Prime finds her anti-Semitism in her Bible and in her faith. *"To Mrs Prime it appeared that anything done in any direction for the benefit of a Jew was a sin not to be forgiven...under no circumstances should a Christian vote for a Jew."* She is quarrelling with her pastor, Mr Prong, who is intending to vote for the Liberal candidate to spite supporters of the Tory. He tries to justify his intention. *"Mr Prong endeavoured to explain to her that the curse attached to the people as a nation, and did not necessarily follow units of people who had adopted other nationalities."*

Reading such sentiments from the other side of the Holocaust makes us pause for thought and contrition. Humility, too, is in order for all Evangelicals. We do not

distance ourselves from the spirit of the age as easily as we would like to think, and our judgments on political and social matters are not guaranteed to be right simply because we lay claim to Scripture as our authority.

If you are a stranger to Trollope, why not try *Rachel Ray*? it is by no means one of his greatest novels, but it is short by his standards, and a "good read".

**Michael Ball**

(Quotations, for which permission has been obtained, are from the Folio Society Edition published in 1990, and information concerning the circumstances of the novel's genesis are taken from the Introduction to that edition by John Letts, and from Victoria Glendinning's biography: *Trollope*, published in 1992.)

## Resource Books on Counselling

I have been asked to suggest a short list of books on counselling that would be helpful to ministers in their pastoral work.

The possibilities are considerable, but I believe the following recommendations offer insights and practical guidance which will prove invaluable.

Usually these books are easily obtainable, but where there is difficulty, Bodey House should be able to help.

Revd Tony Noles, Director, Bodey House Counselling Service, Stock, Essex CM4 9DH

1. On Becoming a Counsellor - Eugene Kennedy (Gill & McMillan) £11.99
2. Psychology and the Spiritual Quest - David Benner (Hodder & Stoughton)
3. The Healing of Emotional Wounds - David Benner (Clinical Theology Association, Oxford)
4. Counselling in the Pastoral and Spiritual Context - David Lyall (OUP) £10.99
5. The Art of Psychotherapy - Anthony Storr (Seker & Warburg) £16.99
6. The Presenting Past - Michael Jacobs (O.U.) £19.99
7. Psychodynamic Counselling in Action - Michael Jacobs (Sage) £9.95
8. Couples in Counselling - Tony Gough (D.L.T.) £6.95
9. The Road Less Travelled - M. Scott Peck (Arrow) £4.99
10. Clinical Theology - Frank Lake (D.L.T.) £13.95



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

It is said that the reason why history repeats itself is because people never learn from it.

In last January's edition of the Journal, I mentioned a Church being faced with an unexpected and expensive bill because they had not arranged appropriate insurance cover. I am sorry to have to report that there has now been a major incident at another Church where they have not arranged the correct cover. As a result, they are faced with having to finance the cost of rebuilding the sanctuary - the existing one has been so badly damaged!

They could have insured against the risk for a few pounds and this would have relieved them of all the worry and hassle, quite apart from the financial implications, and enabled the rebuilding work to commence with the minimum of delay.

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Yours in His Service

T. E. Mattholie

# As We Were: Baptists in the 1930's: Part Two

*In his first article, Michael Goodman dealt with the issues of politics, pacifism and ethics. Here he examines the Denomination's response to the numerical decline of the 1930's.*

A further factor was also at work conditioning Baptist responses in the 1930's, namely their almost obsessive preoccupation with arresting the decline in numbers within the Baptist churches. This concern might be construed to indicate that the Baptist churches were in fear of losing their hard-earned social status if their numbers, and hence their voting power, continued to decline. Yet, in fact, by the Thirties, power and status had effectively already gone. Whilst the numerical decline of the denomination continued to be the over-riding concern of its leadership, and some rationalisation of the causes is apparent, few in leadership appear to have openly faced and enunciated the hard fact that real decline - as assessed against the national population - was no new trend. Rather, it had become the norm during the 1890's and throughout the twentieth century. Yet the debates engendered by the continuing decline in denominational membership could have been valuable if they had forced upon Baptists the unreality of their present state and supposed status. Yet they tended to be limited to discussion on the nature of church membership and the rationalisation of church rolls. At long last it was becoming clear that many who had previously regarded themselves as Baptists were actually no more than nominal in their allegiance. Not unrelated to this point, the full extent of the social catastrophe that was the Great War was also beginning to be realised. The impact had been most forceful in that broad body of the populace affected by 'diffusive Christianity', the classic 'fringe attenders' or 'adherents'.

