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**the baptist ministers'
journal**

April 2012 volume 314

Desert island books

Pat Took

Special issue on mission

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From the editor

I have just had an interesting talk with my friend—an academic philosopher, who is close to being, if not quite, an atheist—about hearing the call of God. She is interested in what she terms my 'framework' for life, but asks very sharp and pertinent questions—as one might expect. I reflected afterwards that although one may be very careful in one's use of words, the hearer's *perception* is all—even for a careful and rational philosopher! She thinks I mean that God has already worked out my life for me and I just need to feel comfortable about it. I mean something quite different: I understand hearing God's call as saying an essential 'yes' to discipleship, but then working out what it means to live faithfully in the midst of life. After a while, we had a meeting of minds (I think!).

Is that a possible way to think about mission? For Christians and others to find a 'meeting of minds' in which a conversation can take place? I think this is the basic idea behind the BU's recent Crossing Places initiative, which has included some great ideas.

In this issue of *bmj* we have focused on the general theme of mission, and I hope that you will be informed, encouraged, and maybe even excited by the stories told. I would also be interested to hear about your own mission if it brings something new that others might be able to use in their places of ministry.

I am also delighted that we can launch our new occasional column, *Desert island books*, in this issue. It doesn't need a lot of explanation (unless you live in a cave where you cannot receive BBC Radio 4). Pat Took starts us off with the first offering, and it is a privilege to read it. We look forward to others in future issues (maybe not every issue).

As ever, do feel free to get in touch if you'd like to write for *bmj* or to offer a comment on, or response to, something you have read in it. I can let you have information about length, style and format. SN

Pat Took's

Desert island books



What a delightful invitation! To choose, and to write about, the three books I would like to have with me if I were to be unfortunate enough to be cast away on a desert island.

I ought perhaps to start by owning up to not being much of a reader. My parents used to forbid me comics or books with pictures, realising that given a chance I'd avoid the text (but, like Alice, I did wonder what use a book was without pictures or conversation).

So, choosing three books is both harder and easier for me than three pieces of music—which would have filled my mind with a thousand possibilities. Nevertheless, the choice of three books has given me plenty to think about. After all, on a desert island there would presumably be plenty of time and no interruptions—though I suspect I might have a go at a bit of gardening, fishing, shed building, signal sending *etc*—everything other than intellectual pursuits. Still, there would come a moment when that too became a necessity.

So what to take?

I could, of course, choose books that have meant a lot to me in the past, and there would be good sense in that—I'd have the pleasure of good things revisited, and could be sure that I wouldn't be disappointed. But if I were marooned on a desert island (in the expectation, of course, of eventual rescue) I think I would want to spend the time creatively, which really means engaging with something new.

My first two choices are both, in different ways, new to me.

In the first place I think I would take a copy of the 14th century Italian poem, the *Divine comedy*, by Dante Alighieri. This masterpiece has been my lifelong companion, by virtue of being the lifelong companion of my lifelong companion! My husband John has spent the whole of his working life studying this poem, reflecting on it,

teaching it and writing about it—it has been the subject of countless conversations and I doubt that a single day of my life has gone past in which it has not figured in one way or another. So it is about time that I paid it serious attention.

For that purpose I would need to have an edition with the Italian text, an English translation, and notes. It is full of mythical, classical, astrological and historical references which fill me with a sense of ignorance, but for all its difficulty, my reading so far convinces me that this is a mountain that must be climbed. Quite apart from the beauty of the language and the vividness of the imagery, it deals with the ultimate question.

It is the tale of the poet who, in the midst of his life, is confronted with the reality of who he is, the reality of his destiny. Through the intercessions of the beloved Beatrice he is transported to hell, in company with Virgil, and descends through the infernal regions. There he meets a remarkable collection of individuals (including a good few Popes) who are suffering the effects of their continuing choices against God and their neighbours. The two travellers go down and down until they reach the frozen depths where all life, light and energy are extinguished.

Eventually they emerge on the shores of Mount Purgatory in the fresh dawn of a new day, and begin to climb painfully up from one terrace to another, encouraged by the spirits they meet along the way, who are pushing on in all haste towards their goal in the presence of God. On the way the poet is confronted with what it is in himself that must die, in what ways he must be liberated and re-ordered, if he also is to come ultimately to that blessedness.

This journey progresses out of the alienation and recrimination of hell, where all souls isolate themselves in self-justification and self-obsession, into light and love—a journey through self-knowledge and contrition into freedom and companionship and mutual delight. From beginning to end the pilgrimage is prompted and sustained, urged on by the love and grace of God as he draws the soul to himself.

Given the stipulation that one of my books must be a theological one, I think this work must qualify, if we are to understand theology not just as analytical and propositional discourse but as all discourse that reflects on the nature of God.

To make sure I have fulfilled my brief, I have chosen another theological work, and another one which will be new to me. A risk of course—perhaps I will be disappointed—but at least it will keep me occupied for quite a time until someone

sees my SOS spelled out in conch shells on the beach. The book in question is Walter Brueggemann's two-volume commentary on Isaiah. I don't yet have a copy of this, so I shall have the pleasure of something completely fresh. And from Brueggemann I shall expect rather more than commentary

I'm not, in general, a great fan of commentaries—maybe because when I started to preach I did not have access to any, and have never had the money, or the kind auntie, to provide me with a comprehensive library of them. Nevertheless I have gathered some around me over the years, and have found them very useful tools for preparing sermons.

I have noticed that the unwise use of commentaries can result in an excessive concentration on the details of scripture at the cost of the broad lines of its message. Commentaries are often unaware of the fascinating and unexpected counterpoints that the Bible constantly offers. Even more significantly, all our studious efforts in perusing the commentaries can have the effect of deafening us to the dynamic of scripture—we can forget simply to listen to the text, which may have something entirely new to say.

Sometimes you come across a commentary that is truly revolutionary, throwing a completely new light on the Bible and reconfiguring our understanding of the faith. These commentaries are best read straight through, rather than dipped into. I still remember the thrill of reading Barth on Romans. I'm hoping that this commentary on Isaiah will be similarly mind-opening. It must surely be time well spent if it opens up again this constantly thrilling and beautiful book.

So what about book number three? Perhaps I should now turn to one of those beloved books (all short!) which have exploded in my mind at various times in my life, in such a way that my understanding has been profoundly and permanently changed.

Perhaps *The cloud of unknowing*, or Kierkegaard's *Sickness unto death*; Tillich's *The courage to be*, Bonhoeffer's *Letters and*

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of God

papers, or Buber's I and thou. All wonderful—perhaps a locked chest could be cast up on the shore, which when opened is found to contain them all.

But in the end it is a wonderfully solemn and reflective spiritual classic inherited from my father in a battered volume (with illustrations), that I have chosen—Jerome K. Jerome's *Three men in a boat—not to mention a dog*. Given the challenges of desert island life—the problems of opening tins of pineapple without a tin-opener, the difficulties of erecting a shelter—it seems like a good choice.

And in fact I found on browsing it again that the three men had also seen the similarity.

George said why could not we be always like this—away from the world with its sins and temptation, leading sober, peaceful lives and doing good. I said it was the sort of thing I had often longed for myself; and we discussed the possibility of our going away, we four, to some handy, well-fitted desert island, and living there in the woods.

So there is always a chance that I will encounter Harris one day, coming back from an early morning swim.

