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

Editorial

William Wordsworth, looking back nostalgically to his Republican youth at the time of the French Revolution, declared "*Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven!*" Sadly, like so much youthful idealism, it was broken on the back of experience. And there can be few, if any, occupations, which hold out as much promise as Christian Ministry. One recalls the days of training and ministerial formation when what lay beyond the lecture room was tantalising in the extreme - and when those already in ministry were envied shamelessly. To meet people at their point of greatest need with the healing love of Christ, why this was something for which one would give one's eye-teeth. And then the Ordination: "*Do you promise to carry out this ministry with enthusiasm and dedication, to set God's Word before his people...?*" What a question! For whatever is asked will be gladly given in so glorious a calling.

But there has been a sea-change. And one which many of us could not have envisaged, and were certainly not prepared for, 20 or more years ago. We appreciated the financial privations, lack of status, marginalisation and sheer uphill struggle of keeping the rumour of God alive in a highly secular society. But we were quite unprepared for the new culture which increasingly colours ministry. Compounded of management style target-setting, success-oriented strategies, an unyielding triumphalism and millennial expectations, it is the new orthodoxy.

Positively, it has sharpened our focus, caused us to dream bigger dreams and motivated us to overhaul creaking, outdated structures. But, negatively, it has produced dis-ease in the ministry, the "failure" syndrome in pastors who can't deliver, and a frenetic drivenness which many can't resource from within. But, more seriously than any of these, has the new ministry culture distorted the very nature of the Christian gospel? If so, then God forgive us!

James Taylor reveals his deep anxiety about all this in our first article. He does so by means of Paul's most extraordinary letter, 2 Corinthians, stressing the paradoxical nature of the Apostle's experience of Christ. It prompts the question: in today's climate, would Paul be ministerially "unsettleable"? Our second article is a cry from the heart for a Central Stipend Fund, long the dream of Philip Cooke. What price independency if it cripples mission?

Extracted from a longer study, we have next an approach to prayer by way of Ephesians, from Callum Jones. He considers it as an all-embracing activity, by means of which the multi-faceted "principalities and powers" are confronted. Unless John Major calls a snap election, our next article will, hopefully, help in evaluating the issues from a Kingdom stance. Don Black is our guide. April's final contribution, from Ted Hale, strikes at the heart of assumptions about the "gathered church", "membership" and demarcation lines between those "in" and those "out". Is the Kingdom essentially at odds with such theology?

The Spirituality of Weakness

A good argument can be presented for saying that the prevailing evangelical spirituality of sections of the modern Church is that of power, even success. We are singularly badly read if we have not pawed over 'Power Evangelism' and 'Power Healing' and other titles with the same emphasis. 'Power encounters' is part of the vocabulary of the well informed. Perhaps the word 'success' has connotations which make it embarrassing but the concept is with us. Church Growth teaching probably introduced it; success being thought of mainly in statistical terms and applying to growing Churches. Pastors may protest but, all too often, they are assessed by a statistical yardstick. When a popular speaker is introduced with the words 'His Church has doubled in size during his ministry'; then we are left to draw the obvious conclusion. We are in a number's game.

Part of us tells us that all this is wrong. We find ourselves agreeing with Chuck Colson when he writes,

I believe...that it is a dangerous and misguided policy to measure God's blessings by standards of visible, tangible .. material success".

The trouble is that we agree with him and then turn back to our graphs, records, programmes and activities, and reach for the latest paperback in which some pastor describes the 'success' story of his Church.

Maria Boulding, in 'Gateway To Hope', has written

"Life in the western world today tends to be success orientated; from childhood we are exposed to influences which raise our expectations of ourselves or project on to us the expectations of others."

The same expectations can be found within the Church scene. A young pastor is called to a middle-aged congregation with the expectation that he will 'attract the young people'. Another pastor discovers that he is expected to reverse, all on his own, years of decline. When nothing happens, when the congregation remains insular and sluggish, when the young people look and then go away, he feels, and is considered to be, a failure.

Part of the trouble is that we keep singing such triumphalist hymns and choruses. The prevailing spirituality, all too often, is that of warfare and incessant victory. A Church has, behind the pulpit, a large banner which proclaims "We have complete victory through Christ our Lord". The trouble is that the pastor suffers from a stress-related illness and cannot preach. In the light of the banner he is under pressure to feel that he is an inconsistent failure.

The same problem exists in the area of leadership. The very words "pastor" and "deacon" suggest, not status, but service, with strong overtones of self-giving and sacrifice. The thought of service does not naturally incline us to consider authority and power. Now, however, we hear the word 'leadership' used to describe those who have been given responsibility in a Church. Status, authority and power are all implied by that word. Not surprisingly, we begin to see a power game developing or, worse still, a power pyramid being erected with the authority resting in a few rather than in the many of the Church Meeting served by the pastor and deacons. We again detect a spirituality of power.

Paul and the Paradox of Weakness

The time is ripe for a rediscovery of a spirituality of weakness. Of course there is success, and numerical success at that, in the New Testament. Of course there is power. There is, however, much more about weakness, even apparent failure.

In 2 Corinthians, particularly, Paul is astonishingly open about his weakness and vulnerability. The power belonged to the Gospel; the messenger was a 'jar of clay'. He carried about in his body 'the death of Jesus'; he experienced 'conflicts on the outside, fears within'; he boasted 'of the things that show my weakness'; he delighted in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong'. The spirituality of the apostle is a spirituality of weakness.

Consider, for a moment, what we could call the development of our spirituality, that is, how we believe it can best be renewed and strengthened. Basically, evangelical Christians are encouraged to think in terms of withdrawal. We take note of incidents in the Gospels where Jesus took His disciples aside. We, in turn, feel the need to recharge our spiritual batteries. We can only do that, we believe, if we withdraw. Spirituality is best developed in the quiet place of retreat and solitude. We can be strong, and will be seen to be strong, in relation to our disciplined withdrawal. Closely allied to that conviction is the modern stress on the necessity of time off. Disciplined disengagement, periodic recreation, regular detachment, are all regarded as necessary for effective pastoral ministry, to say nothing of alert and flourishing spirituality. Days off, telephone answering machines, sabbaticals are all commonplace today.

Such an attitude has a lot to commend it. It could be claimed, as we have seen, to have our Lord's blessing. Yet, Paul's spirituality was that of the dusty road, not the retreat house. There was no let up. Leisure and recreation never seem to be mentioned. He daily experienced a brutal and bruising world. It threatened, insulted, injured, imprisoned and beat him. Despite his personal weakness and vulnerability, pressures and strains, his commitment never flagged and his spirituality flourished. His strength was constantly renewed from within. He was always 'in Christ', whether physically he was in prison or in a pulpit. In his weakest moments there was no sign of 'burn out' or spiritual exhaustion. 'We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed...' (2 Corinthians 4:8,9). Paul's experience is calling us to rediscover the truth that precisely in our moments of complete exhaustion, when the heat is at its most intense, when we are wounded, emotionally or even physically, God is to be found, renewing and sustaining us. Precisely when the fragility of the 'jar of clay' comes painfully home to us, when antagonisms threaten to drain us, we shall be 'inwardly renewed day by day'. (2Cor.4:16). Being spiritual means being 'in Christ,' whether we work or rest. It is not a matter of withdrawal over against action. It is not flight from the world over against identification and involvement.

Another important area is that of expectations, either what others expect of us or what we expect of ourselves. Many in our congregations find themselves assessed by the yardstick of achievement or results. It is so easy for us to lay the same measuring rod against our own ministries. If we don't, there are others who will. A recent issue of the American 'Leadership' journal gave a number of examples of pastors who had to resign when they could not come up with results. We smile at the story of the emergency meeting of the pastoral team in one American Church. The problem they faced was that the Church down the road had three responses the previous Sunday and they only had one. They were in a crisis situation. As usual, humour plays with the truth. We can be nearer wanting successful Churches than we

want the smile of God. There is always a subtle pressure to evaluate mostly everything by the standards of numerical growth.

In truth, so much is expected of pastors. They are expected to be 'messiahs' of acute domestic or relationship problems. In an age of 'instant' relief from discomfort or pain, they are expected to offer immediate solutions to a whole variety of problems. These expectations leave many a pastor feeling ashamed of his weakness, inability and apparent failure.

Sooner, rather than later, the pastor experiences a crisis. He faces a sense of his own failure, his very human weakness. It is usually at that point that thoughts of resignation arise or unhelpful comparisons begin to be made with the pastor down the road. Disaster looms.