One must further ask whether Baptist concern and confusion over denominational decline and its causes also distracted them from social and political engagement, or whether, in fact, their weakening political and social voice was itself a factor in their numerical decline. The balance of argument rests with the former. By the nineteen thirties the denomination was clearly facing an identity crisis. Whether or not the average church member was fully aware of the changed religious climate, the leadership of the denomination could see that change most clearly, even if they were largely powerless either to understand it fully or to redress it. In turn, their concern lay more with finding a new identity for the denomination and thus, hopefully, moving back to a policy of growth, than in seeking to regain major political influences.

The leadership of the Baptist Union in the 1930s thus continued the well-established trends whereby issues of 'personal' conversion and morality came to predominate. Their role had become largely one of trying to keep together, and in good heart, a denomination that had lost its former distinctive identity and perhaps even its very *raison d'être*. The Baptist movement which entered the Thirties was a significantly different organism from that which, but a quarter of a century previously, had been on the verge of sharing a national assumption of authority in the name of Nonconformity. The years that followed have witnessed the further outworking of this critical change as the denomination's leaders at both national and local levels have attempted to redefine their place in the social order.

## What About the Local Churches?

For most of the evangelical Baptist churches studied in my thesis, set as they were in the comparative affluence of the South East of England, certain key features may be discerned. Crucially, their evangelicalism did not protect them from numerical decline. Indeed, their reliance on conversion as the principal means of social differentiation, meant that they generally failed to analyse the changes in their fortunes with sufficient objectivity and dispassionate criticism. Nor did their theologies prove sufficiently developed and comprehensive to furnish them with a world-view capable of issuing in a theological response to the complex changes they found themselves facing in the Thirties. Each of the churches studied sensed that 'something' had changed, but as to what that 'something' was, they were at a loss to know. Sensing crisis, they simply learned to cope with their new position in society whilst remaining largely confused as to what that status might actually be. The actual timing of the crises which faced these churches varied. In general, local factors, whether in terms of their church ethos, strength, etc, or local social conditions, were the deciding factors in determining the precise point at which the sharpest decline occurred. Yet the common thread running through each case study is that of a crisis on confidence and a loss of a clearly-defined sense of purpose.

A second significant social pattern emerges from the study of Baptist churches in the depressed areas of Britain. To take but one example, the financial restrictions felt by the 'suburban' churches exhibited themselves as full-blown crises in South Wales. The recurrent crises of the Twenties and Thirties brought out the best in some churches in South Wales, with many chapels using their limited resources to feed and educate men in distress. Yet some of this activity had to be undertaken in spite of the opposition of large groups within their membership. Moreover, these economic and industrial crises also destroyed the certitudes which had undergirded generations of Welsh Baptist life. Evangelism now seemed almost sacrilegious when so many were hungry and jobless. In South Wales there was a willingness on the part of many to think out the issues and to rise to the challenge of the slump, even if it meant that long-held Christian values might be challenged. Yet, here as elsewhere, for others the only hope of survival was perceived to rest in an escape to the old certainties, irrelevant as they increasingly were to the contemporary world. The result of this evading of the issues was disastrous.

