



# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

July 2000

Vol 271  
ISSN 0968 - 2406

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## Contents

Editorial ..... 2

Opposite the Millennium Jewels    Nicholas Rothern ..... 3

'Birmingham's Coloured Preacher'    Paul Walker ..... 5

Called to be a Preacher    Albert Richards ..... 10

Truth not Heard Elsewhere    Steve Holmes ..... 13

On a Journey of the Spirit    Robert Ellis ..... 19

j-mail    Richard H Clossman, Harry Young ..... 23

In House    Bob Almond ..... 24

Review Section    John Houseago ..... 27

Of Interest to You    Gwynne Edwards ..... 30

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

## The Still Point at the Centre

There is 'a search in our society at the end of the 20th Century for an understanding of spirituality which makes sense in terms of personal health and well-being, in terms of belonging to a believing community and in terms of responsibility for injustice on a global scale.'

That search is the impetus behind the 'Living Spirituality Network', launched in London last April. It may be new in its expression, but the Network's roots go back to the old Farnham Community and now embrace the Fellowship of Prayer for Unity.

A key element of the Network is its commitment to 'building bridges between new forms of Church and mainstream Christian traditions.' Hence the importance of attracting the active support of people like Inderjit Bhogal, Director of the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield and the new President of Methodist Conference.

An ethnic Sikh, born in Kenya, Inderjit is the Conference's first black President and takes his place alongside other ethnic leaders who have contributed so much over the years to the thinking and perception of British Christians: people

like Frederick George of East Barnet, who was President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 1997, and the Anglican Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali, among others. Paul Walker's article in this issue is also a timely reminder of the long standing, if slow to be recognised, multi-ethnic nature of Baptist life in Britain.

Spirituality, Inderjit reminds us, 'is not passive, but it is about honesty, openness and courage. It does not require escape to quiet retreat centres, though that has value, but the discovery of the *still point at the centre* (Mother Julian of Norwich) where we are.'

In the 'French Lieutenant's Woman' John Fowles wrote that 'we are all in flight from the real reality.' That is something people in earnest about Living Spirituality can never afford to be. **bmj**

## Apologies

We offer our sincere apologies to Mr Alf Green of the Baptist Insurance Company for the error in the April edition of the Journal. Readers will have noticed that we repeated Mr Green's letter from the January edition, instead of the new copy. These letter-advertisements always deal with extremely important subjects, and we know are much appreciated. The information on Arson which should have appeared in April will be found in its usual place in this edition. Our thanks to Mr Green for his understanding!

# Opposite the Millennium Jewels

**Monsignor Nicholas Rotherham, Principal Chaplain at the Dome at Greenwich says there's more to the Dome than its fourteen zones.**

To many people the Dome at Greenwich will conjure up images of the Zones: the enormous Body, the Faith Zone, and many of the spectacular entertainments. Yet the structure of the Dome itself, and many of its features, represent a fascinating way in which life may develop in the coming century. To list a few of them: integrated public transport with the exclusion of the private car; access for the disabled; reclaiming industrially polluted land; the collection and re-use of rainwater; an equal employment policy and the materials and form of construction. There are many brave experiments here which will be reviewed with interest in years to come.

The Christian Churches are present in an innovative way. From the earliest days of the design it was agreed there would be a prayer space. This is totally separate from the Faith Zone, which is an exhibition area to explain the Christian Faith and other Faith Traditions present in the United Kingdom. The Prayer Space is where these concepts are translated into a practical reality. The plans for the Prayer Space were developed and honed with the help of the Lambeth Group, the inter-Faith Committee which worked with the Government Departments and the National Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) in preparing the Millennium Celebrations.

## **Positive**

The eventual scheme for the Prayer Space is a worship area, which can seat about a hundred and which is used for regular Christian daily worship, and by people of all faith traditions as a place of prayer and reflection throughout the day. A separate Prayer Space for the Muslim Community has been provided outside the Dome. Other faith traditions also celebrate their major festivals at the Dome but do not hold worship on a regular basis.

A team of Chaplains has been recruited, mainly from local Churches in the Greenwich area. There are twenty

members in the team, and normally two are on duty in the Dome at any time. The members include ordained ministers and lay people. They come from the Church of England, the London City Mission, the Roman Catholic Church, the Baptists, the URCs, the Salvation Army and the Pentecostal Churches. Their tasks are to conduct worship and to provide a Chaplaincy service to both staff and visitors. They are not remunerated by NMEC and much of the equipment has been provided by the various Churches.

The experience of the project to date has been very positive. Initially the members of the team came from very different backgrounds, but they have developed a great friendship and respect for one another. It has been suggested that part of the task has been to minister to one another as we share our work. The staff at the Dome value their presence and the team has developed very good relationships with them.

Many of the visitors to the Dome are unaware of the Prayer Space and are agreeably surprised to be able to share in the Worship. In a large area where there are 5,000 staff and up to 30,000 visitors a day the different team members have tended to adopt their own methods of work. Some are experienced industrial

chaplains, others spend time working side by side with the staff, whilst others spend time with visitors. There is scope for a wide variety of forms of ministry.

### **Privileged**

The Daily Prayer, morning and evening, takes the form of a psalm, a scripture reading and some prayers of intercession. A book for prayer intentions has been placed by the door, and invariably, day by day, requests for prayers are added.

On Sundays the Church of England and the Catholics hold Eucharistic celebrations with a Free Church Service in the afternoon.

At a team meeting, the members were asked to comment on their experience to date. Without exception, they felt

delighted and privileged to be able to share in this project.

To go back to the starting point, it may be that this suggests a possible future method of operation for the Christian traditions. They are very much on the 'high street', visibly working together in the midst of large numbers of people. There is an economic use of premises and equipment.

If you are able to visit the Dome, please come to see us in the Prayer Space. It is located on the Ground Floor of the Harrison Building inside the Dome – we usually say 'opposite the Millennium Jewels!' Times of services are given in the Dome Newspaper, and on the information screens. We would be delighted to see you and explain our work to you further. **bmj**

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# 'Birmingham's Coloured Preacher'

The Revd Peter Thomas Stanford (1860 – 1909)

**Detective work by Paul Walker, minister of Highgate Baptist Church, Birmingham, uncovers part of the forgotten history of the Baptists.**

Whilst researching the history of Highgate Baptist Church, in Birmingham, a chance discovery gave me quite a shock! Revd. Alan Betteridge picked up an old magazine in a house sale, glanced casually through it and noticed an article that referred to Hope Street Baptist Mission, the forerunner of my present church.

I found a copy of the same magazine in Birmingham public library and sure enough it confirmed what Alan had told me.<sup>1</sup> The Revd. Peter Thomas Stanford, "Birmingham's Coloured Preacher", was indeed the minister of Hope Street Mission in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century! How was it possible that an African American ex-slave was the Baptist minister in the Victorian slums of Birmingham?

That initial discovery led to investigations that have confirmed and enlarged this fascinating story. Revd. Peter Thomas Stanford was born into slavery at Hampton, Virginia in 1860. By the time the picture with the article was taken he was about 33, a good looking, rotund person dressed in a high collared shirt, a preaching gown, looking rather noble and dignified. The article revealed that Stanford was an educated, able minister with a considerable significance in the Birmingham of the day.

## Kidnapped

Stanford was the minister of Hope Street Mission and later the Willberforce Memorial Church between 1889-1895. The *Birmingham Faces and Places* article mentioned that Stanford had written a brief account of his life entitled *From Bondage to Liberty: The life story of the*

*Revd Peter Thomas Stanford*<sup>2</sup> which, after a long search was discovered un-catalogued in the library's archives. Like other American slaves Stanford was liberated during the American Civil War. After he was freed, aged about five, he had a long series of adventures; being kidnapped by American Indians and eventually ended up living with a children's gang on the streets of New York. He was converted at a Moody and Sankey rally and came to the attention of some of the influential New York Abolitionists of the time. They helped him to gain an education at Suffield Baptist Institute in Connecticut and he was ordained in Hartford in 1878, where he ministered for a couple of years.

