

# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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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  
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# Editorial

The letter to members of the fellowship enclosed with this edition brings an apology for inconsistencies in Journal production. I would simply add that quite a number of them need to be laid at my door, and I am grateful to members of the Committee and to you for your patience through recent months. We are now back 'on course' and hope that this 'bumper issue' will provide food for thought and reflection, as well as helping to keep us in touch with one another in our prayers and concerns.

In this month which marks the 100th Anniversary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity we take a look at one often-neglected aspect of Ecumenism as it is experienced by those whose Christian experience is focussed and fed in new and emerging forms of Church. We do not find the word 'Ecumenism' in John Matthews' article, but the sense of crossing and erasing former boundaries is strong in some of the movements he explored in his recent Sabbatical. Graham Sparkes' reflections on Baptists and ecumenism are also pertinent in this whole area of what we bring and what we receive from other Christians as we take part in the Mission of God in the world.

When members of the fellowship send material they have produced or published, it is not always able to use it immediately, but that does not mean it is not noted and appreciated. A booklet written by Eric Eyre was forwarded to me. (*Is there life after retirement?* Copies £2 from Eric H Eyre 47 Aldish Drive, Willen, Milton Keynes MK5 19HP.) It contains a prayer of gratitude for the opportunity, in retirement, to deepen one's spiritual life. Phrases from this prayer also pose questions in a new year for those of us who are not yet retired:

I pray for less width and more depth. Less width of random activity, often seeking to fulfil others' expectations of me, and more depth in my relationship with you, through meditation, listening and devotional study...

I pray for less width in trying to maintain shallow, passing relationships and more depth in developing deeper love and understanding with those closest to me ...

I pray for less width in doing more and more Churchy things and more depth in my relating to those outside the Church ...

I pray for less width in supporting redundant self-interest groups in the Church and more depth in responding to the cry of the hungry, poor and suffering of our world..

Help me to spend less time trying to disturb the comfortable and more time trying to comfort the disturbed...

In the middle of all the doing-things, we are well served by those who both continue to support us, encourage us, yet in different ways pose the questions about our priorities and purpose.

# Emerging Church, Fresh Expressions, Deep Church

**John Matthews**, Hitchin, offers some reflections from his recent sabbatical studies.

In 1998 10% of adults in England attended church at least monthly, with another 10% doing so less often. 40% of adults had never been to church apart from weddings or funerals, and 40% had previously attended church but no longer do so. Of these, half had no intention of returning.<sup>1</sup> In 2000 4% of children attended a church, compared to 6% in 1990, 14% in 1970 and 35% in 1940.<sup>2</sup>

Whilst Baptist churches have experienced a slight increase in membership in recent years this is largely due to substantial increases in the membership of some black majority churches. Whilst this is to be welcomed, such increases in a small number of churches may give the impression that overall things are better than they really are. The Baptist Union's concern about the declining number of children and young people attending Baptist churches was expressed in calling churches to a Day of Prayer in 2006.

We live in a society in which the Christian faith is not the only faith and where the Christian voice competes to be heard with the voices of those who are members of other faiths or none. Many people have had what they call a 'spiritual' experience, but few of these people are turning to the church, and many more are turning away from it.

In this situation Christians have been described as like a football team 'playing away' in that we are 'not at home' in our culture.<sup>3</sup> Other analogies include the church as a 'colony of resident aliens'<sup>4</sup>, though the church is not settled, as this implies, but on the move<sup>5</sup>, and Christians as 'exiles' (see Brueggemann and Frost). One of the dangers of exile is that of becoming self-obsessed and being unable to see beyond the present situation.

All this raises questions like "In what ways can we be 'in' a consumer culture but not bound by its underlying values?" and "What forms of church does this require?"<sup>6</sup> In attempting to communicate the gospel in today's culture there is three-way conversation to be had...(between) the historic gospel, uniquely expressed in Holy

Scripture and the Catholic creeds; the Church, which is engaging in mission, with its particular culture and history; and the culture within which the gospel is being shared.<sup>7</sup>

An increasing number of efforts are being made to make the Church more accessible to, and welcoming of, those currently outside it. What follows makes no attempt to give a comprehensive view of these. Rather, it is intended to give an introduction and to point those who wish to explore further to some helpful resources.

**Emerging Church (EC)** is the phrase used to describe new gatherings of Christians (mainly, though not entirely, in urban contexts) who are experimenting with new forms of church, more relevant to contemporary culture. Some prefer to speak of the 'emerging movement' or the 'emerging conversation' (which happens mainly through blogs and websites). These alternatives serve to point up that there is not an 'emerging church' equivalent to, say, the Methodist Church. Murray suggests that attempting to categorize the EC at this stage is like trying to

nail jelly to a wall<sup>8</sup> and that perhaps the best image for describing and interpreting EC is a kaleidoscope – the basic elements are unchanged but there are many ways of displaying them<sup>9</sup>. A comprehensive overview of ECs in the UK and the US define them as 'missional communities arising from within postmodern culture and consisting of followers of Jesus who are seeking to be faithful to their time and place'<sup>10</sup>.

**Fresh Expressions (FE)** is a term used in the Church of England report 'mission-shaped church' to describe new groupings from existing churches meeting on different days of the week, in different places, doing very different things. There is an organisation called 'fresh expressions' which is a partnership of the Anglican and Methodist churches with other agencies, but the term is also used more generally of new initiatives by established churches of various denominations.

The latest definition of a fresh expression by the organization itself is a new or different form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of those who are not yet members of any church, through principles of listening, service and incarnational mission and with the potential to be or to become a mature expression of church shaped both by the gospel and by its cultural context.<sup>11</sup>

**Deep Church (DC)** is a term originally used by C. S. Lewis in 1952 as a suggested name to unite Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics, who had a 'orthodox' view of doctrine, against the Liberals and Modernists. It has recently been revived by those who

feel that Christians need to be more aware of their deep roots, and to remember and learn from the riches of Christian history in order to be better equipped to face the future. (So, as with 'emerging church', the use of the word 'church' is misleading.)

DC echoes Webber's emphasis reflected in the title of his book, 'Ancient-Future Faith' that 'the road to the future runs through the past'<sup>12</sup> and Brueggemann's belief that 'only memory allows possibility'.<sup>13</sup> This emphasis is not totally lacking in new forms of church. One example of which, from the emerging church is, 'We can only ever be relevant as Christians if we are firmly rooted in our tradition...To lose our grip on that heritage is always an act of betrayal and ends not in relevance but apostasy.'<sup>14</sup>

## Motivations

EC and FE are both motivated by a desire to reach people established churches are not reaching; both those with previous experience of church (the 'dechurched') and those with no experience (the 'unchurched') and recognise that that to do this means understanding and relating to the cultural context. It also means that a congregation must become a place where members learn to function like cross-cultural missionaries rather than be a gathering place where people come to receive religious goods and services.<sup>15</sup>

EC is also motivated by dissatisfaction with aspects of established churches, not least where worship focuses on words to the neglect of symbols and the use of the senses, and ways of reading scripture. Peter Rollins says that he was 'worried about the evangelical

churches' way of reading the Bible as a singular book with one voice rather than a book with many voices and many ways of interpreting.<sup>16</sup>

DC is motivated by two concerns. Firstly, 'almost a lament for the lack of confidence in the gospel and the paucity of spiritual and theological resources available to contemporary Christians', and secondly, 'a common desire to see a hospitable, orthodox approach to the Christian faith...less concerned with denominational boundaries and more concerned about...the nature of faithful and enlivening witness...'<sup>17</sup>. Walker believes that 'one of the greatest obstacles to overcome in embracing what Brian McLaren, amongst others, has called 'a generous orthodoxy', remains the ignorance of Christian history among ordinary believers and the one-sided sleight-of-hand historical summaries some leaders use to bolster their own positions ecclesiological predilections.'<sup>18</sup>

This emphasis reminded me of the words of Mark Oakley. Part of me worries that the contemporary Church is losing aspects of its wide and generous memory and therefore condemning itself to become a 'swimming pool Church' – one that has all the noise coming from the shallow end.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst EC and FE are about new and creative ways of being church which are true to the gospel and culturally relevant, DP is more an emphasis or an orientation, encouraging these and established churches to remember their roots.

### **New Expressions of Church**

In what follows where the phrase 'new expressions of church' is used it

embraces both EC and FE.

An excellent introduction to the British emerging church scene describes EC as 'a mindset ("we'll come to you") rather than a model...a directions rather than a destination...(it) rests on principles rather than a plan...arises out of a culture rather than being imposed on a culture'<sup>20</sup>.

In practice, though, many new expressions of church, whilst more user-friendly to those outside the church, are still inviting people to come to something already set up.

An exception to this is 'Quench' in Northampton, where Adam Eakins and others from Broadmead Baptist Church had thoughts about creating something for people who do not go to church. However, instead of setting it up and inviting people to come, they began by inviting some friends out for a meal (paid for by the church) in order to float their ideas and invite the friends to give some shape and substance to them – and even to choose the name! On the basis of in-depth interviews with fifty emerging church leaders (half of them British, half American) Gibbs & Bolger conclude that the three core practices of emerging churches are identifying with Jesus, transforming secular spaces and living as community. They also list six other characteristics; welcoming the stranger, serving with generosity, participating as producers, creating as created beings, leading as a body and taking part in spiritual activities. Lack of space precludes these being expounded here but each of the nine receives a chapter in their book.

Writing of the British context, admittedly twelve years ago, Robert Warren says that in contrast to established churches, emerging churches'

- structure is light/flexible rather than fixed/heavy;
- leadership is collaborative/creative rather than clerical/control;
- focus is whole-life rather than church-life;
- form is community rather than organization;
- pastoral goal is holy rather than happy;
- expression is diverse rather than single;
- orientation is future rather than past.<sup>21</sup>

### **Worship**

In new expressions of church, worship is usually more participatory than in inherited churches, with more stories and discussion and fewer sermons. This 'relieves pressure on preachers and empowers church de-skilled by dependence on sermons'<sup>22</sup>. There is often less singing, if any, and the use of symbols and ritual and multimedia are common, as are use of the body and the engagement of the senses.

In contrast to many established churches where the minister alone plans and leads the worship, the planning of worship may be open to anyone who wishes to be involved and different parts will be led by different people, without anyone necessarily being 'upfront'. Rather than everything being planned and controlled there will be time and space for people to make their contributions.

Worship does not necessarily take place on Sundays, and certainly not necessarily on Sunday mornings. 'Being able to imagine how things can be different is the key'<sup>23</sup>.

