

The Baptist Ministers'

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"The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily
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Editorial

UNITY IN PRACTICE BUT NOT ALWAYS IN PRAYER

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity - observed between the 18th and the 24th of January for the last 90 years - has become almost ingrained in the life of many churches of all traditions. And this year's theme, 'Strong in the Spirit' based on Romans 8:26 and tied in with a countdown to the Millennium is certainly apposite. But like all such events, which start off because they capture something fresh, the danger is that this particular week too, and all that it stands for, has become institutionalised and, in the process, lost its edge. Even the attempt by some churches to shift the week from the beginning of the year to Pentecost hasn't been able to revitalise it.

Strangely, though, while this particular observance of our essential unity in Christ fails to excite, the conviction of the need for Christians to engage in mission together has almost become commonplace and in some instances quite dynamic. The significant vote of the Plymouth Assembly of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1995 in favour of continuing involvement with the new ecumenical instruments of the 90s was just one indication among others of a broad consensus, whilst retaining a healthy right to agree/ to disagree whenever that seemed necessary.

There is a gap, however, between the way we work at our discipleship together - individually and as local churches - and the formal apparatus of achieving it liturgically and institutionally.

Stimulating our discussion of the unity question in this issue, therefore, are contributions from Keith Clements and - from outside our tradition - Rowan Williams. In-between, we have articles by Michael Docker (a former student of Keith's), raising some disturbing questions for Christians, following a sabbatical researching the Holocaust, and by Nicholas Wood on how to be sensitive to the whole variety of contemporary society, whilst still having a grasp of the universal appeal of the Christian model.

As I take over the editorial chair, I would like to pay my own tribute to Michael Jackson. Whether in pastoral charge, or now as a Church administrator, I have valued the 'Journal' (or 'Fraternal' as it used to be called) over innumerable years because it stretched my thinking academically and informed my ministry in a practical way - including through its invaluable Review Section. During his long tenure as editor, Michael kept that balance - as well as ensuring that all shades of theological thinking were represented. It is an approach I am committed to maintain. - G. A-W.

Thank You, Michael.

In the last issue of the Journal, in a short paragraph at the foot of the editorial, Michael Jackson signed off after eleven years as editor. We should not let him slip away so quietly.

Michael became editor of the Baptist Ministers' Journal in 1986. In the years from then until now he has done an amount of work on our behalf which I hardly like to think of. Hardly a week goes by without something to do in connection with the Journal, and as the deadline for each issue approaches there is, of course, a considerable amount to be done. Until the last couple of years he was editor for the book review section as well. We should be appreciative that he has performed this task consistently, conscientiously and carefully. The Journal has never been late or incomplete through Michael's fault.

Over the last eleven years the Journal has grown in size. Once it contained four or five main articles, now there are six or seven - extra space which Michael has taken good advantage of. During his editorship there has been, I think, a greater breadth to the Journal, both in subject matter and in authorship than before. This must be right for a Journal that seeks to stimulate and reflect a wide readership. Michael has always seen this as his task.

Every reader has particular interests and will home in on favourite subjects, but it has certainly been true for me, that there has never been an issue without at least one article I was keen to read, and almost always one or more others which I found to be of great interest. The quality of our Journal, modest in readership and constituency though it is, has been excellent. I would like to pay particular tribute to Michael's editorials - little polished gems. He has used them to introduce the articles and set them in context, yet has unflinchingly managed, in just a single page, to also say something fresh and worthwhile about ministry and theology today. We should also note that when controversial matters have arisen, they have been dealt with in a sure and confident manner.

When Michael began his work, unsolicited articles were a rarity. Now there are so many that Michael can fill about half of each issue with unsolicited material while still being selective about quality. This may, in part, reflect the growth of word processor ownership and skills among Baptist ministers - it has never been so easy to put thoughts onto paper - but it must chiefly reflect the regard in which the Journal is held. People see the Journal as a valuable forum for discussion and dissemination and want to communicate with its readers. This measure of the Journal's sustained relevance, interest and quality is the one I think Michael should take greatest pride in. He hands it on in excellent health.

On behalf of the Editorial Board I must say what a pleasure it has been to work with Michael over the years. He is gracious and consultative and, though our job was supposed to be to encourage and support him, appreciation and encouragement have flowed the other way at least as often.

With this issue we welcome Gethin Abraham-Williams as our new editor. We are delighted at his appointment, offer him our support, and look forward to working with him.

But for now the last word should look back, so on behalf of the BMF Committee and all our readers as well, to Michael I say, simply and sincerely, thank you.

Stuart Jenkins, Chair, Editorial Board.

“SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER”

KEITH CLEMENTS. General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC), and one time tutor at Bristol Baptist College.

When Dr. Clements was first introduced to CEC's Assembly last July in Graz, Austria, he set about answering two questions: first, in a light hearted vein, What sort of person had they appointed as their Chief Executive; and, second, more seriously, How did he see the future of CEC under his stewardship?

What follows is the text of his address, as delivered to Church delegates from countries as far apart as Norway and Greece, Portugal and the Ukraine.

I'm not the best person to answer the first question directly. So let me tell you some of the things that others have said about me: to be precise, what was said exactly forty years ago this month, July 1957, in my school report. After all, as one of our English poets has said, 'The Child is father of the Man.' For the fourteen year-old Keith Clements, lessons had to compete with his two main passions of cricket and bird-watching. In my report, my Biology was pronounced excellent and the English, Latin and French teachers were also very pleased with my work. But in Chemistry and History the verdict was, 'More effort needed in class' My two Mathematics teachers tried to temper judgment with mercy: 'It is a pity about his mathematics - but he is a good boy,' said one; the other, I think, also meant to be encouraging by saying 'His work is far from hopeless'. However, my worst performance of all that year was in Religious Education, where I was second from the bottom in class and earned the comment: 'The work must be brought to higher standard'. Well, I've been working on that ever since, but don't say you have not been warned! Then came two final comments on my work as a whole. My housemaster said: 'Very good work and conduct' but the headmaster stated tersely; 'Some weaknesses show here: he must work consistently'. So, if the General Secretary of CEC has to be prepared to cope with differing opinions, not least about himself, then I think I can claim a long experience in that!

In all seriousness, to have been invited to become the third General Secretary of CEC has been a most surprising yet thrilling experience. After ten years as a Baptist pastor of local congregations, then thirteen years as a teacher in a theological seminary and university, for the past seven years I have worked at the International Affairs Desk of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (CCBI). In all those spheres of service, in their very different ways, I have felt richly blessed. When I began to contemplate what would happen after the end of my contract with CCBI, I tried to envisage what kind of work would enable me to use what I have learnt over the years as pastor, teacher, writer, organizer and, especially in my last post, as an ecumenical worker engaged in international issues. I did not find it easy, and I have to say that the thought of CEC never crossed my mind until it was put under my nose.

Baptist Pioneer

To my mind, there is no task more exciting or more challenging, than the cause of Christian unity. There is no more important place for that quest to be pursued than here in Europe, our common house, where Christianity was received so early, was established so firmly and divided so tragically, in turn helping to divide Europe itself. There can be no greater goal than that to which the movement itself witnesses, namely, God's purpose to gather up all things, things in heaven and

things on earth, including things in Europe, in Christ. There is no more concrete way of pursuing that witness than through the Conference of European Churches. To serve this fellowship in the way I have been asked to, is an immense privilege. I am very grateful, and deeply humbled - as well as somewhat nervous.

Part of the sense of privilege comes from knowing the succession in which I shall be standing. A week or so ago I happened to be with the minister of the Baptist Church in St. Albans in England, where Glen Garfield Williams, of dear memory, was pastor until 1959 when he took up work in Geneva. My colleague spoke of the sense of pride which that congregation still takes in being associated with the name of Glen Garfield Williams. He was indeed the pioneer of east-west Christian unity during the coldest period of the Cold War, bringing his own personal warmth into those bleak days. The fact that for its third General Secretary CEC has again chosen a Baptist from Great Britain has of course drawn comment. (I think, though, that it was an editorial slip rather than chauvinism which led our Baptist newspaper in England to describe me as 'only the second Baptist' to be appointed to this post! Some might think it equally appropriate to say that I'm only the third male to have been appointed.)

I am no less happy to be following my good friend Jean Fischer. During my time at CCBI, his office has become very familiar to me on my visits to Geneva, as we have talked together over our common concerns, not least the part which the churches in the British Isles might play in efforts for peace in the former Yugoslavia. When I come to occupy that desk, I shall be a chief beneficiary from the crucial developments in organization and structure which owe so much to Jean's foresight and organizational wisdom, and all carried out during these past few years of unprecedented change in Europe.

