

the baptist ministers'  
**journal**

April 2014 volume 322

*Desiring God*

Anne Phillips

*Spiritual direction*

Tim Mountain

*Authority and power*

Clive Jarvis

*Bygone ministry*

Michael V. Jackson

*Black preaching*

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**Contents**

<i>Desiring God</i>	3
<i>Spiritual direction and Baptists</i>	10
<i>A question of authority</i>	15
<i>Ministry: how we were</i>	20
<i>Black preaching</i>	24
<i>Reviews</i>	31
<i>Of interest to you</i>	37

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## ***From the editor***

### *An Eastertide thought*

An older person in our church died peacefully, aged 91, and a Sikh shopkeeper told her family: 'in my culture, we celebrate a long life at its ending'. Implicit in his remark was a judgement upon the prevailing western attitude towards death, perceived as a disaster. Talking about dying in the UK is meant to be getting better, but I remain to be convinced. In some places you can go to 'death cafés' where it is OK to have this conversation, and I am hoping to attend one soon—though I am not expecting a large crowd!

It seems right to think of death at Eastertime, when it is juxtaposed with our glorious hope in Christ. One of my most cherished finds in books is a slim and slightly fragmented volume on death by Dorothee Sölle, completed days before her own death. Full of odd little thoughts and profound reflections, the part I often go back to is a chapter comparing the death of Socrates (in 399BC) with that of Jesus. Both innocent of their charges, these two men were unjustly executed. Both, arguably, could have escaped their deaths by making use of their 'contacts': neither did so. Socrates calmly drank his cup of poison with his friends around him, having bade farewell to his womenfolk and children, and in control of the act itself. Jesus died a slow and painful death alone, his friends having fled.

Is death the worst thing that can happen? Or is it abandonment?

In another book, *Suffering*, Sölle describes isolation as a key experience in our journey through suffering. If our friends come around us, something happens and we do not suffer alone. Perhaps the loneliness of Jesus' death deserves more reflection than it often gets. SN

***If you would like to submit an article, or comment on one you  
have read, please contact the editor, Sally Nelson, on  
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# Desiring God

by Anne Phillips

I was sitting on the floor with my small grandsons, playing with their Brio train set, when it came to me: the magnetic attraction which makes this such an appealing toy was exactly the image I'd been seeking to ground what I wanted to share with ministerial colleagues at last year's Baptist Assembly.

I had been through a period of life-changing events, including a time of enforced dependence on others as I convalesced after major surgery. I had for the first time in my working life the space to reflect on my spiritual journey, and it was a precious gift. Informed, but not ruled, by my usual 'bread and butter' critical engagement with things broadly theological, I was able to indwell scripture, spiritual writings and my own experience afresh, and engage in the kind of theological reflection I'd been teaching for years. The outcome was simple: amidst all the changes in my life, chosen and enforced, I became overwhelmed by God's desire simply to love me, as I am, the unique woman whom God created in love and for love, in God's own image. Although nearing retirement, it also confirmed my life-long calling to servant ministry. I was moving to a new place in my faith—hence the ambiguity of my title.

My aim was to share this gift with companions in ministry, to offer a reminder of the passion with which God loves each of us as we follow our calling, to encourage us all to (re)ignite our desire for God and find opportunities through everyday means to learn from and commune with the Maker. There are lessons here about how our own faith continues to grow throughout life; and as we reflect on that, we are learning too about our accompaniment of others seeking God, within and outwith our congregations.

In this article, I will share the core of my message at Assembly, shaped around that magnetic image and some of the varied writings I used to stimulate the imagination through which we touch again the depths of God's love for us.

Fundamental to all our spiritual journeys is this simple yet profound truth that God created us in and for love. Our making was not out of need but out of desire, for God is by nature relational and true relation only finds fulfilment in union with another. Thus God created in all humankind a yearning for Godself. In the 6th century Pseudo

Dionysius described God's movement out of self as an 'ecstasy of creation', a movement which is reciprocal so that each of us is drawn back out of the fragmentation which follows creation in the fall, drawn back into the singleness of life in God. God's labour of love that brought us into being and nurtures us to the end is the foundation for all that follows.

### **Growing in relationship**

Back now to Brio and the appeal to my spiritual antennae of the force which draws little wooden engines and carriages together. Without stretching the metaphor too far, the two opposite poles can be seen as an image of our spirituality: desire attracts us towards God, only to find God already coming to meet us out of God's own yearning. Some people feel uneasy about using such language, suggesting physicality even eroticism in our relationship with God. A look at the Song of Songs will remind us, however, how it influenced profoundly the spirituality of ancient and medieval mystics and church leaders.

This relationship is far from the emotional enthusiasm which often typifies our early love of God, but rather the awareness of God's love for us that comes when, bringing all our experiences into our reflection, we 'turn aside from speculative philosophy to go more deeply into...interior study'. God meets us in our bodies yet takes us beyond them in self-transcendence. That's the paradox: it is as embodied people that we know God, yet by the Spirit we enter the realm of mystery. Such sensing beyond our senses can arise, for example, in contemplation, or in very earthy moments of creation as in childbirth, or in intimacy with a friend or lover; it can happen too in moments of deep anguish and pain.

Spiritual teachers throughout the ages have expressed God's desire for us, often struggling for words to express the inexpressible, taking risks with language to communicate God's

passion for us, not being afraid to push the boundaries of imagination. For Second Isaiah, as for Jesus, mother/child imagery captures God's desire for the ones God birthed.



Julian of Norwich expressed this desire in extravagant imagery out of her mystical experiences: 'Love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What did he reveal to you? Love. Remain in this and you will know more of the same'. And Meister Eckhart dared to say: 'God loves the soul so powerfully that it staggers the mind. If one were to deprive God of this so that he did not love the soul, one would deprive him of his life and being, or one would kill God if we may say such a thing'.

The richness and challenge of language of desire continues to the present day. Philip Sheldrake calls it a key to our spiritual journey, vital to spiritual growth and discernment. We're often taught that desire smacks of selfishness which we must set aside; it is God's desires that are important, we want what God wants for us. I'm not denying the importance of seeking what God is calling us to, but too much self-denial can be dangerous. Ignatius recommends beginning each period of prayer by asking God for 'what I want and desire'. This isn't about self-indulgence, as our evangelical sensibilities might suggest, but asking God to develop an openness to God's possibilities for us. God created each of us in the divine image, which means we each have a unique imprint or hallmark of God within us; that is what we are searching to uncover ever more fully through our lives, and what God is yearning for us to find. It takes time to realise one's full potential.

The goal of our prayer life as ministers, then, is to become so aware of ourselves as God's children that our deepest desires are in tune with God's desires for us, as we try to do God's work, to which we have been called.

But how do we get to know the true selves God desires us to grow into? I know from my own experience that I need to leave behind the secondary resources (I say this having written daily notes for IBRA, which have their place) and simply be in God's presence. Silence and contemplation are now more widely understood as paths to communion with God; through the contemplative reading of scripture God can bring to our attention the words God wants us to hear. We often lack the confidence for, or think we cannot give the time to, such contemplation: sometimes as a short cut, we rely too much on others to guide us from their experience. That is helpful up to a point, but another person's journey is not ours. God wants to listen and to speak, and in turn for us to listen and to speak. God is the source of our authority, guiding our thinking, our acting, our doing. It takes time to become so attuned to God that God's desires and ours become one. But Jesus said *As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love* (John 15:9).

We're talking here about cycles by which we move ever deeper into relationship with God, allowing God to love us without our claiming any merit or worth of our own. That

is not to say that we are intrinsically worthless. Thomas Merton identified the paradox that ignorance of our own God-given greatness also inhibits our trust in God.