Do we still find it difficult to appreciate that the Apostle Paul, no less, constantly underlined the disproportion between the scope of his task and the flimsiness of the tool? He never once suggested that human weakness was something to be ignored by the missionary or the pastor. Indeed he saw it as the precondition for authentic mission under God's grace. Let's see how this works out.

Not only does our fragile weakness provide an opportunity for the strength of God to operate, but it also brings us nearer the Christ we serve. It is the essential condition for Christlikeness! To be weak is not to drift from him but to identify with Him. He appeared, in our world, as no superhuman being, a stranger to human weariness, able to cope with all the world could throw at Him. He was no Messiah in the popular sense of the term, offering, from the outside, ready made solutions to human problems.

Maria Bolding puts the truth somewhat starkly, using terms which verge on the dangerous. 'Jesus himself is history's greatest failure'. 'The word was made failure and died among us'. She argues that failure goes to the heart of being human and that Jesus has plumbed its very depths and redeemed it in his own flesh. This is a source of hope to all those for whom failure is synonymous with crushing defeat.

She writes:

'If you have ever been sickened by the crumbling of some enterprise into which you had put all your best effort and the love of your heart, you are caught up into the fellowship of Christ's death and resurrection, whether or not you thought of your experience in this way. God has dealt with our failure by Himself becoming a failure in Jesus'

Christ and so healing it from the inside. That is why we can meet Him in our failure: it is a sure place of finding Him, since He has claimed it. So central is failure to the Easter mystery that a person who has never grappled with it would scarcely claim to be Christ's friend and follower"

So, inevitably, and rightly, we arrive at the cross. It was the same cross which Paul gloried in and, when carried, is the mark of our spirituality. Imagine glorying in the very epitome of weakness!

The Way Down is the Way Up.

As preachers we are more than happy to proclaim to our people that the heart of God is most clearly seen in the suffering of His Son. Could it be that we have still to learn that when we, too, are suffering and when our weakness, even failure, sweeps over us, then we can experience, as never before, the love and grace which flow from the heart of God? When we feel that we have given our all and there is nothing more

to give, or say, then God can be present, active, powerful and saving. That supreme paradox is the source of our own deliverance from despair, resignation or self pity. It is when we share the experience of the cross, not when we feel capable of meeting every demand and fulfilling every expectation (including our own), that we discover the true spirituality of weakness.

"The hard, yet joyful lesson to be learnt is that good, and indeed successful Christian ministry which follows in the steps of its founder is born, not from skill, power and knowledge, but from the experience of inadequacy, rejection and sorrow transformed by the love of God and then offered to others." (Stephen Pattinson. 'A Critique of Pastoral Care')

The same truth can be approached from a different angle.

Paul was suffering from comparisons. His Corinthian critics were comparing him with what he scathingly calls the 'super apostles'. (2 Cor. 12:11). They were impressive, whether present or absent. They were men of outstanding good health. They were achievers. They were super-spiritual. They could preach. They got results.

The Corinthians were impressed. They knew where to find true spirituality - not in Paul but in these other impressive people. As one writer puts it: 'They saw Christ at work only where outward glory, heavenly power and imposing signs are clearly manifested. An unmistakable euphoria emanates from their activities'.

The young, and not so young, go off to some celebration-type event. Afterwards the pastor overhears the questions 'Why can't our pastor preach like that?' 'Why hasn't our pastor their experience of God's miracle working power?' 'Why aren't his sermons full of exciting stories of power events?' The pastor inevitably feels crushed, inadequate, broken. He's just a 'vessel of clay' compared with the 'super apostles'.

Notice, however, that Paul agreed with the comparison. Compared to these star performers he was a disaster. They strutted; he suffered. They had four star accommodation; he was familiar with prisons. They were physically impressive; he had a thorn in the flesh. Their message was designed to impress; he spoke of an accursed, crucified Jesus. Their message was of power; his was of weakness. They had a happy ending gospel - with fulfilment, miracles, wonders, health and wealth. He, instead, spoke of vague concepts such as 'perfection', 'edification' and 'Christ being formed in you'. They liked their egos stroked. He admitted to experiences which did nothing for his dignity. One of the Roman soldier's most glorious achievements in battle, the corona muralis, was awarded for being first over the wall of a city under siege. 'As Christ's fool, Paul boasts of first down a wall as a fugitive! (2 Cor. 11:32-33)

Far from being ashamed of it all, he boasts and glories in what others would have dismissed as sheer weakness. He believed that Christ was glorified in his weakness and that was what mattered. He had 'developed a missionary theology and practice in which ecstatic phenomena and spectacular achievements may never become the proof of being truly sent by Christ'

It needs courage to be weak and to let it show. We don't lightly let a congregation know how human we are. It is easier to stand above them and give the impression of super piety. Paul, however, is not slow to confess his weakness to the Corinthians. Recurring concepts in his correspondence to them are weakness, service, dying, suffering and affliction. He is very much aware of the disproportion between the magnitude of the task and the weakness of the servant messenger. Paul's testimony is the very antithesis of a spirituality of power and glory. '...in Asia we were under great

pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might rely not on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead' (2Cor. 1:8,9). It was precisely when death was at work in him that life was at work in those whom he served and for whom he cared.

Apostolic ministry is always arduous and exercised in feebleness in a world where the blood of martyrs, not their noble deeds, is the seed of the Church. What Paul's opponents reject is precisely what Paul insists on having at the centre of his ministry - human weakness and suffering after the pattern of the cross. He dies daily. To the Galatians he bears in his body 'the marks of Jesus'. He gladly follows a Saviour who calls his disciples to take up their own cross and follow him. It is in weakness that the spirituality of Christlikeness is to be found. The difference between Paul and his opponents, between the faithful pastor and the modern 'super apostle' is to be found in the cross.

Henri Nouwen has a brilliant passage in 'The Road To Daybreak' on the comparison between the human glory which leads to death and the Christlike glory which leads to life. He ends with 'Thus the glory of God stands in contrast to the glory of people. People seek glory by moving upward. God reveals his glory by moving downward. If we truly want to see the glory of God, we must move downward with Jesus'.

James Taylor



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A Central Stipend Fund: Impossible Dream?

Those who have read Douglas Sparkes' excellent 'Home Mission Story' will be aware of the considerable efforts which have been made over the past two centuries to provide for the support of ministry within our churches. The story tells of one initiative after another, aimed at trying to ensure a worthy level of support, particularly for those ministers serving churches unable to provide wholly for themselves. Thus, over the years, we have seen such bodies as, 'The Baptist Society in London for the Encouragement and Support of Itinerant Preaching' (later to become 'The Baptist Itinerant and Home Missionary Society'), the 'Augmentation Fund', the 'Church Extension Fund', the 'Twentieth Century Fund', the 'Home Mission Fund' (both the 1890 and 1970 versions), the 'Sustentation Fund', the 'Baptist Union Annuity Fund', the 'Baptist Pastors' Income Augmentation Society', the 'Home Work Fund' and so on and so forth! Whilst each new initiative began with high hopes of success, inevitably difficulties would arise and the various funds struggled to fulfil their aims and objectives. Douglas Sparkes makes the very apposite comment (p.15): 'that although Baptists understand and respond at the local level to the New Testament principle of caring for one another, they are not so quick to apply that principle beyond their immediate horizons'. I think that this judgement holds good for most of the past 200 years

Historical Over-View

A step in the direction of inter-dependency was taken in 1912 when the Assembly finally adopted(after 10 years of discussion!) the 'Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Scheme'. Dr Shakespeare, the Union's General Secretary at that time, said: 'For 300 years Independency has pursued its great way, but it has been an iron way, and there can be no doubt that beneath its merciless, though often triumphant, car the average and the obscure have been crushed and bruised as they have not been crushed in any other ecclesiastical system in the world.' Nothing has changed! - except that for 300 years we should now read 380 years!

