

the baptist ministers'  
**journal**

**April 2013 volume 318**

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## ***From the editor***

### ***Who, did you say?***

Saturday afternoon, 4 pm. Everyone is out, so I am finishing off my sermon in the peace and quiet. The phone rings. 'I am a courier and I want to deliver your new passport—can you explain how to find the house?' (our current home is in a very rural area and people often get lost).

Soon I am standing in the lane waiting for this courier, who duly arrives in a black shiny VW and hands over the envelope with my new passport in it.

My neighbour asks, 'Going anywhere nice?'. 'I am not going anywhere', I reply, 'but it is useful for so many other things these days'.

My mother died last autumn and in dealing with her affairs (which were not complex) it feels like my passport has never been used so much—yet not once for travelling anywhere, only for proving who I am. I suppose one could say that it now helps me to travel 'administratively' rather than geographically. On the other hand it seems a bit sad that my identity has, for most purposes, been reduced to a combination of this minimal booklet, which contains so little information, and a recent utility bill.

I am reminded of Hannah Arendt's observation in *The human condition* that as soon as we try to answer the question of 'who' someone is, our very vocabulary leads us into addressing 'what' that person is. Actually we can't really answer the matter of 'who' except by recounting stories about that person—his or her relationships, likes and dislikes, things s/he does, and so on. The 'who'-ness of me—or you—is very hard to pin down!

No wonder God chose incarnation so that we could begin to get at 'who' he was. If he had not, we would never stand a chance. SN

***If you would like to contribute to bmj, or comment on an article you have read, please contact the editor on [revsal96@aol.com](mailto:revsal96@aol.com).***

## Faith Bowers'

### *Desert island books*



Three books, one theological? I am not a theologian but a Baptist historian, and the kind that works with story rather than philosophy. I have read quite a bit of theology in my time (I was secretary to the BU Doctrine & Worship Committee for 13 years!), but would not instantly choose that as my companion in solitude. So a story that could be interpreted as theological: what better than John Milton's *Paradise lost*?

I have always found fictional personifications of the forces of darkness helpful, especially when faced with the realities of evil powers at work in the world. It began with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, introduced at school when I was eight, read by the teacher as a serial once a week. At school too, but eight years later, I met Milton's Satan and his fellow fallen angels. At university I delighted in C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape letters*, advice from a senior to a junior devil. Milton and Lewis especially show the insidious nature of temptation and God's ultimate omnipotence in ways that I find helpful. Satan explains:

*To do ought good never will be our task,  
But ever to do ill our sole delight,  
As being the contrary to his high will  
Whom we resist. If then his Providence  
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,  
Our labour must be to pervert that end  
And out of good still to find means of evil...*

Sometimes life feels like that.

*The mind is its own place, and in it self  
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.*

Milton's blank verse reads aloud wonderfully. Well versed in scripture and the literature of ancient Greece and Rome (he was Cromwell's Latin secretary), his work is packed with allusions which would prompt searches in the Bible and draw

on distant memories of my own classical studies. I have read perhaps half of *Paradise lost* in the past and have always meant to read the whole—the desert island should give the time. Milton's stated intention was to write a Homeric epic poem about the fall. The part I know best (A-level set text!) deals with the actual temptation of Eve and then of Adam, with all the imagined coaxing arguments.

The poet begins with the wretched state of the fallen angels in hell. Satan alone escapes and goes to inspect God's new creation, hoping to attack God again through man, to which end he hides in the serpent. We are given a detailed account of creation through the activity of the filial word. Angels describe to Adam the battle in heaven that resulted in the rebellious angels being consigned to hell. Eve argues for a measure of independence, which challenges Adam's manhood as well as his desire to protect her. Satan seizes his opportunity when he sees her alone and persuades her to taste the apple. Eve coaxes Adam to do likewise. All the various arguments are rehearsed in lengthy conversations. Now conscious of their nakedness, they hide when God pays his evening visit. I love the way the word of God's future incarnation is suggested: *the Voice of God they heard,/ now walking in the Garden*. They are banished from Eden, but the archangel gives them a glimpse of the future—the flood, the patriarchs, and the eventual conquest of sin and death by the Messiah. Theology enough contained there, I suggest!

Next I am sure I should take a Baptist hymn book, to save the frustration of half-remembered verses. I could sing on the desert island without the embarrassment of others hearing when I hit wrong notes! Although I am of an age to have learned many Bible passages by heart in both day and Sunday school (AV/KJV of course), it is often hymn lines that come first to mind, speaking into the various circumstances of life. I am familiar with three hymnbooks: *The revised Baptist church hymnal* (1933), *The Baptist hymn book* (1962), and *Baptist praise and worship* (1991). Any of these would suit, though perhaps the middle one would hold most memories: a music copy of the new publication was my engagement gift to my fiancé. It has hymns to suit most moods.

There is my baptismal hymn, *True-hearted, whole-hearted, faithful and loyal,/ King of our lives, by thy grace we will be*. Then there's *Yield not to temptation*, and *Christian dost thou see them/ On the holy ground,/ How the powers of darkness/ Compass thee around?*; *Quem pastores laudavere*—the words here *Father, in thy presence kneeling* rather than *Jesus, good above all other*, but it was the Latin version I used as my sons' lullaby. *O thou, my soul, bless God the Lord*—chosen for our wedding and our elder son's

dedication service. *Father, hear the prayer we offer*, the only hymn we could bear to sing at Richard's, facing the doctors' bleak prognosis for a baby with Down's Syndrome. *God is love: let Heaven adore him, Behold the mountain of the Lord*—there are so many hymns to relish.

My favourite remains *How firm a foundation*, with God's wonderful promise *to sanctify to thee thy deepest distress*. A tinny rendering of the tune *Montgomery* is the distinctive call of my mobile phone. When Richard was born, I sang that over and over to ward off the temptation to fear the effort to rear this child would be as futile as the doctors suggested.

Do my choices have a gloomy ring? I don't really fancy that desert island! But I assume they should show something of my faith. I grew up within the church and had no dramatic conversion. The testing of faith has for me mostly been around the 'problem of pain'. Born in October 1939, family life was disrupted first by war and then by parental illness. Courting was overshadowed by Brian's near-fatal illness. Our child, although surrounded by prayer from the first, was disabled from conception. I began to question the omnipotence of a God of love. Milton's and Lewis's imagined subtle temptations came into their own, with their reminder that bad things happen and omnipotence may be more about bringing good out of the apparently bad.

Sorrow over Richard's condition was a constant for 25 years. Then, at a Baptist Assembly, as part of Sunday worship, a group with disabilities re-enacted in mime the passion story. Jesus was played by Philip, an inspired actor whose grasp reached far beyond his intellect. As he was 'nailed' to the cross, the camera focused in. On the big screen I saw Christ's face contorted in agony—with those familiar Down's features. The pain of the condition departed from me. Christ had indeed sanctified my deepest distress. Now I marvel at the ability of my friendly, kind son to spread good cheer wherever he goes.

So a hymn book to help me cope with solitude and its attendant challenges.

For the third, I choose a remarkable book that speaks of hope: Thomas Buergenthal's *A lucky child* (2010). Born a German Jew in Slovakia in 1934, his early years were spent in ghettos in Poland, before he and his parents were taken to Auschwitz, his grandparents left to their fate. His father persuaded the guards that his young son was capable of work, saving him from immediate death. He lost his father and a succession of friends, but Thomas survived both the death camp and Death March, though he lost two toes

to frostbite. Helped by Polish soldiers, he reached an orphanage and was later reunited with his mother, also a survivor.

He was 12 before his schooling began, as the only Jewish child in a class of Germans. Because they stayed in post-war Germany, he and his mother had to learn to forgive. He contrasts this with the attitudes he found in the US, when he emigrated there at the age of 17. In spite of his delayed education, he went on to study, practise and teach human rights law, rising to become a judge on the International Court of Justice. He commands the respect of lawyers for declining to sit in judgement on those tried for Nazi war crimes. With the perspective of a lifetime of dealing with human rights abuses, yet with vivid memories of his disrupted childhood, Buerenthal recognises the need to break the cycle of hatred and violence that inevitably leads to more suffering. I find this a profoundly moving book, a grim story transfused with life-affirming hope.

And a luxury? That's easy. At heart I am a writer so would most value a good supply of paper and a pen. My husband adds 'and a very large bottle of ink'—I suppose the alternative would be to hunt for squid! Preferably a pen with a fine tip to constrain my scrawling hand and fit more on every precious inch of paper.

