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From the editor

The kindest teacher?

The historian was in full flow. Victory in war, he said, is about who makes the fewest tactical errors. Napoleon, in his view, had made several such errors at Waterloo, the most significant being that he delayed his attack, believing that his was so far the superior force that he could not lose. This delay allowed Wellington to retreat to a defensible arena and directly enabled him to lead the English forces to victory 200 years ago. Napoleon's delay had lasting consequences: and who can say what might otherwise have been?

Much more recently, I was marking some theological reflections for students in which they had to analyse a real pastoral encounter. I was moved by the honesty and self-awareness with which these men and women in formation carefully examined their on-the-spot decisions and their consequences.

Without a doubt, the 'tactical errors' had led to the greatest learning and a greater awareness of every human person's need for God. We might spend hours of time and shedloads of money on books helping us to do ministry 'right', yet the fact remains that, as in any other walk of life, we will always learn most from our failures.

In the end, knowing ourselves honestly can only drive us to God, the place we need to be. Failure can be the kindest teacher—and lead to promising and hopeful futures. SN

If you would like to submit anything for consideration in bmj, please contact the editor.

Ruth Gouldbourne's *Desert island books*



Quite a number of things can make me uneasy when I am travelling, but one of the most panicking is to discover that I have not packed enough reading material! I have a range of books that, in normal circumstances I would not buy, but which have been bought because they are better than not having something with words on a page when I am away from home. (A Kindle is, in these circumstances, a great blessing—though there is then the fear of the battery expiring...) Consequently, though the idea of a desert island is very appealing, one with only three books is not in fact high on my list of must-do things.

However, it appears that is where I am heading for the purposes of this page, so here goes.

Trying to decide on a theological book to take was perhaps the hardest. Vanstone's *The stature of waiting* is a book I love, and it seemed appropriate for the island as I wait for rescue, but in fact I am going to choose Walter Wink's trilogy (now available in one volume I hope) on *The Powers*. While the first one I found a technically very demanding book, since I am not well versed in technical biblical studies, the other two, *Naming* and *Redeeming the Powers*, have been profoundly formative in my personal and theological life.

As I was beginning to think seriously about theology and its working out in prayer and living, there appeared to be only two approaches to an understanding of 'principalities and powers'—that of seeing demons under every stone, *à la* Frank Peretti and that of dismissing such language as shaped by a completely alien worldview and therefore inappropriate to a contemporary theology. Not being prone to seeing demons under stones, I had adopted the latter, but found it less than satisfying, since it left unanswered questions.

It was as a result of exploring theologies of peacemaking that I was put in touch with Wink's writings, and found much in them that stimulated, challenged, irritated and delighted me. In many areas, he gave me a framework to make sense of disparate ideas and intuitions, and a language and theology to begin to build some kind of

coherent thought. And at the centre of this for me was, and remains, his insight into the way in which the language and theology of the Powers can be understood as the inner identity of that which is manifested outwardly in systems and structures—and the capacity of these systems and structures to embody idolatrous or redeemed identities. It is particularly this conviction of redemption that has held me to this approach.

It is all too easy, I find, to assume the worst of a person, an institution, a structure, and therefore to 'demonise' (a word chosen with care) them, and not only write them off, but scapegoat them, use them as the carrier for all the ills in a situation. This insistence that the Powers can be redeemed, with its underlying conviction that God does not give up will not let me get away with such an easy escape route from my own capacity for domination and damage. I know that I have only begin to grasp the depth of this thinking, and what it means for living, preaching and praying in the real world, and time on an island (on the assumption that I will escape from it at some point) will allow me the opportunity to get to grips more fully with this thinking and reflect further on it.

The Narnia novels in one volume was one option I considered for my second book, or one of the novels of Charles Williams (or all of them in one volume) but instead, I am going to ask for *The complete Lucia Victrix*, by E.F. Benson—again, a multivolume work, five novels in one book. I know this exists in one volume because it is currently on my shelf as such, and it is one of those books I go back and back to, for delight, relaxation, and appreciation of good writing.

The E.F. Benson characters, Mrs Lucas (Lucia) and Miss Mapp, along with Georgie, dear Diva and quaint Irene have all become TV favourites, most recently this Christmas, but I was fortunate enough to be introduced to them in novel form in my late teens, and have adored them ever since.