Despite this revolutionary 'step forward' the Sustentation Fund was soon to struggle and get into difficulties, a situation compounded by the dreadful economic situation of the 1920s and 30s. The scandal which the 1912 scheme was intended to eradicate reappeared and many ministers suffered a reduction in stipend. Many churches could no longer afford ministers and in consequence a large number became out of pastorate. The prevailing state of affairs led, in 1937, to an attempt to try and introduce a system of 'greater equalisation of both the tasks and the stipends of ministers'. A special committee (heaven only knows how many such special committees have been set up over the years!), which later became known as the Polity Committee, was set up in 1937 'to examine into Baptist polity with a view to reporting what changes it deems necessary in the relationship of our Churches to one another, to the Ministry and to the Union.' The terms of reference could have been written today: 'in view of the fact that under the system of Independency prevailing in our denomination there are great difficulties in effecting the settlement of ministers, more particularly those of 50 years of age and over; and also disparities in the responsibilities and stipends of those who are called upon to serve our churches, the Committee is asked to consider whether these difficulties could be met by modifications

in our denominational organisation which, while preserving to all churches a measure of autonomy, would associate the denomination as such, acting through its regional Associations and Council, with the call to the pastorate of every churchand further, to consider the possibility of linking our churches in some form of connexional organisation and the payment of all ministers from a common fund to which all churches shall contribute an agreed quota proportionate to their ability...'. In the event, the Second World War overtook the work of the Committee . It was forced to conclude that any radical changes should be set aside' and its report was limited to much less controversial matters.

The ailing Sustentation Fund was replaced in 1944 by the 'New Home Work Fund' and Scheme, and this included the concept of a standard or, as it later became known, minimum stipend. Despite this, however, the lot of the average minister did not improve a great deal and Council was led to comment in 1949 that 'we have the worst-paid ministry of any of the leading denominations', a charge which has been made repeatedly since then. Endeavours to raise the standard stipend were thwarted by inadequate contributions to the Home Work Fund. In 1952, John Barrett (former North-East Area Superintendent) wrote an article entitled 'Whither Baptist Polity?; and various committees were formed to consider solutions to the eternal problem of the proper payment of our ministers. The discussions founded because of an inevitable failure to agree on the 'underlying principles'. Thus in 1960, one such committee judged 'that the churches would not, on the whole, favour establishing a central fund to which they would have to contribute according to an agreed scale and from which all ministers would be paid'. In 1966, Sydney Clark (another North-East Area Superintendent) resurrected the discussion with an article on 'How should our Ministers be paid?' arguing: 'that since the Home Work Fund had the effect of introducing the principle of equalisation of pay to one-fifth of the 2,100 Baptist churches, the principle should be extended so that all ministers should be paid from a centrally administered fund.'

Feasibility and Frustration

I joined Council in 1969 as a comparative 'youngster' (or so it seemed in those days!). Some of those who served at that time may well recall my rather unorthodox contribution at my first meeting when I sought to put right all of the denomination's ills in fifteen minutes or so! (The Chairman of Council was particularly kind and tolerant in those days!) The outcome of my contribution was the setting up of a Finance Enquiry Committee, to which I was somewhat surprised to be appointed, but it provided a platform from which to add my voice to the plea for the creation of a central stipend fund. I provided for that committee a discussion paper setting out the basis for a possible scheme and, in turn, Council authorised the General Purposes and Finance Committee (GP&F) To continue investigations into the feasibility of a central stipend fund for which additional information would be required from the churches'. GP&F invited me to undertake this investigation and this involved an approach to 263 of our churches, carefully selected to obtain a cross-section by size and location, for financial and other statistical information. To my delight, as many as 206 of the churches (78%) responded to the questionnaire and provided accounts and only 14 specifically declined. Only six of the responding churches said that they did not favour the principle of a central scheme, whilst a considerable number welcomed the idea and expressed the hope that a fund would be established.

The survey revealed quite conclusively that a central fund would be both financially and administratively feasible and it also demonstrated that, if necessary, churches

would be able to supplement the 'minimum' stipend which would be provided from the central fund. The scheme would be funded on a two-tier basis, involving both a per capita contribution and a percentage of a church's 'total income' (as defined and exclusive of legacies and memorial gifts). It was emphasised that a central fund could operate on the basis that ministers would continue in the employ of the local church, the primary objective being to ensure an acceptable minimum level of stipend throughout the denomination. The cost of the work of the union at national level, as well as that of the Associations, would also be financed through the central fund and the study concluded that much of the administration of the scheme (including the examination of accounts and assessment of contributions) could be handled by Associations, thus limiting central costs. Contributions from the churches and payment of stipends would be dealt with by way of bank credit transfer. The report went on to demonstrate that it would have been possible to increase the 1970 minimum stipend of £790 pa to between £1,000 and £1,200 pa, depending on whether or not the scheme included service increments.

The report was considered by the Finance Advisory Sub-Committee, which concluded that 'a central stipend fund was, under certain circumstances, both administratively and financially feasible' and it advised Council to give permission to GP&F to pursue the investigations further. Regrettably, from my point of view, the matter was referred to Ministry Main Committee who judged that it would be 'undesirable to embark upon a central stipend scheme at the present time', an outcome which prompted one senior member of Council at the time to remark that 'he had never before witnessed such a demolition job as had been inflicted upon my report!' Despite a reference back to Ministry Main to consider 'how the scheme might be presented to churches and ministers, together with the pros and cons', Council was finally persuaded, in 1972, not to pursue the idea. Possibly because the concept of a central fund was thought by some to be too incendiary, my report was not officially distributed to the churches or ministers but the Worcestershire Association's stationery and postages account soared that year as a result of supplying over 800 copies to enquirers!

A further attempt was made three years later, in 1975, to put the subject back on the agenda and Council agreed (in response to a resolution moved by the West Midland and Worcestershire Associations) to request the GP&F to set up a select committee' of three ministers and three lay-persons 'to give further consideration to the desirability and feasibility of establishing a central fund and whether and how ministers and churches should be asked whether they would support the establishment of such a fund'. This committee decided, in its wisdom, to approach the ministers and churches on the principle of a central fund before giving further consideration to its desirability or feasibility and so that when it reported, a year later, that of the 479 ministers and 837 churches who had responded, only 34% and 22% respectively were in favour of a central scheme, it was hardly surprising that Council agreed with the committee that the degree of support necessary to carry through such a change would not be forthcoming. Once again, it was regrettable that ministers and churches were not provided with a copy of the earlier feasibility report.

The Sad Cost of Independency

That was over 20 years ago! Since then the subject of a central fund has been raised periodically but any interest shown has not been sustained. Whilst, undoubtedly, there are many ministers and churches who would readily accept that this is a concept which we should have taken on board long ago, it is questionable whether there would

still be an sufficient take-up to make a central fund viable. Personally, I find this very disappointing and it only serves to underline the sad fact that Baptist churches generally are still a million miles from a proper understanding of the meaning of inter-dependency. I further have to say that the 'precious independency' which is cherished by so many of our churches is in danger of being equated with an attitude of self-interest or selfishness. Not only is this borne out through the pages of Douglas Sparkes 'Home Mission Story' but, regrettably, it is also underlined today by the actions of so many of our churches in their desire to enlarge the size of their ministerial teams or to pay stipends greatly in excess of the Home Mission stipend. I fear that this lack of concern for sister churches and brother and sister ministers will be the undoing of our beloved Union. More and more of our smaller churches are finding it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to finance full-time ministry and this in turn seriously impacts upon the number of ministers who find themselves out of pastorate. Are churches which cannot afford ministry to be left to sink or swim or are we prepared to embrace these churches in a system of shared ministry? And are the ministers whom the churches cannot afford to employ (most of whom will undoubtedly be in the 50 plus age group) likewise going to be thrown on to the 'scrap-heap' or are we prepared to find opportunities for them in an ordered and planned system of ministry?

In the paper which I prepared for the Finance Enquiry Committee way back in 1970, I argued that the establishment of a central fund would:

- (a) lead to a broadening and strengthening of fellowship between churches and ministers;
- (b) raise the general level of stipends;
- (c) lead to a greater degree of mobility amongst ministers, thus making it possible for ministers with particular gifts or abilities to serve where they are most needed; and
- (d) bring to an end the constant struggle to fund Home Mission.

I am conscious of the fact that I have not, in this article, touched upon the moral, scriptural or theological arguments in favour of a system of 'greater equalisation of both the tasks and stipends of ministers,' but I judge that those who might read this article will be much more competent than me to make due comment. However, I am still persuaded that the foregoing practical points are just as valid today and, in my view, a central fund would still prove to be financially and administratively feasible. Is it too much to ask that we take another purposeful look at the situation? When Council 'buried' my scheme in 1976, Richard Fairbairn, the Union's solicitor at that time, commented: 'that Mr Cooke is 30 years ahead of his time....in 30 years he will be hailed as a great prophet.' On that basis further discussion at this time may be a trifle premature, but then it did take ten years of discussion before the 1912 scheme became established!

Philip Cooke

The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Warfare

Introduction

Prayer has a particular role in spiritual warfare. Traditionally, in the Charismatic and Pentecostal strand of individualistic Western Christian culture, prayer in spiritual warfare has been focused upon the exorcism of demonic forces from "possessed" or "oppressed" individuals. It is relatively recently that a further shift towards exercising authority over the powers in a particular location has occurred. Events such as the "March for Jesus" campaigns are illustrative of this type of theological approach. However, a closer analysis of prayer in Ephesians will prove constructive in determining its place today.

