

**the baptist ministers'
journal**

January 2010 volume 305

Life in ministry

Brian Jones

On the Emmaus Road

Tim Carter

Why the apology was right

Mark Woods

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From the editor

Theology networking

Love him or hate him, Richard Dawkins has his uses. One of them has been to make Christians think clearly about what they believe and why—and then to communicate their thinking as effectively as he does! There has been an avalanche of books and articles written in response to *The God delusion*, and some of it has been more encouraging to the Christian community than we might have expected, confirming our hopeful belief that many people do not want ‘this’ to be ‘it’.

So how do we go about keeping on our apologetic toes? Many of us will attend regional group ministers’ meetings or Mainstream theology days, as well as other events. There are also some local theology groups that are not part of any formal network, dedicated to discussing the theological issues that affect us in ministry. In Yorkshire, for example, we have TINY (Theology IN Yorkshire, which has developed from an earlier group), at which ministers present papers and gather to talk theology as we wrestle with the challenges of contemporary society (usually more interesting than Dawkins!). If you are part of such a group in your area, please get in touch with me—it would be good to know what is happening and maybe to form a loose network of ministers’ theology groups.

TINY is joining with NBLC (the Northern Baptist Learning Community) on 20 April to offer a one-day theology consultation at Blackley BC near Huddersfield: we will have a keynote speaker and then ministers will offer their own papers for discussion. It is open to all—contact Anne Phillips at NBLC for bookings.

Dawkins: we are fighting back! *SN*

Life in ministry

Brian Jones

As a minister, either in a local church or elsewhere, you and your family will certainly have first-hand experience of the joys and heartaches involved. Anecdotal evidence abounds, but what do ministers *really* think about their work, the impact of ministry on their personal life, housing, finance, and ongoing professional development?

If you are a member of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship you will know that you were invited by the officers of the Fellowship to take part in some research on these issues by completing a *Life in ministry* questionnaire. The BMF was interested to know what Baptist ministers felt about the key features of life in this vocation, and in particular whether there were any 'pressure points' where changes might need to be made or support provided either by the BMF or by drawing matters to the attention of the Baptist Union. It was also felt that the questionnaire would facilitate feedback from a wide spectrum of members and provide a general overview of satisfaction levels in current Baptist ministry.

This is a diverse set of aims, and although such studies require careful reflection and interpretation, the *Life in ministry* initiative has revealed some key insights into the nature of contemporary ministry which are worthy of further exploration and evaluation.

So what was the outcome? This article is intended as a synopsis of responses to the survey—it is a 'snapshot'. It does not attempt to analyse the data in detail, or at this stage suggest any firm conclusions. In total 231 respondents started the online survey and 218 (94.4%) completed it. In addition, four members participated by submitting 'hard copies' of the questionnaire, all of which is a very credible section of the 1200 members of the BMF. *Life in ministry* was an issue that clearly struck a chord with members.

In addition to the statistical data generated by the survey, the narratives (comments) that members added to their responses were especially valuable. These ranged from one sentence comments to whole paragraphs—each giving a brief insight into opinions and concerns.

First impressions

The first part of the *Life in ministry* questionnaire required participants to indicate their gender, age, married (or single) status, the number of years spent in Baptist ministry, the type of ministry they were engaged in, whether they were BUGB accredited, and the number of years they had been in their current post. There is no space here to examine the inter-relationship between these various categories but some features were immediately apparent.

<i>Women in the minority</i>	Of the 226 respondents to this question, 204 (90.3%) were men and 22 (9.7%) were women.
<i>Age/maturity predominating</i>	Of the 229 respondents to this question, most were in the 45-65+ age group and within this group 34.9% were between 55 and 65. Only 3.1% of respondents were between 23 and 34.
<i>Married ministers in the majority</i>	Most respondents were married (93.4%, or 212 of 227 who answered) and only 3.1% (7 respondents) were single.
<i>Depth of experience indicated</i>	For this section, 77% of respondents (of 226) had between 11 and 31 years' experience in ministry, with a significant number registering over 31 years; 23% had been in ministry for 10 years or less.
<i>BU accreditation affirmed</i>	Most respondents were BU accredited (219 or 97% of those who answered).
<i>Stability of tenure in post</i>	Most respondents (100 or 48%) have been in present post for 4-10 years; 46 people (22%) had served 11-20 years. Whether or not representative of all Baptist ministers they suggest a degree of stability of tenure.

The survey focused on four key areas of life in ministry. People were asked to respond to questions as follows: 1=strongly agree; 2=tend to agree; 3=neither agree nor disagree; 4=tend to disagree; 5=strongly disagree; 6=don't know; 7=not applicable. These gradings apply to all the data tables in this article.