So there are my three books—and we did get some pictures and some conversation. But what about a luxury? My first thought was an inexhaustible supply of dark chocolate (Fair Trade, of course). But in the end I think I would ask for a radio permanently tuned to Radio 3. That way I get my eight records as well—and a lot more besides. And perhaps I could pick up some news of who out there might be in the vicinity of my desert island. Solitude is all very well—I often crave it, and go looking for it—but on a winter's evening it's a poor substitute for a companionable supper with someone you love, a hot bath, and a warm bed.

Pat Took has recently retired as Team Leader of the LBA and is currently BU President.

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It shouldn't happen to the Rev

by David Chawner

It was a bitter February night with an icy wind blowing straight across the pitch. The teams were lined up, waiting for the referee's whistle to start the game. At that moment one of the coaches turned to the chaplain and said, 'When did the church finally reject reincarnation? Was it at the Council of Nicaea?'

As all chaplains are aware, the stimulating and simultaneously daunting reality is that you never know what to expect next—though I'm sure the Church Fathers would have been just as surprised to know their work was the subject of discussion at a rugby match nearly 2000 years later.

Once the chaplain walks through the door of the training ground or the stadium, God is on the agenda. Whatever an individual's view of God might be, the chaplain is seen as his representative. There's no hiding place. Such recognition often takes the form of light hearted banter—in itself a sign of acceptance within the group. I was greeted one day with the welcome, 'Hi Dave. How's God doing?'. Never having been one for quick witted repartee, I was rather stumped at first. Call it divine inspiration if you will, I managed to respond with: 'He's doing OK, Jonny. And the last time I spoke to him he was asking for you'.

There are also more serious moments. Where do you turn when you're bereaved, when facing serious illness, when relationships are difficult, or when your whole career seems to be falling apart through injury? Surely God cares, and often the way to reach out for that care is through the chaplain. It has always interested me how often these conversations start with the words, 'I'm not religious, but...'. Again, this is a clear recognition of the chaplain as a representative of God.

A safe place

Rugby is a tough competitive sport in which vulnerability may be mercilessly exploited. In these circumstances the chaplain represents a safe and confidential oasis in which to unburden oneself. There are also people who are on a genuine spiritual quest. Rugby players do have souls, though the broken noses and cauliflower ears may cause them to appear more like gargoyles than saints.

When the film *The Passion* first came out, it seemed that most folk in the club went to see it. This led to questions such as, ‘Did it really happen like that?’, opening up conversations on Jesus’s life and ministry. Similarly the writings of Stephen Hawking were read by many and led to discussions about the reality of God. It is safe to talk about such things to the chaplain.

Over my 10-year involvement with the sport there has been a clear increase in the number of committed Christians within the game. Those who have followed rugby union will be aware of the strong Christian influence of the Pacific Islanders. It was through such a route that Jason Robinson came to faith, but latterly we have seen home-grown players openly confessing their faith, and quite a few young lads entering the professional game who already have a living faith.

Living out that faith in the macho environment of a rugby club is not always easy. To help the players, small fellowship/study groups have started within some clubs, often led by the chaplain. We had one such group in West London for professional and semi-professional players from various clubs. It was greatly encouraging to see individuals growing in their faith and becoming more open about it. The emphasis within the group was on studying scripture together and encouraging each other in Christian witness in the club environment. Issues such as dealing with non-selection, competition for places in the team, facing injury and dealing with contract negotiations were all of interest.

Integrity

Generally speaking, within rugby union there is an atmosphere of respect for the person, including respect for one’s beliefs, provided they are lived out with integrity. Although this brings an acceptance of faith, it also keeps individuals on their mettle—the chaplain as much as anyone else. One player I know was encouraged in his own search for faith through observing the conduct of one of the Christian players in the squad who, even though he had been an international, was always the one tidying up the dressing room, rarely a neat environment, when everyone else had gone home.

Studying and praying together threw up some interesting scenarios, especially when the guys found themselves opposing each other on the pitch. One player remarked that as he saw the other group member coming on as a substitute he had a sense of wanting him to do well—though not to win, of course—and a real concern that he should not get injured. This was a totally new experience for him.

Rugby is a dangerous sport with a one in eight chance of any player starting a game getting an injury which could mean at least 3-4 weeks in rehab. Not only is this a concern

for those on the pitch, it is also an issue for parents, wives and families, and the chaplain has a supporting role to play. In one instance a pre-match conversation with one mother concerning her fears was followed by her son breaking his leg five minutes into the game.

It is not just worries about injury that families face. There are supporters who will verbally abuse players, and some infamous venues where it is almost expected. It may be ‘all part of the game’, but to hear your son being ‘got at’ is not a very pleasant way of spending an afternoon. The friendly face of the chaplain can help. I have been intrigued to find that many players’ families have a Christian background and quite a few are active in their faith. Invariably they value the pastoral and spiritual support the chaplain provides within the club.

Support

Equally in rugby union there is quite a strong Christian element among the fans. They can be a great support for the chaplain, and are a reminder that as supporters identify with the club, they also see the chaplain as ‘theirs’, bringing an added responsibility. A couple of keen supporters linked to one of the club’s main sponsors asked to have their wedding on a match day at the ground. The club agreed and though it meant a civil ceremony, offered my services to give a blessing. From the club’s perspective it was an extra service they could provide. From the ministry angle it was an opportunity to build a relationship through marriage preparation and an open door to minister in the name of Christ.

At London Wasps, most home games took place on a Sunday. The club realised that for some, both workers and supporters, the timings meant that people were unable to attend church. So for the past three years we held pre-match services. It was nothing grand, just 20 minutes of prayer, scripture, music and reflection. It was advertised in the match day announcements as a ‘Time of Reflection’. There was never a huge attendance—maybe three or four people on average—but it was a privilege to have Sunday worship as part of a match day and to be doing that within the stadium, praying for all involved; though not for victory.

Match days always demonstrate how much more there is to a professional sports’ club than the players on the pitch. The chaplain is there for everyone in the club, from the CEO to the stewards. For the past few years I have been invited to take a more active role with the stewards on match days, including praying for them at the pre-match briefings at the first and last home games of the season. Getting to know them, learning about their work and families, and even having the opportunity to pray with some has been a great honour. It has also been an encouragement to receive appreciative comments for this ministry from individuals of all ages and different faiths.

Time at the training ground can be spent with admin and coaching staff as well as players. They are all integral to the club, but are often the first to feel the pinch when things go

wrong. If the team is playing poorly, then it's the coaches' fault. If the club is struggling economically (and most rugby union clubs are), then it's the backroom staff who take the financial hit and often face redundancy—also true when poor on-pitch performance brings relegation. In addition, they face all the normal pressures of life, and many will seek out the chaplain for support. I recently had contact with a former staff member, who said that she had just been telling someone how she wouldn't have survived at the club without the chaplain.

This point brings us back to the coaches. They don't all have a detailed interest in the deliberations of the Council of Nicaea, but they are just as vulnerable to life's pressures as anyone else. Most can see the potential benefit of chaplaincy and will occasionally refer players to the chaplain. To have the head coach on board and allowing the chaplain time in team meetings is of great value, indicating to all that the role is an integral to the functioning of the club. In my 10 years at London Wasps I was blessed to have very supportive head coaches.

Most of the above will be familiar to anyone engaged in workplace chaplaincy. The main difference is working in a tight knit club and a relatively small professional sport where friendships stretch across boundaries of club and nation. Also it requires a long term commitment as professional sport is suspicious of 'hangers on', mostly there for what they can get out of it. It takes time to establish that you are simply there to serve after the manner of Jesus, who said, 'I am among you as one who serves'.

