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A table of contents for *The Fraternal / Baptist Ministers Journal* can be found here:

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The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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Contents

Editorial	2
For your own good Julian Gotobed.....	3
God's law on Marriage and Divorce Colin Cartwright	9
The Ward and the Word David S Russell	14
Tale of Two Cities and a Village Stan Lane	18
J-mail Kenneth Toms	22
Review Section	24
Of Interest to You	29

The Baptist Ministers' Journal is the journal of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship.

Details of the Fellowship can be found on the inside back cover

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

Editorial

Faith Zone

The zone designated 'Faith' in the Greenwich Dome raises a number of issues for Christians - which it's meant to do! I was forced to confront these issues as a late comer to the 'Lambeth group' — the ecumenical, inter-Faith committee set up to advise the Millennium Company on its contents.

By the time I joined the committee, by virtue of becoming General Secretary of one of the national ecumenical instruments in these islands, the basic decisions had all been taken. But that didn't let me off the hook. I can't duck out of responsibility for the final result as easily as that! And when I went round the zone for the first time on the opening night I have to admit I was relieved to see how Christian it had actually turned out to be!

Strangely enough, though, my disappointment with the end product is that it fails - on two levels - to convey the mystery of Faith. On the level of theology, I wonder whether the reason is that we tried to do it as an Inter-Faith exercise. That was the government's brief, and we kept to it. But each world Faith has its own way of conveying its insights into the nature and being of God. And I'm not one of those who believe that the followers of other Faiths are not in the same 'frame' as Christians. But when you try to build a picture - as this zone does - based on a common denomination of Faith, you can be in danger of losing the plot. And I think we have.

At another level - that of presentation - I think we've been caught out again, because an exhibition style cannot do justice to 'Faith'. That's not to deny that

the quality and detail of the material on display - including audiovisual - is very professional. There are also genuine attempts to encourage contemplation and reflection as one moves around the exhibits. But in the end it feels static; perhaps even dated. There's no sense of the numinous here. No awe. No humour even! The one place in which mystery begins to engage with the imagination is in the quiet area, bathed in soft light, at the heart's zone, where there are no words, no images.

The historical Jesus is certainly well represented in the Faith Zone. But I do not get a sense of why he has, and continues to have, such a hold on the hearts and minds of so many because they see in him the very face of God. In coming to terms with suffering and cruelty in a quite shocking way (because what else is the Cross?), Christianity also dares to say that it sees suffering as the means of redemption, and that resurrection cannot be understood unless one has first stood at the foot of the cross.

This zone in the Millennium Dome is a brave attempt to capture 'Faith' in contemporary Britain. However, in accepting collective responsibility for the final result, I think in all honesty we can only award ourselves a 'Special Effort' prize! **bmj**

For Your Own Good

Julian Gotobed, minister of Battersea Chapel, South London, was a guinea pig for the *Proposed Appraisal Scheme for Baptist Ministers*. Here are his findings.

A fleeting conversation with Malcolm Goodspeed, Head of the BUGB Ministry Department, in the middle of a crowded exhibition hall at the 1998 Baptist Assembly revealed that he was developing an appraisal scheme for Baptist Ministers. Malcolm needed guinea pigs. I was preparing to depart for the USA to spend three months on sabbatical study leave at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, New England. The main purpose of my sabbatical was to enhance my understanding and competence in the fields of homiletics and pastoral theology. I also intended to reflect upon my experience of ministry as pastor at Battersea Chapel, South West London. The Ministry Department's embryonic scheme of appraisal offered me a tool with which to reflect on past ministry in my particular church and social context. A further conversation over the telephone with Malcolm clarified the nature and intention of the appraisal scheme. I received the first draft version of *For Your Own Good: A proposed Appraisal Scheme for Baptist Ministers*, packed the papers in my bag, and made the journey across the Atlantic Ocean to New England in September 1998.

Appraisal

What is appraisal? Appraisal is a type of evaluation. The BUGB scheme *For Your Own Good* is a form of guided self-appraisal. The process begins with an Appraisal Exercise that prompts and guides self-evaluation. The resulting analysis serves as the basis for further reflection in the company of an Appraiser. A suggested course of action for the future is distilled from the conversation that ensues.

Since my participation in a trial run, *For Your Own Good* has been publicised to the wider Baptist constituency as part of the programme presented in the Away Days organised by the President of the BUGB 1999-2000, Revd Michael Bochenski.

For Your Own Good aims:

To encourage ministers

- To reflect on their past ministry, particularly since a previous appraisal
- To develop and build upon owned skills

- To make realistic plans to enable ministry in areas of acknowledged weakness
- To identify needs for further resourcing and training and devise a plan to seek them

Hesitation and Procrastination

I did not launch into the formal process of self-evaluation set out in *For Your Own Good* immediately on arrival in the USA. This was due in part to my participation in a full programme of study at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. But there was a further reason. A shadow of anxiety had crept into my mind. I was on sabbatical. I was using my time wisely. Why bother with the effort of self-evaluation? And did I really want to expose myself to the gaze and scrutiny of a fellow Minister? A combination of activity and anxiety elicited hesitation that grew into procrastination.

Delay in completing the formal process outlined in *For Your Own Good* did not mean that I abandoned any

notion of appraisal. The opportunity to stand back from the normal responsibilities of being in pastoral charge of a local church and the privilege of studying at a North American Seminary acted as catalysts to reflect upon my experience. The *ad hoc* thoughts precipitated by living and studying at a distance from all that I was familiar with suggested to me that a structured process within which to reflect on past ministry and plan for the future was indeed a valuable exercise. It would enable me to think rigorously and relate several disparate strands of thought arising out of my past ministry into a coherent whole. Towards the end of my stint in New England I pulled out the appraisal papers and began to apply myself to the task of working through the process of self-evaluation mapped out in *For Your Own Good*.

Expectations

For Your Own Good sets the Minister an Appraisal Exercise in the form of a Forced Choice Instrument Test. In plain English this means that the participant is required to work through a list of the church's expectations of a Minister and consider whether or not they are appropriate to his or her current sphere of ministry on a scale of 1 to 5. Space exists to add unlisted expectations and mark them in a similar way.

Appraisal Exercise

The following is an extract from the Expectations Form:

Expectations	Reasonable					Unreasonable				
	5	4	3	2	1	5	4	3	2	1
Person of Prayer			x							
Policy Maker				x						
Community Involvement										x

The participant then notes particular activities/projects in the past two years that have addressed these expectations.

For each heading the participant in the scheme follows through these five processes:

- a) Reflect on performance in the period preceding appraisal
- b) Identify what was effective, achieved, not completed, ineffective
- c) Review objectives and expectations in the light of (b) above
- d) Consider future development needs for yourself including further training
- e) Examine whether there are skills and abilities or knowledge which could be used more widely.

I chose to focus on three particular activities/projects that addressed some of the expectations outlined in the Appraisal Exercise and stuck closely to the five processes recommended.

As Business Manager

Vision 2000 Building project

- a) I advocated a comprehensive review of the fabric at Battersea Chapel with a view to drawing up a step by step plan of action to upgrade the facilities to modern standards. This entailed working in a team alongside two deacons, an architect, and contractors. My key task on several occasions was to explain the options and implications to the Church Meeting to facilitate clear decision making.
- b) (i) The Church has begun to think more long-term.
- (ii) The Church Meeting made clear decisions when required to.
- (iii) Tangible outcomes are:
 - Installation of disabled ramps and toilet facilities.
 - New heating systems.
 - New roofs and skylights.

Improved toilet facilities.

An upgraded meeting room

- c) The Church has made good progress towards fulfilling a comprehensive renovation of the fabric at Battersea Chapel.
- d) The process of decision making within the life of Baptist Church Polity is a topic worthy of further consideration.
- e) I think I possess skills to analyse and enable churches that find it difficult to change to make decisions for change.