### **Mission & evangelism**

As mentioned above one of the motives for new expressions of church is mission. 'Any FE must begin by asking 'mission' questions, like 'who is the mission for?', 'who is the mission by?' and 'who is the mission with?'<sup>24</sup>. Mission is most often seen in incarnational terms, by presence rather than by proclamation in words. 'God is not revealed via our words but rather via the life of the transformed individual'<sup>25</sup>.

ECs do not believe in evangelistic strategies, other than the pursuit to be like Jesus in his interactions with others. When one person shared the four spiritual laws with his neighbour the response was that they were news but not good news. When told that we are to participate in God's goodness, the neighbour received this as good news<sup>26</sup>. ECs are also wary of engaging in acts of kindness as a means of gaining entrance for the gospel, as they are of so-called 'friendship evangelism'. In one EC a visiting speaker was talking about evangelism and invited those present to think of friends they could target. 'At this point there was uproar because people saw their friends as friends, not as targets for evangelism'<sup>27</sup>.

Some ECs see evangelism in very different terms from those in which it is usually understood.

'Instead of religious discourse being a type of drink designed to satisfy our thirst for answers, Jesus made his teaching salty, evoking thirst. In a world where people believe they are not hungry, we must not offer food but rather an aroma that helps them desire the food that we cannot provide'<sup>28</sup>.

ECs also engage in 'reverse evangelism'; being willing to learn from other faiths and those with no faith. 'In Christian mission the goal is not that some people 'out there' are brought closer to God by our work, but rather that we are all brought closer to God'<sup>29</sup>.

In line with the rejection of a 'come to us' mindset, ECs see 'third spaces' as the most natural places for Christians to communicate with people outside the church. 'Third spaces' are places where people go to relax and to be with friends (first and second spaces being home or work). Unfortunately, for many Christians their 'third space' is the church and because they spent so much time there they rarely, if ever, meet non-Christian friends in their 'third spaces'.

### **Discipleship**

In many established churches questions are discouraged and the emphasis is on believing the 'right' things about God (orthodoxy). In ECs questions are welcomed and orthopraxy (right living) is seen as just as important as orthodoxy, if not more so. Borg sees the difference between ECs and established churches as EC being 'transformation-centred' in contrast to the inherited churches being 'belief-centred'<sup>30</sup>. This is not to say that it is always easy to know the right thing to do. Brewin expresses the fact that discipleship is not simple or straightforward in a memorable way when he says that 'We need to...be prepared to journey with the Complex Christ, rather than booking bucket seats on easy Jesus'<sup>31</sup>.

From the DC perspective Kreider argues for a renewal of catechesis, with a twelve step baptismal preparation

taking perhaps a year and a half, and involving the candidates' mentors or sponsors<sup>32</sup>.

DC also argues for that there is a need for a basic introduction to the faith and a continuing deepening of knowledge and experience of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

### **Community**

ECs follow Jesus in crossing boundaries and allowing their boundaries to be crossed by those not attracted to, or rejected by, established churches. 'God encourages us never to separate the wheat from the tares but we do.'<sup>33</sup> 'The body of Christ is where dirt comes to be cleansed, not where the clean come to take refuge from dirt'<sup>34</sup>.

In ECs there is a spirit of openness well expressed in that phrase 'a generous orthodoxy' (see McLaren). EC values people for who they are not what they do, or might do. One person says, Café Church is the first place that I haven't felt 'categorised' or 'targeted' as a single...as a woman...as a potential Sunday School teacher...I am not wanted or valued for what I might be able to contribute, but for who I am<sup>35</sup>.

### **New Expressions of Church and established Churches**

There is a need for both new forms of church and established churches. Rowan Williams has spoken of a 'mixed economy' of traditional churches and new initiatives. This means that

'emerging church pioneers can afford to explore because others are stoking the home fires, while members of existing church may be more comfortable in their roles

knowing that others are sparking new developments.<sup>36</sup>

It clearly helps to minimise potential difficulties and to build relationships if those seeking to initiate new expressions of church, unrelated to existing churches, make contact with the leaders of those churches. The leader of 'Contemplative Fire', Philip Roderick, always does this and says that there has never been any difficulty.

But there needs to be more than peaceful co-existence between new and existing forms of church. Established churches need the stimulus of emerging churches, emerging churches need the wisdom, historical perspective and resources of established churches and they need to talk to each other. What might such conversations achieve? Murray suggests that

- Established churches might adopt or adapt helpful perspectives and practices from emerging churches;
- Emerging churches might learn from history and avoid repeating mistakes;
- Established churches might recognize and renounce attitudes and practices that damage their witness and disempower their own members;
- Emerging churches might discover and release the radical potential of familiar church practices;
- Emerging and established churches might think more deeply about themselves and their local contexts;
- The forging of mutually enriching relationships;
- Established and emerging churches

might be better equipped for the challenges and opportunities of post-Christendom.<sup>37</sup>

### **Implications for Church life today**

The following aspects will characterize the lives of churches serious about witnessing in today's culture

- Cultivating a 'down to earth' spirituality;
- Fostering real friendships and healthy community;
- Holding deep convictions but not fearing questions or doubts;
- Committed at the core but open at the edges;
- Helping people to become Christians and to grow as Christians;
- Genuinely welcoming and accepting all people;
- Giving non-members opportunities for participation without pressuring them;
- Being self-aware and self-critical;
- Engaging with our context and its issues;
- Valuing tradition without being bound by it;
- Worship that fosters dialogue rather than monologue, and encourages participation rather than performance;
- Knowing our own tradition but being open to learn from others;
- Having the mindset of mission<sup>38</sup>;
- Holding 'introduction to faith' courses that begin further back than, for example, 'Alpha' and 'Emmaus', perhaps starting with people's own 'spiritual' experiences as 'Essence' does;
- Remembering that emphasising



that we are sinners in need of forgiveness cuts no ice with people who do not see themselves as sinners (see Mann);

- Experimenting with new ways of doing things, and not feeling guilty if they fail.

### Implications for Ministry/Leadership

In most ECs in the UK leaders are neither ordained nor full-time and the style of leadership is collaborative and low-profile. These churches also tend to be small and do not have the plethora of meetings and organisations of established churches, which can absorb much of a minister's time and energy.

Ministry in established churches is demanding and stressful. Not least because such churches expect their ministers 'to be attentive pastors and to develop strategies to reverse long-term decline, but demand well-crafted sermons each week, that take up an inordinate amount of their time...' <sup>39</sup>.

'Lacking a means of defence against the needs of the congregation pastors feel that they are being nibbled to death by ducks' <sup>40</sup>.

A minister who has to prepare and lead two services, prepare and preach two sermons, prepare and lead a midweek group, support leaders, share in pastoral care, attend meetings, play some part in serving the wider church, and keep up with current theological and biblical thinking, as well as what is going on in church and society does not have the time to explore new and creative ways of being the church today, still less to do anything about them. And yet in these days of numerical decline is this not essential? If it is, what is to be done?

### Questions

- How do new expressions of church remain true to the gospel whilst being culturally relevant?
- How far, if at all, can FEs differ in, for example, worship style and theology from their 'parent' church?
- Does the fact that ECs tend to remain small and, in some cases, not last many years, matter?
- How mission orientated are ECs?
- How do ECs keep pushing the boundaries?
- Will ECs be catalysts for the renewal of the wider church?
- How can dialogue between ECs and established and denominations happen?
- Does the DP concern for a deeper knowledge of the Christian past risk making the Christian Faith too intellectual?
- Should BUGB give more serious attention to new expressions of church than is indicated by employing one person part-time?
- Should Associations make encouraging and facilitating new expressions of church a high priority?
- What role, if any, should this issue have in ministerial training?

**Appendix** – three experiences of new expressions of church:

**Contemplative Fire** - *Abbots Hill School, Hemel Hempstead 10th June 2007. 6.30-8.00pm.*

This was a 'gathering'; one of the larger meetings of Contemplative Fire (as opposed to smaller groups of 3,7 or 12) at which there were about 40 people.

The weather allowed us to be outside and advantage was taken of this to use different spaces. The worship, with the theme 'towards healing', included a simple chant, scripture readings and comments, poem, body prayer, circle dance, silence and Communion. Different parts being led by different people. No books were needed by the congregation. We were each given a sprig of lavender to take away with a card attached bearing the words that had been used in the worship.

**Sunday Breakfast** - *Dagnall Street Baptist Church, St Albans 17th June 2007. 9.15-10.00am.*

Held in the church hall with chair around tables. Continental breakfast was available on arrival. There was time to chat and/read the papers. At 9.30 the theme song was sung, then the minister told the story of the conversion of the Philippian jailer and made very brief comments on it. People were then invited to read details on the tables of Christians who were in prison or suffering persecution. People were then asked to come to and read these and to light one of seven candles for the people concerned. During all this the children were making paper chains which were then joined to make one large chain around the room. There was a closing song. About 70 people of all ages attended (this included a group of young people who were visiting). Usual attendance is 40-50.

**Café church** - *Harpenden Methodist Church 21st June 2007. 7.45-9.30pm.*

This is held in the church coffee lounge furnished with mainly easy chairs. There was coffee and chat with a formal start at 8pm. Different weeks have different themes; for

example, 'book café', 'film café', 'jazz café' and there is usually more interactive than this occasion when one of the church members spoke and answered questions about icons; both their meaning and his painting of them, which was also demonstrated. Those attending include members of this church, other churches and none. Some people attend every week, others come when the topic appeals to them, so numbers vary greatly. On this occasion there were about 20.

**Books**

Walter Brueggemann : *The Prophetic Imagination* (Augsburg, 2nd ed. 2001)  
 Kester Brewin: *The Complex Christ* (SPCK, 2004)  
 Michael Frost : *Exiles* (Hendrickson, 2006)  
 Eddie Gibbs & Ryan K Bolger : *Emerging Churches* (SPCK, 2006)  
 Barbara Glasson : *I Am Somewhere Else* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006)  
 Stanley Hauerwas & William H Williman : *Resident Aliens* (Abingdon, 1989)  
 Kathy Kirkpatrick, Mark Pierson & Mike Riddell : *The Prodigal Project* (SPCK, 2000)  
 Brian McLaren : *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Zondervan, 2004)  
 Alan Mann : *Atonement for a 'sinless' society* (Authentic media, 2005)  
 Michael Moynagh : *emergingchurch. intro* (Monarch, 2004)  
 Stuart Murray : *Church After Christendom* (Paternoster, 2004)  
 Mark Oakley, *The Collage of God* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2001)  
 Peter Rollins : *How (not) to speak of God* (SPCK, 2006)  
 Alan J Roxburgh & Fred Romanuk: *The Missional Leader* (Jossey-Bass, 2006)  
 Michael Schwartzentruber (ed) : *The emerging Christian Way* (CopperHouse, 2006)

Andrew Walker & Luke Bretherton (eds) : Remembering Our Future (Paternoster 2007) Robert Warren : Being Human, Being Church (Marshall Pickering, 1995) Robert E Webber : Ancient-Future Faith (Baker Books, 1999) Mission-shaped church (Church House Publishing, 2004)

**DVDs**

expressions : the dvd 1: stories of church for a changing culture (The Methodist Church, freshexpressions, Church House Publishing, 2006) expressions : the dvd 2 : changing church in every place (The Methodist Church, freshexpressions, Church House Publishing, 2007)

**Blog**

Andygoodliff.typepad.com, which has links to other blogs discussing these issues.