Neither is it as glamorous as it may seem from such a brief summary. Most of the time is spent in mundane visits to training grounds or stadia and in general conversation with individuals about everyday life—and of course about rugby. Sometimes everyone is so busy that they have no time to talk, and the chaplain feels a bit of a lemon. But it's being there and building relationship, so that when someone has a need they are confident to approach you, usually with the words, 'Have you got a minute, Rev?'. Those moments suddenly make you feel worthwhile, even though the end result may disappoint. One day a player asked to talk to me. We met up later and as he approached he rolled up his shirt sleeve to reveal a tattoo, 'Phil 4:13'—a favourite verse of many athletes: 'I can do all things through him who gives me strength'. He then asked whether I could suggest a verse to be tattooed on the other arm. Not exactly what I expected, but all part of serving Christ as a rugby union chaplain.

David Chawner was chaplain for 10 seasons at London Wasps, and from 2007 he worked for SCORE (now Sport Chaplaincy UK). He was recently involved in managing the chaplaincy programme at the Rugby World Cup in New Zealand. David can be contacted on david.chawner@sportschaplaincy.org.uk; see also the website, www.sportschaplaincy.org.uk.

Theology and the Street Pastors

by Susan Stevenson

The Street Pastors initiative is a rapidly growing missional movement currently operating in around 250 locations across the UK. There are many new initiatives based on partnerships between the church and secular agencies—in this case, church, police and local authority—but on what basis do we do this? This article explores a possible theology of partnership—surveying some biblical resources before turning to the experience of the church.

Chris Wright's *magnum opus*¹ on the mission of God demonstrates that a biblical understanding of mission begins in Genesis 1. Arguably a starting point for a theology of partnership in mission begins in the same place. The responsibility for mission is sometimes assumed to have been given to the church. However, the opening chapters of the Bible reveal that the first mission task, to care for the earth and develop its potential, was entrusted by God to all humankind. From the beginning, creation is predicated on trusting, risky partnership in a deeply interrelated world.

Genesis 3-11 tells of human sinfulness, and the destruction and fragmentation let loose. The story of redemption gains momentum in Genesis 12 as Abram is called to an exclusive allegiance to Yahweh. The nature of that call introduces the note of tension into the building of a theology of partnership. Abram and his descendants are called to an exclusive allegiance to Yahweh for the sake of all people. Like the guy ropes that hold a tent in shape, it is living the tension between 'exclusive allegiance' and 'that all will be blessed' that God is revealed and Israel true to itself.

All in it together...

As we jump forward in the story, to Isaiah 65, we see that as well as a common identity, in God's purposes human beings have a common future. We look to the time when the whole created order will be transformed; when, to use Fung's summary of Isaiah's vision, 'children do not die; old people live in dignity; those who build houses live in them; and those who plant vineyards eat their fruit'.²

Fung argues that this vision gives the church an agenda around which it can partner with others. Moreover, he goes on to identify around this agenda a strategy for evangelism. Partnership has a role within evangelism. The problem the church experiences here is the tension of having a double agenda. We want to partner with others in working towards fulfilling the Isaiah agenda, and also to call those others to discipleship to Christ. Yet this is the very tension we have identified as intrinsic to being God's people and part of God's revealing himself to the world. Fung further argues that a vulnerable honesty about the tension we experience could contribute to the effectiveness of our evangelism.

The place of partnership in holding God's people in their true identity is echoed again in Jeremiah 29. Here God's people discover that it is in seeking the good in their place of exile that they regain confidence in God, are rescued from withdrawing into sectarianism and irrelevance, and rediscover their true selves.

Releasing boundaries

Moving into the New Testament, the metaphor of salt in Matthew 5 speaks both of distinctiveness and the loss of self-referencing identity. Salt is effective in seasoning only as it loses its own distinctiveness by enhancing something else. This suggests that the church needs both to maintain its distinctiveness, by attending to its life in God, and also to be involved in the world in ways which are not self-concerned. At times the church may risk losing its own identity. However, this is a risk of faith, similar to that through which God revealed himself to the centurion at the Cross, who recognised the true identity of Jesus as only as he died.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is often used to explain our calling to do mercy, without realising just how explosive a story this is for us as church. The 'outsider' here is not only the one who teaches God's people true obedience, but the one who reveals the mercy of God. Shockingly again, Jesus uses the example of this 'outsider' to help explain his role and the power of the love he will demonstrate on the cross to redeem all people. Boundaries are broken as Jesus opens up the possibility of a life judged not by boundaries but by the generous mercy of God.

The ambiguity involved in relating to authorities is alluded to and embraced by Paul in Romans 13:1-7. Those who confess Jesus, not Caesar, as Lord are never entirely at ease in their relationship with secular authorities. Here again is inbuilt tension. However, as no-one rules but by God's sanction, in the inevitable ambivalence of working with the state, the church can be confident in the sovereignty of God.

The inevitability of messiness as we participate in God's mission is recognised in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. Here the love of God compels Christ to cross boundaries in shocking ways, laying down ritual cleanness, reputation and ultimately his life. Reconciliation happens as God in Christ stands in the place of sin and becomes contaminated, infected, apparently implicated in sin. Here is the God who enters into the ambiguity of life, who 'embraces our humanity with all its vulnerability, pain and confusion, including our evil'.³

While these texts do not prove the validity of partnership with secular organisations, they do suggest that working in partnership is coherent with a biblical understanding of God and the mission into which he calls the church. We now turn briefly to the wider experience of that church.

The literature available confirms what many suspect: that the church seems to reflect and often exacerbate society's fragmentation. Les Isaac, CEO of Ascension Trust, in a recorded interview,⁴ comments on the 'mistrust and fragmentation' which exists 'in the church and across society', and which seems to 'spill out' in 'chaos and violence' across the community.

Words like 'chaos' and 'mistrust' echo the early chapters of Genesis, where mistrust of God leads to disobedience and the release of dark forces of chaos back into creation. There is a powerful dynamic here, involving both the world and the church. In this world partnership is never going to be easy and always liable to misunderstanding, breakdown and corruption.

What, then, in the church's experience and reflection might help us negotiate this risky terrain?

Centred and bounded sets

The metaphor of the church as salt, encouraging a God-centred discipleship that is forgetful of self, is consistent with Hiebert's description of a centred set.⁵ A centred set is created not by drawing boundaries, but by defining the centre and relationships to it.

When the church works in partnership, the centre is a project discerned to be consistent with God's Kingdom. Such a centre gives a common focus, while allowing clear identities for all the partners. Hiebert also asserts that this allows appropriate boundaries to emerge. The church may be confident that in focusing on such a centre, questions of its witness will resolve. It is a risk, but a risk of faith.

In a fallen and ambiguous world, however, there are real risks involved in any partnership. When does incarnational identification with a community become

syncretism? How far can we cooperate for a good end without losing critical distance? What is the relationship between pragmatism and the prophetic?

Renier Koegelenberg,⁶ in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, acknowledges all the dangers, yet argues that it is imperative for the church to partner with the government, for the sake of the poor. Ignatius Swart,⁷ on the other hand, fears an increasing preoccupation with pragmatism at the expense of 'rigorous prophetic-critical reflection', which is 'the authentic task of the churches in social development'.

This debate is both inevitable and healthy. There is an in-built, proper tension when the church partners with secular authority. However, it is pertinent to ask whether partnership makes criticism easier or more difficult to offer.

There is another important dynamic hinted at in these arguments. In living close to the poor, the church identifies with the poor. When the church lives close to the powerful, it runs the risk of coming to identify with the status quo.