Nothing really happens in the books—they are stories of a small town in the 1920s, and a small group in the town (well, taking the whole collection, a village and a small town). They are snobbish, elitist, have nothing to do with life as it is lived, and don't deal, except obliquely, with social questions of justice, change or challenge—but Benson has a wonderful eye for social interaction, an amazing ear for turns of phrases that sum up and expose character and a wicked sense of humour. He explores insecurity, pride, lack of communication, fear of exposure, and the power of groups and of scapegoating with forensic precision and a lightness of touch that belies what I believe to be the depth of his analysis and presentation. And he makes me laugh. (Incidentally, while I thought the Christmas 2014 TV productions were wonderful, in my opinion, Maggie Smith and Prunella Scales are the definitive Lucia

and Mapp!)

For my third book, I am again going for a collection, this time, the *Collected works of John Donne*. Once more, a hard choice. I knew I would want a collection of poetry, and there are many poets whose works I come back to repeatedly. Sometimes it is to a whole body of work, sometimes to just one or two poems, but they are all nourishing—Norman MacCaig, R.S. Thomas, T.S. Elliot, George Herbert. But I am choosing Donne for two reasons. I find the richness of the relationship between the two ‘types’ of poetry that he wrote, his so-called profane and his so-called sacred poetry gives voice to, and pushes me deeper into exploring my experience of being alive.

Both forms of poetry demonstrate passion, longing, perception of the complexity of being human and longing for relationship that is authentic and fun (the same mind produces *The flea* and *Batter my heart*). In various contexts which push us towards disintegration, and in an historical theological tradition that has on occasions radically divorced body and soul, Donne’s capacity to speak with the same depth and sparkle of both matters deeply to me. With a tradition that pushes us toward being disembodied spirits, and a current context that either trivialises or idolises embodiment and in particular sexuality, his seeking of wholeness (though not always finding it) his attempts to own how whole self, and his own struggle with the asceticism of the faith tradition are, for me, important struggles—and he expresses the ideas in such powerful tough, complex and wonderful language that time to read him properly and reflectively would be a delight.

And secondly, the first time I fell in love, we read John Donne. And that in itself is a good enough reason.

Only three books—and yes, I have cheated and gone for collected works. But what a fascinating exercise to reflect on why these three, and what they have meant and mean to me. Though I suspect that, like all of the other reflections I have read in these pages, ask me next month, and there will be a different choice!

My luxury is proving harder to identify—my ‘can’t live without’ is my mobile phone, but I suspect that is not allowed. So, I am going to be completely trivial, and ask for a self-renewing bar of plain chocolate. With that and my books, don’t expect me to demand rescue any time soon!

Ruth Gouldbourne is on the staff team at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church.

Journeying on the way of Jesus

by John Weaver

One of my students at the South Wales Baptist College has written about an experience she had while on placement at Argoed Baptist Church in the South Wales valleys.¹ Argoed Baptist Church has within its archives a recipe for an early type of yeasted bread, *bara brith*,² dating from 1846. This rediscovered food has been recreated by a congregation thrilled that they can lay claim to their own lightly fruited and spiced bread. The bread was used in a Palm Sunday communion service, and as the large loaf was shared the congregation were invited to think about the ingredients: the crushed grain denoting the crushed body of Jesus, spices bringing remembrance of the burial, water the symbol of life, vine fruits symbolising both the life of the Jesus, the vine, and the cup of suffering. Finally, the action of yeast, unseen, working within the dough and bringing the loaf to life, symbolic of God's power at work—the miracle of bread-making, which led medieval society to term yeast as 'Godisgood'.

As is often typical practice in Baptist churches, the congregation took very small bits of the bread during the communion service, but after the service the members gathered round the remaining loaf, cutting slices and wrapping the bread in paper serviettes to take out and share with family, neighbours and friends. Fran Bellingham comments that 'this action speaks eloquently of the sharing of Christ with the whole community, the hospitality of the Lord's Supper extending beyond the walls of the church into the wider community'.

Together and individually the members of Argoed Baptist Church are witnesses on the way of Jesus.

Journeying with others

Moving to the Easter events, the women discover the empty tomb, resulting in a mixture of fear, joy, confusion and disbelief (Mark 16:1-7). Luke tells us of another journey (24:13-35), recalling that Cleopas and his wife leave for home, leaving behind them those traumatic events. On the seven-mile walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus their conversation is heavy with sorrow (v17) and disappointment (v21) and sheer bewilderment (vv22-24). As they walk, a stranger joins them without their noticing, and asks them what they are talking about, which seems to have

made them so sad. Cleopas' reply is sharp, 'Are you the only visitor in Jerusalem who doesn't know the things that have been happening there these last few days?'