As Mentor for disciples

MasterLife

- a) I introduced the MasterLife discipleship material, formed a group, and functioned as the group leader. The MasterLife course is one of the few occasions over the last two years when I have felt that I was doing the essential work of a pastor and actually making disciples, rather than concentrating on projects/activities which really function as a support to ministries (i.e. Vision 2000 Building Project).
- b) All members of the group attended course sessions from start to finish. Several struggled with the home preparation exercises and found the memorisation of verses difficult. However, each member of the group did grow in Christ both in understanding and experience. Some grew in their boldness to witness to the Gospel. A good spirit of mutual encouragement prevailed throughout the duration of the course.
- c) My expectations for the group were not fully realised in terms of what I hoped each individual would accomplish, but it was worthwhile to implement a process that stretched

people and helped Christians to grow. MasterLife did meet one of my self-expectations, namely, that a pastor is called to make disciples. The experience of MasterLife excited me and was very fulfilling.

- d) I would find it helpful to explore the process of adult learning in more depth.
- e) I don't think I have any great skills to pass on to colleagues in the wider church.

As Policy Maker

Church Covenant Celebrations

- a) I conceived the idea of celebrating the two hundredth anniversary of the Church Covenant as a way of recovering and reapplying the New Testament principles embedded within the Covenant statement. Although a small committee was set up to plan the Covenant Celebrations and each member played a valuable part in organising the events that ultimately celebrated the Covenant, it is not unreasonable to assert that the Covenant Celebrations took place, because I made them happen. I exhausted myself in the process.
- b) The Covenant Celebrations were ambitious in scope for a small Church. Many members were surprised at the quality within each event. The Covenant Celebrations engendered the sense that a small Church can occasionally think big. The Covenant Celebration events facilitated a lot of participation. The ethnic and cultural identities within the church were expressed in an unprecedented way. However, it is difficult to assess how far the principles stated within the Church Covenant have been appropriated and realised in the lives of church members.

- c) The need still exists to restate and reapply the New Testament principles set out in Battersea Chapel's Church Covenant. The Church requires a fresh statement of identity, purpose, and vision.
- d) I have utilised part of my sabbatical to develop a model for the identity and purpose of the local Church that begins with the doctrine of God, moves to the doctrine of the Church, and then articulates the role of the pastor.
- e) I think I can help people reflect theologically on the identity and purpose of the Church.

Setting Up the Appraisal

I posted the paperwork to Malcolm Goodspeed and arranged to meet him in early December 1998, shortly after my return from the USA.

Ideally, the interview should take place in a relaxed and secure setting without distractions. Due to pressure on both our diaries, Malcolm Goodspeed and I were compelled to settle for a table in a rather nice in-house store restaurant.

The Appraisal Meeting requires openness within the context of a trusting relationship, if both strengths and weaknesses are going to be shared meaningfully.

The content of the discussion will arise from:-

- a) the paperwork provided.
- b) the particular context of service
- c) the general experience of ministry and particularly the minister's current experience of God.

The Minister prepares a summary of the key points to emerge out of the

discussion. These notes function as an *aide memoir* in subsequent ministry. Attention is paid to affirming strengths and positive achievement as well as acknowledging areas of weakness which need strengthening. The Minister notes any issues and needs, and summarises action points.

Afterthoughts

What I have written is a personal account of the process of the appraisal scheme that I field-tested in the autumn of 1998. The following comments are offered as subsequent reflections upon *For Your Own Good*:

Appraisal helps us to discern the extent to which our practice of ministry corresponds to our theological vision of ministry.

Robin Gill, Michael Ramsey Professor of Modern Theology at the University of Kent at Canterbury, has commented upon the gap between perception and reality in church life:

"Churches ... have a tendency to romanticize features of their life and ignore the realities of the finite and sometimes sinful communities which really constitute them." ¹

If such an inclination exists in church life, we can also expect to find it among those who lead the churches. Churches set agendas for Ministers on the basis of spoken and unspoken expectations. We can be so busy complying with the church's expectations that we lose sight of God's purpose for us and the churches we are called to serve. Submitting to a process of appraisal enables us to compare our stated theological prescription for ministry against an empirical description of the actual practice of ministry. Assuming that our theological vision for ministry is

grounded in and shaped by the Gospel, correlation is cause for joy. Discrepancy is cause for thoughtful and hopeful correction, and implementation of strategy to move closer towards the theological vision.

The practice of ministry occurs within social and spiritual contexts. The Social context is the specific circumstances of life. My answers to the Appraisal Exercise relate to the period from the summer of 1996 - summer 1998. Five features defined the social context of my life over this two year period:

- i. Vision 2000 Building Project
- ii. Church Covenant Celebrations
- iii. MasterLife Discipleship Training Course
- iv. Regional Ministry in the London Baptist Association South West Region
- v. Parenthood

Focusing on a particular two year period of ministry helps to identify the social factors impinging upon our service in church and society. A funeral a month for twelve months will impact the life of the church and the Minister conducting the funerals. Theology is shaped by social context and so is the practice of ministry. We need to be aware of the factors that impact our practice of ministry to form a balanced perspective when reviewing the past and planning for the future.

The spiritual context is our relationship to God. The condition of our walk with God plays a crucial role both in our practice of ministry and our self-evaluation. The extent to which we expose our lives to the Word of God in Scripture and open ourselves to the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit makes a decisive impression on both our

experience and evaluation of ministry. Unless we are open to God the process of evaluation will fall short of all it can be for us. Appraisal must take into account the social context within which Ministry is practised in church and society. Equally it must be alert to the Minister's personal relationship with God. If either of these two dimensions, the social and the spiritual, are omitted from the process of appraisal the result will be distorted and misleading

Guided Self-Evaluation is an expression of Walking Together and Watching over each other. The key to a meaningful self-evaluation is to guard against self-deception:

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"²

An Appraiser guards against the deceitfulness inherent within the human heart. Working with somebody is a check against self-delusion. The meeting with my Appraiser, Malcolm Goodspeed, was an affirming and challenging experience. Strengths were affirmed and weaknesses addressed. But who should do the work of an Appraiser? The BU Scheme operates independently of the local church. The deacons and members of the local church have no input into the process. In most instances the Appraiser is likely to be an Accredited Minister of the BUGB. The obvious potential weakness is an inadequate picture derived from a second-hand paper-based knowledge. Paul Beasley-Murray prefers interaction with the local church: and the presence of an outside Ministerial Colleague to overcome this dilemma.³ The truth is there is no fool proof system of appraisal. Each approach has its merits and demerits. All methods of appraisal require trust and integrity to be of any benefit.

For Your Own Good facilitates structured and on going guided self-evaluation. The scheme is a useful tool to help Baptist Ministers enhance the quality of the ministry we offer in service to Christ among the churches. These outcomes, to my mind, are both desirable and commendable. *For Your Own Good* represents a step in the right

direction on the journey of faith for those who take covenant commitment to one another seriously. **bmj**

¹ Robin Gill, *Beyond Decline: A Challenge to the Churches* (SCM London, 1988, pp8-9)

² Jeremiah 17:9

³ Paul Beasley-Murray, *A Call to Excellence: An Essential Guide to Christian Leadership* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1995) p20

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the Revd Norman P Wright (Tel: 01255 679502).

(Apologies to the Wrights for the late appearance of this notice.)

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Our apologies to the Goddens.



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God's law on Marriage and Divorce

Colin Cartwright, Assistant Minister of Dagnall Street Baptist Church. St Albans finds some surprising insights in John Milton's theology.

John Milton has been described in this century as both the 'most liberal expositor of the divorce texts', and 'the first protagonist in Christendom' to argue for divorce by mutual consent¹. During his own day he was accused of advocating 'divorce at pleasure'². So, at a time when church, government and wider society are rightly concerned about actively supporting the institution of marriage, how are Milton's views relevant to today? This article runs a double risk of not only appearing to legitimise the dramatic rise in the prevalence of divorce, but also of seeming to use the views of Milton the anti-royalist to decide the understandably tortuous question of whether our future King should be allowed to re-marry in church.