To the complex enterprise of partnership, Anne Reissner⁸ brings the image of dance. She identifies five steps in the dance of partnership:

Indwelling. In risky mutuality, where power is equally shared, partners are invited to 'indwell' one another's world. This potentially changes both partners and enables the emergence of something new for both. Newness is attractive, even hinting at the new creation God promises, but there is risk. What may be lost?

Indirection. The willingness to advance obliquely.

Inquisitiveness. The willingness to live with questions we cannot immediately resolve.

Iconoclasm. The risky shattering of old certainties. Reissner refers to the experience of Peter in Joppa (Acts 10).

Imagination. Inviting the church to imagine the world God wants, she asks it to gather the world, through partnership, into the celebration dance of God's new creation.

In a discussion of partnership, power is an ever recurring theme. Although a complex issue, which looks different depending on where we stand, the question of the location, nature and use of power is crucial. It could be argued that Street Pastors, who have no enforceable power, evidence the power of the apparent powerlessness and self-giving love we see in Christ.

There are real risks in working in partnership. In partnering with power the ambiguity is real, serious and deep. Some fear a return to Constantinianism, the 'partnership'

between church and state which for many marks the beginning of the church's decline. Having got it so wrong there, people fear, the church dare not risk it again.

Ultimately anxiety about getting it wrong is part of the pain of living hopefully in a world of ambiguity. It hurts to hope, but to hope we are called. It hurts to get it wrong, but in an ambiguous world to get involved always risks getting it wrong. Yet the greatest betrayal is not to get involved. To live, to follow, is to risk, trusting in the grace of God and the ultimate victory of God's love in Christ.

People talk of trying to keep up with the movement that is flowing through churches and society at the moment as being like white water rafting. In these exciting and dangerous times, my sense is that finding some theological ground under our feet in this area of partnership in mission is vital. This is a tentative beginning...

Susan Stevenson is a Baptist minister, previously working for 22 years in a church in south London, and now based in Cardiff. This article is based on a paper offered at the Hearts and Minds Conference in Oxford in August 2011. A fuller version is available from revsas@hotmail.com.

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From minister to freedom fighter

by Malcolm Egnor

From the age of four, 'Manjula' accompanied her mother at 5 o'clock every morning to the matchstick factory in Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu, India. Going without sleep, and abandoning any pretence of safety, Manjula and her mother worked in hazardous conditions for just a few pence a day. Every month they saw dozens of their 'colleagues' suffer chemical burns and terrible injuries from explosions. They also lived in fear of being beaten and abused if they did not meet their production quotas.

Today, Manjula is 12 years old, and her younger sister, 'Kavitha', has also taken up the matchstick trade. Her parents live in a never-ending cycle of debt. Manjula and Kavitha are the collateral with which those debts will be repaid. With scars on their frail, undernourished bodies to tell the tale, these girls have been denied a childhood and a life of freedom. What hope do they have for a better tomorrow?

Manjula is one of an estimated 15 million children in bonded labour in India today. Like Manjula, up to nine out of every ten are Dalits. They can be found in brick kilns, in silk factories, working in the fields and in many other industries. They work in often dangerous conditions for long hours and are subject to physical and sexual abuse, illness and injury. Many will be working for the rest of their lives to clear the family debt. Some will even have been sold to the landowner or factory boss.

'Premila' lived in a small village in rural Bihar, India. Her parents lived in extreme poverty. Desperate to escape their plight, they signed Premila over to a nightmare on her 18th birthday. For just £10 (800 rupees), she was sold to a man living in faraway Punjab state. He claimed there were no 'good women' in his

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village and therefore he was forced to buy a wife. 'Wife' is a loose term. 'Sexual slave' would be more accurate.

For almost two years, Premila was used as a concubine. There was no marriage or hope of marital love. Her body was used and abused at the will of this man, her 'husband', and of any of his male relatives who came to call. It was a living hell. Then a new investment opportunity presented itself and Premila was turned out of her new 'family' in Punjab and sold to a prostitution ring in the nation's capital, New Delhi—this time, for £60 (5000 rupees). She joined thousands of other women in impoverished and disease-ridden conditions. She was forced to sell or give her body under threat of abuse or death. What else could she do?

Bride trafficking is a growing trend in India, mainly due to the gender imbalance. This is particularly prevalent in areas such as Haryana and the Punjab. The northeast states, such as Bihar, are primary sources for both bride and sex trafficking. Most of the victims are Dalits and Tribals, who fall outside the hierarchy of India's rigid caste system. Almost half of the 27 million people in modern slavery today are Dalits—untouchables—in India. It is a shocking injustice, and it is one of the best kept secrets in the world. My mission is to change this. Yet why is a Baptist minister who detests curry and struggles in the heat heading up a national campaign to bring an end to the human trafficking and slavery of India's Dalits?

The day that changed my life

Six years ago, I heard someone speak for five minutes at a leaders' conference about the plight of the Dalits. I had never heard the word 'Dalit' before. I was vaguely aware of the term 'untouchable', but had no idea of the 3500 years of oppression and exploitation suffered by India's Dalits under the caste system. I was emotionally 'wrecked' as I sat and listened. My heart was broken. I hurtled up to the speaker and blurted, 'I don't know why or how, but I feel I need to go out to India to see what is happening...' So my journey began.

Back in 2001, Dalit leaders had met with the leaders of other minorities (Christian, Buddhist *etc*) and asked for their help. They wanted two things: for others to tell the world about the issues that Dalits were facing; and to educate Dalit children so that they could lift themselves out of the cycle of poverty and exploitation.

In 2006 I travelled to India for a week to see for myself what was happening, I visited three schools (Dalit Education Centres) that were part of the response to the Dalit leaders, and met with key players in the struggle for Dalit emancipation. After this trip,

we began to develop a link with Dalit churches in Maharashtra. For the past five years, teams of 15-25 people have gone from our church to take part in a week of conferences for pastors, women, youth and childrens' leaders, and families in these churches. Every year, the report back session is one of the most moving experiences in our church calendar, as individuals share the impact on them. We have learnt so much and been challenged to greater commitment and faith.

I have not been out on any of these church trips. I thought my work was done—what I had set in motion now had a life of its own. I should have known better!

Slavery is alive and kicking

On Remembrance Sunday 2008, we heard from a visiting Indian speaker about the issue of human trafficking among India's Dalits. In the same way that discrimination, oppression and abuse on the basis of caste had made an impact a few years earlier, so the revelation that most of the trafficking victims in India were Dalits made its mark. Untouchables became very 'touchable' when they are trafficked for sex; whereas the traffickers appeared to be 'untouchable' as they engage in their criminal activity sometimes in full view. The thought of vulnerable women and children being abused and exploited in horrendous ways while no-one lifted a finger because they were outcastes stirred my heart.

This revelation coincided with a time of transition for the church's Justice Issues and Campaigns Group. A decision to focus on a single issue led to our enquiring as to how we might support this work to combat Dalit trafficking. The response was 'Can we work on this together, and develop something new?' At the same time, I had a growing sense that it would take more than a handful of people doing something in their spare time—it would need someone able to give considerable time to this. The realisation that such a person might be me was stomach-churning!

Thus began my secondment to Dalit Freedom Network UK to put together a campaign working towards ending the human trafficking and slavery of India's Dalits. After a year of developing resources and refining strategy, the campaign was launched in the House of Lords. A year later I am working full time as National Director, looking for people to become Dalit Freedom Champions or to form Dalit Freedom Action Groups so that they can help right this wrong. The issue is so large that although there are many Christians involved in and supporting DFN, we are willing to work with people of all faiths and people of none. It will take a worldwide movement to change the product of 3000 years of injustice.

