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The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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Editor: HAZEL SHERMAN

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

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

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

Editorial

This issue of the Journal co-incides with the gathering of Baptists from all over the world at the BWA Centenary Congress in Birmingham. Many readers will not be able to be present, but we hope that the reflections in these pages will help to focus on a sense of belonging which is wider than our geographical limits in the UK.

Warmest congratulations are due to David Coffey, a member of our Fellowship, as he takes up the Presidency of the Baptist World Alliance. Our prayers will continue with him as he faces a huge range of opportunities and challenges.

On its website, Denton Lotz, General Secretary of the BWA, recalls the words of F B Meyer in his concluding address in the Albert Hall, London, on 18th July 1905 at the first Congress, calling participants to go back and learn that "the Gospel of Christ is not individualist but altruist; not every man for himself to save his own soul, but every man to save the soul of someone else". Though the language and context is of a former generation, the sense of mutuality in the gospel which has nothing to do with accident of birth or status, the challenge of the Scriptures to any easy or corrupt options of the age and the call to stand against "all that disintegrates and corrupts modern society" rings with a

contemporary clarity: we are "against war, against slavery.... We are against bribery and corruption in high places. We stand together for purity and right". As Baptists gather together in Birmingham we look forward to opportunities for mutual learning in a world that in many ways has grown smaller since London 1905 but whose divisions, of which we are more aware, may seem greater.

There are a number of 'domestic' matters to note for readers of this Journal. John Houseago has stepped down after 10 years of faithfully editing the Book Review section, and Gwynne Edwards has retired from his task of producing the 'Of interest to you' pages. We are grateful to each of them for their consistent, quiet and effective work on our behalf, and welcome Michael Docker to his new task of Book Review editor and Peter Dwyer as Gwynne's successor. **bmj**

Baptist Ministers' Fellowship AGM

to be held at

Baptist House, Didcot

28 September 2005 1.30 pm

Nominations are requested for Vice-Chair
to be elected at this meeting.

Please respond to the
Secretary, Derek Keenan

David Coffey – Friend and Teacher

Zeljko Mraz, General Secretary, Baptist Union of Croatia (Saveza baptističkih crkava u Republici Hrvatskoj)

I first met David in Portugal during the 1995 EBF assembly. This was my first assembly as a General Secretary meeting Presidents and General Secretaries of other Baptist Unions in Europe and the Middle East. At the time I was one of the youngest Baptist leaders in Europe (I was 29) and there I was in the company of people I had only heard about. On that meeting David Coffey was chosen for vice-president of EBF and it was the first time I had the privilege of listening to someone with experience talk of his life and work. I will never forget how graciously the leaders and especially David accepted me. They were friendly and obliging, ready to help this young man who didn't really know what he was doing there and why he had accepted such a ministry. I also noticed that these people were not only spiritual people, but people who like myself loved the little things in life, such as football and Chelsea (and they're people of faith who can wait 50 years to see their dream come true!).

During these ten years that I've known David we have had many encounters and there have been so many events where I had the opportunity better to experience his leadership skills. Along with the visit to the Maracana stadium in Rio de Janeiro (during the BWA Council, after all the meetings!), and text messaging the results for Chelsea in Norway, specially memorable (so you don't think we just talked about football) was the Conference in Prague in 1999 organised by EBF for young leaders, for the so called "Joshua Generation". At that Conference I learned a lot about leading and transforming a denomination as well as many other things

needed for the ministry I have. The significance of that conference can be seen in the many participants of that conference who are now leading the unions of churches in their own countries.

To learn, not only at conferences, but directly from people who have the same ministry (if it isn't pretentious to compare small and large Unions), to be able to share your experiences and problems is a great blessing and encouragement. I'm glad to be able to say that one of my tutors was David Coffey.

On one occasion I was invited to visit the Baptist House in Didcot where I had the opportunity to get acquainted with the work of the Baptist Union in Great Britain as well as the missionary work of British Baptists through BMS World Mission (our mega-partner, thanks!). The BUGB as one of the biggest Unions in Europe is full of diversity, diversity of individuals and communities. It consists of very closed communities and very open ones, very conservative communities and those less so, charismatic communities and those who are not. To reconcile such diversity and keep the unity of the churches much wisdom and skill is needed. During my visits to the UK I saw how Baptists, regardless of the fact that they live in a post-Christian age, manage to keep the trend of membership growth in their churches as well as being highly regarded by other Christian churches. I am sure that the influence of David Coffey's leadership had a large part to play in this area.

My vision has been to work to maintain this unity in diversity in the union of

churches I work for so that diversity in practice and belief (on peripheral issues) will not mean division in belonging to the one God through our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe the wider Baptist family has a lot to learn in this field from their brothers and sisters in the UK.

Finally, I remember when David Coffey visited Croatia in 1999 as president of EBF. He preached a sermon based on John 6, which tells of the miracle of feeding a great crowd and how a little boy was willing to give what he had for Jesus to multiply. At the time his message was a great

encouragement to us to be bold and to give the Lord what we have in faith so that he may multiply it.

Now that David Coffey is accepting this ministry of President of the Baptist World Alliance in a very critical time for our Baptist family I would like to think that we all bring before the Lord our love, trust and fellowship in our Baptist family and let the Lord multiply it to his Glory.

May the Lord bless his servant David and the people of BWA whom he will serve. **bmj**

“In her book *The Color of Faith: Building Community in a Multiracial Society* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998, p. 4), Fumitaka Matsuoka says; “A significant theological challenge facing Christians is to discover what it means to live out our faith in a time when basic patterns of human relationship seem to be under major reconstruction. The church can no longer ignore the multicultural and multiracial context of the world today and of societies everywhere. It must move from distrust and alienation into dynamic interrelation with a new vision of humanness.”

..... “Culture is a complex component of human existence. It defines who we are as people. Values, traditions, language, music, food, stories – all these things make up the culture of a people. We need to understand that there is no normative culture out of which all others are measured. Each culture is a prism through which we see reality and ourselves, including our spiritual selves.

Once I was called to school by a teacher who claimed that my daughter had been disrespectful. I went to the school to inquire. The teacher said that she had admonished my daughter and that my daughter kept looking to the floor. In this school in suburban Boston where my children were the first minorities ever, I had to teach the teacher that in our culture, when a person is admonished, that person should not look at the eyes of the other. That would be challenging and disrespectful. My daughter was not being disrespectful. She was behaving in the most respectful manner she knew, because of our culture.”