Neither of these perceived dangers should deflect us from considering whether Milton does have something to say to us across the centuries. In view of Milton's position within our cultural heritage it is regrettable how little is known about his thinking. The modern debate has overlooked his important contribution to this debate. The church reports, *Putting Asunder and Marriage, Divorce and the Church* would appear to be alone in making glancing references to Milton's writings³.

Milton's arguments are remarkable neither for their apparent originality nor for the fact that they were aired over 350 years ago. Indeed, a number of writers have argued that Milton only brought to a logical conclusion what others had been saying previously in a more fragmentary way. What is remarkable about his views is that they arise from the deepest considerations of the nature of God and the nature of God's law. Many of those who have argued for leniency on this issue in this century have based their arguments largely upon the need to recognise marital breakdown because of the reality of human sin and failure. Milton however, based his views first and foremost upon the nature of marriage as

God instituted it. When he was accused of resting his case upon the Old Testament divorce legislation in Deuteronomy 24, Milton rightly countered: 'I rely more on the institution than on that'.⁴

Disillusioned

The man who published four 'divorce tracts' also wrote *Paradise Lost*. Here there is arguably the most powerful evocation of marital bliss and also a poignant depiction of reconciliation between Adam and Eve after a serious breakdown in their relationship. Milton demonstrates how it is possible to simultaneously have a high view of marriage and also to allow for the legitimacy of divorce in certain, limited circumstances, consistent with the purpose for which God had framed his laws of marriage. The ground upon which Milton took his stand was more theological than pragmatic. However, a quick survey of his life reveals that he was open to the charge of special pleading, due to his own unhappy marriage.

Born in 1608 and brought up within a Puritan household, Milton studied at Christ's College, Cambridge from 1625 to 1632. During this time he became

increasingly disillusioned with the established church, turned his back on taking holy orders, and embarked instead upon a different vocation of becoming a 'poet-priest', engaging in private study for six years. After a tour of Europe, he returned to Britain in 1639, at a time of growing conflict between King Charles 1 and Parliament, when Archbishop Laud was attempting to reassert the authority of the bishops over the church. Milton initially identified with the Presbyterian wing of the Puritan Parliamentarians, and vigorously entered the public debate on church government, writing five tracts on the issue. (Later, he was to work closely with Oliver Cromwell as 'Secretary for Foreign Tongues').

But, in the spring of 1643 his mind was obviously on other matters. He took a break from his writing and from London and travelled to the countryside near Oxford. He returned a few weeks later with a young bride, Mary Powell. After a short time, Mary became homesick and it seems she requested to return to her family for a while. However, she stayed away longer than had been arranged and did not come back to London, despite Milton sending a number of messages, entreating her to return.

Biblical Principles

Her reluctance to return to her husband may have been as much to do with the political situation as anything else. She left London at a time when many royalists were fleeing the capital in anticipation of civil war. King Charles chose to set up court in Oxford, so the road between London and Oxford became virtually impassable. But there may have been more to Mary's continued absence than this. The Powell family were staunchly royalist, and at a time when the King's cause seemed to be in the ascendant, they probably did not

want to be associated with someone who seemed likely to be executed as a traitor.

Seventeenth century canon law effectively prohibited any divorce. Even with a case of proven adultery, the ecclesiastical courts could only declare a separation and the innocent party was still not allowed to re-marry. Consequently, Milton found himself facing the very real prospect that he and his wife would never be re-united, while knowing that he could not re-marry, even though he was ostensibly the party who had been wronged.

This was the immediate background in which Milton wrote his tracts on marriage and divorce. He published his first tract anonymously. *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* appeared in July 1643, just a month after the Westminster Assembly had been convened. Milton clearly saw his campaign to reform existing canon law on marriage and divorce as entirely consistent with the whole programme of reform through which Parliament was seeking to establish a Commonwealth founded on biblical principles. Indeed, the second edition of his pamphlet, published in February 1644, appeared with his name and was prefaced by an address which appealed directly to Parliament and the Westminster Assembly.

Legitimate

In 1644 he went on to publish *The Judgement of Martin Bucer*. This was a translation of a work by the sixteenth century reformer and theologian, whom Milton had gleefully discovered had taken a similar approach to the issue. The following year he published his most mature reflections in *Tetrachordon* and also *Colasterion*, which was a withering attack upon an anonymous pamphlet

Baptist Ministers' Journal April 2000

denouncing his views. Milton also restated his views in his work of systematic theology, *De Doctrina Christiana*, which he completed later in life. The following description of his argument aims to summarise all that he wrote on the subject, with particular emphasis upon *Tetrachordon*.

Milton argued for the priority of Genesis 2:18 over the traditional focus of 2:23,24. On this basis he asserted that companionship with a compatible partner was uppermost in God's mind in creating Eve for Adam. Both Platonism and Puritan teaching reinforced his thinking that mental union came before sexual union in marriage, both in order of importance and in the natural sequence of events. This immediately questioned traditional church teaching which held that the most important reasons for marriage were firstly procreation, secondly the avoidance of promiscuity and only thirdly companionship. To Milton, marriage was only effected by a joining of compatible minds: '... it is not the joyning of another body will remove loneliness but the uniting of another compliable mind' ⁵. So, his logic drew him to conclude that becoming 'one flesh' was only one of the effects of marriage, not its cause.

Consequently, Milton asserted that there were not only other breaches of the marriage covenant than adultery, but that some were more serious than this. He argued, for instance, that God had been more consistently angry throughout the Old Testament at his people being misled into idolatry through inter-marriage, while the practice of divorce was not similarly condemned by the prophets. Indeed, divorce was encouraged wherever seducement into idolatry was apparent (Ezra 9, for example). Milton felt that it was clear, from both Israel's history and from the *Baptist Ministers' Journal April 2000*

way Deuteronomy 24: 1 had been framed, that there were other legitimate causes of divorce than adultery.

Incompatibility

But arguably his strongest point concerned the very nature of God's law of marriage and the purpose of the law as a whole. As ever, Milton wanted to return to first causes and focus upon what was most fundamental. He perceived that God's positive will for marriage was essentially a loving relationship based upon a compatible pairing. Consequently, incompatibility was the greatest threat to marriage as God intended, before any other factors. Therefore, his argument went, where there was no love in a marriage due to incompatibility that marriage was not only not fulfilling the purpose for which God ordained it, but that it never could fulfil that purpose. Consequently, any church or civil law which sought to enforce marriage where it did not exist as God intended was contrary to God's will. In this situation, Milton asserted, it would be best to recognise genuine grounds for divorce with the possibility of re-marriage.

Milton then went on crucially to draw a parallel between sabbath law and marriage law. According to the teaching of Jesus, there were situations in which sabbath law could be overruled. ⁶ God's law was introduced for the purpose of human good and therefore, whenever the interpretation of a law became contrary to human good, then the higher law of charity overruled the stricter interpretation of the law. Milton put it most succinctly when he wrote that 'no ordinance human or from heav'n can binde against the good of man' ⁷. He asserted that just as the sabbath was made for humanity not humanity for the sabbath, so marriage was made for humanity not humanity for marriage.

Marriage was a means to an end not an end in itself. He wrote, '... as oft as the good of man is concern'd (God) not only permits, but commands to break the Sabbath. ... therefore to injoin the indissoluble keeping of marriage found unfit against the good of man... is to make an Idol of marriage, to advance it above the worship of God and the good of man...' ⁸

Companionship

Milton had rightly identified that there was a fundamental principle of human good which was superior to the written law because it rested upon the greatest law of all which Milton called the 'law of charity': God's nature of love towards creation demonstrated ultimately in Christ.

However, it was the words of Jesus about divorce which themselves presented Milton's greatest challenge.