Slavery takes many forms in India. Besides the bonded labour, bride and sex trafficking mentioned earlier, many children are trafficked into abusive domestic servitude. They may also find themselves trafficked into child beggar gangs, as portrayed in *Slumdog millionaire*. Exploited by ruthless gangmasters, many will be deliberately maimed so that they earn more sympathy and are given more money by passers-by. Many will be Dalits. The same is true for those trafficked for the harvesting of body parts.

Of particular concern to DFN is the phenomenon of ritualised prostitution. Going under various names, including *devadasi* and *jogini*, the practice involves dedicating young girls to a goddess, and then when they reach puberty they are sold for sex and condemned to a lifetime of prostitution sanctioned by religious ritual. These girls are robbed of their dignity, their virginity, their freedom. Many of them will be trafficked into brothels. Practically all are Dalits. The scope and scale of the problem is daunting, but it is the individual stories, such as those of Manjula and Premila, which show the true nature of this exploitation.

Good news for the poor

Dalit Freedom Network is engaged in advocacy and raising awareness in the UK to influence the decision makers in India so that better laws are put in place, enforcement is more effective, and there is improvement in the care and protection of victims. We are already involved in two British government consultations, and often have parliamentary questions on the issue tabled.

We also fund our on-the-ground anti-trafficking projects in India. We now have over 100 schools with 22 000 pupils, in response to the request of Dalit leaders. These Dalit Education Centres provide a quality education, in the English medium (the language of opportunity since it is the language of government, of higher education and of international trade), promoting a worldview emphasising values such as equality, dignity, self-worth, freedom *etc.* Not only will an education provide Dalits with a way out of the cycle of poverty and exploitation that makes them so vulnerable to human trafficking and slavery, but we believe that without our schools some 30-40% of the pupils would be trafficked or in bonded labour.

Other projects include healthcare, women's empowerment and economic development—including vocational training and self-help groups where microloans are available to set up small enterprises that will provide a livelihood. The aim is community transformation. Through this attitudes can be changed so that human trafficking and slavery become unacceptable. DFN UK focuses on supporting projects

run by our Anti Human Trafficking Unit including an HIV/AIDS Centre in the *devadasi* area, three or four womens' short-term refuges, a children's refuge, and a prevention and awareness programme in the *jogini* area as well as several schools linked to these projects.

As our International President, Dr Joseph D'souza, puts it, 'We can take people out of their misery...one person at a time, one child at a time, one village at a time, one community at a time'.

Malcolm Egner was until recently on the ministry team of Rising Brook in Stafford. He is now National Director of Dalit Freedom Network UK. To find out more, please visit www.dfn.org.uk or write to DFN UK, PO Box 3560, Stafford, ST16 9QP. You can also email Malcolm at malcolm.egner@dfn.org.uk, or call 01785 785068.

Response to Baptists and liberal theology

I am glad Philip Clements-Jewery felt able to write in defence of theological liberalism in *bmj*, January 2012. My own faith journey has been different to his. Coming from atheism *via* liberal theology, I soon found myself in a position that others might label as conservative evangelical. That, though, is not how I would label myself. I see myself as radical, since I want to be true to the roots of our faith in Jesus Christ as revealed in holy scripture, as our BU Statement of Principle says. Philip is right that, for (British) Baptists, authority does not reside in the Bible *per se*, but neither is authority simply in the living Christ present among his people by the Spirit. We recognise freedom of interpretation under the Spirit, but there is still an objective revelation of Christ in Scripture to be interpreted.

This British Baptist view, locating authority in Christ in scripture, is shared in practice (whatever the EA Statement of Faith may say) by most British conservative evangelicals. It distinguishes us from American fundamentalists such as Southern Baptists, who do locate authority in the Bible *per se*. When Philip speaks of a commitment to the way of Jesus as ordering his theology, he stands in our tradition himself! Whether our interpretation of Christ is conservative or liberal, I hope we all share the radical desire to let his teaching and example challenge all our beliefs and behaviour, both as individuals and in society. What we must resist is the postmodern attitude that denies there is any objective revelation to challenge anyone!

Bob Allaway is minister of Eldon Road Baptist Church, Wood Green, and can be contacted at Robert.allaway@o2.co.uk.

Stepping Stones: a strategy

by David Newton

I have always been impressed by the hard work and energy of so many people in churches. Individuals commit hour upon hour to the life of the church, often with a desire to share their faith with people in the local community. With so much time and effort going into reaching people, with such a great message, you would expect our churches to be filled to overflowing—yet they are not. Often, in spite of constant efforts, our churches may go for many years without seeing a new person attending on a Sunday.

My observation is that much of the work done is excellent in its own right, but with a little strategic planning could become really powerful in bringing people to their local church and coming to know the Saviour.

A picture

Imagine your church is on the side of a river. You and your friends are about to go into church, when you see some people on the opposite bank. They live on your street, or are work colleagues. You call to them, ‘Why don’t you come to church today?’ They really would like to join you. The only trouble is the river. They don’t know how to cross it. So they make their excuses. What would you do to help them cross over?

Well, if it were just a river you’d put in some stepping stones, wouldn’t you? That way they could take small steps into the church. Physically there is no river, but emotionally there is. They don’t know anyone except you, they don’t know what happens in there (unless it’s like the dull place they went when their old aunt died or the cold place where their cousin was married). What your community needs is for your church to help them to come in easily. I encourage churches to think of six stepping stones that they can put in place.

Most of our churches do lots of activities at Step 1 and will from time to time undertake something at Steps 5 or 6. Sadly there is often nothing in between, and in my picture of a river people end up in the water instead of the baptistry!

Let’s look at the stepping stones and see what sort of things fit each one.

Step 1. Initial contact

This is the sort of thing which makes people aware of your church. It can be a community event in which your church participates, the local fair or Dickensian market. Giving away mince pies as you carol sing is a great example of this. Leafleting has the same effect. I always try to do a lot of leaflet distribution because it says to people that the church is here and available when they need you. Everyone has a moment when they know they need God in their life. The Spirit is prompting them and at that moment they need to know where God's people can be found. Your local takeaway restaurant works on this basis—one day you will want a Chinese. So every week they deliver a leaflet.

Step 2. Building friendships

At the heart of the gospel is the opportunity for relationship. People today are really looking for relationship with other people and then with God. The 1970s and 80s were a time of increasing isolation. The workplace changed as large mills, factories and mines were lost, and smaller office-based work developed. Growing prosperity meant a drop in the size of the average household as an increasing proportion of the population found itself living alone. The key technologies increased isolation as people watched TV and bought video recorders.

The past 20 years have seen the desire for relationships grow and in the 21st century the key technologies that people use are mobile phones and Facebook. People want to connect with others in meaningful ways. Here the church has good news to tell. Join your local church and you immediately get involved with a supportive community of people. The opportunity to make friends is an important part of a church's strategy. It can be a toddler group or a community coffee shop; a gardening group or a craft class. The activity is not the important thing. The opportunity to build friendships is central.

The joy of this stepping stone is that it should be something that people want to do anyway. So a men's breakfast where men don't have anyone to tell them how to be healthy is often popular, as is aerobics for another set of people. The secret here is not to look for something another church is doing, but to find something that three or four people in your church would like to do together. Then advertise it and get a group who meet regularly.

Step 3. Involvement as a helper

It is always good to involve people in the church. I like to get people helping in something for outsiders—maybe a fundraising activity for the homeless project, or better still helping on the homeless project, or the annual shoebox appeal, or collecting tools to be sent to Africa. They can bake mince pies and come on the carol singing with you.