This pattern was echoed amongst the Baptist churches of Yorkshire, which appear to have reached a significant crisis point with the outbreak of the Great War. In these churches, for generations rooted in Christian pacifism, a further crucial factor was the difficulty the leaders of the Association had in coming to terms with a Christian patriotism which required what they perceived to be the rejection of Christian pacifism. The traditional link between chapel and Liberalism being long dead, in the more working-class churches of Yorkshire sympathies with the Labour party became well-established (although even in these cases, the churches often remained cautious in adopting a radical political stance). The more suburban causes, however, tended to remain solidly Conservative. As the economic crisis deepened, plans for church growth and the erection of new buildings were pared down or rejected altogether. As elsewhere, whilst church membership had continued to fall off, the considerable increase in numbers of 'sermon tasters', during the 1920s, swelled congregations, but served only to hide the seriousness of the plight facing the churches. By the mid-Thirties deep numerical and financial crisis gripped the churches, and a certain introspection settled on them, interspersed with only very occasional concern about international situations. the great social evils of the day were, as ever,

conceived to be cinema, drink, immorality and gambling, thus perpetuating the tendency to drive a social wedge between the church and the unchurched.

It may well be that Queen's Road Baptist Church, Coventry, indicates a third - although comparatively small - category of Baptist churches in the 1930s. These were generally larger 'institutional churches' of a more liberal theological persuasion. Some of their characteristics are actually more akin to the Methodist Central Missions. Numerical growth mattered little to them. What did matter were issues of the kingdom demonstrated in practical and tangible terms. The Queen's Road church faced financial difficulties arising from a number of factors: it was engaging in newer, more costly ministries; unemployment in Coventry was rising rapidly; the membership was, on average, younger than had previously been the case; the considerable body of Welsh members sent money home to their even more hard-pressed families in South Wales. Yet during these years the church explored the key theme of Christian community and citizenship. Emphasis was placed on the needs of young people, and Inqli James, the minister, frequently preached on issues pertaining to economics and unemployment, especially when Coventry was in some way affected. He had a vision for the kingdom of God on earth and a Christian conscience sensitive to the social, political and economic implications of the gospel. His political radicalism served as a powerful draw to many, and such was the manner in which his ideas were presented that he managed to take many of his more Conservative members with him, and even when they could not agree with their pastor, they seemed able to differ one from the other with Christian tolerance and graciousness.

Sunday cinema and sport were vigorously opposed, although James saw both the cinema and sport as, themselves, gifts from God. Deep concern was expressed and long debates took place over the issue of gambling (in the form of whist drives and football pools), and the nature of brewery advertising. Queen's Road opened a pioneering centre for the unemployed in the early Thirties which, amongst other ministries, cared for more than 50 men over the age of 60 years. As the Second World War approached, James maintained his absolute pacifism, whilst also condemning the evils of dictatorship. In this he was joined by many in the church, more than forty men registering as conscientious objectors on the outbreak of hostilities. James preached long and hard the need for trust in God in the dark days of the Thirties.

### **A Denomination in Crisis**

In summary, then, during the 1930s the Baptist Union and many local Baptist Churches experienced a period of crisis. It was not a sudden crisis such as that which faced them in 1907 (as they first realised that their numbers - and hence, influence, were waning) or 1914 (as the outbreak of the Great War finally threw old securities to the wind). This was now a long-term, deepening crisis of confidence and identity. In the Thirties the situation for the churches declined rapidly because the national crisis tended to highlight the helplessness of the churches. Their voices were now largely silent, not because their own ethos had fundamentally changed, but because they were increasingly no longer sure what role remained to them in the broader fabric of British society. Their recourse to issues of 'old dissent' merely served to isolate them from the rapidly changing society about them. Few Baptist leaders saw this. Despite the brief resurgence of Baptist fortunes in the early-to-mid-1920s, the denomination - and Nonconformity as a whole - was in steady, remorseless decline. In church life uncertainty had become the norm. To make

matters worse, theological debate became increasingly limited solely to those areas of thought which might be termed 'spiritual'. Lively, theological critique and response to the national and international crises of the Thirties and the relevance of the Christian message to such issues was meagre in extent and inadequate in content. Thus the Baptist denomination found itself groping for a new sense of purpose, but doing so without the essential contribution which thorough, sustained and wide-ranging theological reflection might have afforded.

