



# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship.

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

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# Editorial

Edwin Robertson has given a considerable proportion of his ministry to exploring and interpreting the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This has been acknowledged in a Lambeth Doctor of Divinity awarded in June this year, for his "contributions to Christian communication and the contemporary ecumenical movement as a broadcaster, author, translator and editor, notably in the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer." The warmest congratulations are due to him from this fellowship.

His most recent book, "The Shame and the Sacrifice and After" (Eagle, UK; Zondervan, USA) brings former work before a new audience and includes a Postlude for the contemporary reader. The significance of digging deep into resources which are in the public domain and thus available for both misuse and good use cannot be over-estimated. Bonhoeffer died before many readers of this journal (myself included) were born. Unable himself to further develop the insights into the Christian response to God in personal devotion and political engagement which shaped his own journey from a pietistic background to involvement in a plot to assassinate Hitler, he left tantalising questions for those who seek guidance in their own political involvement in an age of conflict. Sixty years after his execution in a prison cell in Bavaria, his words to his sister-in-law are still often quoted:

"If I see a madman driving a car into a group of innocent bystanders, then I can't, as a Christian, simply wait for the catastrophe and then comfort the wounded and bury the dead. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of the driver" -

but those who use them do not always distinguish between their use as incitement to violence and encouragement on the costly path of discipleship.

Recently, Pat Robertson, chairman of the Christian Broadcasting Network, stepped into hot water whilst damaging nothing but his integrity when he used Bonhoeffer as ammunition in his call to the US to 'deal with' the Venezuelan Hugo

Chavez. An instance of the dangerous combination of rhetoric and hot air which is designed to blow up in other people's faces rather than one's own.

Whenever we try to 'prove' the rightness of our attitudes, or the actions of a State, by reference to others, we are in danger of misusing and misrepresenting them. Particularly when they are not around to speak for themselves. That is not to say that we should not quarry the words and works of the great and good and learn from them, and try to understand the perpetrators of evil and learn from them. The journalist, historian or indeed broadcaster or newspaper columnist (in an era where broadcasters are celebrities and some columnists demand and receive thousands of pounds for a few square inches of space) has more destructive and constructive potential than many realise.

To deal respectfully, without succumbing to sycophancy or easy opportunism: this is one of the tasks of the journalist, historian and interpreter. It is also one of the tasks of the Christian scholar and preacher – not only with regard to those great figures of faith, the 'cloud of witnesses' who surround us, but particularly with respect to the words and works of Jesus of Nazareth and the tradition of faith within which he grew. It is easy to dress up rubbish as fascinating, but far harder to represent the good as compelling. And that is perhaps the greatest challenge that continues to face us in our preparation for every Sunday and our pastoral engagement throughout the week. **dmj**

# 'A foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet...'

For those of you who were able to attend the reception hosted by the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship at the Baptist World Alliance Centenary Congress in Birmingham on Thursday July 29<sup>th</sup> this year, and we estimate that there were over 300 of us, we may not have been able to feed you as well as in heaven, but the joyful sense of fellowship was certainly a foretaste!

For us as British Baptists it was a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to welcome you. Despite the fact that we had to evacuate the Birmingham Council House because of a fire alarm – we understand there was a genuine emergency in a staff restaurant – it was impressive to see that Baptist Ministers don't give up the opportunity to eat and drink together lightly, and after 25 minutes we were able to resume our reception.

In my words of welcome I took the opportunity to tell those gathered a little about the BMF which I repeat here: there are approaching 2000 ministers in the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and the BMF sees its role in terms of representing our ministers to the structures and leadership of the BUGB on issues such as accreditation; settlement; terms and conditions; pension schemes; disciplinary matters; and general concerns of ministry. All the work done for the BMF is entirely voluntary and we have no paid staff. The burdens that fall on our office holders and the editor of this magazine are therefore considerable.

Our main means of networking is, of course, 'The Journal'. We see the main roles of the Journal as communicating (we publish four times a year); informing; stimulating; and most importantly, sharing and caring.

But we also look to you to communicate with us. Thankfully modern means of communication enable this to happen more easily, and you will find a number of email addresses on the inside

back page of the Journal for you to use. We hope that the Birmingham reception will be the start of a wider international 'conversation and caring' between ministers across the world.

We also want to say that if anyone from outside the UK finds it difficult to pay for the Journal, that is not a problem – we send many abroad free of charge. If you can pay, that is fine – but our real emphasis is on *fellowship*, and we are willing to bear the cost of that.

The reception ended with the opportunity to welcome Rev. David Coffey, the General Secretary of BUGB, as the new President of the Baptist World Alliance. David has been our General Secretary for 16 years, having served in three pastorates in England and as Evangelism Secretary of the Union. In welcoming him I assured David that he had been in our thoughts and prayers ever since the announcement of his appointment last year and wished him God's blessing for the next five years. In response David spoke warmly of the experience of local ministry and the support he had always received from fellow ministers, and he wished the BMF well in its work. Numerous representatives from around the world brought greetings to the gathering, expressing great appreciation of the Journal in its promotion of our global conversation and care networks.

I would be delighted to hear from anyone out there who was able to be

present in July, especially to get your impressions of the Congress as a whole. If you were not able to come to Birmingham it is all the more important that we continue to hear from you.

With greetings from BMF and our prayers for your continuing ministries.  
**dmj**

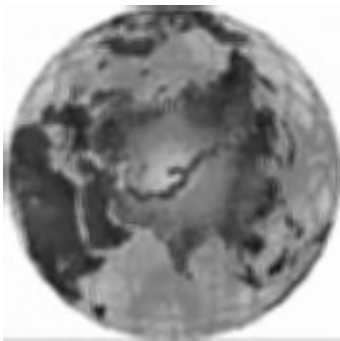
**Rev. Michael J. Cleaves –  
International Secretary**

Generous God,  
we know that all we have is yours;  
save us from the delusion  
of believing that it is ours;  
save us from our possessiveness,  
that your grace may abound  
in all things at all times;  
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

An offertory prayer from 'Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples', The Baptist Union of Great Britain.



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# Bonhoeffer and the European Union

Edwin H Robertson, London

As a member of the Church of the Old Prussian Union, Bonhoeffer was schooled in the Prussian mandates: loyalty to Church and State, to Family and Work. As a Lutheran minister he did not interfere in politics. Both Church and State had authority under God and did not encroach upon each other's territory. It was not until the Nazi movement sought to influence the Church and to threaten its autonomy under God that he took to protest. Then he had many things to say and do which led eventually to his imprisonment and execution.

There is one document among the mass of Bonhoeffer literature which is little noticed, but tells us much of what Bonhoeffer would have thought about the European Union and the recent shower of 'No' votes with all the explanations that are emerging. The document is a response to a book by William Paton which appeared in the much lamented SCM Religious Book Club in 1941, "The Church and the New Order"

William Paton was Secretary to the International Missionary Council and he wrote recognizing that he was an amateur in the field of international politics and even less than that in economics. He consulted with many and felt the compulsion to write in the middle of a war we appeared to be losing. This was before Pearl Harbour and when Germany was triumphant in Europe and rapidly advancing into Russia. Paton believed that the Church of Christ had a task of its own to fulfil "distinct from, though intertwined with, the efforts of statesmen to obey the ethical imperative in affairs of state."

This book was sent to Geneva where Visser 't Hooft was the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (in process of formation). At the time, Bonhoeffer was in Geneva on one of his 'conspiratorial' travels for German Counter-intelligence (Abwehr). By then, he had decided that things had gone so far

that he was prepared to act politically against his government - even in wartime. In the following year, he did in fact lay plans for the overthrow of the Nazi regime before the Bishop of Chichester in Sweden to be given to the British government for their acceptance. Much of his proposal for that acceptance is expressed in his comments, together with Visser 't Hooft. It is that joint response to Paton's book which expresses most clearly what he hopes for a future Europe. Together they laid down their basic principles:

The state of Europe, they wrote, "has made Continental Christians conscious of the fact that the future is in God's hands and that no human planning, however intelligent and however well-intentioned, can make men masters of their own fate". Therefore we realise that "the kingdom of God has its own history which does not depend upon political events. If this is so, "The Church has its own God-given laws which are different from those which govern the life of the world".