1. Housing and personal finance

This section of the questionnaire sought to find out what members thought about the sensitive issues of money and finance: housing and retirement.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>I am happy with my level of stipend (%)</i>	24.6	35.5	19.7	10.8	6.4	3.0
<i>My present housing meets my needs (%)</i>	55.0	30.0	6.5	5.5	1.0	2.0
<i>The maintenance of my housing is good (%)</i>	31.8	35.9	16.9	9.2	3.1	3.1
<i>My expenses are fully reimbursed (%)</i>	59.3	23.6	7.0	4.0	4.0	2.0
<i>I have adequate pension arrangements (%)</i>	33.3	35.8	18.6	7.4	2.5	2.5
<i>I am happy with my retirement housing provision (%)</i>	34.7	18.6	14.6	7.0	10.6	14.6

There was a varied response as to whether ministers were ‘happy’ with their level of stipend: 122 out of 203 respondents either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘tended to agree’ that they were, while 35 respondents took the opposite view, either ‘tending to disagree’ or ‘strongly disagreeing.’ Forty indicated no strong opinion either way. ‘Happy’ is not an easy word to interpret—it can mean different things to different people. However, on balance it seems as if more ministers are ‘happy’ with their stipend than not. This feature does not mean, however, that some are not facing genuine financial hardship:

I have come very close to having to leave the ministry entirely due to inadequate income and uncertainty about pension and housing provision in the future, as well as provision for my children’s education and future.

Another commented that:

At times I have regretted the financial sacrifices we made because we have not always been able to support our family financially.

And another:

If it wasn't for tax credits, the stipend level would be quite difficult to live with.

With regard to housing, most respondents indicated that their current housing was sufficient for their (unspecified) needs, although some raised concerns relating to the ongoing care and maintenance of the property they occupied. Situations varied depending on whether the minister concerned lived in a church manse, or in a personal home.

It was encouraging to note that most ministers seem to encounter few problems getting their expenses reimbursed by their church or employer, although some did experience difficulties.

What happens after retirement from ministry is a big issue. Regarding pensions, most respondents indicated that these provisions were adequate for their means and that they were 'happy' with their retirement housing provision; but not all respondents felt so reassured. One said:

I have no retirement provision and am concerned for when I retire.

Of the 50 people who added written comments in this section, pension and housing after retirement were a recurrent theme. The situation is clearly different for those who already own their own houses compared with those who will never be financially in a position to secure a mortgage and buy property and whose worry and concern are real. One indicated that all would be well provided that 'the Retired Baptist Ministers' Housing Scheme has enough properties in a few years time'.

2. The personal life of the minister

There is a tendency in Christian circles to overlook the importance of the personal life of the minister and her/his family—the emphasis being on the work of ministry. It was good to note that there was a significant response to this section of the questionnaire. There was a strong affirmation by respondents to the effect that their personal theologies fitted well with the 'demands' of ministry; that they had 'good control over their personal life'; and that they were 'happy' with 'the amount of work' the church expected them to do. Equally noticeable was the feeling of being 'well supported' by family and that ministers were 'happy about the wellbeing' of their families—although not everyone was so positive.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>I feel my theology and the demands of ministry fit well (%)</i>	32	56	4	4	1	0	2
<i>I have good control over my personal life (%)</i>	24	51	16	8	1	1	0
<i>I am happy with the amount of work that my church/employer expects of me (%)</i>	20	45	17	11	3	1	3
<i>I have an active social life (%)</i>	12	26	28	21	11	2	0
<i>I feel well supported by the BU (%)</i>	15	37	26	13	8	1	1
<i>I feel well supported by my family (%)</i>	65	29	3	1	1	1	2
<i>I am happy about the wellbeing of my family (%)</i>	35	40	9	11	1	1	3
<i>I am happy about the expectations placed on my family by my church/employer (%)</i>	29	34	16	9	5	1	7
<i>My children enjoy/have enjoyed being brought up in a manse (%)</i>	8	24	22	14	3	3	26

One person wrote, 'My children gained a lot from being a PK [pastor's kid] but there were many negatives as well—it was the demands of my time that caused them to feel they were secondary'. Another poignantly added:

My children are now adults in their own homes. In the past they've seen the good side, but when it's been rough they have cried themselves to sleep, as we have.

The ambivalent role of the minister's spouse was raised by this respondent who indicated:

The biggest cause for concern...was the pressure placed on the minister and his/her spouse in every area viz. the pressure placed on their relationship due to church expectations of the minister and the nature of the job, the failure of churches to understand the different expectations of minister's spouses in the church, the difficulty of churches to adjust to those expectations, the difficulty of spouses to relate to an undisclosed image of what a minister's spouse should do, the problem of having no formal position in the church, but being loaded with undisclosed expectation of what a minister's spouse should do. A lot of thinking needs to be done here and some good papers produced for the benefit of all.

Most respondents seemed to be able to fit in an active social life alongside their work commitments and on the whole felt well supported by the Baptist Union. There were, however, several instances where pastoral care and support appears to have broken down or did not meet the expectations of the individual concerned. This was reflected in one comment:

A significant area of stress for the ministerial family is that the family feels it has no minister. There are times when the family needs someone else to help spiritually, and there is no one else available and able.