There has been much research on the steps we take as we grow in faith towards closer union with God. As faith matures, it bears marks other than a return to simple desire. Some of these are controversial such as a move away from exclusivity towards a broader understanding of God's unconditional love for all people (which leads to controversies over sexuality, gender, interfaith dialogue for example), and an ability to sit comfortably with ambiguity, as well as turning to God as our ultimate locus of authority. I have spent much of my own ministerial life researching and teaching in this area, helping students to understand the dynamics of faith to help them and their congregations to 'grow their own' not in isolation but in the community of believers, honouring each other's journeys, living with questions and a spectrum of always provisional answers.

### **Theories of faith development**

Among the most influential theorists in this field, James Fowler has a hierarchical linear approach, John Westerhoff III uses concentric circles, and Robert Kegan, a psychologist whose work informs faith development theory, a spiral—the image that I think works best, moving us on while remaining grounded in that early open love. For all their varied models, they are unanimous in recognising that among the most significant movements forward in faith is that moment when, as with the Samaritans in John 4:42, people 'own' faith for themselves: this is the term Westerhoff chooses for 'mature faith arrived at after a time of questioning and searching not dependent on an external authority'. God invites us to approach faith with the directness and openness of the child, and grow a relational faith that fulfils all that God desires of and for us individually. In our desire to see people learn and grow in their faith—very often teaching them our faith and understanding—we can close down their growth in God, dull their desire or even alienate them, from church if not from faith.

My own research testifies to this. While investigating how young teenage girls 'do faith', I conducted a memorable interview with a 13-year-old who reflected in some depth on her relationship with God, but also with sadness on the difference she found between the things she now thought for herself about God, and the things she 'ought to think'. At church, she felt constrained to toe the line, to go along with what she'd been taught even if she questioned or disagreed with it. There is often a dissonance between what we are taught and what God may be saying to us in our contemplation and through our experiences.



My own research confirmed what others have found—Rebecca Nye, for example, in her research with David Hay—that children naturally have a profoundly original relationship with, and almost instinctive understanding of, God that somehow gets lost as they grow and learn to conform to the beliefs they are taught, at the expense of enquiry and dialogue with doctrine and tradition. Sheldrake puts it down to the church tending to place strong emphasis on external sources of authority in contrast to our personal desires. Of course church tradition and doctrine are valuable as pointers to God; they have been forged out of genuine experiences of faith and challenges of their age, but as Baptists we need to remember that they are time- and context-bound, and God is not. Where some doctrines nail God down rigidly and exclusively, God always has a new word to speak, and habitually through the small and weak and marginalised.

Karl Rahner recognised the danger of demeaning and dismissing childhood faith: like other theologians and writers on spirituality, his ideas have much in common with faith development theorists. Rahner saw it as something that ‘may always remain open’, something that ‘we go towards...as that which has been achieved in time and redeemed forever in time’. Ricouer’s second naïveté touches on a similar notion, an idea revisited recently by Franciscan Richard Rohr.

What is it that causes these changes in faith, the spiral that returns us to familiar territory, but seen through a different lens? ‘Life’, of course, is the broad answer, life’s transitional stages (such as leaving home, having children, retiring) or experiences (such as bereavement, illness). This is not dependent on age: a mature faith can belong to a young person with a lot of life experience, and a childish faith to a senior who has not. For the 13-year-old who was subjecting her earlier teaching to radical critique as she searched for a new sense of self, it was puberty which was moving her on towards greater autonomy in faith. Such transitions are not easy: each is a fresh conversion often causing us to journey through a ‘dark night of the soul’.

For Rachel Mann, a parish priest in Manchester, it was life-threatening illness that drove her through the darkness of God’s absence to find the self God had created her to be—being me by being in God’. Mann tells us that it was only when all else was lost, in the desert place where God seemed hidden, that She came in stark love, as gift when words no longer nourished. God’s desire is to hold us even at times when God feels far away and we echo Jesus’ lonely cry in Gethsemane.

Both stories affirm in different ways the findings of Nicola Slee in her study of women’s faith. She found common patterns for women on their journey towards their true depths in God: many experienced alienation often from the very structures that failed to nurture them, towards awakenings in which they found confidence to give



authentic voice to their own experiences, while retaining their sense of relation throughout their spiritual impasse, an ‘enduring connection to God’ which was often expressed with the passion we have seen used by others. Slee recognises the danger of essentialism here, and offers in her conclusions a more nuanced explication of that relation. Would that there were more academic research on the faith patterns of a wider range of people groups.

Desire, unequal yet reciprocal, God’s and ours for perfect union—is the way and the goal of our spiritual journey. The laws of physics gave us an opening picture. In the end for me, though, it is the arts that best point us to this mystery, through the beauty of word and image. The famous icon by Rublev, for example, of the Visitation of Abraham, or the Trinity, grounds the physical force in relationship and in theology.

The open foreground draws us in: the Three, in such close dynamic union that they are not self-contained or absorbed by one other, yearn for each of us to occupy the open space and so to complete the divine circle—they invite us to the table to drink deeply of the cup poured out for us to share. We stand in the rectangular space as those responding to Love’s outpouring, offering our lives, as Henri Nouwen puts it, as a witness to that love, ‘committed to the struggle for justice and peace in the world while remaining at home in God’s love’.

As we set our gaze on God, may we all respond simply to the pull of love; thus are we strengthened to fulfil our calling as ministers of the gospel.

I often use toys or children’s stories to illustrate theological insight: the very best contain profound truths which help adults as well as children on their way to healthy spirituality and psychological growth.

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#### **Notes to text**

1. Quoted in P. Sheldrake, *Befriending our desires*. DLT, 2001, p42.
2. Bernard of Clairvaux in E. de Waal, *The way of simplicity*. DLT, 1998, p104.
3. Isaiah 49:15, Matthew 23:37.

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5. For example in T. Merton, *The spirit of simplicity*. Trappist, 1948.
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***An invitation to you....***

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# Spiritual direction and Baptists

by Tim Mountain

Talk about and practice of spiritual direction has been slowly growing over recent years in Baptist circles. Twenty or thirty years ago, many Baptists would have regarded such a thing as spiritual direction suspiciously. Certainly, as Kenneth Leech pointed out, ‘spiritual direction cannot be said to have played a central role in most modern Protestant traditions’.<sup>1</sup> It was a practice associated with Catholics or Anglo-Catholics, not nonconformists. Calling someone a ‘spiritual director’ suggested that a person would assume an authoritative place in a believer’s life—a place that rightly belongs to God. It is a distraction from the demands of an active ministry, an exercise in pious navel-gazing.

But now, not only is spiritual direction being received and offered increasingly among British Baptists, it is recognised as a valuable component of ministerial formation. In a recent report of a team of inspectors of Spurgeon’s College it was recommended that ‘the College is more intentional in alerting and enabling students to seek spiritual direction within an appropriate Baptist framework’.<sup>2</sup> The term is heard in conversations and communications by members of the BU Ministries Team; the article in a recent edition of *bmj* about the College of Baptist Ministers mentions ‘help for ministers seeking [among other things] spiritual direction’.<sup>3</sup>

Very little is published by British Baptists on spiritual direction. A couple of leaflets have been produced on behalf of the Baptist Union Retreat Group (BURG);<sup>4</sup> John Rackley has written on ‘spiritual guidance’;<sup>5</sup> and Ian Randall mentions spiritual direction in an article on spirituality;<sup>6</sup> but I have unearthed little else of note. Therefore, I recently undertook some (MTh) research about spiritual direction as practised by accredited Baptist ministers.<sup>7</sup> As part of my research, a questionnaire was circulated to those (Baptist minister) directors I could track down to ask them about their practice of and thoughts on spiritual direction. I identified 45 who self-designated as directors and sent out questionnaires to them; and 33 accredited ministers, currently serving in a range of ministries (*eg* local church pastors, chaplains, ‘retired’ ministers), returned completed questionnaires.