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## **NOTICE**

**Important changes to the BUGB Constitution will be considered at the Union's Annual General Meeting to be held at the Assembly this year. For more information please check the Baptist Union website. Those who have booked to attend Assembly should receive details by post.**



# A cancer journey

by Neil Draisey

Most *bmj* readers will have had experience of cancer. As pastors we will have cared for those diagnosed, we will have walked with those undergoing treatment, sat with those who are dying, taken funerals of young and old, male and female, and comforted those who have been bereaved. My reflection here is from the other side, as someone who has had that devastating diagnosis, who has undergone surgery and treatment, whose life has been turned upside down.

My journey with this disease is not unique, and others will have had different experiences. This account is personal and it was also perhaps the loneliest time in my life. I will tell you something of the diagnosis and treatment, and something of the deep theological reflection which has resulted from my illness and which continues to challenge me and make me think about my relationship with God, and how that relates to being a minister of the gospel.

## Personal reflection

No-one is ever prepared to receive a diagnosis of cancer. According to the Macmillan Cancer Support Website, 'each year more than a quarter of a million people are diagnosed with cancer in the UK and 1 in 3 people will develop cancer during their lifetime'. The mere mention of the word 'cancer' can strike terror into the bravest person. It is a disease that indiscriminately affects young and old, those who are seemingly fit and healthy, and those who have led a more sedentary lifestyle, those who have a history of cancer in their family, and those who do not.

The story of my encounter with cancer begins in 2009, when I discovered that an ulcer under my tongue which I had had for a number of weeks just would not go away. Having tried all the home remedies I eventually made an appointment to go and visit my local GP, who said as I was leaving, 'Well, I don't think it is anything to worry about, but we'll get it checked out anyway'.

An appointment at the ENT hospital in Sheffield was arranged, which involved a biopsy. At the follow-up meeting, a doctor said quite matter-of-factly, 'Hmm, there are some cancerous cells and I'm going to refer you to the dental hospital for further

investigation'. That was the first time that the word 'cancer' had been mentioned and I can remember feeling a little nonplussed but relatively calm.

I was referred to the Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. I had never heard of the word 'maxillofacial'—I wasn't even sure how to pronounce it—so I Googled it! 'Oral and maxillofacial surgery is surgery to correct a wide spectrum of diseases, injuries, and defects of the head, neck, jaws and the hard and soft tissues of the oral and maxillofacial region'. I had a tiny ulcer under my tongue and this article was talking about defects, and injuries and major reconstruction of the face. Surely there must be some mistake?

There was no mistake: the diagnosis was correct, and I began a series of meetings with my consultant and my oncologist and indeed a whole host of strangers, who over the coming weeks and months would become very familiar, even friendly.

When one is diagnosed with cancer, all sorts of questions spring to mind. Why had I got cancer and, according to my consultant, a type of cancer that I was in the least likely group of the population to get? I am relatively young and healthy, never smoked, hardly ever drink alcohol, have no history of cancer in my immediate family and never worked with any substance which could have caused it. As he said to me, 'It is a mystery, and I can't give you any answers!'

To get a little technical, the type of cancer I had was a squamous-cell carcinoma of the right side of the tongue, and on further investigation it was discovered that I also had cancer in the lymph nodes on the right side of my neck. The 'treatment' for me was a combination of surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy 'to give you the best possible outcome', I was told. My initial calmness was now replaced by a whole host of emotions ranging from disbelief and shock to anger and helplessness. There were moments in the lead up to surgery when the daily humdrum of life would overtake me and I wouldn't think about cancer, and then there would be times when the gravity of the situation would suddenly hit me and I would find myself overcome with the feeling that it was all so unfair. Time and again in the pages of my journal I would write something along the lines of: 'I can't get my head around this'.

My surgery was scheduled for 7 May 2009 with a partial tonguectomy and reconstruction using a skin flap from my left arm, removal of the cancerous lymph nodes on the right side of my neck, the insertion of a tracheotomy to aid breathing after surgery and a nasogastric feeding tube. The surgery lasted 11.5 h and the first question I asked (written down on pad of paper) was, 'Will I be able to talk again?'.

That pad of paper proved to be an invaluable source of reflection as well as my means of communication while in hospital. Looking back on my notes I can see just how low and depressed I was. It was perhaps the loneliest experience of my entire life. At one point I asked the question: 'Does God hate me this much?'.

Re-reading my notes now, I am reminded that the various procedures and tests prior to surgery took place during the season of Lent 2009. As Lent moved on into Holy Week and beyond, I read some very pertinent words in my reflections regarding suffering.

*10 April 2009, Good Friday: What does it mean to have written beautiful words about suffering? Nothing! Nothing! One must experience it to know what such effusions are worth (Sacred Space Website).*

*27 April 2009: We do not have to linger on the times of suffering, yet we can thank the Lord for our crosses, and for being with us in the worst of times as well as the best. We are never good judges of when God is closest to us (Sacred Space Website).*

### **Theological reflection**

‘We are never good judges of when God is closest to us’. How very true that has been for me. It has taken a considerable time for me to begin to reflect theologically on the experience. For some weeks after my final radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatment I just couldn’t think straight. I didn’t pick up a book for months, I couldn’t write anything meaningful, praying was difficult. It was a lonely place in which I just had to be. I had to wait on God, wait for my thinking to start again, wait for something to happen. The hospital chaplain was very supportive to me and my family, sitting with me, praying with me and reading my frustrations.

Waiting for some sense to come has been as tough as the experience itself, but as the days and weeks flowed I began trying to understand a little more of what I had been through. After a tortuous weekend in hospital post-surgery I wrote: ‘I have kind of had an insight into how Jesus must have felt on Good Friday. That sense of abandonment. Terrible!’ In no way am I likening my experience to that of Jesus dying in agony on the cross. But that comment out of desolation and abandonment became something that would enable me to think more deeply about being alone, particularly in the light of the comment that ‘we are never good judges of when God is closest to us’.

The question in my mind became: ‘Where was God in my suffering?’. My problem had to do with feeling abandoned. Later I was able to ask whether God did actually leave me in my hour of need, or whether it was just my felt experience. Where might I find some answers? I turned to the book of Psalms and read, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest’ (Psalm 22:1-2).

The writer is having a terrible time. Illness is stalking him, death seems to be knocking

at his door, and his companions are unsympathetic to the point of being hostile. Yet of more concern to the writer is the sense that God has forsaken him in his predicament. The psalmist recalls that the God who is holy and enthroned on the praises of Israel (v3) is also his God and the God of his forefathers. But that observation only highlights further his dilemma, because God answered them in their need, 'to you they cried and were saved' (v5a), while for him, God seems silent. To rub salt into the wound, the question of 'trust' is brought into the equation (it is used three times in vv4-5).

Where is God and why is he so quiet? The psalmist's felt experience is that God is not with him, and yet his knowledge of history tells him that God should be there. Such was the gravity of the situation that from the writer's point of view this sense of being forsaken by God 'was the fundamental problem—more grave than the actual condition of sickness and the threat of death' that he faced (Word Commentary, p199).

Of course, we cannot now read Psalm 22 without also hearing Jesus, dying on the cross. 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). If they are uncomfortable words from the psalmist, then they are positively shocking from the second person of the Trinity. Jesus' cry from the cross is of such depth that we cannot fully explain or reason why such words should come from the Son of God, the one who is in every way human and divine. It is a mystery that we may never grasp and yet it is before us every Good Friday when we recall the events of Jesus' death.

This question from the cross is a heartfelt cry from the loneliness, pain, and distress of being exposed to one of the most awful modes of execution ever devised. It is an expression of an honest human emotion, the feeling of facing such a situation alone. But is Christ alone upon the cross, and is the psalmist abandoned in his distress? Are we ever alone in our suffering?

Psalm 22 is a lament, but it develops as it progresses through prayer and on to praise and thanksgiving. The turning point comes when it is revealed that the writer has experienced a turn around in his situation. Speaking of the Lord, he declares, 'For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him' (Psalm 22:24). Likewise, Jesus' ordeal on the cross is not the end of the matter—Easter Day always comes, but there is that 'odd' day in between with which Baptists struggle.

Holy Saturday is a day of silence and emptiness, not unlike the situations that we face when we feel that God has abandoned us. But it is also a time of waiting for God to

give answer to the death of Jesus. It is thus a precious time that has been described as ‘...the no-man’s land between questions and answers, prayers uttered and miracles to come. It is where we wait—with a peculiar mixture of faith and despair—whenever God is silent or life doesn’t make sense’ (*God on mute*, 239).