Prayer as Spiritual Strengthening

It is noted that prayer, in Eph. 6:18, 19, is not really a seventh weapon. Instead it functions as a partial basis for the deployment of the other weapons¹. The stress on prayer indicates that it is crucial to effective spiritual warfare. Arnold comments that prayer gives access to divine power,² and recalls the fact that the author of Ephesians has already modelled the type of prayer that is meant (Eph. 1:15-23). There the writer "wants to impress indelibly upon his readers that no conceivable being can even come close to matching Christ in power or authority."³ Prayer has a role, therefore, in focusing the attention of the intercessor upon the reality of what Christ has achieved and how this is infinitely superior to any power exercised by any other power. This is further amplified by the prayer in Eph. 3:14-21. Here the author calls upon the Father to make known to the Christians in Asia Minor the all-encompassing love that is in Christ. This knowledge is to be understood on the basis of the Spirit's work in the believer's "inner being" and appropriated by faith. Essentially, therefore, the prayer is a request for divine strengthening. It is conceptually linked to the first prayer and serves to endorse the reality of Christ's supreme power related in the opening chapters of the epistle.

In the context of the Asia Minor environment, such prayer, while not directed against the "powers", enables Christians to realise their position in Christ. Its impact would be to give assurance that in the face of oppressive powers that are hell-bent on sowing fear in the hearts of the believers, there is no reason to fear such threats. The powers cannot threaten the Christian's standing within the love of God. From this it is clear that prayer is the means to appropriate (or "live within") the security of God's armour.

However, it would be incorrect to assume a relaxed and comfortable posture. The battle is real. Eph. 6:18 demands that prayer be accompanied by a watchful and persevering attitude. This suggests that prayer cannot be a single event. Living in a hostile environment requires continuous prayer. There is the ever frequent necessity to draw on God's strength, to be reminded of the efficacy of the armour, in spiritual warfare.

The text also indicates the context in which such prayer is to be uttered. The admonitions are all in the plural, requiring a corporate dimension. Here, the call to pray "for all the saints" has a mutual sustaining power. Arnold observes that in this sense the saints arm each other⁴: a point supported by the author's request for prayer for himself (6: 19)

Christian Behaviour as Spiritual Warfare

Throughout this discussion the assumption has been that the effect of such prayer would be the giving of spiritual strength. It is legitimate to ask what impact, in terms of behaviour, might be made as a result of this form of prayer. If prayer is the means of appropriating the armour of God then there are some important linguistic parallels in other parts of the epistle that will help to answer the question posed. Arnold comments:

Paul saw the gospel as "truth" (Eph. 1:13) and as the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16). In contrast, the devil is the arch adversary who uses many schemes designed to misrepresent, deceive and trick. Believers need to be convinced and assured of the gospel's truth and what it affirms about them as God's children. By implication, believers need to conduct their lives in a manner consistent with the truth of the gospel. Lying and deceit can have no place in a believer's life; they are an affront to the God of truth. Consequently, in Ephesians, Paul told each Christian that he or she "must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour" (Eph. 4:25; see also 5:9)⁵

It seems quite justifiable to draw from this that the author of Ephesians understood ethical behaviour in line with the gospel as a form of spiritual warfare. In this sense how one treats one's spouse, one's children, one's slaves, one's master, one's fellow believers are all actions that are to be seen as ways to conduct this warfare. Prayer, correctly then, encompasses every aspect of a person's life. Prayer, therefore, opens the gates to allow God's power to influence the believer as he or she appropriates the armour of God in order to stand firm in every circumstance. This is a bold and vibrant perspective that Ephesians brings. It is also one that is generally overlooked in some of the modern popular expositions of spiritual warfare - especially those from within the more charismatic extremes of Christianity.

Encountering the Powers in Structures by Prayer

Yet there can be a danger in the application of this because, while evil forces can lie behind structures, there is a tendency among today's more conservative Christians to ignore the social evils that are rampant in the world. The sort of ethic proposed above will certainly go a long way towards placing personal behaviour in the context of a spiritual battle but it could leave untouched the whole area of spiritual power struggles in the corporate, structural dimension. It is in this context that, once again, Wink has provided the basis for discussion⁶.

Wink understands prayer as an envisioning activity. In prayer the intercessor realises within himself the possibilities and is empowered to make them a reality. He says that the future is not closed. There are "fields of forces whose interactions are somewhat predictable. But *how* they will interact is not."⁷ With this concept it comes as no surprise that Wink, in common with most thought today, does not see God as immutable. He describes biblical prayer to be more like "haggling in an oriental bazaar than the polite monologues of the churches".⁸ He sees God as One who waits for the intercessor. In fact, Wink comments that the Lord's Prayer, being in the imperative and not the indicative, commands the intercessor to command God.⁹ Prayer then sets God free to act: "An aperture opens in the praying person, permitting God to act without violating human freedom."¹⁰

It is in this sense that prayer confronts the powers in society. By praying the intercessor is being truly revolutionary. Goldingay comments on Daniel's act of

defiance in Dan. 6:11, ".....Daniel's response to the prohibition on prayer is to continue praying." He goes on by stressing that Daniel is ".....not a man who has lost his true human freedom. He retains that, while neither civil servants nor king behave as free men."¹¹ Wink's insight is equally crucial: Daniel's "seemingly innocuous act" was "more..... revolutionary than outright rebellion would have been. Rebellion simply acknowledges the absoluteness and ultimacy of the emperor's power, and attempts to seize it. Prayer denies that ultimacy altogether by acknowledging a higher power."¹² Similarly, prayer, induced by the Spirit (cf Rom. 8:26-27)¹³, helps bring to consciousness what God is calling the believer(s) to do. It is revelatory. It enables the intercessor to see reality as it really is - to externalise (to use Wink's concept) the powers in society and to become liberated from their ideology.

This interaction between God and his people is the basis for the exercise of a Christian ethic in society. It is the danger of the Christian social activists' movement to treat prayer as an "opt out". That the struggle is against the powers and not "flesh and blood"; and that it takes place in "the heavenlies"; is a call not to social inaction but to realistic social action. If the perspective on prayer outlined above has any truth in it, then the Christian's act of prayer is a constant source of renewal, appropriation of spiritual strength, and insight into the true reality of the powers' involvement in human structures. Prayer gives social action integrity,¹⁴ because it ensures that Christian activism does not "merely reflect one or another counter ideology of some counter-Power".¹⁵

Prayer is, therefore, moved from being a pious performance to an action that precedes all other actions. Through it the intercessor can engage with the powers that lie behind circumstances throughout the world. Through it the intercessor encounters the God who wants to bring freedom from the oppressive powers, who wants to establish justice and righteousness. Through it the intercessor grasps anew the supremacy of the resurrected Christ who calls creation to a new order. Such prayer transforms the intercessor into someone who engages in action while awaiting that Final Action that will eradicate all evil.

Perseverance in Prayer

Yet prayer must also take seriously the present continued nature of the battle. The exegesis showed that "the evil day" (Eph. 6:13) refers to both a particular time of struggle that precedes the end of the world and the whole of the present age. The author requests continued prayer for his mission, aware that he is constantly under pressure to refrain from declaring the "mystery of the gospel" fearlessly (Eph. 6:20). There is, therefore, the realism that perseverance is necessary. Wink looks to Daniel's experience awaiting a reply to his prayer (Dan. 10:12ff). He notes that answer to prayer can be delayed ("thwarted" is his word)¹⁶, because of the ferocity of the powers' determination to retain control. Nevertheless, the answer is given to Daniel (an answer given on the first day!) after he has contended with the powers for twenty-one days. This struggle is a reflection of the struggle between the angel sent to Daniel and the "Prince of Persia". Only when Michael (Israel's guardian angel) is despatched to assist in the fight can Daniel's message be delivered. Wink concludes, among other things, that this "myth" depicts the actual experience of praying believers. The immediacy of an answer often seems so remote. There is a battle going on. However, that answers do eventually come is an indication of the efficacy of prayer. Yet, while the battle wages, answers are seemingly few. And the Bible does not attempt to justify the delays. There is this mystery in prayer, highlighted by the blocking tactics of the spiritual powers. The ultimate answer rests in the eschatological aspect of

Christian faith. Christian faith rests on "the knowledge that our intercessions will ultimately prevail".¹⁷ Wink rightly comments:

That is why the delay of the Kingdom was not fatal to Christian belief. For the church could now see the Domination System¹⁸ for what it was, and could never wholly capitulate to it again. And it has caught glimpses of God's domination-free order, and could never give up the longing for its arrival".¹⁹

Callum Jones

N.B. The above is an extract from a longer study in Ephesians

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¹C.E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and magic. The Concept of Power in Ephesians in the Light of its Historical Setting*, Cambridge, 1989, p112.