One of my objectives, prompted by the report on Spurgeon’s College, was to ask

what ‘an appropriate Baptist framework’ might look like. In the attempt to find a possible answer, I gave extended consideration to the practice of spiritual direction among Baptists historically and today, and reflected on the relationship of pastoral ministry to spiritual direction.

Practice of the latter, as described by ministers’ responses in the survey, seemed to be an expression of that ancient ministry that had its roots in the desert *abbas* and *ammias*, and developed as part of a rule of life in later monastic traditions, such as the Benedictines and Jesuits. It has been shunned until relatively recently by Baptists but (as I argue in the dissertation) is justifiable and valuable. (It needs to be noted that it is but one particular approach of seeking and interpreting God’s guidance for the disciple of Jesus, which, of course, occurs in a variety of other ways through the general ministry of the church and its members.) In a final section I drew the threads together to address the question of what a Baptist framework might look like. It is impossible to present all I would like to say in an article of this nature and length. Therefore, I will focus attention on why there is resurgence in the interest and practice of spiritual direction among Baptists.

### **What is direction?**

Before going further, I need to say briefly what I mean by the term spiritual direction. There are various ways of interpreting it and contexts in which it can occur, but what I am describing here is an intentional one-with-another relationship in which one person (the director), by careful and prayerful listening and questioning over a period of time, helps another (the directee) to reflect on his or her walk with God. The true director in the relationship is the Holy Spirit, and together the human director and directee seek to develop an awareness and attentiveness to the work of the Spirit in (particularly) the life of the directee, so that her or his relationship with God might be strengthened and deepened. I would want to distinguish spiritual direction from other accompanying ministries of discipling, mentoring and counselling.

Understandably, because of possible misunderstanding, some ministers who submitted responses commented that they were cautious of, or rejected outright, the term ‘director’—preferring terms such as ‘companion’ or ‘accompanist’. However, as another suggested, the term spiritual director is ‘widely understood within the spirituality community’, which echoes Jesuits Barry & Connolly, who write that it is ‘firmly entrenched in the tradition and is more widely and spontaneously used than any other term that has been proposed to replace it’.<sup>8</sup> I shall continue to use the term

‘director’ here.

So, why the growing interest and practice of spiritual direction in our denomination? Let me make some tentative suggestions as to why Baptists and their ministers are being drawn to this ministry.

*Ecumenical relationships.* In recent decades, a spirit of openness and humility between church leaders has broken down mistrust and led to relationships and friendships being forged across denominational boundaries. One of the outcomes of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) was an increasing openness from Roman Catholics to outside influences and cross-denominational engagement. Many Protestants have also been prepared to learn from others in different church traditions. Practices previously unfamiliar to many in the Baptist tradition such as spiritual disciplines, spiritualities such as Ignatian or Celtic, and spiritual direction, have proved helpful to many. The willingness of ministers in the survey to take advantage of training courses offered by Catholic and Anglican groups, and to have non-Baptist spiritual directors, witnesses to the growing trust and cooperation between Christians across the denominations.

*The retreat movement.* The retreat movement has also contributed to the growing cross-denominational exposure to different ideas and practices. Through the influence of Margaret Jarman, a former President of the BU, the Baptist Union Retreat Group was formed in 1988. A number of ministers in the survey noted their involvement with BURG for some years before beginning to accompany people as a director.

Retreats are now a familiar part of Baptist life as a means of refreshment and re-engagement with God. Such a thing would have been uncommon until relatively recently, despite J. H. Shakespeare’s support for the idea of a ‘retreat movement for ministers’ in the first part of the 20th century.<sup>9</sup> Although the evidence is anecdotal, increasing numbers of Baptists are taking retreats, which are usually ecumenical and may well include the opportunity to receive individual direction; the positive experience and benefits then trickle out into the wider church. Indeed, as a result of taking a retreat some years ago, I became aware of, received and also now offer, spiritual direction.

*A yearning for ‘something other’.* In our society not much attention is given to the ‘other’ (where the ‘other’ might be God or another person). Rather, attention is given to strategies and numbers, economics and politics, technologies and communication, leadership and power. It is now commonplace to acknowledge the existence of a societal spirituality vacuum, and people are anxious to try to fill it, occasionally by turning to the church but perhaps more often by turning to practices and thinking that

are sub- or non-Christian (eg New Age techniques, Eastern mysticism).

A spirituality vacuum may also be characteristic of many churches in our culture, including those who would like to be identified as 'evangelical'. Even though she writes from a Reformed perspective, and is highly critical of evangelicals who are turning to things like Ignatian retreats, Celtic prayer or seeking out a spiritual director, Marian Raikes acknowledges that in talking to Christians she sensed that they were missing something necessary to meet their spiritual hunger for growth. She says that they did not find it in an evangelical spirituality that they found to be 'too cerebral, too study-bound. And too activist, too meeting-bound'.<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, Tilden Edwards refers to the 'starved half of the social activist'.<sup>11</sup> Bakke makes a different but related point:

*People are hungry for authentic spiritual companionship. Many are concerned about the crassness of the larger culture, and the fracturedness and pace of life—they desire to slow down and notice more about who they are and how to be connected with God. They are dissatisfied with what feels like a lack of significance and are seeking something more.*<sup>12</sup>

Many Baptists who are activist by nature (I hasten to add, not wrongly so) and busily involved in the demands of church life, might well identify with those observations. They feel out of kilter. They are dissatisfied with what our churches are and offer. They have a yearning for 'something other'.

Spiritual direction offers an opportunity to be present with another who carefully, slowly and lovingly listens and pays attention; someone who helps the directee to delve into the deeper places of the soul, to begin to address that spiritual yearning.

Regarding ministers in particular, I know colleagues who are seeking 'something other', who feel pressurised by some to exercise a model of Baptist ministry that might be described as 'evangelical activism' to the neglect of a more contemplative approach. They resonate with the writings of people like Eugene Peterson who critiques pastoral ministry that is too hurried and over-busy, too managerial and goal-oriented, too taken up with numbers and strategies. He urges pastors to recover something of the qualities of the 'unbusy pastor'.

Although Peterson speaks to a US audience I think his observations apply to aspects of pastoral ministry in the UK too. To place oneself under direction is one way that some ministers find to help them attend to the yearnings of the soul, to build into their walk with God some prayerful reflection with the help of another. Perhaps if Baptist ministers took more seriously the state of their souls, there might be fewer shallow ministries and burnouts.

We should not underestimate the effect that Peterson's books, along with others by writers such as Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, or Henri Nouwen, have had in the past couple of decades. Some ministers in the survey mentioned the influence that books like these had in prompting interest in spiritual direction, either those set as part of a college course or they had discovered in private reading. For many years these authors have been urging a recovery of some of the ancient ways of sustaining the Christian life and Christian ministry, including that of spiritual direction.

I believe spiritual direction as an accompanying ministry to help a disciple of Christ in his or her walk with God can prove valuable for some. As Baptists, we have much to learn from our brothers and sisters in other denominations who have been practising it for centuries, and must guard against cherry picking without understanding its roots and tradition. There are questions to ask about formation and training for spiritual directors, about accountability and supervision, about affirming and recognition of the ministry. Discussion of these is for elsewhere, as is the matter of how spiritual direction can be offered such that it is consistent with a Baptist theology of God and the church. For now, I leave the final words to one minister who wrote that spiritual direction 'is a fine art; and many within the Baptist family would benefit from it'.

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12. From an interview with J. Bakke for *Christianity Today*, 2001.



