

the baptist ministers'
journal

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Detective fiction

Philip Clements-Jewery

Near to death

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Mission in reverse

Israel Olofinjana

Marriage and divorce

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Centres of gravity

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From the editor

Information overload?

I am currently doing some research, and via the university's electronic journal access and the British Library, I receive email alerts about new journal articles in my area. Keywords (chosen by me) are picked up by the service and I get a message telling me that an article has been published on that subject. Most days I get 5-6 alerts, but it can be many more—which amounts to a minimum of 30 per week. All these references then need to be looked up and checked. A mixed blessing!

There is a great mass of information out there (as if we didn't know!) and the body of knowledge is growing all the time. Yet, personally speaking, a lot of it is not as useful as I might hope.

The *bmj* is a very targeted publication: it is for those engaging in Baptist ministry. We at the BMF would like it to be as useful as possible to you as you seek to serve Jesus Christ in your life and work. We seek to resource you: by publishing articles and reflections on ministry and culture; reviewing books that may be of use; and keeping you up to date with the whereabouts of your colleagues. We don't want *bmj* to be food for the recycling bin even before it has been opened.

Please let me know what you think and what you'd like to see more of (or less of). I will do my best, with my colleagues on the editorial board and in BMF, to consider your suggestions. There may be practical reasons why we cannot do everything you think of, but we will read and consider what you suggest.

Please help us to provide the journal you want and need for the 21st century. Get in touch with me, preferably on reval96@aol.com. *SN*.

Please contact me (reval96@aol.com) if you have a contribution for *bmj*. Concise articles will usually be published more quickly (allowing for other constraints), so please try to keep to under 2000 words for main articles and under 1500 for *Points of view*. Shorter comments are also welcome. If you would like to discuss or submit a longer article, it may need adaptation or serialisation. Thank you.

Making the gaps speak

by Philip Clements-Jewery

It is my impression that very little seems to have been written exploring the links between theology and detective fiction, although there has been plenty of material on the relationship of theology and science fiction, theology and art, or theology and film. In this article I will explore some theological themes in crime fiction.

Solving clues: order and meaning

In *The fifth woman*, Henning Mankel's Swedish detective inspector Kurt Waulander muses about the work of a detective: 'Police work is a question of piecing together tentative solutions. We have to make the gaps speak and the pieces tell us about hidden meanings. We have to try to see through the events, turn them on their heads in order to set them on their feet'.¹ Such musings apply as much to the task of the theologian as to that of the detective!

Solving crimes may sometimes have less to do with reasoning than with lateral thinking. Detectives in novels frequently rely on instinctive gut feelings and flashes of inspiration as well as the kind of steady police work that uncovers the evidence. But logic and reasoning also have their place, and so the solving of clues is ultimately possible only in a world that has both order and meaning.

In Umberto Eco's *The name of the rose*, the point is made in a negative way. At the end of the book Brother William confesses that 'there was no plot and that (he had) discovered it by mistake'. But although he says that he has 'never doubted the truth of signs, because they are the only things a man [sic] has to orient himself in the world', the pattern he thought he had discovered underlying all the crimes was merely accidental. 'I behaved stubbornly,' he confesses, 'pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have well known that there is no order in the universe'.

For Brother William, such order exists only in the mind, although he says, 'it's

hard to accept the idea that there cannot be an order in the universe because it would offend the free will of God and his omnipotence'. The conclusion drawn is that where there is no order or meaning there is no difference between God and primigenial [sic] chaos.² Without God, the criterion of truth and meaning, communication and understanding become impossible. The collapse of order in *The name of the rose* is symbolised by the destruction by fire of the Abbey's famous library.

If the interpretation of observable clues is possible only if ours is an ordered and structured world where meaning can be discerned, then detective fiction indirectly witnesses to the theological truth of an ordered creation by a God of reason.³ Things in the world can thus be seen as pointing to their author. Of course, the world is fallen and thus, to a degree, disordered. Crimes are a cause of disorder and thus clues can and do mislead. Most, if not all, detective fiction thus depends on the suspense created when the clues are discovered to point in the wrong direction and seem to incriminate the wrong person. Readers are drawn into this suspense and invited to work things out for themselves.

A superb example of this is found in one of the finest Dorothy L. Sayers' books, featuring Lord Peter Wimsey. In *The nine tailors*,⁴ the story is three-quarters finished, and things seem to be moving towards a revelatory conclusion, when Wimsey dramatically declares that he has got it all wrong, that he has foolishly misinterpreted the evidence, although he still does not know what really happened.

Before going any further I would like first to refer to a paper delivered by Paul Fiddes at the Baptists Doing Theology in Context consultation in Manchester at the end of August 2008.⁵ The question addressed by Fiddes was 'how can the signs of the world and of human culture point to God?' and he comes to the conclusion that these signs have the power to draw us into a deeper participation in reality. It is participation in God that enables us to interpret the world.

To return to *The nine tailors*, at the very end, a year after the events related earlier in the book, Lord Peter Wimsey returns to the scene of what must be described as 'whatever might have been a crime', and at last understands what happened and how the death occurred. And he discovers this by undergoing—*ie* participating in—a similar experience to that which caused the earlier death. Indeed, Wimsey himself nearly dies as a result of this experience.

To sum up, detective fiction reminds us that the solving of clues requires ours be an ordered and structured world and thus leads us to an understanding that the

hidden meaning of that world can be discerned only by participation in it and, ultimately, in the One who created it. Furthermore, by solving crimes detectives help to restore a degree of order to a disordered world and thus could be said to participate in God's redemptive work. That is something to which I shall return at the very end of this paper.

Evil and the dark side of human nature

Crime novels are often very far from being cosy. Much detective fiction explores the gritty, seamy, underbelly of society. It reveals a grim and fallen world that is far from the experience of most Christians—a world where seedy high-rise housing estates, gangland culture, drug dealing, prostitution, mafia-like godfathers and, sometimes, corrupt police officers are major features. However, some crime novels present a fantastic dimension to the murders that are investigated. Deaths are frequently gruesome or bizarre. In Henning Mankel's *Sidetracked*,⁶ for example, the murderer is a disturbed teenage boy who dresses up as a native American—feather head-dress, war paint and all—and scalps his victims.