*I am indebted to Simon Carver (Dagnall Street, St Albans), Adam Eakins (Broadmead, Northampton & Quench), Andy Goodliff (Bunyan, Stevenage), Juliet Kilpin (BUGB), Philip Roderick (Contemplative Fire) and Helen Wordsworth (Mission Enabler, CBA) for their time and stimulating conversation. Also to Andy for a supplying a book list, lending me books, and pointing me to 'deep church'.*

- 1 mission-shaped church, 37
- 2 mission-shaped church, 41
- 3 Sweet, quoted Murray, 2004, 155
- 4 Hauerwas & Willimon, 12
- 5 Hauerwas & Willimon, 51
- 6 mission-shaped church, xii
- 7 mission-shaped church, 91
- 8 Moynagh, 14
- 9 Murray, 93
- 10 Gibbs & Bolger, 28
- 11 fresh expressions leaflet
- 12 Webber, 7
- 13 quoted Brewin, 84
- 14 Kirkpatrick et al, 127
- 15 Roxburgh & Romanuk, 13
- 16 Gibbs & Bolger, 70.
- 17 Walker & Bretherton, xvi
- 18 Walker & Bretherton, 14
- 19 Oakley, 10
- 20 Moynagh, 25
- 21 Warren, 97
- 22 Murray, 190
- 23 Kirkpatrick et. al., 120
- 24 mission-shaped church, 115
- 25 Rollins, 42
- 26 Gibbs & Bolger, 56
- 27 Gibbs & Bolger, 127
- 28 Rollins, 37
- 29 Rollins, 54
- 30 in Schwartzentruber, 12
- 31 Brewin, 7
- 32 in Walker & Bretherton, 177ff
- 33 Gibbs & Bolger, 129
- 34 Brewin, 142
- 35 in Kirkpatrick et al, 51
- 36 Moynagh, 39
- 37 Murray, 117 (Murray uses 'inherited' where I use 'established').
- 38 indebted to Murray, 55f, 64, 124, 137, 226f
- 39 Murray, 188
- 40 Hauerwas & Willimon, 126

## Who pays the piper?

**Fred Stainthorpe**, Willenhall, asks the question, at the time of year when many churches and organisations are preparing and agreeing their budgets for the coming year.

**How should we finance mission work?** All Christians would agree that ultimately our money comes from God but the differences arise when we ask "How does it come?" Should Christian organisations and missionary societies prepare budgets and ask their constituents to support them or should they rely directly upon God without reference to people? Is the first way worldly and the second spiritual?

**The second group** can call upon a strong list of witnesses to buttress their case. George Muller obtained over a million pounds in his lifetime to finance his Orphan Homes without ever asking anyone for help. Hudson Taylor, who began the China Inland Mission, never made any appeal for money and is credited with saying that "God's work, done in God's way, will never lack funds". WEC, begun by CT Studd, operates in the same way. It is possibly the largest Protestant missionary society in the world. Likewise, Brethren missionaries "live by faith". Other missions, many of them American in origin, follow the same plan. To appeal for funds, they say, is to follow the world's way and God will not honour it.

The mainstream denominational societies have followed a different path. One of the first acts of the group which constituted the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792 was to take up an offering. It is not certain when BMS began to prepare a budget but someone must have suggested that they put their finances on a business basis and from that day to this the Society has produced a budget forecast in the belief that constituent churches will rise to the challenge and meet its demands. Other denominational

societies have followed the same rule in their different ways. Which way is correct?

**The first group** can claim theological and scriptural justification for its stance. God is Sovereign and therefore cannot allow His servants to lack anything. He purposes to establish His Kingdom and so He will provide the means to gain this end. They point out passages in the New Testament which support their point of view. Just before His passion, Jesus asked His disciples "When I sent you out that time without purse, bag or shoes, did you lack anything?" "Not a thing", they replied" (Luke 22:35 He was referring to the occasion when He had commissioned the 72 disciples to go on a preaching tour (Luke 10). He had given similar instructions to the Twelve on the occasion of their itinerant mission (Matthew 10). They were to depend on the hospitality of those who heard them. Other passages of scripture would support this point of view.

These instructions, however, refer to a short-term mission. We do not know how long it lasted. Other passages of the New Testament indicate that the apostles had to make preparations for longer-term work. For example, when Paul expected Timothy to join

him, he urged him to "bring the cloak that I left in Troas with Carpus; bring the books too and especially the ones made of parchment". Some element of forethought and preparation was apparently necessary. One could also say that after Jesus asked His disciples that question in Luke 22, he urged them to arm themselves!

Faith Missions believe that **the most reliable way of financing mission is by direct appeal to God**. Asking people may or may not produce the right response but God is never going to deny His followers the means they need for His work. To ask people for help is to descend to the world's methods of raising money and amounts to a denial of faith in God. Moreover, they might claim, as did CT Studd, that it limits God. To place a ceiling on giving restricts missionaries to a certain extent of work whereas "faith" methods open up endless possibilities. They may not say so directly but one could gain the impression that they regard any other method but their own as sub-Christian.

**How consistent is this approach?** It can become living by faith and hints. "We do not make direct appeals for money but we are trusting the Lord to provide for our needs" can sometimes become a subtle (or not so subtle) suggestion that the hearer ought to do something about it! On our sea voyage to Congo many years ago, we shared the journey with a family belonging to a smallish American mission. The mother spent much of her time in their cabin writing letters to supporters in the States. They probably said that they were living by faith but it seemed as though it was more like "faith and letters". Moreover, even George

Muller's work became known to other people who probably thought as each year came round that they ought to send him something.

One cannot deny, of course, that George Muller and many others record examples of miraculous providential care. Many others could tell similar stories. Yet at the same time, even such missions as OMF (the former CIM) admit that they can sometimes only provide their personnel with a certain percentage of their allowance in some months. Why does the Lord not send the whole amount?

Of course, other missions suffer deficits. BMS has had its share of these. At one time, according to Basil Amey, prominent business men who formed part of General Committee often made this up from their own pockets but on other occasions the Society has had to make urgent requests to churches for help. This likewise raises the question "Why has the Lord not sent the amount needed?" and could give a bad impression to outsiders.

Many "budget" missions would also claim scriptural authority for their way of raising money. They would point out that Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to emulate their Achaean brethren in sending relief to the church in Judea. He devotes two whole chapters to this subject in 2 Cor. 8 and 9. If the great apostle was not ashamed to ask for money, why should we? In Galatians 2:10 and 1 John 3:16-18 as well as James 2:14-17 we find the same sentiments expressed and the same commands given. If one objects that these passages refer strictly to philanthropic giving, one may reply by asking whether bringing the Gospel to others is not the greatest philanthropy of all?

**Should we accept money from non-Christians?** 3 John 7 refers, presumably with commendation, to those who set out on the service of Christ without accepting any help from non-believers. Many missions, particularly faith missions would take a similar view. Isobel Kuhn in her book "By Searching" mentions a friend Ruth whose father offered to pay her way through her Moody Bible Institute course. Did she not see the Lord's hand in this? Kuhn apparently did not. Ruth's father, "though a fine clean man, played the races and gained his money in the usual worldly ways". Hudson Taylor believed firmly that God does not need and will not use for blessing, the money offered by unbelievers. "We cannot afford to have unconsecrated money", he said. One cannot but admire such an attitude. In the same way, such missions will not make any appeal for money in missionary meetings. (Sometimes, however, a basket is left discreetly at the door!)

William Booth, on the other hand, appears to have taken a somewhat different point of view. When a high-minded Christian rebuked him for accepting a donation from the Marquis of Queensberry, a professed agnostic, he was unrepentant. "We will wash it in the tears of the widows and orphans and lay it on the altar of humanity", he replied. Who was right? Perhaps both of them were. When we take up our offerings in worship, we do not hesitate to offer the collecting bag to visitors. Possibly some of them are unbelievers. Does God condemn us for this? Or was F. W. Faber right when he wrote "we magnify His strictures with a zeal He will not own"?

Booth was never shy of asking people to fund his enterprises. Nor were other prominent Christian figures such as C. H. Spurgeon, who normally encouraged his hearers to give by first making a generous donation of his own! Hugh Price Hughes, for example, the pioneer of Methodist Home Mission causes, spent much time pleading their case throughout the country. He was also influential in wiping out, at a stroke, the whole of the debt which the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society had incurred in 1883. His eloquence so evoked the response of the congregation that at one service £8,000 was offered and the books cleared. He estimated that in his lifetime he had been instrumental in raising over a quarter of a million pounds for Methodism. Dare we say that God withheld His blessing because of the methods he used?

A local church holds coffee mornings and a sale of goods each Thursday morning. Numbers of people from a multi-racial area attend. Recently a Sikh woman who runs a nearby laundry came in with a gift of two bags of five and ten pence pieces. Should the church have refused the money because the donor was not a Christian? Hudson Taylor might presumably have done so. Although he would certainly expressed himself in a gracious manner, might not the woman have regarded this a slight and been turned away from the Christians? Would she have seen it as an instance of "my money is not good enough for you"? In the event, the church received her gift with thanks. Magnanimity triumphed over strict Christian logic and left the door open for possible conversation about the Gospel.

**Should we accept money from the Lottery?** Many churches would regard this as pandering to the spirit of greed. Gambling is inherently wrong and we should avoid it. Others might answer that while they could not accept it to finance church activities, they would not be averse if the Lottery funded some or all of their weekday social work. Opinions will always differ on this but I feel that most Baptist churches would rather do without the Lottery.

Sales of work figure largely in some churches' programmes. The outsider (and some insiders) might see them as an admission of their weakness. "They are asking the general population, who never darken the doors of a church otherwise, to bolster up a cause in which they do not believe and which the adherents are unwilling or unable to finance themselves!" - might be one attitude. Others may see them as a "sacrament" of the church members' consecrated use of time during the previous year. I admire the work people put in to hold them but often wish that we could devote their proceeds to outside causes. If we devoted an equal amount of time to prayer, who can tell what effect it would have on the church's finances?