This young Dutch pastor with worldwide connections and this young German theologian spoke from both sides of the conflict that was tearing Europe. They pointed out that, "The insecurity of life and the tremendous upheavals have made Continental Christians acutely conscious of the fact that the future is in God's hands and that no human planning, however

intelligent and however well intentioned, can make men masters of their own fate." Such a conclusion can lead to "an attitude of pure other-worldliness", but it need not. It could lead to greater involvement of the churches in political affairs. Why the latter? Because, and this comes clearly from Bonhoeffer, "the kingdom of God has its own history and does not depend upon political events". They thus agree with Paton that the life of the Church does not depend upon the outcome of the War.

It is therefore with more confidence than others that the Church can look at the post-war world. Only a few years earlier, Bonhoeffer had written that victory for Germany would mean the end of civilisation as we know it. Then he had not contemplated involvement in the political affairs of post-war Europe. Now he is moving towards involvement. He and Visser 't Hooft can now, write: "Many who had previously considered that the Church had nothing to do with such secular problems have come to see in these last years that the Church is truly the salt of the earth and that the discarding of God's commandments means death for nations as well as individuals." We dare not consider that the 'world' is a domain which lives by itself quite apart from God's plan. There are limits which dare not be transgressed, if Christ is to be Lord of the world.

Both Visser 't Hooft and Bonhoeffer were involved in the ecumenical movement, the former as General Secretary of the WCC and the latter the one-time Youth Secretary for Central Europe. At this stage they saw the unity of the churches as growing across the frontiers of war. In fact, it was the only international community which remained united in spite of war and conflict. These pioneers of the ecumenical movement did not see it as a series of unions, but as a

growing community for the sake of the world.

Having declared their basic principles, they tackled the full text of Paton's book, taking up chapter after chapter - first 'Peace Aims'. They recognized that the disarmament of Germany would have to be demanded, but they insisted that peace aims must be more than that. These must be part of a wider programme, including a certain amount of political and economic security to a disarmed Germany. At the same time there needed to be an acceptance by all nations of a certain amount of control of their armaments. At that time in England there was a conference which produced the Malvern Report doing precisely this, and these two men deplored the fact that the BBC talked only of disarmament and said so little about the Malvern Report, which would have encouraged the opposition in Germany.

Seven years before, the even younger Bonhoeffer had spoken at an ecumenical conference in Denmark on the same lines. In Geneva, the interminable 'Disarmament Conferences' were plodding uselessly along, while Europe prepared for war. It was a small conference, only partially representative of the churches, but Bonhoeffer spoke even then with confidence: "Who will call us to peace so that the world will hear, so that all peoples may rejoice? The individual Christian cannot do it. When all around are silent, he can indeed raise his voice and bear witness, but the powers of this world stride over him without a word. The individual church, too, can witness and suffer, but it also is suffocated by the power of hate. Only the one great ecumenical council of the Holy Church of Christ over all the world can speak out so that the world, though it gnash its teeth, will have to hear, so that the peoples will rejoice because the

Church of Christ, in the name of Christ, has taken the weapons from the hands of their sons, forbidden war, proclaimed the peace of Christ against the raging world."

Rhetoric? Yes, but an early vision of the Church as a serving church. For essentially it is a serving church. It is not an exercise of power, but an uttering of the voice of Christ. That early speech was then, and this response to Paton is also, a call to the churches to fulfil their ministry to remind the world that there are limits which must not be transgressed, a ministry which for a long time it had not exercised. After 'Peace Aims', Paton had written of the chaos behind the war. The response was that the deepest reason for the moral confusion in Germany, and to some extent in Europe as a whole, was not merely the opposition against Christian ethical standards, but rather the ability of the National Socialists to present its injustice as true justice. There was just enough relative justice in some of Germany's claims to make it possible for Hitler to present himself as a prophet who came to re-establish justice. In addition, that the statesmen of other nations became the supporters of Hitler by making concessions to him that they would not make to his predecessors (the Weimar Republic). The opposition in Germany, of course, saw that this was Hitler masquerading as "an angel of light". But this should be taken into account when we complain that all Germany supported the Nazis. Bishop Bell, almost alone of church leaders, repeatedly called attention to that 'other Germany', which suffered.

It is in the section on 'The Ideal and the next steps' that the response begins to look at the possibility of unity in Europe. Paton had said that the international order after the war cannot be "a mere restoration of the pre-war political and economic system". They agree with him that, "In the

political domain there must be effective limitations of national sovereignty. In the economic domain there must be limitations of economic individualism." That would mean planning for economic security of the masses. But the ultimate settlement of a peaceful Europe will depend upon the preliminary steps taken immediately after the war is over. Fortunately, there was no repeat of the Versailles Treaty, but they were right then and we have discovered since that "the question as to how Germany may find its way back to a system of government which is acceptable to the Germans and also be an orderly member of the family of nations" was the most difficult issue. Bonhoeffer pointed out that the total occupation of Germany would not help, because any government formed under those conditions would be like the Quisling government in Norway. At this point in the response to Paton, Bonhoeffer is already thinking about the opposition to the Nazi regime within Germany. Within eight months Bonhoeffer would be in Sweden with George Bell (Chichester) laying before him the very plan that he proposes in this response. Here are his words: "The question must now be faced (September 1941) whether it is possible to offer such terms of peace to Germany that a new government composed of non-Nazi German leaders who are ready for international collaboration may not be discredited from the outset in the eyes of their own people." He spells out the warning: "If such a government were formed, if it made a genuine peace offer (evacuation of all occupied territories, ousting all Nazi leaders, willingness to disarm) and if then it were rejected, there would be danger that Germans of all sections and groups would be thrown into the nationalist opposition, and that for a very long time to come no German government worthy of that name could be formed."

This is one of the 'ifs' of history. The war might have ended in 1942, when Bonhoeffer met Bell in Sweden. There were good reasons in the summer of 1942 why the Allies dismissed the offer. But at least the Christians were speaking for peace. They failed, but the attitude of the Church as averse to political involvement had ended.

What Bonhoeffer and Visser 't Hooft had to say in the last section of their response was made irrelevant by events, but the earlier paragraph was still relevant for the rest of Europe. Sadly the divided Germany cast a shadow for many years over that too. But here is his vision: "We believe that it is possible to find men in Germany who have shown by their

attitude during these last years that they are not infected with National Socialist ideas, and can be counted upon as loyal collaborators in a European community of nations. And we believe that they should be given a chance for the sake, not only of Germany, but of Europe as a whole". Later efforts culminating in the tragic failure to assassinate Hitler had to be made without any promises from the Allies. It took a great deal longer before Germany became a loyal collaborator in a European community of nations. **bmj**

# Don't stay in the dark



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# Pastoral Ministry in a Spiritual Age

**John Rackley**, Bath, considers what it may mean for us to explore and experience pastoral ministry as going 'with Jesus to the edge'.

Beginning with two quotations and an incident:

*Spirituality is concerned with the deepest desires of the human heart for meaning, purpose and connection; with the deep life intentionally in reference to something larger than itself*

Marie McCarthy

*'for many the exodus from religion as institution has been necessary for their spiritual survival'*

Michael Downey

The incident is used to explore the holistic healing ministry of Jesus. It is also a parable for our times. In Luke 17:11-17 Jesus travels through border territory on his way to Jerusalem. He arrives at the outskirts of a village: a place on the edge of two regions. He and his disciples are on unfamiliar ground. They are no longer amid the well-known people and places of Galilee.