In 1880 Stanford went from Hartford to London, Ontario, where he became the minister of an African Baptist Association church and editor of the *Christian Defender*. Then in May 1883, he arrived in Liverpool and after a few weeks went to London. During his time in London "for five months the Rev. Mr. Baxter, editor of the *Christian Herald*, found him employment as an evangelist, and then he visited Leeds, Barnsley and Keighley, Yorkshire." At this time Stanford experienced "opposition and obloquy at Bradford" although generally "He was

<sup>1</sup> *Birmingham Faces and Places 1894: An Illustrated Local Magazine*. Vol. VI. J. G. Hammond & Co. Birmingham: April 1894, p.183..

<sup>2</sup> *From Bondage to Liberty: Being the life story of the Rev. P. T. Stanford who was once a Slave and is now the Pastor of an English Baptist Church*. (Smethwick: Press of W. J. Durose, 1889).

kindly received by the English people, and greatly encouraged to prosecute his work as a Christian minister." To better equip himself for his ministry Stanford studied "courses in law, medicine and theology" "under private tuition".

### Accusations

In "1888, he married Miss Beatrice Mabel Stickley, an English lady, a cultivated Christian woman" who came from West Bromwich. They were married at the Baptist Chapel, Regent Street, Smethwick on August 13<sup>th</sup>. They were both "admitted as members of the Victoria Street Baptist Church at Small Heath". The Revd. Charles Joseph, who later became President of the Baptist Union in 1914, was the minister and he soon became a personal friend and great supporter.

"On May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1889, he accepted a call from the Hope Street Baptist Chapel," He was not allowed to take up his ministry, however, until some accusations made about him by an anonymous person were cleared up with the help of Charles Joseph. He remained solely at Hope Street only until September 1890, although while he was there "he had the gratification of seeing the work grow... and had flourishing schools and organisations there."

Stanford, "aided by an accomplished wife, and together with the aid of a band of workers" took over a church in Priestly Rd., Sparkbrook, which he acquired "by the kindness of a friend." It was his desire to "express in some tangible form the gratification felt towards William Wilberforce, the great benefactor of the negro"<sup>3</sup> so they called the church

Wilberforce Memorial Church. "The congregation was composed largely of the labouring people, who were greatly attached to their preacher. Here he continued for eight (sic) years, doing heroic work." During this time they used Hope Street as a mission church, which is where the title Hope Street Mission originated.

### Ecumenist

During his time in Birmingham he was strongly committed to the raising up of the Negro race. Although slavery in America had been officially abolished with the end of the Civil War the condition of the Negro was still one of oppression, poverty and rejection by large parts of American society of the day. One of the brutal methods of social control and subjugation of the coloured race in the Southern States was lynching. These lynchings became a *cause celebre* in the Birmingham of the time and "At a public meeting held at the Willberforce Memorial Church, Priestly Road, Birmingham, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1894, it was resolved that Stanford should visit the States for the purpose of investigating these alleged outrages"

Thus began another period in Stanford's ministry. In the "last week in September" 1895 he left for America. The results of his research in the States revealed that the condition of the Negro race was indeed desperate and that the reported "Lynchings, which are so diabolically done until now" were worse than the reports in England indicated. After this period of investigation and writing Stanford published *The Tragedy of the Negro in America*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The use of the word 'Negro' and 'coloured' to describe people is largely unacceptable today, however these phrases were used by Stanford and others at the time as self-designations.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Tragedy of the Negro in America: A condensed history of the enslavement, sufferings, emancipation, present condition and progress of the Negro Race in the United States of America.* Author's Edition; Boston, Mass.: 1898.

Then in 1896, Stanford accepted a position with the American Home Mission Society as minister to African Americans in Boston, where he founded St. Mark's Congregational Church, Roxbury. He was also an early ecumenist and was responsible for organising the Interdenominational Ministers Association.

In 1899 "Stanford moved to North Cambridge, Massachusetts and founded the Union Industrial and Stranger's Home for homeless women and children".<sup>5</sup> He contributed regularly to his neighbour, Pauline Hopkins's, *Coloured American Magazine*. He served as Vice President of Christ's Medical and Theological College, Baltimore and as the Vice President for Massachusetts in the National Baptist Convention. He died, aged only 49, on May 20 1909 of kidney failure and is buried in the cemetery at Cambridge.

### Moral Cordon

Having initially thought that Stanford's ministry in 19<sup>th</sup> century Highgate was unique, further research and other chance discoveries soon revealed it was not. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century some, although not many, African, African American and Caribbean people came to Britain not as slaves but as free people. Some were brought by owners returning from the Americas or the Caribbean and freed, but most came as travellers, fugitives, students or anti-slavery lecturers. They arrived for different reasons, by various routes and became involved in Abolitionism, thereby playing a significant role in our history; contributing to political, church and social life in the U.K. These 18<sup>th</sup> century arrivals were the first of many who came over the next 150 years, numbers reaching a climax in the period 1830 –1860 and continuing till at

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<sup>5</sup> All quotes up to this point are from either the *Birmingham Faces and Places* article; *From Bondage to Liberty* or from the biographical sketch in *The Tragedy of the Negro*.

least the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century slaves from the Caribbean and America came to Britain in growing numbers because of emancipation in the West Indies, and the social and political situation in America, particularly the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.<sup>6</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the rapid growth of the Abolition movement in both the Americas and Britain and thus many fugitive and liberated slaves came to Britain as part of the Abolition movement, which aimed to erect "a moral cordon around America that would isolate her from the international community."<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to estimate numbers, but if we include those who came from the Caribbean, the extensive connections between Abolitionists in Scotland and the U.S.A.<sup>8</sup> plus those who came to work for missionary societies then the total number may be in excess of 100.

### Missionary

Tucked away in Stanford's life narrative was reference to the missionary work being done on the West Coast of Africa. Stanford, like many people at the time, was convinced that the African slave trade was part of God's plan for the evangelisation of Africa and believed also that missionary societies were sending the wrong people to Africa. He suggested that it was Negroes who should go there and cited as examples "Revd. Bishop Crowther

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<sup>6</sup> This act made the capture of fugitive slaves and return to their owners a legal obligation even in those States, and Canada, where slavery had been abolished. Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery*, Penguin Books 1993, p84.

<sup>7</sup> R.J.M. Blackett, *Building and Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement 1830-1860*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge and London, 1983. p6.

<sup>8</sup> See C. Duncan Rice, *The Scots Abolitionists, 1833-1861*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge.


of the Church Missionary Society, now labouring in West Africa; J. J. Fuller and C. H. Richardson of the Baptist Missionary Society,..."<sup>9</sup> At first the significance of this phrase didn't register but later it became clear that both J. J. Fuller and C. H. Richardson were not English but Caribbean!

In the Angus Library there are also records of the names of Joseph Merrick, the son of a Baptist pastor in Jamaica who, in 1841, when the Africa mission was first suggested, offered to go to the Cameroon and was stationed at Bimbia. Francis Pinnock a West Indian who volunteered to be a missionary in Africa and was stationed at Victoria. Bishop Crowther, whose name is remembered in Crowther Hall, part of the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, was also, it seems, an African. It is clear that just because

people came from Jamaica or the West Indies doesn't mean that they were Black, but in the light of Stanford's comments regarding Fuller and Richardson it seems likely that they at least were.

