

the baptist ministers'
journal

July 2014 volume 323

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From the editor

The big debate

Ministry issues are currently running high on the agenda as the Baptist world morphs into something new. What will we be doing in the future? How will new ministers be formed? Will paid ministry be a thing of the past?

BMF has started to hold 'Conversation days' on topical issues for ministers. Last year's Conversation (held in London and Sheffield) covered the new marriage laws. This year we are focusing on new pathways for ministry, hearing from those who are not on a full stipend but facilitate their ministry in other ways. A short account of the London Day is on p11 of this issue, plus notice of the northern BMF Day in Huddersfield.

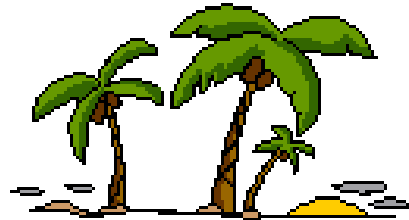
We need very much to hear from one another, to get excited and be challenged about ministry in today's world, but to continue to hold the core Baptist principles that bind us together: our corporate and covenanted life in particular, which is potentially so countercultural. Helen Dare's Whitley Lecture for 2014 discusses the 'fray' of the church meeting and how we can value all members of the community through debate and genuine respect for the other—a great read and a useful contribution to the current debate about being Baptist.

In this issue you can read some contributions on ministry past, present and future, which all give us food for thought. There are also two articles with different views of the new marriage laws and, wherever any of us sits in this discussion, as Baptists we need to allow the other person to speak.

If you want to contribute to *bmj*, do get in touch with me. Please tell your colleagues in ministry to join BMF and take part—your denomination needs YOU!

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

Carol Murray's
Desert island books



Desert islands, for me, immediately bring to mind sand, sea and palm trees, and that may have been engendered by being an avid listener to *Desert island discs* with its evocative theme tune and amazing choices of 'discs' over the years, as well as the fascinating life stories. But perhaps desert islands should have more of the emphasis on 'deserted', with time to read (or re-read) those books that have meant most throughout one's life. Being limited to three brings its own rather difficult constraints and choices for me, for books have been my friend since childhood. As I was an only child, I often retreated into books of all sorts to discover worlds and experiences of which I was quite unaware, yet attracted to. Now on my desert (or deserted) island, what will I need to last with me? What will stimulate me? What will console me? What will make me think? What will make me laugh and what will bring me peace? Quite a tall order and I'm not sure I've got it right, but here goes.

When I set out on the path of higher education it was to train for teaching, and most people in those days did it at a college of education. Off I went to Coventry College of Education to train as a secondary school teacher in Sociology and Religious Education. It was quite an explosive time historically, culturally, educationally and within theology—the 60s really did swing, whatever anybody tells you to the contrary!!

The College held prayers each weekday for those who wanted to attend, and so I was introduced to Michel Quoist and his *Prayers of life*, and some of his subsequent publications: *The Christian response*, *Christ is alive*, *Meeting God*, *Living words*, *Pathways of prayer*, and so on. Quoist was a French Catholic priest, as well as a writer, and always very much in touch with the world at large, and those to whom he ministered. From a young age, with his family, he had been involved with the Young Christian Workers, and, I think, that brought a sharp and real edge to his theology and his writing, especially through *Prayers of life*, which became hugely popular and

influential in France and later here, after translation.

Some people found the prayers a little too revolutionary (!!), a bit racy, and rather too edgy, but they all came out of his experience; and, as he said in his preface, 'To pray these pages...was to help others to bring to God every aspect of their lives and to transfigure their lives through prayer'. His language was 'of the street', no *thees* and *thous*, no pious words or phrases, he told it as it was, and it blew us away at the time. Each prayer is prefaced with a comment and a text from scripture to contextualise it in the gospel, bringing together gospel and life, which Quoist sees as the two avenues that God uses to speak to humanity.

I would value having these prayers to keep me in touch with life, rather than becoming disorientated and institutionalised on the island, and to remind me of the vast world beyond, that is also within God's loving care and attention—rather than getting wrapped up in my own rescue. There is a final section also that features the stations of the cross, which could mark the Christian calendar and keep me on track with the liturgical seasons of the year.

Moving on, I have always been fascinated by poetry and have tried to widen my knowledge and appreciation of it over the years. I have moved through old favourites John Donne, William Wordsworth, John Keats, George Herbert—all that you'd expect to be on my list and more. Then I picked up with Walt Whitman, W.H. Auden, Michael O'Siadhail, Seamus Heaney, Carol Ann Duffy, Ted Hughes, ee cummings, Michael Symmons Roberts, and my all-time favourite, U.A. Fanthorpe.

I have decided to go with none of these, for I have been entranced, stimulated and unsettled by the *Staying alive* poetry trilogy. This is a set of contemporary poems from all around the world and the first one, *Staying alive*, contains (from the comments on the cover) 'life-affirming poems fired by belief in the human and the spiritual at a time when much in the world feels unreal, inhuman and hollow'. That really resonated with me and took me onto the second in the trilogy, *Being alive*, which was equally stimulating and disturbing. From its back cover: 'poems that touch the heart, stir the mind and fire the spirit—being about love and loss, fear and longing, hurt and wonder'.

For me it was all of that, which has taken me to the third volume, *Being human*, which is my choice to take with me to the island. (I would like all three, but I doubt the editor would let me. She's very fierce!!) It offers a really broad range of poems from the international stage and they are set in real time, spanning very recent experiences in world history as it takes in poets from the first decade of the 21st century as well as the 20th. There are sections to the poems, but all deal with being

human in various scenarios. Some of the poems in *Fight to the death* and *War and survival* are very hard to read, yet are balanced by *Living in hope* and *More to love*. This set is such a rich resource for island living because it would help me cope with the very tough times and those various emotions that will be thrown up, while giving hope for rescue at some time.

My final book takes me into unfamiliar waters, into which I feel I should have gone before, and now get the opportunity. Over the years I have become familiar with South and Central America and some of their authors, but not with the Columbian, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. With his death in April 2014 and the publicity surrounding it I thought I would take his first novel, *One hundred years of solitude* (1967), the one that led to his Nobel Prize for literature in 1982. I look forward to reading it because it chronicles several generations of a family from founding a rural village in South America onwards, with their trials and tribulations, births and deaths, and (as the title suggests), exploring the theme of solitude which might be quite apt for this desert island, although I hope not for 100 years! I think this book would also give me plenty to enjoy, tussle with and think through.

Turning my thoughts to the luxury item I hark back to a desire from childhood. My grandmother had in her 'front room' a piano, and I dearly wished to be able to play it. But 'we was poor but grateful', and it never became possible for me to have lessons. So, with money no object, (courtesy of BMF!!) I would like a piano with some easy 'teach yourself the piano' books. I hope the climate will be conducive to keeping the piano in tune, but perhaps with me learning to play it won't matter too much! And I hope on my return to be pianist enough to amuse myself at least.

Carol Murray has ministered in two churches and taught at Regent's Park College.

Corrigenda

In April's issue of *bmj* there were errors in two articles, for which the editor apologises.

In Anne Phillips' article the footnote numbers were missed from the text. Contact Anne or the editor for the details.

In Samuel Thomas' article the third paragraph on p 25 should read:

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 being said. Hartner and Eschmann's views are reflective of areas of Black preaching.

Black preaching is known to be 'biblical, expressive, oral, creative, rhythmic, inspirational, and dialogical: a journey towards celebration'.

Ministry for the future

by John Rackley

*Do not try to call them back to where they were,
and do not try to call them to where you are,
as beautiful as that place might seem to you.*

*You must have the courage
to go with them to a place that
neither you nor they have ever been before.*

(Vincent Donovan)

It is time for ministers to become clearly and unequivocally ‘missionary pastors’. The generalist description ‘minister’ will no longer do—it lacks direction and focus. For me, the need is for pastors, which is the core work of Christ (Matthew 11:28-30) and reflects the nature of God (Ezekiel 34:11ff, 2 Corinthians 3-5).

Missionary is an old-fashioned word, and yet seems to have hung on in the more recent terms of ‘mission worker’, ‘missioner’. I believe both the need of the churches and the contemporary context of our churches requires this qualification of the role of the pastor. Some may say this has always been so, but I fear that the edges have become blurred and one has cancelled out the other.

I have become increasingly convinced that there is a need for churches and ministers bravely to take up the path ‘into the new’ described by Vincent Donovan. In fact these words were not his, but those of a student in a US university in the late 1970s.

They speak of loss and letting go; they challenge the idolatry of the established; they invite trust and risk-taking; above all, they require humility.

They are about an obedient submission to the Lord who has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word. A dawning that will emerge in the encounter between faith and non-faith, spirituality and secularism in this present age, not in the security of the same-minded which we call the local church or our particular version of the Christian Way.