# A question of authority

by Clive Jarvis

It was at the age of 16 in the summer of 1974 that I came to faith, mainly because of the witness of Christian school teachers but with an acknowledgment to the work of the Campaigners, *via* the local London City Mission Hall and a Church of England Youth Club. In the main, however, I was unchurched, and when, through a friend at school, I began to attend the nearest Baptist church, my fate was sealed. Nearly 40 years on I am still a Baptist and for the past 27 years I have served as an accredited minister in various UK churches. I am not sure I would want to be thought a dyed-in-the-wool Baptist, but I was fascinated by John Colwell's analysis of modern Baptists in the light of the decline of mid-20th century Brethrenism (*bmj* Oct 2011, pp3-10) and the insight it gave to one who is spiritually a child of the charismatic movement.

It was in his discussion of the minister as priest that John touched a nerve around the interrelated issue of authority in church life. I am sure most of us believe that our practice is determined by our theology and that we act according to our beliefs and our principles. I am also certain that this is often far from reality, and that theory has to catch up with practice as we justify our actions. It need not be considered negative unless we assume our theology and our principles are always correct. One has only to consider slavery and the subsequent American Civil War, to be clear that Christians can hold to theology and principles that are in grave error. I am convinced that people often intuitively act correctly despite the apparent theology and principles they or their churches are deemed to maintain. Indeed the Reformation could not have happened had Luther and so many others not done this very thing.

When we begin to consider what it means to be a priest or minister, the distinctions between theology and practice can quickly become blurred. As I reflect on my years in pastoral ministry this pressing issue in the life of our churches is best addressed by a discussion of authority alongside that of the priest/minister dialogue.

To the question, 'where does authority lie in Baptist churches?' all too eagerly comes the reply, 'in the church meeting'. Of course, authority in the church resides with Jesus Christ, who made this very point in addressing the future leadership of the New Testament church in Matthew 28:18 when he said, 'All authority in heaven and on

earth has been given to me'. As Baptists we would all recognise that ultimate and legitimate authority resides in Jesus. That's the theory—but what about the practice? I am concerned that all too often our theology of theocracy (the rule of God) has been replaced in practice by democracy (rule of man).

I suspect that all in pastoral ministry would agree that they are challenged more frequently about the content of worship services than any other topic. When faced with someone lamenting that their personal wants and desires are not being met, I often ask myself why, as minister, it is OK for me to ensure that my wants and desires are being met? In fact there are relatively few occasions when I have planned a service in which my wants and desires are fulfilled, because that is not my task as a minister. My task, as best as I can, is to lead the congregation I serve in worship and that is why hearing members express their wants and desires is necessary. The better question is: 'why am I the one who gets to make the decision on what constitutes worship, and appropriate worship at that?'. That for me is a question of authority.

### **The authorised version**

The answer to the question above is that I get to make the decision because I am the one God called, chose and (hopefully) anointed to be a minister of the gospel. I get to choose because God has given me the authority to choose. Some will immediately want to point out, and correctly and legally so, that the church meeting has the power to direct a minister as to the conduct of worship. What is less clear is whether they have the spiritual authority to instruct a minister in this way.

The relationship between minister and church is a fascinating one within our denomination. I have no doubt that as a minister my first responsibility is to the Lord who called me to ministry, not the church in which I minister. The call of God came before the call of the local church and it is to God I must answer before the local congregation. It is also true that before being called as a minister by the local church, I was accepted by the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

Personally, I find the concept of ministerial accountability to the local church to be too narrow and isolated, and that there is greater balance to be found in being accountable to the wider church, as an accredited minister of the Union. For me this points to the principle of interrelationship between Baptist churches, which has been replaced in recent years, for good reasons, with ecumenical relationships within a more tightly defined locality. We have gained from this in many ways but the breakdown of any true 'Association' between Baptist churches will mean we have lost out as well.

So I contend that we derive our authority to minister from the God who called us, and our affirmation of this call from the denomination that accredits us. What we derive from the local church is permission to exercise our God-given ministry among them, but not the authority to minister or to be a minister. I fully realise that the BUGB system of accreditation of ministers is not common to all Baptist Unions and Conferences worldwide and some may want to denounce its use in the UK, I merely reflect as I do in the circumstances in which I find myself.

There is, and properly so, a tension between minister and congregation, a balance to be found of both power and authority. Power is the ability to be able to do something (temporal) and authority is the legitimacy for doing something (spiritual). Too much is done in our churches on the basis of power lacking authority, and there is a real danger of true God-given authority being eroded in the pursuit of individualism, which elevates all to the same level of authority.

### **Some Pigs are more equal!**

George Orwell famously wrote that ‘All Pigs are equal, but some Pigs are more equal than others’. When you create a power vacuum, someone of power will fill it and it may not always be the people you want, or more importantly, God wants. The widespread commitment to the ‘priesthood of all believers’ may well have created such a power/leadership vacuum; and while in theory few members overtly renounce the leadership/authority role of their minister, the reality may be that church members are happy to accept the leadership/authority of their minister as long as he or she does and says what they personally agree with. While we affirm that in the eyes of God we are all equally loved and valued, and none is more important to God than any other, then the idea of an all-encompassing priesthood is a powerful truth we must continue to affirm. However, if we mean to imply, as is increasingly the case, that every church member has an equal God-given authority to every other church member, and most especially in context, to the minister (and by extension to elders and deacons), then we have a problem: and in fact we do have a problem!

When I entered ministry at 28 years old, I recall a very dear old lady saying to me when I arrived at my first church, ‘I don’t know what to call you, you are far too young for me to call you pastor’. When I look back at my youth and inexperience and at what was achieved I conclude that much was made possible by the fact that the congregation believed their minister was one whom God had sent to lead them and who should be respected and followed—though (I assure you) never blindly, foolishly or

unquestioningly! There was a clear understanding of the minister as called and chosen by God and therefore separated to undertake the work of ministry.

Three decades on I detect a significant change in these perceptions, and I wonder if the prevailing philosophy of the age has confused our understanding of true God-given authority. I always found it quite humbling in those moments at leadership or church meetings when, having heard the discussions, I would draw things together and feel the warmth, respect and gratitude of the meeting: that sense, as minister, that when you spoke, people listened, because you spoke as one who had authority.

I perceive now that it is more likely that the voice of the minister is one among many, just another opinion to be heard but no more authoritative than any other. Here is where George Orwell comes in, because he is absolutely right that when you adopt a philosophy of governance that creates a vacuum of leadership some Pigs will make themselves more equal and the 'priesthood of no-one' opens the door for such Pigs! Power exists in every relationship and in every situation and if you do not ascribe authority (legitimacy) to those who exercise power over you, you will end up with those who exercise power illegitimately. Power does not disappear: it will always find an outlet, and George Orwell is clear enough as to where that will be!

### **Choose your Pig carefully!**

The minister is the 'Pig' that the church gets to choose as the one who will be more equal than others, or 'first among equals'. I am not advocating dictatorship and would want at a different time to state a strong case for ministers as servants of Christ and the church, who exercise their God-given authority on behalf of Christ for the sake of the church. The discussion here is about a positive understanding and proper exercising of authority, not of power. I want to raise serious questions about the evolution in our churches whereby the church meeting has become the repository of both power and authority in church life. Churches are not democracies, though, encouraged by charity law in the UK, this is how they usually operate. While it is incumbent upon churches to adhere to the law, their primary accountability is to God, and our governance must be godly before it is temporal.

I accept the notion that the church meeting morally and legally has ultimate power (temporally) but less so the idea that it is the place where authority (spiritual) resides in the church. Much depends on our definitions: I am working with the idea that authority is a spiritual or God-given legitimacy, and I am not sure that the church meeting necessarily possesses this kind of authority. It has the responsibility to seek 'the mind

of Christ,' which is to look for authority and recognise it and act accordingly—but that it does not possess this authority as a gift from God.

Consequently the authority of God is given to those he calls, chooses and anoints, whom in this context we recognise as ministers. I am equally uncomfortable with this idea, though for different reasons, because I am in no doubt that it is a hefty responsibility that can only be borne with a supportive leadership and church meeting. I am not so dismissive of the concept of the 'priesthood of all' that I cannot see God in his infinite grace using any person to reveal his will, and enable any of us on occasion to speak with authority—but that is not to say that those individuals possess as a gift the authority of God.