Most if not all of us believe that the gifts of the members should finance the local church's activities. We ought to regard anything else as ancillary.

Many Christians do not give as they should. Barbara Boal, in "The Church as Christian Community" contrasted the relatively vast amounts which the Kond Christians in northern India used to give to placate their gods during their heathen days with the paucity of their offerings as Christian believers. Apparently, grace did not have the same power as fear. We might trace a

parallel here and ask how the money British Christians spend on their holidays compares with their yearly offerings to God's work.

With regard to the "faith versus budget" question, perhaps we should follow Paul's advice to the Roman church "Keep what you believe about this matter between yourself and God" Romans 14:22, and "Let us stop judging one another" 14:13. The Lord apparently blesses both methods of working. "Faith" emphasises the sovereignty and faithfulness of God. "Budget" also shows faith and looks to the faithfulness and response of God's people.

In the early days of WEC, C. T. Studd said that the "Home Committee" was to be regarded as totally irresponsible for the care of missionaries on the field. They were to depend on God alone. Perhaps later generations take a somewhat different point of view. On the other hand, missions such as BMS regard themselves as responsible for the welfare of their personnel. Many have expressed their gratitude at the extent of this care when they were in need.

In conclusion, all church and mission work depends on the giving of God's people which they have either earned or received. "Spiritual work" depends on secular work. Whatever the method used to finance it, one is always conscious that we could do more, perhaps much more. We have yet to match the offering made one evening at a New Frontiers conference recently (reported in the BT September 6<sup>th</sup> 2007) of £1.25 million pounds. If all supporters of mission gave to this degree, we could go ahead in top gear no matter what method we adopt.

# Baptists and Ecumenism: Personal Perspectives

**Graham Sparkes**, Didcot, prepared this paper for an Ecumenical Officers' Consultation last year. It will be made more widely available in due course through the Faith and Unity Department at BUGB.

'A united church is no optional extra,' said Desmond Tutu at the World Council Churches (WCC) Assembly at Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2006. Rather it is 'indispensable for the salvation of God's world.' He went on to link unity firmly with our mission calling to make a difference in the world, arguing that the work of the WCC – of Christians together – was vital in the struggle against apartheid. 'You, the WCC, demonstrated God's concern for unity, for harmony, for togetherness,' he declared.

## **A History of Ecumenical Commitment**

The Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) was there at the WCC Assembly, alongside 350 other member churches including the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church, as one sign of our active involvement in, and commitment to, the ecumenical journey. Of course, when Baptists first came on the scene back in the 1600s, we were a persecuted minority – dissenters who rejected the established church. We were part of the divisions that tore apart the church in this country, as we rejected the enforced use of the Book of Common Prayer, for example, and claimed freedom in matters of faith and practice that others would not allow. But as during the last century the Christian church has begun to seek to heal its divisions and come together, Baptists have been fully involved; ecumenically committed.

When the World Missionary Conference took place in Edinburgh in 1910 from which the Ecumenical Movement received much of its early inspiration, Baptists were present. And early in 1914 the Baptist Union Council agreed to take part in a proposed

World Faith and Order Conference that finally met in 1927, and led in time to the formation of the WCC in 1948 with full Baptist participation.

The inaugural meeting of the British Council of Churches was held in 1942 in Baptist Church House in London. And when in 1987 the Swanwick Declaration sought to move the churches to a deeper commitment to one another, drawing in the Catholics for the first time by forming the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland (together with Churches Together in England and the other national instruments), BUGB voted decisively in favour of being part of the new ecumenical landscape at its annual Assembly.

Individual Baptists have made a significant contribution to the modern ecumenical movement. The Revd J H Shakespeare, General Secretary of BUGB during the early years of the twentieth century, had a strong ecumenical vision. 'I passionately desire the goal of Church unity,' he wrote in *The Churches at the Cross Roads*, and he worked hard to develop plans for unity between the Church of England and the Free Churches,



including Baptists. In the end, of course, the talks came to nothing. The Revd Ernest Payne, who also served as General Secretary of BUGB during the mid twentieth century, played a very significant role within the WCC, serving on its Central Committee as well as in many other ways. More recently, the General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and of the Conference of European Churches have both been Baptists.

The local picture also witnesses to significant Baptist ecumenical commitment. The majority of congregations within BUGB have some kind of link with groups of churches together, with over 200 involved in formal Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). Some participate in single congregation LEPs, while others share buildings, or are in close covenant partnership with other traditions as they serve and witness to the local community together. More than 30 Baptists are present in a variety of chaplaincy situations, often working alongside those from other Christian traditions and other faiths, and there are a significant number who serve as County Ecumenical Officers. Thus, in all kinds of ways, both formal and informal, locally and nationally and internationally, BUGB has expressed its commitment to the ecumenical journey.

### **Issues and Challenges**

This might surprise some! Despite such a clear commitment expressed in formal votes and active participation, experience of Baptist ecumenical participation – particularly at a local church level – can be very mixed. Whether this is very different from

churches of other traditions is open to debate, but there is no doubt that Baptists have the potential to be awkward companions on this shared journey of faith. There are a number of reasons for this.

- a) There is the issue of baptism. While the majority of Christendom practices infant baptism, Baptists have a commitment to believer's baptism, and this presents clear difficulties in trying to reach agreement about the meaning and practice of this central sacrament within the life of the church. There continue to be those who hope and seek to build deeper ecumenism on the basis of a common baptism, but this is always likely to be problematic for Baptists. That is not to say ways forward cannot be found. The recent conversations between BUGB and the Church of England, published as *'Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity'*, offers fruitful paths of exploration involving the recognition of a shared journey of initiation. But nevertheless this issue continues to be a source of some tension due to our varying practices and understandings.
- b) There is the Baptist emphasis on mission. The evangelical nature of many Baptist churches is often expressed in a deep commitment to live out the mission of God, and this will often determine the nature of the ecumenism to which they are committed. Issues of faith and order – what might be termed the traditional ecumenical agenda – are often regarded as of little importance and so will receive little time or energy. There may well be a lack

of sensitivity to Church traditions that, for example, value highly the recognition of particular orders of ministry, and with it an impatience at how this might appear to impede a coming together in unity. Opportunities for collaborating in employing a school's worker, on the other hand, may well receive strong support.

- c) There is the issue of ecclesiology. BUGB is a union of churches, associations and colleges, who covenant together, and so each Baptist church has freedom to order its own life and ministry. Whatever the commitment of BUGB to the ecumenical journey, local congregations will remain free to work this out in their own way – or not as the case may be! Such a devolved ecclesiology certainly means that theological commitment to ecumenism will vary; and it also affects the practical outworking of ecumenical ventures. On the one hand, the way in which we manage our finances will for the most part be local, with very few resources held or distributed centrally, and this can give the impression that there is a lack of ecumenical will when significant funding is needed. On the other hand, light structures mean that Baptists can easily be frustrated by other traditions that seem unable to respond quickly and creatively to new ecumenical opportunities.

Such issues can be a source of difficulty, and it would be easy to see them as nothing more than obstacles to be overcome. However, they might

also offer the framework for developing a distinctive Baptist contribution to ecumenism, enabling alternative ways of doing ecumenism to be identified and affirmed.

### **Developing a Baptist Ecumenical Methodology**

What might a distinctive Baptist methodology for doing ecumenism look like and what could be its distinctive features?

A Baptist approach to ecumenism will undoubtedly be rooted in the recognition that it is insufficient for us to be alone. The language of covenant is central to Baptist life and thought. It is the conviction that we are bound together in covenant relationship with God and with one another, and this conviction is one that must be extended to include the wider Christian family. The commitment to seeking unity is an affirmation that all Christians already exist in covenant relationship, whether we like it or not, and so our ecumenical methodology calls us to engage in shared worship, learning and serving. We are incomplete when left on our own. With the humble trust and openness that marks true covenant relationships, Baptists must recognize that they can only ever see themselves as part of the Church, and that they are in need of the other parts in order to continue the journey towards fullness.

This emphasis on covenant means that Baptists will tend only to look for minimum agreement in order to recognize, talk and work with others. Covenant is about walking together and watching over one another, offering a dynamic basis on which a relationship can grow and develop,

and so there will not be the demand for unity on key issues prior to such a relationship being formed. It will be a unity of reconciled diversity, despite the inevitable pain that arises from such shared brokenness.

Whereas the methodology followed by other traditions (such as the Church of England) would tend to give very careful attention to faith and order issues in order to seek and attain maximum agreement and commitment as a basis for formal talking and working together, Baptists will look for only minimum agreement in order to recognize, talk and work with others. Whereas such other traditions would be looking to establish and affirm the marks of the true church in others in order to make the journey towards structural unity, Baptists will be more concerned with seeing and affirming the true marks of Christ in the lives of individuals in ways that enable resources to be shared and the mission of God fulfilled.

Baptist imperatives will be about conversion, the development of faith, and mission and spirituality. Ecumenical discussions will be a means of recognizing and affirming the journey of individual Christians and groups of Christians, almost irrespective of the structures in which they are placed. The concern is more for inward reality than outward form, and is linked with the conviction that in the end God does not take much notice of ecumenical differences.

This lack of concern for structural unity leads to a further feature that reflects a distinctively Baptist ecumenical methodology. Ecumenism usually operates in an environment that

assumes hierarchies, and so takes place within the different hierarchical levels. In many traditions there are councils and synods with the power to direct policy, and there are those who are appointed to offices that give them the authority to speak and act on behalf of their church. They in some sense hold within themselves the unity of their church.

Baptists, however, don't tend to see things this way! Our egalitarian principles allow for other ways of working and associating that are not bound by the need to concentrate authority on the shoulders of certain individuals or even assemblies, and this means that we can potentially bring into the ecumenical arena those who might otherwise be on the margins, creating space for energy from the edges. So we may well want to ask questions, such as: who is talking, who is part of the conversations, and how can we involve different kinds of people? The truth is that creative ecumenism often happens outside the formal structures that are too often dominated by older white men, and at our best Baptists should be able to model a methodology that challenges and breaks apart the dominating ways of working.

Again, the Baptist lack of concern for systems and structures will mean that the way we do ecumenism rarely seeks to be comprehensive. It will not try to talk about everything all at once with everyone represented in some way! Such an approach can work, bringing about significant progress towards deep and lasting unity, but it also has dangers. It can be painstaking and frustrating for those involved, and easily bypass those who simply

want to work together. It is likely that Baptists will do ecumenism by being responsive to particular issues, look for creative ways of allowing groups of people to meet and act. And such initiatives will be encouraged to happen without any direction or involvement from a hierarchy!