Under God's Word

In January this year, at the press conference following my election by the Central Committee, I rejected the talk of an 'ecumenical winter' and spoke instead of an 'ecumenical spring' I think that caused a little surprise in some quarters, because we have got used to stressing the difficulties and set-backs to ecumenism these days. But by 'springtime' I do not mean a time when everything in the garden is lovely. Springtime, in Britain at any rate, is often a time of very variable weather. We still get cold winds some days, and sometimes very discouraging showers of snow, and frost at night. The ecumenical weather has certainly been variable lately, especially in Europe. But in springtime, nothing can deny the fact that daylight is slowly getting longer, things are starting to grow, often in hidden ways, sometimes in startling new outbursts. How can anyone have been present in Graz these past few days (for the Second Ecumenical European Assembly, to which an estimated 10,000 people came), and not feel this? It is above all the time to start getting busy, digging, and sowing seeds: to start co-operating with the forces of life that are already stirring.

That's why I like the title of the report of CEC's work from Prague to Graz: the Apostle Paul's words, 'Working Together with God.' (CEC's last Assembly was held in Prague in 1992). The ecumenical work of which CEC is a part, is first and foremost God's work, not ours, or it is nothing. It is not our business to get working on our programmes and then call in God's help when we get into difficulties and tell God where he ought to be lending a hand. That attitude reminds me of the religious magazine which once reported that a certain person had retired from full-time Christian service but was continuing 'to serve the Lord in an advisory capacity'.

God does not need our advice; it is we who stand under his word. But God does call us to co-operate with him, to share in his sufferings in the world, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it. It is first and foremost our business to look and listen for God, to be led by the Spirit to discern where God is at work and is calling for our participation in his enterprise.

Church and Society

One of the great things about CEC, is that the diversity of traditions represented in it, taken together, can be such vital channels of God's wisdom in helping us to reach that discernment. With the **Orthodox treasury** of theology and spirituality, we are always taught that our present - day life is grounded in the eternal life of the triune God, holy and indwelling, ever-present, yet never enslaved to the present and its passing fashions. With the **Reformation message** we are taught that it is the God of free grace who alone is the final truth. Therefore before God and before one another we can afford to confess our failures, and to speak our minds honestly, however painfully at times, in the light of God's forgiving grace. There are other emphases among us. I am myself, literally, a child of the **evangelical** missionary movement, having been born of missionary parents in China. That tradition within our CEC fellowship should always be challenging us to our calling, to look beyond the questions which so often preoccupy us, and to ask: 'Is the gospel, for all our ecclesiastical and indeed ecumenical busy-ness, really being heard by the people in our societies?'

By the end of this Assembly recommendations will have been brought for priorities for the future work Of CEC. Again, it is not for me to say what they should be. But I hope we shall be given pointers for CEC to be an instrument of further visible unity among our churches at the continental level. Among the pieces of advice that I have already received, has been the suggestion that we should leave so-called **Faith and Order** issues to other bodies and let CEC concentrate on the **social agenda**. I do not think that is the way ahead. It is not just that I speak as one who has been, for a number of years, on the Faith and Order Commission. It is that in some parts of Europe the social agenda on the one hand, and the confessional and ecclesiological issues on the other, just cannot be understood apart from each other, especially where they have been caught up in conflicts and disputes about human rights but it is also a matter of sheer credibility. Unless the Churches, at the very least, are seen to be determined to overcome concretely the divisions of the past they can hardly be taken seriously by the people of the future. CEC must surely be behind such efforts.

Economics and Identity.

Then on the other hand has come one plea from a well-wisher, who writes hoping that under my General Secretaryship CEC might become a less political organization! I am not sure quite what this means. CEC is not a political body. The kingdom it serves is the kingdom of God. But God's kingdom impinges on every aspect of human life including the political, and a European fellowship of Christians and churches cannot retreat from **speaking truth to power** as the Quakers put it, in the name of justice, peace and of human dignity. There are times when in the name of Christ we must speak the truth to the power of governments, to the power of the new structures of decision-making emerging in Europe as a whole, and to the power of public opinion. It is not easy, as I tried to say in a book I recently wrote called *Learning to Speak: The Church's Voice in Public Affairs*, but by God's grace it is possible.

I believe there are two areas in the public realm which we will have to address even more in the coming days. The first is economics. The second is that of communal **identity**. Both are at root not just public, or secular, or political issues. They are profoundly spiritual. **Economics** is not just about money but about bread. It is bread we pray for every time we say the Lord's Prayer. How can we pray for our daily bread and not ask whether those of us who have plenty of bread, are getting it at the expense of the many who go hungry, both within Europe itself and in the wider world? Europe needs a gospel in economic terms, and an economics in terms of the gospel. When it comes down to it, that is what is at stake in our planning for a new Commission on Church and Society.

So also with the issue of our communal **identities**. Can we as Christians demonstrate that it is possible both to cherish our particular identities, our local and national cultures, yet at the same time to rejoice in belonging to a larger whole, the family of Europe? If we cannot, then what difference does talk of the love of God, creator and reconciler, really make to Europe? The tragedy of Europe is that so many people are trying to meet the threats to their identities in negative ways, by the way of banishment of the other person, the way of exclusion. We see it in the horrors of so-called ethnic cleansing. We see it, no less, in the individualistic materialism spreading from the West, where people are encouraged to create a comfortable, self-enclosed lifestyle where they will not be troubled by the people next door, let alone the next country. By contrast our gospel is a message not of exclusion, but of welcoming inclusion. It is the gospel of the one who says, 'Come to me, **all** who labour and are heavy-laden... ..'

Capacity to Listen.

So much of what we do in our churches hangs on the **way** it is done, and that applies no less to our ecumenical life. That, I think, is the most daunting thought I have in taking up the General Secretaryship. I shall, more than ever before in my life, become an 'official.' That frightens me because officials are always tempted to imagine that they are the only channels through which important things can and should happen. It's always good to remember that in the western world about a century ago, the ecumenical movement itself was born out of very **unofficial** impulses, above all in the energy and enthusiasm of young people, students in particular, who were gripped by the vision of Christians uniting and sacrificing to bring the one gospel to the one whole world. If there's anything I pray for in particular, and I invite you to pray for as well, it is the capacity to **listen**: listening which is attentiveness to what people are saying, and to what they are trying to say even when they are silent; listening even to the very 'unofficial' voices on the fringes or outside the normal tracks of our institutional life, who may be God's messengers to us. I suspect we still have to learn a great deal about really listening to one another even within CEC circles. I am troubled by the fact, for example, that many **women** still feel relatively inaudible, even invisible; and that **young people** often feel accorded only token recognition.

People ask me, and my wife too, 'Are you looking forward to moving to Geneva?' I say, 'Yes,' for all the reasons I have given and for many more. I greatly look forward to working with such an able and committed team of staff Colleagues. But I look forward not only to moving to Geneva, but to moving to Moscow, and to Athens, and to Lisbon, and to Budapest, and to Helsinki and to all the other places where I can go to share something of the life and experience of your churches, and to learn what it means to be church in your place, and to find what you can bring

to our common life and mission in Europe as a whole. Above all, I simply look forward to making many new friends. We will have much to think about and work on as regard our structures and programmes. That will be essential. But the ecumenical movement at heart is the weaving together of innumerable friendships in trust and loyalty and affection, the threads of the bonds of peace in the Spirit.

Let me share with you a picture which has inspired me over the years, and from which I will continue to draw inspiration in the years ahead. The original building of the Baptist Church in which I worship at home in Bristol, England, was destroyed by bombing in World War II. The sanctuary was almost completely devastated, but the baptistery survived. We have a photograph, taken at the end of the war, of a baptism taking place there. A young woman is being baptized. Around her, the shattered, crumbling walls stand open to the sky, signs of the old world of enmity, conflict and violence. But in the water, in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the new creation is being proclaimed and experienced: reconciliation - gift of God and source of new life.

At the end of the day, no doubt, it will be said again as it was forty years ago, 'Some weaknesses show here.' I will try to work consistently, but, still more important, to live by the faith expressed in a verse of the hymn which I chose for my own baptismal service:

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our guide.
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be Thou at our side.

Ed: Founded in 1959, the Conference of European Churches is the regional ecumenical organisation of the Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic and Protestant churches of Europe. Since its beginnings at the height of the 'cold war' CEC has seen its task as being a bridge-builder between the churches in all parts of Europe. It's a task that is no less urgent in the new Europe of today. We assure Keith of the Fellowship's prayers in this important new ministry.

“WHY DID HE LOSE SIX MILLION JEWS?”

MICHAEL C. DOCKER Minister of Stonegate Baptist Church Leicester

Sometimes things take hold of us in ways we do not expect. At Bristol Baptist College in the late eighties preparing for ministry, I took a year option in the University Department of Theology to study the Holocaust. It was, at the time, an easy enough decision, I needed to balance my programme of study, which was heavily skewed towards biblical subjects in that particular year, with one or two things of a more general theological/historical nature. Also, the course was being taught by Keith Clements. Baptist College students naturally felt a certain responsibility, if not outright desire, to support one of our own tutors!

A few weeks of lectures, a couple of assignments - not much in themselves, perhaps - but I well remember coming out of those afternoon sessions feeling very strong emotions. One knew about the Holocaust, but this was the first time I had been led to think systematically about what happened, and about its implications. In parallel New Testament courses, we were working from within the new world of interpretation which had opened up as a consequence of E P Sanders' work on Jesus, *Paul and Judaism*. It gradually became clear that the Holocaust presented the student with a range of implications - not just for Biblical studies, but for Christian/Jewish relations as well, and - hardest of all - for Christian theology. A snatch from an early seventies rock song came back to me about that time: 'why did He lose six million Jews?', Why indeed? But the question of suffering was made more pointed than ever, because it began to look as if, in the Nazi era, many of those who laid claim to God's name as an answer to the question were part of the social world which laid siege to the Jewish communities in Germany, Poland, and a dozen other places.