When we cannot sense or feel the presence of God, it does not mean that God is not there. Spurgeon said that in Jesus’ worst hour on the cross, with darkness all around him and within him, he still clung to God with both hands. (Spurgeon’s sermon, *Our Lord’s solemn enquiry*, p3).

He goes on to say that, ‘it is easy to believe that God is ours when he smiles upon us, and when we have sweet fellowship of his love in our hearts; but the point for faith to attend to, is to hold to God when he gives the hard words, when providence frowns upon thee, and when his Spirit seems to be withdrawn from thee’. Even though he is surrounded by trouble, trapped, encircled and exhausted, powerless with no seeming routes of escape, Jesus still hopes and trusts in his God.

I shared some of these thoughts in a Good Friday sermon in 2010 stating that in Jesus’ cry, ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me’, there seems to be the moment when Jesus had lost the sense of the Father-Son relationship. Suddenly the Father was hidden from view, absent, and silent. Those who were opposed to Jesus and who were standing by jeering and mocking him on the cross thought that too: ‘Those who passed by derided him shaking their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God come down from the cross’ (Matthew 27:39-40).

I believe that God did not abandon his Son in his most terrible moment. For some there is the assumption that in some way, ‘the Father turned his face away’ from Jesus—made explicit not by the scriptures, but by a Stuart Townend song, *How deep the Father’s love for us*. I am a musician and it is a beautiful song, but I think this line can lead us into giving to God the Father a characteristic that is not his.

There are of course arguments why it should be so: that God cannot look upon such a scene of sin because of his holiness, or that the Father was displeased with the work of the Son in some way. Such a view fails to recognise that throughout the redemptive work of God in the Bible, God uses frail and sinful human beings to achieve his purposes. God in Christ was incarnate in human flesh, in one who was without sin, and lived among sinful humanity. God’s nature can withstand being exposed to our sinfulness, otherwise it makes the birth of Jesus and his life among us impossible. And to answer the point that in some way the Father was displeased with Jesus is to lose sight of the occasions when we hear the words, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with

whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:17, 17:5; Mark 1:11, 9:7; Luke 3:22, 9:35).

There is another argument against abandonment that resonates with my own experience. If the Father can abandon the Son on the cross, then God can abandon me to my suffering and pain. While that may have been my sense at the time, the experience as a whole shows that God, rather than leaving me alone to face this ordeal, was very much with me. For me this idea gives purpose and meaning to my experience, because 'we are never good judges of when God is closest to us'. It means that we can have hope that in our darkest times God is with us. Such an assurance then we can give to those who are in our care and who themselves may be asking the question, 'Where is God in my hour of need?'

There have been for me many examples of the goodness and love and provision of God shown through different people. To some I am known; others only know me as a name and a situation on a prayer list. I cannot but conclude that God has been with me throughout my battle with this disease, and that no matter what life might throw at us, God will not leave us alone or abandon us.

***Neil Draisey is minister of Beckenham Baptist Church and can be contacted on [neil.draisey@beckenhambaptist.org](mailto:neil.draisey@beckenhambaptist.org). This article was given as a paper at the 2011 Hearts and Minds consultation at Regent's Park College, entitled: God, where are you? A reflection on an encounter with cancer. Neil's church at that time, Hillsborough BC, made the journey with him.***

### ***Books***

Pete Grieg, *God on mute*. A book to help everyone who is struggling with pain and loss and suffering and asking the question, 'Where is God and why aren't my prayers being answered?'

Harold S. Kushner, *When bad things happen to good people*. A small and very readable book written by a Jewish rabbi, valuable for anyone who is having to live with the death of a loved one and asking questions of God.

Lynn Eib, *When God and cancer meet*. Stories of real people battling cancer and their journeys written by a cancer sufferer and counsellor who listens to those affected by this disease.

John E. Colwell, *Why have you forsaken me?* An honest and open account on one man's lifelong struggle with bipolar disorder and the questions it has raised in his mind about God and suffering.

# Pastoring multiethnic churches

by Gale Richards

What might pastoral care be like when it takes seriously the influence of ethnic identity and enables individuals to participate fully in the life and mission of the church? I will offer some reflections based on my 2012 study of nine Baptist churches in the West Midlands.<sup>1</sup>

A helpful context for this article is a brief account of the arrival in the UK of many of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people in our churches. In 1948 the Nationality Act gave UK citizenship to members of Commonwealth countries, and the subsequent arrival of the Empire Windrush from the Caribbean is often used as a pivotal landmark of mass migration to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s. This migration led to sizeable BME populations (in addition to the existing Irish minority), which have increased over the decades through more measured migration after the Commonwealth Immigrants Acts of 1962 and 1968, and subsequent Immigration Acts. In addition, some people have sought asylum in the UK, and more recently some have arrived as EU nationals. How did churches receive these new arrivals?

*Between the 1940s and 1960s many immigrants to Britain went to churches belonging to the same denomination as those they had attended in their home country. However, factors such as worship and preaching styles, community cohesion and racism caused many Black Christians to switch to the churches that were then emerging from the African Caribbean diaspora. However, this did not deter many others, who felt called to stay or who genuinely believed that they had no reason to leave...as it would simply not be true to say that all Black people were treated appallingly when they came to Britain...It is also clear that all was not, and indeed is still not, well for black Christians in historic denominations. Many have suffered, and continue to suffer, racism within these churches. Often this racism takes the form of exclusion from decision-making processes, little or no encouragement to enter pastoral ministry, poor pastoral care, and even white flight, because too many black people were joining the church.<sup>2</sup>*

In 2002, recognising that racial injustice still persists in the UK, the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) appointed a Racial Justice Adviser (RJA). The BUGB website records that this adviser, working in conjunction with BUGB's Racial Justice Group

(RJG), seeks to ensure that the life and structures of BUGB reflect a commitment to racial justice. I suggest that part of this commitment to racial justice means supporting local churches in finding appropriate approaches to pastoral care in a multiethnic context. What might such an approach look like? Some reflection on the life of Jesus seems a useful starting point.

As we look at the gospel accounts, a time of preparation seems clear. Luke's account suggests that Jesus was 30 when he began his ministry with the calling of disciples (Luke 3:23). We also know from Luke that Jesus spent significant time in the preceding years listening to and engaging with the people group to which he was later to minister (Luke 2:41-52). This picture from Jesus' life contrasts with Baptist ministers today, who receive only two days of reflection on racial justice issues as part of their training, despite research<sup>3</sup> suggesting that ethnicity can play a significant part in shaping an individual's life experience in the UK. My study suggests that such training is not sufficient to equip ministers systematically to raise awareness of the experiences of racial injustice that members of their congregation (or wider community) may be experiencing, or to suggest ways of challenging it. In some churches there is a lack of 'colour consciousness', a failure to be aware of the experiences of injustice encountered by people from particular ethnic backgrounds. Parker writes:

*Color consciousness is not simply a cognitive state of being or conscious intellectual activity but also a physical manifestation as well...the knowing and doing among those who move away from false consciousness...*<sup>4</sup>

I believe that there is only one race, but many ethnicities. Since ethnicity can be very broadly defined (not just based on physical appearance), it might be more useful to talk of 'intercultural consciousness' rather than 'colour consciousness' in relation to ethnic injustices. This consciousness is born out of what I would call 'intercultural dialogue' and 'intercultural relationships' (Lartey<sup>5</sup> uses the term 'intercultural' to show that to some degree all human beings are like all others; like some others; and like no other).

### **BUGB initiatives**

The BUGB Racial Justice Adviser (RJA) and Racial Justice Group (RJG) need to work with Baptist Colleges and Regional Baptist Associations to increase the 'intercultural consciousness' of ministers in training and in service by advising on and monitoring the extent to which core modules for ministers (as well as stand-alone modules, placements, trips, sabbatical opportunities and reflection days) enable intercultural



consciousness. Mullings<sup>6</sup> cites the example of The Queen's Foundation offering modules in Black and Asian Theology, and Bible and Liberation, as well as sessions within the curriculum as a whole incorporating aspects of Black and Womanist Theology.

Ministers appropriately prepared for 'pastoring' multiethnic churches by having an intercultural consciousness would, if we look at the life of Jesus, also need systematically to use four approaches to pastoral care: ministry, social action, empowerment and personal interaction. It is beyond the scope of this article to reflect in detail on each of these four approaches, so I will offer brief comments on three, with more detailed reflections on the approach of pastoral care as ministry—which is probably the area in which churches might engage with the most BME individuals.

*(i) Pastoral care as social action.* A powerful gospel image of truth being spoken 'to structures' is where Jesus challenges the authorities who seek to stone a woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11). In the gospels Jesus systematically challenges the core approach of the teachers of the law and Pharisees (eg Matthew 23). Yet my study suggests little if any evidence of lobbying, campaigning or demonstrating against the structures that are enabling racial injustices in UK society.