It might be said that each denomination has a distinctive calling, or vocation, within the life of the wider church. We need, for example, the calling of the Orthodox to draw us back into the universal song of unending praise to God, or the Church of England to help us express a vocation to serve the life of the nation. For Baptists the commitment to the local will, perhaps, always be an important contribution, both to ecumenical life and to the way in which ecumenism is done.

### **The Future of Ecumenism**

It has been suggested that the ecumenical movement, both in this country and internationally, is middle aged and slowing down! Certainly it feels as if there is a lack of energy, and the general decline experienced by the major denominations does appear to have led to a degree of retrenchment, with less willingness to do invest resources in ecumenism despite the fact that this might be the very time such moves are most needed! But there are possible ways forward as well, and Baptists might well want to draw attention to a number of key pointers.

- a) There needs to be a constant reaffirmation and recognition of what ecumenism is all about. It is not just about reorganising the church, or even about enabling the churches to witness to their

own unity. It is about the unity and oneness of all creation that finds its life in God. This big vision needs to be at the core of what we seek as churches together and anything less will be a denial of the gospel.

- b) It is important to affirm the signs of hope – the places where energy is allowing new ecumenical ventures to flourish. As Baptists, our covenant partnership with the Independent Methodist Connexion is a significant step on the journey of bringing together two different traditions into a new future. And the creation of the Joint Public Issues Team with the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church is an immensely creative step forward in shared work and witness in one particular area – that of social and political affairs.
- c) Greater attention needs to be given to naming and exploring the different ecumenical visions that exist, in order that we can better understand the attitudes and approaches of our varying traditions. One vision is to seek to identify the marks of the true church that then enable moves towards full visible unity, including common structural forms. An alternative vision is to recognise a unity of spiritual life amidst a diversity of organisations, allowing shared commitment to mission to be the source of ecumenical life. Perhaps misunderstanding too often arises because these alternative – but not necessarily competing visions – are not properly identified.

- d) Unity needs to be bottom up! There is energy to be found on the ground, where new forms of church are emerging and initiatives in mission are happening. While often fragile and uncertain, these signs of life need to be given space and encouragement, and they point to the need to re-examine LEPs in the search for more varied patterns of partnership. The future will be messy, reflecting a unity in diversity rather than a coming together into one world church. Ecumenism has to be a movement that is inherently flexible, rooted in deep and meaningful relationships at all levels.
- e) Spirituality has become one of the main drivers for ecumenism.

The evidence is that many outside formal church structures are nevertheless engaged in a spiritual search, and to fail to respond to this will be to desert our primary calling. The challenge – particularly for Baptists – is to pay renewed attention to the mystical, offering with others the kind of hospitable space that can nurture life in the spirit in all its many dimensions.

Ecumenism is an inescapable reality for all of us! Our churches are made up of Christians from varying traditions. So while not many Baptists would hold to a vision of structural or organic unity, we need to accept the challenge of offering our own contribution to shaping what it means to live together and serve together in the future.

## Religious Freedom

The editors of the *Baptist Quarterly* would like to draw your attention to an article which may be of particular interest to readers of this Journal. The Baptist Historical Society's Annual Lecture for 2007, 'On Religious Liberty: re-reading *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* in London in 2005', was given by the Revd Dr Brian Haymes, formerly Principal of both Northern and Bristol Baptist Colleges and then minister of Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church 2000-2005. This London ministry saw the impact of the terrorist attacks in the USA on 9 September 2001 and in London on 7 July 2005. In the light of these events, Dr Haymes re-examines Thomas Helwys' early statement of the principle of religious liberty that has been characteristic of Baptists down the centuries. That affirmation is then examined in the context of the London bombings and related contemporary issues. Religious liberty is an immense topic, with huge political, philosophical and moral implications. This lecture reflects on the nature of some current issues as a contribution to what will be a long-running debate among the nations and the religions. It is published in the July 2007 issue of the *Baptist Quarterly*, volume 42, pp.197-217. It can also be found on the Society's website: <http://www.baptisthistory.org.uk> under 'Articles and Reviews', © 2007 Baptist Historical Society, Baptist House, 129 Broadway, Didcot OX11 8RT, UK.

## From Mince Pies to Easter Eggs ..

In years such as this when the date of Easter falls early there seems a relentlessness to successive weeks: scarcely has Epiphany dawned than we are preparing for Lent groups, Holy Week and Easter celebration. Beginnings and endings seem closer to one another than usual and T S Eliot's phrase of the Magi "I should be glad of another death" may echo clearly as we walk our pastoral and personal pathways. The perplexity felt by those travellers is expressed again in the stark Easter experience of the women at the tomb: what follows is an attempt to respond to the Gospel event of Mark 16.1-8. It may be sung as a hymn to the tune 'Kingsfold'.

They brought the things they had prepared,  
they knew what they must do;  
they'd lived and laughed and loved and cared,  
but now his life was through.  
If only time could be reversed  
and days re-run again -  
they'd find a way to stop the hurt  
and turn away from pain.

Let's take the dying of our hopes  
and bring them to the tomb:  
for here at least we know that they  
need not be felt again.  
Let's take the habits of our lives  
in which we feel secure,  
to bury joy and hence contrive  
no further grief to endure.

Such fear it was as felt no grace -  
the stone was rolled aside,  
and sitting in their master's place  
a man unrecognised.  
The words he spoke they could not hear,  
they could not understand,  
and running blindly through their fear  
they sought familiar land.

Lord turn us all to face such depths  
as have been dredged by you,  
teach us what comes when death is faced  
in love and risen through.  
Your place seems empty and destroyed  
it takes away our breath:  
however fearful this must be -  
God raises life from death!

Hazel Sherman

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### **REDUCING RISKS IN USING BAPTISMAL POOL**

In October 2005, Kyle Lake a 33 year old pastor of the University Baptist Church in Waco, Texas was electrocuted inside his church after grabbing a microphone while performing a baptism.

The Rev. Kyle Lake was standing in water in a baptismal pool, when he reached out to adjust a nearby microphone which produced an electric shock. He was taken by ambulance to Hillcrest Baptist Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead.

I'm sure most of us think of this as a freak accident and consider the risks to be quite low, however, it pays to be aware of the dangers and the methods to reduce these by carrying out a risk assessment.

Risk factors, which should include those listed below, must be considered and written procedures drawn up and followed.

- Electrocutation – Wire free microphones must be used in or within 2 metres of the pool in view of the dangers of using those connected directly to the mains electrical supply. Consideration must also be given to electric emersion heaters, other electric heaters, guitar amplifiers, trailing cables and other electrical equipment not only in the vicinity of the baptismal pool but in changing areas where persons could be wet. Measures must be taken to ensure that electrical equipment cannot fall into the pool.
- The risk of slips, trips and falls is present when persons are coming out of the pool dripping wet. Pools and the area around them should have a slip resistant finish.
- There is a manual handling risk as there is bending and, to some extent, lifting, involved on the part of the person performing the baptism and training should have been received in manual handling techniques. It may be necessary on occasions for two people to assist in the baptism.
- The cleanliness and temperature of the water also needs to be considered. The water should be tested for biological contamination such as Legionella. Whilst I've mentioned above the main issues associated with the use of a baptismal pool, the emphasis of course is on the Managing Trustees to identify and reduce the hazards as part of their own risk assessment process.

Yours sincerely  
Paul Bayliss  
Survey Manager

## Novel-Reading as Spiritual Encounter

**Brenda Morton**, Sydenham, offers us a brief reflection from her encounter with the novels of Maya Angelou. What novels have you come across recently which have had an impact on your discipleship and ministry?

A few years ago I inherited some books left in my keeping by a young South African man who went to America to work as a chef for a year and didn't come back as he began to train for the ministry! Among them was the first volume of Maya Angelou's autobiography, 'I know why the caged bird sings'. It took me a long time to get round to reading it – when I did, I couldn't put it down and had to buy and read the rest – another 5 books.

I had to find out how a young black girl, growing up in the South before the Civil Rights movement, raped at the age of 8 by one of her mother's lovers, could get to be a professional singer, dancer, actor, and respected poet and author. As a single parent she had to turn her hand to work of many kinds to survive. She was in the original touring cast of 'Porgy and Bess', and saw first hand the riots in Harlem and experienced the assassination of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.

The story is fascinating, but more than that, has given me huge insight into the Civil Rights movement from the black perspective, and into how a black American viewed white people in those days. Working for Martin Luther King's organisation, Maya could not understand why white people could want to be involved, and did not trust them. It has explained for me how, at least Maya's generation, and maybe generations since, have the memories and injustices of slavery burned into their psyche.

Much later she married an African and went to live in Africa, convinced that she was going home, and at last would feel settled. But she found that, while there were many similarities between Black American and black African culture, there were also many differences - something I have long known but it was good to have it confirmed by someone who knows both intimately.

Maya is a good writer, and someone determined to live life to the full, and both her style and her zest for life make these books compelling reading. She is very honest about her shortcomings as well as her triumphs, and you can't help loving her in spite of her faults. Her faith in God is a given, unquestioned, the background to her life, although many Christians might find her life-style strange, even shocking. They are definitely informative for ministry, and I read them in the mornings as part of my time of spiritual reflection. These are books that I think every minister, particularly those working in a multi-racial setting, should read. I commend them to you.



# Isaac Watts and Hymns as a vehicle for Evangelical Spirituality

**Steve Langford**, Exmouth. Part of a longer study on hymns and Evangelical Spirituality

Born out of Puritan roots, Evangelical spirituality is essentially a spirituality of 'The Book'. The question is which book, the Bible or the hymn book? In his article for The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, Ian Randall suggests,

*Evangelical spirituality is essentially a form of Christianity founded on the discipline of the daily bible reading and prayer.*<sup>1</sup>

I believe Randall is correct in this assumption as, throughout its history, Evangelicalism has sought to encourage its participants to establish a changed lifestyle through the preaching of the biblical truths and the prayerful meditation on the Scriptures. This devotion to the Scriptures is revealed in the way Evangelicals practice a daily 'Quiet Time' where they read the Scriptures and pray. Furthermore, in the latter part of the twentieth and early twenty-first century, it has been common practice for Evangelicals to take notes during the Sunday sermon.