The crises faced by English and Welsh Baptists reflected the patterns of change in the broader social, economic, political and philosophical life of Britain in the twentieth century. The security of Victorian certainties had passed and now both nation and churches felt the cold wind of re-assessment. Life and attitudes in local Baptist Churches closely mirrored those of the communities in which they found themselves. The national crises of the Thirties served to precipitate the realisation in the church that all was not well. Sadly, it appears that all too often the very sense of decline and crisis that permeated church life caused introspection and intense reassertion of old values and what were considered to be well-tried strategies. Neither proved adequate for the entirely new ethos now facing the churches and society at large. In particular, evangelicals within the denomination were distinguishable by a general reliance upon activist responses, which usually centred around evangelism and a negativity towards social change. As a consequence, the churches became ever more isolated from the broader society in which they found themselves placed. A cycle of decline had become established, acute crisis had effectively evolved into long-term, pragmatic survivalism.

In closing, one must pose the question: 'Has anything changed?'

**Michael Goodman**

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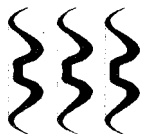
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# Working For You: Twenty Years of the BMF.

Joining a committee for the first time is one thing. Joining a committee when one's predecessor, as Secretary, has done the job for 12 years, and was first elected to the committee in 1959, is another! Since this was my humbling situation when I attended my first BMF Committee in September 1995, it seemed wise to do some homework. The obvious way of doing this was by reading the Committee's minutes for the past few years. They tell an interesting story. Far more interesting, to be honest, than I was expecting.

I have known of BMF for 20 years, but have never had a firm idea of what it did. I saw it as a kindly, benevolent body which oversaw the publication of the *Fraternal* (as we used to know it), organized the Pastoral Session at the Assembly, made occasional gifts to ministers, widows and orphans, and invited ministers to pray for one another on Sunday mornings. All those things are true, but they are only the start of the story. My trudge through the minutes took me back to the far off days of the mid '70s. This was a natural starting point for me because it was then that I set out on my own ministerial pilgrimage.

## Addressing the Issues

It is as well to remind ourselves of the very different world of 20 years ago. Wally Wragg, the then Secretary, had to respond to fierce criticism that the subscription for 1975 had been raised to the dizzy heights of £2.50! He encouraged members not to be hasty in withdrawing from the Fellowship, reminding them that this was, in fact, "less than many of us pay for four gallons of petrol". In 1975, the membership stood at over 2,000, and it was the first year in which Sabbaticals made an appearance as a regular part of ministerial life. Despite having little notice of this innovation, it was reported that, in the first year, thirteen pioneers had boldly stepped out into this brave new world. The year was also marked by a small census of fraternalists in which ministers had overwhelmingly rejected the idea that the BMF should become like a Trade Union.

The most impressive feature of the minutes is that they consistently reflect the Fellowship's warm pastoral heart. Every set of minutes speaks with concern of ministers in particular need. The network of correspondents has ensured that effective contact has been maintained with many ministers, especially in times of change and difficulty. There is never any pretence that the network is complete, but there is no question that many have felt the support and understanding of their fellow ministers through the agency of the BMF. Throughout the years financial gifts have been made to ministers and their families in need, and it is encouraging to see that such gifts have greatly increased in recent years, thanks to the generosity of our members. This is a precious aspect of our Fellowship and the fact that this is necessarily a quiet and hidden ministry, should not cause us to underestimate its importance.