Then someone gave me a photocopy of the Centenary Souvenir booklet from Four Ways Baptist Church, Cradley Heath, in the West Midlands. In it was the story of Revd. George Cousens, the church's second minister: "Before the end of (1837) the church obtained the services of... Rev. George Cousens... there is reason to believe that several members left the church at this time on the grounds that they did not care for a 'black man' as minister"! The booklet goes on "The popularity of the 'black minister' is indicated in the frequent requests the church received for his services to conduct School Anniversaries." "Cousens left the church at Cradley Heath in 1839 to

<sup>9</sup> From *Bondage to Liberty*



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become pastor of Brierley Hill Church.”<sup>10</sup> Then between 1869 and 1879 Cousens is again pastor of Cradley Heath. “...his wife Betsy Cousens, who kept a private school... whose memory is still treasured by the older members (in 1933) survived him some years, and was laid to rest along side her husband in the South Street Cemetery”<sup>11</sup>

## Gaol

Whilst searching in Liverpool Maritime Archives for records of the ship that Stanford came to England on, to my amazement I discovered another African, who was a slave in America, came to Britain and eventually became a minister! John Jea's life narrative- *The Life History and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, The African Preacher complied and written by Himself*. (Circa 1810) tells the remarkable story of his birth in the South Nigerian port of Old Callibar in 1773, his capture at the age of two and a half years, his being shipped to America and sold in New York to a Dutch American Farmer. Self taught, he became a preacher ministering to the plantation slaves in New England. About 1800 he enlisted on a ship bound for Liverpool. He preached a number of times in that City and travelled widely throughout the north of England. On his return from a trip to Ireland, where he married an Irish woman, he was captured by a French privateer and spent five years in a French gaol. The end of his narrative sees him reunited with his wife and pastor of a chapel in Portsea, near Southampton.<sup>12</sup>

By now I should have known that it was possible that there were yet more undiscovered people like Stanford, Cousens and John Jea. Even so I was still

surprised when a telephone call from a T.V production company asked me if I could help them with investigations into Henry Parker (1827 –1912), a Baptist Deacon and preacher in Bristol, who escaped from slavery and arrived in Bristol before 1853!<sup>13</sup>

So what does all this add up to? Well it is clear that there is a whole area of our history that has been forgotten, some would say because of the inherent racism in our culture and society. The evidence suggests that the belief that it was solely white Europeans who were missionaries in Africa is erroneous.

That there was the equivalent of a transatlantic mission of Black people to Britain and that the contribution of African, African American and Caribbean people to the church and society during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in particular was considerable. Judging by my past experience there is almost certainly a great deal more to be discovered about this intriguing part of our cultural history. If you investigate the history of your own church you may well discover that a former minister, member or local preacher was African American, Caribbean or African. If you do please let me know!

**bmj**

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<sup>12</sup> Merseyside Maritime Museum 1996.73, DX/1646.

<sup>13</sup> RDF in Bristol who produce the series 'Bloodties'. The programmes tell of the strange and fascinating forebears some people have in their family trees. They hope to include Henry Parker's Great Great Grand-daughter in a later series

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<sup>10</sup> Idris Williams, *Centenary Souvenir: Four Ways Baptist Church Cradely Heath, 1933*. p17.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p35.

# Called to be a Preacher

**Albert Richards, National Convenor of the Baptist Forum of Preachers, answers some questions from Stuart Jenkins, the new vice-chair of the Baptist Minister's Fellowship.**

- *Albert, how did you begin preaching?*

A concise answer would be when my Minister recognised preaching and leading worship gifts in me and encouraged me to begin to develop my skills in these areas. He created opportunities for me to exercise these gifts and took me 'under his wing' for some personal tutelage.

- *Do most lay preachers have a sense of call?*

Yes, you have a sense of vocation, in the Lutheran sense, to minister the word without becoming part of the separated ministry, and see your ministry complementary to the ordained ministry. At some stage you may feel a call to full-time ministry but gradually become aware that preaching without being 'a minister' provides you with a unique opportunity for ministry and your sense of calling is reinforced.

- *What have you personally found most helpful by way of training, reading, and other resources? (And, incidentally, where were the gaps?!)*

Formal training by distance learning courses provides a framework and a basis for further study. Such training has to be supplemented by continuous reading. Books recommended to me by others have been useful, but reading book reviews in theological journals are always helpful: the Regent's Park one is excellent. What I have needed most is an opportunity to discuss my reading with others. The gaps are in the more practical issues of leading worship, voice production, etc. It may be difficult to run in-house sermon classes where the number of preachers are few, but if the minister sat in on a service where I preached or led the service such an opportunity would arise naturally.

- *What are the main frustrations for lay preachers today?*

Lack of opportunity. This does, I agree, vary over the country but two constant comments I hear are that 'the pulpit is guarded against the laity', and 'having trained there is little opportunity to serve Baptist churches'. As a result several Baptist preachers have sought opportunity elsewhere, e.g. the Methodist or the URC. Spasmodic preaching means that skills are not honed. I agree that the minister of a church has been called to preach, but developing new patterns of church life can lead to the creation of teams that provide ministry in a variety of formats.

- *What particular advantages do you think lay preachers bring to preaching?*

A life-world that is different to the pastoral situation. For a long time lay preachers have been seen as 'apprentice ministers', and they have been encouraged to follow a similar pattern of ministry. Once they are seen as complementary to the full-time ministry they ought to bring into their preaching illustrations and insights from non-pastoral situations

into their ministry. This makes the *church's* ministry richer, and more connected with everyday life. People who work in industrial mission often have comments from people on how helpful illustrations and insights from non-pastoral situations have been. But this, of course, requires theological reflection by the preacher and preachers need help and support in doing that reflection.

- *How should ministers use lay-preachers?*

There is no one answer to this question. I think the main point is that preachers need to be seen as part of the church's resource for ministry and mission, and its teaching and preaching work, and to be used as such. In addition, they can be used to highlight issues drawn from everyday life, e.g. in a dialogue with what it means to work as a Christian in industry when a firm is being taken over or merged. Whilst any Christian would have a view, the preacher should have reflected upon the situation as part of his 'sermon' preparation. This helps to 'earth' the church's ministry in today's reality.

- *How could ministers encourage people to become lay preachers?*

First, by identifying the appropriate gifts in people. Then encouraging people to develop those gifts. Finally, by creating situations where those gifts are exercised. Some ministers do this as a matter of course, and in so doing develop a team of skilled people around them. Others seem reluctant. Lay preachers rarely want to usurp the minister, but they do want to work with them in the ministry and mission of the church. As in all walks of life, a little interest reaps big rewards.

- *How can more women be encouraged to lead worship and preach?*

General Superintendents will testify to the difficulties in settling women ministers. The same problems also apply to the acceptability of women preachers. Perhaps we need to value the leading of worship and preaching by the laity more, and to let them see that this is part of the caring and nurturing ministry of the church. Too often they have been confined to the formation of Christian disciples at the children stage, without stressing that their insights have relevance to the continuing formation of Christian disciples.

- *What are the main obstacles and difficulties that people face when they start out on the road to become a preacher?*

Friends comment that their early experience is of being 'dropped in at the deep end' without help or support. Having the ability to stand up in public and speak (as in teaching) does not automatically make a person a preacher. Imparting information is not the same as application of the Word to the human condition. A major obstacle though is having the opportunity to lead worship or preach while establishing credibility. Another is knowing where resources to help improve your preaching can be found. This applies to reading material. Preachers do not want spoon-feeding, but appreciate guidance, especially when those who give it follow it up.

- *What sort of encouragement and criticism are most helpful?*

Of course, words of encouragement and criticism about the content of the sermon are always appreciated and found to be helpful. But if there is a fault there it should be picked up fairly early. The areas where encouragement and criticism are most helpful

are in the more practical ones of voice delivery, stance, and whether the service is integrated, the length of the sermon/service, sermon construction, etc. This does require the minister to hear the preacher and to provide feedback. When it was pointed out to one minister that a preacher from their church did not seem to have any construction or conclusion, and as a result rambled on far too long, the reply was 'I wouldn't know as I never hear them!' **bmj**

Ed: In the next issue, BMF members answer some equally pertinent questions from Albert

### **Making the original word audible**

'In the sermon, the foundation of a new world is laid. Here the original word becomes audible. There is no evading or getting away from the spoken word or the sermon, nothing releases us from the necessity of this witness, not even cult or liturgy. ... The preacher should be assured that Christ enters the congregation through these words which he proclaims from the Scripture.'

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

*quoted in The Monarch Book of Christian Wisdom*

# **FOR THE BRIGHTEST NEWS OF THE YEAR**

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# Truth not heard elsewhere

**Steve Holmes, Ashford (Middlesex) Baptist Church and lecturer in Christian Doctrine at King's College, London, points us in the direction of theologians intent on doing ethics differently.**

In academic life, as elsewhere, fashions come and go. Generally they pass unnoticed by the world around, having provided some useful insights, and much material for scholars to argue about. Sometimes, a new academic approach arrives which seems to make a bit more of a difference: it lasts longer, and spreads wider; no-one who is active in the field can ignore it; applications and relevance are visible outside the narrow realms of academia. The obvious, if tedious, recent example is the announcement (first heard amongst academics studying architectural styles) that we are now 'post-modern'.