Jesus had done this before. It seems to have been a pattern. He walks with his disciples to the edge of their known world. Luke makes a lot of it in his gospel. We shall just note the times Jesus made his disciples walk the margins

- Caesarea Philippi; place of Pan Worship and a question: who do you say I am?
- Tyre and Sidon; a Canaanite woman who has a question of Jesus: who do you think you are?
- Across Galilee into Gedara, to the edge of Roman civilisation and a man who lived among the dead, the last place for

Jews to gather.

It seems to have been the policy of Jesus. He goes with his disciples to experiences and questions that are new, different and challenging. He then expects them to see what he does and watches their reaction.

Why does he do this?

- Going to the edge gives us a glimpse of something different
- Walking on the borders allows us to see where we have come from and where we might go
- Going to the edge enables us to become a connection, a conductor for what is out of reach at the centre
- On the margins we are less in control, less certain of ourselves, more ready to learn
- As if on the margins of a page; we scribble notes, place our half-formed ideas, speculate, note mistakes and place what needs to be added.

**Jesus walks with his disciples to a place they have not been before and invites them to see what happens.**

What is Jesus saying who walked his disciples into unfamiliar experience say?

'See where you are; look out from your self-absorbed lives; walk to the edge of your comfort zone; let the people on your margins speak to you...call to you....show you their need....demonstrate their faith.'

The healing occurs but only one man comes to Jesus. Notice the process. We are

told what he did and then we are told who he is! Praise! Prostration! Thanksgiving! Identity? A Samaritan! Couldn't he go with the others? Wouldn't their priest accept him? Where could he go? Jesus does not refuse his advances. He stays where he is.... in the space between two regions. The Samaritan comes to him. The leprosy which gave him a false identity has been stripped away. With his true identity he and Jesus create a prophetic relationship. It is a relationship that challenges the conventions and traditions of both Jew and Samaritan worlds. For the disciples this is an important time of teaching in the actions in Jerusalem. The twelve have nothing to say. Perhaps they were troubled that someone so unlike them was acting so like a disciple of Jesus. Jesus took his disciples to the borders. He invited them to meet the people on their margins; to listen to their needs and let them procure common ground for all to stand. He is showing them what it means to be Kingdom people. This parable for our times can be summed up in this quotation from Vincent Donovan's seminal work: *Rediscovering Christianity*

*Do not try to call them back  
to where they were;  
and do not try to call them  
to where you are,  
beautiful as that place may seem to you.  
You must have the courage  
to go with them  
to a place that neither you nor they  
have been before.*

I want to suggest both parable and quotation can act as a guide to Pastoral Ministry today.

The message would appear to be clear: Religion can no longer carry the spiritual quest for people in the Western culture. David Tacey<sup>1</sup> believes there is a Spirituality Revolution under way that is the spiritual

counterpart to former and continuing democratic revolutions in politics, society, race, education and gender. Diarmuid O'Murchu<sup>2</sup> goes further

*Some readers will come to this book (Religion in Exile) seeking clues on news ways to be church. It seems to me that this is not a major concern for the majority of our contemporaries. Most have given up the old idea of church and no longer feel guilty about it. Many are wandering in a spiritual wasteland but re-invented versions of the church don't have any appeal as a means of finding one's way around or out of the wasteland'*

It is not a wasteland for such as John Drane. He writes in the current edition of *The Bible in Transmission*<sup>3</sup> that we are in *kairos* time when God is doing something new. He believes the rise of the New Spirituality has created a generation of spiritual searchers who in practice have turned their back on 'the implausible thesis of secularization'<sup>4</sup>. He is not ready to disdainfully ignore the quest for the transcendent in the multiple versions of the spiritual journey pursued today. He calls on us

*to listen and learn before we speak so that the message of the Gospel is heard in ways that are truly incarnational..... which emphasise that mission begins with God and our calling is to discern where God is already at work and then collaborate intentionally with God's activity.*

The Group for Evangelisation of Churches Together in England<sup>5</sup> are equally convinced that this is a time to review our evangelistic policies in the light of the dawning of this Spiritual Age.

So we arrive at my title. What is a

*Baptist Ministers' Journal October 2005*

Pastoral minister about in all of this?

I am still trying to factor-in all the insights and permutations that are arising from Emerging Church, Fresh Expressions of Church, New ways of being Church, Deep Church, Post Christendom Church and what goes for church in the mind of the members at my church! But I feel the force of what is being said by those who ask us to embrace this new-found enthusiasm for Spirituality. I recognise what O'Murchu declares

*Pastorally, we are encountering a new situation...people of our time do not talk about leaving the church or abandoning the faith. Rather they talk about 'outgrowing the need for church' or formal religion. There is real pastoral urgency to engage those who feel they are outgrowing the need for church right where they are.*

I am drawn by his use of the word 'pastoral'. It describes what I regard is God's calling on my life. I have never thought my Pastoral ministry kept me to the people of the church. The nature of the new encounters in this Spiritual Age both attracts and daunts me. I have reached thus far in my response as someone in this sort of life:

1. It is not as neat as some would wish. Our culture has many tracks and people move along them at different speeds. I could introduce you to some people in Bath for whom the Enlightenment appears not to have arrived. The annual Civic Service at Bath Abbey is a Christendom occasion with all the trimmings. Secularization is firmly in control in much of our public life. Yet the Guardian newspaper Editorial of 19 August commenting on the ugly death of Brother Roger suggests a future of sorts for religion

*The Taize Community represented everything that the future of religion ought to be. It was non-sectarian,*

*apparently almost free of doctrine (I think they mean dogma) and enormously attractive to seekers after truth who felt alienated from organised religion.*

Jonathan Sacks made a spirited defence of religion over against spirituality in a 2002 article in the Times

*The great religions are more than spirituality. They ask how we translate our private experiences into the public world we share and make. How do we turn our intimations of eternity into a more gracious order of acts, relationships and institutions? How do we escape not from but into reality? What is hard is to bring God into the world, with all its poverty, violence and terror, and make a home for His presence by celebrating His image in others. This takes real work, the long, hard, steady work of love in action, loyalty in deed, generosity to those who are different from you and commitment to those who do not yet share your blessings. That's what makes pilgrims different from tourists, holy days different from holidays and commitment something greater than the search for experience.*

What he finds hard, the Christian can celebrate in the Mission of God in Christ and enthusiastically imitate in love for the world which is the first place of God's activity.

Sacks is among those who believes that much popular spirituality is self-absorbed and world-denying. He is suggesting that the spirituality of a religion needs to be judged by the difference it would make to the world community. I would want to add and the most deprived, marginalized and oppressed in that community at that!

2. Eugene Petersen would agree with Sacks and declares that for the local church to serve the world the Pastoral ministry is about giving attention to God in prayer, scripture and spiritual direction.<sup>6</sup>

In my experience I have discovered that a Spiritual Director needs four freedoms

- total trust and confidentiality
- privacy
- freedom to go with the directee to where they must pray and discern without fear
- freedom from the need to represent the church.

These raise questions over whether a minister can be the Spiritual Director to the congregation. I think it is not easy. It depends on where you place the authority of the minister in the life of the local church. I have been and still am the spiritual director for some of my congregation in all but name. But I know some of the dynamics of the relationship between minister and membership prevent or inhibit the four freedoms mentioned above.

However I am quite certain that Spiritual Formation needs to be at the heart of a church's priorities. As Glen Marshall wrote in the Baptist Times (11 August) our churches need to be places where people regularly encounter God.

Spiritual Direction is concerned with the activity of God's Spirit in the life of a person. I would suggest that the priorities of a Spiritual Director can help in working out a church's purpose and mission and in turn would prepare a church for its mission to our Spiritual Age.

Many of the people that are drawn to the Spirituality Revolution are the very people I have met as Spiritual Director.