The stranger invites them to tell him, and so Cleopas recounts his story of Jesus. It contains a summary of Jesus' ministry, crucifixion, and the hope of resurrection; he tells of the empty grave, and the witness to that fact. But there is no personal experience of the risen Christ.

Cleopas and his wife are clearly intrigued by the stranger's conversation. By now they have reached Emmaus, and they offer hospitality, the Jewish pattern of feeding and housing the stranger. They felt moved to invite him into their home and then they realised the truth. As Alan Jamieson remarks: 'he stayed with them just long enough to help them rethink the illusion and rekindle the flame inside them'—just long enough for them to be 'called to trust again, this time with a deeper and more inner knowing'.³ They have discovered that Jesus has gone ahead of them and that he does indeed meet with them on the road, even when they have failed to grasp the truth of the resurrection.

This resurrection event provides a model for our involvement in the mission of Christ: walking with people and listening to their stories, drawing on our own experience of living the life that our friends and neighbours also live. For many people, life does not make sense. They may ask questions, expressing their view that the world is a terrible or even terrifying place, or simply struggling through a life which has no hope. Look at the pattern set by Jesus.

First, we listen to people; we invite them to tell us their story; to recount their experiences of life and the world; to tell us what they understand about those experiences; what they mean to them and for them.

Second, we share with them what we know of Jesus; how the gospel message has made sense of our lives; and our experience of Christ.

Third, then we stay with people whatever they think or believe; we are not put off; we demonstrate our care, interest and love; we eat with them.

Last, and prayerfully, they will see something in the integrity of our lives—where the realities of life and God meet together to give joy, peace and love; something attractive to which they will aspire.

This approach affirms the need to listen to the stories of others and to live with the uncertainty of questions rather than simply offering answers. Peterson maintains that 'it is the task of the Christian community to give witness and guidance in the living of life in a culture that is relentless in reducing, constricting, and enervating this life'.⁴ We believe that Christ is with us in the conversations and journeys we share. We recognise that we are all in different places on our journeys of faith, but nevertheless they are journeys empowered by the Holy Spirit and in the company of others.

Karen Smith helpfully suggests that Christian spirituality develops as beliefs are examined in the light of experience of relationship with God, others and the wider world. It is in the Christian community that we share our stories, interact with each other, and interpret our experiences. Here is the place where we share our struggles, hopes, dreams, sorrow, mistakes, pain, discovering more of our relationship with God and others. She concludes that ‘storytelling, of course, is not simply a matter of relating an event—it is about seeking after truth that is beyond the story itself’.⁵ We may find this disturbing, but it nevertheless offers opportunities for our spiritual growth.

The reality of resurrection

Worship is not restricted to what happens in church. We must make all the connections between faith and life, and faith and work—in fact our whole life journey—and recognise that discipleship is full-time ministry for all Christians. Our spiritual life is expressed in the way we, as individuals or groups, aim to deepen our experience of God.

Jesus explains to Martha that in him resurrection life is a present reality (John 11:25-26). In Paul’s vocabulary this is a life that is ‘in Christ’ (Romans 6:3,11; 8:1), and in Luke’s understanding this is kingdom life—Jesus declaring that the kingdom is near, in our midst, within us (Luke 10:9, 11; 11:20; 17:21). The Kingdom of God is central to Jesus’ message. We need to adopt Jesus’ agenda—to deny self, take up the cross, and follow. We are following Jesus and joining him in his mission of shaping the world, in the power of the Spirit.

We live within the hope that the gospel will influence lives by the activity of the Spirit; that Christians will be challenged to live sacrificial cross-shaped lives, which look to the needs of others. We live as those who know that the current reality of the world challenges our God-given responsibility to our neighbours both local and global.

It is beyond the resurrection that the disciples, obedient to the call of God, find Jesus on the road—on their journey. Resurrection is the key to new possibilities in Christ, to the formation of Christian community, opening up the possibilities of redemption for human beings and for all creation, and for justice, liberation and hope.⁶

Paul places the redemption of human beings in the context of the redemption of the whole creation, powerfully expressed in the Paul’s letter to the Romans (8:18-25). The resurrection has brought about a new reality, and the church is part of this new reality, the body of Christ, through which God encounters the world as saviour and liberator. So we are called to step out in faith, meet Jesus on the road, and be drawn into Christ’s mission in and for the world, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are then led to ask: in what ways is the church engaged in the reality of such an invitation to mission?