What I imagine the student to mean is that I (as a Christian) must be ready to leave behind anything that I may cherish and count as an advantage received from my Christian context and background, for the sake of the gospel.

Could I persuade churches I have been part of to do this? It has been difficult. Did I really

want to do this myself? In my heart of hearts it was a struggle. The words of the student are a great rallying cry, but to make those words incarnate has been beyond me so far. Yet they still tantalise me.

With the current examination of the call, formation and selection of ministers, missionary pastors and churches are required to become centres of pastoral embrace. As a minister of a city-centre church, one of the conclusions to which I have reluctantly come is that the model of the 'gathered' church does not fit this situation well. It may well be one of those beautiful things that need to be left behind and I wonder whether this is an issue for settings other than city-centres.

How beautiful have been our chapels on the corner! How loved and cared for! How Bible-centred our sermons! How brilliant our musicians! How committed our deacons! How wonderful the fellowship! And how ignored!

It seems that when a 'gathered' church is called to become more missionary; more community-centred, more engaged with the multivarious dimensions of a city centre, there is emerges a fault-line. It is a fault-line that can be summed up by the question: *Who belongs here?* Or putting it another way: *Who is one of us?*

Two answers are common. The first is 'the members', the second 'those who come on Sundays'. I do not think either fits the missionary context of the city centre or current contemporary pressures on the church in our islands. There are consequences for our understanding of membership and relationships with other churches. I think it requires more about being gatherings, rather than being the gathered.

What might this mean for the minister-in-training who wants to be ordained as a missionary pastor or the minister *in situ* who wants to reframe her ministry?

Be clear for whom you are there.

Phillips Brooks, the author of *O little town of Bethlehem*, used to speak of a tension he felt as he followed his calling. When he was in his study he thought he should be out visiting. Then when he was on a pastoral visit he felt the need to be in his study. Today I think the tension is different. Now it is the tension between the requirements of the church and the needs of the community. Is this familiar?

What's she got herself involved with them for? will be a question reported by a deacon to a minister, describing the concern of some members that she is getting too involved with something beyond the fellowship. This confrontation of alternatives cannot be avoided if you are called to be a missionary pastor. But it is disconcerting and challenging.

To return to the dilemma of Phillips Brooks, the questions become: for whom do we study and among whom do we visit? There is a real temptation, encouraged by our default understanding of church, to become a chaplain to the self-selecting few. It can

be comfortable but it is sedentary. It might reach out but only as far as we can stay put in what we are. This fact is what makes the Donovan quotation so awkward and destabilising both for minister and members.

The option presented by some is that we must start afresh. The new plant and the pioneer trail are both attractive and necessary. But I believe that many ministers are still with the established and settled. I believe it is essential that we, and the members of our churches, at least start thinking ‘congregation’ before ‘members’. Who is it that we see outside Sunday or church meeting? This approach breaks down the sharp edge which is encouraged by the ‘gathered’ model. It raises the hope of a more natural community where people are in all sorts of different relationships with one another.

This model suggests that we see Christ beyond the pale, waiting for his disciples to arrive, rather than leading his people out into the community. Christ at the centre of the church may well be a captive Christ. He is held within in the beautiful ideas and thoughts with which we encourage and challenge each other, but the reality is that his thoughts are not our thoughts and his ways are not our ways, and paradoxically this takes us back to the study—or wherever creative theological thought takes place.

I have long cherished the hope, though I cannot claim success in practice, that any theology that I may explore is informed by an apologetic imperative:

- * What does this mean for the person who does not know God?
- * What sense does this make for the community around my church building?
- * What nourishment does this offer to the blighted soul?
- * What point of contact does this create for those who have other theologies beyond the beauty of my own?

The ‘gathered’ church model emerged in the protest and social upheaval of other centuries. Those reasons for its development no longer exist. So what is it to become?

The key may be both letting go what we treasure and, in the company of the willing stranger, exploring together the gospel of Christ—which is not the possession of any church but God’s gift to his world.

John Rackley is minister of Manvers Street Baptist Church, Bath.

Ordaining pioneers

by Katherine Labeledz

Can you imagine it? In the future there will be no petrol or diesel vehicles because supplies of oil are running out. Shell estimates this huge conversion could come as soon as 2070. Research into, and development of, new forms of transport is ongoing and some people are already buying hybrid or electric cars. This is a partial analogy for what is happening with the UK church: a massive change is underway. There will always be church, just as there will probably always be transport, but we need to find new ways of being church and engaging in mission.

A new movement is growing to equip and release Baptist Christians. The Pioneer Collective was launched last year, with a vision for 400 pioneers to emerge within the denomination, defined as: 'a risk-taking Baptist sent to advance the Kingdom beyond the fringe of church in new and creative ways'. These pioneers will be 'going to where the church isn't, doing what Jesus does and seeing what happens'. The experimental, open-ended nature of this work is similar to overseas mission with a contextualised gospel, and indeed, a new UK Field Leader role has been created within BMS.

Training is being offered, leading to accreditation as a Baptist pioneer. This training is separate from the ordination route for Baptist ministers and means that many of the pioneers may well end up as 'lay' workers, similar to children's and youth workers and without the means of support or influence within the wider church that a minister can usually expect. It is possible to take an ordination route by completing the more specific Urban Mission and Church Planting course at Bristol Baptist College, which requires students to be bivocational.

It remains to be seen how these new pioneers will make a living, given the fact that local church ministers are directly funded by their congregations and pioneers do not have a congregation. It could be that bivocational working will be encouraged.

The question arises of whether pioneers really need to be ordained. Baptists generally hold to a non-hierarchical view of ordination, since we affirm the priesthood and ministry of all believers. Baptist congregations select their own leaders and the ministerial calling has been understood as the leadership of a local church congregation. Ordination is a way of acknowledging and commissioning local church leaders and it is usual practice that from these men and women, regional ministers and Baptist Union office holders will be selected.

These ordained ministers will usually meet in regional clusters and may attend

ministers' conferences and other training, as well as the annual Baptist Assembly. From among them the tutors at ministerial training colleges will normally be employed. When these ordained ministers gather they network and build relationship, they share stories of what God is doing, plan and share practical and theological training, they articulate vision and make plans for the future, deciding about the use of resources. What difference would it make if the 400 pioneers were absent from such gatherings or if we end up with separate gatherings, as we do for youth workers?

My concern is this: pioneers need to be seen as sharing the leadership and vision within the denomination, they should be central to all gatherings, and their voices need to be heard, because they have precious insight into how Christians can live as missionary disciples, incarnating the gospel in their own contexts. The conversation between pioneers and traditional congregations and their leaders is vital because we need to understand together how God is leading and forming us as we respond to the world around us. Pioneers provoke a re-evaluation of what it really means to be church and to share the good news; they unsettle our assumptions and values; they point to a future with which we need to engage. They can help churches understand how better to read their contexts and local culture and they will be living signs of the need to take risks and go beyond our safe boundaries.

Whether it is through the ordination of pioneers alongside congregation-based ministers, or a change in the culture and practice of the denomination, we must keep the different parts of the body together. The 'supporting ligaments' in Ephesians 4:16 will be crucial, whatever form they take. For example it could be argued that too much separation of youth and children's workers from the gatherings where these important conversations happen has impoverished our understanding of how to engage with these generations and, after child theology, how to enter the kingdom.

In the same way, if we are not careful, the emerging pioneers will find themselves being seen as a kind of 'niche' ministry and this will similarly constrict and disable the church. Just as the pioneers go out, far out from the walls of the church, so too they must return with their stories of how they have seen God's kingdom coming and their hard-won insight and wisdom.

Katherine Labeledz is an MIT and pioneer at Spurgeon's, working with Warren Park Cafe Church.

Pathways for Baptist ministry

The BMF review of the year (AGM) was wrapped within a Conversation Day whose subject looked forward. About 30 people came to Bloomsbury BC in London to explore pathways for Baptist ministry. We will all be aware of the changing challenges of the context of ministry, the financial pressures and the weight of expectations. And this in the midst of a root and branch review by the BU.

So the meeting heard Joe Kapolyo of Edmonton talk about his experience and gifts as a pastor, Dawn Savidge of Bloomsbury reflect on her calling to be a pioneer, and Dan Foster of Welwyn Garden City ponder the holding of two vocations—minister and musician.

In conversation, we heard about many of the vexing questions that nag at confidence. How do you acquire new skills? Have churches unconsciously settled for a hierarchy of ministry— starting with full time ordained ministry and working down? How do we fit pioneers into the system? How can we encourage a rigorous theological mind capable of engaging intelligently with the issues of the day? And is it possible to juggle more than one vocation without burnout?