O'Murchu is primarily focused on people who have only just begun to disengage from the church and says of them

*They tend to be reflective people, who have given many years of love and loyalty to the church or formal religion. In general they are not embittered or disillusioned people. They do not have an axe to grind over some moral, theological or ecclesiastical directive. Instead they are people who acknowledge the process of growth and seek to respond responsibly and creatively.*

He then adds

*They could well be the prophetic people of our time and important companions on the journey home.*

I believe he is correct to take this positive view of those who move away from the churches. It is too easy to deny ourselves their gifts. Whether they are just leaving or are into the third generation at a distance from the Church they can reveal the work of God to us as much as we to them.

3. I recognize that acting as a Spiritual Director has affected my Pastoral Ministry in a number of ways

- I recognise the privilege of being involved with someone's walk with God
- I have learnt confidence in the transforming power of the Gospel
- I have learnt to challenge when people are evasive and manipulative
- I have become more confident in speaking about God and asking where God is at work in the circumstances of a person's life
- I have discovered the prophetic edge of discipleship in the individual and the local congregation
- I have not felt bound by any one

## Christian tradition

- I have discovered the blessings when struggle, questioning, doubt, apostasy become part of a person's engagement with their faith and God
- I have needed to explore the meaning of Faith Development and Spiritual Traditions as lived experience not ideas on a page.

I am not suggesting that these discoveries are unique. They are simply what have happened to me.

4. One of the challenges I find is to think of how to engage with all this exciting exploration and possibility whilst still having to be minister to a church that is what it is; baggage and all! So far I have come up with this:

a) I spread the need to research and discern the spirit of the times with other people in the church.

b) We give 25% of my/our time to experimental ventures that seek to engage with this area of life knowing that they may fail but will only work by trial, error, failure and discovery.

c) I am trying to enable the church to discover its own spirituality. I do not believe that we need to find a Spirituality for whatever we have already decided is our Mission. Surely it is the other way around? Aren't we to discover our spirituality and the mission is there waiting for us? This is another way of saying when we find who we are in God we will inevitably develop a heart for mission (2 Cor 5:14-20). For Paul, the call to a ministry of Reconciliation begins with reconciling ourselves to who God is and what God has done for us.

d) So each church needs to take seriously that it is a centre for encounter with God. This is the basis of spiritual theology. It is an exploration that starts with the Mystery

of who is God and builds and rebuilds on the Grace of God revealed in Christ. It resists the temptations of Christ to be relevant, spectacular and powerful and is not frightened to be encountering the unorthodox both in belief and practice.

e) When our spirituality is about God it is not firstly about ourselves, whether we pray or not or at all, or whether we are known for our clear vision or profound insight or the numbers in our church. It is about a relationship which is the deep note in our life. It abides - despite of our circumstances. It is as much about yearning and longing; 'seeking and knocking' as finding and arriving. It is holy dissatisfaction.

It may not be a serene relationship. It may be characterised by all that our humanity and vulnerability can do to it. In fact if it is not composed of that fragile fascinating material it is not authentic and will not produce effective service.

f) We need to consider what healthy spirituality is or what is involved in an authentic spiritual formation. These features need to be in place as we question our core values, mission plan, and the future of our church and so on. Marie McCarthy suggests such authentic spirituality would include<sup>7</sup>

- **Contemplative Awareness:** the desire to be aware, ponder, take time, pay attention to the events and material of life and the revelation of God in Christ. This is similar to the call for a contemplative ministry from Ian Stackhouse
- **Community:** spirituality is not an isolated, privatised or individual affair.
- **Authentic action in the world:** this is for some enshrined in the Micah Call or the Jubilee announcement of Jesus in Luke. Christ-centred spirituality has an edge in which it engages with the world

to make a difference for good.

- **Life is one:** it is never contemplation or action; the connecting word must always be 'with'; as it is between church and community. Life is not a convenient series of rooms where we go wearing different hats. The same God who is always calling 'new born worlds into life' is active in each.
- **A foundation life stance is 'openness':** especially to the new and unexpected. There is an openness to the future that embraces difference and risks change. This is border-living discipleship.
- **Security in a tradition:** We need **rootedness** in our chosen or given story: be it Scripture or some part of it; a tradition of spirituality arising from the life of Christ like Franciscan or Evangelical; the writings of a particular person or community. For many of our members it is the church myth of their particular fellowship. Out of this rootedness and spiritual shape we can be continually discerning the will of God.

Pastoral ministry in a Spiritual Age requires the confidence to go the edge of our experience. God regularly uses people and places on the fringe, in the margins to be – often in spite of themselves – to be signs of alternative possibilities where the future is glimpsed. Can someone offer me evidence in Scripture or the history of the Church that new energy is inevitable when the tradition gets it right or when those at the centre produce a master-plan?

We live in a spiritually inquisitive, God-averse and religion-intolerant age. Yet dare we discern in this a cry for the church to be more like the church, to represent the space and place where holiness, meaning and God can be found, experienced, understood and re-imagined. Only, I suggest, if we are prepared to make the

journey outlined and illustrated by edge-walking discipleship formation of Jesus.

For many the traditional patterns of religious life remain too patriarchal, inadequate and obsolete. For others the church seems too much in appearance like the world – too busy, too tired, too involved, too demanding, too unstable, too spiritually thin.

If we are truly in the time of a Spirituality Revolution then might it be that the church is being called to receive the Spiritual Direction of the spiritual researches of our spiritually inquisitive contemporaries? But to do this we must be keep close to our Lord, to watch and pray and discern his path for us. For walking the borders is a demanding experience.

*In 2006 John Rackley is holding a series of public 'Conversations' in various parts of our country on 'The Spirituality Revolution and the local church' under the auspices of the Living Spirituality Network with its director Eley McAinsh. [bmf](#)*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Spirituality Revolution*, David Tacey, Brunner-Routledge 2004

<sup>2</sup> *Religion in Exile*, Diarmuid O'Murchu, 2000

<sup>3</sup> Bible Society, Summer 2005

<sup>4</sup> Article 'The Myth of the Twentieth Century: the rise and fall of secularisation', Harvey Cox *The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview*, Maryknoll, Orbis 1999

<sup>5</sup> *Beyond the Fringe* (Cliff College); *Evangelism in a Spiritual Age* (CHP); *Equipping your church in a Spiritual Age* (CTBI)

<sup>6</sup> *The Contemplative Pastor*, Crossroads 1989

<sup>7</sup> Article, 'Spirituality in a Postmodern Era' *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 2000

# A liturgy for minister and congregation at the conclusion of a pastorate

**Brenda Morton**, London

Minister: We come to this special service with mixed feelings about the past and future –  
feelings of thankfulness and failure,  
feelings of anticipation and trepidation.  
Let us bring all these thoughts and feelings to the Lord.

People: Lord, graciously hear us.

Minister: Lord God, for all the blessings I have received in this place,  
For all the love and hospitality,  
For all the grace and forbearance,  
For all that I have learnt,  
Even for hard lessons that have helped me grow,  
I thank You.  
For all that I have been able to give,  
For all that I have achieved,  
For all the friendships made and people helped and healed  
Through this church and our ministry together,  
I thank You, Lord.

People: Lord God, for all the blessings we have received during this ministry,  
For the love, patience and pastoral care shown to us,  
For the fruits of study and prayer in teaching and preaching,  
For new thoughts and a widening of our horizons,  
We thank You, Lord  
For opportunities taken together as a church and minister  
To show Your love to the community,  
For those we have seen come to faith,  
For growth in faith and understanding,  
We thank you, Lord.

Minister: For all I have left undone,  
For hurts I have caused unwittingly,  
For failures of ideas, projects and plans,  
For missed opportunities,  
For all I have failed to achieve through lack of inspiration or vision,  
For moments of impatience and lack of grace,  
Father, forgive me

People: For what we have failed to receive,  
For hurts we have caused unwittingly,  
For missed opportunities and failure to grasp new ideas  
For failures of vision, enthusiasm, or energy  
For moments of ungracious criticism or lack of love,  
Father, forgive us.