From an essay by José Abraham de Jesús, Minister for Worship and Education Ministries of the United Church of Christ, Cleveland, Ohio, USA (*Seasons of the Spirit, Pentecost 1 2005*)

FELLOWSHIP IN CHRIST

Faith Bowers, London, reflects on the richness of experience and mutual learning from a grass-roots experience of Baptist World Alliance encounters

Through the 1990s I was privileged to be a BUGB representatives at the BWA Council, and I have continued on the Heritage and Identity Commission, as one of three British historians, with John Briggs and Ian Randall, contributing to the Alliance's centennial history. International meetings have their Babel-like quality, with native English speakers at an advantage, but you can usually recognize the renderings of 'Jesus Christ' and there is something splendid about the universality of 'Amen'.

The BWA is a loosely structured, low-budget organization, yet it encourages and helps many churches - sharing resources, helping with training and literature, providing aid, working in reconciliation, and championing human rights. With modest numbers in Europe, we easily forget that Baptists are numerous in North America and in parts of Africa and Asia. We are not homogeneous - that would not be the Baptist way. Varieties of theology, practice and attitudes often reflect different origins - some by spontaneous efforts to recreate a 'New Testament' church, others by missionary outreach, some implanted by settlers. We all practise believers' baptism, we look to the Bible and the Holy Spirit for authoritative guidance, we locate government in the local church, and we recognize the missionary imperative. Baptist practice encourages lay participation in decision-making and worship-leading: Baptists from Myanmar (Burma) say this gives them an advantage over other Christians during times of persecution, as they are better equipped to survive when missionaries have been banned and clergy imprisoned.

Heritage members tend to be enthusiastic about the BWA (colleagues on the Doctrine and the Ethics Commissions have not always felt equally positive). The numbers and affluence of Baptists in the United States make them dominant, but there are other voices and moving stories for those with ears to hear. These were years of considerable change in eastern Europe and Africa, while many Asians spoke of persecution. In some conversations you felt transported back to the Acts of the Apostles.

Baptist World Aid is small as such agencies go, but when Kosovan refugees flooded into Albania, Baptist aid was up and running three weeks ahead of the Red Cross, supporting relief work of local churches, composed entirely of new converts since 1992. Further east the tiny Hungarian Baptist Union has done impressive aid work.

Books are always in demand: we were encouraged to take some to give to those who had few. The Africans pounced on everything of a pastoral nature. One, asked if he had any room, said he would gladly leave everything else behind if he could fill his case with books! In Buenos Aires my turn to staff the free book stall fell on the last day, with just a few German theological tomes left. I kicked my heels for 50 minutes, then an Argentinean appeared, 'Have you *anything* on work with the mentally handicapped?' Challenged by a local need, he did not know where to begin but had come that day from a distant town believing God had promised help. In my bag were a full range of BUild publications on such ministry. He seized on them with delight. We both

knew we were where Christ wanted us that afternoon.

Western countries have been generous in sharing materials, but they are not always appropriate for other cultures, so the BWA helps church leaders write their own. In Jamaica in 1992 a single Cuban pastor managed to join us, the first for many years. I remember him gently declining Southern Baptist materials in Spanish, explaining, 'We have good writers able to produce our own material. We have computers. We have Canon. We have Japanese equipment. But we have no paper ... The Gospel is going ahead in Cuba, using a very bad kind of paper - not like this lovely paper' (wistfully he fingered some Didcot copier sheets). 'If you could send us rolls of newsprint, via Mexico or Jamaica, I think our government would only confiscate a quarter, as they would want to encourage further supplies.' [This provoked exclamations of dismay.] 'No, no, my friends - it is reasonable for the government to take some. Paper is scarce: the government newspaper is only a single small sheet.'

Three years later Nilo was back at the Congress in Buenos Aires, accompanied by his friend Leoncio. We were glad to hear that the Americans had supplied his newsprint. Nilo and Leoncio had both been imprisoned for preaching, but found opportunities there for pastoral ministry: 'Often the soldier looks like an iron man, but when you talk you find he has a hole in the heart'. Despite persecution, they told us proudly that their children and grandchildren had all chosen to follow Christ.

Johanna from Indonesia found openings for the gospel where overt witness was forbidden through her gifts of music and dressmaking. She arranged musical evenings, thus gaining entry into wealthy homes, where ladies admired her clothes

and asked who made them. Soon she was making theirs. During fittings, she found ladies would pour out their troubles, giving scope for pastoral conversations. Her business grew so she trained more needlewomen, teaching poor girls a skill that would provide a reliable living. As they worked she told them Jesus stories.

A few years later another Indonesian pastor's wife told us that persecution made it too dangerous for church members to come together. Their seminary had been fired and roads blocked against firefighters. She called on her Chinese friend, doubly at risk on ethnic and religious grounds, once a week to pray with her, never staying more than five minutes as they were under surveillance.

As Yugoslavia split up, Serbians and Croats had to form new Unions: Council meetings gave a rare opportunity to see former colleagues. Fresh from the war, the Croatian leader spoke of his country 30% destroyed. Branco had just visited Sarajevo and was reminded of pictures of Hiroshima: 'When you see it, something in your stomach goes boiling'. He visited some new converts - father, mother and son - but could not baptize them as the curfew ruled out the river and there was no water supply to their bath. The father, blast-deafened, borrowed a hearing aid in alternate weeks. In later years we heard he became pastor to a whole church of deaf converts.

Branco's wife, Mirjana, looked in dismay at our literature and asked how BUGB could hope to get it into secular bookshops. Croatian Baptists produced high-quality publications, including translations of English material, and sold it well beyond their 1,200 Baptists. A Catholic conference in Zagreb always meant brisk business at the Baptist bookshop.

Once I sat next to a radiantly smiling African. Called to the microphone, Samuel told how most of his family were killed in Rwanda. He and his wife gave up good jobs and a nice house elsewhere in Africa on hearing God's call to pastor his people - widows, orphans, men who survived only with right arms chopped off. He spoke of reconciliation and rehabilitation, of 60,000 Hutus and Tutsis worshipping together in Baptist churches. His smile was a lesson in faith.

One peaceful evening by a Swedish lake I saw a woman motionless on a boulder seeming part of that natural scene. She was a Native American, a Cherokee, watching her town-bred grandson being taught to row by a German girl and a young Belgian pastor. Clydia told me her tribe worshipped a beneficent Creator. When she was introduced to Christ, he put a loving face to the elder brother she had learned about around the Sacred Fire. As an American Baptist leader, she remained a Cherokee, and held to their practice of praising God in the morning - and not pestering him with requests until the sun had reached its full height.

In a seminar in Durban a Ghanaian boldly asked the Zambian speaker whether they had problems dealing with Southern Baptist missionaries. Like Ruschlikon, many African seminaries had suffered from defunding, highlighting dissatisfaction with erstwhile friends. The convenor caught her breath - several Southern Baptists sat round the table. The Zambian's reply was gentle and devastating: 'Some missionaries are spiritually immature - but we bear with them.'

Repeatedly Africans challenged us not to work out personal faith in naive individualism but in community. Many Africans normally arrive at communal decisions by consensus, however long that takes. Baptist decision-making 'comes
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naturally' - and they are bewildered at the way we muck it up with 'democratic' voting!