It was that course, and its aftermath, which laid hold of me, and, arguably, has put a mark on my whole approach to ministry. It was realising that, in towns and streets all over Europe, good Christian people watched as their neighbours, business colleagues, school friends, acquaintances, were first robbed of their possessions and livelihoods, then stripped of their dignity, then denied their citizenship, then denied their place in common humanity, and finally hauled off to the gas chambers. The Final Solution, it was called. All else having failed, the only way to deal with 'the Jewish question' was to eliminate the race. As Hitler said, 'Die Juden ist unsere ungluck' - the Jews are our misfortune. But not just a few fanatical Nazis agreed with him. Many ordinary people agreed with him. Many of them were Christians.

Mrs Thatcher's Premiership

And I began to think, 'how did Christians do this?'. Was it the times they lived in - the pressure of war? But the Jewish question was raised long before the war, when Germany was prospering. And European anti-Semitism had burned away amongst Europe's sophisticates and devout for hundreds of years. Church leaders had pronounced it from their pulpits and in their writings. Ordinary Christian people had walked the streets of Prague while round the corners of the suburb of Josefov Jews were crowded into hovels and their gravestones tumbled over each other for lack of space. In Spain, Russia, France, England, Jews were rooted out and

expelled.

As many historians have pointed out, the reasons for all this are complex - economic, social, religious. All sorts of factors, it seems, make people behave as they do, be they Christian or no. But maybe that's the point. For me, embarking on ministry during the closing years of Mrs. Thatcher's premiership, it never would seem quite enough to preach a gospel message aimed at saving individuals from their sins. Those individuals belonged somewhere - in a society. They might come to belong somewhere else as well - the Church, but neither place could be understood in isolation. One or two basic pastoral conversations were enough to confirm the obvious truth that as Christians we hold to attitudes that are formed by factors economic, social, political, as well as religious. I came to see that the most fundamental Christian questions about God - such as 'why is there suffering?' - could not be separated from questions about humanity - why are we like we are?

For if, in Europe, Christians (many, though not all) believing in God could collude in the systematic elimination of the Jews, I found myself facing an issue for contemporary ministry. How may Christians be Christian today, given the economic, social, political and religious factors affecting them, if, just fifty years ago, Christians acted like that? Gradually, through the course of a few year's ministry, the issue became deeply embedded in my whole theological approach. But it came to be focused in a particular ambition. It was to visit the site of Auschwitz, the very heart of the Holocaust.

I suppose I harboured some idea of visiting Auschwitz in the way of a pilgrimage. Traditional pilgrimages, to Christian 'holy places', have never much interested me. I like cathedrals, but share something of Philip Larkin's ambivalence about such supposed 'holiness', seeing them as places 'to grow wise in, if only that so many dead lie round'. Holy Land tours have themselves become part of the 'pilgrimage industry' - Christianised tourism, where 'pilgrims' aka tourists jump off buses at pre-planned sites before dashing to the next one, largely untouched by (and untouched) the political and social context in which these places are to be found.

Who Controls Memory?

But Auschwitz, I reasoned, would be different, a kind of 'anti-holy' place, certainly somewhere where many dead lie round, possibly, I hoped, somewhere where this particular Christian minister might grow wise in. Holiness of a different order might be found there. What I discovered certainly was a kind of holiness. But I am now much more hesitant in describing the visit as a pilgrimage.

In any case, one must reckon with all the contradictions involved in any attempt at remembering the Holocaust. In a recent book,¹ Isabel Wollaston points up many of these contradictions. Holocaust (even the name is open to controversy) memorials proliferate, and not just at the sites in Eastern Europe. The United States has its own memorial museum in Washington DC, and some of its supporters argue that the longterm future of authentic remembrance depends on such places, free of either the 'untrustworthy' stewardship of Europe itself, or the 'biased' memorial of Israel's own Yad Vashem. Meanwhile some sites like Auschwitz, attract huge interest, while other, equally significant sites of former extermination camps are neglected.

Wollaston speculates that, actually, for all the compromises and dramatic license, most people will encounter and thus reflect on the Holocaust through its portrayal in popular culture. What value my 'pilgrimage' to Auschwitz when,

arguably, I could have received the same emotional effects by watching Schindler's List?

So I had to consider that visiting Auschwitz - whether I felt myself to be a tourist or not - did involve me in an activity with political and social ramifications. Some camp survivors believe it is inappropriate for people to go there at all, unless they have some personal link. Others are offended at the presence at Auschwitz of specifically Christian acts of memorial, such as the existence of a Roman Catholic Carmelite foundation in the former commandant's house, and the veneration of the so-called 'Saint of Auschwitz' - the priest Maximilian Kolbe. Central to a more general concern is the question, 'who controls memory?', and thus who legitimises the ways in which the Holocaust story is told, and, indeed, not told. Christians in the evangelical tradition should at least recognise the similarity between these issues and the ones raised by the interpretation of the New Testament, specifically the way in which the story of Jesus is told, and thus remembered. But still I felt I had to act in accordance with that sense of 'being held'; of course it is not necessary for a Christian minister to visit Auschwitz. Maybe, though, it was necessary for me.

Work Makes for Freedom

A visitor to Auschwitz today begins by feeling less like a pilgrim, more like a tourist. It is on the new Eastern Europe 'tourist trail'. Talking to an English couple and a Dutch family on our campsite just outside Katowice this was brought home to me. "We're heading for Krakow, and then Zakopane in the Tatras. We did the same trip last year," said the English woman. "But we'll go to Auschwitz first. Well, you have to, really, don't you?"

The Dutch man concurred, mentioning that their visit the day before had coincided with a visit from the Austrian Chancellor, so they had had to miss most of the main site. Sitting there on a warm summer's evening under the trees, with glasses of wine in our hands, we could have been talking about anywhere in the world, from Ayer's Rock to Warwick Castle.

My first impression confirmed this. Auschwitz I - the original, smaller camp, in a converted army barracks, contains the Auschwitz museum. It is carefully maintained by the Polish government. There is a well ordered car park, presided over by students doing vacation work, a visitor centre with a canteen and a bookstall, and besides the cars, rows of brightly coloured coaches from all over Europe, disgorging Poles, Dutch, Germans, Americans. Many of them are Jews. There is a short film show, though its content is of course not typical of the stirring images on offer at your typical French Chateau or high-tech museum. But once you pass these peripheral things you emerge from the walkway onto the open ground in front of the camp entrance, and the 'tourist' label begins to lose its force. There, a few yards away from the rows of shiny motors and the canteen serving burgers, is the infamous entrance gate set in its doublebarbed wire electric fence, with the crescent of words picked out in wrought iron, 'Arbeit macht frei' - work brings freedom.

There is a notice alongside, seeking to impress on visitors the need to maintain a reverent, respectful quiet in the site. It is not needed. On the day we were there, no one made a sound, except for small groups of orthodox Jews who were to be found at various points inside the camp, quietly joining in prayers, in response to the leading of their Rabbi. The museum comprises three elements. There are a number of national displays, each in a separate barrack-hut, showing in pictures and words the fate of French, or Polish, or German citizens, mostly Jews, who

were transported to the camps. During our visit there were no other British visitors, and our sense of isolation was reinforced by the knowledge that, for our island nations, no such display was necessary.

The Whim of an S.S. Officer

Then there are the exhibitions of inmates possessions - the suitcases, shoes, spectacles and other personal effects of hundreds of thousands of people - piled high behind glass screens, mute testimony to the high level of organisation that went into the Final Solution. What is there today is but a tiny part of the huge quantity that accumulated during the years the camps operated. Most of it was transported back into Germany and distributed among the people in the war-ravaged towns and cities. Finally, there is the camp itself, standing in good order, with its rows of barracks, its tree-lined avenues, its punishment cellars and its execution courtyard where many hundreds of people were shot, and its single, small crematorium. For Auschwitz I is only a tiny part of the monster which Nazism created on the plains of southern Poland. Here, in the little town of Oswiecim, where several of Europe's major railways cross, Auschwitz I was a first, tentative experiment. The first attempts at mass extermination were carried out in a small cellar, on a few Polish Jews and some Roman Catholic Priests. As it proved so successful, the decision was taken to build another, much larger camp, just down the road at Birkenau. Many of Auschwitz I's early inmates were worked almost to death building it, and then became some of its first victims. At the same time a third site was constructed nearby at Monowice, to house thousands of the fitter prisoners of the Reich. They were to become the slave workers who worked the new rubber factory built in the town.