Clearly there were more questions than answers but we hope that this was a helpful meeting to express concerns about some of the big issues relating to Baptist ministry that face us all.

Stephen Copson

An invitation to you from BMF in the north

***Pathways for Baptist ministry: pastor, pioneer,
bivocational***

Tuesday 16 September

New North Road Baptist Church, Huddersfield

(close to the railway station and a few miles from M62, J24)

The church and its ministry

by Pat Goodland

Two friends, recently retired from ministry, have been telling me of their difficulties in finding a new church. 'We find there are many weeks when we haven't wanted to go to church because a lot of what we have seen in our travels has turned us off', they say. 'There is plenty of showmanship, correctness, sloppiness, aloofness, shallowness, incredible sameness and dullness...Is it too much to ask that we might actually experience God at church? To be assured that God is real, present, and active in the lives of people today?'. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident but a predicament shared by a growing number of our thoughtful Christian friends. It has prompted me to consider again my understanding of 'church' and its ministry.

A respected bishop's son, who gave up on the church some years ago, said to his father, 'the preacher is saying all the right things but he isn't saying them to anybody. He doesn't know where I am and it would not occur to him to ask'. This incident provokes the question of whether we know the people the church is seeking to reach. Are leaders and pastors really in touch with the 6% of UK population who attend church and the 94% who never darken its doors? Sometimes the best argument against Christianity is Christians. The pressing need is for individual Christians to enact the faith with love and integrity. The church is in danger of becoming a narcissist fellowship: so many Christian books, church conferences and reports are focusing attention on themselves.

As I contemplate why 'church' is becoming a turn-off for many, are we not perhaps partly to blame? Many churches have gone along with the cultural emphasis on feelings and experience, to the exclusion of teaching biblical foundations which require the engagement of the mind. 'Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 2:5); 'set your minds on things above' (Colossians 3:2; Ephesians 4:23). Are we being dragged down by the undercurrents of media culture, seeking to entertain rather than inform and challenge? Do we have to meander into football commentary, the latest joke of some comedian or indulge in 'mediaspeak' to win disciples for our Lord and saviour or build up God's church?

Relevant experience and testimony, homely illustrations and references to genuinely tested Christian experience can be very helpful. Jesus used parables and stories to command the attention of his diverse hearers. Once they were hooked, Jesus led on to great truths about God and his relationship to mankind. Simply to

major on stories, experiences and testimonies without the exposition of scripture is an inadequate diet for building and strengthening people of faith.

Today the media seem bent on suggesting that Christianity is a spent and irrelevant force that needs burying. The church therefore needs to teach and demonstrate that the rich and inspiring heritage of biblical Christianity has been the foundation of our nation's laws and culture. Our morality, legal systems and ethics have been profoundly shaped by biblical teaching. Concepts of honesty, truthfulness, fair play and respect for human life are derived from the teaching of Jesus in the four gospels.

Nietzsche's candid atheism clearly imagined the consequences of his 'God is dead' philosophy. He suggested it represented a catastrophic historical experience, the death knell of civilisation. Something by which the world had lived, had vanished. As G.A. Morgan argues in *What Nietzsche means* (Harvard University Press): 'If God is dead the basis of absolute truth and morals disappears. Morals and conscience can no longer claim to be influenced by a greater than human personality. There is no ultimate goal in life, moral norms and no cosmic purpose'.

What is a Christian response?

There appears to be increasing pressure today from social leaders, politicians and influential atheists to reinforce the theme of social inclusion, which implies that Christianity should be marginalised because we are now a multicultural nation. So from where would we obtain our national moral norms? The media give coverage of Christians who have been disciplined for indicating that they are believers. Wearing a tiny cross is thought to be divisive. Doctors and nurses who have spoken of their personal faith at the request of patients have been reprimanded.

As the UK races into a post-Christian context, what is our response? There are no easy answers, but there are signs in the growth of a number of churches in the UK where there is still biblical exposition and a caring fellowship.

Modelling the message in our community. Consistency of lifestyle, building relationships with non-Christians, and demonstrating the teaching of Jesus in caring actions, is essential to church growth. This includes listening sympathetically and being signs and instruments of God's grace and care for all people, irrespective of their education, social standing, colour or creed. Only by such authenticity can we earn the right to speak. One-to-one encounters are more demanding than hiding behind microphones and megastars. 'One beggar telling another beggar where to find bread' is still the most effective means of church growth. There is a greater need for relationships and living out the faith, than for noisy celebrations.

In his autobiography, Lesslie Newbigin describes the influence of individuals whose

lifestyle attracted him to the faith. Arthur Watkins, captain of the college rugby team, offered the gift of friendship to every person. 'More than anyone else he drew me into a personal faith...As I came to know him I realized that the centre of his life was a profound devotion to Christ. He was the most vivid example I know of the fact that the grace God is so overwhelmingly absurd that one can only laugh and sing'. There are many people on the fringes of our churches. Understanding where they are and how they view Christians may be the key to relationships which will bring them to faith.

The content of our public church services. An Orthodox Jew would feel completely out of place in a bacon shop. If we take a non-Christian friend to church, will they have similar feelings? For many years we have been told that the content of services must change. Having witnessed the downward drag of media culture and the dumbing down of the traditional biblical components of the church, I wonder if the essentials of Christian worship gatherings have not been reduced to mush.

Change in terms and adjustment of language, inclusive gender terms and the length of services will be necessary and on church agendas. Charles Wesley wrote, 'Hark how all the welkin rings/glory to the King of Kings', but now everyone sings, 'Hark the herald angel sings/Glory to the newborn king'. Thankfully most archaic forms of speech such as words ending with 'est' and 'eth' have been abandoned. Having addressed about 500 young people at a school assembly, I knew we were in trouble when the robed headteacher announced the final hymn, *Fill thou my life, O Lord my God*. The last two lines, 'At intercourse at hearth and home with my beloved ones' were a disaster. Nudges, smirks, smiles, winking and blushes spread through the hall. Thoughtful, reasoned change is often necessary and acceptable. Change without explanation can cause unnecessary unpleasantness and should be avoided.

Worship

The word is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word *weordscipa* which can be translated as 'worship' or 'full of worth'. In the NT the common word for worship is *proskumeo*, which suggests bowing down. But what are we doing? Are we trying to supply the Almighty with a continuous diet of flattery? This cannot be: he is too great to require any boosting or promotion from his creatures. No! Worship is mostly for our benefit, comfort and strengthening. In worship we are expressing his worth, his power and greatness as creator and saviour of mankind. We are also rejoicing in his care and love. This gives us a sense of proportion and feelings which have a strengthening and revitalising effect upon us. In the presence of a loving, eternally fathomless God there is mystery which we gradually explore and this leads to praise. Worship is delighting in a loving God, akin to the thoughtful abandonment of two lovers. Falling in love defies analysis; it is often indefinable, but totally absorbing and engaging.

Worship at its best should be an enjoyable, uplifting and a positive experience. The essential ingredients are thanksgiving, adoration, praise and confession. It is not first and foremost about words, but about being in tune with God. The 18th century divine Jeremy Taylor defined prayer as, 'the peace of our spirit, the stillness of our thoughts, the rest of our cares and calm of our tempest'. Christians are on a pilgrimage from bondage to liberty (Psalm 39) and on the way we experience joy, despair, perplexity and illumination.

Music and song has always been an inclusive part of the Judeo-Christian tradition in worship. The Psalms are not only Israel's early poetry, but also their praises and prayers. This is understandable, for music is at the heart of creation: the spring chorus is like a harmonious choir; while 'The whisper of leaves, the ripple of water upon a sandy shore, and the wail of wind or sea', John Lubbock suggests, are also a part of the music of nature. The power of music awakens emotions, enlivens expectations and brings calmness to troubled or elated minds. We sing to unite in our mutual thanksgiving for life and each other, and to communicate with God.

There was a hymn and song explosion in the 1960s and 70s, together with much revision in the language used. Few churches were uninfluenced by the vast outpouring of charismatic songs and repetitive choruses. The criteria for what is worthy of inclusion in Christian worship should be taken seriously. In 1 Corinthians 14:15 Paul tells us that we are to pray with the spirit and sing with our minds. Feelings and emotions mingle in harmony with our minds in genuine worship.

The choice of Bible readings, hymns and music should not be divorced from the other elements of a service. The practice of allowing the music instrumentalists or singing groups to choose material, independent of close consultation with the preacher or leader is, in my view, reprehensible. The whole service should be integral to the particular truth the preacher is seeking to expound. Worship is not a pop concert with a variety of unrelated acts, but a memorable unity. The praise song needs to be recognised as but one tributary flowing into the wider river of hymnody. Those who opt for a narrow stream lose the glory of some of the theology contained in memorable hymns. Good hymns can be remembered at home and often verses retained in the mind, giving spiritual nourishment. Personally I am not impressed with the bland repetitiveness, shallowness and emphasis on human desires, needs, or of what 'I' want songs and choruses.