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are exploring our relationship with God through Christ, our relationship with each other in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and our relationship with the world, just as the congregation at Argoed Baptist Church discovered on the Palm Sunday they shared the *bara brith*.

Paul Fiddes moves our understanding to a new depth, when he suggests that we share in the *perichoresis* (mutual indwelling) of the triune God.⁷ In our identification of God as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are describing God in relationship, in community, and we emphasise that God is personal and welcomes participation. Through baptism 'into the community in the name of the Trinity we are freshly defined as participants in the work and being of God'.⁸

The sacraments are a means of grace for healing and transformation, and for creating community. As we covenant together, we turn outward to the task of reconciliation that God has given us. Fiddes stresses that 'the real presence of Christ is manifested in the community of the church, as it becomes more truly the body of Christ broken for the life of the world'.⁹

Peterson similarly challenges that there is 'no maturity in the spiritual life, no obedience in following Jesus, no wholeness in the Christian life apart from an immersion in and embrace of community'.¹⁰ Our life is anticipated by the resurrection, and so the Christian life is not about us but about God. Peterson describes this relationship with God as 'prepositional participation'—the prepositions that join us to God and God's action in us and in the world. We live 'with', 'in', and 'for' God—we are participating in what God is doing and we do it in Christ's way.¹¹ Our celebration of the Lord's Supper encompasses all these aspects of encountering Christ and being drawn into his mission.

So we journey with others, expressing resurrection life, and being drawn into the very being of God, who encounters, empowers and guides us through our Christian walk. But this walk will cover ground that is both rough and smooth.

Vulnerability and integrity

After discussing L'Arche community, Smith observes that 'the picture is one of weakness and vulnerability...community is about diversity and difference as much as sameness or similarity. And also it is about the strength discovered in the weakness and suffering of the cross'.¹² However, the Christian church is not very good at owning suffering and failure—even though walking with others and watching with them in their suffering allows us the privilege of absorbing some of their pain. We use the metaphors of 'body', 'fellowship', '*koinonia*', 'communion', words that express relationship and community. The call to follow Christ is not a solitary pilgrimage but to follow in community with others.

As Alan Jamieson maintains, we are called to be there for people in the midst of their faith struggles, questions and doubts, providing resources, support and companionship for people seeking to contend with the difficult places of faith.¹³ We need people with whom to travel, and who will help us to find God in our desert places, and in God to find new depths of hope, faith and love.

Jamieson explores hope and trouble (Romans 5:2-5) and helpfully introduces the reader to Ricoeur's 'knot of reality'. This is a move to Ricoeur's second naïveté created through forming a knot of realities—'the reality of pain, suffering and despair that lies within and around us tied to the reality of a deep faith in God'—which brings hope in despair.¹⁴

We can imagine a reef knot which bears all the stress that we place upon it; the realities of life being intimately intertwined with the promises and reality of God. The witness of the three men in the burning furnace fire (Daniel 3:16-18) is an example of such faith, or Job's testimony in his suffering: 'I know that my redeemer lives' (Job 19:25-26).

God promises to be present with us in the realities of life (Psalm 23; Isaiah 43:1-5; Matthew 28:20), and encourages us to hold onto hope in the face of uncertainty. We learn from Jeremiah that the false prophets promised hope without catastrophe, while God's prophets offer hope beyond catastrophe. Our hope is located in the promises and purposes of God.

Living together

As Kingdom people we will be a community that reflects the life of Jesus; a community of generosity and sharing, of friendship and belonging, of mission and identity, of freedom and risk-taking. As such it cannot but help stand out against the deeply held values of Western culture and society.

Such a community will recognise failure and the grace of God's forgiveness for all. We must face up to failure in ourselves, our attitudes and actions. The Christian church should be a place where people fail, and are seen to fail, learn from their mistakes, and are forgiven. There is a problem of success-driven congregations in a success-driven society. Maria Boulding gives helpful encouragement:

If we cannot endure failing and being weak, and being seen to fail and be weak, we are not yet in a position to love and be loved...Christ has gone down into the deepest places of our failure and claimed them as his own, and now there is no possible failure in our lives or our deaths that cannot be the place of meeting him and of greater openness to his work.¹⁵

We honestly face up to our own weaknesses and failures, and are ready to encourage others in love to live with their mistakes and failures.