He set about refuting the traditional interpretation of Jesus' teaching in a number of ways. Firstly, he argued that Jesus was not abrogating the Mosaic law of divorce, because he came to fulfil the law, not destroy it. And, conversely, if Jesus was making some kind of legislative pronouncement forbidding any divorce, perhaps with the exception of some form of sexual unfaithfulness, then that would mean God's law had wrongly allowed divorce to his people for centuries. Secondly, Milton argued that, if companionship was God's primary purpose in marriage, claiming that Jesus was saying adultery was the only legitimate cause of divorce was logically impossible, because that would mean that sexual union was the most important aspect of marriage. Thirdly, he pointed out that it would be against the whole tenor of the gospel to be stricter than the law. Fourthly, Milton appealed to the context of the divorce controversy

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mentioned explicitly in Matthew 19. Milton saw that Jesus' words were a direct response to the Pharisees' question about being able to divorce 'for each and every reason'. Given this context, it is possible to see Jesus' words, not as an absolute pronouncement against divorce, but as a rebuke to the Pharisees' licentious interpretation of the Mosaic legislation and as a strong condemnation of divorce when the difference between the partners is reconcilable.

Travesty

By his own implicit admission, Milton had been inexperienced in the affairs of the heart. It appeared that he had been mistaken in his choice of life partner and the differences seemed irreconcilable. However, Mary returned to him in 1645 and he responded by taking her and her family into his home. The breach was seemingly healed before the Westminster Confession, published in 1647, ruled that desertion was a legitimate cause of divorce and that re-marriage should be allowed to the innocent party.

Milton's argument is sometimes weak in its exegesis of scripture and is even weaker over practical considerations. But, whatever else can be said about the case he made, Milton was certainly right to question whether God's law was intended to punish someone potentially for life because of a mistake. Equally he was right to assert that condemning people in their weakness and sinfulness presented a travesty of the gospel of Jesus.

It is questionable how far Milton's arguments justify many modern divorces. Milton's main focus seems to have been upon those in a scenario similar to his own, where a natural incompatibility was not discovered before marriage. Of course, his approach is open to abuse, which he acknowledged. But, he argued that it was better to have a situation where a genuine freedom was abused by some, than to have a situation, contrary to the law and the gospel, where everyone was in bondage to the law and even legitimate cases of divorce were prohibited. True marriage involved 'unfained love and peace' not 'forc'd cohabitation'⁹.

The Church of England's present policy of generally preventing re-marriage in church risks a greater danger than appearing to condone divorce. This greater danger is more than the pragmatic consideration of alienating thousands of people from the church. It is the more profound danger of misrepresenting God's nature expressed in the gospel of Christ. **bmj**

Ed: An edited version of this article appeared in ¹ *The Church Times*, 21st January 2000

Wenham & Heth and Olsen respectively
William Prynne

² *Putting Asunder: A Divorce law for Contemporary Society*: (London 1966): *Marriage, Divorce and the Church*: (SPCK, 1971)

³ *Complete Prose Works*, vol II (Yale University Press, 1959) p744

⁴ CPW, II, 327

⁵ See Matthew 12:1-13, Mark 2:22-3;5, Luke 6:1-10, John 7: 21-24

⁶ CPW, II, p588

⁷ CPW, II, p276

⁸ CPW, II, p254

'Canon Chasuble: 'The precept as well as the Practice of the Primitive Church was distinctly against matrimony.

Miss Prism: That is obviously the reason why the Primitive Church has not lasted up to the present day.'

Oscar Wilde; 'The Importance of Being Ernest (1895), Act 2 – quoted in the Monarch Book of Christian Wisdom 1997.

The Ward and the Word

David S Russell, a former General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, recounts a tale of two Tonies.

I have recently returned home from a four weeks' stay in hospital, one of them in intensive care. It was an interesting experience, to say the least, and I am grateful for all the kind greetings received and the prayers offered on my behalf. Apart from three collapses, two ops. and umpteen injections, it was almost enjoyable!

The hospital ward is an alien environment, but for over a month it was to be my 'parish'. How was I to exercise my God-given ministry there? Not by coercion, but by caring; not by standing aloof, but by becoming involved; not by 'preaching', but by sharing and taking opportunities as they came. And come they did.

I confine myself to my relations with just two fellow-patients, both called Tony. For the sake of clarity let's call them Tony and Anthony. Tony was foul-mouthed and Anthony wasn't far behind. Their topic of conversation was threefold - booze, gambling and sex. But not necessarily in that order! The more they made the nurses blush, the more they roared with laughter (I reflected: how easy it is for ministers and other Christian workers, in our rather rarified Church environment and in our sometimes 'holy huddles', to be 'cushioned' and cut off from non-Christians and from much that is going on around us).

Prostituted

Tony was a hard-swearing, hard-drinking man who gave a graphic description of his social relationships in these memorable words: 'The people I associate with, especially the women, are so coarse they would strip the skin off a shark!' Quite a turn of phrase! Almost poetic in fact! His language, echoed by that of Anthony, was multi-coloured, but

predominantly blue. (Again I reflected: why is it that so many expletives have such a close association with our Christian faith and that swearing and cursing make such ample use of the name of our Lord - Christ, Jesus Christ, 'Jesus wept', God Almighty and so on. Words like damnation, damn and hell are in frequent use as is the most common expletive of all, 'bloody', which is, I believe, a corruption of 'By our LADY' which use goes back at least as far as the Middle Ages. How is it that such religious language and such holy names should have been so debased that they have become commonplace profanities in constant use in daily conversation, on the radio and on television. The Lord's name is taken in vain and sacred language is prostituted for base effect. (Perhaps there's a Ph.D. thesis here for somebody!).

What was I, a Christian minister, to do in such circumstances? Should I reprove the reprobates and denounce them in the name of the living God? Should I wag my finger and adopt a judgmental attitude? Should I stand on my dignity and pontificate that I was an ex-General Secretary of the celebrated Baptist Union and a 'Rev.' to boot? Hardly! But if not, why not? Was I scared to say so? Or what? Rightly or wrongly I decided to bide my time in the belief that the moment had not yet arrived. To act in any such way would have meant the shutters would come down and close

with a clang. I decided to wait.

Spy

First of all there had to be some kind of rapport, some sense of 'belonging'. Gradually it came. We were on first name terms from the beginning. First it was 'David', then the unaccustomed 'Dave' and finally the great breakthrough occurred - I was given the supreme accolade: I was accepted as 'mate'. I counted it an honour. The occasion was twofold. The first involved Anthony, a knowledgeable fellow who prided himself on his ability to solve crossword puzzles; but the very last word in that morning's newspaper puzzle completely stumped him. Could I, by any chance, help? By a sheer fluke I, a non-crossword puzzler by nature, came up with the solution. My stock went up! Thanks, mate! Then there was Tony who prided himself on his quick wit, albeit at times highly seasoned. With due modesty I have to say that I was able on occasion to outmatch him in repartee, though with a much less colourful turn of phrase. This, for some reason, won his respect and thereafter, to him too, I was 'mate'. Somehow I felt like a spy from MI5 (or is it MI6) infiltrating a closely knit gang. But I reminded myself that I was there, not to steal a secret, but to share a Secret! But how? And when? I sensed that even now, however, the moment had not yet arrived. And so, when asked the inevitable question, 'What do you do?', I stalled and said I used to lecture. My chance would surely come! And it did!

Out of the blue (or perhaps, more appropriately, the blue haze) came Tony's voice, a *propos* of nothing at all: 'My boss is a **** Christian who has tried to convert me. He has the picture of a fish stuck on the back window of his car. I haven't a *** clue why'. As in the Old

Testament God used Cyrus, so here in the hospital Ward he used Anthony: 'A fish? Oh, it has something to do with this Jesus business'. The moment had arrived, the *kairos*, the appointed time, God's time. Without his knowing it, Anthony had opened the door and I was able, without intrusion and without fuss, to squeeze through.