The arguments about structured/planned liturgical worship over against unstructured and unprepared worship is not a new phenomenon, but has erupted from time to time for at least 400 years. We make the gravest of errors when we set these two variants apart. Structure and spontaneity are not opponents but friends. God can be heard and experienced in both.

Teaching

She was a petite, well dressed, attractive Asian business woman from the city of London; we were sitting in a packed church. At the end of the service I asked why she attended worship in this particular church. 'Because I gain teaching on how to be a Christian in my daily life' was the gist of her reply. Sermons and study groups should not be viewed as entertainment, but as a challenging time to explore the greatest story of Jesus Christ. The task of the church is to expound the word of God, so that Christian believers are strengthened and equipped to be articulate, confident witnesses. Expository preaching is often thought of as synonymous with long-windedness, dryness and a 'turn off'. It can be, but where a preacher or teacher crafts his material with all his powers of mind and a warm heart so that it is attractively presented, it can be like a digestible meal, really satisfying and energising. To offer emotionally charged 'candy floss' will only produce weak and undernourished believers. Effective witness takes place when members of the church get alongside a person to share the thrilling experience of knowing Jesus. How can we live the faith if we are not clear what the faith is?

Jesus constantly stretched the minds of his listeners. He was always loving, and sought their highest good, but he also made them think. His message was often comforting, disturbing and enlightening, and the result for many of his listeners was transformation. They went home rejoicing or sorrowing, and many changed their lives. Reinhold Niebuhr's challenging maxim about the sermon still holds good: 'to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable'. The church is under obedience to interact with society and to enact the gospel; we therefore need an informed faith. Healthy Christians become aware that God is infinitely great, and want to share their adventure of faith in Jesus. Special evangelistic services and outreach programmes have their place, but more people are won to the faith by individuals 'walking the talk' and giving explanations of their beliefs.

Christians bank everything on the belief that the world and mankind have been created and then redeemed. Our joy and peace spring from our dependence, trust and obedience to our Lord. We believe that the living Holy Spirit is present and active in our lives. It is in this confidence that we fearlessly confront the secular age.

Where a regular diet of the word of God is provided, and the church envisions praise and prayer as channels through which the energies of God's grace can flow, the church will grow. Such a church can minister to its community and be a magnet drawing people to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I became a Christian in the early 1940s. Reflecting on my teenage years I see now that it was a time of evangelical theological irresponsibility. The escapist dispensational gymnastics, as taught by the highly recommended Scofield Bible, gave a very limited Christian understanding. Conscripted into the army at 18, I was totally unprepared for the barrage of questions that my comrades threw at me about

human responsibility, prayer, lifestyle, and the world of apparent warped providence and the seemingly systemic influence of evil. How I wished I had been better equipped!

Fellowship

Christians see the meaning of life in relationships, essentially with God but also with other people and with nature. The Christian church is a multicultural family, ordained to be a worshipping and witnessing community. One of the great strengths of Christianity is that it bonds us to God and to one another, allowing us to be instruments of God's grace and a blessing to others. It moves us beyond the narrow boundaries of a 'me culture', and gives an incentive to care for the lonely and isolated and to offer support, friendship and acceptance to the brokenhearted. Ideally the fellowship of believers is also where doubts can be expressed, questions faced, and opinions considered, in a spirit of openness.

The Christian church is commissioned by God to 'bring good news to the poor', which includes the spiritually impoverished, the materially and educationally poor, the culturally deprived, and other hurting persons. The foundation of Christian community is set out in Philippians 2:5-11. If the Spirit of Christ is indwelling us, let us show it in words and deeds and human experience. As Donald English said: 'What God is working in, through scripture, prayer and fellowship and worship, reading and reflection—you work out. And that will be quite enough to be getting on with, for the rest of your life'.

Pat Goodland is now retired but held two long pastorates, at Stanmore BC and at Gorsley BC.

A community of grace

by Phil Jump

The most recent update from the BU on same-sex partnerships describes differences of opinion as something that can ‘enrich us and potentially... divide’. My sense of an increasing commitment to the former is something that I want to celebrate and affirm.

I would identify myself as holding the majority evangelical view that an active same-sex relationship is incompatible with a life of Christian discipleship. I say that not to defend or entrench that perspective, but because I want what I write here to be engaged with for what it says, and not simply as a means of second-guessing the stance of its writer. At the same time, this article emerges from a viewpoint that I recognise is not shared by some, and for them the arguments may be different. My point, in this context, is that even where one’s foundation is what is often called the ‘conservative’ view, there are significant challenges to be embraced.

Some may be surprised that I consider there to be *anything* further to say. I hold a view that represents the *status quo*; the historic and prevailing belief of the overwhelming majority within our Baptist community as far as we can tell. What else is there to discuss? I would argue that there is a great deal.

For one thing, the context in which I hold that view has changed unrecognisably in recent years. The introduction of civil partnerships and, more recently, same-sex marriage represent monumental changes to the laws of our land. Setting these aside, perhaps even more significant are the changes in attitude that lie behind them. My view is as much generational as it is theological—I have met significant numbers of teenagers, serious about following Jesus; serious in their discipleship and commitment

Phil Jump agreed to write this article so that, together with Keith John’s article, bmj could offer to readers some different views within the Baptist community on the current debate about same-sex relationships (Ed Board).

to God’s word who, when confronted with the traditional view on same-sex marriage simply say: ‘we don’t get it—what’s your problem?’. A colleague pointed out that our parents grew up in a world where practising homosexuality was illegal; we grew up in a world where it was ‘immoral’; and today’s teenagers have grown up in a world where it is ‘normal’. Even if the church’s view remains constant, it requires a very different narrative with which to explain itself; this is a generation for whom ‘because

wrong' simply won't do. Every local church needs to understand that if we are to speak with credibility and integrity on this matter, then we need to be able to articulate a clear, robust and informed biblical argument.

In expressing my view, I choose my words carefully. Ours is a gospel of grace, founded on the premise that 'all have sinned and fall short of God's glory'. I look at myself, a married heterosexual, and recognise much that is 'incompatible with a life of Christian discipleship'—yet I believe there is a place for me within the people of God, and one that, by God's grace, involves significant and undeserved leadership within the church. Anyone whose philosophy of ministry does not recognise it as a calling for which we are unworthy, has lost sight of something very important.

There are many whose overbearing leadership styles, fits of temper, rudeness, arrogance and other failings are all too evident. Yet for all this incompatibility with the call to be Christlike, the narrative of grace can somehow be extended such that their positions remain unchallenged. If this principle of unworthiness is so central to my acceptability, can I be certain that God's grace cannot embrace and include those whose sexual orientation gives rise to different 'incompatibilities'?

We might argue that the vices of leadership simply do not belong in the same league as practising homosexuality, yet if I truly examine myself, I would have to admit that such a conclusion is more cultural than theological. After all didn't they tell me in Sunday school that in God's eyes no sin was better or worse than any other?

We might cry that homosexual practices are unequivocally condemned within scripture, so of course there is a difference—but so many other things are outlawed too: wearing polyester and cotton shirts, growing different crops in our fields, being tattooed or eating our steak rare (for these and other examples, see Leviticus 19). We have jettisoned whole swathes of Old Testament practice, so it behoves us to ask by what criteria we cling to the bits that we claim are so non-negotiable?

Looking more carefully at the gospels, we realise that this kind of cherry-picking approach doesn't really stand up at all. The same Jesus pronounces that not the slightest pen-stroke of the law should be changed, yet disregards the Sabbath regulations as he wanders through grainfields and heals the sick and broken. It seems that Jesus' appeal is not that the law needs some significant revision better to reflect the cosmopolitan, multicultural church of the New Testament. Rather it is to invite those who have sought to interpret the law as legalistic dogma, to re-embrace the principle of revelation. This is God's word to us, God's self-disclosure in a particular place and time, a process of revelation that finds its consummation in the coming of Christ; the word made flesh. In the gospels the inadequacy of a simplistic 'this is what the Bible says' approach is powerfully highlighted in the wilderness temptations; a reality no less evident in the Acts 15 Council of Jerusalem.

What would Jesus do?

Here lies one of the key challenges for biblical Christians: those who argue that this is an argument over biblical authority are missing the point. The Christ we meet in the gospels reveals a God of grace, reaching out to the marginalised: accepting, generous and gracious. To accept the biblical call to follow Jesus is an invitation to seek to be like him, not to sign up to the law codes of his native people. Surely the question we face as we engage with the issue of same-sex orientation and the increasing raft of issues that surround it is not what does Paul, Leviticus or Deuteronomy say, but ‘what would Jesus do?’. We may disagree about the answer, but to do so does not require us to condemn our opponents as having abandoned a biblical faith.