When I first started as a minister, the Church Growth Association had a magazine which carried articles written by practising clergy observing what helped churches to grow. I was struck by one article, entitled *The active person syndrome*. Essentially the writer had noticed that people who join churches are usually activists before they join, and part of the attraction for them is that they can get involved in church life. Churches which are attractive to new arrivals are those that allow people to join in and make it clear that they can contribute. As part of this strategy, for helping people to cross the river into your church, you need to be deliberately asking people to be involved in what you are doing.

Step 4. There is a message here

You've made an initial contact, and friendship has grown. The person is involved in one of the church's activities. He or she knows a few people at the church and is part of the network of church relationships, but they know there must be more than this. After all, this is not the community centre—it is a church, you are Christians. What else is there? Coming on a Sunday is still a big step. After all if they come once you'll expect them to come every week.

They need to know a little more. They need to know that there is a message driving everything, and that it is good news for them. Here is where the one-off events come in. A low-key event with a gentle message fits here: the carol service; a gospel singer; a special meal; a film night; a visiting theatre company; a church conference at the coast; an open day to welcome a new minister; a farewell service to say goodbye to the old minister. The event is clearly marked up as an event with content. So the after dinner speaker is on the invitation to the meal.

This stepping stone makes it clear that we are not just about doing good because it makes us feel good, but we are wanting to change the world because God has changed us. The good news is highlighted.

Step 5. Find out more

At some stage people know they need the Lord. Now they want to know more. At this point it is natural for them to start coming to church on a Sunday. They have not made up their minds, but they want to investigate. They know enough people who already attend to feel that they won't be out of place or uncomfortable. They attend on Sunday and this is the key moment. Eddie Gibbs used to describe this as 'the moment they walk into the showroom', and it is a good analogy.

When I go to buy a car I expect to be able to see cars. I expect someone to take an interest in the fact that I have arrived and I expect to feel good about being there. It's the same when I walk into church.

* I expect the people on the door to greet ME, not the person they have seen every week this year.

* I expect them to show me where the best place is for ME to sit, not leave me to wonder if I'm in old Mrs Smith's favourite seat.

* I expect them to sit me next to someone who is vaguely like me, same gender, similar age, similar sense of style (or absence of style).

* I expect them to introduce them to me by name and explain that they will show me how things go on here.

* I expect that person to smile at me and tell me a little bit about him/herself and why he/she comes to this church, and ask if I know others.

* I expect the speaker to keep me awake and have something relevant to my real life.

* I expect things to be explained in plain English so that I don't feel too lost.

* I expect to be taken to the tea and coffee station after the service by the person I've been sitting with.

* I expect him/her to introduce me to a couple of other people in the church, but not be abandoned by them.

* I expect the speaker to say hello and introduce him/herself to me.

* I expect someone to ask for my addresses (real and email) so the church can keep me in touch with things that are happening.

* I don't expect someone from the church to turn up the following day with a bunch of flowers from the church to say that it was nice to see me yesterday and he/she hopes I'll

come again—BUT IF IT HAPPENED, THEN THE CHANCES OF ME COMING AGAIN ROCKET—especially if it's not the minister.

Step 6. Making a decision

Just because someone comes to church every week it does not mean that they have made their decision to follow Christ. So it is important regularly to give an opportunity for people to decide to follow Jesus in baptism. At least every quarter a straight gospel message should be proclaimed in church on Sunday morning. It is good for the saints! We always rejoice when we hear the good news repeated and our hearts rise with thankfulness. But it is also good for those who don't yet know the Lord as it gives them the reminder that they need to take this step.

David Newton is minister at Gildersome Baptist Church near Leeds. He can be contacted on david@gbchurch.co.uk.

Baptists thinking about the future...

If you visit this site,
you will find a project
that will gather 40
different voices—
hopefully a lot more—



<http://www.beyond400.net>

from across the British Isles, between now and the May Baptist Assembly, on what it is to be Baptists beyond 400 years. We believe this will be a positive contribution to the wider conversations taking place about the future shape of the BUGB.

This discussion needs you!

Essay review

Ministry in three dimensions: ordination and leadership in the local church (Steven Croft, DLT, London: revised and updated edition 2008)

Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery

I have recently heard colleagues expressing reservations over the use of the terms 'leader' and 'leadership' when they are applied to the life of Baptist churches. The concern, which I share, is that worldly management models may have come to be employed in the church, with notions of hierarchy and authority that may be foreign to the gospel.

The plea has been that we strive to retain the title of minister (to whomever and to how many it may apply) because it reminds us of Jesus' call in the Gospels that his followers take the path of humble service rather than that of overbearing domination. I'm not saying that those who are known as church leaders always and inevitably fall into this second category, only that titles and role descriptions may matter—both to those who bear them as well as to those who give them—such that the temptation may exist to get up on a pedestal or to allow oneself to be put on one. Even those who prefer the title of minister face this temptation, so they are not immune either.

It is surprising, and refreshing, to read Steven Croft on such matters, for since the publication of this new edition he has been appointed as Bishop of Sheffield. But this particular representative of the Establishment wears his Anglicanism and his episcopal office (and, so I am told, his robes!) lightly, and the subtitle of his book accurately reflects his concerns.

This book is an accessible and readable offering, mainly about ministry in the local church, and as such should be warmly received by Baptists. The first version of the book was published in 1999, but the author, when invited to revise it, decided that the original should stand and that all that was necessary was an additional chapter to take account of developments in church life in the past decade, particularly the rise of Fresh Expressions to which the author himself has contributed not a little, especially through the concept of the mission-shaped church.

Basically, *Ministry in three dimensions* is an extended exploration of the New Testament concept of ministry as *diakonia*, *presbuteria* (to coin a word) and *episcope*. Of course, Steven Croft cannot but refer to the Anglican practice of ordaining women and men as deacons first and then, after a year, as priests (or, as we should probably say, as presbyters).

Some churches, particularly the Roman Catholic church, but also the Methodists, have in recent years established a permanent diaconate, people who are ordained as deacons and remain as such. I suspect Croft may have some sympathy for this practice, but the point he makes is different. Rather, it seems to me as if he is suggesting that these different aspects of ministry are like the layers of an onion, or like a set of Russian *matryoshka* dolls in which the different components sit within each other. In Anglicanism, he suggests, priests/presbyters do not leave behind the dimension of *diakonia* in their ministries when they are so ordained, any more than those who are called to the episcopate leave behind their diaconal and presbyterial roles. In fact, ministers of all denominations should pay most attention to, and seek to foster above all, the diaconal dimension. They must not shirk the humblest chores in the life of the church.

Dimensions of ministry

Where Croft's argument touches upon the ministry that we are called to exercise is his contention—a right one, it seems to me—that *diakonia*, *presbuteria* and *episcope* are essential aspects of each and every ministry. This is not a specifically Anglican insight. In fact, it seems even more appropriate in Baptist ministry.

Croft unpacks in turn what is meant by each of the three dimensions of ministry. Each section explores the biblical background, looks at how each aspect of ministry has developed over the years, and makes suggestions as to what it means in practice today.

In Croft's scheme, *diakonia* consists of simple, hidden acts of service, competent and careful administration, and a spirituality whose main characteristic is the ability to listen. It is interesting that Croft considers *diakonia* as being mainly exercised within the community rather than in the church, and so he assigns evangelism and pioneer ministry (eg fresh expressions of church) to this dimension.