There is a move in academic theology at the moment to do ethics differently; what has been called 'theological ethics'. I believe this is important, and should shape our responses to ethical questions. My purpose here is to draw it to your attention, by means of a discussion of several key authors.

Before anything else, though, it would be as well to explain what I mean by 'theological ethics'. It has sometimes been assumed that ethics within the Church is simply a matter of exegesis: within the Bible we find (amongst other things) a set of rules to be obeyed. This, however, raises problems concerning things the Bible makes no mention of - current questions about artificial insemination which face many childless couples in our churches, for example. So we have a second tradition, asserting that we may discover what is right by the light of human reason, a so-called 'natural law' position. Thus Christian ethics and secular ethics will in this case coincide. It seems, however, that we struggle to agree on what is right by the light of reason.

A third approach has thus become more popular, owing much to the ethical

content of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, which asserts that the truth about God, ourselves, and the world around us, that comes to us in the Gospel carries with it command. Christian ethics, on this account, is a matter of learning to live as those created by the Triune God, as those redeemed by this same God's action in the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of God the Son, and as those awaiting this God's decisive act of consummation in the second coming of Jesus. An ethic, that is to say, that begins in theology; a theological ethics.

## Asking the Questions

We begin with Alisdair MacIntyre, who in 1981 announced that we lived *After Virtue*.<sup>1</sup> He told the story of Captain Cook's visit to Polynesia, and their attempts to make sense of the moral code of the islands' inhabitants. Men and women could not eat together, because that was taboo - but sexual relationships were unregulated and unashamedly promiscuous. Their questioning as to why some things were illicit and others licit could produce no further response than 'it is taboo'. Modern anthropologists have

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<sup>1</sup> *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 19852).

suggested that where there was once a coherent cultural tradition that made sense of the taboo rules, this had been forgotten, and only arbitrary ethics remained. As a result, on being forced to ask why some things were forbidden, and finding no answer, the Polynesians gave up their remnants of a culture within a generation of first meeting outsiders.

MacIntyre believes a similar thing has happened to the culture of the West. In the Middle Ages, there was a shared understanding of what was good, and so a shared moral position. Moral debate could and did take place, but with an agreed and understood basis as to what was good and how things could be known to be good. This has been lost, not least due to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. All that remains are fragmentary positions, snatches of conversation, which we repeat to each other without understanding. This, says MacIntyre, is modern moral discourse.

If you don't recognise this description, cast your mind back to recent controversies over genetically modified crops. On the one hand are those who announce that such things are 'unnatural', and so dangerous, and should not be thought of - the 'Frankenstein foods' tag captures the fears very well, as with the best intentions we may create a monster we cannot control. On the other side are those who speak with confidence of 'improving nature', and of the clear good that will result - less chemicals, better yields in countries now affected by famine, and so on.

### **Incomprehension**

Strikingly, there was almost no intellectual engagement at all. Serious and intelligent commentators on either side met the claims of the other with blank

incomprehension, being unable to imagine how anyone could think like that. There was no shared ethical tradition, and so no possibility of debate. Monsanto did not understand this, and tried - hard, all credit to them - to create informed discussion. The ironic postscript came a few months ago, with the news that even Monsanto's staff had voted for a GM-free canteen.

I am not arguing one way or the other in this debate, but merely illustrating the lack of shared moral ground on which to base a discussion. As a result (as Monsanto found to their shareholders' cost) what carries the day in modern ethical debate is emotive appeal, catchy sloganeering, loud shouting, and good PR, not intellectual argument. MacIntyre's diagnosis, it seems to me, is perceptive.

So, what do we have? In MacIntyre's view, we have a variety of traditions of discourse, each coherent within itself, but lacking any ground to speak to any other. I can think as a liberal, or as a feminist, or as a Christian - or, most likely, as a confused muddle of all of these things. In each case there is a broadly coherent discussion going on, but there is no way of evaluating the rights and wrongs of conflicts between the discussions. I might have learnt from feminism to regard control over her own reproductive processes as a basic right of every woman, and so to support state-funded abortion on demand; from my church I might have learnt that killing - even the unborn - is just plain wrong. What neither can give me is a way of evaluating the relative claims of the two positions, and so a coherent reason to prefer one view of abortion to the other. MacIntyre offers an interesting analysis of those things that people who talk endlessly about postmodernism merely assert: moral

relativism is now the norm in our society.

## Living the Kingdom

As Christian ministers, what do we do in the face of this? One answer, attractive to those in our own, Baptist, tradition, has been offered over many years by the American writer Stanley Hauerwas, now of Duke University. If you have never read Hauerwas, you have a great pleasure awaiting you. His preferred mode of writing is the (short) essay, and most of his (many) books are collections of essays (and, usually, one or two sermons). They are always thought-provoking, often laugh-out-loud funny, and discuss the most bizarre subjects. Here, he compares Karl Barth and Anthony Trollope ('My aim is to show that Karl Barth's main problem is that he did not read enough Trollope ... Barth was formed personally and intellectually by confronting Hitler. Trollope faced the English postal service.'<sup>2</sup>); there is a sermon on Lk.14:26 entitled 'Hating mothers as the way to peace'.<sup>3</sup> Over there an essay explaining 'Why Gays (as a Group) are Morally Superior to Christians (as a Group).' (Because, argues Hauerwas, they have community practices which are regarded as incompatible with participation in the idolatrous practices of the military state. If Christians were true to their community practices, the same result would arise - 'consider the problem of taking showers with such people. They are, after all, constantly ... witnessing in the hope of making converts ... Would you want to shower with them? You never know when they might try to baptize

you.'<sup>4</sup>)

Hauerwas offers an ethical position which owes much intellectually to Karl Barth, but which is broadly Anabaptist in its development. MacIntyre's account can be accepted and celebrated. Christian ethics is different from, and unintelligible to, those outside the Church, but that should not worry us. The Church is called to be a community of virtue in the world, letting the light shine. The only thing, it seems, the Church has to say to the world is 'repent and believe'. All other ethics is internal. What Hauerwas has learned from Barth is that we understand the created order only through the Gospel, as it is known and lived in the life of the Church.<sup>5</sup> Thus, he shares the characteristic Anabaptist distrust of all that is secular: state, government, law enforcement, the military - a Christian ethics will just be suspicious of such things.

So, for Hauerwas we live in the Kingdom and we live out the Kingdom. Christian ethics is about practices internal to the Church. As such it can be resolutely and unapologetically theological: speaking only to those who have believed the gospel, it can be based in the gospel without any difficulty. There is a problem here, however.

## Believing in the World

We might take the recent BUGB study materials on *Making Moral Choices in Our Relationships*<sup>6</sup> as an example of an ethical

<sup>2</sup> See 'On Honor: By Way of a Comparison of Karl Barth and Trollope' in *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (London: Duke UP, 1994) pp.58-79; the quotation is from p.79.

<sup>3</sup> I think this is in a book called *Rescuing the Bible From Captivity to America*, but I do not have a copy to hand, and so cannot check.

<sup>4</sup> The essay is in *Dispatches*, pp.153-155; the quotation is from p.155.

<sup>5</sup> '...as Christians we know nothing about what we mean by creation separate from the new order we find through the concrete practices of baptism and Eucharist, correlative as they are to Christ's resurrection.' *Dispatches*, p.175.