I used to deal with these struggles by seeking to distinguish what I called ‘occasional’ from ‘institutional’ sin. By this, I meant that various moral lapses could be forgiven when my good intent to live as a faithful follower of Jesus was momentarily overcome by emotion, temper and human weakness in the face of temptation. However, to structure my lifestyle by making arrangements and alliances that anticipated and encouraged such sinful behaviours, and doing so in the cold light of day rather than the heat of the moment—well, that was a different matter.

To some degree it worked, and could be used to distinguish same-sex orientation from homosexual practice or intentional partnership. But the more I learned about myself and the world I live in, the more I recognised its inadequacy. My early working life was spent in the defence industry, which some described as a deliberate life choice that flew in the face of my Christian identity. Yet none of my critics seemed to question my suitability for baptism and church membership. Had my lifestyle choice been openly to express a same-sex orientation rather than to pursue a lucrative career, would those contradictions have been so easily overlooked? If not, on what basis?

Now that I have left that career behind, I still find myself embroiled in a lifestyle that is wracked with such contradiction. I am caught up in the economic systems of a nation whose wealth and prosperity is built on the poverty and debt of others, and woe betide our pension investors if they fail to secure for us an adequate return. I hire a local restaurant to celebrate our silver wedding, and then return home to carry on writing a resource calling for action against food poverty. I arrange an event that is costly, wasteful of resources, encourage people to travel miles to attend it, and do so in the name of Christian mission. These are just examples—and, yes, I know it’s not that simple, but how often have I used that as a sop that helps me to avoid the words of a saviour who declared, ‘sell all you have and give it to the poor’? My point is that none of us can claim a lifestyle that at some point does not contradict our gospel values. As those who are invited not to judge lest we ourselves are judged, I sense that any

instinct to condemn needs careful examination. None of this leaves me wanting to change my original premise, but I am far less certain about how it should be applied within a community of grace.

I find myself also asking questions about the nature of the gospel and how we portray it. The gospel with which I grew up described me as a sinner, in need of Christ's redemption, and called to deny myself and follow him. I still hear echoes of that in the high profile youth events that my teenagers seem so hooked on, but it has taken on a whole new identity. To follow Jesus is to 'live life to the max' it's about being 'full-on', 'awesome' and 'truly fulfilled'. This high-octane discipleship still requires the doorway of confession and forgiveness, but it has begun to feel more of a means to an end than the end in itself. If of course my definition of 'life to the full' happens to conform to the moral expectations of the Christian community then it's all systems go—but what if it does not? What if I am wracked with an inescapable realisation that I am gay—I can have no concept of a fullness of life that does not involve expressing my sexuality, and should I find myself in love with someone that I believe to be my life companion, living in that fullness too? Is our present struggle, at least in part, an unintended consequence of having lost sight of the true nature of discipleship, and, if so, is it fair to simply walk away from that consequence?

The introduction of same-sex marriage, invokes a raft of further complications. I do not believe that a committed same-sex relationship is the same as Christian marriage (and I know of at least two gay couples who agree) but I also know that some religious groups do. Freedom of religion is a hard fought principle for Baptists, and through our European Baptist Federation we continue to walk together with those who in our lifetime have known persecution and imprisonment for its cause. It is a principle I am committed to honour and defend, but what if my freedom of religion comes at the cost of the other's freedom of religion? To put it simply—I can't have my cake and eat it.

I could say the same about freedom of conscience: we have rightly resisted any attempt to compel or enforce Christians and churches to do anything but exercise their own choice on this matter. On what basis can I then impose my perspective upon those who are no less committed to a biblically defined Christianity, but have come to a different conclusion? As a Christian minister, my calling is to proclaim and advocate gospel living; in doing so I do not follow my congregation to work, check their bank statements or internet browser history to make sure they are compliant, I trust their consciences, the word of God and the work of the Spirit. For heterosexual couples this would include not prying into their sex life. Should it be any different for a cohabiting same-sex couple? On what basis does a gospel faith require me to assume the worst of them?

I doubt if I will ever shift from the foundational belief that I outlined at the start; I am far less clear about how I might apply that in the coming decades, and I certainly have

no inclination to disassociate with sisters and brothers in Christ who choose to think and act differently. If this article is not wracked with uncertainty, then I have failed to express my struggle, but perhaps I can finish with one further contradiction. It is the prayer of someone I believe to be a 'sound evangelical', comfortable with view that same-sex partnership is wrong. She heard the story of a young person who was gay, and who after being rejected by their church had attempted suicide: *'forgive us, Lord, for becoming a church that would cause a young person to do that'*.

Phil Jump is Regional Team Leader of the NWBA.

Real marriage?

by Keith John

When new legislation gave to same-sex couples in a civil partnership those legal rights which until then had only been available to married couples, it aroused a whole variety of responses. To many, like myself, it represented a long sought affirmation of human rights and God-given dignity; a fitting piece of legislation both for the kingdom of God and for the commonwealth of goodness! For others it felt as if the very laws of God were being challenged.

But now there is no going back! Indeed, there is more turmoil to come. Civil marriage is now available to same-sex couples and even communities of faith are, for the most part and with a few anomalous exceptions, able to opt in to the new order. For those who welcome these changes, it will mean the culmination of a long struggle in the

church. For many people within our communities of faith, religion has for too long meant safety and not courage. Such people will deplore the 'permissive society' in which we live even though they share in the freedom and tolerance it affords them. They will make comparisons with a better age gone by, an age cleaned up in their own imaginations. Arguments from scripture, well rehearsed and sincerely held, will be oft repeated, but the variety of human sexuality will remain and people will continue to pair off in the most remarkable combinations. While the church continues to call discrimination its right, those who are discriminated against will continue to call the struggle for equality their duty.

The challenges to the churches are great: not only that of theological understanding, but also the charges of irrelevancy and hypocrisy. For many who have been discriminated against, the split between life and religion is very deep. It is the split between where people truly are, and where they are told they ought to be. Many people choose to live without the 'benefit' of clergy; for even though there may be a residue of spirituality in them, and some memory of what they learned in Sunday school, at some point in their lives the church became an embarrassment, and seemed increasingly irrelevant; engaged in self-destructing arguments over matters which wider society no longer felt to be problematic.

Many will remember not only the church's reaction to the new same-sex marriage legislation, but also its challenge to the earlier civil partnership legislation and to anti-discrimination legislation. For many Christians the church lost its integrity in May 2003 when it was given the right, together with certain other groups and under certain conditions, to continue to discriminate against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. Barbara Roche MP was the minister charged with ensuring that new laws against employment discrimination (agreed over three years earlier in the EU) were in force here in the UK by the end of 2004. These laws banned discrimination at work on several grounds, including religion or belief and sexual orientation.

The Government's commitment to equality at work seemed clear. 'We want a society in which everyone has the opportunity to reach their potential...' said the minister. However, the Government went on to insist, under pressure from the churches and from other religious groups, on a special exemption within the EU Directive which allows churches 'and other private or public organisations, the ethos of which is based on religion or belief' to discriminate on 'belief' grounds where they can show that this is a 'genuine...requirement' with respect to their 'ethos'. For many this exemption seemed too broad, and the category 'religious employers' too undefined, and gave scope for homophobic attempts to restrict working rights.

Now there is further concern among those of us who welcome the new same-sex marriage legislation that the church will again seem irrelevant and hypocritical. From within the Church of England, Jeffrey John summed it up succinctly:

*The bishops who voted for the Resolution on Human Sexuality at the Lambeth Conference of 1998; those who opposed the Equalization of the Age of Consent Bill and the adoption of European human rights legislation in respect of gay people; those who attempted to wreck the passage through parliament of the bill to establish civil partnerships, and now those who are opposing the introduction of same sex civil marriage...they have ensured that the church of the 21st century in this country is now perceived as public enemy number one by gay people.*¹

The charge of increasing irrelevance is not to be dismissed lightly with the simplistic assertion that the church stands for eternal truths unaffected by the winds of change. In Studdert-Kennedy's poem, *When Jesus came to Birmingham*, the point is made:

*When Jesus came to Birmingham they simply passed him by.
They would not hurt a hair of him; they only let him die.
For men had grown more tender, and they would not give him pain;
They only just passed down the street and left him in the rain.*²

The challenge to the churches is not just one of hypocrisy or of irrelevancy, but also of theology—so I will turn briefly to Augustine, and to his so-called 'goods of marriage'.

