



The Baptist Ministers' Journal

January 2003

Vol 281

ISSN 0968 - 2406

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

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Editorial

Gethin Abraham-Williams in 'signing-off' his last issue of the journal expressed his delight that I was taking over from him as Editor. Whilst it is my great pleasure to thank Gethin on your behalf for the way in which he has continued to develop and strengthen the Journal, I can't say that delight is uppermost in my mind as I write this initial editorial! However, there is a privilege in taking a part in continuing to discover the many untapped resources for mutual learning, challenge and encouragement which are accessible among us and to us.

Anticipating that the New Year will continue to bring with it reports of famine and terror, we will continue to live with questions inherent in the freedom of matter and mortality. From a wart on a finger to the most aggressively invasive cancer, from a tendency to manipulate, to the pathway to murder, there is no other way to be human than to live with the risk of that humanity's damage or untimely end.

The stories of Adam and Eve, of Cain and Abel, are amongst those told in response to knowledge of life in which things go wrong. Such common experience fills the Lord's Prayer with meaning, when we say, "deliver us from evil". The story of Jesus, who taught his disciples to pray like this, emerged through his own absolute commitment to bringing 'freedom' and 'godly' back into connection again, along with God's equal trust in and commitment to him. It didn't do anything to help him escape death, but it brought him through death, vindicating

the sort of freedoms he stood for:

- the freedom to work at keeping 'love' and 'unconditional' together;
- the freedom to defy anything death-dealing, from smug self-righteousness to the cross of an unholy alliance of state and religion.

If we could find an answer that seemed to satisfy every situation for this New Year, we would only have succeeded in taming God to fit our smallness. But so much of the 'public role' of the minister *seems* to demand answers. In this edition of the Journal we are particularly grateful for the questions which are faced by Edward Williams and his correspondents, and by John Hull of Birmingham University. 'Contextual theology' may sound rather grand, but nothing could be more vital. In the one case, retirement, in the other blindness, has brought questions and theological reflection worth pondering over. **bmj**

'Offspring of the past, pregnant with the future, the present moment, nevertheless, always exists in eternity – always in eternity as the point of intersection between time and the timelessness of faith, and, therefore, as the moment of freedom from past and future.'

Dag Hammarskjöld, *Markings*

'When God vanishes' – a follow-up

Edward Williams, in the July 2002 edition of the *Journal*, wrote of his experience in retirement of intense doubt, such as he had never known during nearly 40 years as a missionary and then as a minister. He asked: "Is this a common experience or unusual? I am writing this article, describing my particular doubts, in the hope of finding out and perhaps of encouraging others."

He now reflects on some of the responses which he received, draws a very 'non-retired' voice into the conversation and makes some suggestions about the fruitfulness of the sort of doubt which prompts us to re-perceive our attitudes towards people of other faiths.

Twelve people have been in touch, which I suspect is an exceptionally large response. Most were retired themselves. One or two just said they were glad I had written the article, but nearly all told of their own similar experiences. In this article, I do not mention names except in two cases where I have been given specific permission.

As for encouraging others, a number said that they had not previously been able to share their doubts with others. One wrote at some length and then said, 'It is a considerable release to be able to formulate these thoughts, something I don't feel free to do either in the church or with my own family – I don't want to damage their faith without an alternative to offer.' I respect that attitude very greatly; but what a lonely position.

Someone else, recently retired, wrote similarly, 'I always held to the view that my wrestlings had no place in the pulpit – I was there to build people up, not pull them down.' But that leaves the question of how we help those in our congregations who are themselves wrestling? Of that, more later.

Some were glad to discuss individual points from my article, sometimes agreeing in general but disagreeing on particular issues.

'You have been very courageous'

Almost without exception, people said that - and expected that I would receive a lot of flak! I am glad to report that there has been none whatsoever. But what does that expectation say about our denomination? And was I really courageous? I suppose I would never have sat down and written from scratch for publication – the article began with something I wrote simply for my own benefit, to try and crystallize my thinking and 'anchor' the point at which I had arrived. It was only afterwards that I realised that, with a little remodelling, it might usefully be shared.

I am sure I would have kept quiet if I had held the senior positions of one correspondent. He wrote, 'Since retirement 10 years ago I have wrestled with doubts about the basic articles of faith which I have preached about so often. I shared your question: "You don't any longer really believe, do you?"'

'In my case the *feelings* have not changed. It only takes the sound of an old familiar hymn or the glories of the mountains to touch me deeply... But *intellectually* I struggle still... I echoed your comment that "to say 'God' is only to give a name to ignorance"... I confess I have kept my doubts to myself. My friends I fear would be very shocked if they realised how agnostic I have become on many issues.'

Some Common Themes

Like the correspondent just quoted, others said that the anguished question I faced, 'You don't really believe any more, do you?' had been their question also. Like him, again, others have found that retirement releases questions that have not surfaced while they have been absorbed in ministry. 'I wonder to what extent the almost continuous involvement in Bible teaching was a support and a distraction, preventing me from examining my own beliefs.' Another example is in the letter quoted at the end of this section. This seems to me a very important observation. What are its implications for those who are in the midst of their ministry?

Half my respondents had a scientific background like myself, often in physics. Four had had a fulfilling professional or serious amateur involvement. Gordon Tubbs told of an interesting experience:

'Some time ago I asked a group of professional and lay astronomers, in a club I belonged to, how much we really knew about the universe. The bidding started at 4% and quickly went down to fractions of 1%. That...was a critical moment for me. If our knowledge were so limited then what was wrong about trust?... As the doubts were often unarticulated, and tended to weaken when set down as propositions, I felt inclined to trust.'

Someone else wrote similarly concerning the possibility of extra-human input to the Bible, 'We know so little that it would be arrogant to say there couldn't be'.

A friend wrote, 'The opposite of faith is certainty.' There is a lot in that. And another friend wrote: 'Doubt is the seed of faith'. I am not sure that I entirely agree with the latter - doubt does threaten faith. There is an old saying that 'Faith is what

you hold on to your beliefs with' - but what happens when you find it hard to believe in your beliefs? But I do agree with him that 'out of doubt comes not certainty but...humility'. This seems close to the words of George Steiner which I quoted in my original article: 'the respectful acknowledgement of the extreme limitation of our own means of understanding'.

A minister's wife suggested that I was in fact suffering from depression. Her husband had moved out of the pastorate into non-church work at the same time as her sons had left home, and she herself had had to give up teaching - within a few months there came 'the dark night of the soul' or, as her doctor described it, 'clinical depression'. She recognised that at her age hormonal changes doubtless played a part. My mental questionings at first seemed quite different from this, but she pointed out the connection with retirement: 'Ministers, like actors, may miss the flow of adrenaline which comes from their work.'

This links with the comment of another, who had to retire suddenly and unexpectedly on health grounds. 'I thought I'd miss preaching terribly. I didn't! Is it the "carrying on as if little has changed" that prevents the facing up to doubts?' He finds that 'traditional words and images no longer work. Doubt of heart and doubt of mind become constant companions.' But he rejoices in 'the freedom to be oneself (and) the freedom to examine one's faith. Looking back I feel you lose this freedom as soon as you come to believe that you have been chosen by God for ministry...God has called you, so God must exist!'

'Choosing to live as in the presence of God'

One letter, quoted extensively below, expressed very clearly an underlying frame

of mind which I recognise within my experience, and which must be the cultural milieu of very many in our congregations. The letter comes from someone in the thick of ministry, and it takes the discussion forward. Dr Pat Took, Regional Minister of the London Baptist Association, wrote:

‘It has been a conviction of mine since I first came to faith, and in recent years in pastoral ministry, that the inevitability of doubt, and its place in our relationship with God, should be acknowledged, and that every new Christian should be taught to expect and to live with it.

‘I have been conscious all through my life of two voices in which I have sought to interpret the world around me. The first is the voice of my generation, my culture – the voice that says, “This is the world: the ordinary, everyday world of Tesco and the Central Line. It is good and enjoyable, but there is no spiritual significance to it – no divine dimension, no eternal destiny.”

‘This voice is dismissive, incredulous of the claims of faith. “Surely you don’t believe this stuff? Angels and virgin births? People coming back from the dead? This is the superstitious world of the neurotic and the uneducated. It’s how people deal with their unresolved fears. It’s how they try to add significance to their ultimately insignificant lives. You know you don’t believe this. Why pretend?” And when tragedies occur despite love and faith and prayers, this voice urges that the answers of faith are a flight from reality – an imaginative version of denial.

‘I do not think this voice is connected with my own love of physics – an early enthusiasm which I did not pursue – or to my perception that evolution seems the most persuasive account of the world as it is. On the contrary, these interests and

enthusiasms belong to the world of wonder – of fascination with and celebration of life – the world of faith. No, the pervasive atmosphere of the first voice is mundane, matter-of-fact, humorous but incredulous. And from early days this voice has never left me...

‘But however persuasive it may be, I find the sceptical disputant unable to counter the second voice, which has claimed my allegiance and somehow continues to exclaim “Abba, Father”. Because even when I deeply doubt the existence of God, I do not doubt that I am held in his love or redeemed by his grace or called to his service. In the face of all that my generation and culture takes as read, still there persists the conviction that my life is personal, a personal gift, for which I need to thank someone and for the use of which I am personally responsible. I cannot resist the experience of the earth dancing in the presence of the Lord. In the face of tragedy the Cross claims my mind and heart and, like you, I find again and again that prayer is unaccountably creative and powerful. And again and again the goodness of men and women of all faiths and no faith points me to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word and the light who enlightens everyone who comes into the world.