²ibid, p112

³ibid p52

⁴C.E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, Leicester, 1992, p.159

⁵ibid. p.155

⁶W. Wink, *Engaging The Powers*, Minneapolis, 1992, p.297ff

⁷ibid. p.299

⁸ibid. p.301

⁹ibid. p.303

¹⁰ibid. p.302

¹¹J.E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Dallas, 1989, p.131

¹²W. Wink, *Naming The Powers*, Minneapolis, 1984, pp110-111

¹³Wink, *Engaging*, p.304ff

¹⁴ibid. p.306

¹⁵ibid. p.297

¹⁶ibid. p.311

¹⁷ibid. p.313

¹⁸cf ibid. p.9 for a definition of this phrase

¹⁹ibid. p.313

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The aim of RBIM is "to promote excellence in the practice of ministry, enabling ministers and pastoral leaders to become increasingly effective in the mission to which Christ has called them". In addition to regular consultations which are held throughout England, the RBIM also publishes, three times a year, *Ministry Today*, a 64 page journal devoted to ministry issues.

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Perspectives on a General Election

"The death of democracy is not likely to be by assassination. It is by the slow extinction by apathy, indifference and undernourishment."

When Paul Schneider, the Pastor of Buchenwald was asked by a fellow Christian during the time of Nazi oppression, "Shall we go on strike?" He replied, " I shall not tell you what to do but I will tell you who you are."

The country faces a general election; a minister's task is not primarily to tell people which way they should vote but, rather, again to remind them who they are.

Kingdom Come

Democracy, more vulnerable than any other political system, is, under threat. Increasing power being gathered, not just to Parliament, but to Cabinet, even ministers; the confrontation attitude in Parliament, when many look for consensus; the tremendous power of QUANGOS; the sense that political decision-making is being removed from us; the feeling that government is inexorably moving in a determined direction about which we can do nothing - all these combine to encourage citizens not to use the power to choose even when it is available. Church people are numbered above; as ministers we are faced with an enormous task.

Yet, we have enormous resources. According to St Mark, Jesus began his public ministry by announcing the Gospel and saying , "The Kingdom of God is here". The full nature of the long promised rule of God is revealed in Jesus Christ. So when we ask, "How do we recognise the Kingdom today?", we know where to turn. We look for the full embodiment of the meaning of the Kingdom in Jesus Christ. Let (s)he who has eyes to see note the many signs of the activity of God in His world. And it is to this bar of judgement that we bring the Party manifestos and election promises, nay more, it is to this bar of judgement and encouragement that we bring ourselves to know the answer to the world's most important question, "Who are you?"

God has established the Kingdom. He does not wait until there are sufficient believers and then He will do something; the Living Christ works continuously. It is true that, as yet, we do not see all things in subjection under his feet; the full consummation of the Kingdom is an event to which we look forward but we do see Jesus here and now. This, or rather He, is our starting point for living.

God Himself has taken the tremendous risk of bringing in the Kingdom to release us from ourselves and setting us free to live together in community. Let us hold fast to this in all the hustings. It is not that living together in community is one aspect amongst many that we are to safeguard. Community is the reason for which we are created; love is the reason why we have been set free. We are created for love. We shall search the Party declarations and ask whether they make for community; whether they help people to live together in harmony.

Words are known by the company they keep. The word 'kingdom' keeps company with the word 'righteousness.' Love cannot be codified; justice can. And it is because we live in an institution that we look for justice. Justice prevents love from becoming sentimental. Justice is something very different from love. Love is irrational. Justice is rational. Justice makes no free gifts. We listen and we read so that as a nation we can work towards a more just society.

It is because we take our responsibility to act for the good of the whole community, that, in the general election, we must consider wider concerns than one single issue.

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To Readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal

Unfortunately, the incidents of thefts from Churches, arson attacks and mindless vandalism are on the increase and we must react immediately before the situation gets out of hand. These days, most Churches have electronic equipment including PA Equipment, Keyboards, Mixer Desks, Computers and Photocopiers. All of these items are very attractive to the petty criminal who is always on the look-out for a soft target. Goods of this nature are fairly easily disposed of and unless they are security marked, are often difficult to trace. Consequently, there is an urgent need to consider crime prevention involving improving the standard of locks on windows and doors and the installation of an intruder alarm. Another improvement which is fairly easy to do, and is extremely inexpensive, is to mark all property of any value with a security marker showing the name of the Church and the postcode.

The one improvement that appears to cause the greatest difficulty to Churches is the installation of an intruder alarm. However, this should not create the problems often envisaged. Intruder alarm companies, particularly those who are members of NACOSS are able to offer good advice to ensure the system that best suits the needs of your Church is provided. You should always obtain competitive quotations from two or three companies and you can always seek further advice from your local Crime Prevention Officer. In addition, we are always pleased to assist you in matters relating to the extent of the system and the type of signalling to be used, e.g. audible bells or siren only or a monitored system to an intruder alarm company central station.

You need to be pro-active in matters of crime prevention; it is no good waiting until after the event. No matter what part of the country in which your Church is situated, it is a target. Therefore, do not let your Church be yet another statistic - **keep the thief out.**

Yours in His Service

T E Mattholie

In this, as in every election, there are a number of single issue candidates. We may, or may not, agree with them, but at this point in our nation's history we are not thinking of a limb or an organ but the whole body politic.

The Kingdom, through its Lord, reminds us that, though we have a loyalty to our own nation and people, the nation that seeks only to save its life will loose it. We must ensure that our nation accepts responsibility for other nations and, especially, for the poor and the poorest of the poor. We look for international awareness in political planning.

Convictions and Contradictions

If only it was as straightforward as that. The Government pledges certain policies, say in health, education and employment. All the indications to date are that the main emphasis this year will fall on these three. Certainly, they are essential in a common life. We will also agree that if it is going to institute those policies, then they must be paid for through income tax - the most just way of sharing the financial load.

We may approve of the way that the 'government to be' declares that it is going to use our money in those three major areas. But the same tax also pays for government activities of which we heartily disapprove. We pay taxes for health education and welfare but, by the same act, we pay towards a massive industry whose sole purpose is to develop and export weapons designed to destroy human life. Now rightly, the Government has a right to compel obedience in the name of social justice.

We have argued that, as people who are concerned for the Kingdom, we cannot elect out, but now, it is by electing in, that we are going to betray certain Christian standards. There is no escape. Refusing to vote does not mean neutrality. We are involved in society whether we admit it or no. Some of our contemporaries, and many in Church history, have considered that they must break the law and take the legal punishment. That may not be the path for all. We return to source. The Gospel reminds us that this is not a perfect world. Every political solution to the problems of society will be imperfect because this is the very condition of people and of the society. Some of the principles which we declare to be the essentials of a just society are ignored.

It is because we are trapped in this society that we are forced in two complementary directions. The first is to face the issue. It is because no matter how we vote we have voted for those matters which are a denial of our Christian principals. By that act, we are invited to wrestle together with these moral issues that really hurt. Christian ethics are essentially community ethics. In these matters the foot cannot say to the hand nor the ear to the eye, "I don't need you". We struggle together towards a more just world at the same time being part of it. The second action is to come to terms with the meaning of this word "compromise". We are involved in compromise because we are alive. We recognise that in the political scene very few issues are inflexible, and by being inflexible we may achieve far less for the common good than by compromise. Always, of course, remembering that it is a compromise and not a permanent solution.

Because our concern is with the Kingdom, we are brought face to face with sovereignty. We declare that sovereignty, as propounded by any party, is never absolute. Already, there are those who would set it up as an idol, a golden calf at whose shrine everything must be placed. Even at best, political sovereignty is an instrument. It is to be used for the purposes of the Kingdom - the good of people.

The independent nation state is a thing of the past. The Kingdom of God knows no national boundaries. Even a cursory glance at the geographical map tells us we are Europeans, and a glance at the trade map makes it clearer still that it is impossible for this nation to live totally independent of other nations. We are not owners. The land does not belong to us. It has been lent to us as the place where we can exercise our stewardship. Stewardship involves us in using our gifts for the good of all.