<sup>6</sup> BUGB, 2000.

proposal that has learnt from Hauerwas, and is sympathetic. The first study, on 'Making Moral Choices', presents an account of how to do ethics which is based on 'our Baptist concern for right living before God; Kingdom of God living!' (6). As a result, the book is all about how we in the Church make moral choices. When it was launched at the recent Baptist Assembly in Plymouth, many of the questions from the floor asked about public policy, and how we might seek to influence that. This is not a fair criticism of the study material, of course; it is rather pointless to criticise any book for not doing what it was never intended to do, and that this material does not help us with politics is no more interesting than the fact that it does not help us with gardening.<sup>7</sup> It might, however, be a fair criticism of the approach: if Christian ethics tells us *only* about 'Kingdom of God living' then the Church has nothing to say to those outside the Kingdom. Hauerwas knows this, and accepts it rather cheerfully; others are less comfortable with the approach.<sup>8</sup>

Two significant British writers have given attention to developing an ethical position that is both theological, based totally in the Gospel narrative, and yet still seeks to be public truth, to speak meaningfully about what is right and wrong to those who do not yet acknowledge Jesus as Lord. Both Anglicans, they are Oliver O'Donovan,

Regius Professor in Oxford, and Michael Banner, F. D. Maurice Professor in my own institution, King's College, London.<sup>9</sup>

## Evangelical

O'Donovan's most recent work has been in the area of political theology, and his *The Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge, 1996) has been hailed as a very important statement. It will challenge those of us from Free Church backgrounds with its robust and powerful defence of the idea of 'Christendom', represented as the triumph of the Gospel, the moment when 'the kings of the earth came to bow before the Lord of the martyrs'.<sup>10</sup> This is important, because it shows just how seriously O'Donovan takes the need for the Gospel to address the public and political realm. For our purposes, however, his earlier work, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Apollos, 1994) is more interesting. That this work originally came out as an IVP imprint and carried the word 'evangelical' in the title no doubt attracted some and put others off; but O'Donovan does not mean 'evangelical' in that sense. 'Christian ethics,' he asserts in his first sentence, 'must arise from the gospel of Jesus Christ' (11) - as gospel-based ethics it is 'evangelical'.

O'Donovan's understanding of the gospel, however, leads him to different conclusions from those which Hauerwas reached. In the resurrection of Christ, the created order is redeemed, and there is a promise of its (and our!) final restoration.

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<sup>7</sup> No doubt there will be a review in these pages before long, but for the record it seems a very worthwhile publication to me.

<sup>8</sup> A forthcoming book by John Colwell, presently Dean of Spurgeon's College, addresses this criticism to Hauerwas' work and offers a reconstruction that contains resources for speaking beyond the boundaries of the Church.

<sup>9</sup> Michael is not just currently one of my senior colleagues, but has been a friend and help ever since my undergraduate days in Cambridge when he was Dean of my college, Peterhouse.

<sup>9</sup> Michael is not just currently one of my senior colleagues, but has been a friend and help ever since my undergraduate days in Cambridge when he was Dean of my college, Peterhouse.

<sup>10</sup> I believe this is a quotation from either the book or a review of it, but I am unable to trace it at present. It is a very fine phrase and my apologies are due to whoever it is I am not giving proper credit to.



# THE BAPTIST INSURANCE COMPANY PLC.

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To the readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal

As a result of three large Arson fires in Baptist churches in recent weeks I feel it timely to draw your attention to the fact that arson and suspected arson constitutes the largest single cause of damage to churches caused by Fire. Although the number is relatively small the cost and upheaval caused to the church community is immense. By increasing your awareness of what can be done to protect your own church I hope this will enable you to take positive steps on the following points to prevent these senseless acts arising.

**RESPONSIBILITY - In every church a particular individual must take responsibility for security -perhaps yourself.**

The person responsible needs to identify ways in which intruders, thieves or vandals could start fires, what the effect would be and how to prevent them.

**SECURITY - The best defence against arson- as well as theft- is to improve security.**

Use properly installed deadlocks and bolts of good quality on all exterior doors and windows.

Securely lock all doors and windows when buildings are unattended

Illuminate the exterior and entrances of buildings.

When church buildings are open someone should always be on the premises.

Securely lock outbuildings - they may contain tools or flammable liquids to assist the arsonist.

**GOOD HOUSEKEEPING - Vandals or thieves (to cover their tracks) will use any "fuel" to hand to light their fires**

Try to ensure that there is no combustible material lying around – don't let rubbish accumulate

Wheelie-bins keep in their locked compartment or well away from the church

Matches, candles, paraffin, petrol and liquid gas should be securely locked away.

**AWARENESS AND COOPERATION -Keep church leaders informed of problems and aware of individuals who may be disgruntled or likely to vandalise or damage church property by arson**

Be aware that vandalism often precedes arson

Encourage neighbours to take note of strangers and keep you informed.

These steps are not intended to be exhaustive and if you feel further advice would be useful we do offer the help of our surveyors without charge. If you feel that this would be of benefit please do contact Baptist Insurance.

A.J.GREEN ACIJ ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

That is to say, in the gospel we do not just understand the Church, but we understand the world as well. Our gospel-based ethics must be claimed as normative for society, on the basis that only in Christ can what it is to be human be truly known, and so only in Christ can human goods be discerned. Unlike Israel's Law, the Church's gospel does demand the obedience of all people, and define what is good for all nations.

Which, once again, raises a problem. This sounds fine in principle, and in the Christendom that O'Donovan teaches us to respect it may have been practical, but how do we enter into the public arena today with a self-consciously theological ethics? I turn to my last author, Michael Banner, and his *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (Cambridge, 1999). Banner can help us here because, as chair of a government Committee of Enquiry and member of a Royal Commission, he works very much in the public arena!

### **Nonconformist Conscience**

This book is a collection of essays, beginning with a programmatic statement, 'Turning the world upside down - and some other tasks for dogmatic Christian ethics'. This sets the tone for what follows: Banner is entertainingly dismissive of every alternative approach that comes across his path, as he pursues an account of the way we should live that depends only on the gospel. Again and again, however, Banner insists that it is the *world* that is to be turned upside down. So whether the reference is to euthanasia, abortion, the care of the elderly, biotechnology, environmental questions, family policy or sexual ethics (all of which are addressed), it is public policy and public morality which is being called to obedience to the

gospel. The answers are distinctively Christian (often far more so than those ethical apologists who too often represent 'Christian' thought in public debate: for Banner both 'pro-life' and 'pro-choice' positions are pagan; a church that has heard the gospel aright would not argue that the practice of abortion is right or wrong; it would find the practice incomprehensible. To accept that there is an argument to be had is to deny the gospel of Christ!), but they are addressed to the public realm.

O'Donovan knows, and Banner exemplifies, the truth that Hauerwas and other more Anabaptist approaches sometimes seem to forget: Creation, too, was a gracious act of God in Christ; in Christ God has redeemed the world, not just the Church; and so Christian theology may speak with authority of what is best for all people, not just of what is best for Christians. Once we knew this, and much good was done to our land by the 'Nonconformist conscience'. Today, we have lost that confidence. This is sometimes celebrated as an end to 'imperialistic attitudes' on the part of the Church; what is missed here is the simple assertion that in the gospel the Church must claim to have heard truth that has not been heard elsewhere.

If this truth were only about praying and Sundays, then the Church would be right to be silent when issues of public morality are addressed. If the gospel transforms every area of life, then out of love the Church must say so, and work for such transformation, within and without its own boundaries. **bmj**

# On a Journey of the Spirit

**Robert Ellis, minister of Tyndale Baptist Church Bristol, wonders whether the 'old Celtic way' of seeing the world and one another is once again set to come into its own.**

Nowadays a fascination with things Celtic is in fashion. My own interest in the area of Celtic spirituality has been linked with my discovery of the Iona Community and its worship resources. But some favourite traditional hymns also show us that 'Celtic Spirituality' is not an entirely new phenomenon, and in this article I'm going to examine two such hymns in the hope of demonstrating the promise of the Celtic tradition for our day.

Compared to some of the other major traditions of Christian spirituality, the Celtic is more amorphous, less dominated by a few individuals and places. Celtic ways persisted at the boundaries of empire and church (the contrast between Celtic and Roman Christianity is often discussed), and the tradition offers resources for making a case against centralised power. Hence a resonance today for whole peoples looking to recover a sense of identity and rediscover their spiritual roots.