For Evangelicals the Bible is the source of Good News that convicts humanity of their sin and points to Jesus for salvation. The Bible teaches and admonishes the believers in how to live the Christian life and guides them along the road of sanctification. David Bebbington, in his book Evangelicals In Modern Britain, defines Evangelicals by the presence of four characteristics; conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism.<sup>2</sup> These can be summarised as:

- Conversionism: the action that sees the heart turned towards God, repentance sought for the forgiveness of sins and the desire to live life differently from this point onwards.
- Activism: the desire to spread the gospel and seek to convert others to the cause of Jesus Christ.
- Biblicism: the devotion to the Bible and the belief that by reading it God is encountered and his truth and guidance is revealed.

- Crucicentrism: the centrality of Jesus' death on the cross as the ultimate demonstration of God's love and the vehicle for his unmerited favour.

Three of Bebbington's defining criteria, however, depend on the fourth; for conversionism, activism and crucicentrism are each born out of the Evangelical's commitment to serious biblical study. In view of this it is not surprising, that with the exception of some early Baptists and some Methodist lay preachers who were often dismissed as 'rude mechanicals'<sup>3</sup>, many Evangelical ministers were highly educated scholars. This is certainly true of Isaac Watts who studied first at the Latin School in Southampton and then under the tutorage of Thomas Rowe in his academy.

However, despite his education Watts would be forced to face two age-old problems: how to reach a largely illiterate public with the Gospel

message; and, having brought them to a place of conversion, making that change of heart stick. Whereas the first of these challenges could be overcome with the traditional act of preaching the second would provide the catalyst for the Watts' greatest gift to Evangelical spirituality and the contemporary church, its hymns and spiritual songs. From the beginning these hymns and spiritual songs became the main vehicle through which Evangelicals complemented the preacher's call for conversion and assisted them in the art of making disciples. Music would provide an extremely efficient vehicle through which lives could be changed by setting scripture, doctrine and theology to catchy, and often well known, tunes.

With his death in 1748, it could be argued that the majority of Watts' work was done prior to the 1730's date cited by Bebbington and Gordon for the emergence of the Evangelical movement.<sup>4</sup> This, however, does not detract from the legacy that Watts left Evangelicalism. His commitment to moving worshipers from the singing of psalms to hymns composed by contemporary authors opened the way for the Wesleys, Sankey, and many other hymn writers. This movement towards singing spiritual songs would not only allow hymn writers to paraphrase scripture but also enable them to teach theology and doctrine. It is for this reason that Selma L. Bishop suggests that many of Watts' biographers and critics describe him as being the greatest hymn writer of the day.<sup>5</sup>

Encouraged from an early age to write verse, Watts is reputed to have complained to his father that the hymns

were the most boring part of church. As a result of this, and following his father's urging, Watts composed his first hymn in 1694/5. He did not go on to write as many hymns as the Wesleys, but he was the first of the many prolific hymn writers spawned by Evangelicalism.

Having served as a personal tutor in Stoke Newington, as Pastor of Mark Lane, and as personal chaplain to the family of Sir Thomas Abney, Watts shows himself to be as much a pastor and teacher as songwriter. In commenting on his time as a pastor, Selma L. Bishop proposes that Watts' ministry was a success with the church congregation growing beyond five hundred.<sup>6</sup> As part of this ministry Bishop speaks of Watts preparing 'serious doctrinal sermons' through which he sought to call the church into action.<sup>7</sup> Clearly such growth in a congregation suggests that, as well as preaching the doctrines of the faith, Watts also offered the invitation to follow Jesus and the challenge of commitment to devoted Christian living. However, whilst this may have been true of his preaching, Watts' hymns do not present an evangelistic fervour. It seems that, in offering the invitation to consider following Jesus, Watts demonstrates his training in philosophy and, rather than present the case for conversion, he offers questions to be considered. We see this technique exemplified in the extensive hymn 'Go, worship at Immanuel's feet'. In his hymn-writing Watts appears much more at ease at creating pictures of Jesus over which the mind visualise and ponder than presenting the sort of cutting edge call for conversion.

In creating these images Watts is

graphic in his description of the Christ's sacrificial act of atonement. He is also potent in his oratory as he speaks of the spiritual battle that ensues as the converts submit themselves to the Saviour:

*Not all Tyrants think or say  
With Rage and Lightening in their Eyes,  
Nor Hell shall fright my Heart away,  
Should Hell with all its Legions rise.*<sup>8</sup>

Watts' hymns might not have an incisive call to conversion, but they are thoroughly scriptural and rich in theology and doctrine. Despite his comprehensive education under Thomas Rowe, Watts composed his hymns for the uneducated. Using scriptural themes from both the Old and the New Testaments, and setting them to common meters, his hymns were designed to be announced and sung line by line thus making them accessible to the illiterate. In 'Behold the grace of God appears' and 'Let me but hear my Saviour say'. Watts introduces the singer to the Evangelical theme of drawing strength for the day from an intimate encounter with Jesus. In 'Behold the grace of God appears', a hymn based on Luke 1:30 & 2:10, Watts not only tells the nativity story but, in echoing the angels command, urges the singer, or listening ear, to 'Go visit Christ your King'. Then, in 'Let me but hear my saviour say' he draws from 2 Corinthians 12:7, 9 & 10 as the inspiration to urge the singer to remember that it is in Christ 'strength sufficient for the day' can be found. As he writes Watts encourages the singer not only encounter Christ but to draw this encounter from the Scriptures. As in the case of 'In vain we lavish out our lives', where he uses Isaiah 55:1,2, Zechariah 13:1, Micah 7:19 and Ezekiel 36:25 as a basis

for his writing, Watts' hymns often use a number of scriptural sources to introduce the singer to a specific doctrine of the faith. Using this method in presenting doctrine, Watts is able to offer the essence of his teaching in a way that is memorable.

In assessing Watts' hymn writing, Lord Bernard Manning suggests that his emphasis of the cosmic nature of God's saving grace is what sets him apart and distinguishes him from the Wesleys.<sup>9</sup> Manning goes on to suggest that this cosmic understanding of salvation is hinted at in the line from his well known hymn 'When I survey the wondrous cross' as he writes the line 'Were the whole realm of nature mine'.<sup>10</sup> Watts' desire to teach the Christian disciple the cosmic nature of God is developed more fully in 'The King of Glory sends his son' where he writes:

*The King of glory sends his son  
To make his entrance on this earth  
Behold the midnight bright as noon  
And heav'nly hosts declare his birth.*<sup>11</sup>

Here Watts demonstrates his cosmic view of the incarnation, whilst in 'Behold the blind their sight receive' he introduces the singer to the eternal context of Christ's work on the cross:

*Thus does th' eternal spirit own  
And seal the mission of the son;  
The father vindicates his cause  
While he hangs bleeding on the cross.*<sup>12</sup>

This sense of eternity brings an important dimension to the believer's life of devotion and offers an important contrast to the intensely intimate view of Christian piety that would later develop. However, the reader, or singer, of Watts' hymns should not be tempted to think that Watts is only

concerned with the sense of cosmic eternity. Although clearly committed to presenting the gospel message in an eternal context, Watts never loses sight of the earthliness of the Christian life. As well as having an eternal view of the cross, Watts sets the passion of Christ in an earthly context. He does so by using particularly graphic and earthy language in describing Christ's work on the cross. This highlights the importance of Christ's atoning sacrifice to the believer's experience of God and their onward journey of faith. Watts' hymn 'Not all the bloods of beasts' is distinctly earth centred as he speaks fluently of the inability of anything other than Christ's sacrifice to deal with human sin.<sup>13</sup> In 'Great God I own thy sentence just' Watts explores the reality of death and bodily decay and juxtaposes it with the assurance of faith and the hope of an eternity with God. In this song Watts is extremely earthy in his description of death and the capability of God to perform a bodily resurrection:

*Tho' greedy worms devour my skin,  
And gnaw my wasting flesh,  
When God shall build my bones again,  
He cloths 'em all afresh.*<sup>14</sup>

Here we see Watts emphasise the assurance that the life of faith brings, which is guaranteed life spent in eternity with God and often cited among the fruit of conversion. It is this assurance of sins having been forgiven that Watts focuses on in his early version of 'In vain we lavish out our lives' where, in verses five and six, he writes:

*Our guilt shall vanish all away  
Tho black as hell before,  
Our Sins shall sink beneath the Sea  
And shall be found no more.*

*And lest pollution shou'd o'er-spread  
Our inward pow'rs again,  
His Spirit shall bedew our souls  
Like purifying Rain.*<sup>15</sup>

It is a shame that these two verses were removed from later publications as the language is particularly poignant and graphic. In this rich, descriptive language Watts clearly seeks to describe the depravity and helplessness of humanity and underscore the gracious working of God's Spirit for salvation. Here Watts also reveals his leaning towards a Calvinistic view of salvation and sanctification where the primary mover for transformation comes from the Divine Spirit rather than the human one.

Watts' hymns hold a Calvinistic line regarding the conversion of souls and process of sanctification. The third and fourth lines from the first verse of 'Let all our tongues be one' emphasises the notion that it is God who brings about conversion:

*Who from his bosom sent his Son  
To fetch us strangers nigh.*<sup>16</sup>

Watts returns to this theme of conversion being the result of movement of God in verse eight:

*Thus the redeemer came  
By water and by blood;  
And when the Spirit speaks the same,  
We feel his witness good.*<sup>17</sup>

He comes back to it again in 'Come Holy Spirit heavenly dove' as he speaks of how the human spirit remains unable to reach out towards God without His Spirit's quickening power.<sup>18</sup>

Watts' Calvinistic and clearly protestant theology is demonstrated by his somewhat sectarian comment in the

hymn 'Lift up your eyes to th' heavenly seats':

*Let Papists trust what names they please,  
Their Saints and Angels boast;  
We've no such Advocates as these,  
Nor pray to th' Heavenly Host.<sup>19</sup>*

Even so, he is not beyond imploring believers to practice their faith with diligence. In 'My redeemer and my Lord' the singer calls upon Jesus to be the pattern for life and seeks to become more like him. In 'Thus saith the first command' Watts writes:

*Thus saith the first, the great command,  
Let all thy inward pow'rs unite  
To love thy maker and thy God  
With utmost vigour and delight.*

*Then shall thy neighbour next in place,  
Share thine affections and esteem  
And let thy kindness to they self  
Measure and rule thy love to him.<sup>20</sup>*

Isaac Watts will undoubtedly be remembered as the first of the great Evangelical hymn writers; and as the man who dispelled the notion that only the psalms could be sung in the worship of God. Across their complete spectrum, Watts' hymns not only echo the preachers' call for conversion but also offer reflections on scriptural verse, theology and doctrine. The movement from the singing of psalms to hymns is his first gift, but Watts' commitment to worshipping the God who is enshrined in a cosmic eternity should not be undervalued. This idea, that the God of eternity is still prepared to be immersed in the earthly reality of life and death, represents a significant theological and doctrinal offering. The commitment to the juxtaposition of earthly faith in relation to the cosmic and eternal nature of God is possibly a greater gift to Evangelical spirituality, as it encourages worshippers both

to engage with the God who meets them in the present and look beyond themselves to eternity. Overall Watts' hymns provide an excellent vehicle through which the unbeliever can be called to faith in Jesus Christ, taught the essentials of the faith, and encouraged to grasp the vast expanse of the God of eternity.