Such gifting does not make the minister infallible, nor does it mean the minister must be obeyed; and both thoughts fail to appreciate what is meant by 'authority'. Part of the gift of authority is the freedom to be wrong and to make mistakes, without necessarily diminishing the gift itself. The anointed minister always possesses the authority to speak and so speaks within that authority, even when s/he is wrong, whereas the church meeting does not possess that authority but has the responsibility, no less crucial, to search for it, to recognise it, and act accordingly. Put another way, those who stand up to speak at church meetings do not speak with the authority of God because they are church members attending the church meeting, they do so only if the meeting determines that on this occasion they have heard in their words that authority.

The difference between acting because we have the power to do so and acting because we have the authority to do so is immense, and too often Baptist gatherings have been struggles for power rather than seeking authority. In Acts 5:34 Gamaliel at least spoke with wisdom, but we might also make a case that he spoke with true spiritual authority when he urged the Sanhedrin not to persecute the early church—but he did not have the power to see his views adopted. Instead the voices of prejudice and hatred prevailed. Too often our decisions are influenced by those who shout loudest and invoke greatest fear. To possess authority is not necessarily to possess power and as Christians we should spend more time seeking authority than we do exercising power. When we allow the pursuit and exercise of power to dominate our meetings we may well find that the Pigs have triumphed after all!

***Clive Jarvis has served several Baptist churches and now works itinerantly, supporting ministers and engaging in mission. Contact Clive on [cliverjarvis@gmail.com](mailto:cliverjarvis@gmail.com).***

# Ministry: how we were

by Michael V. Jackson

A century ago, a Christian minister in Scotland came to the aid of, as he put it, ‘non-plussed’ young ministers, struggling in the early years of ministry. The result was *The minister and his work*, by William H. Harrowes, MA, minister of St Enoch’s United Free Church, Glasgow, published in London in 1909. It came into my hands when, at its closure, books from Western (Congregational) College, Bristol, found their way into the Baptist College. In the light of this book, it is instructive to identify what has remained constant in ministry and what, under the pressure of cultural shift and pastoral priorities, has changed.

The author’s approach is significant. As a primer for ministry, he simply lists the discrete areas of work, as he sees them, and addresses each one briefly. So we have *The minister and his sermons*; *The minister and the young*; *The minister and public life etc*, drawing on his own experience. While this approach is very much ‘hands on’ and eminently practical, it fails to take account of tensions in ministry and theological struggle. Harrowes does not ask many questions—which perhaps indicates that, in his day, much more could be assumed: one simply got on with the job. Your role in society was more or less understood and justifying one’s existence was hardly necessary. How this contrasts with our present ambiguity within secular culture and the personal struggle for integrity in one’s calling! One of our number was told recently when he identified himself as a minister: ‘That doesn’t mean anything today’!

In view of the gender change in ministry, across most denominations, the title of Harrowes’ book is, today, clearly anachronistic. He was writing just as the first stirrings of women’s emancipation were being felt, by way of the Suffragettes, Emmeline Pankhurst *et al*. His society was uncritically patriarchal, yet to enfranchise half the population, and the Christian ministry, with the notable exception of the Salvation Army, simply reflected this state of affairs, to its impoverishment. Our Edwardian author would no doubt be more than a little surprised at the number and contribution of women in ministry today. The question is would the theological arguments used in favour convince him of the rightness of this radical development?

His first chapter deals with the minister himself. He is anxious to spell out the essence

of what 'professionalism' means in terms of the ordained ministry. For him, this is, first and foremost, 'to commend Christ', not simply in church duties but in one's total response to life in all its aspects. In today's parlance, he is as much concerned with 'being' as 'doing'. We should live as we preach and preach as we live, though it could be argued that preaching is essentially aspirational, the content of which we ministers of the gospel strive to attain. But in raising the issue of 'professionalism', he touches on a contentious issue. For some, the very word, in connection with ministry, is pejorative, implying an impersonal, detached attitude to one's duties and responsibilities. It can, on the other hand, express standards in ministry, so that one can be relied upon not to fall below a certain proficiency in the pastoral task: an irreducible minimum.

When we turn to the chapter on *The minister and missions*, we find a sharp contrast with today's thinking. Because for him, and presumably his contemporaries, 'mission' implies one of three things: foreign missions; congregational missions (that is, mission halls linked to a mother church); and special missions, conducted by visiting evangelists. He appears most enthusiastic about the first of these. Today, we have come to regard 'mission' less as short bursts of isolated activity and more as a total mind-set and response to the whole of life: to break Christ open before the watching world. Thus issues of justice and peace; ecology; education; the workplace; and the worlds of sport; science; art and literature are all included in what many Christians would regard as the essential mission of the church. No longer is it compartmentalised, rather it is coextensive with life itself. Surely, in our era, this is a positive development, led of the Spirit.

*The minister and pastoral visitation* paints a picture of our Edwardian predecessors wearing themselves out with constant, unrelenting visiting. One senses that, here again, there may be deviation in pastoral practice. Not that, even in those days, its usefulness went unquestioned, we are told. But for the author, it is clearly central to our work. Among the reasons he gives is 'the affections of the people', that is the growth of love and trust that comes only when the minister gives of himself or herself generously within the home. This, clearly, may pay dividends in terms of the response of people to one's total ministry.

As well as the spiritual benefit that may come to our people through systematic visiting, the writer adds also the benefit that may come to the minister. He is certain that profit is mutual, inasmuch as the pastor's humanity is enlarged and enriched by the circumstances of his or her members, in the heights and depths of their experience. This will inevitably deepen the preaching and teaching ministry. Over against this we have to set the situation

today: ministers pastoring more than one church; servicing a multiplicity of committees; struggling with strategy; time-consuming pastoral situations unimagined by our writer; and the need sometimes of accompanied visiting, not to mention the innovation of pastoral teams. Notwithstanding, as he puts it, 'One visit will sometimes pay more than many sermons'.

Perhaps the chapter which is most timeless, echoing unerringly ministry today, is *The minister and his home*. The issues it raises are as relevant and urgent now as then. He paints an all too familiar picture: the sacrifice of family life to the all-consuming demands of ministry, with the possibility of resentment and estrangement. However, he does not believe that being married to the church is inevitable, urging a more disciplined approach to one's duties, so carving out quality time for partner and family, for they are no less deserving of his time and attention as anyone else. In parenthesis, one senses that in our 24/7 society, many executives caught up in high pressure zones are in a similar category to ourselves these days.

When Harrowes considers the minister's 'wife', he assumes that she has no full-time career or occupation, in contrast with today. His generation lived with the unquestioned assumption that she was the 'unpaid curate', willing and able to supplement her husband's labours to a considerable degree. To put it bluntly, churches were getting 'two for the price of one'. Manse life today is more diverse. One may find a husband making it possible, domestically, for his wife to minister, or a home in which both partners are serving the church in an ordained capacity, juggling family responsibilities. But Harrowes' cry from the heart is timeless: our first responsibility is to our family, from which we receive so much emotional strength and succour.

Towards the end of the book, he deals with *The minister and new methods*. One warms to his conviction that the sphere of the church's influence and appeal should be widened, for 'at present each congregation has too much the appearance of a private enclosure with high walls surrounding it'; in other words, a closed shop mentality. However, when he lists 'new methods' or, as we might say, 'new ways of being church', the book betrays its age, with talk of 'pleasant Sunday evening services', 'women's visiting committee', and the minister's 'consulting hour'. New methods! We note they are predominantly churchy, rather than rooted in the community. However, you may well concur with him when he argues for the mobilisation of the whole church and the urgency of finding as many outlets for the energies of people as possible: 'The ideal church will be all workers and no drones'. While this is on the whole true, hurting, damaged, grieving people still need the church as refuge. Such may be in a position only to receive. To this one could add that the value of Christian witness and service in the secular context, quite outside the life of the institution, is no



less valid, something we pastors tend to overlook when we ascribe Kingdom value to the contribution of our members.