What the tradition lacks in one clear role model it makes up for in breadth and diversity, united in a style of living and believing. They evoke a time when people lived deeply aware of their connectedness to one another, to the natural world and its rhythms, and to God. In an age when the quest for a 'new spirituality' seems urgent for many outside the church, when issues of ecology are to the fore, and when many are discovering that a sense of our individuality is linked to our interdependence, such a spirituality has much to commend it. In an age intrigued by the 'new age', maybe this 'old age' way of seeing the world and one another is set to come into its own.

## **Familiar themes – Celtic 'spin'**

The themes of Celtic Spirituality are the familiar themes of Christian devotion and

lifestyle - but with a particular 'spin'. The Trinity is given a prominent place. The incarnation is central, in a very 'physical' way, real and earthed - like so much of this tradition. There is a strong, almost tangible sense of divine presence in all things - including and especially in the routine and ordinary. While nature is enjoyed and even celebrated as a vehicle of that divine presence, there is also room for realistic acknowledgement of the brokenness of things, of sin and suffering: just as nature is a vehicle for the divine, so it is also a canvas of pain. And through it all an awareness of the human journey, with its times and seasons, as a journey to and for and with God.

Dag Hammarskjöld famously remarked that "the longest journey is the journey inward." The Celtic understanding of that 'longest journey' is laid bare by the term *peregrinatio*. Esther de Waal tells the story of three 9th century Irishmen coming ashore in coracles on the Cornish coast, who explain themselves to King Alfred saying that they have "stole away because we wanted for love of God to be on pilgrimage, we cared not where." This Celtic pilgrimage is not to any shrine or holy place which can be marked on a map. It is the journey inward, and the outer journey of the body acts as a sort of catalyst for the inner journey of the soul -

one is the vehicle for the other. Pilgrims see themselves as “guests of the world”:

“What they are seeking is the place of their resurrection, the resurrected self, the true self in Christ, which is for all of us our true home.”

But one need not leave home, or cross the Irish Sea in a coracle, to undertake such a journey. The journey of each ordinary day is journey enough to go in search of ourselves and our God.

### **Lord of all Hopefulness – the journey of each day**

‘Jan Struther’ is the pen-name of the writer of “Lord of all Hopefulness”. Set to the traditional Irish tune *Slane* it already has a Celtic ‘feel’. The hymn traces our journey through a day - “waking - labours - homing - sleeping” - in each case invoking God’s presence. While the hymn refers literally to any day of 24 hours, it can also refer more symbolically to the ‘day’ of our lives (hence its inclusion in the ‘Funerals’ section of *Baptist Praise & Worship!*).

The word ‘homing’ perhaps sounds especially Celtic, but the hymn as a whole captures several themes. God is addressed as the Lord of all joy, faith, grace and calm; there is reference to the real ‘physicalness’ of Jesus’ earthly life (“whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe”), the familiar Celtic notion of God’s “embrace” is present in the third verse as is the notion of hospitality: “your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace”. The presence of God brings with it something different at each stage of the day: “your bliss in our hearts at the break of the day”, “your strength in our hearts at the noon of the day”, “your love in our hearts at the eve of the day”, “your peace in our hearts at the end of the day.”

In the constant striving for ‘real religious experience’ the simplicity of the Celtic way, seeking God through the normal day in the normal things, has much to commend it, and this hymn is a fine text to put this yearning into prayer.

The Celtic tradition was deeply aware of the rhythm of seasons, day and night, tide and ebb, dawn and dusk, year on year. Often the daily tasks were made into moments of prayer, of seeking or recognising God. The countless prayers over making beds, and other household tasks, testify to this. I am deeply suspicious of those who try to construct specially ‘religious’ moments and experiences in order to deepen their awareness of God. I fancy that Celtic bed-making might have more to offer our contemporaries! As Jan Struther also shows, the ordinariness of our lives can connect with Jesus’ own experience and the Celtic way can lead us to a deeper connection with Jesus’ life also, referring us back to reflect on our lives by first reflecting on his.

“Lord of all hopefulness” has a sense of ‘journey’ about it, a journey through a day. Celtic prayers and blessings are full of this journeying, this peregrinatio, and so always hopeful that God indeed will be found on the journey from waking to labours, and from homing to sleeping: hopeful that such a journey will lead us to our resurrected selves as well as our beds and the end of another day.

### **This world and another**

The strong appreciation of the reality of the incarnation in Celtic spirituality leads to a positive view of the natural world. Nature is creation, and so the vehicle for the creator. But paradoxically, the near realness of the physical world also made these Celts more acutely aware of a world

beyond. It is said that on the island of Iona the 'veil between heaven and earth' is especially thin. This sense of the divine, the other, the transcendent, in the created, the familiar, the immanent, is a great strength in Celtic spirituality - the two are not opposed but somehow held together: one leading to the other and back again. Here we can stand with those who will enjoy the touch and feel and texture of the earth, yet also claim that very texture leads to awareness of another touch.

For the ancient Celts this sense of the closeness of another world expressed itself in terms of God, the angels and the saints. These characters were natural companions on the present human journey. The Celts, however, also had a strong belief in the indwelling Holy Spirit, and the companionship of Christ himself. There is, through the doctrine of the trinity, a belief that not only does God live in us, but that we live in him – our lives are lived within the fellowship of this divine threeness. In an age rediscovering the sense of community and interdependence, the particular stress on trinity found here may be welcome.

### **St Patrick's Breastplate – 'dressing with the Trinity'**

Another long time favourite hymn of mine is now rarely sung because of its complex metre, but Cecil Frances Alexander's setting of "St Patrick's Breastplate" (in the 1962 *Baptist Hymn Book*) has many of the Celtic themes. Just as we might see the Celt praying a 'dressing prayer' in which each item of clothing acts as a spring to prayer and meditation, so this hymn is really a dressing prayer. But whatever is being 'physically' put on by the singer, it is the Trinity which is actually to be worn. The Trinity which will protect and hold and shelter through everything which the

coming day / journey / battle will bring.

The second verse 'binds on' the incarnation - not left abstract but filled out by reference to the baptism in the Jordan river, the cross, and (gloriously) "his bursting from the spiced tomb / his riding up the heavenly way." The third verse 'binds on' the guiding power of God, expressed with unashamed anthropomorphism: "his eye to watch, ... his ear to hearken to my need ... his hand to guide, his shield to ward."

It's in the fourth verse, as the metre changes, and the 'dressing' image is replaced by another one, that we reach a climax. Here we see the invocation of Christ to live within us and through us. The singer implores Christ: with, within; behind, before, beside; to win, to comfort and restore; beneath, above; in quiet, in danger, in heart of all that love me, in mouth of friend and stranger. In fact then, not just a prayer that Christ will indwell us, but also be seen and known as indwelling all we meet. Christ everywhere, in everything, everyone.

The final verse returns to the beginning - "I bind unto myself today the strong name of the Trinity" - affirms the Creator, and ends with an affirmation that "salvation is of Christ the Lord". This 'running back on itself' is another Celtic theme in itself. Like the intricate patterns of weaving, or the engraved patterns on stone crosses, the Trinity has not beginning or end - like the connectedness of all things.

### **The Celtic Cross**

All the talk about nature and connectedness could make Celtic spirituality sentimental and escapist. I suspect that may be its appeal to some who have responded to it. But there is

also recognition of the harshness of the world, of its fallenness. Many of the high crosses depict the scene of the garden of Eden, recognising the fall, and the need for redemption. The very prominence of these crosses on the landscape may suggest a constant desire to remember sin and its cost. But the cross was a sign of triumph rather than a reminder of tragedy. Its decoration was a reminder of this, but its possible that its peculiar design also expressed it.

No one knows for sure why Celtic crosses have the distinctive circle around the angle where horizontal and vertical planes meet. Some possibilities are prosaic in the extreme - like the suggestion that it may have been a form of structural support on an earlier wooden shape. But other suggestions nudge us towards a much more glorious interpretation: it may have been a victory wreath, like those the Romans hung on their standards after battle; is it the sun rising behind the cross, indicating a new day of resurrection; or painted, as they certainly were, there may have been a rainbow on the arcs, recalling the covenant with Noah, never to destroy but always to protect; or maybe the circle is Christ's halo, the circle of the risen and glorified Christ.