‘And so I live with these two voices, and I would have to confess that much of my life conforms to the secular Western culture that finds expression in my first voice. But I know that my allegiance is given to the world of faith and when the decisions I make are made consciously, they are made in obedience to the second voice. And it is that voice that calls out the best in me.., that leads me on beyond my own resources and my own imagination in pursuit of truth and generosity and courage. This way lies risk and love and life in its fullness. It seems to me that this is the

essential nature of faith – to choose to live as in the presence of God, when we glimpse him and when we don't.

'I cannot conceive of faith without doubt. I would fear such faith as superstition, fanaticism or pretence. And it grieves me the way many good, serious, evangelical Christians are plunged into terrible distress when they experience doubt, seeing it as a betrayal of Christ and of those who taught them to have faith in him. Unable to acknowledge or live with doubt they suppress the sceptical voice and deny its existence, until some crisis or turning-point in life faces them with a massive crisis of integrity. What are they to do? Abandon the faith – or go on pretending to convictions which they now discover are deeply problematic and uncertain? There is then a terrible temptation to masquerade. And it is the masquerade which our young people have seen, and seen through.

'But to doubt is not sinful – it is not a betrayal – it is an aspect of our humanity that Jesus shared ("if you are the son of God...?"). We need to acknowledge how partial, how patchy, how occasional our faith is, and how much of our lives conforms to an essentially godless culture. We need to face unresolved intellectual questions and difficulties, and to accept that there are times when God is defined more by his absence than his presence. And we find the tension even in Scripture – in Job and Ecclesiastes, and splendidly in the Psalms. (Psalm 73 stands as an example of the conversation that goes on between the voice of doubt and the answer of faith.)

'I believe that when we are able to be open about this experience, without the anxiety and camouflage of pretence, new levels of fellowship open up...Perhaps more importantly, there can be an integrity about our preaching and teaching that lays durable foundations for those who follow.

'Thank you for opening up the subject. I hope it will liberate good and conscientious pastors from the impossible expectations that they should know nothing but granite convictions.'

The matter of other Faiths is never far away

This issue from my original article was picked up by various respondents, aware of the goodness so often evident in those who do not confess Christ. What do you do when faced with seemingly irreconcilable beliefs about the Truth? You certainly do not easily say, 'Your belief is true for you and mine is true for me...' I venture my own discussion of this question.

I believe the story of Physics is of much help here. Before about 1850 there was great debate about the nature of light: did it consist of waves or corpuscles? In that debate there were as usual many protagonists with prejudices and narrow minds. The key attitude, however, was like that described by Michael Polanyi in *Personal Knowledge*: 'a frame of mind in which I hold firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know it might conceivably be false'. In the end experimental facts were decisive: the phenomena then known required the wave theory and disproved the corpuscular theory. However, new discoveries since then, on a minute scale far below our native senses, require that light consists of 'particles' or quanta, called photons!

How can light possibly be both a shape and a point? Scientists would not, and could not, just say easily that both were true, but in the end they were compelled to admit the truth of both. We can pinpoint when we have to operate in wave-mode, and when in particle-mode (and this is now so routine that it is taken for granted): crudely speaking, light travels

as waves, it arrives as particles. But still our limited minds cannot comprehend how the two can possibly both be held together as true. But God knows!


So it is in matters of inter-faith. Sometimes we focus with utter conviction on Christ as Lord of all, the Saviour needed by all. At other times we meet followers of other faiths and find ourselves compelled, in all honesty, to recognise in them both goodness and godliness. My mind cannot comprehend how both convictions can be reconciled as true. How can my deepest beliefs be true and yet the beliefs of others not be inherently wrong?

But my mind is limited and therefore, like a good scientist, I will not say 'I cannot

understand this, therefore it cannot be so.' I am content to leave God in his infinite wisdom to hold together what I cannot. And I am content, like a good scientist, to function sometimes in one mode and sometimes in the other.

I think this analogy goes further. In view of 'the respectful acknowledgement of the extreme limitation of our own means of understanding' (George Steiner, quoted in my original article) I am content now to function sometimes at a theological, intellectual level, and at other times on a faith level. I find 'God revealed in Jesus Christ, and him crucified,' to be the most satisfying and 'least inadequate' account that our limited understanding can know.

bmj



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'Blindness and the Face of God.'

John M Hull, Birmingham University, argues for a theology of disability

God as Above Average

The human image of God is usually thought of as the image of the perfectly normal human, but raised to an even higher level of perfection. God never sleeps. "He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps.121: 3b). God could not be thought of as suffering from upper limb malfunction or as being hard of hearing. "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear" (Is. 59: 1). The God who is in the image of the perfect human being must possess all the faculties and members of perfect humanity. "He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?" (Ps. 94:9). God is not only thought of as a sighted person, but as being a person whose sight far extends the power of human vision. "For the Lord does not see as humans see, for humans look upon the outward appearance but the Lord looks upon the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). "Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering" (Job 26:6). When God made human beings in God's own image, inference from the normal human body suggests that God must have the normal human powers when thought of in human terms. God walks in the Garden of Eden; God does not limp (Gen. 3: 8). "Ascribe to the Lord, oh mighty ones, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength" (Ps. 29:1). If God is to have a voice, the voice of God must be louder than the voice of the mighty warriors. "The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars..." (Ps. 29:4f).

The God of the Bible is the God of the able-bodied not of the disabled. Women were not permitted to be priests (Lev. 21:16-20), and the God of the Bible is not a woman. Men with a physical defect were not permitted to be priests, and the God of the Bible does not possess physical defects.

No doubt all this is obvious and was inevitable. Indeed, that the image of God is a projection from able-bodied life is so obvious as to be generally invisible by the able-bodied. After all, sighted people do not know that they are sighted. They think the world is just like that. The world of sight is absolutised as being the only world. This sighted world must be relativised if minority groups are not to be marginalised. The biblical image of God in human likeness represents the domination of the normal, the totalism of the average.

Such language is not a mere poetic decoration. It is not to be understood on the linguistic level, as if it were a mere case of metaphor, and to classify it as anthropomorphism is inadequate, since that would be to gather up the whole of humanity within the average. The form (*morphe*) of the human (*anthropos*) is thought of as comprising only the normal. The human family, however, extends beyond the normal; it comprises many who are not average. If the word were poly-anthropomorphism, the plurality of the human forms would be affirmed, but the fact is that the human image of God in the Bible is not many-formed but is uniform.

There are signs of weakness, of course. God weeps, has changes of mind, proceeds by trial and error, and suffers parental disappointment (Gen. 2:18f; 6:6; Hos. 11:1f), but all this is still within the range of the normal. If the God of the Bible suffers from parental disappointment and failure, it is because God's children are rebellious and disobedient, not because God cannot strike them hard enough to maintain discipline, or cannot run fast enough to catch them. We must go deeper than the levels of metaphor and analogy if we are to understand the nature of these projections. The metaphors are but symptoms of a certain kind of embodied epistemology.

Body knowledge

Much modern semantic theory regards meaning as residing in propositions. Only propositions are capable of carrying meaning, which may be true or false in accordance with its successful reference to the actual world. This leads to the possibility of a universal language in which reality is objectively described. The world of truth and the propositions which embody truth is distinct from the worlds of imagination and memory, which are regarded as being individualistic. As sensations or perceptions, such individual experiences are not capable of contributing to the positive or negative character of truth unless they can be stated in linguistic form. On this objectivist view of language, truth is to be found in the relationship between symbols, these in turn being spoken or printed words built into sentences. Although empirical verificationist forms of this semantic theory insist that the meaning of propositions must be translatable in principle into certain experiences or sensations, the body is looked upon as the locus for the verification of meaning rather than the body being regarded as the source or origin of meaning itself.

This rejection of the body as the source of meaning is consistent with objectivist views of theological language. According to such views, religious or theological meaning is also found in sentences which express beliefs. Those who defend the truth-claims of religious statements against positivistic semantics usually do so by qualifying or denying the empirical verification theory, but share with their opponents the view that bodily experiences are not relevant to the search for truth. Truth resides in ideas or beliefs. Truth, it is thought, is spiritual or intellectual. Truth is stated in concepts, which are interrogated by the rational mind, to which the body makes no contribution.

Thus the flesh is to be distinguished from the spirit. The flesh and the spirit are antagonistic to each other. The body is the source of fantasies, desires, impulses, imaginations and temptations, which far from helping us to discover the truth must continually be checked and corrected.

In seeking to understand the human image of God as a contribution to a theology of disability, we must commence not with the formal belief structure of Christian theology, which exists as ideas, beliefs and concepts in the form of sentences but with an epistemology rooted in bodily structures. To be disabled is to have a different physical or mental structure. It is these structures themselves which must be the starting point for a theology of disability, and this can only be done if the body itself becomes the starting point for knowledge, and thus for understanding the human image of God.

The question which we must ask, therefore, deals not so much with the nature and criteria for knowledge, but with the character and origins of understanding. When we ask about how we understand,

the human questions about memory, cognition, expectation, self-deception and so on inevitably arise. Mark Johnson has pointed out that statements of human knowledge would be incomprehensible without their metaphorical content.¹

‘We will have to find a way around the problem.’