These gruesome and bizarre features are something rather different, I would suggest, than the gritty realism of many other works in the same genre. From the perspective of faith they could be taken as evidence for 'the exceeding sinfulness of sin'. In *Wednesday's child*, by Peter Robinson, Inspector Alan Banks reflects that while petty criminals sometimes made him despair of human intelligence, there were some criminals who caused him to wonder seriously about the human soul.⁷ Such thoughts may also correspond with the pessimistic despair that pervades the whole of Jeremiah's prophecy concerning the apparently incorrigible and perverse side of human nature that renders it incapable of changing itself. It may therefore be important to explore the depths of human depravity in order to comprehend the need that brought forth the salvation that is ours in Christ. It may not be possible, or wise, to undertake such an exploration ourselves, but we can vicariously take part in one through the imagination of crime writers.

Detectives must also gain an insight into the sinful criminal mind if they are to have any success. In the St Petersburg mysteries by R. N. Morris the author develops the character of Porfiry Petrovich, the investigating magistrate in Dostoevsky's *Crime and punishment*. At one point, Porfiry observes that detectives deal in the stuff of people's lives and discover far more about people than they might wish to know.⁸ This attempt at getting inside the criminal mind sometimes leads

to an almost symbiotic relationship between detective and criminal. A classic example of this is the relationship between Ian Rankin's DI Jack Rebus and the Mr Big of the Edinburgh crime scene, 'Big Ger' (Gerald) Cafferty. Cafferty is frequently linked to the cases Rebus investigates, although there is never enough evidence to charge him with an offence. This is an uncomfortable partnership for Rebus but, in spite of Cafferty's continual scorn, Rebus keeps returning to him for assistance, with the result that Rebus is often thought to be in league with him, even being accused of being in his pay.

I wonder if in this feature of detective fiction we can see a pointer to human solidarity in sin? Crime writer Andrew Taylor observes that there is 'a sense that crime, investigation and punishment [are] in some fundamental but incomprehensible way linked to the society in which they [occur]'.⁹ Of course, any concept of human solidarity is largely foreign to our individualistic, privatised, postmodern culture. However, the way in which detective fiction draws its readers' attention to the fact of human solidarity in sin may give us the opportunity to draw attention to another solidarity, in the righteousness of Christ, through faith, by which human salvation becomes effective.

The character and personality of the detective

It has now almost become a commonplace in modern detective fiction that the detective is portrayed as a dysfunctional individual. Jo Nesbø's Norwegian detective, Harry Hole, is an alcoholic.¹⁰ His work record includes 'drunkenness, unauthorised absences, abuse of authority, insubordination to superiors and disloyalty to the force'. More well known, perhaps, are Mankel's Kurt Wallander and Rankin's Jack Rebus, both of whom who drink too much, smoke a lot, eat junk food, are overweight, experience bad health, have broken relationships and cut corners in their unorthodox methods of police work. Rebus, especially, is insubordinate and disobedient to his superiors, and is frequently suspended from duty.

There are other examples of detectives who grapple with inner demons, or who have a murky past with which they are still coming to terms. In his series of novels set in Iceland,¹¹ Arnaldur Indriðason's detective Erlendur is tormented by guilt connected with a childhood incident in which his younger brother was lost in a snowstorm and never found. That sense of guilt, which provided the motivation for him to become a detective in the first place, is often brought to the surface by the cases he investigates, and becomes a factor in those investigations.

By such dysfunctionality detectives may exemplify what is called 'parallel process', in which the external case being investigated is mirrored in the internal world of the detective. This provokes the speculation that their ability as detectives may be related to their dysfunctionality as persons. I suggest that there could be a pointer here to the concept of the wounded healer, the supreme exemplar of which is Jesus Christ. Some hackles might rise at the suggestion of a link between dysfunctionality and Jesus, but he certainly did not conform to socially acceptable norms. So far as we know he never married, in defiance of accepted customs. He was regarded as a law-breaker and a disturber of the peace, and his teaching was considered subversive.

Jesus also fulfilled the pattern of ministry set out in Isaiah's description of the suffering servant. Dysfunctional is certainly a word that could be applied to the description of the servant in Isaiah 52:13ff. Furthermore, Isaiah 53:4 is quoted in Matthew 8:17 in connection with the healing ministry of Jesus. I would therefore claim that it is not too fanciful to suggest that there are aspects of some fictional detectives that reflect, in one way or another, and however dimly, the methods and ministry of Jesus Christ. By solving crimes detectives heal wounds in society and thus absolve us of guilt, and their own suffering may have played a part in this process.

I have been seeking in this paper to draw some connections between observable themes in crime fiction and theological insights. No doubt there are additional connections that could be made. But if I have stimulated any fruitful reflection, or suggested to readers that their leisure reading might not always be wholly frivolous or time-wasting, then maybe this paper will have proved its worth. And, of course, I too have received much enjoyment from the reading involved in its preparation!

Philip Clements-Jewery is the minister of New North Road Baptist Church, Huddersfield. A longer version of this article, presented at the one-day Northern Theological Consultation in Blackley, 2010, can be obtained from Philip at minister@nnrbc.org.

Notes to text

1. H. Mankel, *The fifth woman*. Vintage: London, 2004, p 459.
2. *op cit*, pp 491 ff.

3. See Genesis 1 and the prologue to John's gospel.
 3. D. L. Sayers, *The nine tailors*. Gollanz: London, 1934.
 4. I do not know whether this paper has yet been published.
 5. H. Mankel, *Sidetracked*. Vintage: London, 2004.
 6. P. Robinson, *Wednesday's child*. Pan: London, 2003, p 333.
 7. R.N Morris, *A vengeful longing*. Faber: London, 2008, p 148.
 8. A. Taylor in his introduction to M. Sjöwall & P. Wahlöö, *The man on the balcony*. Harper Perennial: London, 2007 p viii.
 9. See, for example, J. Nesbø, *The Devil's star*. Vintage: London, 2006.
 10. *op cit*, p 103.
 11. A. Indridason, *Tainted blood* (first published as *Jar city*); *Silence of the grave*; *Voices*; *The draining lake*; *Arctic chill*.
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This is what it will be like

by Len Schofield

‘This is what it will be like: but not yet’. These are the words I felt the Lord was saying to me as I lay in my bed on the coronary care unit (CCU). Six weeks beforehand I had undergone heart surgery for a bypass at the Bristol Royal Infirmary. All seemed to have gone well, although I wasn’t feeling very well when I was discharged. I had to sit up 24 hours a day because I couldn’t breathe if I lay down. Two weeks later I was rushed into Musgrove Park Hospital in Taunton suffering from heart failure: there was fluid around my heart and on my lungs. I was in hospital for two weeks before being discharged. Then I was only home for a week before being rushed back and put on the coronary care unit. After a number of tests, I was told that I was suffering from Dressler’s Syndrome. It is a rare condition caused by injury to the heart, either through a heart attack or heart surgery. It affects around four in 100 000 cases.