This, then, is a flavour of ministry a century ago. The churches were doubtless numerically stronger and the ministry more confident and secure, less affected by identity crisis. However, one senses that, for this very reason, our Edwardian forebears were less able to break out of the institutional straitjacket than are we, faced as we are with the church's very survival in this country. These critical days are liberating shapes and forms of ministry which might take away the breath of Mr Harrowes. In conclusion, we pray that we may be as faithful in our day as he undoubtedly was in his, meeting the needs of the hour.

***Michael V. Jackson is now retired from Baptist ministry and lives in Yorkshire. He can be contacted on [michael@jackson1941.plus.com](mailto:michael@jackson1941.plus.com).***

## **Pulpit exchanges for UK/US**

When I was in pastoral charge of a church I was able to link up UK pastors with a church in the US. Usually we have been able to find a convenient time when both ministers can travel to each other's church, use the manse and car to travel around, preaching and doing some pastoral support. There is no expectation to be working every hour but rather to put in some service. When I became a regional minister, and then retired, I took over the responsibility from the BU of guiding any such linkups.

If there are any ministers who would like possible contacts then I would be happy to take the first steps towards a link. If this becomes a possible plan for you, please contact me by e-mail, listing when you might be looking for such an adventure, further details of what might be involved, and details of your church that I can share with a US pastor.

I should mention that I already have a UK minister wanting such a trip in 2015, and a recently retired US pastor who lives in Oklahoma who would be willing to come to a UK church for 5—6 weeks in the next 12 months, to do some preaching and to enable someone here to use his home and car in Oklahoma. If you want any further information contact me.

My name is Frank Boyd and my e-mail address is [frankboyd1905@virginmedia.com](mailto:frankboyd1905@virginmedia.com) My telephone number is 023 8046 5649.

# Black preaching

by Samuel Thomas

This article discusses the origins, nature and preaching styles of Black preaching, prompted by reflection on my Pentecostal Christian heritage, and which I believe has shaped my theology. As Thomas G. Long comments in his book, *The witness of preaching* (p53), ‘Preachers go to the Bible, not as “universal Christians” but with a particular theological heritage and viewpoint’. Black preaching in my early church life and Christian faith was inspirational—basic but realistic. I was able to understand and relate to the sermons.

To engage with ‘itinerant scholarship’ (a term used by R. Ruard Ganzevoort to note, travelling, journeying combining experience with scholarship) I would like to dialogue with views and comments that had been held and made on Black preaching. Joel Edwards, former Director of the Evangelical Alliance UK, says in his book *Let’s praise him again*: ‘On the whole, black preachers in the United States, the Caribbean and the UK are extemporaneous preachers who follow an intuitive flow of biblical ideas and text around a particular theme’ (p58). David Buttrick, Emeritus Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee, concurs: ‘Black preaching is scarcely monolithic’.<sup>1</sup>

## Preaching rooted in experience

I am passionate about creating a window into Black preaching, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with its unique contribution to preaching history and practice. Cleophus J. LaRue is associate professor of homiletics at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey and specialises in the theory and method of African American preaching and worship. He claims that Black preaching has a theological and a sociological influence that runs deeper than mere preaching technique. For LaRue, Black preaching is rooted in the extraordinary experiences of Black people (in particular, slavery), and he refers to this as the soul of Black Christian experience, resulting in a Black hermeneutic, which then reflects how the character of God is understood and the ways in which God works through scripture and sermons in peoples’ lives today.<sup>2</sup>

Every ethnic group and nationality of people has experienced some great misfortune, but it is not simply a matter of what happens to a person. As Miles Jones states, 'It is how blacks interpret those happenings in light of what has been revealed in and through the word of God'.<sup>3</sup> I think this is what LaRue is attempting to discuss, adding that: 'It is in the vital interpretative encounter between Scripture and the struggle of the marginalized that the search for distinctiveness in black preaching should begin'.<sup>4</sup>

Black preaching refers specifically to African American preaching, '[a] rich and varied tradition, covering a broad configuration of motivations, theological points of view, art forms, structures, and styles of delivery'.<sup>5</sup>

Achim Hartner and Holger Eschmann both note that preaching involves the entire body—speaking pace, breathing, body language, use of hands and facial expression—these, they argue, reinforce the message and lend credibility to what is said. Hartner & Eschmann describe Black preaching as 'biblical, expressive, oral, creative, rhythmic, inspirational, and dialogical: a journey towards celebration'.<sup>6</sup>

### **Jazz and preaching**

Kirk Byron Jones has written *The jazz of preaching: how to preach with great freedom and joy*,<sup>7</sup> in which he imagines the influence of preaching that was delivered in a manner as contagiously joyful as was Louis Armstrong in his playing and singing. Jones also discusses the potential influence of sermons if they were as rich as Sarah Vaughan in her musical vocals, and as alluringly clear as what he calls the angelic voice of Ella Fitzgerald. For Jones, preaching can be enhanced through the metaphor of jazz. If preachers can understand the inner dynamics of jazz—its particular forms, rules and styles—it will enhance their preaching. Jazz, according to Jones, has a simultaneous structure and spontaneity which, if understood well, can help preachers better to understand their own art. Jones' view of preaching gives support and strength particularly to Black preaching, but it is not certain that it could make the same contribution where Black preaching is not so commonly practised. If congregants are not fond of jazz, then weaving it into preaching could cause listeners to respond negatively—but it is a positive attempt to enrich preaching.

The most obvious place to begin an exploration of the historical origins of African American preaching is the African continent.<sup>8</sup> Understanding the importance of oral history to African and Caribbean people is paramount, 'in that it provides an insight

into the significance placed on proclamation and the manner in which the gospel is communicated'.<sup>9</sup> Henry H. Mitchell traces Black preaching to what he refers to as 'natural African influences'. These, he points out, have affected the vocal expression and delivery of all Black preachers, since they are part of African linguistics and culture.

Mitchell argues that slave storytelling played a large role in Black hermeneutics and theology. Black preaching stemmed from this, and evolved into more oral tradition of learning and cultural expression which is inherently dependent on call and response. Likewise, African music and oral communication are characterised by audience participation. This supports the views of Ruthlyn Bradshaw and Cleophus LaRue on the characteristics of Black preaching. In Mitchell's opinion, the African rhetorical tradition did not lead to an emphasis on the abstract. The Yoruba of Nigeria insisted that ideas be expressed in images that were easy for people to visualise. He notes that the Old Testament uses this same method, as do the parables in the teaching ministry of Jesus. Mitchell points to the fact that images and actions, stories and pictures with meaning, are not primitive imaginings: rather, they are sophisticated principles of communication.<sup>10</sup>

### **George Whitefield**

Another view is given by William H. Pipes, who dates Black preaching back to 1732 and the preaching style of the English revivalist George Whitefield.<sup>11</sup> It was Whitefield, according to Pipes, who built a bridge between Black religious sentiments and the faith of the colonial whites. His preaching challenged the prevalent formal, unattractive style of preaching. It was fervent and dramatic with extreme physical manifestations, and, according to Pipes, had an instant attraction for African people. Benjamin Franklin, an established polymath, was impressed by Whitefield's ability to preach and speak with clarity and enthusiasm to crowds. He described George Whitefield's preaching:

*Frequent repetition, that every accent, every emphasis, every modulation of voice, was so perfectly well tuned that without being interested in the subject one could not help being pleased with the discourse; a pleasure of much the same kind with that received from an excellent piece of music.*<sup>12</sup>

Whitefield elicited emotional responses from his audience. He was an intellectual. He had charisma; he spoke to large crowds and was able to project his voice well

and clearly. His preaching style had an enormous appeal for Black people. Vernon Loggins refers to it as preaching that brought 'to the Negro a religion he could understand and which could stir him to self-expression. He responded to it with enthusiasm, allowed his imagination to run riot with it, and loved it with passion'.<sup>13</sup> Whitefield's method, which was uniquely different from the norm, mirrors the practices that have come to be associated with Black preaching.