From Watts' early experience of hymns being the most boring part of the service,<sup>21</sup> hymns and spiritual songs have moved from being the sermon's supporting act to taking centre stage. Hymns and songs now hold a key place in Evangelical worship and, in those churches which practise a more open form of Charismatic worship, have almost usurped the centrality of the sermon. As a vehicle for Evangelical spirituality the singing of hymns and spiritual songs is now fully established. They are an important emotive force in creating an environment where the singer can find God and feel a connection with Him. They also provide a conduit for teaching scriptural verse as well as developing theological and doctrinal themes.

For Evangelical worship in the early days of the second millennium, hymns and spiritual songs are now recognised being a primary force for change. Such is the power of hymnody that from the plethora of hymnbooks currently available Evangelicals can now find songs suitable for every occasion and addressing virtually any area of the Christian faith. In a society where the majority of Evangelicals are now literate, the power of the hymn or spiritual song remains. Although Evangelicals remain a people of 'The Book' I believe that they are now equally as much a people of the

hymn book as the Bible. Evangelicals now use both, equally, as a means of encountering God and developing their relationship with Him.

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## **Blackpool Assembly: BMF seminar**

Rev Dr Pat Took

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at the Ballroom, the Savoy Hotel, Blackpool on Saturday May 3rd at 4pm

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including presentation of accounts,

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If you wish to attend, please inform the Secretary, the Revd Stephen Copson by May 31<sup>st</sup>. Email [copson@bmf-uk.org](mailto:copson@bmf-uk.org), telephone 01462 442528 or write to 60 Strathmore Avenue, Hitchin Herts SG5 1ST

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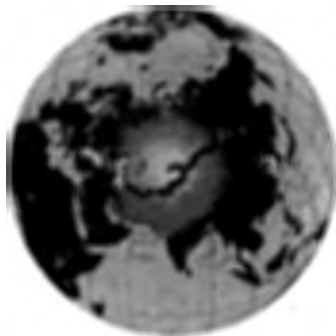
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## Books

We are grateful to Anthony Clarke and the 'Regent's Reviews' team from Regent's Park College for making the following reviews available to us. Quite a number of colleagues in Baptist ministry have had books published during the last eighteen months, with others 'in the pipeline'. Two are amongst these reviewed here, and others will feature in forthcoming issues.

### *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical and Pastoral Commentary*

**Anthony Thiselton**, Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006; pp. xvi + 325, £16.99, 0-8028-2682-2

For those studying 1 Corinthians in College, Anthony Thiselton's major commentary in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary Series* is an invaluable resource. However, it is also rather daunting. Not only is it a very weighty book, reaching almost 1500 pages, it assumes a significant level of familiarity with New Testament Greek and is written in a fairly dense style, as the main text contains much detailed information, often in brackets. What is more, it costs £50!

It is a great advantage, therefore, that over the last six years since this was published, Thiselton has been working on a second and rather different commentary. Aware that the very things that made his earlier commentary so helpful were also drawbacks, Thiselton has not attempted to offer a précis of his earlier work, but to offer a different kind of commentary much more directed at the needs of preachers in our churches. Thiselton reflects, in the Preface, that he had few other books open as he wrote, but rather was able to distil all his years of research. His aims, as he sets them out himself, were to state his own views, rather than give a resumé and critique of others, and to give even higher profile

to the relationship between this letter of Paul and Church life today.

The result is a very welcome, engaging and useful book that would be a significant resource for a sermon series on 1 Corinthians. The Introduction is compact, at 27 pages, but covers the necessary material on the background to the letter, focussing on the nature of Corinth, the wider social setting and the ministry of Paul and his relationship to the church. It offers a very good summary of the essential information.

The main text of 1 Corinthians is divided in 52 sections. For each of these sections Thiselton provides a translation, some exegetical comments and then 'suggestions for possible reflection'. The translation is Thiselton's own, and is taken, with some minor changes, from his earlier commentary. He continues the practice of putting in bold those words in the exegetical comments that are taken directly from the letter itself. The exegetical comments pick up the important points from each section of text in a very readable way. There is no Greek and very few notes, indicating Thiselton's desire not to refer to other writers. Just occasionally Thiselton adds some further more technical information, which sometimes comments on the history of interpretation as well as the finer points of the manuscript tradition or the translation of the Greek. The final part of each section is new to this commentary, and is the aspect



that Thiselton confesses to have been the hardest to write. Here we are offered anywhere between two and eight or nine 'suggestions for possible reflection'. Thiselton highlights central themes that emerge from the text and which resonate with and are important for the contemporary church, with a hesitancy that realises that there are other connections which can be made between this letter and church life today. As an example, Thiselton offers six suggestions for possible reflection on the well known passage on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, with a paragraph on each. These are:

- On whether an act of Christian worship can defeat its own purpose
- On letting certain Christians feel second class
- On the need for both rich and poor within the church
- On worship as celebration
- On the dangers of empty or false witness
- On the whole congregation's vocation to preach and to proclaim

Each of these suggestions could easily be adapted and expanded to form part of a sermon, or often the main theme of a sermon in their own right.

Here is a commentary that would be valuable for any minister or anyone preaching on 1 Corinthians. It is based on good scholarship, the result of many years of theological thinking and teaching, written in an accessible style and with the pastoral needs of preachers clearly in view. It would provide a good grasp of the background to the letter and the key issues of the letter itself as well as many starting points for sermons. With this commentary that sermon series on 1 Corinthians might need to be extended.

Anthony Carke

*A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections* David Day, Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis (eds.) Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005; pp. 300, £18.99, 075465009-X

This is a *seriously* good book. 'Readers' can be very mixed: most have some stand-out chapters, some make-weights. But this volume is well conceived and well compiled: it has an outstanding introductory chapter by David Day which allows the reader to get their bearings and see how the various parts fit together into the whole, and the collection stands as a very fine introduction to the current literature and thinking on preaching. It deserves to be in the library of every preacher who takes their task seriously.

North American writers have significantly fuelled the upsurge of interest in homiletics in the last few decades. Many of the most well-known names can be found in this book, but Thomas Long, Fred Craddock, and David Buttrick are joined by some who may be less well-known in the UK like Tom Troeger (who first stimulated *this* preacher's imagination in the late 70s at Colgate Rochester), John Killinger, and British writers like Jolyon Mitchell and Peter Stevenson. Nestling among them are names more associated with other disciplines, but who have noteworthy contributions to make here – such as Walter Brueggemann and Edward Farley. Some writers I had not come across before, like Cheryl Sanders and Richard Eslinger, but I have rarely read a collection of pieces where the standard is as uniformly impressive. It is a bonus that none of them is too long, and all are thoroughly digestible.

Day's overview at the outset directs the reader to the main issues

treated in the literature – such as the growing awareness on the way listeners process material (rather than receiving it passively, as if words were simply poured into empty vessels) and questions of power (some contemporary critics of preaching argue that it disempowers the congregation, and we are very aware of the dangers of manipulation). This issue of power also connects with feminist critiques of preaching and there is a helpful section later in the book on ‘the woman as preacher.’

After Thomas Long’s historical perspective and Brueggemann’s discussion of preaching in the new ‘cultural and epistemological’ context, we have a set of essays that probe the hermeneutical task in preaching: dealing with the text. Long and Brueggemann come back for more, and there is an article by Day on the epistles, while Farley argues *against* preaching on a particular passage (instead, preach ‘on’ the gospel); finally Leslie Francis uses the Myers Briggs Type Indicator to reflect on the way in which different personality types might ‘need’ a passage dealt with in different ways (and which alerts the preacher to ways in which their own personality tends to generate their own ‘default’ approach to texts).

As these issues of hermeneutics are discussed we already hear about some of the ways in which texts might influence sermon structure – and these and other considerations of sermon design form the focus for the next set of essays. Craddock works on 1 Corinthians 12: 4-6 with a particular congregation in mind; Long again, in his third and final essay here, reflects on introductions and designs; Peter Stevenson contributes a chapter on narrative sermons; and

Dwight Stevenson (no relation, I think) gives eleven examples of how to get it wrong – exhorting us to learn from our mistakes. Of course, this whole book helps preachers to think about what they *will* do and *have* done: preachers need to be reflective practitioners.

Phillips Brooks famously called preaching ‘truth through personality’, and the next set of essays explores personal issues: evaluation, character, ethical questions (like, should you use someone else’s experiences without their permission?), the particular temptations of a preacher, and the way preachers might inspire other preachers. This is followed by essays which explore images and stories, though I would have liked here to see a reflection on the use of projected images to accompany the spoken word: using PowerPoint to highlight the headings is a very didactic approach to preaching and misses the potential of the technology and the cultural significance of image. A set of essays on preaching as an event within worship includes discussions of Afro-American preaching and preaching at funerals. Then comes the set on ‘The Woman as Preacher’: Sanders’ article discusses characteristically female approaches to many of the issues already surveyed, and also grapples with the question of inclusive language. Another piece looks at gender and preaching style in terms of aesthetics, and a third piece connects these insights with the Pentecostal tradition of preaching.

The final set of essays considers how one measures the effectiveness of preaching. Included here is an account of a large-scale piece of research in a Baptist setting into how effective members of the congregation say they found preaching (a complex

investigation with somewhat discouraging results), and another research project which maps the responses of the congregation onto various theological perceptions about preaching. This last section is the most difficult and the most inconclusive: there is an interesting and valuable research project for a master's thesis in a British congregation waiting for someone! On the matter of the effectiveness of preaching, developing helpful criteria for measuring is problem enough. But I tend to go with Brueggemann, that preaching is usually a slow, incremental process through which congregations are invited to see themselves and their world differently, as in the presence and purpose of God. You don't measure this straightforwardly by asking people how many of last week's points they can recall.

My description of this book doesn't do justice to the richness of the collection. It has found its way quickly on to our reading lists in college, but will also provide great stimulus to pastors and preachers. A section at a time it could be a useful focus for ministers' study groups, or be used in other ways to aid personal reflection and development. Highly recommended!