Another felt that:

In a dispute between minister and church the Baptist Union/Regional Ministers favour church. Ministers have nobody officially to support them.

One respondent added,

I feel that both national and regional resources have heavy demands placed upon them and are under-resourced by the churches and this has consequent effects for both churches and ministers.

3. Doing the work

A wide range of issues were covered in this section. The BMF was very interested to know whether ministers felt unduly burdened by their work, given the current BU Terms and Conditions, which state that a minister is to work a six-day week.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>I am often asked to work unsociable hours (%)</i>	23.7	28.5	26.1	16.4	3.4	1.9
<i>I am happy with the number of hours that I work (%)</i>	16.3	43.3	19.2	18.8	1.9	0.5
<i>My church/employer gives me adequate resources to do my work properly (%)</i>	19.9	45.6	17.0	12.6	3.4	1.5
<i>My church/employer gives me enough appreciation for my work (%)</i>	19.1	40.7	19.6	15.8	3.8	1.0
<i>I have good support or encouragement from my peers (%)</i>	24.2	43.0	18.8	10.6	3.4	0
<i>I am happy with the criteria used by my church/employer to judge my competence as a minister (%)</i>	17.1	29.8	22.9	12.2	7.8	10.2

The overall impression is that respondents seem to be 'happy' with the number of hours they worked, despite often being asked to work 'unsocial

hours.’ As one indicated:

When called to be ministers we accept we will be available for God. I am happy to work unsociable hours provided they are for the Kingdom.

Not everyone shared this view—as indicated by the 39 people (out of 208) who were not happy with the hours they were expected to work. One noted:

The need to get a regular day off without the phone calls, door knocks etc—and holidays—we have to get away from the manse in order to achieve this—therefore I feel that the manse is not really a home where I can potter around on a day off or a holiday, but a work place, that I have to escape from in order to get rest.

Most respondents appear to be well supported by their churches in being given sufficient resources for their work. A considerable number of respondents (41) would appreciate their churches tangibly demonstrating greater affirmation and encouragement for what they do.

With regard to the perceived quality and frequency of relationships with other ministers, situations tend to vary depending on the context. Collegiate support is clearly appreciated though there would appear to be room for improvement. There is a feeling among some that ministry in Baptist churches can become a very lonely and isolating experience. One wrote:

Loneliness is a big problem for single ministers, also making friends outside ministry is difficult, especially as there are expectations and assumption about your behaviour and personality.

The final question in this section asked whether respondents were happy with the criteria used by the church/employer to judge their competency as ministers. This issue is clearly sensitive as the range of responses indicates. Some respondents (especially those employed in hospital or hospice chaplaincy, where systems are more developed and integrated) seem to be more comfortable with the practice of assessment than others, who appeared to be more guarded and concerned. This question registered one of the highest ‘strongly disagree’ category responses of the whole survey. One person commented:

I find the way the church attempts to measure success frustrating and disturbing.

Another indicated:

No formal criteria exist and no formal assessment is made.

4. Self-evaluation and the future

A higher percentage of respondents appear to be more ‘happy’ with their choice of vocation/career than they are with the changes that are occurring to their role and responsibilities as ministers.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>I am happy with the changes in the roles of ministers (%)</i>	8.8	35.1	33.7	13.7	2.4	6.3
<i>I have the skills to do my work effectively (%)</i>	20.8	60.4	10.6	7.7	0	0.5
<i>I am happy with my choice of vocation/ career (%)</i>	57.9	34.0	5.7	1.0	0.5	1.0
<i>If I look to move, my skills, experience and outlook will be valued in a variety of Baptist churches (%)</i>	18.0	47.0	15.5	7.0	6.0	6.5
<i>I could access retraining if I chose to leave ministry (%)</i>	5.1	12.2	31.6	15.3	11.7	24.0

As one wrote,

I have never really doubted the call to ministry despite some rocky times.

Another indicated that:

I sometimes feel that the ministry has moved from a covenant relationship built on trust to one of employment—with stronger rules set by the Union. This can make a church feel it is my employer.

One respondent was clearly changing the focus of his/her ministry as a

result of reflection and experience:

After many years in ministry, I am trying to shift my emphasis back to people from programmes, and from management to nurturing.

Interestingly, the changing roles do not appear to signal a dramatic loss of confidence amongst the ministerial cohort. For example, a significant number of respondents believe they possess the necessary skills to do their work effectively although there appears to be more ambivalence as to whether or not they believe such skills would be valued by the churches if they have to move. Women and single ministers can find things especially difficult here. In her own words, one wrote:

Experience tells me that many churches will not be looking at my skills etc but will reject me because I am a woman.

Regarding their future prospects, some ministers feel more confident than others in their ability to access retraining to fit them for different roles and responsibilities should they leave the ministry. Some had already tried to do this and have not found it an easy route to follow:

I had to leave the ministry and was unable to access retraining because of lack of finance. I had to get whatever work was available to me with my existing skills and struggled for years in jobs I was unqualified and unsuited for, getting training on the job.