Today, the 'tourist' has the option to visit the Birkenau site, and some do, though a tiny number compared with the hundreds who come to Auschwitz I every day during the summer. It was at Birkenau that the experience began, for me, to take on some of the atmosphere of a pilgrimage. For Birkenau was the mass extermination site. Here, on a flat, level area, hundreds of single story wooden huts were built in rows behind electrified fencing, each side of a central railway, where for three years thousands of people, mainly Jews, disembarked daily from cattle trucks arriving from all over Europe. The men and some of the fitter women without children were transferred to the huts while, at the whim of an SS officer, families were divided as mothers, grandparents, young children and the sick were led off directly to the gas chambers, either for immediate dispatch, or to wait their turn unknowingly beneath the trees.

This Terrible Century

All this can be gleaned from the simple information posts which are the only intrusion made by the authorities at this site, which is substantially intact. The pilgrimage at Birkenau is two to three hour's walk around and amongst the silent huts, stark sentryposts, piles of rubble marking the gas chambers themselves, and loam-filled pools, where lies the accumulated ash of a million cremated human beings. There is a 'shrine' here, now, an international Holocaust memorial comprising some concrete steps, an abstract mural in stone, and a few words. It provides somewhere for dignitaries to bring their wreaths. For the rest, it is enough simply to walk, think, pause, pray. The atmosphere does its work on everyone, according to their own experience, memory, or outlook. For me it was less emotionally intense at the time than afterwards. On the day I felt dull, depressed; a feeling of emptiness. Now, I find that feelings about the visit still come to me in waves,

prompted by the memory of walking through a cramped wooden hut, where hundreds of people lived in dreadful conditions and permanent fear, or of staring for long minutes into the entrance way to one of the chambers, through which so many passed calmly to their deaths.

Where is God? When all the theology has been written, and the worship services planned, the sermons preached and the Christians of our time reminded once again of the gospel's truth and promises, the question still stands. God is not easily, or readily found in our world, in this terrible century, for its suffering presses the question home very hard to us, and the classical defence of 'human free will' or 'God's eternal purposes' only takes us so far. For the most part we manage, on a diet of worship, moral certainties, or familiar words and teaching. God is everywhere, we say: He is in a beautiful sunset, or a quiet retreat house, or at a sick bed in the response to a simple trusting prayer.

But Auschwitz was a lesson for me that there are places - perhaps there is a place in all of us - where it is very hard to find God, or at least to acknowledge his presence if it is there. Or to look at it another way; all those Christians who found themselves unable to discern what was happening to their Jewish neighbours in the 1930's, or who tacitly approved, as European Christians had done for hundreds of years - was the problem something to do with their inability to recognise God and acknowledge his presence among the Jews? If so then Auschwitz stands as a symbol not so much of a question to be directed at God, but of a question directed at us: where will we allow God to be?

For if the answer is, 'not in the Jew', or 'not in the homosexual', or 'not in the single mother, the black family, or the asylum seeker' then Auschwitz is not only a symbol of the question, it is a kind of answer. It is a place, created by human beings, where we do not want God to be found.

Smorgasbord of Ideas

My visit was part of a sabbatical, a pause after seven years of ministry to reflect. Those seven years coincided with the near triumph in much of the Western world of a kind of philosophy which drives divisions between people, and peoples, on the basis of wealth, status, race, or ability. There were 'enemies within', and the greatest aspiration was to be 'one of us'. Now, as this country emerges out from under one political regime and begins to readjust to another which is likely to be at least as influential, questions about the nature and whereabouts of God press as hard as ever.

The remarkable events surrounding the death of Diana, Princess of Wales revealed deep currents of emotion and a desire to belong to something greater than ourselves in the national consciousness - things which traditionally have been expressed through forms of Christian spirituality. Whatever one makes of the smorgasbord of ideas and analyses often lumped together under the label 'post-modern' it is becoming clear that the future, moral, social, political, is open, fluid and plural.

Historically, it seems that people find it difficult to live with uncertainties, with fluidity, for very long. They want answers, a sense of belonging, leadership, and often those who have set out to offer such things - as Hitler did - have invoked ideas about God in order to legitimate their position and bolster their authority. Perhaps in the next century, the invocation of God will be less obviously inspired by Christian ideas. But that will only throw us back onto the Christian fundamental anyway, which is the notion of giving birth to God in human form. As I said at the beginning, fundamental questions about God can no be separated from questions about humanity.

Here, I think, as a corollary to whatever mission activity our churches might manage to engage in, is the true heart of Christian mission; not merely to tell people about the aspects of God we think we know, but to help people (and ourselves?) to look for *and find God* in all the places in us and our society where our own flawed nature and the demagogues refuse to acknowledge his presence.

But we should never pretend such a search will be easy. Those who lived through Auschwitz, and tried to reflect on its meaning afterwards, testify to how hard it is. Elie Wiesel, one of the survivors, has said that to say he still believes in God would be a lie, and to say that he no longer believes in God would be a lie. We may recognise the paradox in our own experience, though we are unlikely ever to encounter an event that would bring it home to us with the force that Auschwitz did for the Jews. But Christian faith isn't about belief in God, it's about belief in God in Christ. Seeking and finding God in the life and death of a crucified man has always been the hardest faith of all.

Reminding people of that, in a world capable of producing Auschwitz, is at the heart of all true Christian mission.

Footnote:

¹ Wollaston, Isobel *A War Against Memory*, SPCK, London, 1996

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“ROOTED IN POPULAR CULTURE - UP TO A POINT”

NICHOLAS C. WOOD. Director of Master of Theology Studies. Regent's Park College, Oxford. and Minister of Eynsham Baptist Church.

Perhaps like me you are wondering where all this talk of postmodernity is coming from! The following is the result of some initial research and reflection which have clarified some of the issues in my own mind and may perhaps focus some for you.

In the sociological disciplines, modernism refers to life in advanced industrial societies and the contrast is drawn with pre-modern existence. In contemporary philosophical usage, modernity and modernism have acquired a moral dimension with reference to the problems and tensions of life in the industrialised world. Andrew Walker has characterised it thus:-

“Modernity is a historical process that began in the eighteenth century with the philosophical Enlightenment. It accelerated in the nineteenth century as industrialisation took place, and increased even more rapidly in the twentieth century under the impact of advanced technology and science. Modernity is a radical break, both socially and philosophically, with feudalism.”¹

Modernity and postmodernity are the outcome of a whole series of revolutions in European and world history and society. Not simply intellectual, these radical movements took scientific, political, industrial, socio-economic and cultural forms.

Even before the intellectual revolution of the eighteenth century, the scientific revolution of the previous century with its developments in mapping and time-keeping provided the basis for a socio-economic revolution as Professor David Harvey has demonstrated. Since experiences of space and time are the primary vehicles for the coding and reproduction of social relationships, “the Renaissance revolution in concepts of space and time laid the conceptual foundations in many respects for the Enlightenment project.”²

Counter Cultural Movements

Harvey argues that modernism developed an essentially urban form, existing “in a restless but intricate relationship with the experience of explosive urban growth, strong rural-urban migration, industrialization, mechanization” and the massive reordering of landscape and built environment.³ It remained, nevertheless, a fundamentally Enlightenment project until the radical transformations of the period 1910-1915 with its, “rampant confusions” in social and cultural thought,⁴ an associated loss of faith in notions of progress, together with alienation, anarchy and “the discovery of the irrational self”.⁵

This confusion and incoherence in social and political life coincided with the development of what Harvey terms “Fordism”, that is mass-production and the necessary mass-consumption to sustain it, based on a triangular relationship between large corporations, unionised labour and western governments.

After 1945 the culture of modernism, reflected in art and architecture, literature and the new media of film and television, was increasingly “taken over” by the establishment, especially in the United States where there was “absorption of a

particular kind of modernist aesthetic into official and establishment ideology⁶. This led to the anti-materialistic revolutionary and counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and the beginnings of talk of postmodernism.

Through this historical process of modernity, the philosophy of the Enlightenment became a functional rationality increasingly characterised by secularization.⁷ Owen Chadwick draws attention to a number of factors in this process in his definitive study *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*⁸. One was the emergence of religious toleration for the English Dissenters which bore two significant consequences: "Religion being what it is, the right to religious opinion must include the right to religious practice. And freedom of religious opinion is impossible without freedom of opinion"⁹ in general.

The Role of Journalism

The rise of historical consciousness and the development of scientific and critical methods of discourse were thus given free rein in this new more open climate. Chadwick suggests that the name of Darwin became synonymous with this new approach, although "the secularizing force was not Darwin the author of the book *Origin of Species* or of several books. It was Darwin the symbol, Darwin the name which stood for a process ..."¹⁰

Marx applied critical methods to the analysis of early modern capitalist society and the place of religion within it. Just as the failing socio-economic structure of capitalism would be swept away by the relentless tide of history, so too must religion collapse in its wake.¹¹ Like Darwin, and later Freud, Marx became a symbol of this secular modernist approach.