The crosses were carved and painted, often (like St Martin's Cross on Iona) celebrating creation on one side, with local variations and emphases, and incarnation and redemption on the other. They mixed narrative with symbol. These crosses would have been set up all over the place, and amongst the human communities of the Celtic lands, as prominent as church spires, as ordinary as market squares.

There is so much in this tradition which resonates with our contemporary scene,

though we need to be careful neither to sentimentalise those who lived out this faith in hard and gruelling times, nor their sense of unity with the natural world. We do not live in their age, we cannot believe or live in quite the way they did. But we have much to learn from them.

- We can learn the awareness of the constant presence of God in all things by meditation on those ordinary things and a prayerful attitude to them
- We can learn an imaginative appreciation of God in us and us in God
- We can celebrate the connectedness of things and so also learn that we are what we are because of the way we have been connected to others
- We can reflect on the ecological imperatives of our faith and spirituality, and of how our attitudes to those and that outside us shape us and them
- We can 'decorate our own crosses' with the stories of our own salvation
- We can affirm ourselves as "sacred space" but also use the sacred Celtic locations as outer helps for our own inner journey ... travelling to the edge of our own experience "for the love of God" on an inner journey towards our own true, resurrected selves. **bmj**

### Further Reading

- Esther de Waal, *The Celtic Way of Prayer* (1996).
- Ray Simpson, *Exploring Celtic Spirituality* (1995).
- Ray Simpson, *Celtic Worship through the Year* (1997).

# J-Mail

## USA Pilgrimage to British Baptist sites

from Richard H Clossman, Prof of History Emeritus, Judson College, Elgin, IL, USA. e-mail: [closspin@ibm.net](mailto:closspin@ibm.net)

Dear Journal, Some of us are planning to organize a tour of several of the more important sites in Britain which relate to Baptist origins and history. The tour is planned for the summer of 2001. Are there readers of the *Journal* who would be able and willing to help us plan such a tour?

I think we can find a travel agency in the United States to put together the nuts and bolts, but we would probably do much better if we had some expert advice on what sites to include. My reading in the Baptist story in Britain is far more limited than I wish to admit. I could include my ideas; but I feel it is far better to go to the 'experts'.

By the way, I have enjoyed the *Journal* for about 30 years or so! **bmj**

## Angel of Light?

from Harry Young, 12 Francis Drive, Westward Ho, North Devon, EX3 1XE

Dear Journal, In the quiet cloister of retirement, I am distressed that yet another evangelical church has suffered the pain and disappointment of a split which has taken away half of the congregation. The Pastor, under the influence of an American experience, has formed a new church, now meeting in a school hall. Its charismatic character with all the so-called manifestations, is attracting others. Its growth, success and instant prosperity would seem to confirm its emergence as a new dynamic force on the evangelical scene.

The pressure of my anxiety in this and other similar situations has led me to ask this searching question: 'Is Satan disguising himself as an angel of light and are his servants, perhaps unwittingly, disguising themselves as servants of righteousness?' (II Cor 11: 12-15) Are good people being deluded and led astray from a pure and sincere devotion to Christ?

The efforts being made to reach the unchurched with the gospel are to be much admired. It is good to be contemporary and to create a non-threatening environment where people who know few, if any, hymns and are unfamiliar with the Bible and Prayer Book, yet are truly seeking for truth. 'By all means save some,' wrote Paul.

An element of entertainment in music, instrumental and vocal, drama and dance, may be acceptable if it is preparation for a clear, passionate presentation of Gospel calling for repentance and faith. When individuals come to know the Lord, then consistent and patient instruction in the Christian faith and life-style must be provided. New believers are then introduced to Christian worship in which, I suggest, entertainment has no place.

Worship is our enjoyment of God, our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, He who died for us, and the Holy Spirit whose gracious work is not to produce hysteria and undignified behaviour which mystifies many and alienates others. Rather, it is to transform us so that individually and also collectively as the Body of Christ, we show forth the virtues of him who has called us out of darkness into light. **bmj**

# In House

Dear Brothers and Sisters.

As many of you will realize, the Secretary's report appears in the Journal 'after the event' of its delivery at the AGM. So I'll take the opportunity to make a couple of additions and alterations.

This is the first such report I've written, and so it is appropriate that I begin by thanking Jonathan Edwards, from whom I inherited this position. I'm sure you would wish me to express the thanks of the whole fellowship for the able way he has enabled and supported the work we seek to do.

Can I also thank Michael Bochenski, our Chair for the past few years. Michael has an astonishing grasp of the range of issues which our Union is considering at present, and his leadership has been of immense value, making it possible for us to speak with insight and clarity to the whole spectrum of ministry-related questions. It's a joy to record here that the AGM elected Stuart Jenkins as Vice-Chair (to serve as Chair from 2001 - 2004.) Stuart has served on the BMF committee and on the Journal Editorial Board for many years, and will, I'm confident, bring a whole new perspective to the direction of BMF in the years ahead.

While I'm doing the 'thank you' part of this report, I should also acknowledge the immensely valuable contribution made by David Piggott, our UK Membership Secretary. David has decided to step down after 22 years of valued service, and I know that many of you have firsthand experience of his pastoral sensitivity, his practical concern, and his almost encyclopaedic knowledge of women and men in our ministry. We'll miss his insights and his compassion greatly - David; our thanks for your love in Christ.

David is succeeded as UK Membership Secretary by Andrew Henton Pusey, the minister of Sketty Baptist Church, Swansea. We welcomed him into office at the AGM, and assure him of our support in what is an extremely important role in the life of the Fellowship.

We were saddened to have the news over the past few months of the deaths of three of our ministers who have played important roles not only in the life of the Baptist denomination in the UK, but also within the world stage. Dr Morris West had served the Fellowship for a number of years as Chairman of the Editorial Board, and for three years as Chairman of the Fellowship. Dr West was renowned as a scholar and historian, as well as President of Bristol Baptist College. His mordant humour enlivened many an otherwise dour committee meeting. Dr George Beasley Murray was another outstanding Biblical Scholar and former Principal of Spurgeon's College, whose learning benefited many beyond the Baptist fold. Reg Harvey had recently retired as general Director of the Baptist Missionary Society, and at the time of his death was active within the life of the European Baptist Fellowship. To the families of these three denominational leaders we extend our sincere sympathy.

Since the AGM, we've received the sad news of the sudden death of Don Page, who has represented the East Midlands, and been Minutes Secretary for the BMF Committee. Don's sense of humour, his pastoral concern, his real concern for

*Baptist Ministers' Journal July 2000*



ministry and his breadth of experience will be greatly missed. We would want to assure Don's wife Hazel and their three daughters of our love and prayers in their bereavement.

During the course of the year BMF has been involved in discussions covering a wide range of current issues - the new arrangements for caring for Probationer Ministers; the new form of the 'Accredited List'; possible forms of appraisal for ministers; the effects of stress on Ministry Marriages; and the progress of 'Relating and Resourcing.' We've continued to keep a careful eye on pension issues, stipends and retirement housing; Gethin Abraham-Williams and the editorial board have produced many splendid issues of the Journal, and have recently revised its presentation. The pre-retirement courses we arrange have gone from strength to strength, and continue to develop.

In addition to all this, we have recently entered into an informal alliance with the Baptist Forum of Preachers, in order that we may speak more effectively and with a single voice on many ministry related

issues which affect those in paid and unpaid positions alike. We've been glad to welcome Albert Richards from the BFP to our committee meetings, and to invite the BFP to the Ministers' Session. Next year, we plan for the BFP and BMF to meet together, with Myra Blyth addressing us all on 'Ministry in the World Church'

The BMF has also established a presence on the Internet - [www.bmf.ukweb.nu](http://www.bmf.ukweb.nu) for those who would like to have a look - where resources can be shared and communications facilitated. Recent issues of the Journal can also be found there.

Overall, in a time of significant change for the Union as a whole, and for ministry in particular, BMF has been active in representing the views of women and men in ministry as widely as possible - and we hope to continue to support the ministry of those working in the name of Christ throughout the coming year.