‘The next step in the argument is as follows.’

‘Let us have a *closer look* at this question.’

The metaphors in sentences such as these are not merely decorative, nor do they merely tend to make our conversation more colourful. Rather, Johnson argues, they may be traced back to patterns of experience or schemata, in which our bodily experience is generalised. Without such fundamental experiences, which occur from earliest infancy, of distinguishing between this and that, of being in front or at the back, of going forward or being blocked, of learning about place and weight and time and so on, it would not be possible for us to make our lives in the world intelligible. Our language is the fruit of these deep roots, and thus our thinking is embodied right from the start.

This does not lead Johnson into a wholly subjective theory of meaning, for the basic bodily experiences are common to all human beings, and most of them are developed in social relations. This is why the metaphors which express bodily experiences linguistically, are confirmed in public life, and bodily knowledge notwithstanding its individual origin, remains public. Knowledge is thus produced by a combination of subjective and objective factors. It is both bodily and conceptual, situational and yet universal. This is what Johnson means by a “semantics of understanding”.²

Bodies and words

Johnson’s main concern is to establish the epistemological significance of imagination, and he does this through describing the roots of imagination in physical and social experience. In his understandable concern to defend his theory of imagination from the charge of excessive subjectivity, he emphasises the shared nature of metaphorical experience, thus establishing a degree of objectivity for the imagination. In this context, he does not distinguish between different kinds of bodies. So although his work is valuable as an epistemological introduction to a phenomenology and a theology of disability, he does not take us into that specific area.

This is less true of the phenomenological philosophers and psychologists upon whom Johnson depends. Maurice Merleau-Ponty provides the heading “The Body” for the first part of his *Phenomenology of Perception*.³ My body is my point of view upon the world. My body is the perspective from which I perceive everything else, but I forget this.⁴ Instead, I come to regard my body as just one more of those things which I perceive to be in the world. Then I speak as if on the table is my book, the telephone and my hand. I situate my body in space just like the other things in the space around me. Merleau-Ponty remarks that this is misleading, since the other objects in my world may sometimes be present and at other times be absent, but my body is always there. The body is not itself an object in the world; it is that by means of which, for me, there are objects. A theory of the body is thus already a theory of knowledge. However, because what is known is dependent upon the conditions of knowledge, we become unaware of the creative intentionality of our own consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty illustrates this world-generating character of embodied knowledge by referring to the world as known by various kinds of unusual bodies. He discusses the white cane of the blind person, pointing out that as the hand of the blind person holds the cane, the hand is not aware of the cane itself, but of the ground surface as revealed by the cane.⁵ The sharp point of consciousness moves forward from the grip of the hand down to the tip of the cane. In other words, the cane becomes an extension of one's body.

The experience of the phantom limb reported by patients who have suffered amputation is particularly significant. The foot itches although it has been removed. We should understand this strange phenomenon not in terms of neurological conditioning, e.g. your brain has always been used to receiving sensations from that part of your body and it goes on regardless, but we should instead interpret the phantom limb as representing the acceptance on the part of the entire body as living in a certain world. The body has a certain way of relating to that world. The refusal to acknowledge dismemberment is a way of insisting upon remaining in that world.⁶ One represses the knowledge that one's body can no longer be at home in that world. If one accepts the mutilated body, then one's world becomes fractured. The task of building up a new world as a new relationship between the dismembered body and the world is more painful and challenging than the other option: preserving one's normal world and denying dismemberment.

The visual parallel to this is Anton's Syndrome which takes place when patients are unaware of their own blindness. They behave as if they can see, and even confabulate visual experiences.⁷ When this condition is generalised to include the denial of any impairment or

disability, it is called anosognosia. Sometimes a patient with a double impairment is aware of one but not of the other.⁸ I acknowledge that my world is fractured in this respect but not in that respect.

We may distinguish phenomenal consciousness from access consciousness. Phenomenal consciousness means that I am aware of realities. Access consciousness means that I know that I have this awareness of realities. The object of phenomenal consciousness is the world itself, but the objects of access consciousness are symbols, words and thoughts. This distinction is well-established in the experimental literature, where people deny that they have seen the flashing of a light but can point to the area from which the light flashed. "Studies of blindsight strongly suggest that the processing of visual stimuli can take place even when there is no phenomenal awareness of seeing them".⁹ In other words, information can be obtained from visual areas in spite of the fact that there is no conscious visual awareness. Amnesiac patients who are shown a range of pictures may later on be unable to remember that they have been shown the pictures or even taken part in such an experiment, but may be able to distinguish between pictures which are familiar to them and those which are not. There appears in such cases to be phenomenal memory without access memory.¹⁰ A sleepwalker who safely negotiates a window ledge has phenomenal consciousness but no access consciousness.

These cases of malfunction are relevant to the general phenomenon of world projection from the body. Gender is a case in point. Gender so thoroughly permeates my perceptions and interpretations of myself and of the world that it becomes invisible to me. As a man, I may become

unaware of my masculinity; to me, that is just the way things are. My phenomenal awareness is so taken for granted as the basis of my experience that I do not possess access awareness of it. It is the task of gender training which combats sexism to raise phenomenal awareness to the level of access awareness. We can now understand why it is that most sighted people do not know that they are sighted but just think the world is like that. They have phenomenal awareness of sight but little access awareness of it. Only when the clock stops ticking do you realise that you have been hearing it. Only when you become blind do you realise that you were living in a sighted world. So it is that most sighted people, who have perhaps never experienced disability or had occasion to empathise with a disabled loved one, do not acknowledge a plurality of genuine human worlds. To them, there is the commonsense world to which some people do not have access. Thus there is the world of normality and there are disabled people who have the misfortune to be excluded from that world. The world of childhood is also inaccessible to this kind of global totalism. Relativisation is the key to pluralisation, and pluralisation is the key to mutual understanding and acceptance.

The face of God in the Bible

Nowhere is this monism of the majority more obvious than in the biblical references to the face of God. "When He (God) is quiet, who can condemn? When He hides His face, who can behold Him?" (Job 34:29). "They think in their heart 'God has forgotten. He has hidden His face. He will never see it'" (Ps. 10:11). "As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake I shall be satisfied beholding your likeness" (Ps.17: 15). "May God be gracious to us and bless us, and make his face to shine upon us" (Ps.67: 1). "So Jacob called the place

Peniel saying 'for I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved'" (Gen. 32:30). When Jacob had become reconciled to his brother Esau, he said "for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, since you have received me with such favour" (Gen. 33:10).

These and many other similar passages reflect a sighted person's view of the world, including relationships with other human beings. The projection from the human face to the face of God is particularly clear in the way Jacob addresses Esau. Not only is this perfectly natural; it is almost impossible to imagine that it could have been otherwise. However, when the unconscious and taken-for-granted preference for the world of the sighted person is accompanied by an equally unconscious but all-pervasive prejudice against the world of blind people, we have an ethical problem, a problem of inclusion, a problem of the absolutisation of the normal to the exclusion and disadvantage of the minority. Throughout the Bible blindness is a symbol of ignorance, sin and unbelief. We find this metaphorical use as early as Exodus 23:7-9: "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous" (Compare Deut. 16:18-20). "All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant to their own shame" (Is. 44:8-10). "Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs; they cannot bark..." (Is. 56:9f). "Leave them: they are blind guides" (Matt. 15:13). Blindness is generally regarded as a punishment inflicted by God (Gen. 19:11; Deut.28: 27-29; 2 Kgs 6:18; Acts 13:10-12).

It is the references in the gospels to blindness which display most vividly the

prejudices of the sighted world and are the cause of most distress to blind people. The healings of blind people are generally regarded as symbolic of discipleship.¹¹ This is particularly clear in the story of Bartimaeus (Mk.10:46-52). As a result of his faith, he followed Jesus along the way (v.52).¹² The symbol of blindness as unbelief and sin occupies the central place in the Gospel of John,¹³ where the discussion at the end of chapter nine, following the restoration of the sight of the man born blind, reveals this clearly. "Jesus said 'for judgement I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind'" (v.39).

Some of the most vivid passages in which the sight of the human face is used as a symbol of spiritual progress and enlightenment appear in the letters of Paul. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12), "and all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor. 3:18) and perhaps the most beautiful and significant of all such passages, "For it is the God who said 'Let light shine out of darkness' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor.4:6).¹⁴

Living without faces

What does the human face mean to a blind person? At this point, I must speak rather personally, but I know that other blind people share my experience. In the months that followed my own loss of sight, I began to notice that the people in my acquaintance fell into one of two possible groups. There were those who had faces, when I conjured up their image in my memory, and there were those who did not have faces. The first group were those whom I had known before I went blind;

the second group were those people whom I had met since my loss of sight.¹⁵ At first, I could not help imagining what these people might look like, and vivid impressions of various facial appearances would flash before my imagination.¹⁶ Gradually, however, as I entered more deeply into the blind condition the vivid imaginations faded. After some years, I had reached the point where I was so naturalised into the world of blindness that it was only with a slight shock of surprise I could remember that people looked like anything. I had not only lost the images of the faces of particular people; I had lost the entire category of looking like anything. I had to make an effort of memory to realise that to sighted people there was something called 'look like' which was very important to them.