Death was all around me. The gentleman in the bed next to mine died during my first night on the CCU. Someone in the room behind me also died; and a lady just across from my bed was in a very bad way. I was later told that I too had been

seriously ill. It's at times like this that you really begin to believe that time is short, and you'll soon be on your way to heaven. Most of my thoughts were about Jacquie my wife; and how it was going to be for her. Over these past few months she had courageously been through so much. It was in these circumstances that the Lord met with me.

Although I was unwell and my body was struggling to cope, I felt myself drifting backwards, away from the situation. Then I began to move forward, either riding or floating, I'm not sure which. I was travelling through long colourful caves. Not the bright colours that you might see in a rainbow, but rather the colours that we see in autumn: warm brown, orange and golden, similar to the many colours of the leaves on the trees before they fall. Many of the rocks reminded me of crystals; although I could not see through them, and they did not reflect the light. The caves were quite straight, although there were several twists and turns. I was filled with a great feeling of peace and expectation.

At one of the turns I could see several people who seemed familiar, but I couldn't place them. I then noticed among them a young boy about four years of age, whom I recognised as myself. I remember thinking 'This must be where your life passes before you'. I got quite excited, thinking, 'This is going to be interesting, seeing things of the past all over again'. It was at that point I felt the Lord saying in my mind, 'Interesting, yes! But not all of it good' (meaning: not all of it things to be proud of).

I began to move on, and I felt the Lord saying, 'This is what it will be like: but not yet' (meaning: when the time comes for me to join him in Heaven, it will be as gentle and peaceful as this). I continued to drift through the long quiet peaceful caves for some time, having plenty of time to think through the whole experience.

During all this time (in the background), I could still hear everything that was going on all around me in the hospital ward. I felt the Lord saying, 'You will continue to hear it as an assurance to you, that you are not going anywhere. Your time has not yet come'. Although I could hear everything, it did not interfere with what I was experiencing. The sounds around me in the ward were simply present there in the background.

As I moved forward, the cave became quite big. In front of me I could see a large double door. I noticed other people going past me and entering. The feeling of expectation was increasing; but as no-one was beckoning me to go in, I knew this was as far as I go. I continued to watch others go in for a while.

The Lord spoke to me again. I couldn't hear him with my ears; his voice was clearly to my mind. He said 'Not yet. This is how it will be one day. Let me now show you the other way' (which meant: what it would be like if it were not heaven I was heading for). Immediately I was travelling along another cave: very straight, and much narrower than before. The walls of the cave were white. I thought they were probably made of chalk. I thought to myself, 'I would have guessed the way to hell would have been dark and scary; but that's not the case'. But although it wasn't dark and scary, I felt very strongly inside that I certainly didn't want to be going in this direction.

My eyes opened, and I could see that I was still in the hospital ward. I felt the Lord saying, 'Believe what I'm saying: NOT YET'. I was filled with a wonderful sense of peace and comfort, in a way that I have never experienced before. Although I've said this in just a few words, the whole experience was timeless.

As I said earlier, on the CCU, death was all around me. There were six patients, including myself, and for each of us the outcome could easily have been the same as the man in the next bed to mine, whose name was George. It was in this situation that the Father met with me.

First, to confirm clearly that I was not going anywhere yet, in spite of what my situation seemed to be indicating.

Second, to let me see that even when the time does come, there is absolutely nothing of which to be fearful. Even if our actual bodies are going through very unpleasant experiences, we ourselves are removed backwards from the situation to where we are safe. It is then that we begin that truly wonderful experience of not so much of travelling to be with God; but rather our Father personally taking us to be where he is.

For those of you who don't know me, I'm a 60 year old Baptist minister who had taken early retirement due to poor health. But as I now continue to recover, I look forward with great expectation to what our Father has in store for Jackie and I as we seek to serve him together in the days ahead of us. I pray that this experience of mine will be a blessing to others.

Len Schofield was the pastor at Halcon Baptist Church in Taunton until having to retire early because of his health in June 2009. He can be contacted on sonlight5@uwclub.net.

Mission in reverse

by Israel Olofinjana

There has been a massive shift in global Christianity from north to south. Christianity is growing day by day in the continents of Africa, Latin America and Asia, while it is declining in the West. The fastest-growing expression of Christianity is Pentecostalism, with its characteristics of healing, miracles, speaking in tongues, emphasis on the leading of the Holy Spirit and evangelism. Since the latter part of the 19th century, Africa has witnessed various Pentecostal renewals which have changed the landscape of the whole continent, and this phenomenon has been called the African Reformation.¹ One result of these revivals is that Africans are now bringing the gospel back to the West. This reverse in missions has been a recent phenomenon, and has been a fascinating subject for missiologists, church historians, anthropologists and religious scholars. To appreciate and understand this reverse in mission, there is a need first to consider the efforts of European missionaries in Africa.

Europeans in Africa

Today it is generally assumed that Christianity first came to Africa through the European missionaries in the 19th century, but this assumption has to be challenged in the light of the understanding that there is an African Christianity that has its origin in North Africa. Two Patristic churches that have survived until today are the Coptic church in Egypt and the Orthodox church in Ethiopia.

African Christianity was so successful in its first 300 years that it produced great theologians such as Tertullian (AD 150-225), Cyprian (Bishop of Carthage, AD 200-258) and Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-431), whose works have defined and shaped Western theology. In addition, African Christianity produced monks, martyrs and theological institutions. After this early activity, Christianity died out in North Africa and did not resurface until the middle ages.

During the middle ages, attempts were made to plant Christianity in North Africa, which was effected mainly through Dominican and Franciscan Roman Catholic

orders. Their attempts were partly successful, but the Portuguese explorers of the 15th century were more effective. These Roman Catholic explorers took the gospel to the south of the Sahara—exploration and the proclamation of the gospel went hand in hand. In spite of this activity, Christianity was not sustained for several reasons, the most important being the transatlantic slave trade.

The third attempt to plant Christianity in Africa was in the 19th century and this was by far the most successful missionary enterprise in Africa. The Evangelical revival in Europe inspired European missionaries to go to Africa and many countries and denominations were involved in planting Christianity in the continent. This age of mission witnessed the building of schools, hospitals, universities, transport systems and communication networks in Africa. African clergies and elites were also established. It was these clergies and elites who later fought for the emancipation of Africa.