Often personal contacts come outside the formal meetings. We meet not as strangers but as brothers and sisters in Christ. In Jamaica I climbed a 100 foot waterfall - a tourist attraction - thanks to two tall, athletic young pastors, one American, one Estonian, who determined their two older, overweight companions would not miss out. As we ascended slippery rocks, we got a new take on 'brother clasps the hand of brother, stepping fearless...' In chilly Buenos Aires I wrapped a shivering Colombian in my warm shawl as we managed to exchange names. She was Luz (Light). In Germany I found myself explaining mining to a Bahamian pastor who had never realized that people go into the bowels of the earth. Ping from Hong Kong found a small German town on a quiet Sunday so peaceful it was his idea of heaven - even with several coaches manoeuvring behind us!

In South Africa we were shown around Soweto by a student from the Baptist Convention College. Housed in metal cargo containers was a photographic exhibition about the 1976 riots. As a child, Teddy had been there: 'I was in that crowd, baiting the police - we had such fun, diving down sewers to escape ... That's where I was shot in the back with a rubber bullet. I still have the scar ... My friend died there.' In the Mater Mundi church he pointed to a statue of the virgin. 'She saved my life', declared this trainee Baptist minister. 'When the police broke in and started shooting, she was the nearest cover.'

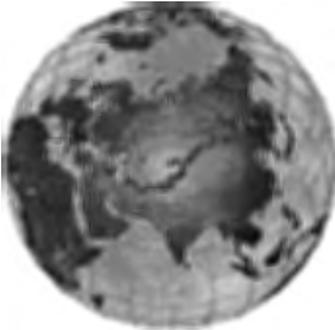
My strangest experience was chairing a seminar, in Spanish with English translation, led by a distinguished Latin-American theologian, Rene Padilla. Eighty

crowded into a classroom for thirty. When the chairperson rose to introduce the session, in carefully prepared if halting Spanish, she lost her chair! The translator, an elderly American missionary, had all his life used both languages but not at the same time. Moreover, he was deaf. Goodwill prevailed. Padilla adjusted his approach and, having studied in Britain, translated himself. Despite uncomfortable perches, all listened intently and good questions flowed. To close, our translator suggested singing a hymn. Fine, I said, if he could instantly suggest one well-known in both languages. 'I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart' - shades of childhood shared with gusto to close that strange scholarly occasion on a note of joyous togetherness.

The Superintendent for the Zulu Baptist churches around Durban was startled when I enquired about worshipping with a black congregation, but kindly made arrangements. High on a hilltop in the Cleraville township, we were welcomed so warmly we totally failed to experience being 'the odd ones'. A lay couple provided a running translation. Hymns were familiar: we could join in 'Blessed Assurance' in Zulu! While used to white missionaries, they were excited to have white people come just to worship among them. This remains our most memorable experience of fellowship in Christ. **dmj**



Baptist Men's Movement



a catalyst for change in a hurting world

www.baptistmen.org.uk
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Further information about the work of the Baptist Men's Movement and its auxiliaries can be found on our web sites, or from
The Secretary, BMM, Engine House Cottage,
Pontesford, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY5 0UQ
Telephone (01743) 790377

The Moment and the Meeting: the Need and the Promise.

Mary Cotes, Milton Keynes. A sermon preached on the occasion of the licensing of Revd Christine Collinge as Anglican priest of St. James', New Bradwell, in the ecumenical parish of Stantonbury, Milton Keynes. The readings from scripture, Zeph.3:14-18, and John 4:1-30, were requested by her.

Jesus said to the woman: Give me a drink.

This story begins by surprising us - by turning everything on its head - everything: our every expectation, our every stereotype. Because in this story, it's not someone in need who comes first to Jesus: it's Jesus who first comes in need to someone else. Jesus has been walking through the countryside; he is tired and exhausted, hot and desperate for a drink, and he comes to Jacob's well, and he sinks down in the heat of the day for a rest - and would give anything for something to quench his thirst. It's the sixth hour - it's midday. Impossible to carry on walking - it's just too hot. He has to have a rest.

Very often we read the story only from the moment when Jesus gets to the well, and when we do we miss those few words at the opening of the chapter which explain why Jesus has been on this walk. It's not that he's just been out on a healthy hike for his own amusement; it's not even just that he's decided on moving for strategic reasons of his ministry - he's been on the move, it would seem, to get away from his opponents, the Pharisees. In the end, as we all know, the opposition that the ministry of Jesus engenders leads to his arrest and crucifixion, but that opposition starts very early on in his ministry - it's there from the beginning. 'When Jesus heard that the Pharisees had found out that he was making and baptising more disciples than John - he left Judaea and

went back to Galilee and had to cross Samaria.' So the Jesus who arrives at the well, slumps down and asks for a drink, is a very vulnerable one: tired and maybe anxious or frightened too. There's already a hint that he's on the way to the cross - the cross from which he will cry, give me a drink - I thirst.

For a while some years ago, it was very much the in-thing to talk about the servant church. I don't mean that we shouldn't still talk about it. It can be a helpful way to think about who we are: church members as individuals are to be there to serve one another, the church body as a whole is to serve the community, meet the community's needs, and if you're a non-conformist, when you're ordained, you become an ordained 'minister' - which means a servant. There is much truth in naming the church as a servant, and there is much that we still have to learn about the nature of Christian service. But by thinking of ourselves as a servant church, we can con ourselves into thinking how very Christian and humble we're being when actually we place ourselves in the position of those who are strong. If we are the servants of others, it's the others who are the needy ones; they need us, even though of course we proclaim that we live only in the strength of the gospel. Whilst we are the servants, whilst we are the ones coming to the aid of others, we are the ones in the strong position, and often we don't have the time or the genuine humility to see our own needs or our own

brokenness. And if we're not careful, we can sometimes feel obliged to serve so hard without crumbling or cracking, we feel so obliged to minimise our own needs, physical and spiritual and emotional, that we can end up collapsing with exhaustion, burnt out.... Nowadays, we speak less about being a servant church and we are thinking far more about being a missionary church - and there again, we have much to learn about mission. But by describing ourselves as missionaries we can easily, once more, fall into the trap of imagining ourselves only as the knowers of the truth going out to educate the ignorant, as the ones with God going out to the people without God - as the strong going out to the weak. But in this story Jesus comes to this woman not as the strong one, but in weakness, with needs, asking someone to do something for him. He is vulnerable, defenceless.