Bugged

'It's a secret sign said I. 'I've seen it scratched on the walls of the catacombs in Rome - those secret underground passages where Christians in the second century used to hide for fear of their persecutors. Those were days when Christians had to make sure who were their friends and who were not. They could be betrayed by a stranger at the drop of a hat. It was the same with Christians in the Soviet Union where, as I know from my own visits there in the Cold War days, so-called friends might well turn out to be informers. I remember having my hotel bedroom bugged in Leningrad and having to be careful what I said to strangers both there and in countries like Romania and Bulgaria. In Burma too I had to watch what I said and was in fact told to leave that country within three days of my arriving there. Those Christians weren't wimps, a bit wet behind the ears. They were tough, ready if needs be to die for their cause. In the very early days in Rome they found themselves in a precarious situation and decided to adopt a sign that would identify them as Christians to those 'in the know'. The sign they used was the symbol of a fish, and many Christians use it still today. You were right, Anthony: it *is* about this 'Jesus business'..

'But why a fish?' asked Tony. 'It's an acronym', said I. Anthony knew what that was; but Tony didn't. 'What's an

acronym?' 'It's a word formed from the first letters of certain other words - like Nato or radar. In this case the acronym is *Ichthus*, the Greek word for a fish - that was the language most early Christians spoke. (My long years of arduous training in Classical and *koine* Greek had at last paid off - I remembered the word for 'fish'! I remembered too a children's address I had given many years before and that many other ministers have given down through the years!). The first letter 'i' stands for 'Jesus' (which begins with an 'i' in Greek), the second and third (ch) for 'Christ' (At this point Anthony repeated these two names after me, except that he gave them a different emphasis and used them as a hyphenated expletive!); the following letters, 'th' and 'u', spell out 'Son of God'; and the final letter 's' at the end stands for 'Saviour'. So for those 'in the know' the symbol of the fish said: 'Jesus Christ (is) the Son of God, the Saviour, and those who made use of it as a secret sign indicated that they were Christians. This is what they believed; this too is what my friends in the Soviet Union, in Bulgaria and in Burma believed; and it is what I believe too. 'Cooh!', said Tony (or some such more expressive word to the same effect). 'I must tell my boss: I'm sure he doesn't have a clue!

Consternation

My hopes of further conversation seemed shattered when Anthony was given his discharge the following day and Tony was taken to another ward. Before he left for home, a curious Anthony came over to me and said, 'What are

you?' At this point I decided to play 'cat and mouse' with him for just a little while. 'In your present state of health, Anthony, with a 'wonky' heart, I don't know if I should tell you; it might be too big a shock for you!' But at last he persuaded me and the truth was out: 'I'm a parson!' His consternation showed in his face - and in his words: 'A *** parson!' 'No, said I, 'just the ordinary kind'. We had further helpful conversation before his departure for home.

Shortly afterwards I was moved into a side ward with just a few patients. After about a week - surprise, surprise! - who did not turn up but Tony, back from the Cardiology Care Unit and, as a temporary measure, took the bed alongside mine. There followed 'a repeat performance' of the game played with Anthony earlier on; 'What are you?' 'I'm a parson!' But the reaction this time was altogether different. There was silence, and then this: 'I was brought up a Baptist'. You could have knocked me down with a feather! It left me thinking of the tremendous responsibility that is ours in dealing with children and young people, sharing with them 'the Word', and the vital importance of our follow-up in later years.

In Tony's case as in Anthony's, there was no blinding flash, no voice from heaven, no Damascus Road conversion. But then I reminded myself that conversion is not our work; it is the work of the Holy Spirit who does his own thing in his own way- and in his own time. Our task is simply that of preparing the way. **bmj**

'... Christian witness has been at its best during the twentieth century when it has displayed an evangelical commitment to the gospel in its scandalous particularity and individual challenge; an ecumenical openness to all that is new and exciting in God's vast creation, and a catholic breadth which embraces the local and the universal ...'

D Denis Morgan: 'The Span of the Cross' (£14.99 University of Wales Press, 1999)

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To the readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal

In recent weeks I have come across several incidents where individuals have suffered injury on church property with the result that they are now taking legal action against the church. Whilst we are in a position to provide an indemnity for these unfortunate incidents it is evident that some churches are not fully aware of their responsibilities for church safety. I feel the need therefore to remind churches that in a changing society where compensation is all too readily sought it is essential that greater attention is needed to safety than hitherto.

The Church Deacons have a duty to ensure the safety of anyone who may visit the Church and its associated buildings and grounds for any purpose. This includes paid employees, voluntary workers, regular members of the congregation, visitors and contractors.

If you have not already done so we suggest that your church appoint a member with responsibility for health and safety. This person could, if practicable, lead a small sub committee who should be given the specific responsibility of checking out potential hazards on an ongoing basis so that action can be taken.

Paths and driveways regularly produce accidents and warrant special attention. These must be kept free of potholes and steps must be in good condition. They need to be properly drained to prevent collection of rainwater and the growth of moss. Where paths are regularly used at night they must be adequately lit. Steps and steep paths should be fitted with handrails.

I also strongly recommend that you check whether your church has any responsibility for maintenance of shared drives and paths. These are often left to their own devices and it is only when an accident occurs that it is discovered that the church is responsible for their maintenance.

We do offer the help and advice of our surveyors without charge and if you feel that this would be of benefit please do contact Baptist Insurance.

A.J.GREEN ACIJ ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

Tale of Two Cities - and a Village

Stan Lane revisits places associated with particular personal struggles.

My 21st birthday within a week of the start of my first term as a "boarder" at Regents Park College; scholarship boy; Billy Graham convert; perhaps a calling to Baptist ministry ? Threshold of excitement and uncertainty; so much depending on how I achieved - academically and emotionally.

The second "age" began promisingly enough - a second class Degree in German and French; confirmation of ministerial calling; a place at Rawdon College; engagement to a fellow member of the Baptist students' society (J.B.S.). But in my last year at Rawdon the wheel started to come off my wagon....

I have never succeeded in becoming an accredited Baptist minister. My first pastorate lasted sixteen months. I had bitten off more than I could chew, and there was little pastoral preparation or support. After that I was very lucky to have three years with Leeds Family Service Unit where I learnt a lot about "problem families" - and a lot more that you don't learn at college. My second pastorate might perhaps have proved more enduring if the Baptists had not pulled out after two years from the ecumenical partnership on which it was based - when the Catholics joined! So it was back to social work. But all was not well at home. I had never fully come to terms with the break-up of my engagement to the Oxford student, though my subsequent marriage and the three children that resulted suggested otherwise, even to myself. The marriage proved insecure, and although it lasted for over twenty years it eventually ended in divorce. I became disillusioned with the Baptists, and for seven years did not go to church at all.

After social work training my career prospects improved for a while. I

became a Team Leader for four years and responded well to the challenge. I was then asked to leave by the Director of Social Services because I was not prepared to conform to his "top-down" management philosophy. As a disciple I believed in a "foot washing" approach to people in need and he found the resulting partnership with local people intolerable. It gave away too much power. It was twelve to fifteen years ahead of its time.

Watershed

I returned to Birmingham and for the next eighteen years worked as a Children and Families social worker in the area where I had grown up. I was never appointed to a management post again. I was at times depressed and finally had a breakdown which led to four years of psychotherapy when I had to address and work through some painful and deep - seated anxieties.

Some very important things happened at this time of transition into "middle age". I read a book by Gerald O'Collins called "The Second Journey" - spiritual awareness and the mid-life crisis. This cast a lot of new light, and I walked the Pennine Way as a "watershed" response. I joined a Baptist church again! How could I after all the anguish Baptist churches had brought me ? Was this a sign of strength or weakness ? I can never feel sure. Diana Hendry writes of the way she is always looking for a spiritual home but can never find a

secure one. Is this arrogance or insecurity on her part, she asks - or maybe both.¹ I can certainly identify with her ambivalence. I suppose Baptists have become rather like family - they go back a long way and it's difficult to opt out. I had after all met most of my closest friends through Baptist churches. Someone once said to me at least they tolerate you! Only just, I replied.