No doubt it is difficult to imagine the world in which other people live. If you, as a sighted person, were to close your eyes, and think of one of your dear friends or loved ones, the picture of the face of that person would irresistibly come to mind. Try it now, and see if you can prevent the image of the face appearing in your imagination. Some of the sighted people that I have asked tell me that they can manage this feat for a few moments by concentrating on the shoes of the friend or by imagining that they are staring hard at a button or at the handbag which the friend is carrying. However, this seems to be difficult if not impossible to maintain: the face keeps coming into view. For a blind person, on the other hand, there simply is no face. Nothing comes into mind of a pictorial nature which represents the features of the face. The memories which a blind person has of someone else gather first around the name of the person and then around the memories of everything which that person has said and done. In the presence of the other, it is the voice which expresses the person, not the face.

One must also remember that although the senses are unified in subjectivity, the experience offered by one sense is incommensurable with another. One may tell a person blind from birth that the colour red is like the sound of a trumpet, and although this will convey the notion that redness is bold and challenging, it will not actually convey the slightest impression of redness itself. If you are my close friend, I may, perhaps, be invited to touch your face. This, however, will give me very little information about what your face looks like. Certainly, I will learn that you have a beard, but I do not remember what a beard looks like; I only know that it is short and bristly. This is most true in the case of the eyes. In the first place, it is difficult to touch the human eye. Even if you close your eyes and invite me to feel the roundness of your closed eyelid, it bears no resemblance at all to the radiant colour and fleeting emotion and the sense of inter-personal subjectivity which sighted people get through eye contact.¹⁷

What does the Bible know of this experience? Very little, if anything at all. Particularly in the Psalms, God is described as hiding his face from Israel. This makes sense to sighted people, for they refuse to have eye contact with people from whom they are estranged, and to look away is a gesture of dismissal, if not contempt. In the world of sighted people, you cover your face in order to disguise your identity. So the bank robber wears a mask, and so do the people at a fancy dress party. A blind person, on the other hand, does not know whether your face is masked or not, although your voice may sound muffled. Blind people can certainly tell when you are looking at them, because your voice is projected directly towards them. It is the voice to which they pay attention, not the face.

The Bible, however, comes from a

sighted world in which it was natural to speak of the human image of God in terms of the appearance of God as prefigured in the relationships which sighted people have with each other. In this context, the face is of supreme importance. "If we are born alone, it is through the face that we first experience things out there that are like us, that respond to us, and which by making faces we can influence".¹⁸ "The sharing of life and of experience, which is the joy of parenthood, begins in the face".¹⁹ The evolution of consciousness is difficult to understand without the face, for the face is the main access to the mind. We are biologically prepared from birth to respond to facial expression. Infants only a few days old are capable of imitating adult expression.²⁰ Although facial expressions might convey slightly different emotions from culture to culture, the way these emotions are recognised in, for example, movements of the eyebrows or the mouth, retain their significance across cultures.²¹ Experiments with computerised facial images, where either the sound of the voice or the picture of the face could be omitted or varied, show that the content of a message is better understood when the face is visible. "In face to face communication, perception of speech does not necessarily result from just the sound but somehow emerges from the sound and sight of the face collectively".²²

Of course, blindness is not the only human condition which introduces a variation on the theme of the face. People with autism are not cut off from the sight of the face but are profoundly severed from the emotions and the mind behind the face. "Autistic subjects actively avoid the face, to avoid complex signals of mood in other people, which on the one hand, they can hardly decipher and, on the other threaten to overwhelm them".²³ Jonathan Cole interviewed people with many different kinds of facial loss or

disfigurement and concluded that it is the world of the autistic person rather than the world of the blind that is really a world without faces because there is no theory of mind, the mind of the non-autistic person. The only glimmering of understanding into others on the part of an autistic person is into another person with autism.²⁴ Mention should also be made of prosopagnosia, a condition in which people are unable to recognise the faces of their loved ones or friends. A remarkable feature of this strange condition is that the prosopagnostic patient can often recognise various features of the face, such as the gender, age or hair colouring, but is unable to identify the possessor of the face.²⁵

In his remarkable book about the face, Jonathan Cole says that he could have interviewed film stars or well-known politicians, people whose beautiful or famous faces are always before the public eye. However, in order to probe the meaning of the human face, he decided to go to those who had in some sense lost the face, whose faces had become immobile, disfigured, palsied, blinded, and amongst these people he had discovered a revitalisation of deep life".²⁶

The face in philosophy and theology

It is surprising, perhaps, that on the whole those who write books on theology and the philosophy of religion do not follow the method of Jonathan Cole. When they seek to describe human responsibility and human relationships, using the face as the focus of their writing, they assume the sole reality of the sighted world. This becomes almost ironic when the subject of discussion is the miracles of the New Testament in which Jesus is described as restoring the sight of the blind. In approximately twenty such articles written over the past fifteen years, I have not found a single concession to the fact that

these stories express a sighted point of view, nor any awareness of how the stories might strike a blind reader.²⁷ No doubt there are plenty of articles written about the healing miracles of Jesus which do display such sensitivity; it just happens that I have not come upon them.

The role of the human face is particularly noteworthy in the writings of Emmanuel Levinas. Transcendence breaks into our lives when we take responsibility for our fellow human beings and "such a responsibility is a response to the imperative of gratuitous love which comes to me from the face of another".²⁸ The abandonment of being into existence, and the unique election of each individual is viewed in the face. It is the face of the other that summons me to this responsibility. For Levinas, the nakedness of the face represents the vulnerability of each human being, for whom there is no defence or covering.²⁹ The core of the infinite is "a summons which comes to me from the face of the neighbour",³⁰ "here I am: under your gaze, obliged to you".³¹ When I relate to another "it is not the knowledge of his character, or his social position or his needs but his nudity as the needy one, the destitution inscribed upon his face. It is his face as destitution which asks me as responsible, and by which his needs can only count for me".³² Yes, but all this presupposes that one can see the face of the other.

It is clear from what has been said about Levinas that his use of the human face, although very individual and concrete, referring as it does to my presence before the specific other who claims my response, remains a symbol. Levinas is not interested in the psychology or physiology of the face. He seldom refers to the face as having any characteristics, except that the eyes of the other gaze upon one. For Levinas, the face does not

smile or frown, it is not a face with a specific gender, nor is it a singing face. In that sense, the use of the face in Levinas is quite similar to its use in the Bible. The face of God indicates the presence of God. Nevertheless, everything depends upon being able to see the face, and the fact that Levinas so often emphasises the muteness of the face of the other heightens the visual presuppositions of his style.

In the case of David Ford, although the symbolic character of the face becomes more apparent as his book on *Self and Salvation* proceeds, the much more detailed descriptions of the face suggest a deeper involvement in the particularities of sighted life. The opening sentence of the first chapter is "we live before the faces of others".³³ "Words have their primary context in faces".³⁴ The Christian Church might be described as "the transformation of facing before the face of Christ". "Christianity is characterised by the simplicity and the complexity of facing: being faced by God, embodied in the face of Christ; turning to face Jesus Christ...being members of a community of the face; seeing the face of God reflected in creation and especially in each human face, with all the faces in our heart related to the presence of the face of Christ; having an ethic of gentleness...towards each face...".³⁵ In this opening chapter, we are presented with an unrelieved visual theology. To be "faceless" is to be anonymous, to be a non-person. Although rich and beautiful in its descriptions of the face, there is no relativisation of facial experience.

This does not mean that David Ford is not sensitive towards the other senses. Chapter five deals with the singing self, and shows a rich sensitivity to music and to sound in general. However, even here the significance of singing lies very largely in its face to face character. "Singing is seen as

a desirable form of face to face address between members of the community, and between singers and God".³⁶ "I sing before the faces of those before whom I have learned to worship, and whom I call to worship".³⁷ There are no references to deafness.

The discussion by David Ford of the face of the dead Christ is both tender and profound. We are led dramatically into the realisation of the dead face.³⁸ After speaking from the Cross, breathing, and crying out, we are then left with a dead face (p.192). This is the projection of a sighted theology. From a blind perspective, when the breathing and crying have stopped, we are left with silence. Ford imagines nothing between the living, glorified, speaking worshipping singing face and the dead face. There is no place in his theological imagery for the disfigured face, the immobilised face, the face afflicted by a stroke, the scarred and the blinded face. The face is tortured and bloody, but it is dead. It is as if there is only normality: the normality of life, the normality of suffering and the normality of death. >From death, and Ford emphasises with a fine theological insight, that the death was a real death, and that the resurrection was a rising from the dead, not just a delayed coming down from the cross. Always, however, the face is seen.

Conclusion

Does it matter? Must majorities always take minorities into account? Cannot sighted people enjoy their world, theologise about their world, speak to each other in that world without blind people nipping their heels? After all, the principal source of Christian theology, the Bible, acknowledges blindness, deafness and other disabilities only to marginalise and denigrate them.

It matters because such attitudes

reinforce the central core of Christian exclusivism. Even in the writings of such enlightened and insightful sighted people as those I have been discussing, such attitudes lend support to the core of that exclusivism which, amongst other things, ignores other religions, only grudgingly comes to accept the ministry of women, supports an ideology of uniqueness, and of the normality of the superior which has brought disgrace upon the Christian tradition throughout the world. It matters because in this world of approximately three billion people, there are about six hundred million disabled people, and the gospel is for them also.