Jamieson notes that 'At various points on the journey of faith we too discover that God is not where we thought God would be and even, perhaps, who we thought God was'.¹⁶ At this point we must not try to deny such experiences, because they can be for us a genuine encounter with God and a step into deeper self-awareness. In like manner Richard Rohr urges us to see that faith is distorted when it is wedded to Western progress and ignores the tragic sense of life. Perfection belongs to Platonism. He challenges us with the observation that:

*...God adjusts to the vagaries and the failures of the moment. This ability to adjust to human disorder and failure is named God's providence or compassion. Every time God forgives us, God is saying that God's own rules do not matter as much as the relationship that God wants to create with us. Just the Biblical notion of absolute forgiveness, once experienced, should be enough to make us trust and seek and love God.*¹⁷

He encourages us to learn and grow through tragedy and failure. Perhaps as churches we need to express a more realistic community, where we provide places for people to explore, question and doubt.

Such a demonstration of the Kingdom lives within the hope that the gospel will influence lives by the activity of the Spirit of God; that it will transform the lifestyles of Christians and guide them to live sacrificially cross-shaped lives, which look to the needs of others.

John Weaver is past Principal of South Wales Baptist College and is now retired.

Notes to text

1. Unpublished MTh essay (Cardiff University, 2011) by Fran Bellingham; subsequently published as *Eucharistic meals*, in *bmj*, **317**, 2013, pp21-27.

2. *Bara brith*, sometimes known as 'speckled bread' (literal Welsh meaning), can be either a yeast bread enriched with dried fruit (similar to Irish barmbrack) or something more like a fruitcake made with self-raising flour (no yeast). It is traditionally made with raisins, currants and candied peel.

3. Alan Jamieson, *Journeying in faith: in and beyond the tough places*. London: SPCK, 2004, p103.

4. Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ plays in ten thousand places. A conversation in spiritual theology*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005, p3.

5. Karen E. Smith, *Christian spirituality*. London: SCM, 2007, pp33, 41-50.

6. Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for today's world*. London: SCM, 1995, p83.

7. Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: a pastoral doctrine of the Trinity*. London: DLT, 2000, pp89, 281.
8. Peterson, *ibid*, p306.
9. Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and traces. Baptist identity in church and theology*. Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003, p168.
10. Peterson, *ibid*, p226.
11. Peterson, *ibid*, p335.
12. Smith, *ibid*, p73.
13. Jamieson, *ibid*, p9.
14. Jamieson, *ibid*, p31.
15. Maria Boulding, *Gateway to hope*. London: Collins/Fount, 1985, pp12, 74, quoted in Stephen Pattison, *Critique of pastoral care*. London: SPCK, 1993, p168.
16. Jamieson, *ibid*, p105.

A contemporary creed: revisited

by Brian Oman

In the January edition of *bmj* I asked for help in producing a statement of Christian faith in five sentences, calling my attempt at this a ‘contemporary creed’. I particularly asked for help in stating why the resurrection of Jesus is so important. I am disappointed by the response—only two suggestions were sent to the editor and they were printed in April’s *bmj*. Both were lengthy personal opinions, one called a poem with a whole page saying what the minister did not believe!

I have received some responses personally, but have had no help in saying why the resurrection of Jesus is so important. I have asked a number of ministers and other people but only one came up with a helpful answer.

I believe there is a place for a contemporary way of trying to say what it is that Christians believe, in five or up to seven sentences. I have used my contemporary creed to help a number of people understand what we believe and have been able to

go through it with them sentence by sentence as I have had it printed on an attractive card which I then give them. We all want to share the good news of Jesus. Please take my request seriously, and let us have some theology in contemporary language!

I believe

Almighty God the Creator of the universe
came to planet earth
in the form of Jesus, the unique God/Man.

Jesus came
to reveal that God is like a loving Father,
to teach us how we should live and
to make it possible for human beings to have
a personal relationship with God which lasts for ever.

Jesus made this possible by dealing with the problem of sin
which separates us from God.

By suffering and dying on a cross He took the blame for us
so that we can enjoy a personal relationship with God
that lasts for ever, called eternal life,
if we truly believe this good news.