In 1979 I started a "spiritual diary" in which I recorded clearly at the outset my determination to recover my earlier sense of calling, and went on to record all the ups and downs of the journey. It still smacked of "all that I wanted to achieve" but took much more note of the things that happened to you, the setbacks along the way. It occupied years, but in 1988 I started a three-year distance learning course at the William Temple Foundation in Manchester leading to a Certificate in Religious Studies. The title of my long dissertation was: "The telling of the story in Baptist ministry and social work - what truths can theology and the social sciences tell each other?" So making connections became an important feature. Also three clear building blocks of importance to me emerged from this period of committed and structured study:

1. The life and works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer
2. The phenomenon of Liberation Theology
3. The issue of POWER; a key issue in all organisations including the church.

What is a theology of power and powerlessness ? I believe that it is crucially about how Jesus has turned the world's values upside down, demonstrating that God's power is made perfect in weakness. We happily sing

Graham Kendrick's bit about: "he turns our weaknesses into his opportunities" - but how does that feel in practice ?

Brokenness

After finishing the course at Manchester I had eight years of trying to live out what I had learned in Birmingham. I cut my paid work to three days a week and gave it up altogether in 1995. I married again, this time happily and with undivided commitment. We lived on the edge of the council estate where I had grown up. Instead of ambitiously trying to re-establish my "calling" as if it all depended on me, I tried to respond to what was happening, especially in relation to power and to the value of each individual; standing attentively along-side the least important and the most oppressed, rather than always feeling the need to "minister" in the way the church often does. It's much more mutual than that. It is important to be willing to listen and to learn too. Brokenness is the key, by which I mean looking at life from the perspective of the cross. Ruth Harvey's book from which I have already quoted is full of examples of spirituality arising from brokenness. The one which stays in my mind is told by John Drane, about his wife's reaction to the death of their second child, and her calling to a ministry of Christian clowning. "Through her pain, she began to share her story tentatively with me, and I was forced to face my own weakness and vulnerability - something men find difficult anyway"² We are broken by many different experiences, but we are never the same again in a way that it may be hard for those who have not survived shattering experiences to understand.

So what did I respond to ? I was recruited by the Association to be their Social Action Rep. The Area

Superintendent tried to get me instated on the accredited list as I was then filling (albeit unpaid) a qualifying office. He came back from Didcot with a negative, commenting quizzically that "we do not live in generous times!"

Especially to broken people apparently.

Manipulation

I have also worked for Unlock (formerly Evangelical Urban Training Programme) which included producing some material on "Romans" for people who do not read confidently. I have been the Editor of "Christian Community" for the last 2 ½ years - the magazine of the Association of Christian Communities and Networks (NACCAN). I have done some work for the Community Learning Network, mainly on gender issues. In the local Baptist church I have done some debt counselling, some visiting of people who asked for help because they had no furniture, and acted as children's advocate. I have had very few opportunities to lead worship.

By far the biggest local challenge was to lead a house group of people connected with the Baptist church who lived on the council estate. We met fortnightly simply to support one another, to share insights into the struggle of living out the faith in a difficult place and to pray together. Most of us were people whose voice seemed disregarded at church. At first we met unofficially, perhaps even subversively. When the church realised what a potent source of energy this meeting was, the leaders tried to control it, calling it a study group or even a fellowship group, which it essentially never was. It was much more liberating than that.

Throughout this period I found the power structures of Baptist churches

very difficult to live with. The behaviour of male ministers was so frequently problematic that it could not just be down to individual frailty. Why does the system protect so many autocrats? Perhaps we should have had a shake-up like Vatican II! The features I particularly disliked were the exclusive "old boy's club" atmosphere that prevailed whenever ministers met together; issues of status and control were priority; articulate "lay" people were regarded with suspicion or even treated like the enemy; church meetings were tightly controlled by agenda and forceful chairmanship in an atmosphere that meant that little voices were either silenced or made to sound ridiculous. Information was restricted, leaving a sharp distinction between those in the know and those excluded. The contents of the church newsletter was unofficially censored - three times our house group had material returned as "unsuitable" or just quietly left out. It is ironic that Baptists believe in "the priesthood of all believers" and pay lip service to a model of equal participation and Christian "upside-down" practice and yet tolerate priestly leadership that is obsessed with keeping control at the centre. In reality I believe that the lack of a formal power structure creates a power vacuum which leaves Baptist church life wide open to manipulation by the powerful.

Voiceless

On the other hand I had good experiences of working with female ministers - almost without exception. Many of them know instinctively what it feels like to be abused or discounted, both inside and outside the church. There is still a long way to go in gender awareness practice in society at large, but my experience was that behaviour is still tolerated by male Baptist ministers towards women that would not now be tolerated in any secular employment.

There have been some real advantages in being out of the main stream, free from the constraints of pastorate and payment. I will mention three specific incidents of what I might call "scattered usefulness" which resulted from simply being there and being responsive. We attempted to set up a LETS (skills exchange) scheme on the estate. It had great potential to offer an alternative life style, more informal, inclusive, eco-friendly. It was rather alien to the local culture and depended so much on trust which was in short supply on the estate: "do you mean you would have to let a stranger into your house?" "What about people who would milk the scheme then disappear?" "How much are you making out of it?" "There's nothing that I'm good at" etc. When people did offer skills they were very disappointed if they were not immediately used. It proved impossible to build up sufficient variety of skills to attract new members, but some new ground of co-operation was broken.

In 1995 I celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by walking 375 miles in 32 days from County Durham to Bath, staying overnight in small places on the long-distance footpaths, and meeting with local people to share thoughts about Bonhoeffer's significance today. The meetings raised sharp questions about how Christians and others can stand against the "idolatry of deregulated market forces", and who are the voiceless in our society and how can they be listened to?

In April 1997 I first heard about Jubilee 2000 when Ann Pettifor visited Didcot. This was just over a year before the G8 meetings in Birmingham. In fact it was from a member of our house group (interestingly an African) that Ann Pettifor learnt that Birmingham would be

Baptist Ministers' Journal April 2000

the venue! For the next year I worked with total commitment in preparation for the "human chain" event which influenced attitudes to world debt so much. Specifically I was responsible for organising four walks over four days into the centre of Birmingham, stopping along the way to draw attention to the Campaign. Those involved in arranging it knew that there were many obstacles - it nearly didn't happen! It was a triumph of cheerful, gritty determination. It was an inspiration to work (not always harmoniously) with such a group of people from different traditions even religions, or no faith at all.

Irony

Each stage of my life seems to have lasted about 21 years! So we moved in 1999 - rather unexpectedly and unplanned - to Orleton, an active village of 1,000 people or so. It has meant a complete change of life style, and five months on, it is still early days. The first thing we did was to join Ludlow Baptist church, which is five miles away - nothing new in that! Some people never learn! The timing was amazing in that the first week we were there the Minister announced his call to another pastorate. So we are now into "interregnum", which I try to persuade Baptists to call more positively "space between ministers" (a suggestion from one of the house group). In the village we have joined the rambling club, a Bridge evening and a monthly house meeting called "Pause for thought", a time for discussion and reflection with a very open and not specifically Christian agenda. We have completely changed our shopping pattern, avoiding supermarkets as far as possible and supporting the three outlets which the village manages to sustain - a post office stores, a bakery and a farm shop selling local meat and vegetables.