Chadwick also notes the emergence of a secular teaching profession and the almost entirely new profession of journalism in the same decade of the nineteenth century,¹² and argues that:

*"It is possible that the coming of the press weakened (more than the coming of modern science) the established moral agreements upon which the consensus of European society rested; and with these moral agreements was integrated religion. It is possible that the coming of the press pushed ordinary readers towards a feeling of the relativity of all opinion and especially the relativity of moral standards."*¹³

Indeed the press, and later the development of other means of mass communication, helped to give shape and expression to the "mass of tensions, contradictions, opinions" which characterised western society, but which were previously only half-formed, and therefore partly hidden.¹⁴

A Crisis in Human Experience

A number of writers in this field refer to Peter Berger's notion of the "sacred canopy"¹⁵, by which he refers to the sense of a shared culture or shared roots, both spiritual and social. The combination of socio-economic, technological and intellectual processes have destroyed the pre-modern cultural consensus, resulting in a world where there is no appeal to common tradition¹⁶. Many aspects of communal life, family, marriage, the place of the elderly, have been radically reshaped, (Walker suggests destroyed¹⁷) by the privatization inherent in these processes. As David Tracy comments:-

"The effects of all scientific models remain powerful, even pervasive, forces in the culture at large despite the intellectual bankruptcy of its reigning ideology. Consider the radical privatization of all claims to truth in

*art, religion, ethics and historical actions. Consider the modern scientific narrowing of the classical notions of reason. Consider how pluralism can collapse into a repressive tolerance ."*¹⁸

Harvey refers to the impossibility of universals, "of any global project"¹⁹ as typical of the modern and postmodern society in which many now find themselves.

What is referred to as postmodernism is, for Harvey, a crisis in human experience of space and time.²⁰ Its prevailing mood, reflected in architecture and urban design, is that of "fiction, fragmentation, collage and eclecticism, all suffused with a sense of ephemerality and chaos".²¹ For Walker too, the pluralism characteristic of postmodernity has to do with the culmination of this historical process in the arrival of mass communication, travel, new patterns of emigration and immigration and wider access to education "²², in sum, in the jargon of the age, with the arrival of "the global village".

Throw Away Society

In postmodern thought there is widespread recognition of these many worlds which co-exist within the time-space continuum, a willingness to recognise their "otherness" and difference, and an acceptance of the need of the voices from these worlds to find their authentic self-expression as part of the legitimate pluralism of our culture. But Harvey argues that by its willingness, in some forms, to ally itself with neoconservative entrepreneurialism, by its ignoring of the realities of global economic forces, and by its deconstruction of all forms of argument and meta-narrative, postmodernism destroys not only itself, but also disempowers the very minority voices it claims to acknowledge.²³

The last two decades, since 1973, have been an intense period of space-time compression. In almost any city in the world:-

*"The whole world's cuisine is now assembled in one place in almost exactly the same way that the world's geographical complexity is reduced to a series of images on a static television screen The general implication is that through the experience of everything from food, to culinary habits, music, television, entertainment and cinema, it is now possible to experience the world's geography vicariously, as a simulacrum. The interweaving of simulacra in daily life brings together different worlds in the same space and time."*²⁴

The throwaway society engendered and required by the consumer culture of late capitalism, has engendered also the throwing away of values, lifestyles, stable relationships and all manner of attachments.²⁵ If, for Chadwick, Darwin is the symbol of the processes of modernism, President Ronald Reagan symbolizes for Harvey the postmodern triumph of image over substance, aesthetics over ethics.²⁶ We are, in Tracy's words, self-consciously linguistic, historical, social beings struggling for some new interpretations of ourselves, our language, history, society and culture."²⁷

Recognition of Limitations

Some would see postmodernism as an entirely new phase in western cultural development, but David Harvey suggests that it is a particular stage within the evolving modernism of the last two hundred years:-

"...there is much more continuity than difference between the broad history of modernism and the movement called postmodernism. It seems more sensible to me to see the latter as a particular kind of crisis within the

former ..."²⁸

He argues that one of the missions of modernism is "the production of new meanings for space and time in a world of ephemerality and fragmentation"²⁹ as a reaction to the Enlightenment rationalization of time and space. Seen as a whole movement in history, modernism "explored the dialectic of place versus space, of present versus past," and offered multiple possibilities in which the many "other" worlds can flourish together.³⁰

This is surely the key feature of the contemporary experience. For pre-modern consciousness there was, at best, a sense of two worlds, the material and the spiritual. For the modern and the postmodern, with the space-time "compression" of which Harvey speaks, within our global village there is consciousness of incredible diversity and therefore of choice³¹, in every area of life, including that of religion.

With this diversity of experience has come the recognition of the limitations on human knowledge, more a feature of postmodernism than the modernist confidence of earlier generations. This is not to deny any possibility of truth, but simply to acknowledge that we know with relative adequacy, within the boundaries of language, history and society.³² Any coherence within postmodern culture "will be a rough coherence: interrupted, obscure, often confused, self-conscious of its own language use and, above all, aware of the ambiguities of all histories and traditions."³³

Able to See but Not to Act.

Tracy argues that the religions, of all aspects of culture, out of their understanding of sin and ignorance, should be least surprised or frightened by this. Indeed the religions should resist attempts at too easy coherence and refusals to face up to "the radical plurality and ambiguity" of all traditions, including their own. But the religions can also resist the postmodern characteristic of being able to see the problem but not able to act.³⁴

Religious pluralism is one aspect of contemporary plural culture with roots in the whole experience of modern life over two hundred years or more, characterised by a developing historical consciousness, the rise of scientific method within an increasingly technological society, and the first-hand encounter with other cultures in the rapid western expansion of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Within Christianity, the rise of biblical criticism and the widespread adoption of the historical-critical method were particular expressions of this movement, and created a climate in which pluralistic approaches to other faiths could develop. Arguably, however, these intellectual developments were less important than the disintegration of the "sacred canopy" as a whole, and the increasingly rapid "space-time compression", which the missionary movement, with its direct encounter with the "other worlds" of religions and cultures, ironically and unwittingly, fostered.

Locked in a Timewarp

Current western Christianity offers a variety of responses to this experience. Traditional evangelicalism and mainstream denominations often seem locked in a timewarp, engaging with the issues of modernism when, at least in the west, culture has moved on. Liberal Christianity seems to have sold out to the relativism of the postmodern culture and is therefore caught in the trap of listening to all voices at once, and not knowing which way to move. Charismatic Christianity is in danger of selling out in a different way by pandering to the postmodern need for "experience" without being able to relate that experience in any coherent way to the historic Christian story. Popular Christianity reflects the eclecticism of our

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T E Mattholie

postmodern culture.

The issue seems to be how can we develop Christian communities which are:-

1. rooted in popular culture, but not held captive by it;
2. in touch with the historic Christian story, yet able to see creative new ways of being church;
3. able to listen sensitively to the alternative stories in our plural society, and still offer the Christian model as one which speaks to the universal human situation.

Answers on the back of a postmodern postcard!

Footnotes:

- ¹ A Walker, *Enemy Territory - The Christian Struggle for the Modern World*, Hodder, London, 1987, p71
- ² See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p249
- ³ Harvey, *Postmodernity*, p25
- ⁴ Harvey, *ibid*, p270
- ⁵ Harvey, *ibid*, pp29-30
- ⁶ Harvey, *ibid*, pp37-38
- ⁷ See Walker, *Enemy Territory*, pp110-120
- ⁸ Chadwick, CUP, 1975, (1990 reprint)
- ⁹ Chadwick, *op cit*, pp26 - 27
- ¹⁰ Chadwick, *ibid*, p174
- ¹¹ Chadwick, *ibid*, p59
- ¹² Chadwick, *ibid*, p42
- ¹³ Chadwick, *ibid*, p40
- ¹⁴ Chadwick, *ibid*, p38
- ¹⁵ P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Doubleday, New York, 1967.
- ¹⁶ Walker, *op cit*, p188
- ¹⁷ Walker, *ibid*, pp120-130
- ¹⁸ D Tracey, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, SCM, London, 1987, p31
- ¹⁹ Harvey, *op cit*, p52
- ²⁰ Harvey, *ibid*, p201
- ²¹ Harvey, *ibid*, p98
- ²² Walker, *op cit*, p136
- ²³ Harvey, *op cit*, pp116-118
- ²⁴ Harvey, *op cit*, p300
- ²⁵ Harvey, *ibid*, p286
- ²⁶ Harvey, *op cit*, pp 329-330
- ²⁷ Tracey, *op cit*, p50
- ²⁸ Harvey, *op cit*, p116
- ²⁹ Harvey, *ibid*, p216
- ³⁰ Harvey, *ibid*, p127
- ³¹ "Eclecticism is the natural evolution of a culture with choice", C Jenks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, London, 1984, p127
- ³² cf D Tracey, *op cit*, pp61ff
- ³³ Tracey, *ibid*, p83
- ³⁴ Tracey, *op cit*, pp83-4

“THANKS, UNCLE SIDNEY”

ROWAN WILLIAMS Bishop of Monmouth and former Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity Oxford.