Africans in Europe

Let us now consider the African mission to Europe. First, it is wrong to attribute the arrival of Africans in Europe to the transatlantic slave trade. Archaeological evidence suggests that North African soldiers were involved in Roman Britain towards the end of the first century. In addition, European contact with Africa through trade and commerce resulted in an increase in the number of Africans in Britain in the 15th century. One of King Henry VIII's trumpeters is thought to have been a black man.²

The transatlantic slave trade, which started with the Portuguese explorers, certainly brought many Africans to Britain and other parts of Europe. It was during the slave trade and its aftermath that African Christians such as Olaudah Equiano (1745-97), Ignatius Sanchos (1729-1780), Quobna Ottobah Cugoana (1757-179?) and a host of others appeared and made their contributions in speaking against the injustice of slavery and racism that was so prevalent at the time.

The first African church and mission agency founded in Europe by an African was the African Church Mission, which started in Liverpool in 1931. It was founded by Daniel Ekarte (1890s-1964), a Nigerian who was influenced by the Scottish missionary Mary Slessor (1848-1915). Ekarte's mission agency was successful in meeting the social and spiritual needs of Africans and other ethnic minority living in Liverpool, particularly mixed race children. However Ekarte's

mission was cut short because of institutional racism and lack of funds. The mission agency was shut down in 1964, the year Ekarte also died.³

The next phase of church planting by Africans in Europe was in the 1960s, when many African nations witnessed independence from their European masters. African initiated churches (AICs), as they are called, were planted in London. African students, diplomats and those in search of a better life migrated to Europe, especially the UK, in this period. It was these Africans who started planting churches in Europe. There are several reasons why these African churches were planted, but exclusion from mainstream churches and the conviction of the need for mission overseas were at the heart of the matter.

The 1990s witnessed the rise of New Pentecostal Churches (NPC) with African origins. The largest church in Western Europe is Kingsway International Christian Centre (KICC), led by Pastor Matthew Ashimolowo (Nigerian); also the largest church in Eastern Europe is led by an African, Sunday Adelaja of Embassy of God in Kiev, Ukraine. African churches in Europe are making many contributions and are bringing renewal to a continent that is fast losing its Christian roots. The contributions of African churches can be seen in church growth, social cohesion among ethnic minorities, community development, ministerial and theological training, womens' ministries and discourse, immigration and *diaspora* studies, revival, missions and a host of others.

Criticisms of BMCs

African Churches are a category of Black Majority Churches (BMCs), and these churches have been subject to criticism from their inception in the 1940s. However, current criticisms come both from black and white Christians. In the UK, the main criticisms are as follows.

1. Mission among their own

BMCs tend to be very homogeneous, such as Nigerians ministering to Nigerians, or Ghanaians ministering to Ghanaians, which has been a major concern for many African and Caribbean leaders. All the respondents to my research agreed that BMC outreach is still very much within their caucuses. One of my respondents reasoned that racism and exclusion, from mainstream churches and wider society, is the main reason for this monoethnic trend.

Another reason given by one respondent was that Africans or Caribbeans feel more at home in a familiar environment, which is true not just only for Africans and Caribbeans, but for all human beings: we all want that sense of belonging and identity in a community. For example, in the UK, we can also find the Indian church, the Tamil church, the Greek church, the Korean church, and white majority churches. Monoethnicity is not just a problem for the black churches, but one of the general problems of the church in Britain. Monoethnic churches have their place and function within British society, but they must be ready and willing to be multicultural because that is the context in which they serve.

2. Lack of wider involvement and engagement in social action projects

Six out of eight of the ministers/leaders interviewed in my study agreed that BMCs are not engaging enough with wider social justice concerns such as global poverty and climate change. They felt that although they are involved in local social concerns, such as gun and knife crime, immigration issues, and the socio-economic needs of migrant communities, yet they are still to become engaged in global issues.

Joel Aldred, the Secretary of Minority Ethnic Affairs for Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, commented that 'it is clear that the issue is not one of the absence of social involvement, but, about the depth and breadth of that involvement'.⁴ One of my respondents mentioned that BMCs need to broaden their theological worldviews to accommodate global concerns such as climate change and global poverty. A few BMC leaders are already engaged with global issues, for example Joel Edwards, through the Micah Challenge, is already tackling global poverty, but we need the wider participation of BMC leaders.

3. Prosperity theology

The preaching of the prosperity gospel has been severely criticised and condemned unanimously both by black and by white Christian leaders. It has been criticised as an import from the US that cannot work in the UK context. It has also been viewed as a means for church leaders to exploit the poor. This last point has some validity, but I feel there is a need for people to understand why this gospel is preached in many black Pentecostal churches in the UK.

First, prosperity theology in the UK must be understood as a contextual theology responding to the economic needs of migrant communities. It must be viewed as an aspect of liberation theology, which seeks to address the experience of the

poor and the oppressed, in this case black people in the UK. When an African immigrant comes into this country, the effects of poverty, economic recession and political instability automatically kick in, and therefore survival dominates his/her existence in the UK. I know many Africans who have had to borrow the money for their plane tickets and visa fees (the latter being non-refundable) from friends and families. To make matters worse, these migrants often have many dependents waiting for them back home in Africa and this why sending money through the Western Union is very important to Africans. These complex financial needs are some of the factors that drive the quest for economic breakthrough among Africans in Europe.

Secondly, prosperity theology is a means of funding independent BMCs. The historic churches often do not have such problems with funding. They have been around for longer, they rely on generous legacies and donations of long standing members and philanthropists, they have acquired church buildings over the years, which means that mortgages have been paid. The independent churches, on the other hand, are young churches which rely on the committed giving of their members to survive. Having said this it must be affirmed that the abusive use of a prosperity message that enriches the pastor at the expense of the congregation, or its use as a magical formula for success, is not scriptural.

4. Lack of effectiveness of BMC mega-churches⁵

Two of the ministers/leaders that were interviewed expressed the view that being a mega-church does not mean that the church is successful. BMC mega-churches must develop and sustain house churches to disciple their members, and not all do so. It must also be mentioned that mega-churches are not just a feature of BMCs. There are white majority mega-churches, such as Hillsong Church (5000), All Souls Langham Place (Anglican, 2000), Holy Trinity Brompton (Anglican, 1700) and Soul Survivor outreach festivals attracting around 15 000 people.