Strangely, there is one aspect of the face of Christ which Ford does not refer to.

It is the blindfolded Christ.³⁹ The dead face of Christ witnesses to the laying down of his life in the nothingness of death. The blindfolded face represents the living Christ who enters into the experience of literally blinded people, and becomes their brother. While sighted people may quite naturally behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, blind people may just as naturally respond to the glory of God in the face of the one who was blindfolded for us.

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This article was first published in Hans-Georg Ziebertz et al eds. *The Human Image of God*. Leiden. Brill. 2000 pp215-229. It has not previously been published in the UK. **bmj**

¹ Mark Johnson *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1987.

² Johnson p.175.

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception* London, Routledge 1962, p 67.

⁴ Merleau-Ponty p. 70.

⁵ Merleau-Ponty p.143.

⁶ Merleau-Ponty p.81.

⁷ Andrew W. Young *Face and Mind* Oxford, Oxford University Press 1998, p.380.

⁸ Young p.379f.

⁹ Young p.375.

¹⁰ Young p.379f.

¹¹ E. S. Johnson 'Mark vii 22-26: the blind man from Bethsaida' *New Testament Studies*, vol.25, 1979, p.370-383.

¹² E. S. Johnson 'Mark 10: 46-52: Blind Bartimaeus' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol.40, 1978, pp. 191-204.

¹³ J.M. Lieu 'Blindness in the Johannine tradition' *New Testament Studies*, vol.34, 1988, pp.83-95.

¹⁴ I have attempted to respond as a blind person to the Bible in my *In the Beginning There was Darkness* London, SCM Press 2001.

¹⁵ John M. Hull *On Sight and Insight: A Journey into the World of Blindness* Oxford, Oneworld 1997, pp.14-15.

¹⁶ Hull *On Sight* pp.15-19.

¹⁷ Hull *On Sight* pp.47-48.

¹⁸ Jonathan Cole *About Face* Cambridge Mass., MIT Press 1998, p.111.

¹⁹ Cole p.111.

²⁰ Dominic W. Massaro *Perceiving Talking Faces: >From Speech Perception to a Behavioural Principle* Cambridge Mass., MIT Press 1998, p.204.

²¹ Massaro pp.229-230.

²² Massaro p.236.

²³ Cole p.4.

²⁴ Cole p.197.

²⁵ Young p.378.

²⁶ Cole p.181f.

²⁷ Hull *In the Beginning*.

²⁸ Emmanuel Levinas *Of God Who Comes to Mind* Stanford, Stanford University Press 1998, p.ix.

²⁹ Levinas p.12.

³⁰ Levinas p.73.

³¹ Levinas p.75.

³² Levinas p.99.

³³ David F. Ford *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1999, p.17.

³⁴ Ford p.22.

³⁵ Ford p.24f.

³⁶ Ford p.110.

³⁷ Ford p.128.

³⁸ Ford p.192.

³⁹ Mark 14:65 and Luke 22:64.

John's Gospel and Mark's Gospel: A Commentary Guide

Sean Winter, Tutor in New Testament, Northern Baptist College, commends commentaries available to preachers for their study and preparation.

In 1999, my predecessor at Northern Baptist College, Martin Scott, published in the *BMJ* an article surveying scholarship, especially commentaries, on Mark's Gospel. Since then, I have contributed further articles on Luke and Matthew. In each case the aim has been the same: to give readers of the *BMJ* an overview of the kinds of commentaries and other items of scholarly literature that are "out there"; to make some recommendations; and all with a view to enabling preachers to prepare to engage in detailed study of the Lectionary Gospel for the year: Year B (1999-2000) = Mark; Year C (2000-2001) = Luke; Year A (2001-2002) = Matthew.

Two tasks, therefore, present themselves for the year 2002-3. On the one hand some consideration of commentaries on John would help to complete the picture. The Revised Common Lectionary states that "John is read each year, especially in the times of Christmas, Lent and Easter, and also in the year of Mark whose gospel is shorter than the others" – so it seems appropriate to offer some guidance to the literature on John this year. On the other hand, Martin Scott's article on Mark is now three years old and thus, as is always the way with scholarship, in need of updating. I attempt both of these tasks in the present article. As usual, the views offered arise out of my own working with these commentaries, and the focus is on more recent scholarship.

Older Commentaries on John

The Fourth Gospel has long been well served by scholars working at the height of their powers. There is a real sense in which the "standard works" on John are the same today as they were two decades ago. For me, pride of place goes to Raymond Brown's *The Gospel According to John I-XIII, XIV-XXI* (Anchor Bible 29, 29A; 2 volumes; New York: Doubleday, 1966,

1970). Brown is the quintessential Johannine scholar possessing a sure grasp of the major theological and historical issues, combined with meticulous (some may judge it obsessive) attention to detail in the exegesis. It is Brown, along with J. L. Martyn whose small book *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* was published in 1968, who established the main lines of Johannine scholarship as we still encounter them today, focussing on the history of the Johannine community and its struggle to assert its identity over against its Jewish neighbours. This is still an expensive commentary, but there is nothing quite like it, and if you see it second hand, then you should snap it up.

There are a number of other commentaries with which readers of the *Journal* may already be familiar. Schnackenburg's three-volume exegesis of the Greek text (London: Burns and Oates, 1968, 1980, 1982) is still an important resource, but the exegesis lacks the verve and perceptiveness of Brown and you have to pay for an extra volume! From the world of British scholarship comes Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (New Century Bible Commentary; London: Marshall Morgan Scott, 1972) that has a slightly

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In the bleak midwinter frosty wind made moan.

As we enter 2003 with the likelihood of bad weather to come this carol prompted me to recall the winter of 1963. This was the year when for two months temperatures did not exceed freezing. Everything was frozen and warmth hard to find.

On Sundays I was eager to get to church as I found it a regular source of warmth. No it was not the welcome of the minister or congregation - it took the form of a large old cast iron radiator which along with several others radiated huge amounts of heat into the spacious church building.

At the time the heating could only be fired up for the weekends and during the week it was left turned off to contain costs. It had been OK for years and on the basis that "if it ain't broke don't fix it" it was clearly left to its own devices.

Well as you will have guessed the inevitable happened and one of the pipes froze – somehow a "frosty wind" had done its worst. To cap it all it must have been a day or two before it was realised that not only did we have no heat in the radiators we had water seemingly coming from everywhere!! What followed was several weeks when the only heat we had was from some pretty ineffective electric heaters. I can assure it wasn't just the wind that moaned!

Although our winters seem to have become milder since 1963 I can guarantee that at the first sharp spell of freezing temperatures there will be both churches and homes that will suffer damage. Although insurance will cover repairs the inconvenience suffered is much greater than that caused by a few simple precautions.

I would therefore urge that:

- Someone carries out regular checks, particularly during cold weather, if the property is empty even for a short period. Church hall toilets can be made most inconvenient!! Although this may not stop burst pipes, it does mean that problems will be discovered quicker, keeping damage to a minimum.
- Those checking the premises know how to find and shut the stop valve
- A keyholder is available at all times especially during holiday periods.
- Pipes and water tanks should be lagged, but tanks should not be lagged underneath so as to allow warm air from below to prevent them from freezing.
- Warmth is the best protection against frost damage so if possible arrange for some form of heating to be maintained.

Yours Sincerely

Alf Green ACII (Assistant General Manager)

PS Do not forget that winter weather will expose any weakness in the maintenance of your property – In particular fallen leaves from nearby trees can be a major source of problems. Do check your valleys/gutters/hoppers/downpipes for blockages regularly.

dated feel. The same is true of C. K. Barrett's *The Gospel According to St John* (London: SPCK, 1978), although the attention to the details of the Greek text is very helpful. Finally, from Germany, comes the colossus of Johannine interpretation, Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1971). In assessing the significance of Bultmann's work for subsequent interpretation one cannot do better than cite John Ashton's assessment: "Rudolf Bultmann, unmatched in learning, breadth, and understanding ... in spite of his pre-eminence, every answer [he] gives to the really important questions he raises – is wrong." [John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p.4]. Yet, most preachers will want a commentary that gives some helpful answers as well as asking the right questions.

Which brings us to Bultmann's translator, George Beasley-Murray. Perhaps the best thumbed of older commentaries on John on my shelves is my paperback copy of the 1st edition of *John* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, 1991). The reasons are clear: this is a one-volume commentary in which the virtue of brevity combines with those of solid scholarship and clear exegesis – and all written by a Baptist. What more could one ask for? Not much, to be honest. The format of the Word series makes it easy to find the information you are looking for and Beasley-Murray's obvious grasp of the text and the secondary scholarship is lightened by his obvious empathy with and feel for the distinctive contours of John's story of Jesus. The preacher will find in this commentary a starting point for their exegetical work, but also suggestions for their own theological reflection on the Johannine text. The main weaknesses are that the commentary does not fully take into account the *narrative* quality of the

Gospel (see below), and there is tendency to bypass the complex issues of the historicity of the material. Overall, however, a Baptist preacher looking for a one-volume commentary on the Greek text should probably begin here (although you should now buy the 2nd edition!).