There's a beautiful hymn which I'm sure you know which goes,

Brother sister let me serve you
let me be as Christ to you
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

(Richard Gillard)

Perhaps because of Jesus' willingness here to be helped, to be the needy one, to be in the vulnerable position, this extraordinary meeting takes place. The woman can hardly believe it - 'What', she says, 'you a Jew asking me a Samaritan for a drink?' This is not how things usually are! Jews and Samaritans just don't get on, to put it mildly. They belong to different races, different cultures, they hold different beliefs. And then later on in the story we are told that the disciples come back and are astonished to find Jesus, a man, talking to a woman out in the open. Certain rabbis around the time of Jesus taught that it was unseemly, not to say scandalous, for a

good Jew to address in public a woman who was not a member of his family - his mother, sister or wife. And worse still, why was this woman out in the middle of the day when everyone else was sheltering from the heat? Was she a social outcast? Did she have something to hide? And here is Jesus, so desperate for a drink, so tired, that propriety goes right out of the window. And this extraordinary meeting takes place, which bridges the great divides of the day: a Jew talks to a Samaritan; a man addresses an unknown woman, a righteous man comes into fellowship with an unrighteous woman. It's as if a rich businessman asks a favour of a homeless youth, or the president of the USA needs assistance from a prisoner of Guantanamo bay, or the commander of the Israeli army finds himself requesting the help of a Palestinian child. And it's not just some superficial conversation about the weather - yes, they come from different places, and the woman has terrible trouble understanding exactly what Jesus means - but nonetheless, they share deep matters: they talk about her life, his life, they talk about her beliefs, his beliefs, they admit what has divided their peoples - Jews and Samaritans - one from another. This is a moment, a meeting, which breaks down the barriers and points to a new way.

For many years, I worked as chaplain to a mental health unit. One of the wards I used to visit was for people with dementia where most of the patients were elderly. I used to visit every week, and used to enjoy my visits, but one day sticks especially in my mind. I arrived in the department and music was playing - band music, I think from the 1940s - but anyway band music from before I was born. The patients were sitting around the lounge, and some of them tapping their feet to the beat. I went over to one woman, Jessie, in the corner. She looked up at me, beaming and smiling. 'Give me a dance,' she said. She struggled

to her feet, got her balance, then took me in a ballroom hold. And before I knew where I was we were turning to the music. Then an elderly gentleman in the opposite corner caught the bug, and the next time I looked he was dancing in the arms of a very buxom nursing assistant. Then the psychiatrist came in and the ward manager and they too found partners and joined the dance. Before long the lounge was filled with dancers, with people round the edge clapping their hands, whooping in delight....And afterwards, as I walked down the corridor on my way home, I knew that something dramatic had happened, which had changed us all. It had been a moment, a meeting to break down the barriers dividing strong and weak, powerless and powerful. And it had been an elderly woman, someone without defences, who had led us in the dance, enabled us to discover our humanity and glimpse the Kingdom of the God who, as Zephaniah poetically describes, exults with joy in our midst and dances with shouts of joy.

Jesus in need comes to the Samaritan woman and says 'Give me a drink' and a new world is born. And within this moment, out of this extraordinary meeting, between Jew and Samaritan, man and woman, righteous and unrighteous, comes Jesus' promise: the promise of living water. 'The water I shall give,' says Jesus, 'will turn into a spring inside you.'

Many expectations are laid upon us these days, or that's how it can sometimes feel. As churches, our denominations can make all sorts of demands upon us - we're challenged to set targets and meet them, give more money, be successful - whatever success is deemed to be. And enormous expectations can be placed upon those in pastoral charge - by members of the community generally, by members of the church, by their own consciences. There's a passage that seems to sum it all up - I'm

not sure where it comes from but I think it bears quoting! It is entitled *The Perfect Vicar*. 'The perfect vicar is 28-30 years old and has approximately 25 years parish experience. She works from 8.00 am to midnight and is also a good caretaker. She has a burning desire to work with teenagers and spends all her time with senior citizens. The perfect vicar smiles all the time with a straight face because she has a sense of humour that keeps her seriously dedicated to her work at all times.'

Jesus doesn't ever promise approval or success. When he encounters the Samaritan woman he doesn't promise her that suddenly she's going to be good at relationships - and goodness knows, she hasn't proved all that good so far. He doesn't promise moral perfection. He doesn't promise her an easy lifestyle where she no longer needs to trek to the waterwell: he simply promises her Living Water. And the woman, fascinated as she is by Jesus, doesn't even really understand what he means by that - she goes on about her bucket and the well - BUT even though she doesn't fully understand she becomes a missionary - the first missionary in John's gospel. 'Come and see,' she cries to her neighbours - 'I think I have met the Christ' - and the scripture says, people started walking towards him. From Jesus' first request - give me a drink - a new dynamic is set in place.

This is a story to turn everything on its head - our expectations, our stereotypes, even our ambitions. And that, after all, is not just what this story does, but what the whole gospel does. Because the gospel tells of a Christ who comes to us, not in strength, but in weakness, who did not cling to equality with God, but emptied himself to become one of us. It tells of a Christ who, humbling himself to death on the Cross, broke down the divides between human beings. It tells of a Christ

who does not promise us success, only living water welling up in us to eternal life. That is the gospel that turns everything on its head. That is the gospel we're called to proclaim.

When I was being inducted into my first pastorate, I was offered the words of a song which have come to mean a great deal to me, and I hand them on now to you, Christine, and to you, members of St. James. It may be that you know them.

The love of God comes close
where stands an open door,
to let the stranger in,
to mingle rich and poor.
The love of God is here to stay,
embracing (and we might add 'exulting
in')
those who walk his way.

(John Bell and Graham Maule)

Chris, members of St James, I pray that here you may dance the gospel. **bmj**

From Rwanda with love.

Buzizi Claver is just one of the thousands of Baptists from around the world who will be joining us for the BWA Congress in July. But he is one with whom we in BUGB have a special link, as for some time we have been supporting the work he does in Rwanda through gifts sent via BWAid and through the strong partnership he has developed with Christian Aid. In conversation with Graham Sparkes, he greets us.

The father of four children, Buzizi is the Projects Manager for the Union of Baptist Churches of Rwanda (UEBR). He speaks of his task as to 'help the churches to grow and become stable and strong through implementing development projects, and organising training seminars for their members, both men and women.' It is something he has been doing now for 18 years, including 5 years spent at university in Nairobi, Kenya, taking courses in development work. Given the country's recent violent history it is an enormous and challenging task. 'Yes,' writes Buzizi, 'the country is recovering from its painful past now. Yes, there is reconciliation going on all over the country. The Baptist churches have coped very well with the reconciliation campaigns in Rwanda, such that positive changes are seen in many regions of the country. The violence which took place in Rwanda in 1994 affected me very badly and in a strange way because I

lost all my brothers and sisters, together with many relatives and good friends, such that I am now like an orphan in the country!'