Cynics could have a field day with these minutes! The same old themes crop up year after year - housing, retirement, settlement, stress, pensions and so on. But a careful reading of the minutes reveals that there has been an enormous amount of progress in all these areas. The BMF has been very active in research, consultation, and in lobbying on behalf of ministers. Take housing, for example. In

1979, a document was issued entitled *House Purchase by Ministers*, responding to the desire of many to own their own house, and to the need for careful advice. In the previous year, it had been noted that whereas only 35 per cent of ministers owned their own house, a further 34 per cent were keen to do so. Ten years later mention was made that 50 per cent of ministers were buying or part buying a house. Housing will always be a matter of lively debate, and there are still many areas of concern, but it is clear from the record that the BMF has always been happy to take up the challenge and to encourage measured and sensitive change.

Pensions have had a particularly important place on the agenda of BMF Committee meetings: rightly so. Ministerial pensions have been pitifully small for far too long. This has to be a matter of pain and disappointment for us all. But the hard work of the past few years has been considerable, and we must rejoice that at long last the Baptist Ministers' Pension Scheme has been established on a sound basis. Indeed, it is generally conceded that the scheme compares very favourably with other schemes. A number of life assurance agents have recently assured me that the scheme is better than anything they would be able to offer. The BMF Committee has kept close contact with the Pensions' Committee and especially with its former Chairman, Philip Cooke, who saw through a succession of important changes to the scheme. At every stage there was lengthy consultation and the BMF committee was able to share its questions and hesitations. Sadly, pensions will continue to be far less than many would desire, but the existence of a properly funded scheme will ensure far greater security and increasing benefits for the future.

Housing for retired ministers has always been a matter of great concern within the denomination. The BMF has been particularly sensitive to this issue and the Committee has maintained a very strong link with the Retired Baptist Ministers' Housing Society. The Society, with the encouragement of the BMF, has always sought to be responsive to ministers' needs and seeks to find appropriate housing, within necessarily prescribed limits, of the type which the retiring minister wants in the area of his or her choice. With good grace and flexibility on both sides, it is good to note that the Society has proved able to satisfy the need.

The *Baptist Ministers' Journal* (formerly *Fraternal*), has been a key feature in the life of the BMF. For many, like me, it has been the main evidence of the life of the Fellowship. Looking back through the past issues is impressive. The *Journal* has never been pretentious. Most of its articles and reviews have been written by ministers, and they have been written with a clear sensitivity to the needs of ministers and the local pastorate. Every issue contains a fascinating resumé of pastoral news and this is a service which is deeply appreciated by many ministers. The BMF Committee has been continually concerned to ensure that the magazine is well written, well produced and affordable. Many minutes reflect agonizing debates over such matters as the finances, the number of pages of the *Journal*, or the staffing of the Editorial Board. It is a testimony to the faithfulness and sheer hard work of a large number of people that the *Journal* continues to be a vibrant and relevant publication.

### **The Voice of the Ministry**

The BMF relies on effective communication in all directions. The Fellowship needs to hear the cries of the ministers and needs to find effective ways of speaking on behalf of ministers to others. Through the past twenty years there have been a number of occasions when the Committee has complained that



ministers and fraternalists have made poor correspondents. So what's new? However, through the Fellowship's committee of over 30 people, there is a wide range of experience and knowledge, and the group can justifiably claim to reflect the concerns of the hundreds of ministers in their own fraternalists and Associations. In addition, the Fellowship has, on many occasions, sought the views of its members. This has often been done through the pages of the *Journal*, and this has ensured that the Committee has been able to speak with authority on many issues. Throughout the years there has been a constant conversation between the BMF and the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Very few committee meetings have been held without the presence of at least one Union staff member, and the relationship with successive heads of the Ministry Department has been of crucial significance.

It is always easy to knock organisations like the BMF, but the fact remains that no other independent body can claim to speak on behalf of such a large body of Baptist ministers. With a membership of over 1,700, the voice of the Fellowship must be heard, and its Committee must continue to beaver away at the issues of the day. On a remarkable number of occasions the Committee has asked itself what its role should be and whether it is doing the job which it has been called to do. This lively self-examination is healthy and important and it is right that this should be a matter of lively debate at the moment. Above all, the BMF Committee is a group of servants whose task is to enable other servants to serve their Master better. It is therefore right that the Committee should always be open to the convictions and hurts and hopes of its members.