The interpretation of African responses to Whitefield has been documented in the autobiography of an ex-slave named Gustavus Vassa, who attended one of Whitefield's services. He states how he viewed Whitefield as a pious man but that Whitefield preached with 'earnestness, and sweating as much as I ever did while in slavery. I was very much struck and impressed with this; I thought it strange I had never seen divines exert themselves in this manner'.<sup>14</sup> Slaves were not free even to preach, and certainly not to study.

Black preaching has its own identity with its roots in African tradition and culture. Therefore I do not support the claim that Black preaching, which is so African in nature, can have had its genesis in George Whitefield. I would, however, credit Whitefield with what Mitchell calls 'transmission' of this style of emotional preaching. Mitchell refers to Andrew C. Marshall and Shubal Stearns, who were converted under Whitefield's preaching ministry, and continued in the same preaching style. The historian Sydney Ahlstrom says that Marshall and Stearns were 'passionate evangelists, incredibly energetic, not a little eccentric, and rather extreme in their employment of emotional appeals. They inspired many converts to be likewise'.<sup>15</sup> Whitefield can be seen as the promoter, and in some respects the developer of (and a person who had a great influence on), Black preaching, as opposed to being its inventor.

### **Comfort and consolation**

During the time of slavery the Black preacher's task was partly to act as a comforter and consoler. He developed a strong imagination to go with his ministerial function. It was from this that he received his special revelation on certain scriptural themes. Imagination has been described by the American Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler as one of the most neglected dimensions of preaching. For Sittler, the skilful use of imagination by the preacher in the sermon is more than a matter of twisting the texts: rather, it is the use of theological concepts with rhetoric. It is the process whereby the text is re-enacted and revisited, and this creates the salvational aspect of the word of

God. For Sittler, imagination is the name given to the category-transcending fusing of vision and speech. Gerhard Ebeling, former student of Rudolf Bultmann at Zurich, seems to share some of Sittler's views. Ebeling states that the preacher executes the text and allows it to work its original will on the hearer.<sup>16</sup>

In researching the origins of Black preaching, Mitchell gives an astoundingly detailed historical account of slave narratives and sermons. It is clear that these sermons were meaningful because the hearers were not mere spectators, but real participants in the experience. These sermons by slaves brought imagination and life experience to the sermon. Thomas G. Long states: 'Whenever we include a "slice of life" in a sermon, we are making implicit theological claims whether we know it or not, by the kind of experiences and images we choose to employ in the sermon'.<sup>17</sup> Imagination causes the listeners to reflect. Through imagination a story is told or retold, and that story is meaningful because it somehow allows the hearer to become involved. Through imagination, pictures are created and painted—the use of imagination, stories and experience, according to Thomas Long, is not mere decoration of the sermon, but a medium for theological issues of great complexity. They are active ingredients of communication.

### **Imagination and story**

Imagination and storytelling in Black preaching bring together a rich African tradition of linguistic and tonal dialogue. This also gives Black preaching a unique richness. Another characteristic of Black preaching is the dialogue with the congregation—'call and response'—which is part of a larger dialogical pattern also traceable to West African culture. This custom from the African heritage provides the audience an opportunity to participate and feed back favourably on the message of the sermon. On occasion, specifically poignant phrases or texts are restated for emphasis. In several instances, the audience participation precedes the words of the preacher.

New Pentecostal churches were founded in England in the 1970s and 1980s. Their emphasis on the Holy Spirit is shared with the classical Pentecostals. Their distinctiveness usually lies in flexible church structures built around the relationship with authoritative preachers, who are almost invariably seen as embodying apostolic ministry. The sermons are normally based on series preaching, empowerment and prosperity, shaped by the personality and charisma

of the leader. However Black preaching still influences these churches and is commonly practised.

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17. T. Long, *The witness of preaching*, p157.

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We are always looking for new book reviewers, so contact John Goddard if this is something you feel you could do, letting him know what subjects interest you. You get to keep the book, of course!

Our copyright position is summarised under the list of contents on p1 of this issue. Thank you.

*Sally Nelson*



# Reviews

Edited by John Goddard

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## ***Learning to dream again— rediscovering the heart of God***

Samuel Wells

Canterbury Press 2013

**Reviewer: Robert Draycott**

This is a good book. I have begun to write this review before finishing it, as the first few pages were enough and it is the sort of book that many in ministry will be able to dip into for inspiration, ideas and insights. As an example, Wells writes about the difference between contracts and covenants: turn to p43 to see if you agree with his comment: 'here's the mistake Christians often make'.

This book is biblically based, not in the sense of proof-texting, but through the reflective exposition of well known passages which, for me, sheds fresh light both on those passages and on the bigger themes. For example, in the story of the Exodus, with whom do people like us identify: the Hebrews, or the Egyptians? Wells then poses the question: 'what would it mean to let the story read us?'

Above all this collection lives up to its sub-title—*Rediscovering the heart of*

*God*. That is in part because of the author's stated aim, 'When I prepare sermons, addresses, essays, papers, or even books, I want them to be like Phaedippides' announcement. I want them to tell of great news...'

For those of you who are impatiently waiting for more detail, there are six sections, *Learning to Love, Live, Think, Read, Feel, and Dream, again*. Each section has five or six pieces with titles such as *Who are you?; Turning all into alleluia; Food is politics; Dwelling in the comma; The word we don't mention*. The 'again' is significant, these pieces are reminders, of the 'old, old story' of God's love in Jesus and of how that good news relates to the 21st century.

The book is readable, it is clear, and it is very thought-provoking. The author is now the vicar of St Martin in the Fields after some years at Duke University in the US. Thoroughly recommended.

## ***The emerging leader: stepping up in leadership***

Peter Shaw and Colin Shaw

Canterbury Press 2013

**Reviewer: Martin Gillard**

Are you just starting out in ministry? Are you taking on a new pastorate? Do you know someone who is? If so, you may find this book helpful. It offers guidance and direction to emerging leaders and those who are enabling emerging leaders to grow to their full potential. Being written in partnership

between a father and a son, it combines the wisdom of experience with the energy of youth.

This book is divided into two main sections: *Understanding yourself and those you work with*; and *Establishing yourself and stepping up a level*. Each section has four subsections giving a good overview of personal and organisational development for new leaders. These also provide a good checklist of leadership principles and practices for those taking on a new leadership role.

The subsections contain a further 33 concise and readable chapters of only three pages each, containing useful practical advice, a helpful illustration and questions for personal reflection. Such short chapters are a real bonus for busy pastors and leaders, taking only a few minutes to read, but equally the conciseness can sometimes seem a little superficial and the ideas undeveloped. On a couple of occasions I would have liked the authors to explain in a little more detail how the advice could be applied in practice.

This book may be given to friends in leadership roles inside or outside the church. While some of the material is focused on the world of business and civil service, the authors are clearly and quietly Christian, and the material easily transfers from secular roles to church, parachurch, and charitable organisations.

The bibliography lists other books by Peter Shaw on similar leadership themes, including those from a Christian

background, such as *Deciding well: a Christian perspective on making decisions*; and *Effective Christian leadership in the global workplace*. It seemed more like advertising than bibliography.

Overall, I would have liked to read a little more detail on recognising and nurturing the emerging leaders around you. But in all, a good introduction to the practice of leadership for someone taking on a new position.