One acknowledged the need for ongoing training/education but could not afford the time or money to do so.

I could access retraining if I chose to leave the ministry, depending on what I was retraining for, but my question is would I be able to afford to retrain ? Could I keep providing for my family while I retrained and where would I live in the meantime? We would probably have to go on the housing list for a while & stay in temporary accommodation while we waited for somewhere to come available.

In conclusion

The *Life in ministry* questionnaire has clearly amassed a great deal of information. Whether it has succeeded in its aim can only be answered by those who commissioned the survey and compiled the questionnaire—bearing in mind that this method of research is not perfect and the data

require careful interpretation. Feedback came from a wide spectrum of members, and the results indicate reasonably high levels of satisfaction in current Baptist ministry on the issues covered—although ‘minority’ views ought never to be easily discarded, for often there can be as much to learn from the concerns that are expressed as from the positive affirmations.

The final ‘Have we missed anything’ section of the questionnaire picked up some of these issues. Respondents wrote about isolation, the lack of pastoral care and support, personal abuse and bullying by church members, difficulties associated with caring for aged and disabled parents, having to cope with unacceptable behaviour by other ministers and the complex management of teams. As one respondent concluded, ‘I hope that good will come of this survey. I am very settled in my calling, family life and ministry but am aware of considerable numbers of ministers and their families for whom this is not their experience’.

There is clearly much food for thought here, and hopefully the BMF will feel sufficiently informed, confident and empowered by the results to be able to affirm the positive insights that have emerged and to address with appropriate bodies the challenges that the survey has revealed.

Brian Jones is Baptist team minister in the Warwick (Anglican) team and is a doctrinal research student with the University of Manchester. A fuller version of his analysis of the survey results can be found on the BMF website, www.bmf-uk.org.

Lay pastor needed for BMF committee

The BMF would like to co-opt a lay pastor on to its committee. This move is a response to a letter from an experienced lay pastor, and the committee would like to ensure that the perspectives and concerns of lay pastors are reflected in BMF discussions. The committee meets three times a year at Didcot (1100 - 1530) and travel costs are reimbursed.

We are looking for a volunteer or a recommendation. If you can help, please contact the BMF secretary, Stephen Copson, on 01462 442548 or email stephen.copson@dsl.pipex.com. Thank you.

On the Emmaus road

by Tim Carter

‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’ (Luke 24:32). Such was the experience of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus as they reflected on their conversation with the ‘stranger’ who had explained to them from Moses and all the Prophets how the Scriptures said that the Christ should suffer and enter his glory. It is only after Christ was revealed to these two disciples in the breaking of the bread that they reflected on how their hearts burned within them as they listened to Jesus talking, and this realisation serves as added confirmation that they have met the Lord.

It is the preacher’s great privilege to expound the scriptures to the congregation, as Christ did to his followers on the road to Emmaus. Whatever other criteria are used to assess a sermon, if the hearts of the people burn within them as the word is preached, that may be taken as a sign that the Spirit of God is at work to witness to the truth of what is being said, ‘revealing Jesus through the word, creating faith in him’. As Calvin put it, ‘The word will not find acceptance in [people’s] hearts, until it is sealed there by the inner testimony of the Spirit, the same Spirit that spoke through the prophet’s lips.’

In the course of sermon preparation, it is right that we too look for that inner testimony of the Spirit witnessing in our hearts to the truth we are to preach. Yet most, if not all of us, will have had the experience of finding that a text yields nothing: the burning heart, the inner witness of the Spirit, the fresh insight, are all conspicuous by their absence. At such times, the preacher may be more inclined to identify with the words of the disciples on the Emmaus Road as recorded in Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D), one of the prime witnesses to the western textual tradition.

Codex Bezae

This Codex was presented to the University of Cambridge in 1581 by Theodore Beza, who obtained it after the city of Lyons was sacked in

1562. It is thought to have been at Lyons since the 9th century. It covers Matthew, John, Luke, Mark, and Acts (in that order) and the text is written in distinctively short lines (*stichoi*), with the Greek text on the left and the corresponding Latin on the right page. The manuscript was probably penned in the late 3rd century in Berytus (Beirut) and corrected and edited over the next century or so. The text (especially Acts) is idiosyncratic, with significant expansions, omissions and alterations. The Codex is a prime witness to the Western Text, popularly used by the Church Fathers in the 2nd century. The text of the gospels and Acts attested in Bezae probably dates back to this early period, as evidenced by the relative freedom exercised in editing the text and the corresponding witness of early Latin and Syriac manuscripts.

Veiled or burning?

In this version of the Emmaus Road episode, as the disciples reflect on their conversation with Jesus, their comment is, ‘Were not our hearts *veiled* within us as he spoke to us on the way?’ The key term here is *κεκαλυμμένη* (‘veiled’), which replaces *καιομένη* (‘burning’) in the other manuscripts. It is this realisation that sends them sorrowing (*λυπούμενοι*, inserted in Bezae in v 33) back to Jerusalem. As they make the return journey, Bezae has the disciples reflecting, not so much on the reality of the resurrection, as on their lamentable inability to understand the scriptures and accept what Jesus has been telling them. So closed were their hearts that even when the risen Lord was expounding them, they remained as unreceptive as they had been when Jesus’ second prediction of his passion had been concealed (*κεκαλυμμένον*) from them (9:45).