I think my Uncle Sidney was responsible for the most significant step forward in my ecumenical education. A devoted member of Crwys Road chapel (as it then was), in Cardiff, he liked to remind me of my roots in the Hen Gorff,¹ and in the whole world of Welsh Protestantism; roots which a rather stiffly and self consciously Anglican teenager wasn't always too happy to remember. My family had become Anglicans when I was about eleven - mostly because of a move to a new area where the parish church seemed a lot livelier than the local chapels; and I'd begun to discover not only the heritage of Anglicanism, but, thanks to one or two enthusiastic curates and a well-supplied school library, something about Eastern Orthodoxy (destined to be a lasting enthusiasm) and something about the great monastic and contemplative tradition of the Catholic Church. My loyalties were about as far as could be from the world of Reformed Christianity. Insofar as I thought about the unity of the churches, it was very much in terms of the catholic and sacramental traditions as represented in the kind of world I was exploring in my reading, and in studying history and English at school.

Uncle Sidney was an inspired buyer of birthday presents; and just before I started as a student in Cambridge, he presented me with a little book by B. L. Manning called *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*. It remains one of my favourite books, and I recommend it to anyone who really wants to understand something about genuine Reformed Christianity in its historic depth. Manning was himself a Congregationalist, but one who was steeped in the literature of the early and the mediaeval church, and who also had a passion for the Methodist Hymn Book. And what he made me see was the way in which the Reformed world at its best cleared away a good deal of froth so as to enable you to see the outlines of what needed saying about the nature and action of God. Manning was scathing about two phenomena which he believed were equally destructive of proper Christian loyalty. He loathed the kind of liberalism that rested on vague convictions about how nice people essentially were and how **very** nice God must therefore be; his comments on that ill-fated Anglican production, the 1920's hymnbook *Songs of Praise*, were pretty pungent. And he almost as fiercely loathed the kind of 'Catholic' piety that buried the sharp outlines of the Christian vision of humanity reconciled with God under a pile of fragmentary and sentimental devotions. If you wanted to know what Christians really thought of the work of God, said Manning, you should look either at the early mediaeval monastic hymns or at Wesley; you could forget most of the rest whether it called itself Catholic or Protestant.

Not Good Enough

What Manning made me see was that I needed to be reminded of the existence of what I can only call a **classical centre** to the family of Christian language and practices, and that this had to do not so much with the kind of considerations that had loomed so large for an old-fashioned Anglican, issues about ministry and legitimacy, as with the vision of the nature of God and the scope of Christ's work. Put like that, it sounds simple; what on earth had I been wasting my time with before? But it wasn't at all that I had never been acquainted with this 'classical' vision, or that I'd been fed all through my teenage years with drab High Church legalism. Far from it; what Manning wrote about I recognised. And that was really

the point. I'd been much in love with the 'culture' of historic Catholicism, and I needed to see how that very culture, when divorced from a sharp critical austerity, could get in the way of the classical vision itself. I still remember the shock of reading Manning's severe judgement of Newman's 'Praise to the Holiest in the Height': it was, he said, **almost** a great hymn - almost, because it fails at the last moment to say what the true purpose of the passion is, and contents itself with 'To teach his brethren and inspire / To suffer and to die'. Not good enough, certainly not by the standards of Wesley, who will write variously of, 'the death divine' that secures pardon and empowers us to stand before the eternal throne, our nature changed into Christ's ('Heavenly Adam, Life divine, / Change my nature into Thine!'). Perhaps Manning isn't completely fair; but I could see what he was on about. And the more I read of early Christian theology, of the best of the Russian and Greek traditions and even of what was gradually taking shape in the late sixties as Liberation Theology, the more I could see the urgency of talking of redemption in terms of a transfiguration of what's possible for human beings; and this needed and, I think, needs just as much now, a robust account of how the incarnation opens up the fulness of human dignity.

God's Vision of the World

Because this was really the ecumenical point: what binds Christians, I discovered, was how extravagantly they were prepared to hope for transfiguration in the light of the person and action of Christ, the Word Incarnate. The tussles of classical theology over the trinity and the incarnation appeared not as idle word-spinning, but as attempts to map out what must be true of God, if this is the effect God has on human beings. I realised more and more that it was axiomatic for a good theology that you didn't achieve anything for the good of humanity by underplaying the mystery of God or by sidestepping the challenge of primitive orthodoxy. Incidentally, I remember being encouraged in this by reading an essay of David Jenkins, then a promising, if rather conservative, younger theologian! And when, a little later, as a theological student, I started trying to come to-terms with some of the great Germans of the century, above all Barth and Bonhoeffer, it was the same message I heard. I can remember a summer vacation spent partly in Sweden as an exchange student, when I worked my way through Bethge's great biography of Bonhoeffer, and realised again what practical impact the classical centre could have. Here was a man whose vision was informed precisely by the doctrines celebrated by Athanasius or Wesley, by the conviction of God-with-us in Jesus; when things became serious, he knew where Christians had to stand. And in his openness to both the heart of the Lutheran tradition and to the resources of the monastic life in the Roman and (surprisingly?) the Anglican contexts, he seemed to me to have understood something absolutely central to the real ecumenical enterprise.

Spirituality is now an over-used word, and a word that can suggest a rather 'precious' interest in self-cultivation, isolated from the conflicts of the world. But thinking about it in the context of Bonhoeffer's life and death, it wasn't that. Theology is there to nourish a commitment to **God's** vision of humanity, a commitment that is bitterly costly when it runs up against other and smaller or more exclusive visions; to bear that cost, you need the disciplines of common life and prayer, the steady diet of a tradition of reading and reflecting that keeps the imagination alert; and - centrally - that discipline, that diet, has to be drawn from more than one corner of the Christian world, because the urgent need for a critical, adult appropriation of what I've boldly called God's vision of the human world is not only by the patient and expectant conversation of very diverse Christian voices. There are things we simply cannot say to ourselves or do for ourselves.

In Spite Of

When I began research (into twentieth century Russian Christianity), it was my supervisor, Donald Allchin,² who made me connect all this at last with my specifically Welsh roots. His own discovery of Ann Griffiths,³ about whom he has written so memorably, as well as of contemporary figures- perhaps Gwenallt⁴ above all - had given him a probably unique perspective on the interweavings of unlikely bits of the Christian world. He had been a friend of Thomas Merton another patron saint for me of the kind of ecumenism that matters - Merton, whose journals I'd read as a student, watching with delight as his own discoveries of Bonhoeffer and Barth seemed to echo mine, his own liberation from a sectarian Catholicism showing me something of the way forward. Conversations with Donald were rather like finding my way back to Crwys Road from the other side of the world. I understood what Eliot meant about the 'end of our exploring being to arrive where you started, knowing the place 'for the first time'.

In the years since, I've felt a strong sense of homecoming in a lot of ecumenical contexts where the classical vision manifestly stands at the centre, and the priority is finding the resources that will keep us faithful to the fulness of what God has made possible for us, in prayer and action. For three years, I taught in an ecumenical federation of theological colleges (Anglican, Methodist and URC). The vision was there; but somehow the nature of the institutions didn't always move us towards each other. What I remember as moments of breakthrough are not so much the planned events, let alone the endlessly negotiated and worried-over patterns of worship, but occasional and marginal things - a sermon here, a meal there, celebrating an informal Eucharist at the end of an evening's discussion in the Methodist college's common room, using a rite we'd all worked at together. Put three or four institutions close together, and each will be driven on the defensive at least some of the time. It isn't surprising that the advances come in spite of the public structures rather than because of them, a lot of the time. Homecoming was clearer in things like contacts with Iona and Taize, where there was a tangible common commitment to learning from the wholeness of the Christian past and present, and where the structures are actually designed to nourish this. And, more locally, my first visit to Llanfair Penrhys⁵ instantly awakened the sense of being at home - at home with the Catholic Church, witnessing and working and praying out of a depth of shared understanding, reconciling a lot of histories as it worked for practical reconciliation and transfiguration in a very wounded human setting.

Tools for discernment

I have deliberately not talked about ecumenical experience at the level of conferences or negotiations. I don't dispute the necessity of institutional negotiation; in the federation of theological colleges I described, we **had** to do at least some horse-trading for the sake of more important matters. But as we all know, there is a demon of suspicion and defensiveness that takes over quickly and efficiently in so much of the public and corporate life of ecumenical discussion. It simply isn't in these settings that I've learned anything much about the worthwhileness of ecumenism. It has been, as I've tried to say, in this nebulous but all-important area of ecumenical spirituality, to give it a name that is instantly off-putting by its abstractness. I'm driven back all the time to the question of how we feed ourselves and how we are to be prepared for times of serious discernment and decision. One of the Russians I read for my research has a famous parable of the last days, when Christian unity is finally brought about by the advent of Antichrist; and Desmond

Tutu reminded the recent Faith and Order assembly in Spain that no **one** Christian community alone could have resisted and survived in the years of struggle in South Africa. Some of the pressure of ecumenism, I think, comes not just from the needs of mission in general, but from the need to have tools for discernment in crisis; something with which to withstand Antichrist. This means not just a need to understand each other and to be able politely to work and even worship alongside each other, but a need to **understand God together**. We have to have a common vision; and that means (unfashionably perhaps) a common doctrine, a common sense of what kind of God we own and who owns us. This is something that can only come from the serious sharing of worship and of silence - more than sitting amicably alongside each other, but challenging each other to be more faithful to the God of our common vision. The Faith and Order movement has worked hard at producing an ecumenical commentary on the Nicene Creed. It's a fairly dull document, inevitably, but there's something there worth working with. The real commentary on the common classical faith appears in how we pray and **sing** it together, and how we enact what it tells us about human possibility. And that's where we have to develop a much more sharp sense about what's central in all our traditions, and how this or that subsidiary matter of language or practice does or doesn't serve clarity about the classical centre.