Buzizi explains that the UEBR 'has got 52 big churches and 267 schools or branches with 79,000 members to date. The churches are in both cities and rural areas. Churches are being planted in different and new places of the country, and we have no problem at all to plant new ones. The UEBR is mainly concerned with evangelisation and socio-economic projects for the welfare of the Rwandese in general.' It is this work of giving new hope to people living in poverty that Buzizi is particularly committed to.

'The UEBR is so thankful to BWAid, Christian Aid, and BUGB for the financial assistance that they have given,' says Buzizi. 'It has enabled the poor farmers to

grow food for themselves and become self-reliant as far as foods, milk and meat are concerned. With the money that we got from the above named organisations, we were able to support - and we still are supporting - 4,980 poor farmers and their families, grouped into agricultural cooperatives in different regions of Rwanda. The UEFR was able to give goats, cows, different types of seeds, farming tools, fertilisers, the veterinary to care for the animals, and the agronomist to care for the plants and teach the farmers how they should plant using modern methods in order to grow good foods and in good quantity. The 4,980 direct beneficiaries were taught how to help their neighbours with animals and seeds, too, through the rotation of animals or the passing on gifts. For example, the first born from any animal should be given to the most needy neighbour until very many poor people are also served. Because of the support we have received, so many poor people have had their living conditions improved - they now have food to eat, milk to drink, some money which can help them to cover the cost of their basic needs, to pay for the school fees of their children.'

It is a wonderful story of a little going a long way. And it is clear that the work Buzizi is engaged in makes for exciting – and perhaps unusual – Church Meetings! Following receipt of a gift from the BUGB Tithes Fund last year, Buzizi reported that, 'In our Church Meeting, we invited the women representatives to help us plan, and we all agreed that goats should be given to the most needy widows and orphans. It was unanimously decided that the local goats should be bought and distributed to the widows because they are easy to raise and maintain (*the goats, that*

is! – editor). We were able to purchase 274 local goats and give them to 274 widows and orphans within their respective communities. These beneficiaries were extremely happy and thanked God for such a blessing from brothers and sisters in BUGB.' That seems like good kingdom business for a Church Meeting to engage in!

Of course, challenges remain. 'The biggest problem that we are facing now,' says Buzizi, 'is that while the direct and indirect beneficiaries of this project are much better off, we have so many more poor people within our Baptist Churches who also need such support very much and whom we cannot help because of our limited means. The future is still unclear because there is still so much poverty to be overcome, and this will continue to be a vital part of my work in Rwanda. What brings me sadness is that we have so many people in our churches made miserable by poverty and I am unable to help them as I would wish to. Hopefully, the economic and political future of the country will positively change because the leaders of the country are seriously working for that.'

That sense of hope is evident to all who meet Buzizi. The strong faith that has sustained him through personal tragedy now sustains him in the work he seeks to do to help rebuild his country. 'What brings me joy is that I am in a position to help my people improve their living conditions for better and get to know Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.' Buzizi provides us with just one example of the riches present within our wider Baptist community. **[mj]**

Belonging in Europe

Reflections on current European Baptist life

Tony Peck, General Secretary, European Baptist Federation

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were.

John Donne, 'Devotions upon Emergent Occasions' 1624

The title, *'Belonging in Europe'*, is of course ambiguous. It could lead on to a description of what already is happening, or it could be followed by a question mark. And that ambiguity has struck me very forcibly in my first nine months of serving the European Baptist Federation (EBF) as its General Secretary.

There is a sense in which the EBF, founded in post-war Europe in 1949, had always had its 'belonging' defined by a struggle against obvious opposing factors – the huge needs of post-war reconstruction of Baptist church life was quickly followed by the realities of the Cold War. During the first forty years of its life much of the energy of the EBF was rightly focused on supporting believers in Central and Eastern Europe who were being oppressed by the various forms of Soviet-influenced communism. Such oppression creates its own sense of belonging and during the past year I have listened from time to time to many stories of incredible courage, faith and sacrifice of Baptist brothers and sisters from those dark times. This is often accompanied by a continuing sense of gratitude to those in the West who offered prayer, practical support and who spoke up on behalf of those oppressed and imprisoned.

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 the emphasis of the EBF shifted again. Over the next ten years 'belonging' increased and the number of EBF Unions

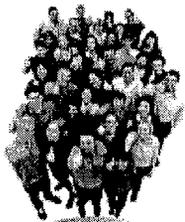
doubled as independent states were formed from the old Soviet Unions and other Unions grew out of the tragedy of the conflicts in the Balkans. The focus of the EBF in the 1990s under the able leadership of Karl-Heinz Walter was on the humanitarian needs of a post-communist Europe. Working closely with Baptist World Aid the EBF founded Baptist Response-Europe (BR-E) to channel resources to help the basic needs of Unions, churches and individuals.

At the same time there were those who wanted to retain the sense of belonging which they had experienced in the former All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists which was the single Baptist body for the whole of the Soviet Union. So the Euro-Asiatic Federation was founded in 1990 to act as a regional umbrella body for Russia and the new independent states building on the existing relationships established between leaders. The E-AF continues at the present time though opinion about it in the former Soviet states ranges from those who value its support and networking to those younger leaders who are less sure of its continuing purpose.

In appointing my predecessor, Bulgarian Baptist Theo Angelov, in 1998 the EBF found a gifted leader who had direct personal experience of the hardship of life under communism and was able to have the confidence of the Eastern

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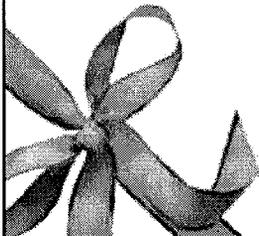


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European Unions whilst having many close contacts in Western Europe. Theo Angelov made a priority of supporting the continuing struggles in some countries for religious freedom for Baptist and other minority groups.

Theo Angelov also realised that EBF needed a renewed sense of purpose in belonging. His presentations to the annual EBF Council often focused on the changing face of Europe, East and West, North and South, and how as European Baptists we might respond to these changes. The belonging in adversity' which had characterised the first half-century of EBF life now had to give way to something else.

Coming into the General Secretaryship in October 2004 I was well aware that we need to renew and re-affirm our sense of belonging and I believe that there are encouraging indications emerging of the way we might do this. Before discussing these, however, I mention other aspects of 'belonging' among European Baptist today most of which share the 'ambiguity' I described earlier..

First of all, there are those in the worldwide Baptist family and in Europe who desire 'belonging' to be more closely defined in terms of consensus round an ultra-conservative agenda in doctrine and practice.

At present what happens in Baptist life beyond national Unions is in terms of 'alliance'; or 'federation' which is a model of a diversity of Baptist life and practice centred on the Lordship of Christ and the distinctive ideas of our Baptist identity. This is still the overwhelming view of the EBF Unions who each have their own Statements of Faith and who see clearly that there is a broad evangelical consensus in the EBF with much more to unite the Unions than to cause division.