Thus, for the disciples on the Emmaus Road in Codex Bezae, there was no sense of illumination as they listened to Jesus talking to them. Oblivious to his true identity, his words did not connect with their hearts at all. It is only after they realised who Jesus was that they perceived how blind and deaf they had been: able neither to recognise him nor to understand what he was saying. Until they recognised who Jesus is, they were unable to receive what he has to say.

In the western textual tradition, represented by Codex Bezae, the moment the disciples’ eyes were opened was when they received the bread that Jesus took, blessed, and gave to them: Bezae inserts the clause, *λαβόντων δὲ αὐτῶν τὸν ἄρτον ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ* at the start of v 31. Bezae’s account does

not particularly recall the Last Supper, where Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples (22:19), since this version of Luke's gospel omits any reference to Jesus breaking the bread at Emmaus. Thus the disciples did not recognise Jesus on the basis of his actions at the Last Supper, and any Eucharistic overtones are muted until 24:35, where the disciples recounted how the Lord was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. In Bezae, there are stronger links with the account of Jesus feeding the 5000, where he took the bread and fish, prayed and pronounced a blessing on them, and gave the food to the disciples to distribute to the crowds (9:16).

In the western version of the Emmaus story, it is in the act of receiving from Jesus that the disciples' eyes are opened to recognise who Jesus was and, in retrospect, to understand what he had been saying to them on the journey. Until they received from Jesus, they were blind to his presence and deaf to what he had been saying to them. Thus the revelation moves in one direction only: Jesus was not revealed in the scriptures; on the contrary, the meaning of the scriptures was revealed through Jesus. An exposition of the scriptures did not enable the disciples to recognise Jesus, but once they have recognised Jesus in the act of receiving the bread from his hand, the veil was lifted from their hearts and his explanation of the scriptures became plain to them.

Why did the Bezan scribe alter the text in this way? It is tempting to suppose that the episode may have been revised in the light of 2 Corinthians 3:15, where Paul says of the Jews, '...whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts': ἡνίκα ἂν ἀναγινώσκηται Μωϋσῆς κάλυμμα ἐπὶ τὴν καρδίαν αὐτῶν κεῖται. Whether the scribe had 2 Corinthians 3 in mind or not, we can see a parallel between the disciples on the Emmaus Road and the Jews to whom Paul referred in 2 Corinthians 3: in both cases, as they listened to Moses and the scriptures were read or explained, a veil was over their hearts so that they could not behold the glory of the Lord. For Paul, it was only when one turned to the Lord that the veil was removed (3:16). With the veil in place, the letter kills; when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed and the Spirit gives life. Without the Spirit, scripture remains a dead letter. One cannot access the Lord from scripture: one can only access scripture from the Lord.

If you are reading this, there is a good chance that you are doing so because you have been called to be a minister of a new covenant of the Spirit, not of the letter (2 Corinthians 3:6—if not, why *are* you reading this journal?). Bezae's interpretation of the Emmaus passage reminds us

that without a prior turning to the Lord, our hearts and minds will be veiled: instead of discovering Christ in the scriptures, all we will have is a dead letter. No amount of commentaries or online resources will enable us to find Christ in the Scriptures if we have not first turned to him in our hearts. For the written word to live in our hearts, we first need to have encountered the living Word, the Son of God. Without his interpretation of the written word to us by his Spirit, our hearts remain veiled. Without Christ, we have nothing to say.

Bezae is an idiosyncratic text. Rarely are its readings found these days outside the footnotes in Greek Testaments or modern Bible translations. In this case, that is appropriate, for the main witness of the textual tradition here ought to be the norm: our hearts should burn within us as we listen for the voice of Jesus making himself known to us through the scriptures. But a marginal text like Bezae can meet us at the margins of our experience, at those times when pride or pressures of time or other things veil our hearts and we open the Scriptures to find nothing but dead letters.

At such times Codex Bezae invites us to replace the commentaries on the shelf and share bread and wine with Jesus, because it is only as we receive from him that our hearts can be opened to understand the scriptures on which we have to preach. As ministers, all too often we are presiding at communion and it is easy for us to lose the sense of fellowship with Jesus as we lead others in worship. Maybe we need to seek out regular opportunities where we can, as it were, receive as from Jesus' hand bread and wine that he has taken, blessed and given to us, so that we can see the risen Lord with fresh eyes and hear what he has to say.

Tim Carter is the minister of Brighton Road Baptist Church, Horsham, and an associate research fellow of the London School of Theology.

Notes to text

1. D. W. Whittle, *I know not how God's wondrous grace*, BPW 532.
2. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion*, I.7.4e.
3. cf D. C. Parker, *Codex Bezae: an early Christian manuscript and its text*. Cambridge: CUP, 1992. The text itself is available in F. H. Scrivener (ed), *Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis*. Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1978.