More Recent Contributions

The commentaries I have mentioned so far all adopt what in general terms may be designated the "historical-critical" approach to John. To take an example: if we look at Beasley-Murray's comments on the story of the Wedding at Cana (John 2.1-11) we find information about the possible source behind the story; the significance of the Johannine word *semeia* (sign); the likely Old Testament background to the imagery; grammatical information telling us, for example, if Jesus is really being rude to his mother in 2.4. This information is then gathered together in the "Explanation" section of the commentary and forms the basis for suggestions about the basic theological ideas that the author intended to communicate.

The commentaries mentioned below are all characterised by some kind of shift away from this approach. Most significant are those that seek to understand the *narrative* dimensions of the gospel. The work of two authors may be mentioned.

Mark Stibbe's 1993 commentary, *John* (Readings: Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press) stands as an initial example of the value of this more "literary" reading. Here the Wedding at Cana episode is connected with the wider narrative context of John chapters 2-4, focussed on the narrative setting of Cana. The structure of the text, its essential *movement*, is also identified (in this case a chiasmic ABCBA structure which draws the readers focus to vv6-8 as the centre of the drama). Comments on

characterisation follow, in which it is noted that the usual focus for a wedding story, the bride and groom, are absent from the narrative and that the role of the "chief steward" in the narrative (see 2.9-10) is designed to demonstrate that the miracle of transformation is essentially hidden from public view, thus keeping Jesus' identity hidden. Within such a narrative reading, details that from a historical perspective are kept firmly in the background now come to the fore. So the setting of the Cana miracle on the third day (2.1) identifies this as a miracle of the new age, of new creation. Finally, literary sensitivity might detect significance in the romantic (this is a wedding) and comic (note the ignorance of the chief steward over against the knowing smugness of the servants in 2.9) elements of the story. In other words, we have a romantic comedy in which the wedding happens at the beginning (compare Shakespeare's comedies), an observation, which opens the way for talk about John's realised eschatology!

This is fascinating stuff, and enormously suggestive for the preacher who is concerned to take her hearers *into* the story and allow it to connect to their own lives. Some of Stibbe's readings are speculative and others are just unconvincing, but there is plenty in this commentary to get ideas going – and it is the narrative *method* that is the key.

More sober, scholarly and yet still breaking new ground is Francis J. Moloney's *The Gospel of John* (Sacra Pagina; Collegeville; Michael Glazier, 1998). Moloney is a distinguished Johannine interpreter, who has already published three narrative-critical readings of the gospel which if you see them are worth picking up (*Belief in the Word: Reading John 1-4; Signs and Shadows: Reading John 5-12; Glory Not Dishonour: Reading John 13-20* (21), Minneapolis:

Fortress, 1993, 1996, 1998). The one volume commentary, which is published in the increasingly distinguished Catholic Sacra Pagina series, is a handy summary of this earlier work. Moloney offers us more than Stibbe by way of information about the details of the text and thus covers much of the same ground as Beasley-Murray. However the creative use of a literary approach enables new insights to be gleaned.

For example, on John 2.1-11 Moloney shows how the passage is structured around two exchanges that lead to two actions. The exchange between Jesus and his mother in v4 leads to the action of Mary instructing the servants in vv5-6. The exchange between Jesus and the servants in vv7-8 leads to the servants' action in vv8-9. Both Jesus' mother and the servants thus become the first examples in the gospel of the correct response to the presence of Jesus – trust in his word. Listen to Moloney finishing off his reading of this story:

The unconditional faith of the mother of Jesus in the word of her son initiated a series of events that led to the revelation of the glory of God. What Jesus *said* was done, and his glory was manifested as a consequence of an unconditional acceptance of his word. But there will be an "hour" in the future when this revelation will come to a final consummation. The mother of Jesus, the woman, will return at that "hour". (p.69)

I am still getting to know this commentary. However, the more I use it the more I like it. Considerations of cost and an inevitable Baptist bias still favour Beasley-Murray as "first choice", but in the long run Moloney may offer more to the preacher. I would even suggest that the difference between them correlates with distinctive understandings of the task of

preaching. Older models of preaching tend to emphasise the *meaning* of the text, emphasising content over form. Here, the preacher spends time finding out what the text *meant* and this is where good, historical critical commentaries come into their own. From there the task is to connect this to what the text *means* in the contemporary context. Thus, the move is from exegesis to exposition and a commentary such as Beasley Murray's is enormously helpful in providing the information needed for accurate exegesis, as well as suggesting possible lines of exposition.

However, the risk of this approach to preaching, not least with the gospels, is that the significance of the form of the text (in this case narrative) is underestimated. Preachers who have been influenced by more recent models of preaching that emphasise the importance of narrative form within the sermon (such as in the so-called New Homiletic in the U.S.) will want to attend not only to meaning but also to *rhetorical function* by asking questions about what the text *does* or, to put it another way, *how* the text means. This needs a different kind of commentary resource, and Moloney, in my view, fits the bill admirably, enabling the preacher to consider how she might re-present this rhetorical function through the medium of the sermon.

Other Works on John

Of course, we have only scratched the surface here. Those who insist on the complete historical veracity of John will look to D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) or Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; revised edition; Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1995) for support but in my view this focus leads to a mono-

dimensional reading of the text. There are other works that I simply do not know well, such as Thomas L. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

So finally, I will mention several other recent works on John's gospel that are worth considering. Readers familiar with Ched Myer's work on Mark's gospel may be interested to know that there is an equivalent volume on John, not in the sense that Myers wrote it (although he does supply a Foreword), but that it reads the text from an explicit stance of political commitment and radical discipleship. Wes Howard-Brook's, *Becoming Children of God: John's Gospel and Radical Discipleship* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994) adopts a liberationist reading strategy in which the fourth gospel invites readers to a radical commitment to follow Jesus from within a spirit-filled community. Howard-Brook, like Myers, is a careful scholar (there is plenty of historical and literary information here), but the scholarship always has an edge and a purpose. For him, the Cana location of 2.1-11 is significant insofar as "Jesus begins his activity not in the headquarters of the Law, not in the center of the religious world of Israel, but on the obscure margins, hidden, quiet, yet invited" (p.78). I like this commentary. Howard-Brook refuses to follow the consensus view that the Johannine community has essentially withdrawn from the world, and demonstrates how this gospel is fundamentally about engagement with the world. Two other works make a similar contribution: David Rensberger, *Overcoming the World: Politics and Community in the Gospel of John* (London: SPCK, 1988) which may, unfortunately,

now be out of print, and Michael H. Crosby, *"Do You Love Me?": Jesus Questions the Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2000), a much more Catholic reading, but suggestive nonetheless.

Apart from commentaries, I would recommend D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) as the best small introduction to the gospel; John Ashton's *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* as the best recent attempt to articulate the historical and theological uniqueness of John; R. Alan Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) for those wanting to follow up the narrative/literary approach and finally Andrew T. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial: The Lawsuit Motif in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000) as a recent example of scholarship on a particular feature of the gospel with one eye to its contemporary relevance within the postmodern context.

Recent Work on Mark's Gospel

It remains for me to mention a few recent works on Mark's gospel. We are now in the fortunate position of having two (or one and a half to be accurate) recent full-scale commentaries on Mark. Both repay careful study.

The "half" a commentary is the first volume of Joel Marcus' contribution to the Anchor Bible series, *Mark 1-8; A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Vol 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000). When complete this commentary promises to be a major achievement, akin perhaps to Brown on John's Gospel. Again the hallmarks are a comprehensive attention to detail combined with a clear concern to communicate the power of Mark's narrative. Marcus' special concern is to set

Mark against the historical background of the 1st Jewish War in 66-70 A.D and the apocalyptic tenor of those times. Subverting all hopes for redemption from Roman oppression through violent rebellion, Mark narrates the story of the Messiah who conquers through rejection and death.

R. T. France will be known to some as the author of excellent studies of Matthew's Gospel. He has now produced an equally detailed, if perhaps a little less exciting, commentary on *The Gospel of Mark* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids / Carlisle: Eerdmans / Paternoster 2002). France has admirably eschewed the temptation to tell us what everyone else thinks about Mark (reviews of scholarship are often the plague of modern commentary writing) and instead takes us carefully through the Greek text, and reading it as a literary whole rather than a random collection of independent units. Narrative criticism first hit New Testament studies with books on Mark, and both France and Marcus are attentive to the narrative dimensions of the text; France, for example argues that Mark can be read as a drama in three acts. As would be expected from a volume in this series, France is concerned to address issues of the historicity of the Markan account, and does so from a broadly evangelical perspective. Yet there is much, much more on offer for the student and the preacher. If you don't have a decent up to date commentary on the Greek text of Mark (and don't want to wait for volume 2 of Marcus) then take a look at France.

Finally, one more recommendation from the world of Markan studies. Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000) is a fascinating study of Mark based upon the (surely correct) assumption that the gospel

was meant to be read out loud to a congregation. This perspective again enables Horsley to open up *how* Mark would have functioned within the early Christian community for which it was written, and along the way there are a number of new observations about the narrative style and persuasive power of the earliest gospel.