Rob Ellis

*Making Sense of Generation Y: The world view of 15-25 year-olds*

**Sara Savage, Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Bob Mayo with Graham Cray,**

London: Church House Publishing, 2006; pp. 170 + appendix, notes, index & bibliography, £12.99, 0-7151-4051-5

Some of us having only just adjusted to the notion of Generation X, the post baby-boomers so graphically

characterized by Douglas Coupland in his novel of the same name, a world of virtual reality and ephemeral 'Mcjobs' – a categorization which has subsequently appeared in dictionaries and is being challenged by the eponymous fast-food chain – when we are confronted by the next cohort of young people imaginatively branded Generation Y. These are less Thatcher's children than Thatcher's grandchildren, born after 1980, shaped by virtual relationships maintained by email and text messages. This book, based on research commissioned by Graham Cray, now the Bishop of Maidstone and the Chair of the Mission-Shaped Church working group, when he was Principal of Ridley Hall, offers an original analysis of the culture and spirituality of 15-25 year olds.

Part One, the first three chapters, provides an overview of the research (conducted by a sociologist, a psychologist and a practical theologian), its methods (based on Tom Wright's analysis of story, symbol and praxis) and its findings; Part Two, chapters 4-6 offers an in-depth encounter with the world of these young people through various media, soaps, film and music and shows how these diverse images and symbols shape their spirituality. Part Three discusses the implications of the findings not only for youth work and youth ministry but also for the whole church.

The bedrock of their world-view is happiness for themselves, their family and their friends, what the book terms 'a happy midi-narrative', from which notions of God, sin and fear of death were notably absent. More surprisingly, perhaps, so too were romance, sexual fulfilment, achievement and structural inequality. At the core of the narrative were life, family, celebrity and

commercialism. (A this-worldly rather than an other-worldly approach.) This is interestingly explored through the various media analysed in Part Two using real voices of young people taken from the research process and which opens up their world to other generations in a helpful and creative way.

This is not simply a 'generation gap' however, it is a cultural gap which requires what the writers call *prior mission* if the formative spirituality of Generation Y is to be able to access the transformative spirituality of the church. Older missiologists have always recognised the necessity of what they termed the *praeparatio evangelica*. This is a useful guide which not only introduces the reader to the world of Generation Y but serves as a helpful introduction to the world of cultural studies. The conclusion, that 'come to us' strategies must be replaced by 'go to' ones is hardly surprising or original, but it may help some of us to feel a little more at ease in the cultures to which we go.

Nick Wood

*Preaching the Atonement* **Peter Stevenson and Stephen Wright**, London: T. & T. Clark, 2005; pp. 221, £14.99, 0-567-0899-1

The teaching of preaching has developed a long way since the days when students were advised to get a copy of W.E. Sangster's *The Craft of the Sermon*, and turn up at sermon class every week. At Regent's, for instance, we attend to both the hermeneutical (working on the text) and the rhetorical (shaping material into a message to be delivered and heard) aspects of the homiletical task, and we use a variety of useful books to

help students reflect on the processes of preaching. Most of those books, with one or two notable exceptions, come from the States: but now we will be adding this excellent British book to the resources employed. (And I'm not the only person to like it – it's been nominated for the Michael Ramsey prize.)

Peter Stevenson and Stephen Wright both teach at Spurgeon's College, and the book provides many students and pastors with a model for reflective practice in preaching. There are ten chapters, and each takes a major theme in relation to the atonement. First the authors offer a discussion of the text that focuses the theme; then a sermon is offered on the text; finally the authors reflect on how the sermon has dealt with the various hermeneutical issues raised earlier and what rhetorical devices have been used to communicate to the congregation. If one had any scruples about this general method it might be a concern that the specific congregation has not been analysed explicitly (some writers speak of 'exegeting the congregation'): but, while this might have been useful in helping preachers focus on their own congregations, it would have added another layer of complexity to this exercise.

In each chapter the various elements are worth a read in their own right: there are some helpfully nuanced discussions of the texts, and some excellent sermons in this book. But put together, with reflective discussion of the sermon itself, they make a really useful combination. The texts and themes considered include some of the more obvious ones, such as the suffering servant, and reconciliation; but also the Abraham and Isaac story, forgiveness spoken from the cross,

and a dip into Hebrews – a rarity for some nowadays, I suspect. All of this is helpful and sheds some new light, but I have to say that I found the central chapters on the Word made Flesh, and divine justice especially helpful. The latter speaks about the need to emphasise God rather than humanity, and shows how three images (justification, redemption, atoning sacrifice) interact with one another in Romans 3:21-26, each needing the other to begin to round out the wonderful mystery of atonement.

There is much of value and interest here to anyone who preaches regularly, or who wants to open up to others something of the dynamics of preaching. And the book may be useful as a tool in understanding doctrine also - there's a doctrine text book on the atonement contained within these pages: unsystematic, perhaps, but a careful pondering of issues and a sustained reflection on how these can be made clearly relevant to our contemporaries. An excellent book.

Rob Ellis

*Promise and Presence: An Exploration of Sacramental Theology,*  
**John E Colwell**  
Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005; pp. xiii + 284, £13.99, 1-84227-44-7

There is certainly something unusual about John Colwell's latest book. In many ways it fits within a wider rediscovery of sacramental theology with our Baptist family in recent years. What makes it unusual, but also both impressive and helpful, is its scope. Just over half the book is devoted to a discussion of the seven traditional sacraments of the Catholic Church, exploring both why they might be sacramental but also probing important

points of connection with the Baptist tradition. Before this, in the first two sections of the book, Colwell explores the whole nature of sacramentality.

This discussion is wide ranging, drawing on significant theological traditions and yet rooted in scriptural interpretation. In many ways these first hundred pages are a reflection on the oft use phrase 'means of grace.' Colwell is adamant about two concepts, necessary for a sacramental theology, but also at the heart of a theology of God, thus cutting through some of the traditional antithesis between those who do and do not accept a sacramental understanding. The first is that grace must be truly gracious, that is from the God who loves in freedom. The first chapter of the book is an exposition of trinitarian theology to firmly establish that all that God does is gracious, rather than in any way compelled. The second concept is that this grace is always mediated, through the Spirit and through various aspects of God's creation. The phrase 'mediated immediacy' pervades the book, and this is an expression of Colwell's fundamental understanding of God and creation. God has chosen to act towards us in a way that is mediated, in such a way that any part of creation could be sacramental, although is not constituted as a sacrament. So Colwell concludes, at the end of chapter 2, that sacramental signs are:

'established by a promise of God to mediate his presence and action through the agency of the Spirit in and through these distinct material particulars of creation.' (p. 61)

In part two Colwell moves on to reflect on the Church and the Word from this sacramental perspective. Drawing on the fourth part of Barth's *Dogmatics* and

the Baptist / Anabaptist understanding of the gathered church, argues against an ontological interpretation of church in which it is straightforwardly identified as Christ's body and for a sacramental understanding in which the church is a witness to Christ. The Church is gathered by the mediating work of the Spirit, who mediates the grace of God through the sacramental life and worship of the church. Thus for Colwell, baptism and communion identify and define the church, and Colwell argues vigorously for Baptist churches to rediscover the centrality of baptism.

Colwell then precedes to discuss the way that Scripture might be understood as a means of grace. Reflecting on a wide variety of influences on the way we have read the Bible, such as historical biblical criticism, fundamentalism, and more recent speech-act theory and post-modern understandings of text, Colwell argues that the reading and hearing of Scripture is a transformative experience not because the meaning is already set in the text but because here God speaks mediated both through the human text and through the Spirit. It is this double mediation that makes reading Scripture to be a life giving experience. While such mediation is true of all texts, the distinctiveness of Scripture is simply the promise of God. Here the Church expects God's mediated presence and action, but does so humbly and prayerfully.

After these foundational chapters Colwell then devotes chapters to each of the seven catholic sacraments. Those of baptism and the Lord's Supper, together with the chapter on Christian ministry, resolutely affirmed as principally as matter

of 'being' rather than 'doing', will connect most immediately with Baptist congregations. Colwell's perspective remains catholic, as he seeks to make connections with the wider and universal church. He ends the chapter on the Lord's Supper, for example, with a plea for the sharing of communion among the denominations as a way of creating unity rather than as its end point. But equally, the book, as is to be expected, is full of Baptist insight, and is clearly written as a challenge to both expectations and practice in many of our Baptist churches. Colwell seeks baptism and communion to be truly moments of encounter with God where God's free grace is mediated to us.

Yet, in other chapters Colwell picks up themes that frequently reoccur in our churches, even if we would not recognise distinct sacraments at work. Forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing are part of the on-going pastoral work of church and ministry. Theological and practical issues around marriage and co-habitation are now part of church life. And whereas confirmation is not part of any understanding of believer's baptism, the nature of our church congregations, drawn from many traditions and none means that the nature of baptism and appropriate rites for those coming to faith in Baptist churches who have been baptised as infants is a challenge faced by both individual churches and national inter-denominational conversations. There is much in these chapters to ponder. Colwell's sacramental understanding is never mechanistic, in his repeated phrase, sacraments are never God's prison, and his concern is fundamentally pastoral – how do we experience and receive the free grace of God?

One of Colwell's achievements throughout the book is the creative bringing together of quite distinct strands of historical theology. The two main dialogue partners through the book are Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas, to whom Colwell shows a critical respect, but Luther and Calvin as well as various late twentieth century theologians are drawn upon. Within this Colwell attempts to demonstrate the level of agreement between such theologians, as well as the real points of difference, and in doing so dispels some of the myths that we accept about those who think in a different way. For example, Colwell traces how the Catholic development of the doctrine of transubstantiation was an

attempt, chiefly by Aquinas, to reign in some of the more extreme popular understandings of communion.

As would be expected not everyone will agree with everything Colwell writes. As one who has written on the doctrine of God, I was not persuaded, for example, that divine possibility mitigated against God's actions being truly free and gracious. But this is an excellent book. It is written very much in the style of the author – academically wide ranging, but with a real sense of passionate preaching. It will provoke and challenge and inform, in such a way as to make you think about reality and experience of God's grace.

Anthony Clarke

### Transfiguration : the pivot between Epiphany and Lent

Transfiguration is living by vision: standing foursquare in the midst of a broken, tortured, oppressed, starving, dehumanising reality, yet seeing the invisible, calling to it to come, behaving as if it is on the way, sustained by elements of it that have come already, within and among us.

In those moments when people are healed, transformed, freed from addictions, obsessions, destructiveness, self worship or when groups or communities or even, rarely, whole nations glimpse the light of the transcendent in their midst, there the New Creation has come upon us. The world for one brief moment is transfigured. The beyond shines out in our midst – on the way to the Cross.

Walter Wink, 'Interpretation'