With much love in Christ,

**Bob Almond**

## **Rebel Leaders of the Caribbean**

Ed: In 'Jesus is Dread' (DLT 1998) Robert Beckford, a Black Pentecostal and a tutor in Black theology at Queen's College, Birmingham, argues that Black Christians 'must reappraise Black experience and history as relevant sources for a new Black theology in Britain.

'Rather than looking to Luther, Calvin, Wesley or Tomlinson (founder of the New Testament Church of God), we must re-engage with our history, re-investigating the ministry and philosophy of the rebel leaders of the Caribbean in the last century - for example, Nanny of the Maroons, Paul Bogel and William George Gordon of the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865), the rebellion of Samuel Sharp (Jamaica, 1832) and the politics and spirituality of the nineteenth-century Jamaican Baptist mystic, Anthony Bedward.' ...

'Sharpe, a 'freed' Baptist minister, used his status and relative freedom as a slave preacher to nurture a subversive piety among his congregations. ... This presents an important paradigm for the Black Church at prayer - of the prayer meeting as a sacred space for mobilisation against the forces of injustice.'

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# Book Reviews

*Edited by John Houseago*

**Faith on the Frontier: a life of J.H. Oldham by Keith Clements T & T Clark, Sept. 1999, xvii + 515 pp, £24.95, ISBN: 0 567 086909**

This is an outstanding biography by Keith Clements, General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, formerly a tutor at Bristol Baptist College and Secretary for International Affairs, Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland. It surveys the enormous range of missionary, social, political, intellectual, theological and ecumenical issues with which J.H. Oldham was conspicuously involved.

His spiritual growth from being one of D. L. Moody's student converts in Oxford in 1892 to becoming a major international Christian leader, an ecumenical pioneer, a voluminous writer, and a Christian statesman respected worldwide until his death in 1969, is a remarkable story which deserves to be more widely known. Keith Clements unfolds it both chronologically and thematically, offering his readers not only an inspiring biography, but also a well-informed view of a period of Christian history full of crucial challenges to the Church.

The secret of Oldham's prophetic leadership is in the title of the book - Faith on the Frontier. That's where he always felt constrained to be. God was to be trusted, served and discovered amid the testing realities of the world's life, not in an introverted churchy context. The author shows that Oldham constantly discerned the important frontiers where Christians needed to be involved. Even more remarkable, he was determined to discover new frontiers likely to emerge in coming years. Only thus could the Church  
*Baptist Ministers' Journal July 2000*

be prepared to play its part in God's unfolding purposes, not for the Church's sake but for the world's.

Those who are willing to accept the challenge of reading a substantial book, instead of skimming through a pile of shallow paperbacks will find much to stir the mind, search the conscience, inspire the soul, and prompt a new understanding of what Christian ministry and mission on the frontiers of life really involve.

**Bernard Green**

***The Pastoral Epistles (International Critical Commentary) L Howard Marshall. T. & T. Clark, £44.95 1999; 869 pp; ISBN 0-567-08661-5***

This is a very welcome addition to the new series of the ICC. It is, of course, a full-length detailed, academic commentary on the Greek, with the aim of producing an informed exegesis. It will be a standard work and more popular commentaries will draw freely from its conclusions.

Dr Marshall has tackled an unenviable task with his usual erudition and honesty. It is far from easy to condense and evaluate so much that has been written on these letters and related subjects. He worked in collaboration with Philip H. Towner.

There are also the controversial questions to face. The decision on authorship is bound to affect the exegesis and vice versa. Facing up to the evidence, Dr Marshall argues that it is against authorship by Paul himself, but it is also against the general view that the letters are late pseudonymous writings. He places them shortly after the death of Paul. They

are based on authentic Pauline materials and were produced in a group that included Timothy and Titus themselves. Marshall stresses that there was no intention to deceive and in preference to "pseudonymity" (use of a false name) coins the word "allonymity" (use of another's name).

While he often makes distinctions between the language and thought of Paul and those of the unknown author, he nonetheless argues against the views that the author neglects central Pauline doctrines and that in the church situation there is "early Catholicism". The author is a theologian in his own right and there is natural development from Paul's thought.

In the exegesis full account is taken of the circumstances faced by the author, which have to be considered before the teaching can be applied today. The careful and positive treatment of the text will enable many to take these letters more seriously as the Word of God.

**Edward Burrows**

***Grappling with God* – Nick Fawcett. (4 volumes) Kevin Mayhew, £7.99 each. 96 pages each volume.**

*Why read the Old Testament?* Thus begins the introduction to each volume of studies by fellow Baptist minister, Nick Fawcett. He is convinced of the importance of the Old Testament – giving Harry Mowley credit for this – *whose infectious love of the Old Testament brought its pages to life* (dedication to vol. 3).

In these four well prepared, well presented books, Nick has done us a favour by putting together 80 studies from the Old Testament – each one written from the perspective of the central character in the story [e.g. God in the

Creation account].

The author's purpose, we are told, is to draw people into the Old Testament Stories –through meditations. With a definite echo of Eddie Askew's style, the reader is given a way into many of the great passages of the Old Testament.

So what does Nick offer us?

Well, in each study, there is an introduction, followed by the passage in question (NRSV). Next comes the meditation, then a selection of proverbs, sayings. After this, we are given a few discussion starters, additional scripture passages, finishing with a prayer.

How might we use these books?

The sub-title gives a clue: *Explorations of the Old Testament for personal and small group use*. These books could provide a busy minister with plenty of material for house-groups, though you may feel that further research would be needed for a satisfactory study.

On the other hand, any minister who chose to use these ready-made meditations for her personal devotions, would certainly be stimulated by Nick's particular insights – even when disagreeing with them. [I do disagree with his view of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac. Nick suggests Abraham wouldn't have killed his son. (Book 1 Study 6).]

Highlights? Hard to choose – but one I like is Nick's view of Bethlehem according to Micah (Book 4 Study 6 – From Small Beginnings).

They could help you to get to grips with God, in which case they'll be worth the price and shelf-space.

**Peter Slee**

**Swift to Hear – Facilitating Skills in Listening and Responding, by Michael Jacobs, SPCK, 2000, £10.99.**

This new edition of his earlier book is a response by the author to important changes in society, which are reflected in the examples included in the book. Examples and role-play have been extended to include issues such as culture and disability, which are so significant in our plural society.

The author maintains that the speed and sophistication of modern electronic communication has not made us better at talking to one another. The purpose of the book is to return to some basic rule of communication through better listening and responding. The book is aimed primarily at those who are involved in caring work and claims to be suitable for preparing people for pastoral visiting, advice work, training line managers and teaching. It is set out as a text for training courses and includes clearly presented guidelines for effective communication, and practical exercises for group work.

Chapters One to Three introduce and enlarge on the basic guidelines for Listening and Responding with accompanying practical group work.

Chapter Four puts the guidelines together with more exercises. Chapter Five covers Advanced Facilitating Skills for dealing with difficult situations. This is rounded up by guidance in the final chapter on how to recognise which situations may take the listener out of their depth, again with practical exercises to help, and suggested resources for referral. An appendix gives two outlines for training courses, drawing on material from the book and suggested resources from elsewhere. One focuses on counselling skills, the other on skills for home or pastoral visitors.

The book is clearly presented and very readable, despite being intended as a textbook. I believe it could be used by churches to provide training for those engaged in home and hospital visiting, including ministers, and could effectively be used by local Churches Together groups in particular.

**Kath Lawson.**

**The Great Commission  
according to the ONE Version of the New Testament**

'The remaining eleven of the group with special duties went to a mountain in Galilee where Jesus asked them to meet him. When they saw him they greeted him warmly, but some still had doubts. Jesus came close to them and said, "I'm the one everyone everywhere must look up to from now on. So go and make friends for me all over the world. When you dip people, make sure they know about the Loving God, God's True Likeness and God's Spirit. Pass on to them, in full, my way of life. Look out for me, because I'll always be with you, to the end of time."

- Matthew

*copies from John Henson, 2 Sycamore Street, Taffs Well, CF15 7PU*