Conclusion

African churches in Europe are without doubt making an impact in Europe, but they do have their shortcomings. These weaknesses can be identified in the areas of politics, the lack of ecumenical partnerships, transplanting African Christianity to Europe without contextualising, mission only among their own, lack of involvement in global issues such as climate change and global poverty, and the

abuse of prosperity theology. These churches have, however, only been in Europe for a short period and they are still in the process of adapting to their new setting.

Israel Olofinjana is co-pastor of Crofton Park Baptist Church, a multicultural church in SE London. His recent book on this subject is Reverse in ministry and missions: Africans in the dark continent of Europe, available from AuthorHouse at www.authorhouse.co.uk (ISBN 978-1-4490-9549-9). Contact Israel on isreal2us@yahoo.com.

Notes to text

1. A. H. Anderson, *African Reformation*, p 4.
2. M. N. Jagessar & A. G. Reddie (eds), *Black theology in Britain: a reader*, p 31.
3. M. Sherwood, *Pastor Daniel Ekarte and the African Churches Mission*. London: Savannah Press, 1994.
4. <http://www.joealdred.com/?q=node/30>.
5. Mega-churches here have an average attendance of 1000 or more.

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Marriage, divorce and remarriage

by Andy Ladhams

Statistics¹ indicate that 50% of first and 70% of second marriages fail, and that increasingly fewer couples are getting married today. Couples approaching the church for marriage may well have had multiple previous partners, or have been divorced. Traditional teaching for a long time said that divorce is not an option for married Christians, except on the grounds of adultery; and remarriage is only acceptable if one divorced ex-partner had died. However, the victims of marriage breakdown who initiate divorce proceedings are not necessarily guilty of doing wrong—the guilty party is the person who broke the marriage vows. What is an appropriate biblical response to this complex and confusing pastoral situation?

Marriage and divorce in the OT

Biblically, God ordained marriage (Gen 2:24) but Moses permitted both divorce and remarriage (Deut 24:1).² It is often argued that God does not ‘approve’ of divorce: hence the need to ‘distinguish between marriage break-up, which is always wrong, and divorce, which is a legal recognition that a marriage has broken up’.³ Under Roman law, divorce was very common—either partner could simply walk out without facing any responsibility.⁴ Today, as more and more people choose cohabitation, does our society parallel that of ancient Rome?

In Israel, adultery was punishable by death (Lev 20:10). Technically speaking, only a wife could be divorced for adultery, because a man could have more than one wife (Deut 24:1; the Hebrew word *ervah* literally means ‘a cause of sexual immorality’).

However, a different situation presents itself if we consider the rights of a ‘slave-wife’ (Ex 21:10-11). A ‘slave-wife’ is free to divorce a husband who neglects to provide adequate ‘food, clothing and sexual intimacy’. Since applied to a slave, a free wife would also have these rights and so did a husband.⁵ The Biblical principle seems to be that there is a right to initiate divorce on the grounds of the neglect of material support or physical affection, which includes sexual, physical

and emotional abuse.

Ex 21:10-11 figures in God's divorce of Israel. God had made a covenant (or contract, *berit*) with Israel at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:5), and the people had promised to 'do everything the LORD has said' (Ex 19:8). God provided food, water and clothing for Israel (eg Ex 16; 17, and Deut 8:4); God gave them 'land... flourishing cities...houses...wells...vineyards and olive groves...' (Deut 6:10-11). God loved Israel and was faithful to her, even though Israel was unfaithful in return. The Israelites continued to worship other gods (Judges 2:12) and eventually God reluctantly divorced her and sent her into exile.

We are told that God hates divorce (Mal 2:16). Divorce is the breaking of the marriage covenant, which God calls 'faithlessness'. Marriages are ended by the person who breaks the vows, not by the victim who enacts the divorce. Divorce is terrible, but remaining married can often be worse.

What did Jesus say?

The OT grounds for divorce (Ex 21:10-11 and Deut 24:1) remained the norm until about AD 70, but by the time of Jesus a 'groundless' or 'any cause' divorce was emerging. For an 'any cause' divorce, no proof was needed and hence there was no court case.⁶ Divorce was an easy process, and no wife faced public humiliation. Was it an 'any cause' divorce that Joseph had in mind for Mary (Mt 1:19)?

At this time the 'any cause' interpretation of Deut 24:1 was popular, but was still being argued over.⁷ For example, we are told the story in which some Pharisees tested Jesus (Mt 19 ESV):

'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?' (v 3).

Jesus responded, 'whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery' (v 9).

The proper grounds for divorce are 'marital unfaithfulness'. If either remarries while both are living, they commit adultery under 'any cause' divorce. Jesus did not say that adultery is the only ground for divorce.

Jesus emphasises that 'the two will become one flesh' (Mt 19:4-6). Jesus deliberately includes two, emphasising that God's marriage plan is monogamous and not

polygamous, as was common in first century Palestine. Jesus adds ‘no one should separate a couple that God has joined together’ (Mt 19:9 CEV).

Jesus did not say that divorce was never possible, but rather that it ‘was not what God had originally intended’ (Mt 19:8 NLT). Moses did not command divorce but permitted it as a concession. Jesus said that Moses allowed divorce ‘because of your hardness of heart’ (Mt 19:8 ESV). This phrase occurs in Jeremiah,⁸ where Israel is described as a wife (Jer 2:1) who repeatedly commits adultery (Jer 2:20-26), so God was forced to divorce her (Jer 3:1-8). Judah was going the same way as Israel (Jer 3:10-14) and was deliberately hard-hearted (Jer 4:3-4).

Jesus is saying that divorce should only be used where there is a stubborn refusal to stop breaking marriage vows and not as a convenient means of escaping a relationship.

Paul’s views

In spite of suggestions to the contrary, Paul did not disapprove of marriage. He was a very strict Pharisee who ‘faultlessly’ kept the law (Phil 3:5) and therefore was most likely to have been married in obedience to Gen 1:28, although he was single when he wrote 1 Corinthians.⁹

Marriage was compulsory for Jews and a legal requirement in first century Roman law, because Roman men preferred affairs rather than the responsibilities of marriage and fatherhood. However this law was rarely enforced.¹⁰ When Paul refers to ‘the present crisis’ (1Cor 7:26) and says it is better to remain unmarried (1Cor 7:29-35), we need to ask what the crisis was—perhaps his expectation of the second coming of Christ, or of impending Roman persecution,¹¹ or famine,¹² or was it simply the difficulties of being a Christian?¹³

Responding to concerns expressed in a letter he had received, Paul says it is a good thing to have sexual relations (1Cor 7:1-2) but only within marriage. Marriage provides ‘for a balanced and fulfilling sexual life in a world of sexual disorder’ (1Cor 7:2 MSG). Heterosexual, bisexual and gay and lesbian relationships, along with fornication and adultery, were common—possibly not unlike today? In his writing in 1 Cor 7:3-6 Paul echoes Ex 21:10:11, which would have been readily understandable at the time since Greek marriage contracts said something similar.¹⁴

The Pharisees strongly supported marriage, but Paul now believes ‘singleness might well be the best...as it has been for me’ (1 Cor 7:8 MSG). Why would he say that? Was Paul’s highest priority his devotion to Christ?¹⁵ Paul says being married or being single is a gift from God (1Cor 7:7).