- Minister: For these people, Lord  
 I pray that they may be united in faith and vision  
 As they face a new chapter in this church's life.  
 Grant an outpouring of Your Spirit to guide and overrule as they seek a new minister,  
 And grant that he or she will love and enthuse them  
 As they love and support him or her.
- People: For our departing Minister, Lord  
 We pray for wisdom and guidance  
 As she/he takes up the new task to which you have called her/him.  
 Pour out your Spirit upon her/him  
 To love and guide the people you have given to her/his care.  
 Grant her/him the gifts of love, support and enthusiasm  
 From the people to whom she/he will minister.
- Minister: Lord God, I pray for this community,  
 That this church will shine like a beacon on a dark night,  
 To draw people to Your light, our Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus.  
 I leave them with my blessing.  
 Grant them your blessing
- People: Let our light shine in this place.  
 May our departing minister's light shine in the place to which You have called her/him.  
 We let her/him go with our blessing.  
 Grant her/him Your blessing.
- Minister: **Past put behind us, for the future take us,**  
 and **Lord of the Years, to live for Christ alone! Amen!**  
 people:

## Holidays

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## **Autumn - the Season of Mists and Mellow fruitfulness**

Last year when we were planning to share our Centenary celebrations with churches we knew we had to accept that we were never going to be top of the Agenda in items of local church interest, even if we have been around for a hundred years. We needed therefore to do something different and concluded that instead of just making claims payments for losses suffered we would give prizes for success in Baptist related competitions.

With the autumn season now upon us I am delighted that those plans have come to fruition and members of the Baptist community have been able to share in our celebrations.

The first of these was a painting competition for all young people from the Baptist community with the simple task of painting a picture of their church. Little did we realise how successful it would be with a fantastic 457 entries from all over the UK.

All the entries displayed that enthusiasm for life found in our young people and some pretty accomplished artistry. It was a real pleasure for us to meet the winners with their Mums & Dads to present them with their prizes. They were such delightful families and demonstrated how, in these days of endless reports of violence in the press, it is easy to forget that there are still a lot of decent people around.

Clearly not all children have the benefit of a secure family upbringing and it is important to remain vigilant against those who choose vandalism as their recreation rather than use their skills to become better citizens.

By the time you read this our next competition will be under way and will provide an opportunity for adult church members to win a donation for the benefit of their church. We are inviting you to tell us in under 100 words how your church would spend £2,500 on making improvements in certain areas e.g. safety & security, child protection measures or improved accessibility for the disabled etc.

With a top prize of £2,500 and runners up prizes of £500 for each of the Baptist regions we hope to have another bumper number of entries. Do look out for our advertisement in the Baptist Times or contact us directly on the above telephone number for full details.

And finally a quick reminder - Autumn brings with it fallen leaves which fill gutters. Those gutters have downpipes which only work if they are clear of obstruction. Inevitably if they are left to their own devices damage will eventually occur.

Do please therefore remember to add to the list of jobs to do, to check your valleys/ gutters/ hoppers/downpipes for blockages. (A pair of binoculars is particularly useful equipment to have a good all-around look at your roofs, and rainwater goods!).

These are all simple protective measures which if done regularly now, can save a great deal of time and trouble later in expensive repair/replacement costs.

Yours Sincerely

Aif Green ACII  
ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

# Reflections on the Church as the People of God

John Barry Dyer, Brazil

The Roman Catholic scholar, José Comblin, argues for the place of the people of God at the heart of any discussion concerning the church inasmuch as it is the key that allows one to relate the divine and the human in the church.<sup>1</sup> If this appears to be stating the obvious it derives from a concern that biblical truths are not always at the centre of church practice.

Almost logically, the church began as a movement within Judaism as can be seen from the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles: "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2.46). At this point there was no sense of breaking with Jewish tradition and two realities, the old and the new, appear to operate side by side. Rudolf Bultmann, in fact, considers that the Jerusalem church remained very Jewish in its orientation and conservative in outlook, especially in respect of its adherence to the law and the synagogue.<sup>2</sup> On closer inspection this does come across quite clearly, albeit indirectly, in the sermon attributed to Stephen in Acts 7.

## The church takes shape

Within a few years, though, the fledgling Christian community had begun to develop its own leadership structures and liturgical patterns. With the inauguration of the New Covenant at the Passover prior to the crucifixion, a new chapter in the history of the people of God was under way. Leadership at the highest level became apostolic. That is, leadership exercised by those who had witnessed Christ's life, ministry, death and resurrection. This category of leadership was assisted and supplemented by the leadership of prophets, teachers, evangelists and pastors. By the close of the first century, apostolic leadership had

passed into history.

At this time, circumstances prevailed upon the church to accept the need for *episkopoi* – leadership which was formally appointed and regional in its jurisdiction. Firstly, the number of house-churches was growing and so the need arose to gather them together for the sake of unity; secondly, the church was becoming independent of Judaism and required to develop its own distinctive leadership structures; thirdly, it became necessary to provide a safeguard against heresy which reinforced the case for a professional clergy to perform this function.<sup>3</sup>

Necessary as it may have been to establish a hierarchical system in the New Testament Church, the underlying objective was to develop a decentralised pattern of church leadership. Terminology such as bishops and elders was invariably used in the plural form. Paul exhorted Titus to appoint 'elders' in each of the churches founded by him. Furthermore, Paul and Barnabas appointed 'elders' in all the churches of Asia Minor: "So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" (Acts 14.23). The evidence portrays leadership in the New Testament as essentially collegiate. Individuals of proven experience and maturity were to exercise spiritual, administrative and moral

leadership in the local churches.

There was no question of one individual assuming responsibility for all the activities of each local *ekklesia*. Leadership was shared and as a result, the use of available gifts and talents was maximized. Moreover, Paul's responsibility was understood to have been discharged upon the appointment of local leadership in the churches. Indeed, the testimony of Luke leads us strongly to this conclusion. Having assured the future care of the churches, the apostles "...sailed to Antioch, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed" (Acts 14.26).

The church's progress can be seen also in the Pastoral Letters with regard to the emergence of the elders and bishops and in the letters to the Corinthian and Roman churches concerning liturgical issues. There was, nevertheless, no particular form of church government or liturgy in the New Testament which was binding on all the churches. We read of bishops and deacons leading the church in Philippi (Philippians 1.1), but the great missionary sending church in Antioch was evidently governed by prophets and teachers (Acts 13.1). Of course, a period of nearly twenty years would have separated these two examples. The reference to Antioch is at the beginning of Paul's ministry, whilst the situation in the Philippian church represents a period in time shortly before the apostle's martyrdom in Rome.

The nature and structure of the church are both important elements for our understanding of the church as the people of God and also as a new and distinct representation of that concept with its own particular characteristics. This is highlighted by the Cambridge theologian, C.H. Dodd who describes the work of the Christian Church as a major attempt at community

within the amorphous society of the Roman world. He puts its considerable success down to "a real experience of fellowship" based on a personal relationship with a living Lord.<sup>4</sup> The idea of belonging to one another was important to members of the early church community, as we can see from Romans 12.5; 1 Corinthians 12.27 and Ephesians 4.25.