A point of view

Why the apology was right

by Mark Woods

I'm grateful to Ted Hale for his article, *Slavery, the Bible and the apology*. However, here is another point of view (and I write as a middle-aged white male, and am not seeking to represent my black brothers and sisters). I was not present at the relevant Council meeting, so was unaffected by what was by all accounts a very moving process. Nevertheless, I am absolutely sure that it was the right thing to do, and believe it in spite of the following possible objections.

1. That apologising for something that previous generations have done makes very little sense without a virtuoso display of theological gymnastics.
2. That my own ancestors, at the height of the slave trade, were in all probability Lancashire millworkers, whose condition was hardly distinguishable from slavery (child workers were punished by having their ears nailed to boards, for instance). They were politically powerless.
3. That if we are talking about slavery, isn't it worth mentioning the black Africans who were enslaved by Arab raiders (up to 18 million, against up to 14 million in the Atlantic trade) and the one million Europeans, including English men, women, and children?
4. That once started on this apologetic path, it's hard to know where to stop. Great War deserters have been posthumously pardoned (though in the eyes of their comrades—the only ones with the right to judge—the scoundrels richly deserved their fate); Christians have apologised for the Crusades (a Norman land-grab, a more successful example of which occurred in 1066); while nonconformists have not yet felt obliged to apologise for the execution of King Charles, but it is only a question of time.
5. Finally, isn't it more sensible to accept that human beings do dreadful things not because they are white, or black, but because they can? It is power that corrupts, not skin colour, and poor people—black, white, or brown—will always be victims as long as that power is not opposed. We are part of a capitalist society in which some people are rich only because other people are poor. Slavery is just extreme capitalism. So should there

be a wealth threshold, for instance, after which felines should be obliged to apologise for their obesity?

It is easy—and rather fun—to write in this way. I do think all of these positions are arguable to some extent, and in another context I would cheerfully argue them—but not in this one, because so far, it is just an intellectual game involving the marshalling of arguments on one side or another. Nothing I have said is news to any of us, black or white.

What is missing is any kind of engagement with another person. It has become clear to me that for many black people in the UK and the Caribbean this experience of ancestral deracination, compounded—crucially—with their experiences of discrimination (both institutional and individual), defines their identity today. It is not as if the Somerset peasantry still had the right to feel aggrieved at the judiciary because of Judge Jeffreys, or Northumberland should be eternally republican because of William the Conqueror's Harrying of the North. It is a current experience—and so, of course, there is a continuing sense of injustice.

Secondly, there is the question of who should apologise. Baptists? Our record was patchy, but not too bad in general. White people? See points 2 and 3 above.

Arguing like this represents both a failure to understand the power relationships of black and white people today, and a failure of theology. No matter what progress against discrimination has been made in recent years, it is still harder to be an ethnic minority. Leaving aside the position of black people in wider society, in our own Union, there are only three black people serving as regional ministers or working directly for the Union, and two of them are in race relation roles. There are no black college lecturers as far as I know. As long as these positions are for white people to grant to black people, there is an issue. We may say, and genuinely believe, that we don't have a 'them and us' mindset, but the facts on the ground indicate otherwise.

As for the theology: in Ephesians 5:21, Paul says: 'Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ'. The word 'submit' really only makes sense if there is a winner and a loser. But in our new spiritual economy, such categories no longer apply.

'O, reason not the need!' Lear cries, appalled at the calculating spirit of his daughters. Forgiveness is the engine which drives the life of a gospel community. We white British Christians should be willing to apologise, fully and freely, because we have been asked to do so; we have been given

enough grace for us to be gracious. Let the historians reason the need. For us, it's unnecessary.

A song and a poem sum up the argument. The song is by HEBA regional minister Keith Judson, who hails from Bromsgrove, where conditions for the ironworkers were so bad that they were known as 'the white slaves of England'. It's a brilliant song, in which he tries to compare and contrast, before concluding:

*Does it help to compare all these wages of sin?
Do we know where to end it or where to begin
To lead black and white true freedom to win
From weary lives labouring hard?
Can grace so amazing still wash guilty stains
And bring us together to heal what remains
From when the white slaves of England made irons and chains
For the black slaves of Africa?*

The poem is by Lucy Berry, from her *Trouble with church?* collection (which I cannot recommend too highly); here are a few lines:

*And the Lion lay down with the Lamb:
the lamb forgave the lion for being a lion.
The lion forgave the lamb for being a lamb.
The Greek made friends with the Turk.
And the Indians went round to the
people from Pakistan
and played cricket in their garden.*

*And the East said, 'We are sorry.'
And the West said, 'Beg your pardon'*

...

*In Rwanda and Chechnya they heard the news:
round the world in every nation
that it was reconciliation.*

'It is true. We did it. We hated you.'

...