Conclusions

Writing these articles over the last three years has been an interesting exercise. A number of readers of the *Journal* have written or emailed to say that they have found the comments helpful, or to let me know that I have missed something! Many, of course, do not submit to the constraints of the lectionary for their preaching, and

there has been little help in these articles for those who spend more time in Paul and the others than in the gospels, let alone the Old Testament. If people have specific questions about literature on some of these other New Testament texts, then I am happy to answer individual enquiries. All of this suggests that there is still among us a commitment to careful exploration of the biblical texts, often in the original languages – an encouraging thought. In a day when the prices of theological books are increasingly exorbitant, and where there is a penchant for multi-volume commentaries it is tempting to resort to whatever volumes we purchased at College. But scholarship moves on and so do the commentaries that so often function as compendia of that scholarship. Happy reading! **bmj**

j-Mail

Dear Journal,

We would like to introduce readers to **FLARE** (Baptists for Family Life and Relationship Education).

A large and important aspect of pastoral ministry lies in offering support to people in the variety of relationships they form. Sometimes this will be when there is a crisis, but such ministry may also be one of simple encouragement and practical help in the ongoing development of a relationship. Particular areas of ministry include marriage preparation, longer-term marriage support, running parenting courses, hosting a family contact centre on church premises, working with singles and the divorced and separated, and much, much more.

FLARE was launched at the Baptist Assembly in Plymouth in May 2002 as a resource for Baptists involved in ministry to

families, married couples and other forms of relationship. It aims to provide a network for the exchange of ideas, experiences and resources in the area of family life and relationship. There is an occasional newsletter which is distributed mostly via e-mail, although it can also be sent out by post. We also sent out a questionnaire which produced some interesting results. Also available is a directory of Christian groups and organisations working in the field. Another special interest group meeting is planned for the Assembly in Cardiff in May 2003.

If any readers of BMJ would like more details or would like to join the mailing list, please contact Philip and Sue Clements-Jewery, 14 Norwood End, Basildon SS14 2SD Tel: 01268 284479 E-mail: pandscj@fish.co.uk

A burning and shining light

Maggie J Marr, Donor Development Officer, offers a glimpse into changes in the picture of Spurgeon's Child Care.

Founded in 1867, Spurgeon's Child Care remains committed to the vision of its founder, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. But a changing world means a changing approach to working with children, young people and families.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was an extraordinary man. Described as "a burning and shining light that suddenly burst upon a moral world", he was best known for his preaching, full of humour and common sense, which captivated and sometimes enraged congregations. But Spurgeon was a man of action as well as words. In 1866, Mrs Anne Hillyard, widow of an Anglican minister, offered him £20,000 to found a home to look after fatherless children, and a year later, the charity that still bears his name was founded. For Spurgeon, helping vulnerable children was a natural extension of his Christian faith.

135 years on, we remain committed to children, young people and families, as a practical expression of our faith. But the world for children has changed, and the way in which we need to respond to their needs has changed too. We no longer run orphanages – the last of these, at Birchington in Kent, closed in 1979. Instead, we provide a range of services, based in the community, and work in partnership with local authorities, social services and churches to provide practical support for children and their families.

Thanks to the support of individuals and churches, and the success of partnerships with local authorities, we now have over 100 projects, in the UK and across the world, and each one is different. "There are certain things that are constant in all our projects, such as financial controls, personnel procedures and professional

standards," says David Culwick, Spurgeon's Child Care's Chief Executive. "But I believe we must give our project managers the chance to develop services that meet the needs of their communities."

Wallbank Family Centre in Whitworth is just one example. Driving through the Rossendale valley north of Manchester, you might not even notice it is there. The main road passes through the "posh" side of the town, with old stone houses and stunning views of hills and moors. But the other side of the town tells a different story – a pocket of deprivation in a beautiful location. In a pair of houses provided by the local council, we run a family centre that is literally in the heart of the community.

"Everyone knows us here," comments Lorraine Moore, the project manager. "Sometimes I wish we could move to somewhere that had more room. But people know where we are, and come and knock on the door." For parents suffering stress, a cup of tea and a friendly face can make all the difference. And an after school club for the children on the estate gives them confidence and skills, and keeps them out of trouble.

Easton in Bristol is a very different community from Whitworth, and the services offered by Easton Christian Family Centre, which we run in partnership with the local church, meet a different set of needs. The community café provides good food at a reasonable cost – a lifeline for

families on limited budgets in this inner-city area – and a low-cost nursery means that parents can return to work knowing that their children are being looked after in a stimulating and caring environment.

“Our nursery places aren’t filled up by the children of middle-class parents – this just isn’t the kind of area they’d send their children to,” explains Gill Miles, the centre manager. “We provide help for families

who really need it.”

Supporting the children, young people and families who really need help is central to what we do. In Easton, Whitworth and other communities across the UK and around the world, we remain faithful to Spurgeon’s vision, and our work is “a burning and shining light”. **bmj**

In 81 projects in the UK, and in 7 countries overseas, we are giving children, young people and families practical support and the opportunity to improve their own lives. The range of services we offer includes:

- out of school clubs and play schemes
- support for young people leaving local authority care
- independent visitors for those within the care system
- help for young people who break the law
- short breaks for children who look after ill or disabled relatives
- education for children orphaned by AIDS
- a refuge for women and children escaping domestic violence
- crèches for children visiting relatives in prison

What can you do?

As well as giving your financial support, you could get involved as a volunteer in one of our projects. Or perhaps you and your church would like to make a difference for children and families in your community. If you do, we can help.

For more details, call us on 01933 412412.

Holidays 2003

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OVERSEAS PASTORAL EXCHANGES

The Executive Minister of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec would like to set up some Pastoral Exchanges with his pastors. A New Zealand Baptist minister would also like to take part in an exchange.

These are arranged about 18 months in advance and usually include the whole family.

Typically, everything except clothing is exchanged. Duties are kept to a minimum and the host churches encourage sightseeing in their country. If you are interested, please contact Vic Sumner, 6 Middle Onslow Close, Ferring, Worthing BN12 5RT.

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with agencies and local authorities or on a one to one level with a person in need. These personal relationships at all levels have brought about a deeper understanding and although we may think our contribution is just a drop in the ocean - as Mother Teresa said "An ocean is made up of many drops." With all our support, this work can continue, whether we make a donation or offer help as a volunteer. Providing we have faith & commitment in all we do, each and every one of us can play our part.

Louise Jordan

Dame Louise Jordan



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Book Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

Journeying with God. **Malcolm Rothwell.** SCM Press. £9.95.
ISBN 0716205491

This is the account of a personal journey with God. It took place during a retreat following the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola. The Exercises involve reflecting on Gospel passages as if you were a participant in the story. For the author this involved dealing with his feelings and emotions rather than the familiar territory of his academic background. As a result Rothwell perceives there to be a tension between 'head and heart' and struggles with holding the two together.

After giving an account of how the exercises came into being and a little of Ignatius' history, Rothwell takes you through the four stages of a 30 day silent retreat. The daily pattern is of five 1hour sessions of quiet prayer and meditation then a period for taking notes. At some point each day there is time with a Spiritual Director. The Exercises cover the contemplation of sin (designed to bring you to an understanding of God's goodness), the life of Christ, the Passion and the Resurrection. The book deals with the issues around anger, discernment of God's will and the development of faith. It also highlights the distractions and the difficulty of concentration during silent prayer, as well as the experience of intense silence and the feeling of being totally alone.

I found this book a confusing read. The perceived tension between 'head and heart' dominates the middle section of the book to the extent you almost lose the pattern of the Exercises. For someone struggling with the 'head or heart' issue

and discerning God's will within that tension it is certainly worth reading. For those who do not regard this as a major issue, this could be a frustrating read.

**Lynn Britten,
Claremont, Cricklewood.**

St Augustine. **Serge Lancel, translated
Antonia Neville.** SCM Press, 2002.
Paperback £25.
ISBN 0-334-03866-3

It is said that no English language playwright or poet since the seventeenth century can do anything but imitate or rebel against Shakespeare. It is equally true that all theological thinking from the end of the fourth century is shaped by the thinking of Augustine of Hippo - and in this book Serge Lancel shows us how much Augustine's thinking was shaped by the philosophical, social and theological debates and controversies which dominated Late Antiquity. This is an immense work. It is a detailed and painstaking account of the whole of Augustine's life, and at times the sheer weight of detail and richness of incident overwhelms the reader. But in the midst of all the complexity there are fascinating facts which bring the story to life - the length of time that journeys to episcopal councils could take, the mechanics of producing the written works which were to prove so important in shaping Christian thinking, the personalities of Augustine's friends and opponents.

None of the 36 chapters is long and the book itself is divided into three parts. The first concentrates on the early part of Augustine's life, tracing his childhood and youth, conversion, ordination and reluctant consecration at Hippo. This

section includes a wealth of topographical detail, placing Augustine not only in historical and social, but also physical context.

In the second part, Lancel tells the story of Augustine's time as a bishop, looking in particular at the struggles to establish the church in a pagan culture. The final part, while still telling a chronological story, concentrates particularly on Augustine's major theological works - on the Trinity and City of God, as well as his struggle against Pelagianism.

Throughout the whole book, we are made aware of the way in which theological exploration takes place - in struggle and with intellectual rigour. Augustine's theology was not, on the whole, worked out in the seclusion of the study, however much he would have preferred that. Rather, it was done in the midst of a busy personal situation, and in conversation with others of different opinions. In the argument, and the commitment to pursue the truth, the revelation of God is found.

This is a big book - not a light read, nor an easy one. But it is a worthwhile study, pushing us back to reread Augustine and on to think hard about faith.