In the course of time the church community which comprised of many interdependent local communities became increasingly institutionalised. This is evident especially in connection with the cultural heritage with which the church has become largely associated. Ernst Troeltsch has painted a somewhat disturbing picture of the situation, as follows:

"It is impossible to deny facts or to resist the decrees of fate. And it is historical facts that have welded Christianity into the closest connection with the civilizations of Greece, Rome and Northern Europe. All our thoughts and feelings are impregnated with Christian motives and Christian presuppositions; and conversely, our whole Christianity is indissolubly bound up with elements of the ancient and modern civilizations of Europe. From being a Jewish sect, Christianity has become the religion of all Europe. It stands or falls with European civilization; whilst, on its own part, it has entirely lost its Oriental character and has become Hellenised and westernised..."<sup>5</sup>

There is much here with which we might like to take issue and Europe has moved on since these sentiments were expressed in 1923. For example, with the rising tide of secularism and its ever expanding frontiers, it is no longer possible

to say that Christianity is the religion of all Europe. Furthermore, Christianity is not confined to Europe alone and is now, in fact, considerably stronger in the southern hemisphere than in Northern Europe.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the point in question is that the church has moved away from its origins in the New Testament.

True as this may be, it is not a betrayal of the prophetic vision, but rather a logical outworking of its implications. The concept 'people of God' is not restricted to the Old Testament covenant and neither is it limited to an exclusively Jewish Christian interpretation of the covenant. In its final state, the church as people of God is well described in the book of Revelation, "After these things I looked and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!'" (Revelation 7.9-10). Yes, it will become and already is unrecognisable from its Oriental beginnings precisely in order to fulfil its mission as the agent of God's salvation, giving itself and losing itself into the bargain (see Matthew 16.24-25).

### **Continuity and discontinuity**

From the time of the covenant between God and Abraham, there existed the notion of progression from a relationship with a single people to one with all the peoples of the world (Genesis 12.3). The prophet Isaiah, speaking in messianic tones, refers to a Rod appearing from the stem of Jesse (11.1) and a Root of Jesse to which the Gentiles would come (11.10). David Catchpole claims that Jesus had a "keen sense of continuity with the patriarchs (Matthew 8.11; Luke 13.28) which informed not only his hope for the

future, but also his bringing healing and social inclusion to those who were sick and/or sinful" (Luke 13.16; 19.9).<sup>7</sup> One may also perceive there was a clear pattern to the development of the church. There was no sudden rift with the people of the Old Covenant and significantly Jesus stated that his mission was to Jew and Gentile alike (John 10.16).

Nonetheless, William Barclay points out that with the New Covenant the concept 'people of God' had been "radically altered". The people of God are rightly considered to be a chosen people, but they also had their particular understanding of this. For the Jews it entailed the rite of circumcision, yet according to the radically altered status of the Covenant "this does not consist in membership of any nation or in any external mark upon the body; it consists of a relationship to Jesus Christ".<sup>8</sup>

### **A new theological awareness**

Whilst there is a real sense that things are different with the New Covenant, the element of continuity is also present. Though the matter of circumcision was not made binding upon the Gentiles, obedience to the Law was still required, but not as the ground for putting the people in a right relationship with God (Galatians 3.24). This was not imposed as a means of becoming justified with God which, according to the New Covenant, is solely by faith in Christ (Galatians 2.16). It should also be noted that when Jesus referred to the commandments (Matthew 5.19), he did not have in mind the burdensome details of the oral tradition (the work of the Scribes), but the "great principles" of the Mosaic Law.<sup>9</sup>

Daniel Fuller reminds us that "the early Christians regarded the Old Testament as their Bible, for they believed that Moses, the prophets and the Psalms found their

fulfilment in Christ".<sup>10</sup> This assertion is backed up nowhere more strikingly than in the Transfiguration of Jesus and the appearance with him of Moses and Elijah. Together, these two representatives of the Law and the prophets respectively, personify the Old Covenant relationship between God and his people. More importantly, they stand with Jesus and acknowledge his supremacy as the mediator of a new and better covenant (Hebrews 12.24).

According to N. T. Wright, "the lens through which the Christian viewed the whole of reality was a recognisable variation on the Jewish worldview".<sup>11</sup> In this connection he argues that Israel and the Church share three theological assumptions. Firstly, that of a creator God interacting with his creation; secondly, that of a covenant God acting through his people in history; thirdly, that of an eschatological end game when God would establish his rule once for all. These three assumptions are brought together in a single unit of thought by the essential monotheism which is common to the people of the Old and New Covenants.<sup>12</sup>

Progressively, Israel's spiritual journey brought her to new depths of theological insight. The so-called School of Isaiah provides evidence that the theological awareness of the people was moving into a quite different mode of operation. Now, only one God is perceived to exist (Isaiah 44.6). The rest are relegated to nothing more than the creation of the human mind and imagination (Isaiah 44.17). In fact, the period of Israel's history leading up to the exile through to the restoration was especially formative for Israel's knowledge of the covenant God, as well as her understanding of the place of Gentiles in the divine economy. Cyrus, the foreign ruler, is raised up by God to bring about the release of Israel from exile. This is very

different from the way the people were delivered from Egypt.

The Gentiles also are clearly included within God's salvation plan in a more general way. They together with their offerings and sacrifices are declared to be acceptable to Yahweh, just as those of Israel (Isaiah 56. 3-8). Therefore, it should have come as no surprise to the apostle Peter (and perhaps it didn't) that a Roman centurion and his household might also figure in God's wider plans (Acts 10). And so the people of God come to a new and exciting discovery which Peter articulates in these memorable words: "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptised who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10. 47).

There is no abrupt change of direction in the divine purpose in the New Testament. There is though an important change of strategy. Israel was unable to fulfil its mission as the agent of God's salvation to the world. The idea continued, but another covenant needed to be ratified. This was achieved through Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8.6; 9.15; 12.24).

The people of God concept no longer refers to an exclusive group, or that group of people which was brought out of Egypt under God's mighty hand. It has now come to include all those who, receiving the Holy Spirit, confess Jesus as Lord. Albeit the New Covenant is a departure from the Old, the promises of the Old Covenant are clearly fulfilled in the New (Romans 10.11-13).

### **A new dynamic**

In the Old Testament, the people of God are a people of faith, as they are in the New Testament. However, in the New Testament, they become the people of the Resurrection and of the Spirit, which is

radically new. These two factors provide the new dynamic (Greek, *dúnamis*) for the New Covenant relationship. The New Testament evidence points to the Resurrection of Jesus and the Day of Pentecost as ground breaking events in the history of God's people.

The following which Jesus had commanded during his ministry in Galilee, was all but extinguished as the disciples gathered together behind locked doors on the evening of the first Easter Sunday. His coming to them and his subsequent appearances during the forty days immediately after the Resurrection were to keep the group of followers together. All the same, it would seem that this was not enough to get them to go out and testify among the public. That moment came only when they were given the power and the words with which to speak, as recorded in the second chapter of Acts. This was the work of the Spirit, the gift of the risen Lord (see John 20.22). Already a special people, they were now a transformed people, incorporated into the kingdom of God by the action of God upon their lives. Baptism was the outward sign of this, in the way that circumcision had been the sign of belonging to the Old Covenant.

For some time following the momentous events of the Resurrection and Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus continued to observe their Temple obligations. In fact, it was not until after the stoning of Stephen that the church began to separate from Jewish customs. The issue of circumcision, which was later to become such a bone of contention, had not yet been brought into question, though it was that very issue which established the difference in understanding concerning the Old and New Covenants.

In a paper presented to an international

conference of theological educators in Brazil in 1995, the Peruvian scholar, Samuel Escobar, argues that the New Testament image of the people of God is "a dominant image providing continuity between the Old and New Testaments".<sup>13</sup> Whilst this may be true, the nature of the covenants is sufficiently different to establish a definitive moment. This has significant ramifications for the people of God, as Paul explains: "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5.17).

With the coming of Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Covenant, his rejection by Israel and the emergence of the Church (the New Israel), the eschatological dawn had arrived. The Old and New Covenant people of God thereupon went their separate ways. That is, those who believe in Jesus as the Messiah and those who still await his coming. What is more, the Resurrection was the crucial event that brought this about, because the Resurrection is the hallmark of the new community and the reason for its existence.