*(ii) Pastoral care as empowerment.* An example of drawing out and building up unnoticed strengths and resources within and around people and communities can be found where Jesus identifies and calls 12 of the most unlikely individuals, and intentionally grows them as his disciples. We see them journeying with Jesus, observing as he teaches, heals *etc*, and then we see him releasing them to do the same.

My study suggests that some churches may not be intentionally drawing alongside the BME constituency, who may—potentially more than others (from the disadvantage experienced in wider society)—need opportunities to explore their true capability.

*(iii) Pastoral care as personal interaction.* Jesus had many healing encounters with individuals through word and/or deed—for example, the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). The reader is struck by Jesus' awareness of the woman's need, as well as the way he does not look down on her difference. Instead he listens and offers alternative perspectives for her to reflect on how this might change her life and that of others. My study suggests that some churches may not be providing opportunities for congregation members (BME and non-BME) to be aware of and develop the skills needed (eg the ability to listen in a patient, sensitive, non-judgemental way) so that healing conversations around racial justice issues can take place.

*(iv) Pastoral care as ministry.* This caring might be associated with Jesus' teaching at the synagogue, or his Sermon on the Mount, or the telling of parables to gathered crowds, or leading the Last Supper. These things might typically take the form in Baptist churches

today of Sunday worship services. I want to use Pembroke's idea that pastoral care in worship services can be regarded as having four theological themes: reconciliation, lament, hope and communion.<sup>7</sup> Pembroke acknowledges additional themes, but suggests these four cover any other pastoral concern you might care to name. I am inclined to agree with Pembroke as I reflect on the gospel ministry of Jesus, although I would be keen to stress a link between liberation and hope that Pembroke does not clearly state.

### **Pastoral care and worship**

\* **Reconciliation.** Worship services should include a focus on our need to be reconciled with God and neighbour—congregations being led in worship to a place of self-awareness of their sin. This process includes the use of 'Christ as a mirror', reflecting on how he affirmed ethnic identities and created the space for different cultures to be both celebrated and challenged. The process will also name our sinful tendencies to stay in the comfort zone and avoid challenging situations—balanced of course with reminders of God's accepting and affirming nature, so we are not left in an unhealthy state of feeling ashamed, inferior, or defective.

Research on BME disadvantage suggests that racial injustice is still very much at play in today's society. So it would be not be surprising if:

*Members of ethnic minority groups may internalise the prejudicial stereotypes of the dominant culture. They may come to condemn themselves as... 'ignorant' or 'lazy.' Even when a person begins to be successful according to the standards of the dominant majority, a lingering feeling of inferiority may plague her.*<sup>8</sup>

\* **Lament.** Worship should allow expressions of protest as a way of letting out the anger and frustration felt in the midst of suffering and distress—as evident in the protests in the Psalms (eg the strongly worded Psalm 44:11-12 and the more softly worded Psalm 27:9). At the same time, lament in worship will need to be balanced, for example, by pointing to God's saving grace through Jesus' death on the cross, and the divine solidarity in that God does not stand aloof from our pain and suffering.

Many of our multiethnic churches will have a history of racial injustice dating back to the arrival of current BME members in the 1950s and 1960s. Research suggests that racial injustice still occurs in the UK today. Consequently there may be a need to provide the space in worship for congregation members (BME and non-BME) to release anger and frustration. As Pembroke<sup>9</sup> argues:

*...there is more authenticity associated with bringing our total experience of life—*

*peacefulness and anger, a sense of order and disorientation, God's presence and God's absence—than with offering up an edited version in which only the nice, 'acceptable' bits are included.*

\* **Hope.** Worship should also witness to hope through trusting in God, which will include recognising the good that can come out of suffering.

*It is not possible to find witnesses where there is no genuine experience of community. If we are to tell each other our stories of pain and confusion, we need a relatively high level of trust...The tasks of helping each other to nurture hope and of building community are indissolubly linked.<sup>10</sup>*

Part of this hope will involve re-reading biblical texts from particular ethnic and cultural perspectives, revealing that minority groups can and have overcome racial injustice. As Reddie<sup>11</sup> cites, this re-reading is necessary because of the dominance of Eurocentric philosophical thought in interpreting texts. Mullings<sup>12</sup> highlights the impact of re-reading from a black and minority group perspective by citing the Civil Rights Movement in 1960s America, from which the academic discipline of Black Theology emerged. This development was followed by the emergence of what Grant<sup>13</sup> calls Womanist Theology—re-reading biblical texts from a black woman's perspective, which highlights a combined experience of gender and racial injustice issues.

\* **Communion.** Embodying communion emphasises that the fullest expression of faith involves giving and receiving in community, as a contrast to the failure of self-giving and lack of concern for the common good which are the hallmarks of the individualistic western societies in which we live. This emphasis will need to be balanced by a theme that healthy communion will mean balancing love for others with proper love for self.

My study suggests that there are likely to be missed opportunities for racial justice issues to be addressed in worship services. The RJA and RJG need to work with Baptist Associations to support ministers in ensuring that churches create specific moments in Sunday worship to address racial justice issues (*eg* Racial Justice Sunday), and additionally to weave into regular Sunday services (through prayer, testimony, sermons, sacraments and reports) a greater awareness of justice issues. It may be that racial justice issues are addressed on a rotating monthly basis, so there are several opportunities throughout the course of the year.

It is also important that within Sunday services individuals have access to images, symbols, words and sounds which reflect their ethnic backgrounds and cultural heritage. This is first so that there are no barriers to worshipping God in a heartfelt way, and second to help everyone to develop intercultural consciousness.

To conclude, a model of pastoral care that takes ethnic identity seriously will have intercultural consciousness at its heart. Such a consciousness needs to be cultivated in ministers as part of their initial and in-service formation. These ministers in turn need to enable this consciousness in their congregations, which will entail working to a model of pastoral care (as ministry, social action, empowerment and personal interaction) that enables the whole congregation (BME and non-BME) to own the struggle for racial justice at personal and structural levels within the church and wider society, recognising we all potentially have a part to play in the achievement of racial equality and justice for all.

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#### **Notes to text**

1. Further details of the study can be obtained by email from: [projectdevelopmentworker@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:projectdevelopmentworker@hotmail.co.uk).
2. M. Sturge, *Look what the Lord has done*. Scripture Union, 2005, pp 55-56.
3. See Merrick & Brady, *Race in Britain 2012: has life changed for ethnic minorities?* in *Independent on Sunday*, 8 January 2012, pp 1, 8-9.
4. E. I. Parker, *Teaching for colour consciousness* in R. C. Bailey (ed), *They were all together in one place? Toward minority biblical criticism*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009, pp 331-346.
5. E. Lartey, *In living color: an intercultural approach to pastoral care and counseling*, 2nd edn. London: Jessica Kingsley, 2003, p 171.
6. L. Mullings, *Teaching black biblical studies in the UK: special issues for consideration and suggested hermeneutical approaches*, in *Disclosure Journal*, **8** (2), 2009, 81-126.
7. N. Pembroke, *Pastoral care in worship: liturgy and psychology in dialogue*. London: T&T Clark, 2010, pp 3-5.
8. Pembroke, *ibid*, p 27.
9. Pembroke, *ibid*, p 63.
10. Pembroke, *ibid*, p 101.
11. A. Reddie, *Working against the grain: re-imagining black theology in the 21st century*. London: Equinox, 2008, p 50.
12. Mullings, *ibid*, p 81.
13. J. Grant, *White women's Christ and black women's Jesus*. OUP, 1989, p 200.

# Silence in prayer

by Sarah Bingham

We live in a noisy world. We fill our lives with noise—music, television, computer games—and even when we seek quiet, noise intrudes: the rattle of the freezer, traffic passing by, or neighbours talking. Twenty-first century Europeans rarely experience silence and we are not comfortable with it when we do, yet silence has always played a role in spirituality. After his dramatic showdown with the priests of Baal, Elijah needed fresh vision to carry on. His encounter with God came not in all the noise and drama, but in ‘sheer silence’ (1 Kings 19:12, NRSV). Habakkuk calls the earth to silence in response to his vision of what God will do (Habakkuk 2:20).

As a small child, my first encounters with prayer were at a church primary school and at my grandparent’s home at bedtime. Prayer was all about speaking, never listening. In confirmation classes, the acronym ‘ACTS’ was given as a pattern for prayer. Although adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication are key components of prayer, the focus is still on talking. However, within the Anglican liturgy in use in the mid-1970s, the phrase ‘silence may be kept’ occurred. This intrigued me; it often seemed that silence was kept only if the service was not ‘running late’! No one ever explained what was meant to happen in the silence, or why it might be kept.