### ***When God is silent—divine language beyond words***

Barbara Brown Taylor

Canterbury Press 2013

**Reviewer: John Matthews**

This book deserves to be bought, read and pondered. It contains the text of the 1997 Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale Divinity School and arose from the author's experience of God not saying much to her.

Brown Taylor argues that God's silence need not mean that something is wrong with our relationship with God and can be as much a sign of God's presence as God's absence. It can also mean that we are being invited into a deeper kind of relationship with God that surpasses all speech.

The first lecture, *Famine*, argues that language has been hit by consumerism, journalism and the sheer proliferation of

words, which means most of us have become hard of hearing. The second, *Silence*, suggests that we have difficulty listening to God because we prefer to speak, perhaps because we are afraid God won't. Biblical instances of God withdrawing or not speaking are given. Jesus' preaching 'was full of questions which left great pockets of silence in his proclamation' (p76).

In the third lecture, *Restraint*, the author speaks of the need for homiletical restraint in terms of economy, courtesy and reverence and argues that sermons should be shorter rather than longer; we should 'say only what we know to be true, say it from the heart and sit down' (p101). And she asks, 'Where do you go to listen for God's silence and God's speech? Who taught you to do that and whom have you taught to do the same thing?' (p95).

This brief review cannot do justice to the richness of this short book, from which every preacher could profit.

***When rain falls like lead:  
exploring the presence of God in  
the darkness of suffering***

Andy Percey

Paternoster 2013

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

Fellow Baptist minister Andy Percey has written a candid and honest book out of his own experience of the devastating

loss of a much-loved younger sister who, in her early 20s and only a year after her marriage, died suddenly and unexpectedly from a stroke. Such a loss would test the strongest faith, and Andy does not spare us his own vulnerability as he writes. He tells us in his introduction that writing has been both a painful and a healing experience, and throughout the book he includes accounts of family encounters that continue to be helpful to him in his grieving process.

The book comes with glowing tributes on the back cover from David Coffey and Ian Stackhouse, and there is a perceptive foreword by John Colwell in which he points out that all theology is contextual and that we come to scripture 'as the people we are'.

Unfortunately, this book never really catches fire so far as I am concerned, although Andy ticks all the right theological boxes. He tells us that for him the real question is not so much 'why does God allow suffering?', as 'where, and how, do we discern God's presence in suffering?' He devotes chapters to the hiddenness of God, to the experience of Job, to the Psalms of lament (including the need to reclaim a space for lament in our worship today), and to the story of Jesus' life and death. But in all this Andy does not really have anything new to say, and others may, indeed, have said it better. (See, for instance, my review of *Soul pain* in the October 2013 issue of *bmj*.)

In the first seven chapters there is nothing that would necessarily prevent me from suggesting that bereaved laypeople might be helped by reading this book. But when we come to chapter eight we enter deeper theological waters as we encounter a discussion, drawing on Patristic thought as well as modern theologians, about the immutability of God.

There is no space in a short review to engage with the arguments. Suffice it to say that the issues really need a longer and deeper treatment than the one that Andy provides. I personally have come to a different conclusion concerning divine immutability, so that what he writes, to my mind, raises as many questions as answers.

For me, this chapter reduces the value of the book as a pastoral resource. So while there is much about it that is good and commendable, in the end I have to say that my overall feeling is one of disappointment.

***Immense, unfathomed,  
unconfined: the grace of God in  
creation, church and  
community—essays in honour of  
Norman Young***

Sean Winter (ed)

UAP (Melbourne), Alban Books, 2013

***Reviewer: Rosa Hunt***

This volume is a festschrift in honour of Professor Norman Young. Ordained by

the Methodist Church, Professor Young was involved in the establishment of the Uniting Church in Australia (formed from the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches.)

Young's wider ecumenical commitment is reflected in his having been a member of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, and of the World Methodist/Roman Catholic International Commission. The volume is a collection of thought-provoking contributions from biblical studies, theology and Wesleyan studies—exploring the central theme of God's immense, unfathomed and unconfined grace through 25 different lenses.

It would be very difficult to give an overview of the book without committing the injustice of attempting to summarise each paper in a couple of sentences. Instead, I will give a brief description of the papers which I found most interesting as a Baptist minister and Patristics student.

My current research grew out of an interest in how the creation narrative to which people subscribe informs their theological practice. In the opening chapter of this book, Suzanne Boorer explores the importance of Priestly creation theology for the church today. She brings out the strong correspondences between the Priestly narrative in Genesis 1:1-2:3, and the Sinai narrative in Exodus 25-40 and Numbers 1-2, especially the description

of the tabernacle as the place of God's dwelling in the midst of his people.

This observation leads to a discussion of the close link in the ancient Near East between a society's creation theology and the ordering of its ritual worship (and indeed of the society itself)—Boorer uses them to interpret and shed light on each other, with the setting up of the tabernacle being interpreted as the climax of the Priestly creation theology. Once the tabernacle is complete, God is immanent in his creation. For Boorer, the Priestly emphasis on the importance of all creation redresses the anthropocentric claims of the New Testament by allowing us to see the risen Christ (who has superseded the tabernacle) as the climax of the entire cosmic creation.

So much for my research—most of the time I am engaged in pastoral ministry. What is that?! In the next chapter, Randall Prior provides a Lucan rethinking of the nature of pastoral ministry. Arguing from selected texts, Prior starts from a definition of pastoral care as essentially Christological—it stems from the good news that God in Jesus 'declares, bestows and promises the utter re-definition of broken and dehumanised life'.

This definition allows Prior to define the church as the broken community which knows itself to be the recipient of Jesus' pastoral ministry. Jesus Christ is the pastor—and the unique role of the ordained person is to represent the

ministry of Jesus Christ for the people and...to uphold their common calling to ministry'.

Pausing briefly to note my gratitude to Gerald O'Collins SJ for having introduced me in these pages to the practice of *risus paschalis*—the widespread mediaeval practice of the pastor telling jokes on Easter Sunday to celebrate Jesus' last laugh over Satan and death—I will move on to another paper I found particularly interesting.

This paper is another exploration of what it means to be a minister. Beverley Campbell uses Gillian Rose's concept of the 'broken middle' and Bakhtin's dialogic theory of self to analyse the identity of the ordained minister. Campbell uses excerpts from interviews with ordinands to illustrate the process of negotiating an 'ordination identity' which occupies the middle ground between private self and public self. She concludes with Norman Young that 'the call to ordained ministry [is] the call to embody God's grace'.

Through some highly enjoyable detours along the paths of Benedictine opposition to grumbling, Wesleyan poetic dependence on Dryden, the Methodist doctrine of perfection and the tension between Rahner and Barth's views of grace, I arrived safely at the last chapter of the book, where I was fascinated to read Norman Young's insights into the process whereby three Australian denominations came

together to form the Uniting Church. Here in Wales Baptists are currently exploring the possibility of bringing the two Baptist Unions together to form one Baptist family, and so his gracious and thoughtful comments on his own experience were very welcome.

This is an intellectual roller-coaster of a book, a high octane journey through different disciplines, always circling in trajectories of various shape round that central mystery of grace. I thoroughly enjoyed it. In my opinion,

the mark of a good book is that it doesn't leave you unchanged. Ideas from this book have crept into my preaching and pastoral reflection, and it has made me absolutely determined to read more Barth and Bakhtin—so watch out! It might have the same effect on you too...

[Review editor's note—this was an unusual selection for review, but I thought friends in BMF might like a reminder of the work of our colleague Sean Winter out in Australia. JG]

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## Could YOU review



*If you would be interested in reviewing for bmj, please contact John Goddard on [jmgoddard@tinyworld.co.uk](mailto:jmgoddard@tinyworld.co.uk), telling him your area of interest and giving contact details.*