*And best of all, the children ran together
pink and brown, straight and curly,
In a huge, loud, happy, swirling muddle
Yelling, 'Yes, we did it! And we're sorry!'*

And the Lion lay down with the Lamb.

Mark Woods is the editor of *The Baptist Times*. The article by Ted Hale to which Mark is responding here can be found in *bmj*, October 2009 (vol 304).

Honey pots: another view

Michael Mortimer

I did not find Paul Beasley-Murray's apologia for honey pot churches convincing. I have always regarded the New Testament church as a blueprint, and tried to work on those lines in the churches in which I have ministered. So I note from Acts 2 that the believers were together, had all things in common, shared with one another, and daily broke bread and shared meals together. 'Church' seemed to be a seven-days-a-week way of life rather than a Lord's Day event. I suggest that worship should be something which springs out of our life together rather than something in which one goes somewhere else to participate. I really do not feel you can equate worship with going to the theatre or to a football match.

At one time, quite large numbers of visitors used to come to Sunday services in one of the churches church I led, which was perceived to be pioneering new ways of worship. After such visitors had attended regularly for six weeks or so I would gently suggest that they should either seek the Lord as to the possibility of moving to our town, or find a church in their own immediate locality. (As it happened, we spent a good many weekends helping families to move house; but that is another story.)

A while ago, I attended a ministers' event in a large church some 12 miles

away, which draws people from a wide area. I was warmly welcomed by a man on reception and we got into conversation. On asking him where he came from, it transpired that he actually came from my small town and lived no more than 200 yards from me! We had never met before or enjoyed fellowship until that day. I felt deprived.

Michael Mortimer is a retired minister, currently pastor at Stow Park Church Centre, Newport.

The BMF benevolent fund

Here a few questions are answered about this fund, operated by the BMF.

Who is the fund for?

The fund exists primarily to help Baptist ministers who could benefit from a ‘fellowship gift’.

Under what circumstances might a gift be made?

There can be no definitive list, but a small gesture can be a real encouragement. For example, when there has been a bereavement, a major disappointment, surgery, marital breakdown, or perhaps difficulties in ministry.

How much will the BMF give?

The BMF is not able to assist anyone to overcome significant financial problems. If the BMF receives suggestions for help from *bona fide* sources, then the BMF will respond positively, provided that there are sufficient funds in hand to do so. What the fund offers is a tangible token of fellowship, which generally would be in the region of £25-£100. The BMF has to balance realism about finite resources with generosity of spirit.

How are recommendations processed?

The BMF treasurer receives recommendations for help from the benevolent fund. These are always welcome and will be prayerfully considered. Agreement between the BMF officers that a gift should be made is sufficient discharge for the

treasurer to make a gift. This process helps to keep gifts confidential.

Who can make a recommendation?

Recommendations are normally made by members of the BMF or by a regional minister. The person recommending that a gift be made should briefly set out the situation and identify the presenting need.

To whom, and how, should recommendations be made?

There is no formal application form. Recommendations should be made by letter, email or telephone call to the BMF treasurer (see the back inside cover for contact details).

If I make a recommendation, will I know the outcome?

Normally, if you enquire, you will be told in confidence whether a gift has been made, but the amount will remain confidential.

From where does the fund derive its income?

Every year, when subscription reminders are sent out, all members are invited to make a gift to the benevolent fund. This letter should have been sent to you with this copy of the journal. This act of fellowship is the main source of income. Gifts for the fund are welcome from ministers or churches at any time.

Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

Towards a theology of the environment

by Paul Haffner

Gracewing, 2008, £15.99

ISBN 978-0-85244-368-2

Reviewed by Colin Sedgwick

If you are interested in a Roman Catholic take on environmental issues, this is the book for you. Professor Haffner is a priest and theologian based in Rome and thus, unsurprisingly, is well-versed in Roman Catholic writings old and new. Apart from a few references to Orthodox and Protestant writings, his book is Catholic through and through.

His basic theses are straightforward enough: that this earth is God's gift to the human race; that we have made a mess of it; and that the church should be in the forefront of recognising the resulting crisis and addressing it. Throughout, Haffner insists that envi-

ronmental issues should be treated as spiritual and moral in character.

The book opens with a detailed account of the current situation. One can only be impressed by the sheer wealth of scientific detail Haffner has marshalled—from mobile phones to acid rain to synthetic poisons to noise pollution.

After a brief reflection on how we should view the situation, we are given a lengthy account of papal pronouncements, often quoted verbatim, and other Episcopal and high-level documents. This is material for the specialist, given that most of these documents are saying pretty much the same thing. I'm not quite sure why we need to be told about, say, the Lombardy Bishops' Conference of 1988.

A 'Christian vision of creation' is then presented, grappling bravely with all sorts of biblical themes such as the role of man as God's image, the purpose of the created order, the place of animals, and the reality of fallenness and sin, to mention only a few. Inevitably in a book of some 300 pages, these big themes are dealt with in a summary fashion, raising the question of just how useful the treatment is. Indeed, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that basically the same things are being said

over and over again with minor variations.