## Prayer as dialogue

It was only when I became a student that the concept of prayer as dialogue entered my thinking. It had minimal impact on my prayer life, as I had little understanding of God speaking through any means other than the Bible. The listening aspect of prayer became vital as I joined intercessory prayer teams in my late 20s and early 30s, yet I still did not consider the role of silence in personal prayer. Troubles and trials come upon us as we mature and I gained more insight into what Paul meant when he said the Spirit could pray in and through us without words (Romans 8:26). I also realised, finally, what the silences in the Anglican service were for—to allow reflection and listening for the Spirit to speak to us internally.

I decided to spend 15 minutes every day over the college vacation ‘Son bathing’ (*ie*

sitting in God's presence trying to be actively receptive to all he might say or do). My intention was that it would not be a time of speaking, but of quiet openness, with no agenda. I did this throughout July, August and September, jotting notes about what I perceived to be happening.

Initially, I found it very difficult to 'still' the internal monologue of inconsequential thoughts, or thoughts relating to specific issues in my life, which undermined my desire to receive God's agenda rather than impose my own. However, I had read the *Cloud of unknowing* while at London School of Theology, and knew that the author suggested the use of a short phrase as a means to set distractions aside (see pp 62-65). I also knew of the prayer practice of turning hands down to symbolically release things or put them aside, and to sit with hands up as a symbol of being open to receive from God. I combined these two elements to aid both an external, physical focus and an internal, emotional focus, hoping to permit a whole 'spiritual' focus on God alone. I would, therefore, turn hands down as I exhaled and mentally said (*eg*) 'fear' and turn hands up as I inhaled and said (*eg*) 'love'. This lessened the extent to which I was setting an agenda, more so when I used the actions without words. Sweeney suggests

*Praying with our hands is a way of practising mindfulness. It can give stability to our spiritual lives...When words don't say adequately what we mean, our hands might be able to show it (p 72).*

I was encouraged when two friends made positive comments; a Christian friend who had just lost her mother agreed we should meet for coffee as planned 'because I am only surrounding myself with gentle people at the moment'. A non-Christian friend, who is a singing teacher, told me over the phone that my voice had changed pitch and timbre and when we met stated that physically, my posture was more open and relaxed. She ascribed this 'to whatever it is that God is doing'.

It was refreshing to have times of silence built into the College Autumn Quiet Day. I have never struggled with this use of silence, where although the day is a communal activity, there are times for individual reflection and silence. Some use this time by walking, observing creation or reading, but I have found that in these delineated times my favoured response is to sit still, and out of the thinking I do and metaphors I explore, a poem is written. Interestingly, this contrasts with my pilgrimage experience, where the slower pace, regular rhythm and focused attentiveness leads me to a more analytical thinking and listening, rather than creative response.

Having used times of silence (more or less successfully) in worship with children, young people and in all age contexts, I decided to explore it further in college chapel

worship. I put together a programme using some of the college liturgy, some heard words, some projected words with music and some silence.

A number of issues arise from these reflections, including:

- \* should every believer meet God regularly in silence, is it integral to prayer?
- \* how can 'ordinary' believers be helped to explore silence communally and individually? Does silence work differently for different people?
- \* how do we know when silence is our best response? What if God's response seems to be silence?
- \* how do we each balance spiritual practices necessary for our personal relationship with God, with requirements for work or study purposes?

### **Making connections**

*Silence and prayer.* As mentioned above, the Bible does indicate that there will be times when all believers are called to silence. Like Habakkuk, Zephaniah commands silence in response to God's revealed plan of judgement (Zephaniah 1:7). In heaven, silence will be the reaction to the unsealing of the seventh seal (Revelation 8:1). These silences are in response to God, though, rather than a means of seeking His will or to indicate the desire for Him to draw near. The example of Elijah comes to the fore here, along with Jesus' invitation to the disciples to come away to a quiet place (Mark 6:31), an extension of his own practice of prayer (Matthew 14:23). If we believe that we follow a God who speaks, we must, like Samuel, be able to recognise God's voice and respond by saying 'speak, LORD, for thy servant hears' (1 Samuel 3:9). The Bible implies that believers need to pray in silence to hear God's voice, even as the prophets did.

*Experiencing silence.* Pritchard carefully explores the use of non-verbal prayer and silence as means for individual meditation. Ideas for gaining familiarity with using silence in a group context can be found in Yaconelli's *Contemplative youth ministry* or Scripture Union's *Prompting prayer*. The main method is to outline the purpose of being silent, to define a period of silence and try it, and to then allow a time for sharing or feedback. As the group becomes more familiar with the practice, the period of silence can be extended. Once a core within a congregation are comfortable using silence (either through use in house group or midweek settings, or because the church has run a course) it can be introduced into worship services, with some explanation.

Each of us is a different personality, with different tastes, opinions and preferences. God tailors his means of communicating to match the recipient. Thus, for some, in silence they will see a picture or unfolding scene; another may find a Bible verse springs to mind or a word of knowledge comes to them. Others may receive a profound sense of peace, comfort or contentment. For some, fear may prevent such engagement—in silence, we confront both God and ourselves, but facing the fear may be the best thing to do.

*When silence falls.* Encompassed within the range of personality is self-expression. We communicate differently with different people or for different purposes. Each of us may use silence as a response to different things; to overwhelming joy, to profound revelation, to immense sadness, to a depth of pain, to incomprehensible situations. These are all appropriate. Sometimes in relationships, shared silence reveals the depths of trust and intimacy that have been achieved (Mother Mary Clare & Townsend, p 32). Job's friends did their best work in bringing comfort when they purely came and sat with him (Job 2:11-13). It was in speaking that they went wrong. Some things are too deep for words.

Followers of God do experience times when God seems silent and distant for extended periods. This is sometimes referred to as 'the dark night of the soul'. A natural reaction might be to assume one has done something 'wrong'—but God has said he will never leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). Bryant & Henderson suggest it is a normal part of the spiritual life.

*In the spiritual journey we travel through the night towards the day. We walk not into the bright sunshine of total certainty but through the darkness of ignorance, error, muddle and uncertainty. We make progress in the journey as we grow in faith (p 7).*

God's seeming absence can be a time of refining faith, of deepening trust and developing our relationship with him. Taking away 'consolation' from our relationship means we are forced to depend purely on God and seek him for himself, rather than any comfort, blessing or gifts that we might receive from him. In groping around in the silence, we may indeed find him for himself (Acts 17:27).

Finding the balance. Jesus told us that the greatest command is to love God with all our being and the second greatest is to love our neighbours as ourselves (Matthew 22:37-40)—so even ministers who have many demands upon them need clear priorities about time. We need to develop lasting patterns for ministry that place God first (anything else would be idolatry), but then allow a flexible balance between the needs of others, family and self. A saying of Abbot John Chapman of Downside



Abbey is ‘pray as you can and not as you can’t’. We may try different methods or patterns of prayer, of Bible study or worship within our personal walk with God, but we also need to be honest enough to admit that what works for one may not work for another. The patterns and rhythms of a walk with God will change in different seasons of our life and we should not waste time condemning ourselves for what we cannot do: rather, to live life to the full (John 10:10), we should celebrate those things that are shaping us—even the painful ones like ‘dark night’ experiences or times of suffering.

Finding the balance may be a lifelong task, because when we have found it, things will move on and the balance point will change. Perhaps this is a reason for celebrating the metaphor of life as a pilgrimage: until we reach our final destination, we will need to keep moving on and experience new terrain, new vistas, new people and new challenges.

### **Living out the implications**

Silence should be integral to prayer as individually and communally we make space for God to communicate with us. Silence will not happen unless we make it happen. We require discipline and regular practise to make silence and listening as natural as singing our praise or crying out to God in our need. This involves self-discipline at an individual level and a trusting acceptance of those leading worship at a communal level, as well as an adventurous spirit brave enough to say ‘yes’ to something new and different.

Developing a rhythm for life will be ongoing. Periods of personal prayer, worship, and Bible study may shift in time, place or practice, depending on other responsibilities and the current call of God. There may be more or less silence, daily, weekly or monthly journaling, reading by using *lectio divina* or more analytical techniques, times for dancing, singing, artwork and writing as well as times for walking, prostrating, weeping and enduring. Sometimes we must give up ‘the good’ for ‘the better’.