Both Paul and Jesus condemn ‘groundless’ divorce. Roman law allowed groundless ‘divorce-by-separation’ and, having separated, one would be free to re-marry.¹⁶ Christians should not practice ‘divorce-by-separation’, because in Biblical terms they are not properly divorced (1 Cor 7:10,11). As implied by 1 Cor 7:11, some Christians had used ‘divorce-by-separation’, which means they should have attempted reconciliation.

Paul does not want believers to separate from their unbelieving partner, but says ‘if the unbeliever leaves...A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances’ (1Cor 7:15). The marriage has failed and presumably reconciliation has also failed, so Paul suggests that we let them go: ‘God has called us to live in peace’.

The Biblical principle is to do one’s best to forgive a partner who breaks her/his marriage vows, if that partner genuinely repents and takes steps to change. If s/he stubbornly refuses then, like God, one can divorce the partner for hard-heartedness.

Remarriage

We need also to ask whether the Bible implies that (1) once married, we are always married, or (2) only death can end a marriage?

Jesus said: ‘no one should separate a couple that God has joined together’ (Mt 19:6 CEV). No one should, but it does happen through the breaking of marriage vows. Jesus’s response (Mt 19:9) implies that if you divorce someone except for adultery you are, in God’s sight, still married. But this was a specific response to an interpretation of Deut 24:1.

In Romans 7, Paul compares the relationship of a believer with the Law of Moses to a woman’s relationship with her husband. In context, Rom 7:1-6 teaches that people are bound to the Law of Moses until they die, as a wife is bound to her husband until he dies. When we accept Jesus we spiritually ‘die’ to our old life, ‘to what once bound us’ (Rom 7:6), and are therefore free to be bound to another,

namely Jesus. Paul is illustrating a relationship that has nothing to do with marriage and divorce.

Consider those who are widowed (1Cor 7:39). By saying the widow 'is free to marry anyone she wishes', Paul released widows from Levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10). However, by the first century, many Jewish leaders did not enforce it. A widow is free to remarry,¹⁷ but a believer must marry a believer.

The Bible and Roman law¹⁸ both assume that divorce certificates are given to enable remarriage. Jesus and Paul taught that to remarry was right given a proper divorce but Christians are to marry Christians (1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14). Paul says that if a believer divorces a believer (1 Cor 7:10, 11) or a non-believer (1 Cor 7:12, 13) by using 'divorce-by-separation', that person needs to repent and attempt reconciliation. If this fails and the divorced partner wishes to remain divorced, then both parties are free to remarry.¹⁹

If a believer, married to a non-believer, was a victim of 'divorce-by-separation' (1 Cor 7:15) then s/he was free to remarry. The victim has been abandoned without material support or physical affection and so becomes a victim of (Ex 21:10-11). So victims of divorce, even groundless divorce, are free to remarry.

As pastors, we can listen and help to rebuild lives. Guilt needs to be faced, repentance made, and forgiveness sought. Adams²⁰ has helpfully developed a check-list of principles and questions, and I commend it to readers of *bmj*.

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Notes to text

1. Census, April 2001, Office for National Statistics, 11 October 2004.
2. Divorce certificates typically stated 'You are now free to marry any man you wish'. D. Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and remarriage in the church*. Paternoster, 2003, p16.
3. *ibid*, p 16.
4. *ibid*, p 17.
5. *ibid*, p 21.
6. 'Any cause' divorce was created by Rabbi Hillel, who lived a few decades before Jesus (see Instone-Brewer, p 37; also J. E. Adams, *Marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the Bible* (Zondervan, 1980), chap 11, for an extensive analysis.

7. Instone-Brewer, p 39.
8. *ibid*, p 44.
9. *ibid*, p 51 (also see S. Zodhiates, *May I divorce and remarry?* AMG, 1994, p 15).
10. Instone-Brewer, p 51.
11. B. Barton *et al*, *Life application New Testament Commentary*. Tyndale, 2001, p 669.
12. Instone-Brewer, p 52.
13. S. Zodhiates, p 230.
14. *ibid*, p 230.
15. *ibid*, p 15.
16. Instone-Brewer, p 54.
17. *ibid*, p 66.
18. Roman law required people to marry within 18 months of a divorce or within two years if a partner had died. (Instone-Brewer, p 83).
19. Adams, p 87.
20. *ibid*, chap 16.

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A point of view

Centres of gravity

by Fred Stainthorpe

It is difficult to write on this subject without being thought of as an Ebenezer Scrooge or a Uriah Heep (or just a crank!), but here goes.

When my wife and I served in the (then) Belgian Congo with BMS (before it became) World Mission, we had a visit from one of our primary school teachers, named Bobenga. He carried in his hands a few cards and asked me if he could borrow them. Having found the cards in a cupboard, he wanted to use them so that his little boy might learn how to read. I agreed willingly but as he left, my heart smote me, as David's might have done (1 Samuel 24:5).

Each night, we used to read to our two eldest children from a Bible storybook. They had other books besides. Every week they received a comic sent to them by a church member in Gateshead (bless you Peggy Mckerchar! Hebrews 6:10 applies particularly to you). Bobenga was pleased to receive a few cards! I had many books with me, as well as others left in England. He probably possessed only a New Testament and a hymn book.

The contrast between Bobenga's situation and mine has remained with me ever since, and has coloured my views of church life in Britain and influenced what I have tried to do.

The church in the UK

Scholars tell us much of God's leaning towards the poor and how Jesus' coming was intended to be good news for them. The church should be his agent for implementing this mission. One would expect, therefore, that we would direct most of our resources to those areas and peoples in greatest need. Would an impartial observer of the UK church scene feel that we had followed our Lord's wish and plan?