It has been good to look back. I am perfectly happy to admit that I have been humbled by the exercise! I simply didn't realize all that the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship was doing on my behalf. With shame I call to mind all the times when I have failed to read the *Journal* from cover to cover, when I have not managed to attend the Pastoral Session at the Assembly and, horror of horrors, when I have, in my murky past, forgotten to renew my subscription. But maybe, just maybe, I don't need to take all the blame. Perhaps it is true that the BMF has kept its light under a bowl at times. But now that I have completed my stroll through the minutes, I am convinced that the Fellowship occupies an exciting and vital role within our Baptist family. We live in days of exceptional opportunity and breathless change, and I am sure that the BMF will continue to play a crucial role in encouraging and supporting Baptist Ministers as we move into a new millennium.

**Jonathan Edwards**

## **Nominations for the Vice-Chairmanship**

Members are invited to send names of nominees for the office of Vice-Chairman of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship. The full list of nominees will be considered by the next meeting of the B.M.F. Committee, and the duly elected Vice-Chairman will be presented to the Pastoral Session in Blackpool. The Vice-Chairman will take up the Chairmanship, in succession to the Revd Dr Alison Fuller, at the Pastoral Session in 1997 and will serve for three years.

This is a vital role within our Fellowship and members are urged to send their nominations to the Secretary, the Revd Jonathan Edwards, by 1st March 1996.

# Book Reviews

## ***Straight and Narrow?* by Thomas E. Schmidt (IVP, 1995, 240pp, £8.99)**

A young person whose call to ministry was an attempt to run away from his homosexuality was not my first encounter with an agonised evangelical who knew his expressions of sexuality were quite unacceptable to others in church around him. It did, however, have the effect of opening my heart to such people, to let them do the talking before I did any judging. For that reason I was keen to delve immediately into Thomas Schmidt's book, sub-titled, "Compassion and Clarity in the Homosexuality debate".

The writer is Professor of New Testament and Greek at Westmont College, California, specializing in New Testament Ethics. Therefore, he is particularly keen to look at what the Bible has to say on the issue of homosexuality, although he starts from a human perspective by describing a number of people he knows to whom the Church has nothing to say simply because they are homosexual.

He rightly declares that all too quickly disagreement on this volatile issue degenerates into a battle of labels, the culture war between the Religious Right (who are sometimes seen as all "homophobic") and the homosexual agenda (empowered by "secular humanism"). His own position is to put Jesus at the centre of the debate.

The writer takes time with the Biblical evidence and explores how the polemic has ranged over the handful of passages interpreted historically as condemning homosexuality. He shows how scripture has been re-interpreted as having nothing to say about what might be called a genetically-fixed homosexual orientation and the long-term relationships formed by those who see themselves in those terms.

Schmidt brings critical analysis to bear on the disputed passages and points out that the kind of things related in the Sodom story, for example, (Genesis 19:1-8) and in Judges 19:22 (the Levite in Gibeah), while alluding to male-to-male sex, are not strictly about homosexuality at all but about male rape, not necessarily motivated by homosexual desire. Modern gay and lesbian people, he says, would condemn such behaviour just as vigorously as heterosexuals do.

While prepared to listen to the revisionist interpretations of Scripture on this knotty subject, he believes research points up inconsistencies: "revisionist argument", he says, "stretches credibility for the sake of a theory". That this conclusion has emerged from serious study is witnessed by one of the most exhaustive bibliographies I have ever seen in an IVP paperback!

Overall, this writer's argument can be summed up by saying that when any same sex act - "be it with angels, with prostitutes, with boys, with mutually consenting adults.. is evaluated in relation to the marital union of male and female, it falls short of the plan of God present from creation". This central platform is emphasised by the alarming chapter towards the end of the book entitled "The Price of Love", detailing medical conditions which sometimes arise from practices found among homosexual communities.