God is so amazingly great that we cannot
adequately describe him in human terms
but He has revealed Himself as
a loving Father,
Jesus, willing to die for us and
powerful Holy Spirit
all rolled into One in the mystery of the Trinity!
Hallelujah!

Brian Oman is a retired Baptist minister living in Swanage.

A conversation overheard

by Dennis Ottoway

Prompted by the correspondence on alternative creeds in the past few issues of *bmj*, I offer this short imaginary conversation, subtitled: *When religion gets in the way of following Jesus*. The conversation was written in response to hearing about a church that was looking for a new minister, one of the essential criteria being that the candidate had to be sound in doctrine.

Hello. Is this your first visit to our church?

Yes. I have recently moved into the district.

So, did you worship at a Baptist church in your previous town?

Yes I did.

So you are a believer?

I am a follower of Jesus.

Yes, but are you evangelical?

I am a follower of Jesus.

Yes, but are you born again?

I am a follower of Jesus.

Yes, but have you received Christ as your personal saviour?

I am a follower of Jesus.

Yes, but do you believe in penal, substitutionary atonement?

I am a follower of Jesus.

Yes, but do you believe in the divine inspiration of Scripture?

I am a follower of Jesus.

Yes, but do you believe in the second coming of Christ?

I am a follower of Jesus.

Yes, but...

Excuse me, but why are you asking me all these questions?

Well, because I want to know if you are sound.

Sound?

Yes. That you believe correct doctrine.

You mean being a follower of Jesus isn't enough?

Yes, but you have to believe the right things about Him, otherwise how can we have fellowship together?

You mean loving one another isn't enough?

What do you mean?

Well, Jesus said, 'All men will know you are my disciples if you love one another.' Isn't that enough?

Yes, but...

The church has a dark history of persecuting men and women who did not believe 'correct doctrine'. Whatever 'correct doctrine' is, I would encourage Christians to read *The dark side of Christian history*, by Helen Ellerbe, published by Morningstar & Lark, PO Box 153, Windermere, FL 34786, first published 1995, eighth printing August 2009.

The book has an extensive bibliography. In her forward the author states: 'My intention is to offer, not a complete picture of Christian history, but only the side which hurt so many and did such damage to spirituality. It is in no way intended to diminish the beautiful work that countless Christian men and women have done to truly help others. And it is certainly not intended as a defence of or tribute to any other religion'.

I am conscious that faith is a journey and as we travel the road the landscape is always changing. What I once believed as a Bible college graduate in 1964, who had his theology 'all sorted', no longer holds true. I thank God that I live in a free country, free from the tyranny of a state church, where I am at liberty to believe or not believe. Had I lived in an earlier age I would have faced execution.

Church order in the *Didache*

by Michael Jackson

Lost for many centuries and discovered in the Patriarchal Library in Constantinople in 1873, the *Didache* (*The teaching of the twelve apostles to the nations*) appears to shed tantalising light on life in church communities around the close of the 1st century of the Christian era.

Believed to have originated in Syria and of unknown authorship, the *Didache*'s status is questioned by the claim that it may be a forgery, deliberately framed to appear archaic but composed many years into the 2nd century. Against this must be weighed some distinctive features, such as a christology that appears more revelatory than redemptive: the life and knowledge that you made known to us through Jesus your child (*Didache* 9:3), and church government which advocates a multiplicity of locally appointed leaders—presbyters and deacons (*Didache* 15:1)—rather than the monarchical episcopate advocated notably by Ignatius of Antioch, which became the model for the future church.

Also, though clearly familiar with teaching in the gospel tradition, especially the gospel of Matthew, it sometimes reinterprets such teaching in an individual way, as when it adds to the Q saying about generosity (Matthew 5:42//Luke 6:30), teaching about the reciprocal responsibilities of those who receive (*Didache* 1:5). This relative independence, reflecting a time before the canon received the imprimatur of the church, is an argument for its genuinely ancient status.¹ Showing signs of being a composite, redacted document, it is not entirely free of inconsistencies (aporia).² Its practical usefulness, dealing as it does with issues of ethics, liturgy and church order, is reflected in extant fragments in a variety of translations: Latin, Coptic, Syriac, and Arabic, testifying to its wide influence in the early Christian era.³ Of particular interest is the issue of church order, and the growing tensions reflected in the *Didache* between two foundational expressions of earliest Christianity.