I suppose what I'm after is a recognition that ecumenism isn't an exercise in finding a minimum level of agreement, but a way into a **maximal** level of shared discernment and shared wonder at the mystery of God's being and action. Ecumenism based on liberal indifferentism is really neither here nor there; ecumenism based on the discovery of a **passion** in common is everything. When I read Manning on Wesley and Watts, I believe that's what was going on: I'd found a shared passion, something that rebuked the triviality of so much of my own practice and called me to a renewed seriousness and also a greater freedom and joy in faith. The passion of faith has no life without the vivid sense of wonder at the trinitarian God and the opening of the divine life to us by incorporation into Jesus Christ; and where this is truthfully felt, there is a language and a sensibility in common that really does work to keep alive the critical wisdom we need to see past what our current fashions and pressures push at us. I'm thankful that I had the chance to discover something about shared passion through Wesley, Bonhoeffer and Uncle Sidney. If you've known even a little of shared joy and thanksgiving in the face of some profound menace to God's vision of the human, you know why unity matters, and you know where to look for nourishment. It's as true in Penrhys or St. Mellons as in Bonhoeffer's Germany or the old South Africa. Singing together about our access to the eternal throne and the restoration in us of the divine image is the lifeblood of common witness and action. We need above all an ecumenical practice that will help us do just that.

Footnotes:

- ¹ Hen Gorrff: A popular appellation for the Presbyterian Church of Wales, meaning 'The Venerable Body'.
- ² Allchin A.M. *cf Praise Above All: Discovering the Welsh Tradition* (University of Wales Press, 1991)
- ³ Griffiths, Ann: 18th century Welsh Poet and passionate Christian. Compared by some to Hildegard of Bingen in 12th century Germany and Julian of Norwich in 14th century England. S.R. Thomas said of her: "She listened to him. We listen to her".
- ⁴ Jones, D Gwenallt: 20th Welsh poet whose work 'is the product of a creative clash between his idea of man's sinful state and his perception of the ideal order intended by God'.
- ⁵ Penrhys and St Mellons: Local ecumenical Partnerships, with Baptist sponsorship, in areas of deprivation in South Wales.

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Book Reviews

edited by John Houseago

***Our Journey Home* by Jean Vanier. Hodder and Stoughton. £8.99**

For many years an earlier book by Vanier has been a second "Bible" to me. It is called *Community and Growth*. This is a worthy successor to it.

Do not be put off by the sentimental title. The subtitle says it all: Rediscovering a common humanity beyond our differences. Here is a healthy spirituality. No harmful dualism between flesh and spirit, between incarnation and atonement, between faith and the secular, between normal people and handicapped people. He is ploughing a familiar field for people who know his views, but he is going beyond the stories of L'Arche.

How I wish that he had been writing out of his experience of the local church but sadly it is rarely the place of peace, acceptance and understanding that he has found in groups beyond the Church.

How I wish this sort of book could be turned into a course for enquirers and new Christians. We are made to face the wounds in our humanity and its consequent brokenness. The experience of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age is examined in terms of growth and change. The scene widens into the human environment beyond the self and the home. The future is about choosing peace. Practical help on handling conflict is offered, and it is this last section that makes this look particularly apt for me in my work as a minister.

At the close of the most bloody, awful century in the story of humankind, when more lives have been taken by conflict than ever before, what we need (and by 'we' I mean Christians) is the vision of the Shalom Saviour, the Peace Christ. What we need to become are Peace churches. This book comes at the right moment for people pondering the millennium. Vanier should be one of the voices of the twentieth century that is heard in the next.

John Rackley

***Handbook of Pastoral Studies* by Wesley Carr. SPCK 1997 £15.**

This book, by the Dean of Westminster, is in the New Library of Pastoral Care Resources series, and is an introduction to the theology and practice of pastoral studies. It is not an easy read in parts, as the author himself admits; indeed it would be better to use it as a reference book than to curl up with it on the beach! There is a useful bibliography and index provided. The author gives pastors a guide to the theological, psychological and sociological concepts which enable them to fulfil their ministry. Paragraph headings help the reader to follow the argument. By using the index you can turn to such important subjects as theological reflection, secularization, or hermeneutics and you are given a working definition and practical examples.

You will not expect an Anglican to agree with us about baptism! Dr. Carr relates how a vicar in an urban parish decided to offer a service of blessing instead of baptism to non-Church attenders; but he reverted to the latter because "he felt that the loss of encounter and potential ministry was too great a sacrifice." (p. 215) He adds that there are people in that area of London who presumably think they were baptised but without water!

I found the section on a model for pastoral ministry very helpful and thought

provoking. He sees the Church as a herald, with the minister as a prophet; as a servant, with the minister offering servant-type leadership; and as sacrament, with the minister as representative both of the Church and of God. He admits that the servant model of ministry confronts the pastor with profound questions of authority. "This is partly because authority is frequently confused with authoritarian behaviour, and partly because power is misconstrued as authority." (p. 188) He says that the servant model illuminates these issues, drawing attention to the minister's authority "not from the perspective of one who has power but of one under orders."

The author has a concluding chapter on Ministry and Therapy, distinguishing between pastor and counsellor, but stating that it is essential that Pastors are familiar with the nature of the therapeutic approach. The first of the appendices is a practical piece on "Doing a Placement as a Paradigm of Ministry." This book is good value. I wish I had had it to hand when teaching pastoral studies to Church-based students at Spurgeon's.

Bob Archer

***Fire over the Waters: Renewal among Baptists and Others from the 1960's to the 1990's.* by Douglas McBain. Darton Longman & Todd Ltd. 1997. £8.95**

As one whose pastoral ministry has spanned the period covered by this book, I welcome this concise overview of renewal as it has influenced Baptists in particular during the past 30 years. Douglas McBain's careful research, coupled with his own close involvement in some of the significant moments of this period, enable him to present a clear and well-documented account of events which for a generation have appeared to dominate much of our life together. Sadly, they have proved divisive through exaggerated claims on one hand and fearful reaction on the other. Whilst admitting these extremes, the author sets out his personal conviction 'that the spirit of God is stirring in these activities in a renewing way for our common good'.

In his introduction Douglas McBain sets the historical context and gives helpful definitions of terms. He proceeds to detail the events and personalities of each decade, showing generous appreciation of key people in the Baptist Union and beyond who would not readily identify with charismatic renewal in its popular form and reasoned evaluation and some criticism of those who would. At times McBain seems reluctant to disclose his own significant role, almost shyly admitting to his part in the process which began at the Nottingham Assembly in 1977 and led, amongst other things to the formation of Mainstream.

Concluding that 'renewal.. needs to return to its own roots for the growth of a healthy inner spirituality', the author proceeds from this priority to the importance of appropriate worship patterns and challenging preaching which in turn lead to responsible social action and outreach. In many ways, for me, this was the least satisfying section of an otherwise excellent contribution to a balanced understanding of renewal. Nevertheless, this 'story of the impact of the spirit on the Baptist family' is well worth the reading.

Roy Freestone.

***Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism* by Peder Borgen.
T & T Clarke. Edinburgh. 1996. 376 pages. £27.50**

This is a quite technical volume whose stated purpose is to 'understand better the interrelationship of Early Christianity and Judaism and the interaction of both and the wider Graeco-Roman world.' The volume contains twelve essays, most of
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them previously published as articles in journals or as contributions to books or dictionaries (including the 'Judaism in Egypt' article from the {Anchor Bible Dictionary} in 1996). The dozen chapters are provided with an introduction and are divided into four sections: 1) Jews and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World 2) The Gospel of John 3) Acts of the Apostles and Paul's Letters 4) The Revelation to John. The guiding theme throughout is the exploration of the diversity of both Judaism and Christianity within the ancient world. As one might expect, there are quite a lot of references to the Jewish writings of antiquity (Philo and Josephus make frequent appearances in the discussion as do the Sibylline Oracles and the Maccabees).

There is a great deal that is of interest here, although some of it is a bit esoteric in nature and assumes a high level of knowledge on the part of the reader (including competency in Greek within several chapters). This means that the book will be of use mainly to ministers and teachers who are interested in specialised themes and how they are worked out in the first-century context. Thus, those pursuing probationary studies or research in such matters as cultural accommodation, or the clash of religious traditions, or in the differing uses of scripture within faith communities, might find sections of the volume helpful to their work.

Larry Kreitzer

***Child Sexual Abuse and the Churches* by Patrick Parkinson.**

Hodder & Stoughton. 1997 £8.99

When child abuse is suspected or disclosed in the church, ministers and church leaders agonise over the right course of action, and the theology which should guide and inform their pastoral care. Professor Patrick Parkinson's book provides a comprehensive resource to meet these needs and to complement policies already in place in many Baptist churches through 'Safe to Grow', to which he makes reference.