Schmidt's book is an honestly and compassionately prepared introductory manual to the ongoing Christian debate on homosexuality. It fails, however, to

address the emotional *impasse* faced by homosexual people who believe, quite simply, that they were born that way and for whom their expression of sexuality has not been something "to which they have changed" but simply something which, for whatever reason, they have grown into. For such people Thomas Schmidt advocates (as does evangelicalism in general) a life of celibacy if they are to be able to look God and the Bible squarely in the eye.

This work will attract the criticism of gay activists. But they and the genuinely caring Thomas E. Schmidt, as Dr Johnson said while observing two women raging at each other across a garden fence, will always be "arguing from different premises".

It's a shame no evangelical cartoonist has yet depicted the God of love saying something amounting to '*tough luck guys! I made you to live a life deprived of any physical warmth; so just get on with it.*' that, though, is the conundrum, and it's also the reason why the debate about homosexuality will never go away.

**Mark Rudall**

***New Intercessions for the Church Year* by Susan Sayers  
(Kevin Mayhew, 1994, 224pp, £9.99)**

One of the casualties of some strands of contemporary worship appears to be intercessory prayer. There are insufficient air-holes for a tragic world to find a place. This being so, the present volume, which serves as a weekly companion to the ASB, supplies a need. As with all prayer books, it can be used as it stands or as a suggestive starting point for one's own intercessions.

From Advent to the long stretch of Trinity, the prayers are all responsive. Wisely, the responses are short and easily memorised. The format each Sunday is the same: an intercession, a silence and the congregational response. For this reviewer, a more varied format would have been appreciated. Each Sunday is represented by year's one and two of the lectionary.

The author's scheme is to begin her intercessions with the needs of the Church and then move out into the world, hence there is balance. The language is clear and accessible, even if it is not particularly rich in evocative and memorable imagery.

Overall, it is a useful worship resource, which can be relied upon to address the human condition and a wide range of needs.

**Michael V. Jackson**

***A Call to Excellence* by Paul Beasley-Murray  
(Hodder & Stoughton, 1995, 240pp, £8.99)**

As we have come to expect from Paul, this book, sub-titled "An essential guide to Christian leadership", is a mine of information: there are well over 400 footnote references or quotations in just seven chapters! Paul calls the local church pastor to excellence in all dimensions of ministry, although "excellence" seems more like a peg on which he hangs a sequence of challenges. The pastor is envisaged as called to be: professional pastor, effective leader, charismatic preacher, creative liturgist, missionary strategist, senior care-giver and exemplary pilgrim - a daunting calling indeed! What unfolds in the text is nothing other than a usually masterly distillation of current thinking in respect of professionalism, leadership, preaching, worship, mission, pastoral care and spirituality. Paul hands us such a rich mixture of ideas, resources and practical possibilities, earthed in local church context, that

every pastor-reader is bound to garner good things.

My reading of Paul's book sparked a number of specific impressions. Many readers will wish, yet again, for an accompanying tome which commits church members to excellent co-operation in the dimensions of local church covered herein. Leaders of small churches, with limited resources, will feel that some of the recommendations are light years removed from the realities of their situations. All readers will find challenges they react against, as well as those which strike a favourite chord - and it is important to examine both (reactions can be more telling than chords!). It needs to be considered that excellence can inhibit others from stepping forward; and there is still a crying need for real accountability to be woven into the very texture of a pastor's life, as Paul contends.

Working through any chapter of this book in your Ministers' Fellowship (or Eldership/Diaconate?) could prove to be stimulating and provocative.

**Peter Ledger**

***The Heart of Prayer* by Brother Ramon SSF  
(Marshall Pickering, 1995, 205pp, £5.99)**

If you have always wondered what good a hermit can do, this is a book written by one and for you. Be warned: Brother Ramon is disarmingly direct. He speaks with great clarity about prayer, solitude, meditation, soul friends. It is easy to forget that this is all coming from someone who, since 1990, sees his family once a year and apart from medical necessities, only meets a few people by request each year in his Prayer Hut at Glasshampton.