At church, introducing silence in the midweek group may be a helpful step towards its inclusion on Sundays, as we learn together to discern God’s voice of sheer silence.

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## **Baptist Ministers' Fellowship**

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# Points of view

## *Does God judge nations today?* by Peter Mitchell

As you move around in Christian circles, almost certainly you will hear ideas expressed about God's judgement and wrath—not just in terms of individual sin and responsibility, but at the national level. And the more charismatic these circles are in outlook, the stronger this notion of God judging nations as entities is likely to be!

Most often in my experience this assumption is expressed outside formal preaching. It emerges most clearly in prayers and intercessions, where perhaps all our deepest assumptions come to the surface.

I believe there is a dearth of serious reflection on all this. The one published exception I have found is *God's judgments: interpreting history and the Christian faith* by Steven J. Keillor (IVP, Downers Grove, Illinois 2007). My hope in writing these notes is to get the discussion ball rolling and invite thoughts.

### **The question**

That God is able to judge nations if he so chooses seems clear. If he is judge of all the earth, then presumably this can apply at all levels. The question is: does he actually do so in the present day?

In the Old Testament it seems that God does judge in this way. He first judges his chosen people. He also judges other Gentile nations as entities, by two principal criteria:

1. their collective morality;
2. their attitude and behaviour towards the chosen nation, Israel.

But what about the New Testament? We know that the church is a single body which explicitly cuts across all ethnic and national divisions. It is headed by Christ and all are one in him—this is now God's chosen *modus operandi*. So how do ideas of judgement of the nation state apply when the people of God are no longer defined by ethnic group or nationhood?

Many Christians seem to assume that God does still judge at the national level. The temptation is to take Old Testament verses addressed to Israel or Gentile nations and

simply apply these directly to the UK or the US—for example the well known ‘if my people.....’ passage in 2 Chronicles 7:14. This assumption never seems to be justified or even questioned.

Occasionally you find extreme versions. For example, because in her coronation oath the Queen as sovereign makes promises to God, *ergo* the UK is in a special covenant relationship with him. My impression is that, minus the royalty bit, similar assumptions are not far below the surface in the US too!

Another example came my way recently. A Christian Zionist film examined how Britain had implemented the Balfour Declaration of 1917, concluding (rightly, in my view) that this nation had failed to fulfil the commitment made. However, it went on to say that because of this failure, God’s judgement had fallen on the UK, hence we had lost the Empire and become a second rank power. I query this, asking where was God’s judgement on Germany, whose ‘national’ guilt could arguably be massively greater. The (to me) unconvincing response was that Germany had repented nationally, while the UK had not. Of course this raises further questions: is there such a thing as national repentance? And how big a majority would you need to declare it?

Keillor (who is an historian rather than a theologian) looks at three traumatic events in US history: 9/11, the burning of Washington in 1812 (no, I had never heard of it either!) and the Civil War. He attempts to assess cause and effect: for example, what US actions could reasonably have been expected to enrage militant Islamists, and is there reason or not to think these would also offend a holy God? He concludes that God is still active in judgement, though Keillor seems to be working on a wider canvas than just one nation as he highlights human genetic engineering as an area where there is grave danger of usurping the creator’s prerogatives.

I would be most interested in any feedback from readers. In particular:

- \* am I right about the charismatic emphasis on the judgement of nations? Could it be connected with notions such as territorial spirits/strategic level warfare?
- \* if God is judging differentially at national levels, can we tell which are good/moral nation comparators?
- \* if there is national judgement going on, can we observe a proportionality to that nation’s misdeeds (see Luke 12:47-48)? Or is that God’s business rather than ours?

***Peter Mitchell has been church secretary and a deacon at Truro Baptist Church, and is now retired to the back benches. He can be contacted on [p.w.mitchell@tesco.net](mailto:p.w.mitchell@tesco.net).***

## *Bapticostal congregations* by Israel Olofinjana

Last year marked 400 years since the first Baptist Church was founded on English soil. Thomas Helwys and a small group of Baptist separatists founded the church around 1612 at Spitalfields in the East End of London. Since then, Baptists as a Protestant group have survived various religious persecutions. Key elements of Baptist identity—such as believers' baptism, the separation of church and state, the right for every believer to read the Bible and have access to God without the need for a priest—are values shared with other separatist groups such as Anabaptists, Mennonites and some Puritans.

The priesthood of all believers is another principle shared with other dissenters, but the expression of that through the church members' meeting is one of the distinctives of Baptist ecclesiology. The idea of every believer voting or having a say in church matters, irrespective of their gender or class, was radical when it began. In addition, the Baptist idea of the church members' meeting ensured that it was not only people in ordained ministry who could decide church affairs, but that every believer has the right—by virtue of being a Christian—to discern God's mind and will. This principle was countercultural in a period when church governance was dominated by bishops, synods and clergy in general.

### **Reshaping the distinctives**

As we look back on 400 years of our history as a denomination, I cannot help but reflect on this distinctive element of our beloved denomination, and how it is being reshaped. I am speaking of the congregational type of church governance expressed through the members' meeting. This governance is being reshaped or even totally abandoned in the many new Baptist churches in London—largely churches comprising Christians who have come from South America, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. These congregations are vibrant, energetic and dynamic and the majority have members who have come from a Pentecostal background—sometimes the leaders of these churches have also come from a Pentecostal background. Such churches have brought fresh energy and cultural diversity into the London Baptist Association (LBA) and have borne fruit in the ministry of the Association.

But as they have brought fresh expressions of church, they have also brought a charismatic style of worship and church governance akin to independent Pentecostal churches (hence the term 'Bapticostal' church). This style is seen through church leaders

being empowered to take decisions, as opposed to the Baptist model of congregational governance. One might think that such congregations would certainly not be happy with that, but the truth is they are happy that the leaders are taking the initiative to lead.

This style of leadership is partly influenced by the cultures within the congregation. Take for example, a Baptist church with Ghanaians or Nigerians as the majority of the congregation. Culturally, many are inclined to respect elders or any person in the place of authority. Some might view this as negative, since it can lead to autocratic leadership styles, and this has certainly occurred in some cases.

However, there are also positive features of this trait. One of these is strong leadership, which is not constantly hindered by members having to vote on everything, including minute details such as what colour the wall of the church should be. Ecclesiologically, this style of government encourages visionary leaders who are empowered to act without being prevented by church members who might not get along with them.

It is important to remember that this style of church governance, while common among these churches, is not limited to them. There are Baptist churches with white majority congregations who prefer and adhere to this type of church leadership. Churches practise this style because some of them have been frustrated by the lack of progress made under the congregational governance.

I am not advocating that the charismatic style of leadership is better than the congregational form of church governance, or *vice versa*. I am simply articulating that, as we reflect on our history, it is worth considering whether more Baptist churches, particularly those in London, will change what has been considered as fundamental to Baptist DNA. Whichever way we go, one thing is sure: the Baptist concept of the autonomy of churches based on the Declaration of Principle can allow for both church ecclesiologies to exist within our Union.

***Israel Olofinjana is co-pastor of Crofton Park Baptist Church, a multicultural church in SE London. Contact Israel on [isreal2us@yahoo.com](mailto:isreal2us@yahoo.com).***

*Do you have a point of view? Or would you like to respond?  
Contact the editor on [revsal96@aol.com](mailto:revsal96@aol.com) if you would like to  
offer an article.*

## Can you help?

Do you have periodicals and books on Baptist history to give away?

On November 21, 2012, the Theological Seminary at Elstal, near Berlin, inaugurated an Institute for Baptist Studies. On this occasion, historian Dr Massimo Rubboli, Professor of American History at the University of Genova, delivered an inaugural lecture on Roger Williams. The new Institute will coordinate and conduct research in Baptist and Free Church history and theology, including a new critical and bilingual edition of Baptist Confessions of Faith. The first volume, with 17th century confessions, is being prepared in cooperation with Dr William H. Brackney of Acadia Divinity School, Nova Scotia.

The Seminary library and the Oncken-Archives at Elstal house the largest extant collection on German and continental Baptist sources and literature. Unfortunately, there are major gaps in sources and literature on British Baptist history. Dr Martin Rothkegel, Lecturer in Church History at Elstal and Codirector of the Institute for Baptist Studies, said he would be grateful for donations of used books and sets of periodicals on Baptist history, especially on the history of the Baptists in Great Britain and in North America. If you have books or periodicals on Baptist history to give away, you can contact him to check whether these materials exist in Elstal or not ([MRothkegel@baptisten.de](mailto:MRothkegel@baptisten.de)).