He (or she) would notice that we look after ourselves pretty well. Our churches (even the smallest of them) are warm, comfortable, well lit and supplied with sound systems, whether they need them or not. A plethora of literature on all subjects pours out from our publishing houses. One can find conferences, retreats, seminars, holidays (sometimes very expensive!) and pilgrimages to suit all tastes and theological preferences. At what point do all these become Christian entertainment? Para-church organisations abound, while church building renovations soak up many thousands, even millions, of pounds.

The prophets

What would the prophet Amos make of it all? He excoriated those who lived at ease in Zion while ignoring, willingly or otherwise, the miseries of the rest of God's people.

Isaiah, Micah and Ezekiel echo his words and forecast doom on the religious establishment. John the Baptist uttered challenging words to his hearers, 'He who has two shirts, let him give to those who have none'. The church at Laodicea is rebuked for saying 'I am rich and well off; I have everything I need', and is urged to repent.

It is not difficult to find similar disparities today.

For example, the African Pastors' Fellowship recounts regularly the plight of ministers who often do not even possess a Bible. Masses of people in India have never even heard the name of Jesus. In China, millions of people are reportedly turning to Christ but have no hope of ever obtaining Scriptures. Bible Societies furnish us with many similar stories. While Wycliffe Translators pursue their 2025 programme ('every language group to have their own scriptures by 2025'), many must rely on the uncertain hope of hearing the gospel in other ways. In the meantime, the Christian west continues to churn out lavishly illustrated expensive Bibles. Many of us own more (and often far more) than one copy.

Physically, the contrast remains. Our lives in the UK are relatively comfortable and persecution-free, although recent stories indicate that this may not be the case much longer. Overseas, things are different. The plight of Christians in Orissa remains. Each issue of *Evangelicals Now* contains many examples of the overt and covert persecution of Christians in many parts of the Middle East and Asia, as

does the *bt*. Iraqi believers and others have had to flee their country of birth. Even expatriate missionaries sometimes live in difficult conditions. One missionary nurse I heard of in Albania has to rely on candles to light her home at night!

Some might dismiss these observations and draw our attention to what others are already doing. What about the work of many missionary societies, such as Sat-7, MAF, FEBA, Bible agencies and development groups?' Does this not indicate our involvement? Indeed, it does and we should give God thanks for them. Nevertheless, for all their work, the imbalance remains.

Others might say, 'Why should we not enjoy what God has given us here?' We should indeed rejoice in his bounty but we are always in danger of being seduced by the love of ease. In the early days of the mission in India, William Carey preferred that future recruits be posted not to Bengal but to the surrounding countries. Such pioneering work had the advantages of removing new recruits from the fatal attractions of European society in Calcutta which, he complained, had in a number of cases encouraged a spirit of self-indulgence to the detriment of missionary zeal (see *History of the BMS*, Brian Stanley, p 56).

A suggestion

Some time ago, I wrote to the editor of the *bt*, suggesting that we should scrap all large-scale Christian gatherings in the UK and devote the money thus saved to the 'regions furthest beyond'. The suggestion was impracticable, of course, but other Christians have taken this course with staggering results. When in 1928, Oswald Smith, the well known preacher and missionary statesman, began his People's Church in Toronto, he cleared its debt not by making appeals but by preaching world mission to his congregation. The church then decided that from that time on it would raise more money for overseas work than it did for its domestic consumption.

This policy sounds like a symptom of insanity and a sure recipe for disaster. Yet from that day to this, the church has consistently kept to its promise, raising millions of dollars for overseas work. In the process, far from impoverishing itself, it has grown to become one of the most influential churches in the whole of Canada and has sent out hundreds of missionaries. I know of no church in the UK that remotely comes up to this level of life.

It was Smith who spearheaded this programme. The church's chief aim, he used to say, is missions. 'Why should anyone hear the gospel twice before everyone has heard it once?', he asked. This question is unanswerable. Moreover, he said that any church that followed this pattern would prosper. 'The beam that shines furthest shines brightest near home'. Central to his thesis was the work of the local minister. He or she should be the agent, teacher of, and chief inspirer of world mission. It was too important to be left to the missionary secretary or committee, essential though their work was.

On a more general level, Archbishop George Carey, in his memoir, *Know the truth*, quoted similar words from William Temple, spoken in the 1940s. 'It is in our own self-interest to do so (sharing our resources with the under-privileged of the world), because no one is ever truly rich when another human being lacks clothing, food and love'. The writer of Proverbs 11:24 preceded him: 'Some people spend their money freely and yet grow richer. Others are cautious and yet grow poorer'.

Is this not at least a large part of, if not the whole reason, why our churches are at best not prospering? For all the needs at home, do we not need a revolution such as H. H. Rowdon once expressed in the book *Turning the church inside out*? We ought to shift the centre of gravity of our work. This may mean a simpler lifestyle for many of us and a change of direction in our leadership. Long ago, C.B.

Jewson, the treasurer of the BMS, said, 'A Baptist should be known as someone who is less well off than his/her neighbour'. If the churches at large could rise to this challenge, it would make a great difference to Bobenga with his few cards, the missionary nurse with her candles and many others. It would also do us no end of good.

We are making some progress in this direction. BMS Action Teams and church teams on special projects have alerted many churches to the tremendous needs and challenges abroad. People are much more able to visit their families on 'the mission field' than they used to be. Recently, groups of pastors have spent time abroad learning and ministering. Yet there is still much ground to be occupied. The difficulties and persecution of many of our fellow believers abroad bears no comparison to the ease of our lives here. It is time to up our response. Local ministers should lead the way.

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Reviews

edited by John Houseago

Worship and liturgy

in context

D. B. Forrester & D. Gay (eds)

SCM, £25

ISBN978-0-334-04168-9

Reviewer: Jeannie Kendall

Beginning with Jesus' conversation at the well with the Samaritan woman, this interesting if demanding book recognises that worship needs more than special places. As a 'foretaste of heaven' (how often does our worship feel like that?!) worship expresses and creates a community and must be seen in context: be that historical, ecumenical, social and political, or cultural.

The context for this particular book is Scotland, and its editors are Scottish theologians. It is a book of essays, and the topics range widely. To give an entirely random taster, they include *Worship in Scottish literature from Robert Burns to James Robertson, Baptistal theology and practice in the*

Church of Scotland, Patterns of worship in Reformation Scotland, and (perhaps inevitably), *The worship of the Iona Community and its global impact*. It is claimed that this Scottish emphasis is to give the book its own context and focus, which indeed it does, but for this reader at least it made it a little more difficult to follow, having no background in understanding Scottish church history.

Certainly the book is fairly heavily historical in its style. Towards the end (p 292) Doug Day points out that the contributors are international figures and that the hope is that the book would find a place in wider conversations. This may well be the case, for those able to link the development of worship in this particular context to wider themes in global worship.