In fact the EBF has a good track record of facing up to challenges to its belonging and working them through, for instance in the calling of its first (and to date, only) woman President in 1993, and in the discussions about the future direction of theological education at 'our' International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, which was the subject of some difficult debate in the EBF Council in 1996-7.

However, the withdrawal of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) from the Baptist World Alliance, (of which the EBF is a Regional Body) which, though as a result of a USA-based controversy has had its effects on Europe, with European Baptists being accused of 'liberalism' and 'anti-Americanism' The overseas mission arm of the SBC, the International Mission Board (IMB) has always been a strong supporter of the EBF, though changes in its mission strategy in the late 1990s which weaken the partnership of the missionaries with the EBF Unions has put this relationship under strain. At present the EBF is re-evaluating its relationship with IMB which is a named mission partner in the EBF Constitution.

This conservative 'resurgence' from both outside and inside Europe has its effect on individual Unions, especially those who are more dependent on USA support and finance. For example, where an individual Baptist Union is offered 'free' books, training resources, conferences and personnel it is understandable, though I believe not ultimately helpful, that they may want to take advantage of this.

Secondly, within the EBF itself the question sometimes arises 'when is a Baptist not a Baptist'. For some EBF Unions 'baptist'; is defined over against 'charismatic' and it is not expected that charismatic churches will be part of the Union. And where Baptist Unions in some

of the newly independent states of the Soviet Union have sought to 'contextualise' Baptist life this too has brought questions about whether they still 'belong'.

An example of this would be the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia which, under the leadership of Bishop Malkhaz Songulashvili, is engaged in a bold experiment in contextual mission to build what they see as an authentic 'Georgian' way of being Baptists. The worship services in the Baptist Cathedral in Tbilisi at first sight seem to have more in common with the High Anglican and Orthodox traditions, but it is all underpinned by a clear baptist ecclesiology and is attracting many young people by the freshness and vitality of its life. Many Georgian Baptists want to play a full part in the ongoing development of their nation, and were actively involved in the Roses Revolution of 2003. It is not surprising, however that those in Georgia and beyond schooled in the Russian Baptist traditions find it very difficult to understand and accept this as being within the acceptable bounds of Baptist diversity

The third aspect of 'belonging' is our relationships with those of other Christian traditions. For some European Baptists the word 'ecumenical' is difficult, associated for them with unacceptable compromises in doctrine and ethics.. But on my travels I have discovered that in local, national and in more informal ways, Baptists often have good relationships with other churches, usually based on relationships of trust with other church leaders. The EBF is an Associate Member of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) one of whose functions is to act as a very useful forum for discussion of issues of religious freedom, especially as CEC includes the Orthodox Churches About twelve EBF Unions are full members of CEC.

A delegation from both eastern and
Baptist Ministers' Journal July 2005

western European Baptist Unions took part in recent conversations on the meaning of baptism with the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, the results of which have recently been published.

Finally, in this 'catalogue of belonging' for European Baptists I would mention EBF attitudes to belonging to the European Union. As of 1st May 2005 half of the EBF Unions are in countries belonging to the EU, with Romania and Bulgaria set to join in 2007. I was interested and a little surprised to note the negative attitude towards the EU by Baptist leaders in some of the 'new' countries for whom the economic arguments and the relaxed border controls seem less important than the fear of a godless 'Big Brother'.

The question of a British Baptist attitude to the EU and any referendum on the EU Constitution is relevant here. An article in the *Baptist Times* containing mild, seemingly innocuous comments about valuing our Baptist roots and links in Europe by my colleague Keith Jones and myself drew some critical fire in subsequent letters pages. From this it seems to me that a gospel 'connectedness' in Europe can easily become submerged beneath nationalist anti-European sentiments.

What is clear, however, is that issues relating to the EU and its institutions are going to become more and more important for a majority of our EBF Unions, and as European Baptists we must find ways to make our voice heard. Our involvement with CEC and our links with the European Evangelical Alliance both provide good opportunities to join with other Christians to raise issues of concern in the EU. Even the controversial proposed European Constitution, whilst regrettably not mentioning God in its Preamble, nevertheless contains provision for an

'open, transparent and regular' dialogue with the churches.

What I have described so far are some of the ways of belonging for European Baptists, and how some of these are sometimes ambiguous or even threatening to unity. Baptist life in Europe as elsewhere is fragile, and fragmentation is an ever-present possibility. But I want to close this article on a much more positive note about what I see to be some factors around which European Baptists can unite and find their sense of belonging.

In the BWA/SBC controversy of recent years the BWA General Secretary Denton Lotz has said on many occasions that 'we belong together because we belong to Christ'. At my Induction sermon as EBF General Secretary I tried to explore the meaning of 'koinonia', that profound word which describes such belonging and makes us 'partners in the gospel'. In the midst of cultural, national and theological diversity of the European Baptist family it is important that we keep returning to this essential truth – a truth which from the days of the early Anabaptists has transcended all barriers and borders in Europe.

One positive sense of belonging which I noticed from my very first encounter with the EBF, and which continues today is the sense that we are a 'family'. I understand of course that the term 'family' can be over-used and employed in unhelpful ways in church life. But it describes very well the 'given' ties of Baptist identity which bind European Baptists together and also takes into account that your family members are not necessarily your closest friends! The sense of 'the family gathering' is almost palpable when the EBF Council meets together each year, and the prayerful and practical support and encouragement given and received is often very moving to observe.

If the EBF family is to find a renewed sense of belonging then I believe it will be around the common task of mission to an increasingly secular Europe. I do not believe that it is any longer helpful to talk about East and West Europe as if they were entirely separate cultural entities. Fifteen years after the fall of communism the mission challenges have become more similar and we need the insight and help of one another to face them. There are enough precedents from Baptist history to tell us that building unity around a mission purpose is more productive for the Kingdom of God than expending energy on doctrinal controversies.

So three years ago the EBF began its Indigenous Mission Project. With the help of its Mission partners in USA and Europe, and increasingly by individual Unions and churches, IMP supports gifted individuals to plant churches in their own country. The project started in Moldova three years ago, and there are now forty missionaries, each selected by their own Unions, who also administer the project in their own country. This project is already producing its fund of encouraging and heart-warming stories of new congregations established, individuals who have committed their lives to Christ, and the positive effect on many local communities. In countries like Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia this has added resources to the remarkable church growth which is already taking place.

Another area of strength of the EBF 'belonging' is that it is a grassroots movement which is found in nearly every country in Europe. The potential of this was shown recently when a Consultation took place in Budapest on the increasing problem of the human trafficking of women and girls into prostitution across Europe. Twenty-nine countries and some of the relevant NGOs were represented and we discovered that Baptists in both

'countries of 'origin' and countries of destination' are involved in different projects to prevent and counter human trafficking. As a result of the conference a network across the EBF region will be established and resources produced for Unions who want to do something to combat trafficking and bring hope to its victims.