Croft considers the presbyterial role to be one of sustaining communities in mission. In other words, it is mainly a role of teaching; catechesis, especially in connection with baptismal preparation; preaching; and presiding at the eucharist—in short, the ministry of word and sacrament. As also with *diakonia*, time out for reflection, study and prayer is essential, especially in view of Croft's assignment of intercession as the characteristic spirituality of *presbuteria*.

Episcope, according to Croft, has first to do with articulating and testing vision, helping the community to work through change and the conflicts that might arise, and enabling and resourcing the ministry of others, which is not to be thought of as only within the church, but also as ministry to the whole of life in the world. This aspect of *episcope* might seem to accord with the way ministry in Baptist churches has traditionally been viewed and exercised, which is why this article will reflect more on this dimension of ministry than the others.

The 'watching over' function of ministry

Yet there is more to the concept of *episcope* than has already been mentioned. Above all, there is the vital aspect of 'watching over'. In Acts 20:28 Paul tells the Ephesian elders, 'Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you *episcopoi*'. Croft suggests that such watching over the church may best be exercised as a shared responsibility, with the differentiation of tasks that requires the discernment of the gifts of others. One way that this has been worked out in Baptist churches is through the appointment of deacons, who share with the minister in the tasks of overseeing the life of the local church, who fulfil different responsibilities in the life of the church, and assist at communion. In all this we can see clearly the way in which the diaconal, presbyterial and episcopal dimensions of ministry come together in Baptist life.

'Watching over' also applies to ministers. It is interesting that in Acts 20:28, quoted above, watching over oneself comes before watching over others. Croft identifies discernment as the characteristic spirituality of *episcope*, and what Croft calls 'peer support' is vital. Peer supervision, pioneered in the Yorkshire Baptist Association, is now being taken up in other associations, with ministers being matched and paired so that they can meet regularly to share, in turn and in confidence, the joys and

sorrows, and the challenges and opportunities of ministry.

Episcope, finally, has a translocal dimension. It is the particular responsibility of those who exercise episcopal ministry to relate the local to the universal, and the universal to the local. Baptist ministers often serve on Association councils and committees, or may be elected to serve as members of the Baptist Union Council. Part of what these roles involve is a representative function. The question is, how often is this a two-way street? Is what is planned and decided at Association or Union level fed back into the local situation as a matter of course? How much of local ecumenical life is reported back to the churches? If this aspect of episcopate is taken seriously, then it will be.

21st century ministry

In the final chapter, added for this new edition of the book, Croft revisits his earlier writing a decade earlier. He suggests that the traditional focus on the presbyterial role, while remaining vital, is no longer sufficient for our mission context in the 21st century. He considers that ministers need to rediscover skills of leadership as they help church communities to navigate through the rapid social and cultural changes taking place in our time. In other words, episcopate seems to be emerging as the most important dimension of ministry for the church today. Nevertheless, the diaconal dimension should not be overlooked.

I do recommend that this book be obtained and read by my fellow Baptist ministers. As I have said, it is an easy read and its specifically Anglican aspects can be ignored where necessary, or else translated into a Baptist context without difficulty, especially in view of the fact it is mostly about ministry in the local church. There are extensive and helpful endnotes, which should not be overlooked, especially as they contain references to books and authors not included in the select bibliography. There is no index, but perhaps one is not necessary in view of the way the book is structured.

I conclude by returning to the concept of *diakonia*. We must never forget that our calling as ministers is to be the servants of the servants of God. It is only as we see this that we can also, with integrity, fulfil our presbyterial and episcopal roles.

Philip Clements-Jewery is now retired from Baptist ministry and lives in Huddersfield. He can be contacted on philip.clementsjewery@gmail.com.

Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

The story of women in ministry in the Baptist Union of Great Britain

by Simon Woodman

BUGB, ISBN 978-0-901472-53-3

Reviewer: Rosa Hunt

This reader explores the story of women in Baptist ministry in Britain. Starting from the 1925/6 Council debate over the ordination of women, Simon Woodman uses a wide variety of primary sources to expose the overt and covert motivations of the chief protagonists in the story. You might be as surprised as I was to learn that Council's original opposition to the ordination to women was purely financial—there is no record of the scriptural issues being discussed at this level until the 1960s!

Woodman reviews the historical, social, scriptural and theological debates and argues convincingly that, however it has been couched, the central issue has always been one of conflicting freedoms. Does our Baptist ecclesiology and emphasis on freedom of conscience mean that I am free to hold an interpretation of scripture that bars women from ordained ministry? What

happens when my exercise of that freedom bars another woman from exercising her freedom to respond to her call to ministry? What safeguards are there to prevent my prejudice from masquerading as my conscience, and does our ecclesiology encourage a tacit approval of structural societal injustice which is merely sin by another name?

This reader is an excellent summary of the key historical landmarks and the central issues in the debate. The large number of quotations from primary sources brings the debate to life and allows the different voices to be heard. For those wanting to go deeper, Woodman has included a complete bibliography under historical, biblical/theological, practical/pastoral and ecumenical headings.

It has to be said that equal space is not given to both sides of the debate. We hear the voice of Nigel Wright warning us of the danger of ostracising those who oppose women in ministry, but overall the sources used are overwhelmingly sympathetic to the cause. This is a redressing of the balance of power which is entirely consistent with the author's argument that the invocation of 'freedom of conscience' has led to a vacuum in which negative opinion has proliferated. This book is a lively, thoughtful, well researched and comprehensive attempt to replace that negative opinion by positive affirmation for women in ministry. I would thoroughly recommend it, not only for its excellent contribution to the debate, but also because the arguments it raises about the inherent tension between

collective Baptist policy and individual freedom of conscience touch the very heart of what it means to be a Baptist.

The faith of girls

by Anne Phillips

Ashgate, Farnham, 2011

ISBN 978-1-4094-2198-6

Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery

This book is an important one on an unusual theme, and our colleague Anne Phillips has done us all a service by writing it. Before continuing, I had better offer a disclaimer! In the preface Anne writes, 'men...cannot help but write from their own standpoint...' As the male reviewer of a book written from a feminist point of view, I had better watch my step! Nevertheless, as the father of daughters this book is not without relevance to my own experience.

Furthermore, all of us, female and male ministers alike, will probably have known churches where the youth group predominantly consisted of girls between 11 and 13-14 who are the focus of the research upon which this book is based. It must not be forgotten that girls of this age are undergoing the profound physical, psychological and social changes connected with puberty.

Phillips has found an area of study that has been greatly under-researched. It is impressive in its scope. After an introductory chapter, she discusses

theories of spiritual and psychological development and surveys relevant theological literature. There follows a chapter on the vital issue of methodology in connection with the author's conversations with 17 girls in a variety of churches and social settings.

This material gives way to reports of girls' own words about their lives and how they view matters of faith. These chapters are interspersed with theological reflections on the responses of two girls who were questioned. A final chapter offers the metaphors of womb and birthing as ways of understanding the transition to adulthood and as clues to offering appropriate pastoral and spiritual care to girls at this stage of their lives.

Throughout the book Phillips offers interesting interpretations of the relatively few biblical passages where girls are mentioned. Of particular note are her reflections on Lo-ruhamah (Hosea's daughter), Jairus' daughter, and the depiction of the people of Judah in Ezekiel 16. We would also all do well to note the aspects of faith that seem important to girls of this age. Their theological priorities may not necessarily be ours!

This, of course, is an academic book, and not a 'how to' guide for leaders of youth groups, although it does have considerable practical relevance to those engaged in youth ministry. Even so, all ministers would find it a book worth wrestling with. Like all Ashgate publications it is beautifully produced and has a large bibliography and is fully

indexed. Do not be put off by the price (£45), for the book will repay reading and the reflection it provokes.