### **A church of the people**

Historically, the concept 'people of God' has been rightly preserved and perpetuated in the Protestant evangelical churches as has the Reformation principle of the priesthood of all believers. The Roman Catholic Church also raised the profile of the people of God at the Second Vatican Council, though the visionary work of progressive theologians at the time has been largely abandoned by the Catholic hierarchy in the intervening years.

Protestant evangelicals continue to uphold the idea of a people bound together in a covenant relationship. They also adhere to the notion that all are equal within the people of God. But do they

really embrace the idea with a whole heart, or have they adopted a system which portrays the church as essentially clerical (its ministers and pastors) and material (its buildings and places of worship)? Further, how does the biblical concept of the people of God relate to and influence our thinking and decision-making in the church?

Isaltino Gomes Coelho, a Brazilian pastor, educator and writer has said that the church is its people. In other words, the church is the sum total of those who belong to it and who give it expression in the workplace, in our schools, secular institutions and in the context of family life.

The church as the people of God is a concept that needs to be rediscovered in the present age. It offers a powerful remedy for the ineffectiveness of the church as a catalyst for change and transformation. To be an agent of transformation, the church needs to be in a constant state of transformation itself as it yields to the influence of God's spirit.

Roland Allen, in his seminal work on Paul's missionary strategy, has drawn attention to the involvement of the whole church in the reception of new members and in the choice and appointment of its leaders. Referring to the apostle's work he says, "I cannot help thinking that here we find one of the most important elements of his success. By leaving the church to decide who should be admitted (as members of the church), he established firmly the great principle of mutual responsibility." The same principle, he continues, was applied to the appointment of elders where the church had some involvement in the decision-making process.<sup>14</sup>

Questions of this nature are raised especially by those of an ecclesiastical

tradition where the appointment of priests and bishops is taken out of the hands of the local church. Those of traditions where the local church is regarded as autonomous might wonder what all the fuss is about, but it is a clear indication that some still long to find new ways of being church.

Among the churches of the Reformation, the people of God were given a profile for centuries denied to them. This issued from the discovery of an important New Testament concept which was again to become formative for the church's identity and sense of direction.

Following the example of John Wycliff more than a century earlier, the reformers of the sixteenth century took up the idea of Christian education for all God's people. Similar initiatives were taken by Martin Luther, while Philip Melancthon put the flesh on the bones of his mentor's proposals for educational reform. Also strategic for the Reformation was the founding by John Calvin of an institute of higher education in Geneva (1559), which produced many of the next generation of Protestant leaders.<sup>15</sup>

In the twenty-first century, the people of God have largely thrown off the authoritarianism of papal politics and subservience to ecclesiastical authorities in the traditional sense. Nevertheless, important questions of authority and spiritual leadership remain to be tackled and resolved within the Church of Rome.

For example, the Roman Catholic theologian, Joseph Comblin, argues that the concept of the people of God has been "systematically eliminated" by the Church for more than a quarter of a century.<sup>16</sup>

Roman Catholics, whilst having much to do in order to restore the people of God

to centre stage within the church, are not alone in their need to address the question. It is a matter which the whole church would do well to re-examine. Biblical theology and Church history speak in unison to inform us that the church as the people of God is not only a concept; it is a strategy and more importantly a mission strategy.

Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version, 1982. **dmj**

<sup>1</sup> José Comblin, *O Povo de Deus*, p. 51

<sup>2</sup> Leonhard Goppelt, *Teologia do Novo Testamento*, p. 268

<sup>3</sup> R.A. Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (PhD thesis), p. 2

<sup>4</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Meaning of Paul for Today*, p.169

<sup>5</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *The Absoluteness and Relativity*

of Christianity, *Readings in Christian Theology*, p. 361

<sup>6</sup> For an appraisal of the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, 2002

<sup>7</sup> David Catchpole, *Resurrection People*, p. 220

<sup>8</sup> William Barclay, *Many Witnesses, One Lord*, p. 113-14

<sup>9</sup> William Barclay, *Many Witnesses, One Lord*, p. 30-32

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Fuller, *Easter Faith and History*, p.17

<sup>11</sup> N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 456

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p. 457

<sup>13</sup> This paper by Samuel Escobar was subsequently published in the Latin American theological journal, *Vox Scripturae*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 49-78

<sup>14</sup> Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* pp. 98-99

<sup>15</sup> See my article in the *Journal*, April 2001, p. 19

<sup>16</sup> José Comblin, *O Povo de Deus*, p. 9 Reflections on the Church as the People of God

## An Invitation to Warsaw

May I extend an invitation to readers of the Journal who would like to spend a study week, or a sabbatical, in a new and fascinating location to consider flying over to Warsaw and to the Baptist Theological Seminary here. You will be most welcome at our picturesque Seminary complex in Radosc, a pleasant suburb to the South East of Warsaw. Our prices, as you will find out, are very reasonable too!

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# Fraternals – still essential for Baptist Ministers?

First thoughts in a discussion provoked by **Ted Hale**, Northampton

Before anything else is said, if there is any attempt within Baptist ministry to hold a "fraternal", then it is a dead horse. "Well", you might say, "we only have male ministers in our area, so what's wrong with calling it a fraternal?" If you are male, would you join something called a "Sisterhood"? Language matters.

I write from a Northampton perspective where we have a monthly Baptist ministers' meeting which is well supported by about 80% of serving and retired ministers. Retired ministers are valued for their experience, and sometimes their new spheres of ministry. I know some of them deeply appreciate the continuing recognition of their ministry and the friendship a ministers' meeting provides. Over the years the meeting has enabled ministers new to the area to quickly find a network of colleagues sharing a common task, good friendships to be established and support given beyond the actual meetings. Because there is mutual respect and honesty, it is a forum where serving ministers can sometimes share thoughts which would not be appropriate or helpful if shared with church members. It sometimes takes new members a little while to get used to the frank exchanges, but if ministers can't speak the truth in love to each other, what chance have we in our wider ministry? We have a flexible approach to meetings, so someone has usually prepared some provocative thoughts for discussion, but if pastoral care and prayer for each other takes the whole meeting, so be it. We visit each others places of work (church, hospital, etc), and have "guests", as well as an annual social meeting for a meal. The meeting gives an opportunity for regional ministers to share some of their thoughts on more than just an individual basis. The Baptist ministers' meeting provides an opportunity for Baptist ministers to talk about what is going on in Baptist life at all levels. Where else is that still possible?

My concern, which is shared by my colleagues, is that the majority of Baptist ministers in Northamptonshire have no such meeting; nor as far as Northamptonshire is concerned do the new structures of our denomination help Baptist ministers to meet on other occasions. At a Catholic priest's funeral recently it was interesting to see how many other priests came to the service, and to see the obvious friendships between people who shared their lives of ministry. If a Baptist minister died in Northamptonshire, how many Baptist ministers would attend the funeral, or even send a letter of condolence? The fact is that the same bonds of friendship do not exist. I believe they once did, and colleagues would be seen at inductions and farewells and funerals. Because we saw each other at Association events and meetings, and Associations were of distinct and reasonably sized geographical areas we knew each other and became friends. That has gone; and it is my belief that if Baptist ministers do not have their own meetings the friendship of ministers which is such an important ingredient in any Baptist Union, Baptist Association or Baptist Ministers' Fellowship worthy of the name will have gone.

Of course there will always be Baptist ministers who do not wish to associate with their Baptist colleagues, but as members of the BMF we are committed to seeing that Baptist ministers have such meetings available. So how can it happen? And what do you do about it? If you have thoughts and ideas worth sharing, please let the Editor know!

## Book Reviews

*Travel with William Grimshaw*

**Fred Perry**, Day One Publications 2004  
ISBN 1 903087 68 6 128pp

This little book is a gem. Fred Perry's 40-year research into William Grimshaw's life has paid rich dividends. The book comes alive with its detail. One can see Cromwell's cavalry tethering their horses in the meadows behind St. James's Church, Brindle, William's birthplace. And the boy Grimshaw being promoted at school "to the group at the other end of the room".