I was rather reminded of the little girl who, when asked what she thought of a book on penguins, replied, dissolving into tears, that 'This book told me more about penguins than I wanted to know...' Haffner's book offers us a great welter of detail, but not much in principle with which any thoughtful Christian could take issue.

Walking the walk: the rise of King David for today. A dramatic exposition of 1 Samuel 16 to 2 Samuel 5.10

by Pete Wilcox

Paternoster Press, £8.99

ISBN 13: 978-1-84227-648-8

Reviewed by John Morgan-Wynne

Canon Wilcox of Lichfield Cathedral dramatically expounds David's story, from his anointing by Samuel to his capture of Jerusalem, in three acts subdivided into four, twelve and five scenes respectively: 'a classic rags to riches tale'.

He does not offer technical exegesis or

analyses for sources behind the present text (though occasionally difficulties or tensions are noted). He explains the flow of the story, and then in the conclusion to each scene offers helpful spiritual, theological and psychological reflections. The style is vivid and readable, and points the way to making the OT come alive and how it might become a word of God today, especially as the amount of sex, violence, quest for power, and weakness and strength of characters in these chapters reflects much present day life.

More than once Wilcox comments on the enigma of David—the humble, devout believer and the cunning, ambitious politician, his capacity for faith and trust in the living God coupled with a capacity for calculation, and political cunning. On the whole, Wilcox gets this balance right, though at times perhaps inclined to overemphasise David's holiness and spirituality (If we were seeking for the 'historical' David, we might want to ask searching questions, but Wilcox is dealing with the text as it stands). He is certainly not afraid to note where David's actions raise problems for Christian readers, and where God's choices might seem arbitrary. Wilcox rightly points out that God's purpose is furthered as much in the Bible by human shortcomings as by

human saintliness, and this is certainly well illustrated in David's story.

In his *Concluding reflections*, there are some thought-provoking ideas on the theme of cultivating restraint, together with some (for me) questionable statements about typological correspondences between David and Jesus.

There are several misprints on pages xii, 17, 20, 29, 58, 66, 72, 98, 132, 142, 161 and 182.

Participation and mediation: a practical theology for liquid church

by Pete Ward

SCM 2008 , £19.99

ISBN 978-0-334-04165-8

Reviewed by Simon Mattholie

It was with a sense of excitement that I took delivery of Pete Ward's latest book. I found *Liquid church* to be provocative and energising, and I was looking forward to immersing myself in more 'Wardish wisdom' especially as the title suggested that this would be rooted in practical theology. The reviews on the rear of the book read like a *Who's who?* of theology for which

only professors were allowed.

Ward begins his book by recalling a sermon he gave on the lost sheep, where he turned the story on its head, reflecting that the youth of today are the 99 sheep who are outside the church, and the single sheep represents those people who are part of church. He states that so much of what we do as churches is limited to focusing on that one sheep. Perhaps this is an over-generalisation to make a point, but clearly much of the influence behind the book is borne from the fact that many young people in Ward's experience are open to faith, but struggle in commitment to the local Christian community, especially the institution of the church.

Pete Ward questions to what extent we are asking those who are unchurched and find Christ to conform to our culturally specific ways of worshipping, governance, and discipleship. It is an uncomfortable question for us to wrestle with within the Baptist denomination, because despite our radical free church roots we still expect a great deal of conforming by the new convert. Pete Ward describes Christian community as being socially and culturally dislocated from the world of young people; however, I would also want to assert that quite often those who are

unchurched as adults will also be culturally dislocated. Throughout the book the importance of contextualisation becomes increasingly apparent, and as Ward suggests, the relationship between culture and church has become one of the most pressing issues in the Western church today.

The question of how much of our understanding of faith within the Baptist family is culturally conditioned is one that no doubt we could discuss into the wee small hours of the morning. In his book Ward seems to ask many questions that only an academic would ask, but nevertheless they are questions that we need to address as churches if only we could decomplexify and find more accessible language.

Here lies my problem: it is clear that Ward is a very bright man, arguably with a prophetic message to the Western church today: if only his writing in this book was a little more accessible. Ward has divided his book into three parts: part 1 looking at practical theology; part 2 looks at a theological approach to practical theology; and the final part deals explores the commodification, the Christian culture industry and issues of identity applying these areas to the liquid nature of church.

Pete Ward is a theologian, a very clever

one at that, but this book is not an easy read and you might well need a theological thesaurus by your side or at the very least a professorship of some Christian institution. It contains some challenging ideas that we should explore, but is not the most accessible book for the average Baptist punter.

Regent's Reviews

This useful review journal is back and ready to download, with a mixture of book reviews for the thoughtful minister.

The first issue showcases Baptist scholarship in celebration of 400 years of Baptist thought.

Have a look at

<http://www.rpc.ox.ac.uk/index.php?pageid=228&tln=ResourceCentres>

and sign up to keep in touch.

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Please let Niels Waugh or Nigel Howarth know your new address so that we can keep sending *bmj* to you!