These factors – the sense of belonging together in Christ in a diverse Baptist family, the uniting around the common task of mission, and the networking potential of the EBF – are ways in which our belonging in Europe can be developed and intensified in the future to keep together this European Baptist family which has survived so many difficulties and challenges in the past.

A postscript. The other development of this past year is that the EBF Offices have

moved permanently to the premises of the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) in Prague, itself wholly owned by the EBF and now renamed the European Baptist Centre. During the past year students and volunteers from around 35 European countries have been here. They live in this unique community for short or longer periods learning from one another and finding that their sense of belonging to the European Baptist family is broadened and deepened, and lasting friendships made. All this finds expression in the daily worship of the IBTS community, united around the Word and the Lord's Table. Prayer is offered in a variety of languages, a small foretaste of all the 'tribes and tongues' gathered around the heavenly throne united in worship and praise.

It is at such times that I know that as European Baptists we indeed belong together because we belong to Christ. **bmj**

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Pensions

A report from **Paul Rosier**, elected trustee and contributing member of the Baptist Ministers' Pension Fund.

I am grateful for this opportunity to give a brief report on the fund and related matters. The trustee board of the Fund meets three times a year, and at the last meeting heard that the fund was in reasonably good health. Members will be aware that investment conditions over the last three years have been difficult, and that many final salary pension schemes have closed or converted to money purchase schemes. The BMPF, however, remains intact as a final salary scheme for the benefit of its membership. During 2004 the Fund recouped in excess of £10 million of the value it had lost due to falling stock markets in previous years, and whilst it is not quite back to where it was before the market fell, it has made significant progress.

One of the strengths of the Fund is its growing membership, with a significant number of Scottish Baptist ministers transferring to the Fund during 2004. This is good for income and the sustaining of the Fund. Members should, however, remember that you only get out what you put in! With changes to pension legislation coming through, members should plan carefully and early for their retirements. For many, the issue of housing in retirement remains a pressing problem. Recent correspondence from the Retired Baptist Ministers Housing Society will have made members aware that there is a potential shortfall in provision for the first time in that Society's history.

The government proposes some major changes to pensions from April 2006. It will be possible, for example, to commute a larger proportion of one's pension fund in a lump sum, and this will be of interest and benefit to members wishing to resolve the issue about housing. Furthermore, it will, from that date, be possible to draw from one's pension fund without necessarily having to retire from

remunerative employment. Again, this may be of benefit to some members who may be worried about their ability to cope financially on the pensions available. There will be a responsibility on pension providers to furnish full projections to members of possible pensions both from the private and from the state sector. Many members do not realise that they can already gain a projection of their potential pension from the state. Full details of these changes will be provided to Fund members by the Pensions Office in due course.

It is, of course, already possible for members to make additional contributions to their pension fund to boost their resources, and this can be done by way of Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVC's) which will enhance the level and value of benefits paid at normal retirement age, or by way of Early Retirement Contributions (ERC's), which are less well-known, but which will enable the member to retire earlier than the Normal Retirement Age (currently 65) without loss of benefit (depending on the level of additional contributions made). The office at Didcot will happily provide members with projections on the level of contributions that can be made.

We have a responsibility to ensure that our affairs are in good order. I am one of four "working trustees" of the Fund, with Jonathan Edwards, Neil Smith and Martin Poole. We are anxious to rightly represent the interests of all who are members of the Fund, and we can only do this if you communicate with us over any issues. I am not a financial advisor, just a pastor finding his way through the jungle to the pensions clearing! Please use me!

Paul Rosier, 31, Richmond Way, Newport Pagnell, Bucks. MK16 0LF
01908 616286 revpaul.rosier@virgin.net

Book Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

Exploring and Proclaiming The Apostles' Creed. Edited by **R E Van Harn**.

Continuum International Publishing Publishing Group. Morehouse. 2004 ISBN 0-8192-8116-6 (pp297 + xix) £12.50

Exploration and proclamation are the twin callers as Roger Van Harn summons us to dance to the words of the Apostles' Creed. Drawing together an impressive list of contributors from different Christian traditions (including Richard Burrige, David Ford, Colin Gunton, George Hunsinger and Frances Young), for each of the principle articles of the creed the reader is first presented with an academic essay that opens up its historical and doctrinal significance, and then with a sermon illustrating how the doctrine has both relevance and inspiration to offer the contemporary preacher.

I was initially suspicious that the tandem pairing of essay and sermon would serve only to highlight the divide between academic scholarship and the Sunday sermon. In fact, the scholar-preachers and preacher-scholars who have contributed to this book ably demonstrate how creedal doctrine properly understood and sensitively handled can enrich the faith experience by offering the believer something substantive to chew on, while simultaneously resisting the tendency of post-modernism to relativize faith convictions into mere personal opinion. In a church environment too, where sadly, ministers can uncritically promote their own forms of ancient heresies (Docetism, Pelagianism, Monophysitism) without congregations batting an eyelid, this book is a timely reminder that the "good news" of the gospel is contingent upon a coherent

and consistent interpretation of doctrine, faithfully proclaimed.

Inevitably, some books that I review do not have an enduring place on my bookshelves; this one certainly will. For the busy minister it is both a valuable summary resource covering the fundamental truths of Christian belief and a deep mine of material upon which to construct numerous doctrinal sermons (aside from the fifteen actually presented). I strongly commend it.

**J.P. Elliston,
Darlington.**

PAUL FOR EVERYONE: Romans Part 1 (chapters1-8) and Part2 (chapters9-16): Tom Wright. SPCK. £8.99 each

Wright covers Romans in two volumes. He gives his own translation; divides the text into 38 and 27 sections respectively for comment; and provides a glossary of key terms which are printed in bold type whenever they occur in the Comment. His outstanding scholarship underlies the work which is also pervaded by his passion for the Gospel.

His technique is to open with an illustration which illumines the gist of the passage (most well-chosen and apt) He expounds the passage with a broad brush rather than by detailed verse-by-verse exegesis. Most sections close with a brief, sometimes one sentence, never laboured modern application. Inevitably, some controversial verses cannot be expounded (e.g. 9.5; 10.4) and Wright gives his judgment without indicating alternative views. He helpfully shows how close for Paul is the link between justification and becoming a member of God's covenant

people; how for Paul Israel is part of the problem rather than the solution but God is faithful to His purpose from the beginning to bless the world through His chosen people - through the faithful death of the truly faithful Israelite, the nation's representative and Messiah, Jesus; how Paul's handling of ethical issues is an outworking of his justification by faith.

Unlike William Barclay fifty years ago, Wright cannot count (to judge by surveys) on a wide Bible-reading, church-going circle of readers. But I hope he succeeds in reaching both interested layfolk within the churches and those who have left the churches but retain a Christian awareness. This work can be used for personal Bible study (daily or otherwise) or as the basis for study groups. Whether used personally or in study groups, these volumes will stretch users, but, then, Romans demands effort but rewards it.