For evil to prosper all that is needed is the silence of good men and women. It is not only the actions of bad men and women, it is the silence of good men and women that allows it to flourish. Human progress does not roll along on the wheels of inevitability. It comes through tireless effort of people who are willing to search out where God is at work in His world, and learn to cooperate with Him there.

If you have read thus far, and even if you have come to the conclusion that your time would have been better spent in some other way, but you are going to do something about it, that will be a rich reward for my efforts.

Don Black

Your Church Is Too Small

I echo the editor's sentiments (BMJ Vo1.251 July 1995.21ff): it was good to see Jon Green, theological student, addressing the much debated question of the relationship of children to the sacraments; but I suggest that addressing a prior set of questions concerning the nature of the Church is both necessary and helpful.

Jon's article included these two sentences, *What then, in a believers' church with clear in and out boundaries, is the status of infants and others who do not have the capacity to express personal faith? Are they in the Kingdom or out of it?* These words betray not simply a confusion in thought concerning the Kingdom and the Church, but also state that a believers' church has *in and out boundaries*. This widely-held assumption needs to be challenged, and can be seen as flawed on a number of grounds - Biblical, theological, philosophical and experiential.

Biblical

Of course, even a modest appraisal of a Biblical understanding of the People of God would require several hundred pages, so in this journal one can give only the briefest hints. In the Old Testament we find Cyrus referred to as God's servant and Pharaoh's hard heart is seen as God's work. The Books of Ruth and Jonah are inclusivist. In the Psalms, "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." The work of Isaiah, God's servant, is universal. These are but a few of the many indicators that the concept of "God's People" is an elastic one and does not; for the most part, refer to some tightly drawn circle of inclusion and exclusion. In the few instances where such notions are paramount they are exceptional, not the norm.

The New Testament, interestingly, chooses to include Jesus' specific rejection of the exclusivist group mentality of his disciples (Mark 9.38): the curtain of the Holy of Holies is torn asunder, Peter is compelled by a combination of revelation and experience to acknowledge that "*God has shown me that I must not consider any person ritually unclean or defiled*". And, following Pentecost, when 5,000 (!) were added to their number in a day, the major emphasis is surely not on having all things

in common, nor belonging to a group/community and in this way sharing in a common life , but rather that they had all accepted a life in common; not a common life, but a life in common - the way, the truth, the life of Christ. This, initially, found its expression in particular ways, but people were less than Christlike whenever they became too attached to those secondary ways. It is evident from the New Testament letters that followers of The Way did gather together to grow in faith and understanding of love as God, because in attempting to live the life of Christ in multifarious ways, they often experienced the need for re-direction, for renewal, for refreshment and encouragement in a non-hostile environment provided by co-pilgrims. Paul's Corinthian letters, however, show how easily such gatherings degenerated into inward-looking groups, rife with personality cults, and a focus on loveless / selfish "spirituality", when their life should have been exactly the opposite, like that of Paul, and even more that of Christ Jesus.

As evidenced by Corinth, the Mennonites, Strict Baptists, Brethren and countless other examples, allegiance to Christ is so easily misrepresented and replaced by allegiance to particular people or specific groups of people - who may call themselves a church, or the Body of Christ, and under that guise even demand our allegiance. These tendencies are in every church of which I know, and they are at times hard to overcome, but resisted they must be.

Theological

For a Baptist, theological thought is always an extension of Biblical insight. On that basis we may say that always included in whatever God "is" has been the Word -that which is outgoing; self-emptying; self-denying; universally life-giving; unmeritedly redemptive; be-what-it-will / blow-where-it-will; without favourites; barrier-breaking; tradition-defying; religionless. That is, in all our ecclesiastical efforts to conceptually, geographically, institutionally, or in any other way confine, define or refine possible understandings of, and responses to God, we actually deny the very God we claim to affirm.

People of God are called to reflect God's "nature". Put very simply this means that whenever we make any claim to possess the Word of God (in any way!), or we erect any kind of barriers suggesting where and how God's influence can be experienced /known/ effective / and so on, then we fail to be God's people - for before we are people of the book we are surely people of the Word. Even if we stray from Baptist principles and are unnecessarily constrained in our openness to understanding God by a Conciliar commitment to Trinitarian dogma, notions of God as Universal Father / Creator, or of God as the animating Spirit which gives life to all, we are not in conflict with God as the Word supremely expressed in the person and work of Jesus as the Christ. A genuinely Christocentric theology must inevitably lead to a more "open" understanding of what it means to be God's people than is denoted when a church calls itself a group, a family, a community, or uses any other boundary-creating concepts.

Insights of Contemporary Thought

There can be beneficial side-effects to being requested to do extra reading / writing before one's thesis is deemed acceptable to academia. In my case it meant reading about Postmodernism. Previously, I knew almost nothing about it, though quite unintentionally my work apparently demonstrated many of its features. So I read (three times before I began to understand it!) Kevin Hart's *The Trespass of the Sign*, and Tony Thiselton's *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, among many other works; and

discovered other expressions of what I already knew; namely, that symbols, words, texts, books and all our modes of interaction never have fixed or final meanings/boundaries - and, as David Harvey points out in *The Conditions of Postmodernity*, nor can our institutions. All our thinking, experiencing and interaction with human and other environments is a constantly changing flux - our words, our selves, our spheres of life, all have *blurred edges*. To pretend otherwise, even about, (if not especially about!) sacred mysteries such as Bible, Church, and Sacrament, is to delude ourselves.

This kind of thinking is not just a feature of Postmodernism. People like Dan Via have long talked about the in-meaning and through-meaning of words, and it was interesting when preparing this article to come across A.T.Lincoln's review of J.D.Moore's 1995 commentary which offers a new perspective on Romans 1-8. Lincoln says this new perspective "derives from his knowledge, after a career as a lecturer in Italian, of Umberto Eco's writings on semiotics and aesthetics. Moores suggests that, although the relationship of Paul's Christian experience to his inherited Judaism produces confusions and inconsistencies in his reasoning, this need not mean that his argumentation lacks clarity. In particular, Eco's adaptations of "fuzzy logic" may be useful in understanding how terms such as faith, righteous, law and death function in Paul's argument. Fuzziness is not simply vagueness or ambiguity, "it is a quality which arises where a concept, in order to be what it is, depends on a certain level of irreducibility". A certain level of irreducibility! -I believe that applies to a church whenever it truly expresses its function as the Body of Christ which is at one and the same time ministering, crucified, resurrected and ascended.

Experience

During my 25 years as a Baptist Minister I have never been altogether happy with the idea of a church membership role. Indeed, for the first 7 years here in Northampton I never looked at one. I knew my Church Secretary would keep the records necessary for administrative purposes, and I see no need for myself as Pastor and Preacher to have such information. In recent years our church meeting has set aside a part of one meeting per year to pastorally consider those whose names are on the membership list (approx 100), so I do see the list annually, but that particular pastoral review is overshadowed by a small weekly meeting for prayer and other action. On a 12 weekly cycle, this meeting pastorally considers as many as possible of those who are known to be currently engaged in Abbey Centre Baptist Church's worship and witness (a variable figure of 300- 500?). In addition to this, I have my own weekly and monthly review of personal pastoral contacts made through weddings, funerals, door-to-door visiting, referrals from various people, and so on (anything up to another 200+). There are, of course, others associated with our church who have their own distinctive pastoral lists, which includes many people with whom, even after 13 years, I am not acquainted, but they are people who consider Abbey Centre Baptist Church to be "their church". For me none of these people are more "in" or "out" of the church than any others - and certainly I would have no criteria for judging if they were in or out of the Kingdom! What I do know is that when all people are treated equally, all treated as children of God's love and agents of God's spirit, the results are overwhelming. That is to say, Good News can be shared with all people, and often in the most surprising circumstances; our church's life and work is enriched beyond telling by the talents of all kinds and conditions of people; a considerable and increasing number of people feel able to approach our church for help in their lives without the fear that we shall place more burdens and demands upon them, vis-a-vis beliefs, practices or

commitments.