The Theological Seminary at Elstal is operated and fully funded by the Union of Evangelical Free Churches (Baptists) in Germany, and prepares ministers for the Baptist Union and other Free Churches. Currently there are 66 students enrolled in BA and MA programmes.

# Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

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***The collected sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer***

Isabel Best (ed)

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ISBN 978-0-8006-9904-8

**Reviewer: John Matthews**

This book collects 30 of the 71 complete sermons or homilies in the Collected works of Bonhoeffer. No reasons are given for choosing these and not others. They date from 1928 to 1939, with nearly half of them from the 18 months during 1933-35 when Bonhoeffer pastored two German-speaking churches in London. The titles include *Lazarus and the rich man*, *God is love*, *Risen with Christ*, *Ambassadors for Christ*, *Repent and do not judge*, *Forgiveness*, and *A church that believes, hopes and loves*. The sermons are based on biblical texts or passages, printed in full, and given half-page introductions by the editor.

While Bonhoeffer is not usually remembered as a preacher, true to his Lutheran tradition he believed that

preaching was the very heart of Christian life and worship. But it became something more than this during the Nazi years, when he understood his sermons both as a way of confessing his faith and as a prophetic means of calling his church and his students to withstand the ideological spirit of the times.

In his first sermon in London, Bonhoeffer said: 'when a preacher opens the Bible and interprets the word of God, a mystery takes place, a miracle: the grace of God, who comes down from heaven into our midst and speaks to us, knocks on our door, asks questions, warns us, puts pressure on us, alarms us, threatens us, and makes us joyful and free and sure'. A good reminder to all preachers.

The book is a nicely produced hardback, which includes details of the volumes of the collected works from which the sermons are taken and a list of books for further reading, though this omits the recent biography by Eric Metaxas.

The editor claims to have retained Bonhoeffer's 'outdated' language so it is somewhat surprising to find words like 'humankind'.

The book is commended by Baptist minister and Bonhoeffer scholar, Keith Clements, who says 'Here are treasures both to enrich contemporary faith and to inspire the coming generation of preachers'. I certainly agree with that judgement. Those interested in



Bonhoeffer's sermons may like to know of two collections edited by Edwin Robertson; one of Advent sermons, entitled *I stand at the door*, the other of reflections on the Psalms, entitled *My soul finds rest in God alone*.

***101 great ideas for growing healthy churches: a MODEM guide***

John Nelson, Michael Lofthouse & Anton Muller (compilers)

Canterbury Press, 2012

ISBN 978-1-84825-045-1

***Reviewer: Ronnie Hall***

MODEM is a charity formed in 1993 to help churches with organisation and management. The founders took the view that secular management principles are not in themselves a bad thing. Taken with the appropriate spirituality there is a lot churches can learn from mainstream management and corporate organisations. If you are already switching off that would be a shame because this book is actually quite useful.

Previous publications from MODEM have been guides on management, personnel and leadership in a church context. This book is a departure from that. This guide is a 'pick up when required' book offering nuggets of wisdom no more than a few pages long covering various situations in church life—101 in fact. For example, there are chapters on *Plan ahead and in*

*detail, See the world as Christ sees the world, Messy church: a case study, and Keep critical statistics*. All sections are written by successful managers in the corporate world who have a faith background, or by clergy sensitive to the aims of MODEM. Most chapters have a very short biblical reflection as an introduction and all chapters have questions for discussion and reflection.

The book itself is fairly easy-going. Some chapters were harder than others. The chapters on the church as a business have some very complicated organisational charts and flow charts full of management speak. Once I got my head round it I could see what it meant, but didn't fancy trying to explain it to a diaconate.

By contrast, the chapter called *Explore the skills you need* also has a very complicated flow chart, but I found it very useful since I do have to consider at my stage of ministry what skills I lack or need to work at. Put another way, not every chapter right now is a winner or immediately useful, but that is not to say that it won't be in the future.

This is a useful little book. It is not bedtime reading but one to be consulted as the need arises. Not all of the 101 ideas will connect but hopefully enough will connect to make it worthwhile. I recommend this book, but only if you think we in the church can learn something from secular management.

***Wisdom, science and the scriptures: essays in honour of Ernest Lucas***

Stephen Finamore & John Weaver (eds)

Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, 2012

ISBN 978-1-907600-13-5

**Reviewer: Gordon Hindmarch**

This collection of 13 essays provides an excellent tribute to Ernest Lucas, a much appreciated Baptist scholar, who has just retired from his position as Tutor in Biblical Studies at Bristol Baptist College. He has had a profound impact on a generation of college students, having guided them through their ministerial formation and biblical education. It is particularly appropriate that the essays are grouped around his personal specialisms of *Wisdom in the Bible*, *Science and Christian faith*, *The scriptures* and, last but by no means least, *Cricket* (a particularly stimulating entry by Rob Ellis)!

The book helpfully opens with a brief introductory biography and closes with a select bibliography of works by Lucas. Each essay is followed by an imaginative prayer by Sian Murray Williams, based upon a central theme of the preceding chapter, reminding the reader that Lucas's endeavours have always been shaped by his Christian spirituality.

Contributors are all friends and

respected colleagues of Ernest Lucas, who are familiar with him through: Bristol Baptist College (Steve Finamore, Brian Haymes, Mike Pears, Simon Woodman); Regents Park College (Rob Ellis, Paul Fiddes); South Wales Baptist College (John Weaver) and Trinity College—the Anglican college in partnership with Bristol Baptist College (John Bimson, Knut Heim, Gordon Wenham). Additional chapters are brought by Hillary Nyika (Guy Chester Centre), Elaine Storkey (Tearfund) and Robert White (Professor of Geophysics at Cambridge).

The book reminded me of one of those box collections of connoisseur chocolates, with its rich variety of themes and wide appeal to a range of different tastes. Those who enjoy *Wisdom in the Bible*, for example, will thoroughly enjoy the exegetical studies on Job, Proverbs and Psalms, and a particularly fine chapter on *Personified wisdom in early Judaism*. For those left wanting more, each essay concludes with a set of notes and a bibliography offering pointers for further study.

The layer on *Science and Christian faith*, reflects Ernest Lucas's previous career as a research biochemist. In it Paul Fiddes imaginatively brings ancient biblical wisdom tradition into dialogue with modern healthcare. Robert White creatively reviews the 350-year history

of the Royal Society through the selection of 10 scientists commemorated in a recent series of first class stamps. Brian Haymes wittily asks the question: *Does Ernest Lucas know what he is talking about?* in a study of knowledge and belief. Readers will have to discover the answer for themselves!

For those who want insights into possible future growth areas for biblical study, the essays on the scriptures (by Finamore, Pears and Woodman) offer useful hints. There is plenty to devour here and they are great fun to read.

This collection is a fine tribute to Ernest Lucas, which should provide the reader with hours of enjoyment and plenty of intellectual stimulation, including suggestions for further study. At £15 it is an excellent read. Copies can be obtained from Bristol Baptist College.

***Responding to God's call: Christian formation today***

Jeremy Worthen

Canterbury Press, 2012

ISBN 978-1-84825-212-7

***Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery***

This is a fantastic book, intellectually satisfying and profoundly spiritual. Its author is Principal of the South East Institute for Theological Education, and thus deeply involved in the formation of

women and men for ministry. But this isn't a book exclusively concerned with what happens in theological colleges and seminaries, although it does touch on that matter. It is about the way all of us are formed as persons and as Christians. In short, this is a book about discipleship that draws on insights from scripture, Christian tradition, and the work of contemporary thinkers.

This very readable book has a double tripartite structure. The first three chapters deal with the way we are formed, not always helpfully to our growth as Christians, by life's experiences and by the culture we inhabit, and discusses issues to do with freedom, knowledge and love. The middle section is concerned with Christian vocation in the broad sense, describing how we are called through creation and through Christ, and how we respond to this within the fellowship of the church. Finally, the last three chapters are about how we make space for Christian formation by remembering, understanding and willing.

The book could be used in a number of different ways. It can be read devotionally, for there is much here to foster personal spiritual growth. Ministers and all who have responsibility under God for the pastoral care (formation!) of those in their charge will also find it a rich and stimulating

resource for their ministry. Furthermore, college staff engaged with the formation of students for ministry will find here a reminder that formation for ministry arises out of and, for those so called, is part of, a more general formation as persons and as Christians. And there are interesting reflections on the place and role of academic theology in training for ministry in the chapter entitled *Understanding*. Having recently been involved in the inspection of one of our colleges I wish that that had seen this book beforehand.

There isn't space in a short review to go into details of the argument, but each chapter, concludes with a short summary of its content. It is good to have footnotes rather than endnotes, and there are suggestions for further reading and a full index. I have no hesitation in commending this book to *bmj* readers.