Itinerants and communities

In the late 1970s, the German New Testament specialist, Gerd Theissen, produced an influential study of the Jesus movement from a sociological standpoint.⁴ This study helped to kick-start the fruitful social-science approach to New Testament studies, which explores the creative relationship between the world of ideas and the concrete physical and cultural environment in which those ideas were born. One of the key areas

Itinerant charismatics were frequent visitors to church

on which Theissen focused was the role of so-called ‘wandering charismatics’: influential leaders, variously called in the *Didache* ‘apostles’, ‘prophets’, ‘teachers’ (cf 1 Corinthians 12:28), who toured the churches, evangelising, strengthening and building up. Contextually, their way of life would have been familiar to the casual observer, resembling the many wandering and mendicant philosopher-moralists of the time, such as Cynics and Stoics. In terms of Baptist history, they bear some comparison with the ‘messengers’ (or bishops) favoured by the General Baptists, ordained to a translocal ministry, citing Paul’s missionary coworkers by way of precedent.⁵

Significantly, like the earliest itinerants, these, too, had their critics, not least for being unaccountable and magnifying their office. This led to Associations rushing to their defence, stressing the motive of service over against power and kudos.⁶ As to the wandering charismatics of the 1st century, they clearly modelled themselves upon the *modus operandi* of Christ who had nowhere to lay his head (Q: Matthew 8:20/Luke 9:58), and who sent out the Twelve as penniless itinerant preacher/healers (Mark 6:7-13 and par). Theissen regards such itinerants as the most important figures in the early church—most believers lived sedentary lives in settled communities.⁷ The itinerants’ status sprang both from their spiritual gifting and in the sacrifice they were willing to make for the sake of the gospel.

It remains an open question whether they were commissioned by local churches or regarded their ministry as self-authenticating. Though some are identified in the New Testament, notably Paul and his co-workers, such as Timothy (1 Corinthians 16:10-11); Tychicus (Colossians 4:7-8); and Epaphras (Philemon 23), it is clear from what follows that such itinerant charismatics were present in significant numbers, criss-crossing the Mediterranean world, frequent visitors to church communities and, in some cases, creating a pastoral dilemma within them.

A compromised ministry

It is significant that out of its extant 16 chapters, the *Didache* devotes three (*Didache* 11-13) to the impact of the charismatics on the community and how best to deal with

them. The very fact that such extensive and in-depth teaching was felt to be necessary is an indication of the high profile nature of the issue and its urgency. And so, after the initial ethical exposition of the traditional Jewish ‘two ways’ (life and death), followed by liturgical teaching on baptism and the ‘thanksgiving meal’ (Lord’s Supper?), our writer focuses on the itinerants: their standing within the community, the reception they should receive, and guidance as to how to evaluate their genuineness in the light of their beliefs and behaviour.

From the thrice-repeated call to ‘welcome’ them (*Didache* 11:1,4;12:1), it is clear that, in principle, such itinerants are an invaluable asset to the life and work of local churches. They are viewed as a source of spiritual strength and enrichment, an expression of *oikodome* (building up, 2 Corinthians 12:19). In the same way that, in the Ancient World, the emissary of a potentate was regarded, in essence, as the potentate himself, so it is here: Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as the Lord (*Didache* 11:4, cf 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

The ministry of the itinerant charismatic is to be received with the same eagerness and seriousness as would be rendered to Christ himself. Such a status is reflected in the hospitality to be offered to itinerant prophets. They are to have priority—the first pick of the harvest—even before the poor (*Didache* 13:4, cf Mark 14:7)!—also money, clothing and everything you own (*Didache* 13:7). In other words, such ambassadors cannot be honoured enough for the ministry they undertake in Christ’s name, reflecting the dominical teaching that labourers deserve their food (Matthew 10:9-10).

Furthermore, such treatment reflects that rendered to the priesthood of the Old Testament, who are qualified to consume what the people have first given to God (Deuteronomy 18:1-8; Nehemiah 10:37-39; Sirach 7:31-32).⁸ The Didachist makes this overtly clear: they [the itinerants] are your high priests (*Didache* 13:3). Clearly they were an integral part of the church’s life in the earliest days, which was encouraged to both welcome them and give them every support for the furtherance of their mission.