Charles Gerkin's *Prophetic Pastoral Practice* includes a Chapter, *Normative Metaphors for Pastoral Work: Community*. I wish every church would take to heart his criticisms of the so prevalent pastor-centred model of the church. This model comprises a set of concentric circles with the pastor in the centre circle and therefore most "in", then comes the "church officers" circle, then the members' circle, etc., until one reaches everything which is least related to the pastor on the "outermost" perimeter. Gerkin offers as an alternative: a centrifugal model, or "The God / People of God Centred Image of Community" model, and for many churches this would be a significant step forward, for, as Gerkin puts it, "*The Christian Community thus finds its vocation and self realization not by preoccupying itself with its own activities and circles of involvement, but by becoming dialogically involved in and committed to the enhancement of other loci of communal life*" (p137). This model however, still sees the church as a community in its own right, and my belief is that churches need to develop beyond that understanding. "The Twelve" who were chosen by Jesus to be with him are consistently portrayed in the Gospels as actually being more "outside" in terms of understanding than many of the common people who heard him gladly and who, no doubt, were part of the 72 sent out, or the 500 gathered together at one time. The Kingdom feast (The Lord's Table?) wasn't reserved for any privileged group, but was open to those who were regarded as so much on the outside that they needed to be dragged in - this over-the-top parable shows how nonsensical the idea of "outsiders" and "insiders" was to Jesus, and how sterile is so much debating about who can and cannot "partake of the Lord's Table". Give the invitation in Christ's name, and for Christ's sake let those who will respond do so!!

In describing a church's function, we need to abandon the use of the terms such as family, group, community altogether, for a community is, by definition, "a common possession or enjoyment". Our true calling is to be those who are dispossessed and to enter redemptively into the suffering of all humanity. The garment which covered the body of Jesus was seamless, and its fringe was as redemptive as any other part of it! There was once a vogue for saying "*Your God is too small!*" I want to add to that the suggestion that often our understanding of a church is too small, and many churches now thought of as "the larger churches", are in reality the smaller churches - and vice-versa.

Ted Hale

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Secretary's Report for 1996/7

As our recent Assemblies have got progressively busier in recent years, the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship's Pastoral Session and A.G.M. have become increasingly squeezed. For this reason we thought that it might be helpful to try something new. So rather than take up valuable time during the Assembly I present my report to the readers of our *Journal* - a rather larger audience than usual!

This has been another very busy year for your Committee. Apart from the Pastoral Session we meet for two main meetings each year. These meetings bring together between twenty and thirty people and we now always meet at Didcot. Over the past year we have been particularly keen to recruit new members to the Committee in order to ensure that each Area has two representatives. The Committee is also composed of the Fellowship's Officers, our correspondents, the Head of the Ministry department and the members of the Editorial Board. In addition to our main meetings a small group from the Committee met with the Senior Management Team of the Union (BUGB) in December and we are delighted that this very useful meeting has become a regular feature of life.

What have we been doing? Many of you have informed us that a pre-retirement course would be appreciated, and so we took the initiative to set up a course this year at High Leigh. This was a step of faith in every sense, and we are glad to say that the demand has been so great that a second course has had to be set up for this year. Others have indicated their desire to attend in subsequent years. I am grateful to Jack Ramsbottom and Vic Sumner for their help with this. Retirement has also been on our agenda in relation to the possibility of early retirement. We are grateful for the help which the Baptist Ministers' pension Fund has given with this but it is clear that members would need to plan far ahead (probably soon after birth!) For this to be a viable option.

Some say that Baptists have become review weary! Certainly, the past year has been dominated by reviews within the Baptist family. We are glad to have participated, through our Committee members, in both the Denominational Consultation and the Superintendency Review Group. It is good to see the Union facing up to many of the tough ministerial issues of the day. Amongst them we are glad to see that our convictions about the importance of ministerial appraisal have been affirmed. We also note the universal recognition that more effective support needs to be given to ministers and their families. The process of settlement has often been considered by the B.M.F. Through the years and it is good to see proposals for its overhaul.

The *Journal* continues to bring together a fascinating variety of articles, reviews and news and we are greatly indebted to the editor, Michael Jackson, for this labour of love. He will be greatly missed when he leaves the editor's chair at the end of this year. On behalf of us all I thank all the members of the Editorial Board for their excellent work. The *Journal* gives us effective and regular contact with more than 1,700 ministers and we pray that it will continue to be a source of inspiration, challenge and encouragement in the year to come.

We are grateful to Alison Fuller for her time as our Chair and welcome Michael Bochenksi to this role. Jim Clarke has looked after the books in his usual efficient and effortless way. We are very glad that we have been able to make significant gifts to ministers from our Benevolent Fund due to the generosity of our members. I am delighted that we make these gifts on the basis of need, and we do not restrict such gifts to members of the B.M.F. David Piggott, our Membership secretary (UK),

maintains contact with a large number of our members and we are grateful to him and the correspondents for their valuable work.

B.M.F. is only worth having if it succeeds in strengthening our fellowship in Christ. As a Committee we work hard at doing those things which will, we trust, support and help Baptist ministers. But our work will count for nothing if it is not undergirded by the regular prayers of our members. I encourage you to affirm your membership of the B.M.F. by praying for other Baptist Ministers every Sunday morning. This, more than anything else, will strengthen our love for one another and our service for the Lord.

Book Reviews

***Is the Blessing Biblical*, by David Poulson, Hodder and Stoughton, £5.99**

Christians are good at finding controversy and the 'Toronto' phenomenon is one recent such controversy. Books and articles abound, hailing this as the sign of the great revival to come, or a sign to the devil at work. There are famous names in both camps.

In this book, David Poulson tells us that he has been approached many times to give his authoritative view on the subject, and some readers will want to know what his conclusions are without reading the basis of that conclusion. David is a well known charismatic; one who has spoken out from time to time on controversial issues to do with the 'manifestations of the spirit'. As one who has not been to Toronto, can David Poulson speak with authority on the subject?

This is a book which seeks to answer the question in the title, not by experience, but by an examination of the Biblical basis for determining the work of the Spirit. He skilfully considers the terminology, "manifestation" and "ministry", used so frequently by those who are exponents of this "blessing". He considers whether this blessing can be a fulfilment of the prophecy of scripture, and examines whether the more bizarre aspects of this blessing can have any Biblical basis at all. Poulson has not changed his view on the charismatic gifts of 1 Corinthians 12, but wishes to consider whether these "manifestations of the spirit" are along similar lines. The 'Toronto Blessing' is associated with pronouncements of "times of refreshing" or "times of revival", and David Poulson considers the meaning of these terms Biblically, and whether they can be justifiably attached to this blessing or to anything else, present or in the past.

Probably, for me, the most useful chapter was the one in which he considers the character of God, and whether these bizarre manifestations are the sort of thing the God could or does do. In the chapter entitled 'Mainly for Leaders', he begins to present some of his conclusions. Those who read this chapter may be disappointed if they want a definitive view of whether the blessing is Biblical or not, but the eight points in this chapter are a helpful guideline for those involved in ministry in our churches.

David Poulson speaks of his book in these terms. 'I have tried to ask the right questions. Indeed I believe its title is the right question.....' Certainly it is a question all should ask, whether they be for or against the Toronto experience. It is a question that all of those in our Churches need to be asking and seeking to answer. Poulson expresses concern that the answer to the question might divide Christendom. His book seeks to encourage everyone to consider carefully the issues that he has raised before taking an extreme position. He thus encourages us to a conclusion along the

same lines as him.

I found the book infinitely readable and informative, challenging my own thinking and my own acting. I don't think the book changed my opinion, but it certainly informed it, and enabled me to ensure my conclusions were based on the right criteria.

Tony Cross

Jesus Matters : 150 years of Research,

C.J. den Heyer, S.C.M, £9.95, (193 pp)

The main title attracts, but it is the sub-title which reveals the exact aim, and hence its restricted value for those in the pastorate. The book does not exegete gospel passages or give the author's understanding of the ministry of Jesus. It reviews thematically Jesus' research over roughly the last 150 years, with the occasional venture into art, novel, film (the Last Temptation of Christ) and some studies not by academic theologians. Professor den Heyer is a competent scholar and his assessments are well-balanced and judicious. He brings out the issues thrown up by scholarship. I thought that the book reads well. Some readers may not like the inevitable overlaps which occur with a thematic approach, for authors may figure more than once, but others may prefer this approach as helping to see the main issues. This is matter of personal taste.

I feel that Anthony Harvey's 'Jesus and the Constraints of History'; Ben Meyer's 'The Aims of Jesus'; Marcus Borg's 'Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the teachings of Jesus'; and Joachim Guilka's 'Jesus von Nazaret' (the only recent study of Jesus from within German Catholic Scholarship) deserved a mention. The lack of indices is a drawback in view of the thematic approach.

Anyone who left college around the late eighties should (!) be aware of the contents of this book. If you left college before that and want an update, my advice would be to get this on the Inter-Library Loan and spend your money on something which drives you back to the text of Scripture itself.