Over the years this Baptist-trained Franciscan has prepared a library of books for anyone who wishes to take their prayer more seriously. You could do no better than start with this book. It is characteristically straightforward and yet, at the same time, tantalising. Here is material which will make you consider Scripture and faith today in the light of a disciplined lifestyle. Not many of us can follow Brother Ramon into his chosen solitude, but we can learn from him that the path which Christ opens for us has many discoveries if we make prayer the core activity of the journey.

**John Rackley**

***Celtic Daily Prayer* by Andy Raine and John T. Skinner  
(Marshall Pickering, 1994, 458pp, £9.99)**

With its calendar of readings and tables of scripture references, this book, subtitled *A Northumbrian Office*, looks dull. As looking turns to reading and using, however, you discover you are holding a wonderful guide to that distinctive and resonant world, the Celtic tradition. Better still, you are not being invited to share nostalgia for a long lost history; this is contemporary and alive, a tradition making new and diverse connections.

The book contains the daily office used by members of the Northumbrian Community, supported by cycles of meditation and readings. There is a Communion Service and an imaginative Family Shabbat (which my Church enjoyed on New Year's Day). The material is of a very high quality; the prayers and liturgies simple and deep. There are brief explanatory notes.

Most remarkable of all, and taking up the bulk of the book, is the anthology of daily readings. Monthly themes (Pilgrimage, Desert Fathers, Community), scripture readings, and reminders of the stories of Columba, Aidan and other are woven

together then studded with an exciting diversity of quotes, long and short. I found John Bunyan and Brother Roger of course; Bede, Fenelon and Francis Bacon interesting; George Eliot and T.S. Eliot very nice; and found even Jewish jokes; A.A. Milne and Leonard Cohen - astonishing, yet spot on!

This book reveals a Celtic movement not just rediscovering its roots but pulling them up, dusting them off, and going places. It makes me want to be there.

**Stuart Jenkins**

***The Sheep that Got Away* by Michael J. Fanstone (Monarch, 1993, 288pp, £8.99)**

Michael Fanstone is a relatively rare type of Baptist Minister. He faces a problem and then actually does some research to try to solve it!

In the first part of this book, details are given of a study undertaken seeking to answer the question "Why do people leave the Church?" Stirred by a finding of the English Church Census of 1989 that 1,000 people were leaving the church each week, the author devised a questionnaire which formed the basis for interviews with 509 people who left the church. The results of this revealed some 16 reported reasons why individuals quit their churches, and these are grouped under four heads - problems of personal pain, over leadership, of irrelevance and of not finding God. The second section of the book seeks to provide strategies for tackling these issues.

The author is clearly a pastor of a local church. He is not, therefore, a theoretician when it comes to church life but a committed practitioner. He has not simply sought insights into an important pastoral problem; he is engaged in working out solutions to the problems he has identified. This commends the book to working pastors seeking help in an area of acute pastoral need.

It should be said that the book reflects a developing rather than a completed attempt to grapple with "leakage" from churches. The research provided questions but not the answers. These come rather from the author's extensive pastoral experience. A further study would be needed to evaluate the potential answers.

Also, the author identifies himself as "an evangelical and a Baptist with charismatic tendencies". This shows in both the scope of his bibliography and in some of the solutions proposed and might be a problem to readers of a different theological background.

It is something of a surprise that in a work which deals with issues of culture and social change, no reference is made to the work of Lesslie Newbigin and the "Gospel and Culture" movement, except in the foreword by Martin Robinson!

Nevertheless, this book asks some very honest and penetrating questions of local churches and their pastors. It does not push any easy answers but is a call to a rigorous application of the care of all the sheep of the fold, especially those who have left it. It's a call worth heeding.

**Paul Hills**