This is undoubtedly a masterly work, but I was not entirely sure which target readership was intended. As an academic study it is excellent, but for a minister thinking about how worship might be shaped by and for his/her church's own context, the undoubted food for thought (such as the appropriate domination in early Christianity of the spoken word: is this still the case in our age?) might be hard to find and require a step on from the book's actual content.

In the conclusion it moves on from the historical, looking at charismatic renewal (on which, Gay notes, there has been little academic reflection), and emerging church. At this point I was more engaged, because the material felt more familiar. That said, for the academic or historically astute reader, this will without doubt be a stimulating read.

Can words express our wonder? Preaching in the church today

R. Brown
Canterbury Press, 2009
ISBN 978-1-85311-969-9
Reviewer: Kath Lawson

Rosalind Brown is a residentiary canon at Durham Cathedral. The book arises out of her own extensive experience as a preacher and trainer of preachers, and may well reflect the course material she uses.

Although written in a very readable style, the book is not in fact an easy read. It is densely packed with information, with extensive bibliography at the end of each chapter from a wide variety of sources. It is not primarily,

on her own admission, a book on how to preach, but does include material on sermon preparation and delivery in the final chapters, as well as an example of a complete sermon, tailored for a specific congregation.

The book explores the history and models of Christian preaching, from its roots in classical rhetoric through the early years of Christianity, the Reformation, the Restoration, to the 19th and 20th centuries. Brown then discusses the effect on preaching of developments in electronic communication, biblical scholarship and the Second Vatican Council.

Brown sets preaching firmly in the context of worship and liturgy and discusses how one might preach on the same scriptures in different liturgical contexts. She believes strongly that sermon preparation is as much about personal preparation as preparation of the sermon itself. Emerging from an encounter with God, preaching is an attempt to communicate something of that wonder to our congregations. Her description of how one might engage with bible passages in sermon preparation challenges the commonly held view that personal devotions should be separate from sermon preparation.

I enjoyed reading the book. It challenged me in how I do my sermon

preparation and gave me new ideas and perspectives. It also gave me some insight into how one might reflect on the readings before actually writing the sermon. Brown believes that preaching should be pastoral, and rooted in the experience and topics of the day. Given that she advocates rigorous preparation beginning at least three weeks before the sermon is to be preached, I found myself wondering how a busy pastor would ever manage to do any pastoral work apart from sermon preparation. Perhaps her suggestions are an ideal to be aspired to, rather than a realistic goal to be achieved.

Re-shaping rural ministry

J. Bell, J. Hopkinson &

T. Willmott (eds)

Canterbury Press, £14.99

ISBN: 978-1-85311-953-8

Reviewer: Bob Little

‘Two bishops and the Church of England’s National Rural Officer decide to edit a book...’ may sound like the beginning of a joke, but the issues they raise in *Re-shaping rural ministry* are far from whimsical.

Traditionally, rural churches played a

major role in ensuring continuity in local communities, yet today they face radical social, economic and community change. *Re-shaping rural ministry* explores the responses of several churches to decades of challenge and change. In particular, it explores the meaning of mission, evangelism, vocation and ministry in a modern, rural context.

The book is a product of the Arthur Rank Centre, a resource and training centre for rural churches of all denominations. Focused on the needs of those—lay and ordained—who already help to run rural churches, those preparing for ministry in such a context and for those who provide pre- and post-ordination training, the book includes sections on *Pastoral skills for rural ministry*, *Leadership models for rural contexts*, *Multi-church ministry*, *Developing lay ministry and leadership*, *The distinctive values of rural churches*, *Vocational pathways for rural ministry*, *Should mission be explicit or implicit?* and *Appropriate continuing ministerial education for rural contexts*.

Inviting readers to follow Jesus’ frequent exhortation to ‘see, consider, watch and look’ at what was happening around them, observing the features of their context and reflecting on what they—and God—were about, the book

begins by examining the contemporary rural life under the headings of 'social', 'economic' and 'environment'. It goes on to outline the sharing, showing and telling of the overflowing, reconciling sacrificial love of God' in this context.

Although understandably—perhaps inevitably—written from an Anglican perspective, this book offers useful insights into mission-related issues within rural communities which will be relevant for members of any denomination.

It includes some thought-provoking practical advice for success in 'doing mission' in rural communities. Thankfully, this goes beyond the not-too-serious assertion, on p 62, that the requirements for conducting multiple services in scattered communities are: a thermal vest, a good bladder, a reliable car, a family that doesn't expect Sunday lunch, and at least one churchwarden on every site to set up and clear away afterwards!

***Resourcing mission:
practical theology for
changing churches***

H. Cameron

SCM Press 2010, £16.99

ISBN 978 0 334 04146 7

Reviewer: John Matthews

This book is based on two arguments.

The first is that churches can think about change theologically by using a method called 'the pastoral cycle'. This consists of four stages, each of which builds on the previous one. These stages are (i) Experience—what is happening? (ii) Exploration—why is it happening? (iii) Reflection—how do we evaluate our knowledge in dialogue with the Bible and Christian tradition? (iv) Planning—how will we respond? This planned response generates new experience and so the cycle moves on.

The second argument is that the local church needs to 'read' the cultural signs it sends out to ensure that they are consistent with the message it wants to convey. Cameron suggests that most local churches belong to one of five cultural forms. Gathered congregations are effectively voluntary associations.

The first two chapters expound these arguments. The remaining seven deal with the themes of time, money, buildings, risk and regulation, decision-making, leadership and partnership. They each begin with a made-up case

study and then use the pastoral cycle to explore the particular theme, relating it to churches of each of the five cultural forms. Each chapter concludes with a list for further reading. There is also a comprehensive bibliography, and indices of subjects and biblical references.

The book carries a commendation by BUGB Mission Advisor, Kathryn Morgan, and with good reason. It is clearly written and contains much useful material that will stimulate churches that are willing to reflect on mission. It also has some thought-provoking sentences: 'The reality of church decision-making is that the person who keeps asking why is often regarded as a nuisance or obstructive', and 'We live in a society that is sceptical about the need to immerse yourself in tradition over many years – it wants to cut to the edited highlights and the key tips for success'.

My biggest quibble is the price; £16.99 for 180 average-size pages is very expensive. Are publishers raising prices because Amazon is demanding such huge discounts in order to sell at heavily discounted prices (with the consequent detrimental effect on Christian bookshops) or is there some other reason?

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