The first of Augustine's 'goods of marriage' is the possibility of procreation. I would contest that the notion that Christian marriage must contain such a possibility is not simply discredited, but abandoned! We must of course continue to uphold the value of procreation...if only for the continuation of the species! But we would not want to claim that this 'good' must be definitive within the marriages of infertile or elderly heterosexual couples, for example. So non-consummation is no ground for divorce in the new Marriage (Same-Sex Partners) Bill. The extending of the definition of marriage to same-sex couples is no threat to procreation, and while the homosexual sexual act is, in a sense, sterile, just as are masturbation and the use of contraception, there is a strong argument against the idea that penetrative sexual activity, enjoyed simply as an act of pleasure, love or mutual commitment, is in some way sinful.

The 1662 *Book of common prayer* preserves a dignity of liturgical language rarely matched in English, but its theological teaching has undergone radical revision. Gone are its claims that the purposes of sex in marriage are first of all procreation, then as a remedy against sin and the threat of promiscuity and (only thirdly!) as a 'help and comfort' to the married couple.³ Instead there is a more modern understanding in the Church of England's current liturgy in which 'the foundation of family life' (which presumably includes the birth of children) appears only fourth in the list!⁴

Augustine's second 'good of marriage', the faithfulness that exists between the married couple, is for many of us who look forward to same-sex marriage a good that we would want not to challenge but to extend. Despite the considerable social and ecclesiastical hostility that same-sex partners must face, and despite the lack of the cohesive force that can come with the joys and the traumas of child-rearing, there is

much evidence to suggest that same-sex partnerships can create great depths of faithfulness and commitment. In the year after the introduction of civil partnerships in 2005, some 18,000 gay couples applied for registration and evidence suggests that most of them had been living in committed monogamous relationships for many years.

There is no reason to believe the old myth that gay men are more inclined to be promiscuous than heterosexual men. Statistically they may be, for well documented social reasons to do with the lack of accepted social structures in which love affairs can flourish, and so on. The marginalisation of same-sex couples by the church has had more to do with prejudice and fear than it has to do with available evidence. Homosexuals are still assumed by many in the church today to be promiscuous or paedophiles by nature, because for so long no other model of being gay was ever seen.

Augustine's third 'good of marriage' concerns the sacramental nature of the union. This sacramental nature rests not on distinctions of gender, the 'femaleness-ness' of the church and the 'male-ness of Christ', but on a relationship of complementarity, sharing and mutual love. There is a complementarity that can only be found across genders... but there are other kinds that move beyond our traditional understanding of humanity as a 'two-sex species'.⁵ In the Genesis story, Eve is created 'because it is not good for man to be alone'. So we speak of companionship, mutual help and support, and not only of sexual, but of emotional and mental, complementarity too.

The charge is made that the same-sex marriage legislation represents a 're-defining' of marriage. The ethicist Jean Porter, in an excellent article, summarises some of the arguments offered:⁶ that marriage is neither the invention of church nor state but is part of the natural law. But Porter also rightly recognises that we are heirs to continuing experience. The re-defining of marriage has been done many times before in different cultures and contexts: through the criminalisation of marital rape and the legalisation of divorce; through the legalisation of inter-racial marriage and the elimination of childhood marriage; through the affirmation of a married woman's right to own property; and through the criminalisation of polygamy.

We carry with us not only the treasures of the past but also its junk. Religions move slowly and are rarely revolutionary, even though their founders may have been. While many from the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered communities have left the established churches feeling rejected and marginalised, others have chosen to stay. They recognise that there is much to be gained in fitting together two pieces of creation, even though they find the work difficult and the pain intense. They stay, not to destroy the church they love, but to be a thorn in her side and to seek her good. The church has condemned them, they believe, with a blanket condemnation; she has defined them not by their ability to love but by their genital activity; she has lobbied parliaments for the right to discriminate against them. Yet they absorb the injustice and resist the pressures that turn the oppressed into the oppressors.

What they have gained has not been presented to them. They have, they believe, earned it. Their love affairs have been sanctioned neither by prayer book nor law court but by conviction. There have been no wedding rites, no ready-made homes, no expensive gift lists. What they have, they have earned; and, for the most part, these people have no desire to retaliate. Against all the odds, some are determined to stay in the church.

The church has much to gain in bridging this gulf. She has the chance to give to a marginalised minority the rights and understanding that she claims for herself in an increasingly secularised world. She may be able to learn again the beauty and strength of a stripped-down religion with the frills cut away; a religion that exposes the real cost of sharing home and life together. From those on the margins, who see their sexuality not as a choice but as a given fact, and who will spend less and less time and energy seeking the approval of religious institutions and more time seeking their own vocation in religion, she will gain many gifts of creativity and honesty. The church must embrace loving, committed, same-sex marriages and in so doing she will learn that the truth will make us free. Even if it will not make us comfortable.

Keith John is minister of Claremont Free Church

Notes to text

1. Jeffrey John, *Permanent, faithful, stable*. London, DLT, 1993.
2. G.A. Studdert-Kennedy, *The unutterable beauty*. Liskeard: Diggory Press, 2006.
3. In *The form of solemnization of matrimony* in *The book of common prayer*. OUP.
4. The preface to the marriage service in *Common worship: services and prayers for the Church of England*. London: Church House Publishing, 2000.
5. Adrian Thatcher, *God, sex and gender*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
6. In *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 2010, **30 (2)**, 79ff.

One hundred years ago

by Peter Shepherd

It would be a shame for readers of the *bmj* to overlook the profound changes that took place among Baptists a century ago. Then, for the first time, a nationwide scheme for the financial support of ministers, and to help coordinate changes of pastorate, came into being. The scheme, when it finally became operational in 1916 after a decade or more of planning and raising funds, was described as ‘a revolution’ by the *Christian World*. Echoes of this revolution can still be felt today.

The Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Scheme was the brainchild of J.H. Shakespeare, the remarkable and energetic secretary of the Baptist Union. Appointed in 1898, his overriding passion was for a well trained, efficiently organised, and adequately financed ministry. Such a ministry was, he believed, the key to the churches' success and growth. Distressed by what he called ‘The arrested progress of the Church’, he told the Baptist Assembly in 1908: ‘what the Church needs more than anything else today is leadership in its ministry’. The existing system for training, appointing, deploying and supporting ministers, he believed, was damaging to ministers and churches, and needed a radical overhaul.

During the early years of the 20th century, the influence of the Union had dramatically increased. A denominational headquarters had been created at Baptist Church House in London, an official denominational newspaper had been established in the form of the *Baptist Times* (formerly the *Freeman*) and a large, centrally administered Twentieth Century Fund had been raised. From about 1906 onwards Shakespeare addressed his considerable ability and drive, and the increased resources of the Union now at his disposal, to the ministry. A child of the manse, he knew from personal experience what a struggle life could be for many in the pastorate, and was determined to do something about it.

The first task was one of quality control. Ministers of churches attached to the Union were listed in the annual Baptist Handbook, but many had received no formal training. The practice of ordination had been rejected by a significant number, and its meaning disputed. More pragmatically, for any scheme for ministerial support and settlement to function effectively, it would be necessary to know just who would be entitled to benefit from it.

There was a Ministerial Recognition Committee, whose task was to decide whether ministers who had not been trained in one of the Baptist colleges should be officially

recognised, and therefore entitled to benefit from the limited funds administered by the Union, but its effectiveness was hampered by varying opinions as to what constituted a Baptist minister. More important was the unavoidable fact that, for many ministers and churches, Union recognition made little practical difference to what they did and how they thought about themselves.

Urged on by Shakespeare, the Union's 1907 Spring Assembly adopted a new set of rules for the recognition of ministers. All new ministerial candidates who wanted to be officially recognised by the Union first had to be enrolled onto a list of probationer ministers. For this to happen, they either had to have successfully completed an acceptable course of training at a Baptist college or some other acceptable institution; or, failing that, to demonstrate their fitness for ministry and pass an examination set by the Union. After two years of satisfactory pastoral service and passing a second examination, a probationer minister could be transferred to the list of recognised ministers.

The initial proposal was for this process to be in the hands of the Union's committees, rather than the associations. This, and other aspects of the scheme, was subsequently modified, but the principles of a probationary period and an effective guard of entry to the ministry had been established. Attention now turned to how these ministers could be supported more adequately and deployed more effectively in the service of God's kingdom.

Developments

Two apparently unrelated developments coloured the debates that took place. In 1908, when the annual returns for the previous year were published in the *Baptist Handbook*, they showed that the number of people in membership of Baptist churches was, for the first time, going down. After a century or more of consistent growth, this was a major blow. As a proportion of the population, Baptists, together with the rest of nonconformity, had been in gradual decline for a few decades, but to see the trend so starkly revealed was for many a wake-up call. It called for radical action, and reinforced the resolve of those seeking reform.

The second development was in many respects a consequence of the same sense of crisis. There were increasingly urgent calls for greater organisational unity among the free churches. From 1910 onwards, Shakespeare began to appeal for a United Free Church of England, of which the Baptists and Congregationalists would be part. That such a church, if ever it came about, would imply major changes in Baptist polity was obvious. Change of a radical nature was clearly in the air.

A Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Scheme was published early in 1909, and the Assembly that spring referred it to the churches for consultation. Its central

elements were the creation of a centrally administered fund for paying ministers, and the formation of a federation of churches who wanted to participate in it. Shakespeare's objective was for the denomination as a whole, under the auspices of the Union, to take responsibility for the ministry. Disappointingly, the response from the churches was rather lack-lustre—few, in fact, responded at all. Nevertheless, following some modifications, the Spring Assembly in the following year commended the scheme to the churches for their support. For it to work, they were told, £250,000 would have to be raised for its central fund.

Support and dissent

Supporters knew that passing resolutions at the Assembly, by a broadly sympathetic gathering, in response to appeals by passionate and articulate speakers, did not guarantee church support. Richard Glover of Bristol made his opposition clear. He described the project as a 'wild-cat scheme' that would harm the churches and divide the denomination. There were misgivings about the proposed increased power of the central committees of the Union, and accusations that ministry was being 'professionalised'. The newspaper, *The Baptist*, soon to disappear from denominational life, consistently attacked the proposals. Most channels of communication, however, including reports in the *Baptist Times*, were firmly under the control of the Union. Subsequent events suggest that opposition was limited, and Shakespeare was prepared to make concessions to win over his critics. Many, no doubt, decided to 'wait and see'.

By the spring of 1912, Shakespeare and the Union Council were ready to propose the adoption of the scheme to the Assembly. Greeted, the *Baptist Times* reported, by cheers, Shakespeare argued for it on the grounds of humanity and efficiency. His personal standing and passion, together with support from most other leading figures within the denomination, carried the day, and the vote in favour was unanimous. A second resolution launched an appeal for the central fund, without which the scheme's adoption would be meaningless. John Clifford, F.B. Meyer, J.H. Rushbrooke and the new Baptist Chancellor of the Exchequer, David Lloyd George, all lent it their support. Baptist women, through the recently created Baptist Women's League, played a leading role in the fundraising efforts. Raising the £250,000 was not easily done, but after two years of vigorous campaigning it had become clear that it would be a success.

For some, the successful inauguration of the scheme marked a fundamental change in the character of the denomination. Charles Joseph, who became Union President in 1914, was not alone in claiming that while it had been inaugurated to help Baptist churches, it had revealed 'the Baptist Church', drawing all the churches 'into genuine and lasting denominational unity'. To celebrate, the 1914 Spring Assembly closed with a Great Thanksgiving Rally in the Albert Hall, chaired by Percy Illingworth MP, chief

whip of the Liberal Party, and a Baptist.

Events leading up to WWI, and its eventual commencement in August, delayed the start of the scheme's operation, but in the autumn it was decided to launch it at the start of 1916. Conferences were held with association representatives to coordinate the financial arrangements. Responsibility for making grants for the support of ministers in the scheme was transferred from the associations to the Union, and the promotion of an annual appeal to augment the central fund was agreed. In a remarkable and sudden development early in 1915, agreement was reached with the associations to divide the country into 10 areas. A general superintendent would be appointed for each area. Employed by the Union, their prime responsibilities would be for the Sustentation Fund, raising the money through the annual appeal and distributing grants. They would also administer questions of ministerial settlement, and provide general spiritual oversight. It was a further sign of the diminished role of the associations that five of the new superintendents had been previously employed by their associations as secretary. Parallels were inevitably drawn between the superintendency and the Anglican episcopate. Shakespeare expressed the hope that he would live to see a United Free Church of England, with free church dioceses and bishops.

Throughout the war years, churches were invited to join the new federation. Encouraged by the prospects of benefiting from the fund's resources, they did so readily, and by the end of 1917 the majority had done so. A key principle underlying the scheme was the guarantee that all recognised ministers would receive at least a minimum level of stipend, fixed in 1917 at £130 a year. Churches applied for help in considerable numbers straight away, and by February 1917, 462 grants were being made. Churches benefiting had to meet certain conditions, including the provision of a minimum proportion of the stipend and an up-to-date membership roll. The superintendents met monthly at Baptist Church House to facilitate changes of pastorate. The aim was for this to be done in September, with ministers being asked to give notice of their desire to move by the previous January.

Much of this sounds fairly familiar to us, and it is easy to underestimate its significance at the time. Prior to 1916, financial support for ministers beyond the local church had come from a variety of sources, including associations and a range of denominational and other funds. From then on, most of these were absorbed into the centrally administered Sustentation Fund. Changes of pastorate had been facilitated by the churches themselves, with help from colleges, associations and influential ministers. The Union had been the national expression of denominational life for over 80 years, but its influence over the churches and their ministers had been indirect and limited. It had now become an institution of major importance.

The question as to how far WWI enabled these developments to take place in the way

they did is unavoidable. If the attention of Baptists had not been taken up by the slaughter on the Western Front, and the moral dilemmas raised by the war, would things have worked out differently? Momentum for change certainly existed before the war, so perhaps not, although the speed of change may have been less dramatic.

After the war, the scheme soon came under severe financial pressure. A further £100,000 was raised as part of the Baptist United Fund appeal in 1920, and efforts were made in the early 1920s to tighten up the rules for ministerial recognition. As the years have passed, some elements have been abandoned, and those that have survived have been adapted. The division of the country into 10 areas, largely for administrative reasons, has stood the test of time, and if anything has been strengthened, now that many of the old associations have disappeared. The role of regional ministers in raising denominational funds, allocating grants for ministry and overseeing ministerial settlement has proved invaluable, so much so that it is difficult to imagine Baptist life without them.

Whatever has happened since, and however we judge the wisdom of the changes that were made, the events of a century ago have decisively shaped the experience of ministers over the past 100 years, and still do. Shakespeare would undoubtedly rejoice at the improved conditions of ministry today, and agree with those who claim that leadership in ministry is the key to the prosperity of the churches and the work of the gospel. Sadly, the arrested progress of the church, against which he worked so hard, has not yet been reversed.

Peter Shepherd is minister at Stoneygate BC, Leicester. The full story can be found in The making of a modern denomination, published by Paternoster in 2001.

Reviews

Edited by John Goddard

I'm fine! Removing masks and growing into wholeness

Wendy Billington

BRF, 2013, £7.99

Reviewer: Colin Cartwright

Written from the experience of the Sevenoaks Christian Counselling Service over several years, this book could be helpful to any minister or pastoral care group in thinking about the provision of pastoral care through the local church. A variety of pastoral issues are addressed, including depression, marriage issues, financial issues, parental pain, bereavement, addiction, and domestic abuse.

One of the strengths of the book is the telling of a range of stories related to each issue, which are either drawn from real life or are realistic case studies. With each chapter there are sections headed: *How the church can help; How people can help themselves* and *How the Bible and God can help*.

The single resources page is a little thin. It understandably mentions the Citizens Advice Bureau but omits Christians Against Poverty. Having said that, I

discovered a resource that I was previously unaware of: a national network of Christian listeners overseen by the Acorn Foundation.

At times the book can get repetitive. What continues to be refreshing about this personal and honest book is the determination of this counsellor and writer that, 'our churches be known as communities of compassion and prayer, ready and able to point those who are suffering to Jesus himself'.

1 John: the epistle as a relecture of the Gospel of John

Malcolm Coombes

Mosaic Press, 2013, £29.99

Reviewer: Pieter Lalleman

The Australian pastor-teacher Malcolm Coombes presents a revised version of his PhD, in which he argues that the author of 1 John knew the gospel of John and based his letter on it.

Both authors he sees as belonging to the hypothetical Johannine school. In what seems to me a rather arbitrary way, he divides the epistle into 14 parts and then argues that each of these parts interacts with one or more specific parts of the gospel. Coombes also connects the words about 'writing' in the epistle with words for 'speaking' in the gospel. The 'this is' statements he likewise sees as references to the gospel. The book is full of tables which

show parallels that exist in the eyes of the author but that are often not (fully) convincing.

Interestingly, Coombes argues that 1 John 2:12-14 is a summary of the entire epistle. This suggestion makes sense in terms of the themes mentioned in this short passage but not in the overall structure of the epistle.

The largest part of the book (pp 68-185) is given to a passage-by-passage analysis of the epistle which involves the alleged parallel(s) in the gospel. The book is low on theology and application; it contains untranslated Greek, blips in the English and typos, as well as full indexes. To anyone who wants to preach from 1 John, I would recommend Colin Kruse's Pillar Commentary (on all three epistles), which costs 'only' £23.99.