Now working in Australia, the author is writing as a Christian and as a lawyer; he has specialised in family law and child protection, and advises both churches and legislative bodies. The book, written with a lawyer's clarity, has three sections: 'Understanding Child Sexual Abuse', 'Pastoral Issues' and 'The Churches' Response to Child Sexual Abuse'.

Professor Parkinson gives explicit descriptions of abusive behaviour, and its consequences. He offers no protection to those who deny the common incidence of abuse and the seriousness of its effect on the victim. Using stories from both the Catholic and the charismatic/evangelical context, he shows how churches can intensify the physical and spiritual damage done to children when leaders try to cover up abuse or deal with it internally. He justifies the need for professional intervention, and helpfully describes procedures. He faces squarely the issues of justice and of appropriate pastoral care for victim and perpetrator.

One chapter deals with controversies about abuse including 'recovered memory syndrome': another analyses the true nature of forgiveness and repentance, condemning the pressure often placed on victim and church to forget the past and to trust the offender.

This book is jargon-free and in terms of style is easy to read. So far it is the most comprehensive 'popular' work published for churches on child abuse and protection,

and would be a useful resource for every minister to own and read.

Anne Dunkley.

***Abide with Me: The World of Victorian Hymns* by Ian Bradley. SCM 1997. 299pp. £14.95.**

The author is a lecturer in the Department of Theology and Church History of the University of Aberdeen who teaches the only honours course on hymnology at a British University. The book is the outcome of thorough academic research and is comprehensive in its scope. It explores Victorian hymns from historical, literary, theological, musical and cultural perspectives, in a way that is instructive and by no means superficial.

The first chapter provides a fascinating and sometimes highly amusing account of the genesis of Victorian hymns. Chapters follow on musical and cultural influences, the making of hymn books, the wide range of writers and composers, the main themes covered, the imports of evangelistic hymns and gospel songs from America, and the ways in which hymns were viewed and used. Sometimes the statistics and lists make tedious reading, and some of the material tends to be repeated in several places, but in general here is a most interesting and readable piece of social and Christian history.

Victorian hymns are described as 'the folk songs of the Church' which powerfully transmitted Christian doctrine and aroused a deep response in both committed believers and many 'half-believers'. A final chapter examines the place of these hymns in the twentieth century. It is backed up by an appendix listing 100 Victorian hymns that 'should be in any self-respecting modern hymnal', and another commending hymns and tunes which deserve rehabilitation. At a time when controversy about hymns and songs in worship is quite common, this book could serve a useful purpose. It faces questions like, 'what makes a good hymn?' and 'what is the purpose of congregational singing?' It also underlines the value of each generation's contribution to Christian hymnody, and challenges the tendency so to exult contemporary songs and hymns that worship is impoverished by losing the musical treasury of the past.

Bernard Green.

***Jack – A Life of C S Lewis* by George Sayer. Hodder & Stoughton. £8.99**

This is the third edition of a work originally published in 1988 in the United States and now available in this country. It is written with the warmth and sensitivity of a man who clearly knew Lewis well. He was one of his students and later a close friend when Sayer was Head of English at Malvern College. He describes the unhappiness of Lewis' childhood, his career at Oxford and Cambridge, his strange relationship with Mrs Moore and his love for Joy Davidman Gresham. There is the familiar portrayal of the scholar, the populariser of Christian belief and the writer of children's stories.

For many Lewis has become a cult icon, revered without criticism. Sayer shows a man who had weaknesses, who could make wrong decisions, and who could be easily hurt. He refers to early days as a Fellow of Magdalen when he was diffident and uncertain of himself, and claims it was his conversion that gave him a new confidence and produced within him a profound faith and affection for people. The chapters dealing with Joy's illness and death show how Lewis's faith was severely put to the test and ultimately strengthened.

This biography is being republished to celebrate the centenary of Lewis's birth, but also to refute 'certain false and misleading allegations' that have been written. In the new introduction Sayer says that he does not recognise the Lewis portrayed by Anthony Hopkins in the film 'Shadowlands', still less the Lewis described in A N Wilson's best seller, which he finds 'utterly destructive of his good name and character'.

Sayer's biography is intended to be a corrective. I believe that has been achieved, but it still leaves me wanting to know more about 'Jack' and is an incentive to re-read the collection of C S Lewis I have gathering dust on my bookshelf.

Peter Webb.

Pastoral Care and Counselling - a manual William K Kay and Paul C Weaver, Paternoster 1997, 200pp. £9.99

This book is a very thin soup, but nourishing all the same. William Kay and Paul Weaver write from practical experience of pastoring churches, putting together a mass of good advice and helpful hints. All this is aimed at the new or inexperienced pastor, nothing is taken for granted. It has the Assemblies of God constituency in mind, (for example the delicate justification of AOG presbyterian leadership structure and the explanation of their trusts) which is fair enough, but there is help here for all.

In the longer first part the authors speed through numerous subjects related to pastoral leadership today; its context, the call to ministry, its costs, the pastoral task, gifting, then areas of responsibility including youth work, denominational connection and the community. In the second briefer part they even more speedily deal with counselling theory and some pastoral issues the minister encounters.

The book is intensely practical and it covers a lot of ground, an admirable introduction to pastoral ministry. Anyone who is thinking about a call to ministry or starting out on it, or who is a lay pastor with little time to delve more deeply will find help here. But by covering this ground so fast we are left needing more. Complex subjects are dealt with superficially, notably the first chapter on the social context of ministry covers only four pages and there is a mere seven page chapter on the Minister's Community. In the present crisis of communication with our society this does not sit well with the urgent need for virile local connection by the church.

This is my main criticism of the book, it breathes maintenance. It presents a static image of the church and does not goad nor guide the pastor to mission. Granted it is a pastoral not an evangelism handbook, but I would have hoped for some outward looking advice on how to lead a church in its mission task.

The counselling section would be a good for quick reference in practical preparation of counselling situations, bereavement, weddings and funerals. The appendices on weddings and funerals are a useful summary for action. I was surprised that the issue of remarriage was nowhere discussed; probably the most persistent and disturbing issue for the average pastor.

The material is well presented with headings and boxed sentences breaking up the text. References and book lists show where to look for further guidance, though an introductory book should mention some standard works on pastoral theology and church leadership for those who want to think further.

If you are going on sabbatical, give this book to those standing in for you. If you are starting or helping those starting, buy it. It is a good book to use for first advice.

Yes it is thin soup, but if you are hungry enough and want to get what you need fast here is a good dish. Then you can look about for more substantial courses.

Chris Voke

***Why Do Christians Find It Hard To Grieve?* by Geoff Walters,
Paternoster Press 1997, 203pp. £12.99**

You might expect a rewritten thesis about grief to be morbid and indigestible, a fatal combination. This book is neither. It is lucid, full of valuable insights and practical wisdom. It has been carefully re-worked from its original material and will have an appeal to a wide variety of readers.

The first section imaginatively relates stories of grief in the Bible and beyond drawing parallels to modern psychological theory. Dr. Walters then outlines the influence of Plato and Augustine on our thinking about death, immortality and grief (largely erroneous in his view) and contrasts this with the doctrine of death and resurrection in the Bible. A further section expounds the understanding of grief today and how the pastor or counsellor can best help the bereaved in the light of traditional misunderstandings. A final part draws theological conclusions and illustrates with very perceptive analysis of some Christian autobiographies of grief.

Geoff Walters' basic argument, which arises out of his own experience as a pastor in helping and observing the bereaved, is that 'many Christians struggle with relating their painful experience of grief to what they believe they ought to experience as a Christian' (p.146). He challenges the practitioner on the same basis claiming that 'Christians have let down the bereaved... through a misunderstanding of what should be their own teaching about life after death' (p.151). He argues that Plato's concept of the immortality of the soul and its consequent influence on the church through Augustine has resulted in a false view of death and the after life and a consequent inadequate, damaging experience of grief by Christians today.

The basic doctrinal points seem consistent and acceptable, but I was left with a fundamental question unanswered. Are inadequate and damaging experiences of grief in fact the experience of 'many Christians'? This could only be demonstrated by deeper and wider sociological research. The opposite case could be argued; that many Christians through knowledge of the Bible and wise pastoring grieve very deeply and properly in spite of the doctrinal confusion in which we live. Dr Walters however, draws us helpfully away from inadequate Christian (or folk-religion) views, which Dr Walters characterises as "death denying" and "death accepting", to the biblical view of death and resurrection - "death transcending".

The theology of grief is dealt with all too briefly and having dismissed effectively the doctrine of a two-stage after life and 'soul sleep', a fuller explanation of the concept of "the long wait for resurrection" should, but does not follow. On a superficial note, the shadowy cover appears to have a demonic figure embracing a young girl, a sinister image in contrast to realism and hope, the underlying message of the book.

For those who help the bereaved this is a very useful book and for illumination of these issues it is most perceptive. Above all it is to be commended for its strong emphasis on the hope of resurrection as 'a powerful resource for coping'.

Chris Voke