I have much more time to reflect on my experience of "ministry", the gains and the losses, and to enjoy what feels like the Fourth Age, as well as becoming more aware of the acute problems many country people face at present. In this article I have tried to share as honestly as I can the particular struggles in my story. I have found it a difficult exercise - perhaps I have not wanted to re-visit some of the painful places; perhaps I

have told some parts of the story too many times before and need to move on; above all I have struggled with the irony that I am writing mostly for the restricted readership of the Baptist Ministers Fellowship, for which I have such mixed feelings! **bmf**

¹ See *Wrestling and Resting* Ruth Harvey (ed) CTBI Publications, pp108-110

² Op. cit p11

J-Mail

Hope In Christ

from Kenneth Toms, Ottery St Mary

Dear Journal, now that we are in the year 2000 we naturally look back to the coming into the world of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fact that time changed its measurement at that point (A.D. instead of B.C.) Is important. Whether Jesus was actually born on "Christmas Day" or on an earlier date, possibly in 4 or 5 B.C., really doesn't matter. Virtually two millennia have rolled on since that world-changing event.

There is, however, another aspect of the year 2000 that should claim our attention. Not only do we look back; we must also look forward. And it is the promise that Christ will come again in person to our world that seems important to me.

Scripture plainly declares that we do not know **when** He will come again. But the fact that the Second Coming of Christ is mentioned over 300 times in the New Testament invests this doctrine with a high degree of importance.

It is not my purpose to enter into any controversy as to whether the Apostles or even our Lord Himself were mistaken

in what they said or wrote. I write simply as a believer who has lived with that "hope" deep in my heart over many, many years. In fact it was through listening to a children's talk on this subject in the 1930's that really brought me to personal faith in Jesus.

Paul sums up that hope for us in Titus 2:13: "We wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ".

The Preacher

from Albert Richards, Sheffield

Dear Journal, the meeting of the Baptist Preachers' Forum at the Baptist Assembly in Plymouth will take place on Saturday 29th April in the Blue Room in the Ballard Activity centre between 1545 and 1645. The speaker will be Brian Nicholls, General Superintendent of the West Midlands.

The topic will be: "Setting the Congregation free: The Pastoral significance of the Preacher."

It will look at issues around how good preaching and leadership of worship releases people into life and how bad practice sometimes abuses and enslaves the worshipper.

It is an open meeting, so in the spirit of collaboration between the two bodies,

members of the BMF will be welcome.

Anabaptism


from Dr Stuart Murray, Anabaptist Network, 205 South Norwood Hill, London SE25 6DJ Tel: 0181 653 7892 e-mail: s.murray@spurgeons.ac.uk

Dear Journal, Can we offer your readers a complimentary copy of *Anabaptism Today*?

Anabaptism Today, which is published three times a year, is the journal of the UK Anabaptist Network, a non-denominational network of individuals and congregations interested in exploring the contemporary significance of Anabaptist perspectives for Christian mission and discipleship. The network fosters local study groups, arranges conferences, offers training resources for congregations and is served by a theological circle, as well as publishing the journal. It has growing links with

similar networks in other parts of the world. Recent issues have included articles on interactive preaching, becoming a "peace church", evangelism in an Asian context, and a study of Balthasar Hubmaier. Interviews and book reviews are also regular features.

The journal, to which a number of Baptist ministers already subscribe, is available by subscription at a cost of £12 per annum. Some have also contributed interviews, book reviews or articles. For a number of years complimentary copies have been offered to students starting their ministerial training at Spurgeon's College and we have recently offered the same facility to the other Baptist colleges. We want to extend this offer to those who are in Baptist ministry.

To receive a complimentary copy or for further information, please contact me at the above address. 

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Book Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

***The Jesus Movement: A Social History of its First Century* by E.W.Stegemann and W.Stegemann (E.T. by O.C.Dean), T & T Clark, 1999, xx + 528 pp, £29.95**

This book is a monument to painstaking scholarship. It is technical, detailed, meticulous and critical, likely to become a standard text-book among scholars interested in the social history of religion, but it is a tough read and its conclusions are particularly unexciting. I doubt if it will find, or reward, many Baptist ministers among its readers.

The first part surveys economy and society in the Mediterranean world of the first century, concluding that there were extremes of wealth and poverty, with the great majority of the population living just above or well below the level of subsistence. Ancient society may be divided into an upper stratum consisting of a small elite and their retainers and a lower stratum of relatively or absolutely poor people who made up the bulk of the population.

The second part applies this analysis to Palestine in particular, and goes on to show the variety and complexity of the religious scene in the period before 70 AD in terms of religious parties, and charismatic movements. This forms the background to the study of Jesus and his movement, in which three stages are recognised: the followers of Jesus in his lifetime, the churches of God in Judea, or in other words Jewish Christianity to 70 AD, and the Christian communities in Palestine in the period 70-100 AD, which, it is argued, are reflected in the gospels of Matthew and John. The

authors reject Troeltsch's sect and Gager's millenarian models and seek to explain Jesus and his movement in terms of charisma and social deviance (technical terms which they explain).

The third part deals with Christianity in the cities of the Roman empire, both as to known to us in the 50s and 60s from Paul's letters and in the last third of the century, for which it is supposed Acts provides evidence. Rather against the run of recent scholarship the authors cast doubt on the idea that significant numbers of believers came from the upper stratum of society. They did not come either from the very poor or from the elite, but were overwhelming from the lower stratum with a few relatively better off retainers. There follows a chapter on the conflicts of Christians with Roman authorities and Diaspora Jews.

The final part describes the social role of women in the Christian movement, coming to what many will see as fairly disappointing conclusions.

Alastair Campbell

***Reason To Believe*, by Maurice Wiles, SCM, 1999. £7-95**

In the midst of the celebrations of Christmas and the Millennium (so-called), it was both refreshing and thought-provoking to read this book from Professor Wiles. It was not heavy reading, either theologically or in terms of length (at 120 pages plus some notes, although there are deliberately no footnotes), but it has prompted processes of further thought. And this is indeed the author's intention.

He sets out his purpose as offering 'as simply and as clearly as I can ... appropriate responses to some of the most basic questions about Christian belief'; these he acknowledges as perplexing many people within and beyond the church.

The book comprises fifteen chapters, each of which are short and deal with a key element of the Christian faith, with a number of 'interludes' which take up underlying issues rather than individual aspects of Christian belief. To me the interludes, which in the first half of the book come between every chapter, were becoming interruptive rather than helpful; the flow was certainly improved in the second part.

Otherwise this book shows many signs of being carefully written; it is noteworthy how much Wiles can say within a few sentences (not always by increasing their length!), although to some there may be a frustration that he doesn't say more. The progression to the discussion of the book as a whole is also well planned.

On reflection a helpful and enjoyable read, but I would also want to see this book in the hands of those on and beyond the fringes of faith, to see how it 'works' there too. It is my intention then to pass my copy to an open-minded friend who does not attend church; and I will seek to get his opinion and feedback, perhaps even for the Journal, with editorial permission.

Andrew J Henton Pussey

What is Mission? Theological Explorations. J Andrew Kirk. Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd. 1999. £12-95. 234 pp, plus notes and bibliography.

Andrew Kirk is the Dean and Head of the School of Mission and World Christianity at Selly Oak Colleges. In *Baptist Ministers' Journal* April 2000

'What is Mission' he has produced a good introduction to missiology, with an emphasis on comprehensive coverage rather than in-depth discussion. The detailed notes and extensive bibliography enable readers who wish to pursue particular aspects in greater detail to do so.

The book is laid out in three sections: Laying the Foundations, Contemporary Issue and Mission in Action. The first section offers a short introduction to some of the key ideas of the modern mission movement and to the idea of *Missio Dei* in particular. He argues that mission should be based on the way of Jesus, and discusses how the church might set about the task of reconstructing the mission of Jesus from the New Testament. This was, I felt, a rather tendentious undertaking. Almost inevitably the Jesus discovered is the one who fits the desired pattern of mission.