Praying the dark hours: a night prayer companion

by Jim Cotter

Canterbury Press, 2011

ISBN 978-1-848-25109-0

Reviewer: Brian Talbot

Praying the dark hours is a compilation of material previously published by Cairns Publications in *Prayer at night* (1983); *Prayer at night's approaching* (2001); *Dazzling darkness* (1999), and *Waymarks* (2001). The author was stimulated to start the first work, which forms the basis of this book, when a group of Anglicans met to pray the mediaeval office of compline in the Diocese of St Albans in the late 1970s. Jim Cotter was, in his own words, uninspired by the 'somewhat spare and flat liturgical prose of that generation'.

He sets out the text on the various pages with the intention of 'letting the words breathe', with more space around them than is strictly necessary. 'The space hints at silence. Pauses are indicated to allow the prayer to be prayed through, not simply said'.

The second half of the book is taken from *Waymarks*, although reshaped with a thought for each night of the year. 'The aim is to provide a contribution to the kind of question that rises within us in the often troubled silences and sleeplessness of the night hours'.

In this book there is a range of liturgical material. The author, coming from a 'higher' ecclesiastical tradition than most Baptist ministers includes resources for prayer that may be helpful, but others, such as *Praying with Mary*, with which we may be less comfortable. His attempts to be inclusive (with respect to gender) in language when prayer is addressed to God will undoubtedly be welcomed by some people but not by others. For example, in *Praying in Christ* (p 22), the prayer begins with: 'Abba, our father, Amma, our Mother; Beloved, our God, Creator of all'.

In the first section there is a selection for each night of the week. The resources provided in the second section cover special seasons and occasions. The third section contains particular prayers for people and concerns that may be close to your own heart; followed by a fourth section of items for occasional use. I would not normally use this kind of devotional guide, but found some of the readings helpful for reflection.

The book that breathes new life: scriptural authority and biblical theology

Walter Brueggemann

Fortress Press, 2011

ISBN: 978-0-8006-9830-0

Reviewer: Fred Rich

This book is a collection of some of Brueggemann's most significant essays and journal articles from the past several years. The strength of it is that a whole new audience is introduced to some of

Brueggemann's most insightful and scholarly work. The main disadvantage is that the collection is not as coherent a whole as one might like, with some overlap from chapter to chapter.

Those familiar with Brueggemann's work will not be disappointed by the way in which he combines in-depth technical commentary on scholarly trends with insights that are useful for preaching and ongoing theological reflection and development. Certainly as I read through this volume I was encouraged to think again about issues as diverse as the nature of history, political readings of scripture and the place of creation in the Bible.

This work is split into three sections, of which the first two are probably the most interesting and useful. The opening three chapters helpfully lay out the state of Biblical interpretation and the authority of the scriptures in the academy and church today. In many ways these are the most obviously helpful and applicable chapters for ministers in that they deal with the kind of issues that one tends to wrestle with over the years in preparing sermons and Bible studies, and in one's use and sometime abuse of the scriptures.

The middle chapters of this book (4-8) summarise Old Testament theology and scholarship in the 20th century. As someone who studied under some of those to whom Brueggemann refers, this was surprisingly elucidating. Much of what I was taught came from a relatively narrow perspective that neither picked up on the culmination of

the historical critical method under von Rad, nor the new direction proposed by Childs and others. To this end I found Brueggemann's concise and yet detailed summary extremely interesting and helpful.

Chapter 9 marks a more original approach to the issues at hand. Brueggemann puts forward his own views on biblical theology as core testimony and counter-testimony. He acknowledges the need for dissenting voices that challenge much of traditional Christian theology, alongside the core testimony of the attributes and character of God.

The final few chapters (10-13) are a collection of reviews and brief responses, that although interesting, are much narrower in focus. Without being especially familiar with some of these scholarly conversations their usefulness is perhaps rather limited.

Overall this is an excellent collection of essays and articles that provides the usual mixture of Brueggemann's cutting insights and simple clarity in explaining complex concepts and theories.

The desert movement: fresh perspectives on the spirituality of the desert

Alexander Ryrie

Canterbury Press, 2011

ISBN 978-1-84825-094 9

Reviewer: Robert Allaway

Ryrie argues in his Introduction that the flight to the desert was not a reaction

to the church becoming respectable, but goes back to the earliest years of the church, continuing a Jewish tradition that gave rise to the Essenes and John the Baptist.

He then describes the variety of places in which desert monasticism was practiced, and the different forms that it took. Some lived as hermits in their own cells, devoting themselves to prayer as they wove baskets etc. to support themselves. They came together only on Saturdays and Sundays, for worship. Such an association is called a *laura*.

Elsewhere, they lived in monastic communities under a rule. The first of these was founded by Pachomius, who 'set a precedent for later monastic rules in both east and west'. They worked together (in silence) at agriculture, baking etc. They had two meals a day, and worshipped together morning and evening. The rest of the time, they devoted to individual prayer in their cells. They gave some help to local villagers, for whom they built a church, and worshipped with them on Sundays.

Women also joined the movement. Most settled nearer towns, but some joined the male hermits. Wearing the same monastic habits, they were only recognised as women at their burials!

The rest of the book reflects on practices and theology of the 'desert fathers' and what we can learn from them. The most relevant chapter ought to be his *Epilogue: through modern eyes*. He deals with three things we might find 'difficult to understand and accept: the extreme asceticism, the

belief in demons and the accounts of miracles'. The problem for me was not these, but rather a feature that he sees as characteristic of the desert over against other forms of monasticism, its 'interiority', individuals devoting all their time to their own spiritual state.

They may have claimed to follow Jesus in his 40 days in the desert, and his retreating to desert places to pray, but he did these things to prepare for his work of teaching and healing the multitude. They may have pursued humility, seeing it as the supreme virtue, as Christ showed it in his incarnation (Philippians 2), but incarnate in the world they were not.

Pachomius recognised this, and monasticism elsewhere, built on his foundations, still has lessons for us. The spiritual navel-gazers of the desert have not. Sorry, Rylie.

Reviewers wanted

If you would like to review books for *bmj* please contact John Houseago (see inside the front cover for his address), detailing your areas of interest.

Pulpit exchanges abroad *Frank Boyd*

Some of you will remember that about a year ago I put an article in the *bmj* inviting those who are contemplating a sabbatical break from their ministry in the next couple of years to contact me if they would be interested in a pulpit exchange with a minister abroad, most likely in the US, Canada, Australia or New Zealand.

The concept is that a British minister is put in contact with a minister of another country where English is the standard language, and the two ministers then swap churches, homes and cars for one, two or three months, and take on the basic responsibilities of pastoral ministry there. This exchange gives an opportunity not only to get to know and observe a different country, but also to learn how church life there inevitably runs in a different style from home.

Sometimes it is practical, if the manses are large enough and family make-up similar, for spouses and children of both ministers to be part of the exchange.

Every so often the Baptist Union and the BMF get enquiries from abroad for such exchanges. I have been asked to act as the UK contact. If a minister from abroad has sought such a contact then I attempt make a link. If someone from this country informs me about their desire for such an exchange I will make inquiries in the land of their choice and let them know of any results.

If you are interested in a possible exchange let me know by email.

***Frank Boyd's e-mail address is frank.boyd1@btoopenworld.com.
Now officially retired, he is a deacon, with responsibility for mission, at Thornhill Baptist Church, Southampton.***