J.E.Morgan-Wynne

***Radical Politics* by Paul Rowntree Clifford,**

The Yard Press, Sudbury, 123 pp, £7.50, 1996

The underlying question Paul Rowntree Clifford asks is, "How can we make democracy work in contemporary Britain?" For the author, the present two-party, first-past-the-post system of parliamentary democracy has left too much power in the hands of government which has become, in effect, an elected dictatorship.

Paul Rowntree Clifford writes from the perspective of a Liberal Democrat and the book is a treatise for the Liberal Democrats, but it is none-the-worse for that. You may think that an apology for the Liberal Democracy is hardly radical politics. Think again. Paul uses the word 'radical' in the sense of getting back to our democratic roots, which have been lost through our two-party system. He argues very persuasively for the power being returned to the people through local government (parish and town councils) who have the freedom to make local decisions up through district councils to Parliament and beyond, to Europe.

I thought I was politically literate but learnt an enormous amount about the intricacies of government through all its levels. The author argues for proportional representation, involvement in Europe and stronger local and regional government. He does this by explaining different types of democracy, how different levels of government work, the sovereignty of Parliament, and the effects of being in or out of Europe.

I have not been persuaded to vote Lib Dem, but now feel more informed and believe this an important book for ministers in an election year.

Paul does not write this book from an overtly Christian perspective, but for those with eyes to see his Christian understanding shows through.

As I might say if I was an MP, "I commend this book to the House!"

Michael Bray

***Augustine* by Richard Price, xiii +96pp, Fount £4.99**

***Francis and Bonaventure* by Paul Rout, xii+97pp, Fount £4.99**

***Thomas More* by Anne Murphy, xii+100pp, Fount £4.99**

***John of the Cross* by Wilfred McGreal, xiv+80pp, Fount £4.99**

***Kierkegaard* by Peter Vardy, x+101pp, Fount £4.99**

***Simone Weil* by Stephen Plant, xviii+90pp, Fount £4.99**

The publishers obviously feel there is a market for readable, reasonably priced, mini-biographies, so these are the first six volumes in a new series entitled 'Fount Christian Thinkers', edited by Peter Vardy, lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion at Heythrop College, which may explain why four of the six authors have connections with that place of learning.

There is no editorial introduction explaining the criteria by which the subjects concerned have been selected but the back covers proclaim that these volumes 'provide accessible and stimulating introductions to the lives and works of the most influential Christians throughout the ages. From theologians and mystics to lay people and clerics, these people have shaped our intellectual and spiritual heritage, and still have enormous relevance for our world today.'

They claim to be expert appraisals of the thinkers concerned, providing essential details of biography and thought, using accurate and up-to-date scholarship, with comprehensive guides to further reading. Each volume also bears a commendation, ranging from Donald English to Gerald Hughes.

Do the books live up to the expectations raised by the publisher's claims? In the opinion of this reviewer the answer to that question is 'yes'. Each volume is clearly set out, with a time chart at the front, the chapters sub-divided (although the sub-headings do not appear on the 'Contents' page), followed by suggested further reading and an index which includes both persons and subjects. The authors write in a way which communicates their enthusiasm for their subjects but at the same time they are not afraid to raise questions or express criticisms when they feel this to be appropriate.

Different volumes will appeal more or less to different readers but this reviewer, who knew least about Bonaventure, was particularly struck by his attempt to give the experience of Francis philosophical and theological expression and also by his relevance for today.

These first volumes of the series provide excellent introductions for those approaching the subjects for the first time but also give information and stimulation to those who desire to increase their knowledge.

The initial selection indicates a breadth of approach both historically and theologically, and notice is given of further volumes on Luther, Rahner and Underhill. Given the general nature of the series title, this is clearly a series which could run and run!

John V Matthews

The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II,

Volume 1 1558-1688, Kenneth Hylson-Smith,

SCM Press Ltd, 1996, pp.xviii, 348, Softbound, £19.95

This is the first in a three volume history of all the churches in England from 1558 to the present day. It reviews the story in the light of considerable recent changes in historical and religious perspectives. This book is essential reading for those who are coming new to the story and for those who wish to be aware of the modern historical developments.

It traces developments in England from traditional Catholicism to the establishment of Protestant Christianity, including the emergence of Baptists, Congregationalists, English Presbyterians, and Quakers, as well as the sects of the Commonwealth period under Cromwell. All this is set within the context of the wider radical changes in politics and society.

To what extent has the author acquired a competent grasp of the sources? Dissenters are handled primarily through the record of their emergence given in M R Watts, 'The Dissenters'. However, other reliable sources are set alongside this broad brush approach. Baptist will welcome the reference to Dr Barrie White's 'English Separatist Tradition' but not the omission of his first volume in the new Baptist History series, revised in spring 1996. Neither is there reference to significant 'Baptist Quarterly' articles. It is disappointing that A C Underwood, 'History of the English Baptists' is quoted as standard, although now over 50 years old, and knowing how far Baptist historiography has come in the period. The index fails to note under General Baptists the references to John Smyth, which come on pages 112-118. It is to be hoped the author of future volumes in this series will consult the relevant new Baptist History volumes.

However, this is a first class volume, and commended to all who wish to be properly aware of the contemporary understanding of our origins as a Baptist people in the broad context of the Church in our land.

Roger Hayden

Spirit Without Measure - Charismatic Faith and Practice

by William R Davies, (Darton, Longman, and Todd), 1996, 162pp, £8.95.

Dr. William R Davies is a retired Methodist minister. He had a ministry at Eastbrook Central Hall in Bradford, has served as Principal of Cliff College. He is described as, "A well known and respected figure in charismatic circles, in much demand as a speaker and lecturer."

In the preface to his book, the author tells us that, "It's theme is that of the Holy Spirit at work in all mankind," and that it is intended for anyone who is interested in spiritual renewal. The constant references to the Bible clearly indicate that the author's theology is firmly based in the Biblical revelation. The theme of the book is constantly illustrated by examples from life, and this helps to make it both interesting thought provoking. He calls his readers to a large vision of God, whose spirit is reaching out to people everywhere, whatever their faith may happen to be, but he does this whilst at the same time holding firmly to Jesus as uniquely both human and divine, and the one who alone can atone for sin. He re-affirms the command of Jesus to take the Gospel into the world. He faces up to the obvious question of the difference in the Christian's experience of the Spirit, and the Spirit at work in the life of the non Christian. Within the context of this large vision, he does not lose sight of the fact that it is tragically possible to reject the Spirit of Jesus, and be lost. He looks at what

might be described as 'natural talents' and spiritual gifts, as well as God at work within society. Something of the openness of the book, and it's challenge to us as Christians is found in this sentence, "Within the Christian Church, care has to be taken to affirm those whose blessings received may differ from one's own."

There is much more in this relevant book than I have mentioned. I commend it
Keith Dixon.

Encounter with God : An Introduction to Christian Worship and Practice,
Duncan Forrester, J Ian McDonald and Gian Tellini, T & T Clark,
240 pp. 2nd Edition, £12.95.

Aiming to be an introductory text book that will stimulate theological students and worship leaders to reflect upon the theology and practice of worship, this second edition, (first edition 1983) claims to have revised, sometimes radically, the original chapters. Three general chapters cover: 'The roots of Christian Worship', 'In Spirit and in Truth', and 'Word and Sacrament'. Subsequent chapters cover specific topics of Preaching, Prayer, the Eucharist, Worship and Pastoral Care, whilst a concluding chapter focuses on the current state of worship in the modern world. To this revised text have been added three entirely new chapters ; an opening general one on 'Worship and Christian Practice', and two specific ones on 'Becoming a Christian' and 'Christian Formation'.

The three authors did not aim for uniformity of style. Each chapter concluded with suggestions for further reading and questions for discussion, thus enhancing the view that this is an introductory book.

I am hesitant to say that the book is of great value to those in pastoral ministry. To me some of it seemed too elementary, other parts were dated, few of the questions asked are the ones that I find myself grappling with, and some issues are barely covered. For example: the chapter on "Becoming a Christian" dealing with the rites of initiation, did not reflect adequately on Baptist understandings; Pastoral Care and Worship focuses on Marriage and Funerals with scant mention of new liturgies being created for specific pastoral situations; little reference is made to worship from Pentecostal or charismatic traditions, even in the closing chapter relating to the modern world; I would have valued deeper reflection on ecumenical worship. The practical out-working of the discussions is left to the reader. Stories and case studies of particular liturgies and their variations would have been welcome and perhaps inspired experiment.

In short, a book with introductory material in it for students, so long as it is not all they read!

Ruth Bottoms.