The second section ranges over a whole host of issues: Evangelism, Culture, Justice, Interfaith, Peace and the Environment. It is refreshing to find such wide coverage and a recognition that the gospel, if it is worth anything, must be relevant to all aspects of life.

The last section is the shortest, a mere 30 pages. It contains a brief critique of the Church Growth Movement and a critical examination of the place of the church in mission. There are some interesting ideas here, but all too brief.

This is a useful book for ministers who are not familiar with the field of mission and a convenient summary for those who are. It does not, however, do much more than map out the terrain and highlight some of the issues that need further consideration.

John Houseago

How to Read Bible Stories. Daniel Marguerat & Yvan Bourquin. SCM Press 1999 x + 190pp £12.95.

This latest volume in SCM's 'How to read...' series is an introduction to narrative criticism, which is interested in questions as to where a particular narrative begins and ends, the plot, the characters, the setting and so on.

The chapters can be read in any order, with the exception of the first two, which are introductory but not elementary. They introduce the reader to a welter of distinctions and technical terms - and there are plenty more to come in succeeding chapters! The various terms are explained and illustrated as the book progresses, but your reviewer still found getting to grips with them far from easy.

The reader's understanding of the text can be tested by tackling the questions included in each chapter, answers to which are given at the back of the book. Other features include the large (double column) format, boxes giving definitions, quotations and examples, illustrations and diagrams. There is also a glossary, bibliography, and indices of biblical references and themes.

The reader who perseveres will gain some fascinating insights into biblical narratives, and be given tools that can be widely used. Some may find the journey fascinating and rewarding, others may see the book as another example of scholars speaking a private language, which, like all languages takes considerable effort to master. Others again may echo your reviewer's feelings that narrative criticism can throw new light onto old texts, but also share his wish that its jargon be simplified.

Those interested in narrative criticism

might also explore Mark Allen Powell's 'What is narrative criticism?' (SPCK £9.99) which is more concise, though it lacks a glossary, which makes the task of reminding yourself of the meaning of words like *exiradiegelic* and *iteralive* rather more difficult!

John V Matthews

Visually Speaking. Jolyon Mitchell. T & T Clark. 294pp. £14.95.

Jolyon Mitchell was formerly a BBC radio producer, and is now lecturer in Communication and Theology in Edinburgh. He has written a very stimulating book, which can be recommended to all preachers who wish to reflect on their task.

Mitchell first compares and contrasts the respective fates of preaching and radio in the 20th century. There are striking similarities, and Mitchell wants us to find hope for preaching in the over-pessimistic predictions of the demise of radio which have been sounded since the advent of cinema and television. Radio has survived and flourished as it has adapted itself to a changing age - by changing its style of communication and by reframing its task. Preaching must face similar re-evaluation.

Who was it who said that they preferred radio to television because the pictures were better? Well, Mitchell's thesis (as his title suggests) is that radio works not only when it is intimate and conversational, but also when its practitioners paint word-pictures, when they speak visually.

He fleshes out his case in the central part of the book with a series of case studies of religious broadcasters. First he examines Ronald Selby Wright and C S Lewis; then Angela Tilby and Lionel Blue (and James Jones); and finally a clutch of

American radio preachers. From these examples (exemplars) and his opening analysis he draws conclusions for preachers which are well worth study. The radio broadcaster's particular skills to note are summed up as 'listen, picture, translate, and edit'! Like the best on radio, preachers are also encouraged to "develop an experiential form of discourse", and a newly 'embodied' form of communication (an interesting look at Ellul and Barth here).

Mitchell sometimes has an over-fussy style (with too many footnotes?) but the book is well written and thoroughly argued. His case studies lack something however in terms of final conviction. Wright and Lewis can turn a glorious (visual) phrase, but they belong now to another age. The American preachers operate, albeit with interesting styles and skills, in what Mitchell admits can be called a 'religious ghetto'. The 'thought for the day' presenters are the most obviously relevant, but they also caution us about how easily we slip from good to less good practice.

Maybe Mitchell has not allowed sufficiently for the nature of our visual age either. Visit your local music megastore and watch the latest pop videos on the big screens. Image rapidly follows image, without time for coherent 'meaning' to emerge. Rather they evoke, allude. And the image takes precedence over meaning, the medium overhauling the message. How does one preach to this generation?

But still, this is a book which preachers should find an effective stimulus in their work. It has certainly left this reader thinking more searchingly about his tools of communication. Recommended.

Rob Ellis

***Crossing the Boundaries: A History of the European Baptist Federation.* Bernard Green. The Baptist Historical Society on behalf of the European Baptist Federation. Pages ix + 243. ISBN 0 903166 29 1 £12**

Crossing the Boundaries has been written to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the formation the European Baptist Federation (EBF). The author traces how Baptists have responded to the situation in Europe during the twentieth century. Since its formation the EBF has played a significant role in supporting Baptists in Europe and the Middle East. Assisting those who were living behind the Iron Curtain was not made any easier by a split amongst Baptists in the USSR leading to the withdrawal of the 'Reform Baptists' from the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

Amongst Baptists there are wide differences of church tradition and biblical interpretation concerning the role of women. At the EBF Council in 1987 a resolution was passed encouraging member bodies 'to take steps to enhance the role of women, in accordance with the spirit of the Gospel'. In due course, after some difficulty, Revd. Birgit Karlsson of Sweden became EBF President but no woman has since been appointed to this post!

Normally the EBF has worked in partnership with national Baptist Unions, but when there was a possibility of working in Albania, the Federation had to take the initiative. Bernard Green not only chronicles the events in the life of the Federation but also devotes two chapters to discussing the major issues which have affected its life, namely, theological and Christian education and issues of Christian mission.

This is an inspiring book, which shows

how many Baptist Christians have sought to cross the boundaries that divide them and to discover the truth that "In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or north, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.

Michael J Collis

***Ministry and Priesthood.* Alistair Redfern. Darton Longman & Todd £7-95. 128pp**

Alistair Redfern sets out to explore the place for Ministry and Priesthood within the church.

To achieve this end the book is set out in such away that it can be used by an individual or a group. In neither case do they have to be exploring a personal call to ministry since the book invites us to engage with issues that touch all of our Christian experience at one time or another.

From the opening chapter on "The call to be me", through looking at "Order and Authority", "Women and Ministry" to the closing chapter of "Ministry Tomorrow", each subject is easy to explore and yet invites the reader to seriously think about subjects they may otherwise avoid.

Each chapter starts with an introduction to the topic and has examples from people's personal experience to illustrate the subject

matter. There is helpful and relevant use of biblical accounts as well as turning to other Christian writers and author such as Evelyn Underhill. Each chapter contains exercises to help stimulate the reader to discover more about the subject. The chapters finish with a section entitled "What do you think?" to develop peoples understanding of the subject and a book list for further reading.

There are two possible drawbacks for some in using this book, firstly the Anglican perspective from which the book comes may get in the way at times for those coming from a Free Church background with little ecumenical experience. Secondly those who have already done some thinking regarding the books subject may find it too basic.

Personally I found this book refreshingly simple to use and I can see possibilities for individual chapters being adapted for individual use by Spiritual Directors, Counselors and Ministers as their journey with people in their faith as well as the original intentions of helping people to continue studying after completing an Alpha or Emmaus course or deepening their theological understanding of ministry. So I can recommend this book to anyone who wishes to encourage and support people as they discover the call of God for themselves in their lives.

Sarah Kinch

'The Pilate we think we know is a mixture of dozens of invented men, each symbolic of something: the State facing the individual, the pagan world opposing the Christian one, scepticism versus truth, ourselves facing God. He represents either man's free will, or his hopelessness before fate, or his struggle to distinguish good from evil, or the tyranny of hard choices. People ceaselessly project their own ideas and anxieties on him. They use him, and have always used him, exactly as they want to, often revealing in the process as much about themselves as they reveal about him.'

Ann Wroe: 'Pilate: The Biography of an Invented Man' (£7.99 Vintage, 2000)