***Fresh expressions of the church and the Kingdom of God***

Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby & Aaron Kennedy (eds)

Canterbury Press, 2012

978 1 84825 091 8

***Reviewer: Colin Sedgwick***

My 40-year experience of fairly conventional church ministry has always left me challenged and humbled by those who step out in new, risky and

innovative ways—that is what this book is about, largely within the C of E.

There are 15 contributors to this quite short book, and they all have something interesting to say. There is fairly heavy theological reflection (Phyllis Tickle, Lincoln Harvey), and there are breezily anecdotal accounts, in which writers simply tell us about the ventures in which they have been involved. And surely this cheek-by-jowl presentation is appropriate, given that fresh expressions is essentially an attempt at bringing together theory and practice.

Perhaps the best way to sum up what is going on is *via* the distinction between 'church' and 'kingdom'. Most pastors, certainly of my generation, were encouraged to see our role as 'building the church' through faithful preaching, prayer and pastoral care. But God's kingdom, of course, is more than just the church. The question posed by fresh expressions is: should we be more kingdom-minded, less church-minded? Ideally, of course, there should be no conflict; but they do not always sit easily together in practice.

Are fresh expressions in fact new forms of church—or are they simply old church doing new things? At what point does a fresh expression become a separate entity in its own right? There is no clear answer! No doubt each expression has to be assessed on its own merits. (This,

incidentally, is where the book might be open to criticism: some of these fresh expressions are so new that one wonders if enough time has passed for any realistic assessment to be made.)

If any consensus emerges it is, perhaps, that the church needs a 'mixed economy': yes, it must remain faithful to its inherited traditions (while wary of ossification). But there must be also that adventurous spirit that, for the sake of the kingdom, searches for new ways of being church.

If sometimes, like me, you find yourself getting a bit cynical at what may turn out to be little more than a fad, there is a question that hovers never far away: all right—but what did you ever do, what risks did you ever take, to bring Christ and his gospel to those who know nothing of him?

I am glad to have read this book, albeit a touch uncomfortably.

### ***Ethics matters***

Peter & Charlotte Vardy

SCM Press, 2012

ISBN 978-0-334-04391-1

### ***Reviewer: Peter Shepherd***

This book is aimed primarily at A-level students of ethics and their teachers. I have no doubt that one of the teachers commending it is right in saying that

'bright students will find this book accessible and helpful in raising grades'. Ministers seeking help in reflecting on today's moral issues naturally have a somewhat different agenda. Is there a practical difference between Act, Rule, Preference, Negative and Motive Utilitarianism, I ask myself, and—not having to answer an exam question on the subject—do I really care?

Having said that, it is a useful introduction for anyone interested in the subject, and readers of the *bmj* surely need to be able to speak sensibly about it. As with many other introductions to ethics, it is hard work, and sometimes bewildering, in spite of the authors' attempts to lighten the load by using *The Matrix*, *Avatar* and *The Trueman Show* to illustrate their points. As the authors themselves say, 'neither the foundations for ethical decision-making, nor the process by which decisions should be made, are simple'. The real point, as they acknowledge, is not to treat moral philosophy as an intellectual puzzle or pastime (or, one might add, as a means of getting a good exam grade), but as a lifelong struggle at a time when the need for ethical decision-making has never been greater.

For me, the most instructive part of the book in understanding where we have come from in moral philosophy was its description of the contribution of

Immanuel Kant, one of the 'giants'. In practical terms, the summaries of some of our contemporary ethical dilemmas—in such matters as assisted suicide and business ethics—was also helpful. Not that the book offers answers. The authors acknowledge that 'none of the traditional ethical theories can easily be applied to the business environment'.

The book is broadly sympathetic to Christian (and especially Roman Catholic) insights, although I was disappointed not to find any reference to Reinhold Niebuhr, who it seems to me is one of the outstanding figures of the past century in Christian ethics.

Many students of ethics will find this book a valuable resource. I wish them well. As a tool for refreshing our thinking, it also has something to offer Baptist ministers.

***God's mission and postmodern culture: the gift of uncertainty***

John C. Sivalon

Orbis, 2012

ISBN: 978-1-57075-999-4

***Reviewer: Stephen Heap***

How to do mission in a postmodern culture is the big question this rather thin book (160 pp) addresses. It

sounded exciting, but early promise does not issue in fresh insights.

Sivalon is a Roman Catholic missionary, priest, and academic. His argument is that God is incarnate in all cultures, including the postmodern. To be effective in its missionary work, the church must recognise that and work with the God revealed in culture, joining in the *missio dei* in that culture. In practice, however, the leaders of the Roman Catholic church in particular have rejected postmodernism as 'leading necessarily to nihilistic relativism'—and that has led to the church being sidelined. In response, Sivalon says it is better to work with the characteristics of postmodernity, including uncertainty, for within them faith can be nurtured.

Sivalon's main contention is that the church's mission is a sharing in God's mission. In other words, he advocates a *missio dei* approach. This is hardly new and is likely to be widely supported. It may, as Sivalon argues, resonate with postmodern culture as it takes a dynamic approach to mission rather than centring on proclamation and metanarrative. What is not clear is that it has proved an effective model for the church to relate to postmodern culture.

Death may be the key to that relating, argues Sivalon. Drawing on Derrida, he

says it is the 'gift of death' that 'grounds' postmodern culture. He also says postmodern culture denies death. In Christianity, death features in the paschal mysteries, which do not deny death but open ways to life through death. They are about a new story emerging from a God struggling to be human. They are about searching and discovering new possibilities. The implication is that such things resonate with postmodern culture.

What, then, is to be done? Proclamation, even of a metanarrative, is still needed. So is witnessing to the love of God, with the simple aim of showing that love. Dialogue is important, including a genuine openness to 'otherness'. Worship and praise are also part of mission, as is care for all creation. Here a more radical edge emerges. Sivalon challenges the prioritising of national security, wealth accumulation and the preservation of social institutions, 'including the church'. Mission without an institution; there is a postmodern idea indeed!

***If you would like to review,  
contact John Houseago (see  
inside front cover for details).***

***'To such as these': the child in Baptist thought***

Andrew J. Goodliff

Regents Park College, Oxford

***Reviewer: Bob Allaway***

If only we could all study this book, not to follow its advice (much of which I question), but to make us examine our own theology and practice. The title is misleadingly broad. Goodliff actually focuses on how we conduct services of 'infant presentation' (his preferred term) and the underlying theology.

Chapter 1 surveys such services in books from Gould & Shakespeare (1905) to *Gathering for worship*. Chapter 2 examines scripture used in such services, and in particular Mark 10:13-16, which is common to them all. Chapter 3 asks *Who is the child?* There are many good observations here, although Goodliff does not interact with, for example, the stress on children's importance in Matthew.

*Theologies of sin and salvation* (Chapter 4) is dismissive of the view that, while children share the sinful tendencies of all humanity, God does not hold them responsible until they reach an age of accountability. I am astonished that he nowhere deals with Deuteronomy 1:39, the classic 'proof text' of that position. Instead, he finds assurance of children's

eternal safety in Barthian election.

Chapter 5 surveys four different Baptist views of how children relate to baptism and communion. Through the diversity, he sees a common thread of viewing children within the church's fellowship as catechumens. This begins with their 'infant presentation'.

Chapter 6 asks how this theology might be worked out in 'infant presentation', later given practical expression in an actual liturgy (Appendix 2).

Chapter 7 makes a plea for genuine all-age worship. I wholeheartedly agree with his statement 'worship is catechesis'. Might it not be better, though, to describe children within the fellowship with adult 'regular attenders' as 'novices' (those sharing in the life of a community to see if it is their calling) rather than as 'catechumens' (those under instruction)?

The drawbacks of Goodliff's approach become plain in Appendix 2. An already verbose service from *Gathering for worship* becomes even more verbose as he clarifies its theology. I wonder what sense all this would make to the parents with whom I deal? But then, I see this as primarily a service of thanksgiving and blessing, welcoming parents and children as a demonstration of Christ's grace. Whatever our views, I hope we will all read and discuss this book.

## **Help! My first funeral...**

If you are new to ministry, or if you are not but just want to touch base, there is a helpful resource now available from Ted Hale on the process of taking funerals.

From the funeral director's telephone call to the reception after the service, there is practical advice on this important ministry to our communities. Find it at

[http://  
www.baptist.org.uk/  
useful-information-for  
-churches/guidelines-  
manse-churches.html](http://www.baptist.org.uk/useful-information-for-churches/guidelines-manse-churches.html)