It was in May 1742 when the ordained Anglican priest became the perpetual curate at Haworth with its twelve communicants. A year later over nine hundred flocked to services, with many more standing outside. As Grimshaw wrote, "Our dear Lord was pleased to visit our parish." Converted through reading John Owen's "The Doctrine of Justification by Faith", William himself used to have doubts about his salvation, yet was an exemplary pastor and evangelist. He would often preach twenty times a week! Winning souls for Jesus was like pulling the devil's teeth, he said (words I read at the dentist's awaiting an extraction -honestly!) He enlisted others in the work of spreading the gospel, sharing his home with them. He arranged many, many home meetings, associated with the Wesleys, Whitfield, Benjamin, Ingham and others.

His pattern of starting his day with the Doxology, having four sessions of prayer daily, his stress on self-examination and fasting is a challenge. Of course he suffered persecution, including beatings by mobs, and was arraigned before the Archbishop to answer charges. And much more! It's a delightful, gripping book, and has one hundred and thirty superb photographs plus illustrated maps for the tourist. So, see

his second wife Elizabeth's funeral, the coffin slung between two black-plumed horses, the mourners riding or walking the eight miles from Haworth to Heptonstall. Or his own funeral at 55 years of age, the coffin inscribed with his favourite text, "For me to live in Christ, and to die is gain". A memorable book indeed.

**Alan Hellowell**

*Celebrating Difference, Staying Faithful: How to live in a Multi-Faith World*

**Andrew Wingate**, DLT, 2005 ISBN 0-232-52532-3, 208pp, £12.95

Andrew Wingate brings to this book many years of experience as an Anglican minister and teacher in a multi-faith setting, based predominantly in Birmingham and Leicester. It's these stories and case studies that really bring this book alive and makes connections with anyone whose ministry lies in a diverse cultural setting. I find it a complicated business living in a multi-faith community. It can seem that our aspirations to 'welcome the stranger' compromises our Christian integrity and challenges the very things we value most. It's unlikely that these questions will be going away any time soon, so this is a helpful and timely read.

This is an enjoyable and thoughtful book, covering a wide range of issues including questions about current structures and local involvement, dialogue, the theological questions of salvation, truth and the uniqueness of Jesus, a helpful chapter on interfaith worship and prayer and a very relevant chapter on community and social issues. It will be an informed and useful work book for exploring and developing multi-faith relationships in a local community.

This is not a book to offer clear cut answers, rather the invitation is to engage with the questions that are being asked. It is written with enthusiasm and insight, and with sensitivity to the differences between faiths and between different Christian traditions. Multifaith dialogue and interaction are worthwhile and can be achieved. But it doesn't offer an easy shelter for Christians! It addresses the question of conversions to other faiths from Christianity alongside Christian conversions and the long term difficulties that are often encountered by individuals and families.

This is a book I will return to after it has been read for the first time. Thoughtful questions at the end of chapters can be helpfully used in local church settings. The lists of organizations, networks, books and web links are helpful as are the chapters on community issues and examples of best practice.

**Sarah Parry**  
**Shoreditch Tabernacle**

*Consuming passion; why the killing of Jesus really matters*

**Editors: Simon Barrow and Jonathan Bartley,** Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 2005 £10.95

This collection of essays rejects atonement doctrines that insist that God willed or required the death of Jesus because he needed 'satisfaction'. Penal substitution and Gibson's *The passion of the Christ* are criticized for their theological and political consequences. In one article Steve Chalke repeats his accusation of 'cosmic child abuse', which helped generate the current debate on atonement within evangelicalism. In another Michael Northcott links penal understandings to the war in Iraq. The weightiest contributions are by the writers who have written in depth on the subject elsewhere: Myers sums up his political reading of Mark, Denny Weaver, drawing on his reading of Girard and Wink, runs through his

narrative interpretation of traditional *Christus Victor* understandings of atonement, and Alison, also influenced by Girard, offers thoughtful reflections on the resurrection.

Much of the material is helpful, but the articles often repeat one another as they trace the origins of the doctrine from Anselm to Hodge via Calvin. In addition, none of them is of sufficient length or depth either to convince those who hold the doctrine dear or, more significantly, to set out and defend a viable alternative. Given that the argument is in part about, or purports to be about, the interpretation of scripture, it is disappointing that the collection offers no sustained exegesis of key Biblical texts. Nor is there much attempt to grapple with the different meanings of the word *sacrifice*. Occasionally, the attempt to blame the penal substitution for everything from the Crusades to the latest Iraq War descends into reductionism and ignores the fact that many cultures have engaged in violent empire building without recourse to this doctrine. Finally, since all human cultures have systems of sanction for behaviour which undermines social relationships, it would have been interesting to have read reflection on the cultural purposes of sanctions and their role in restoring relationships for surely these are related to the appeal of penal substitution.

So, an interesting but flawed collection. It mounts an effective critique of substitutionary doctrines of atonement but fails to come to terms with their appeal. After all, the doctrine offers comprehensible interpretations of **some** difficult New Testament texts, and has an intense emotional attraction to those who are deeply conscious of sin and its consequences.

**Steve Finamore**  
**Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol**

*Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples*, ed. **Christopher Ellis and Myra Blyth**, BUGB, 2005, £30, xxi + 423 plus CD format.

As many of you, I have already used service orders from this book and it is a very welcome addition to the bookshelves. The litmus test of any Baptist service book (and there have been several) is whether a variety of voices can make themselves heard through the words and patterns without one voice dominating. It is form with flexibility that we want and Myra Blyth and Chris Ellis, two of our foremost liturgists, have brought together a splendid resource drawn from a breadth of authors and sources that offers just that.

The preface and planning for worship sections will repay reflection by anyone with an interest or involvement in worship, teasing out the structure and dynamic of corporate worship. The editors' philosophy is set out in their appeal "Please use this book creatively, both to enrich your existing local forms of worship and to expand their horizons". Don't use this book slavishly but be prepared to adapt. The forms will take on colour and texture as local personalities and contexts earth the words. Here is affirmation and exploration rooted in worship of the triune God.

The first part of the book gives patterns for worship services that belong to the life of the local church. "Gathering and Sending" includes several options to celebrate the Lord's Supper that epitomise the editors' desire to let our worship reflect the richness and creativity of encountering God. Unlike the previous *Patterns and Prayers* there are no complete services and no lectionary readings. The following sections deal with occasional offices: "Walking Together" addresses dedication, baptism and membership and covenant making - the version of the Apostles Creed substitutes "universal church" for "catholic

church" - and "Living and Caring" covers the pastoral offices of marriage, healing and death, whilst "Calling and Serving" expresses affirmation of gifts in ministry for the local church and in ministries more widely recognized.

The second part focuses on prayer, with general topics and then prayers that follow the themes of the Christian year and a section to guide private devotion. These prayers are well crafted, inspiring and thoughtful. You may choose not to use them verbatim but even those wary of written prayers could find themselves prompted to think about their own preparation for prayer in public worship by the language, imagery and content of these prayers.

The value of this book is clear. To those looking for a pattern for the occasional offices, it provides a framework so we do not have to start from scratch. No liturgical straitjacket here but using these orders will enable a family likeness in worship at key moments in the life of our Baptist churches. We are invited to embrace the richness of worship. Underlying this book seems to me to be a basic assumption that in worship people need to be nurtured and to develop, to be affirmed and stretched in their response to God who loves them in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and calls them to be disciples. We know that our people will not grow healthily on a diet of worship that is unbalanced, theologically shallow and unimaginative in its approach to exploring faith. These patterns and prayers provide a communal feast for our worship and enjoyment of God.

This volume will not fit into your pocket or bag as did its predecessor but the accompanying CD version makes for easy insertion into different media to assist worship. Get it and use it.

**Stephen Copson**