J.E. Morgan-Wynne

Asylum and Immigration by **Nick Spencer**. Paternoster. 2004 £7.99

Subtitled "A Christian Perspective on a Polarised Debate" I found this fascinating book to be Christian in more ways than one. The apparently thorough and balanced review of facts and statistics seems to demonstrate an unbiased Christian perspective of the issues involved in this complex debate over against the often inflammatory and skewed "facts" presented by pressure groups and media on various sides of the debate. From this Spencer teases out the underlying issues, having established clearly the differences between Asylum and Immigration. His chapter on "The Relevance of Biblical History" makes the subsequent arguments accessible to all Christians and non-Christians alike. The exposition of biblical teaching on asylum, immigration and

nationhood prepares the reader for the presentation of principles for engaging effectively in both the debate and the activity of Christian living with Asylum Seekers and Immigrants.

Spencer explodes many myths and prejudices with statements like "Many of the people who end up on British soil claiming asylum do so because they would be dead if they had remained where they were." Statements like "It is better to err on the side of love and risk exploitation by the unscrupulous, than to err on the side of inflexible legality and risk further dehumanisation of the weak and vulnerable." expound a biblically based Christian alternative to many current and more extreme approaches.

However, in a truly Christian way Spencer does not propound "Answers" to the debate but rather by clarifying the issues and drawing out principles he encourages honest and serious reflection of those principles into the present context, which is an ever changing one that needs ever adapting practices. Spencer also offers an extensive bibliography and several patterns of effective Christian involvement which serve to stimulate further engagement.

Does Matthew 25:35 challenge you? Then read this book!

Philip Mader-Grayson

Liberating Ecclesiology by **Andrew Rollinson**. Whitley Lectures. £3.50.

As a relative non-academic, I found this booklet infuriating, awesome and exciting. The way academics drop Latin (or Greek or some other language) phrases into a paper without explanation and the assumption that all readers will understand is infuriating and Rollinson does this

regularly, e.g. *ecclesia semper reformanda!*? (p7. I still don't really know what it means!) However, I was awestruck by the breadth of references to other writers on and practical examples of many aspects of the thesis of the booklet. In addition, I was excited that the academics of our denomination are researching and seeking to apply both theological reflection and practical experience to this vital question of the nature and practice of Baptist churches, albeit here presented in a slightly indigestible format.

The subtitle "*Setting the church free to live out its missionary nature*" is the clear objective and the two ways of reading "*Mission shaped church*" cleverly hint at Rollinson's thesis. He begins by considering four Ecclesiological Methodologies which have had varying effects on the quality of the mission impact of churches. He then takes three Ecclesiological Starting Points and assesses their ability to refresh or deaden the missionary emphases of churches. This leads to the conclusion and challenge that we (Baptists) need to "live out a more **dynamic and God-centred ecclesiology.**"; that "Too infrequently have we insisted that the fruit of God's grace is the formation of attractive, provocative and welcoming communities."; and that becoming "mission-shaped churches will require that costly willingness to allow Kingdom values to challenge and shape present practice."

This was altogether a challenging and exciting review of ecclesiology in view of the need to participate in the *Missio Dei* (oops), but very much a starting point for deeper reflection with excellent resources and penetrating observations and questions.

Philip Mader-Grayson

In the End – the Beginning **Jürgen Moltmann**, SCM, 2004, ISBN 0-334-02961-9. 172pp, £14:99

From the 1960's Jürgen Moltmann has explored themes in theology from the perspective of hope. This book is no exception being redolent with hope, however it marks a change in approach. In contrast to his earlier work this book is written as a contribution to pastoral theology and the style is therefore more contextual and pastoral, drawing directly on Moltmann's experiences and the writing that has inspired him.

There are three sections to the book; the beginning of life, rebirth and the living of life and death and resurrection. In the first Moltmann examines biblical ideas surrounding children, and contrasts this with the treatment of children in more recent times. In the second he explores life after catastrophe, the nature of justice, and the role of prayer. Finally Moltmann examines questions often asked of ministers at times of death, dwells on the processes of mourning and consolation, looking at the concept of judgment and offering an affirmation of life eternal. All of this is accomplished with hope, with a concern for justice, and in the light of the love of God, the latter of which seems to be in question among some Baptists today.

The result is a work of theological depth that is biblical, faith-full, and personal, retaining a realistic and timely view of the world in which we live. In all of this it remains clear and accessible offering an invaluable resource to all those who minister in the name of Christ, and to any church reading group that wishes to go beyond the usual fare of church management and self help books that litter the shelves of bookshops.

Whether reflecting on our pastoral practice, or as a way into understanding

one of the most important theologians of recent times, this is a book worth engaging with.

Gareth Dyer
Chaplain to
Manchester Universities

Imaging life after death. Love that moves the sun and the stars. **Kathleen Fischer**
SPCK 2005, ISBN 0-281-05717-6,
pp.154

Setting aside the title of this book, which in its current trendiness I find mildly discouraging (why is that 'imagining' is out and 'imaging' is 'in'?) I found it a good read. Whilst at one level it is 'easy' – not academically demanding – there are plenty of places where a phrase or comment may lodge in the mind to enlarge both intellect and spirit. 'Life after death' is seen in its fuller context of the wholeness of life which includes death. With a mixture of anecdote and personal experience blended with words of prayer and insights drawn from her work as a theologian and psychotherapist, Fischer provides an anthology of understanding which is rooted in response to a loving God.

Drawing on insights from mystics and poets as well as contemporary events and illustrations she also provides, at the end of each brief chapter, some suggested words for prayer and reflection.

Analogies of different sorts abound. The author is a fast walker, tending to travel at a different rate to her companions. This brings a gem of reminder to pastors and others who forget the basics of 'being with' people in differing circumstances (p 129).

There is a lightness of touch about her writing which is appealing. It speaks from faith to faith (but sets no pre-conditions and makes no assumptions about its strength or quality) and may be particularly helpful to those who are not so much looking for the concept of 'life after death' to be irrefutably argued as to find renewed resource for living now in the love which holds all things together, through and beyond this life. It is a thoughtfully written with pastoral sensitivity. My copy will be placed on our church library table.

Hazel Sherman
Brecon

"Preaching with imagination has never been about simply decorating a sermon to seduce people into listening. In a sense, it has always been about allowing space for a kind of playful energy that can delight and surprise us out of the places where we are spiritually stuck, that can kindle and strengthen hope. It has always been about flinging open windows for the light of the Spirit; about setting doors ajar for God's holy Breath. And it seems as urgent as it has ever been to set those doors ajar today."

Linda Clader *Voicing the Vision: Imagination and Prophetic Preaching*
(New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2003), page 5