Ecumenical dynamic: living in more than one place at once

Keith Clements

WCC Publications

Reviewer: Stephen Copson

Most of us will have been affected by other Christians, either in formal contexts or individual conversations and friendships. We have learned to talk and be silent together, act together and pray together. Most of us will recognise an enrichment in our spirituality and worship, or shared activities, or frustration at the slow wheels of ecumenical structures—maybe all three.

Keith Clements notes how the familiar patterns of 20th century ecumenical engagement have been latterly affected by churches' internal difference and concerns about declining membership, hesitations about institutional Christianity, diminishing public influence, the presence of interfaith conversations and the unhelpful bifurcation of ecumenical and evangelical. The ecumenical spring has become for many an ecumenical winter.

He does not despair but calls for a renewed vision of the ecumenism, which he characterises as the ability to 'Live in more than one place at once'—an appeal for generosity without compromise, about being able to see life from another's point of view. Clements argues that there is something essentially gospel in this way of seeing and to miss or avoid the challenge is to fail to enjoy the full beauty of the Christian story.

Keith Clements has been an articulate advocate for this cause, where his pastoral experience and theological teaching have been shaped by the riches of the church. He calls the reader to reflect again on the possibilities of a commitment to one another. Underlying his outlook is the interaction between the major historical denominations, and perhaps unconsciously those of Western Europe beset by secularising pressures.

The middle section illustrates his thesis by the use of historical examples—George Bell, Edinburgh Conference of 1910, Barth and the evangelicals in Nazi Germany, among others. It may be that

some of his readers today will be unfamiliar with these milestones but it is a pity that there could not also have been contemporary examples of creative theological conversation, taking risks for the Kingdom and corporately speaking truth to power to encourage, stimulate and challenge.

Alongside the value of doing things together, Keith Clements argue that Christians must also seek a deeper theological engagement as together we explore God. The New Ecumenism of street pastors, debt counselling and foodbanks is inspiring (albeit sadly necessary) to see, but ecumenical activism is not sufficiently robust to bear the strain of our forging the sort of theological platform necessary for Christian apologetics to be credible in the public arena regarding justice, gender and sexuality, the care of creation and matching technological advance with ethical wisdom; and other challenges modern society offers.

The author hopes that those who know and have lived this story will appreciate afresh the value of what they hold dear. From those who see 'ecumenical' as rhyming with 'betrayal', he hopes for a fair hearing and for those (the greater part, he senses) who feel frustrated by the search for the will-o'-th'-wisp of church unity he seeks to persuade that the journey is still worthwhile, indeed a inescapable way of being Christian. The book deserves to be read. I commend it.

***Moving on in ministry:
discernment for times of
transition and change***

Tim Ling (editor)

Church House Publishing, 2013

Reviewer: Stephen Heap

This book is written from, and, it seems, mainly for, Anglican contexts, exploring issues for the ordained within the Church of England. Among other things it considers training, ongoing ministerial development, career patterns, the minister's sense of identity, and models of ministry, in 11 short chapters by a variety of authors. Some read as heavily abbreviated summaries of potential or actual bigger works, bursting out of themselves with things there is not space to say.

There are some stimulating pieces. Mark Pryce's chapter based on R.S. Thomas's reflections on poetry, priesthood and life will delight not only Thomas's fans, but others who find meaning in exploring dissonance. Tim Harle's piece on the S-curve as a model for contemplating transition touches on things I have found useful myself. Mark Beach has a chapter on the minister having not a hierarchical relationship with the congregation but, following Robin Greenwood, being 'president of this local community in a spirit of persuasive and courteous leadership'. That might sound remarkably Baptist,

though 'senior ministers' should look away at this point!

The editor, Tim Ling, says the purpose of the book is 'to support theological reflection around the changes we face in our lives and more specifically around transitions in ministry'. It does deal with transitions—meaning either moving from one sphere of service to another, or dealing with change in ourselves and others while staying put. There is some theological reflection, and Ling's concluding chapter advocates 'the essential value of patiently attending to scripture' as a theological resource. Maybe some of the theology could be deeper.

Might the book be useful to Baptists? Parts of it spoke to me! It may be useful to those contemplating change, and indicates other resources.

Mark and empire: feminist reflections

Laurel K. Cobb

Orbis 2014

Reviewer: Rosa Hunt

The cover photo on this commentary is of a soldier in camouflage giving a victory salute to a truckful of his comrades. It is reminiscent of recent TV footage in Africa and the Middle East, and is thus unsettling, alerting us that this is an unsettling commentary on Mark's gospel.

Laurel Cobb will not allow us to leave Mark's words in the 1st century, but insists that we read them in our own unjust world. At an early age Cobb chose social work over theological training, and for 30 years she worked in international public health and social welfare in over 35 countries. She then went on to do theological research having been influenced by Ched Myers, author of *Binding the strong man*, who writes a foreword to her book.

This book is the fruit of her theological reflections on her years of working with exploited and oppressed people. She provides commentary on each pericope from Mark, not just through her words but through photographs of the people she has worked with. The photos tell stories of the interaction between modern day Western empire and those who are seeking liberation.

Some of them are uplifting, like the photo of the Bolivian school girls who walked miles in their home-made leather boots to get to a school funded by US donors. Some of them are heart-breaking, like the photo of the little Ugandan girl attending an HIV AIDS clinic; Cobb comments that the girl is probably dead now because soon after the photo was taken, overseas funding for the clinic was withdrawn.

My children (all boys) wanted to know why it was called a 'feminist' commentary. I think Cobb means that she is writing from a woman's

perspective—not just because she is female, but also to understand how Jesus' words and actions in Mark could be heard as good news by the women and girls she has worked with. So, if you don't normally read feminist theology, please don't let that subtitle put you off. This is an excellent, thought-provoking book. Once you start reading you may not be able to put it down—and it's not often you can say that about a biblical commentary!

The Rev diaries: the Reverend Adam Smallbone

Penguin, 2014

Reviewer: John Goddard

In 1959 a fishing and hunting magazine in the US carried a review of D.H. Lawrence's controversial classic *Lady Chatterley's lover*. The reviewer commented that 'this fictional account of the day-to-day life of an English gamekeeper is still of considerable interest to outdoor minded readers, as it contains many passages on pheasant raising, the apprehending of poachers, ways to control vermin, and other chores and duties of the professional gamekeeper'. He went on to observe that 'unfortunately one has to wade through many pages of extraneous material in order to discover and savor these sidelights on the

management of a Midlands shooting estate' and to mention that in his opinion it could not replace Miller's *Practical gamekeeping* (Ed Zern, *Field and Stream*, November 1959). Given that there has never been a book called *Practical gamekeeping* by Miller, I think we can assume that Ed Zern was not entirely serious...

So why on earth would the book editor of the *bmj* offer you a review of *The Rev diaries*? Do I imagine that Baptist ministers might be interested in a work of fiction simply because the chief protagonist is a vicar, any more than gamekeepers might read *Lady Chatterley* to gain insight into animal husbandry? And yet I do find myself fascinated by how the clergy are portrayed in fiction and film. Why was the vicar in *Dad's army* so pompous? Why was the vicar in *To the manor born* such a drip? Why was Mr Collins in *Pride and prejudice* so odious, and du Maurier's Francis Davey so sinister?

As a student at Regent's Park College (20 years ago...), all ministerial students were expected to read and discuss a termly spiritual classic, and presumably under the enlightened influence of Paul Fiddes one of these classics was Graham Greene's powerful novel *The power and the glory*, following the agonised and tortured life of a Roman Catholic priest in Mexico during a period of suppression and persecution. I

learned more about my own faith through reading about this character's struggle than I did in any number of popular 'faith-building' titles.

Time and again I have had conversations with fellow ministers about how much we enjoy BBC's *Rev.* For a comedy series it seems to have had a particular ability to reduce me to tears. Here is a warts-and-all clergyman, wrestling with his calling as a vicar, husband, friend, and school governor in a challenging urban context and with very limited resources. He gets some things spectacularly wrong, and some gloriously right, and sometimes has the grace to recognise the difference.

Despite the early parts of this book being entirely lifted from the scripts of early episodes of the fantastic BBC TV series, it is a wonderful, poignant, funny, and wholly reverent insight into the life of the fictional London vicar Adam Smallbone.

Those who are expecting a 'vicar's James Herriot' will need to be aware that the language used is unparliamentary, and the scenarios occasionally crude, although the tone and content is never less than reverent. It takes seriously the day-to-day struggles and joys of life as a priest, allowing us to hear the thoughts and prayers of someone who often feels helpless in the midst of his calling. In particular, the 'dark night' feelings are beautifully expressed. This is not great literature. It is a better-than-average TV spin-off (usually a dire genre...), and I loved reading it.

Should I have reviewed it for the BMJ? Well, I think I just did! There will be better and more professional books on ministry—perhaps *Practical pastoring* by Miller? This book and TV series have challenged and engaged me, and I commend them to you.