Ruth Gouldbourne.
Tutor, Bristol Baptist College.

The Meal Jesus Gave Us: understanding Holy Communion. **Tom Wright.** Hodder & Stoughton 1999, re-published 2002, 81pp, £4.99. ISBN 0-340-78731-7.

Imagine a Martian arrives at your birthday party..... Thus, Canon Tom Wright artfully draws the reader into this discussion of the richness of Communion. This is a gem of a primer. Canon Wright uses storytelling to explore theology as the reader is imaginatively transported to the

world of first and second century people to understand the background and meaning to the "Jesus-meal". Neither using technical language nor talking down, the author presents what is being done and what it means in an ecumenically sensitive way (from an Anglican stable). Particularly striking is the railway image to sketch the connectedness of time at Communion: "God's past catches up with us again, and God's future comes to meet us once more". In fifteen short chapters Canon Wright looks at the history and development of Communion thought and practice and offers helpful ways to reflect. An excellent introduction for enquirers, it should even give Zwinglian anti-sacramentalists food for thought!

Stephen Copson, Regional Minister,
Central Baptist Association.

Preaching Is Believing - The Sermon as Theological Reflection **Ronald J. Allen.** Published by Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky.

This book seeks to encourage the inclusion of systematic theology and doctrine in most, if not all, of our preaching. Although written with American culture in mind and with an extensive bibliography originating chiefly from the USA, it is a useful reminder that our preaching can sometimes be 'emotionally evocative but intellectually empty'.

Allen, a member of the Disciples of Christ, identifies himself as a 'revisionary theologian', looking to two sources of authority - Christian tradition and contemporary experience. Within the former he lists the Bible, historical phenomena, affirmations of faith, doctrine and practices. Clearly within this framework the Bible ceases to be paramount. He warns of the danger of revising Christian tradition on the basis of the latest whims of pop culture, but concedes that 'the church must on

occasion criticize or even reject affirmations from the past or present that do not measure up to the 'best of its contemporary theological interpretation'. However, for this reviewer at least, his admission that 'I do not believe that God is omnipotent' (p.95) is a rejection too far.

This book is not a major theoretical work but rather a practical handbook to enable the preacher to help the congregation grasp the core of Christian conviction. There is a timely reminder that both the lectionary and the Christian calendar provide ample material to ensure a balanced diet for the congregation.

Allen concludes his book with two sample sermons by way of illustration. One on the Ascension of Jesus, which starts with the Biblical account and uses insights of systematic theology to interpret the meaning for today. The other focuses on the meaning of Baptism, addressed to a tradition practising the immersion of believers, using systematic theology as both its starting and ending point. Whilst we may question his references to Luther and Calvin as interpreters of the significance of baptism, the sermon provides a good example of the intention of the book as a whole.

The appendix contains a brief analysis of the main features of the major historical and contemporary 'theological families', to enable preachers both to have an overview and to determine into which 'family' they most comfortably fit.

Roy Freestone, retired, former Central Area Superintendent.

Struggling with Scripture ed. **William Sloane Coffin** Westminster John Knox Press 2002

Two things about this book appealed before I even started to read it - the title, which surely resonates with many of us,

and also its length. At only 69 pages, it's a book I can have some hope of finishing, unlike many longer tomes on the same subject. But it is neither a slight nor a casual read. The three essays by Walter Brueggemann, William C. Placher and Brian K. Blount all deal head-on with the fact that many intelligent people find the Bible difficult. As Coffin says in his introduction; 'wrestling with Scripture, far from being a sign of weakness, is a reflection of religious faithfulness. What else would you wrestle with, if not the Bible?'

It is stimulating and thought-provoking for non-specialists. The essays explore very differently the major themes of interpretation, context, cultural perspective, citing helpful examples, including the current debate on human sexuality.

Brueggemann's *A Personal Reflection on Biblical Authority* is a wise and wonderful read, touched with awe and respect for the text, which, he says, is endlessly 'strange and new'. As such 'it always, inescapably outdistances our categories of understanding, explanation, interpretation and control.'

Placher's essay challenges the over-simple assumption that Conservative Evangelicals take the Bible seriously, whereas Liberals do not. He writes about context and genre, and the necessity of historical perspective in interpretation, giving Paul's letter to Philemon as an example, which may have justified slavery 150 years ago, but now is read differently

Blount's essay, *The Last Word on Biblical Authority* argues that because it's a living word, it never stands still, can never be fixed, never become the final or definitive word. This he knows is a dangerous view, because what most

people want is 'simply' to be told what the Bible means. But, he says, it is supposed to be hard!

Yes! and this book encourages honest and intelligent struggling with scripture; well-worth buying.

Jenny Few, Minister of Attleborough Baptist Church, Nuneaton.

Ezekiel; the people's Bible commentary; a Bible commentary for every day. **Lucas, Ernest** The Bible Reading Fellowship, Oxford. 2002. £7.99

Ezekiel can be a daunting and forbidding book. It catalogues the strange visions, rigorous teaching and often bizarre behaviour of one of Judah's great exilic prophets. Parts of it are difficult to understand and elements are difficult to reconcile, in any straightforward way, with our contemporary Christian view of the world.

Meanwhile, the aim of this commentary series is to provide daily readings that both 'instruct the head and warm the heart'. It must therefore provide comment on every part of the text, taking it and its context very seriously, yet relating it to the teaching of the New Testament and making links between the Scriptures and the lived Christian faith of today.

This aim presents any commentator on Ezekiel with a considerable challenge. It says a great deal for Dr Ernest Lucas's skill as an exegete and a communicator that he has fully achieved the goal. He has written a very helpful book indeed. After a brief introduction to the historical context, the prophet, the book and its main theological themes, Lucas offers 103 sections that take us through the 48 chapters of the book. There is commentary on the text, devotional ideas are drawn from it leading to reflection on contemporary church and

society. An appropriate prayer or meditation follows each day's reading. At the end are some helpful figures depicting Ezekiel's vision of the restored Israel; the temple and the land.

Of course, the book is not a replacement for a more detailed commentary. Furthermore, the suggestions for further reading are rather brief and there is no index. However, for someone preparing to preach on Ezekiel who wants some reliable introductory material and some hints as to how the text might be applied today, or for anyone who wants an informed devotional guide to the text, this book is definitely to be recommended.

Stephen Finamore.

Westbury-on-Trym Baptist Church

The Making of a Modern Denomination: John Howard Shakespeare and the English Baptists 1898-1924 by **Peter Shepherd.** Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs. Paternoster Press. 2001. xvii + 220pp. (no price) ISBN 0-84227-046-X.

This book grows out of Peter Shepherd's doctoral thesis and deals with that significant period in the first quarter of the 20th Century when John Howard Shakespeare was General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland. Not so well known by many of us today, such was his influence on our denominational life that we're still living with the fruits of his ministry. Much of what we now take for granted as the way we do things as Baptists were innovations introduced during his time in office; Union accreditation of ministers, a centralised system of grant aid to ministers and churches, the Area Superintendents (now replaced by Senior Regional Ministers) and not least the role of the General Secretary as *de facto* denominational leader.

A gifted public speaker, Shakespeare was a man with undoubted vision, energy and organisational skills. He was instrumental in the birth of the Baptist World Alliance in 1905, but his leadership extended beyond the Baptist fold. The bringing together of the main Nonconformist denominations into the Federal Council of Evangelical Free Churches in 1919 was due to his endeavours. Way ahead of his time, he foresaw that the age of denominationalism was passing, but for all his ecumenical striving, he was to fail in his ultimate goal of seeing the Free Churches unite with the Church of England under episcopacy.

Shakespeare's somewhat pragmatic approach to Baptist ecclesiology brought him into inevitable conflict with others in the Union who were wary of any encroachment on the traditional independency of the local church, a debate that still goes on amongst us in one form or another. As the title promises, Peter Shepherd's welcome book reminds us of Shakespeare's important legacy and at the same time helps us understand ourselves better – definitely worth a read!

**Ken Stewart,
Horfield Baptist Church, Bristol**

Tools for Transformation – making worship work, **Peter Craig-Wild**. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002, ISBN 0-232-52449-1, pp150, £10.95

There are some books that are easy to read and to review. This is one of them. It is not only because of the handy, end of chapter summaries and the odd cartoon. It is because the case made about corporate worship is simple and the outcomes practical. Worship is discussed in the context of Anglican liturgical change with a view to finding an alternative way of viewing church worship that is a creative response to postmodern culture. The

author sees a need for the church to move from a merely text and words orientated liturgy, which is the legacy of the Reformation, to worship which is rounded in style and content including heart, mind, soul and strength. The intention is missiological and pastoral, that the church in corporate worship may be properly connected to our culture and we may see people drawn to faith and sustained in Christ through the worship experience. In the phrase of the title, we need to be equipped with the "tools for transformation" during worship. Two chapters expand the practical outworking of this idea in terms of story and symbol. The author encourages the enhancing of the parabolic content of worship, the use of story elements, and then the use of symbols to enable different human responses, so that transformation becomes possible.

There are many practical ideas here and some illuminating explanations, such as the passage on the gift of tongues in worship. The argument overreaches itself in places, so we read strangely that text is "an outmoded medium of communication." However, the book is an important challenge to our word-based approach to worship and deserves serious attention in any tradition.

**Chris Voke,
Spurgeon's College, London.**