But the evidence is that this very welcome and generous openness contributed, in more than a few cases, to local difficulties. One was the nature of their teaching. Local communities are expected to understand the Christian *kerygma* they received well enough to be able to distinguish between true and false prophets: exercise your critical judgment (*Didache* 12:1, cf 1 John 4:1). The true itinerant will serve to fortify the faith of the church (*Didache* 11:2), his lifestyle will accord to that of Jesus himself (*Didache* 11:8); and he will not be hypocritical, teaching what he, himself, does not practice (*Didache* 11:10, cf Matthew 23:2-3). If he proves to be so, the false one should be avoided (*Didache* 12:5, cf Romans 16:17).

Such teaching reflects that of 2 John (vv10-11), where false prophets are not to be welcomed into believers’ homes, lest they, too, become infected with falsehood. Third John (vv9-10) indicates a (later?), more radical response, citing Diotrephes as banning

the visit of all wandering charismatics to his community. The gospels and the New Testament letters, time and again, reflect this same concern over the activity of those who subvert the gospel (Mark 13:21-22; 2 Corinthians 11:4).

Local communities were clearly very vulnerable to the impact of unscrupulous travellers with charisma and impressive powers, whose egos would be fed by the crowd they gathered and the adulation they enjoyed. The apocalyptic conclusion to the *Didache* indicates that at the end time such false prophets will multiply (*Didache* 16:3, cf Matthew 7:15). However, it is significant that condemnation of such is forbidden (*Didache* 11:7, cf Mark 3:28-29 and *par*). Whatever they do, such itinerant charismatics remain in a different category to others in the church and, as such, subject to God's judgement alone (*Didache* 11:11).

The second and more pressing difficulty generated by itinerants is that of hospitality and its abuse—reflected in the space given to the issue. Some itinerants were overstaying their welcome (*Didache* 11:5; 12:2), asking for money (*Didache* 11:6,12) and sponging on others, refusing to work (*Didache* 12:4 cf 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12). The Kingdom commission to the Twelve by Jesus (Mark 6:7-13 and *par*) is characterised by urgency, and the swift, unhindered progress of the disciples from one town or village to the next. But here we encounter a corruption of this model, resulting in itinerants taking advantage of their hosts, many of whom were very probably living from hand to mouth. There appears to have been almost a culture of parasitic behaviour on the part of the 'Christ peddler', as the *Didache* derisively puts it (*Didache* 12:5, cf 2 Corinthians 2:17).

In this connection, the example of Peregrinus (d 165CE) is often quoted. He was originally a Cynic philosopher, who involved himself with believers. The pagan author,

Lucian, citing him as a charlatan, describes him as benefiting at the expense of Christians in view of their high regard for him: through whose ministrations he lived in unalloyed prosperity.⁹ Again, the early Christians are portrayed as generous and open-hearted, vulnerable to unscrupulous individuals.

**early
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The damage inflicted upon the earliest communities was at least twofold in nature. First, because it was parasitic, it further impoverished those who were, for the most part, living at subsistence level (1 Corinthians 1:26). Secondly, and even more seriously, it degraded the ministry of all itinerants in the eyes of the church. The

behaviour of the abusers was likely to affect the faith of believers in a cynical direction because they were so aligned to the earliest apostles in their itinerant-mendicant way of life, and consequently to Jesus himself. Clearly there was a crisis situation developing.

Pastoral direction

The concept of ‘order’ (*taxis*) in the early church did not feature greatly, though Paul was forced to impose it (1 Corinthians 14:39-40), as was the Didachist who lays down ground rules to regulate the above unacceptable behaviour.¹⁰ As to length of stay in a believer’s home, one, at most two, days are permitted. An itinerant staying longer is deemed to be a ‘false prophet’ (*Didache* 11:5). Furthermore, the itinerant should ask only for bread to continue his journey (*Didache* 11:6). If he asks for monetary assistance, again he is to be deemed false.

Sometimes it appears that such charismatic itinerants wanted to settle down within the community, at least for a period, and guidance is given to cover such cases. The artisan is to pursue his trade, so as not to become an economic liability on local congregations (*Didache* 12:3 cf 2 Thessalonians 3:7-8). If he has no trade, the community is to determine how he can function without being idle (*Didache* 12:4).

Theissen, in a later book, distinguishes between those skills which are transferable from place to place—one could think of weaving or carpentry—and those which are not. So, he concludes, this is why Paul, a tentmaker/leatherworker, could renounce the right to support, while Peter, a fisherman, could insist upon it (1 Corinthians 9:3-7).¹¹ We have no way of knowing to what extent these guidelines were adhered to in those earliest Christian communities, in which it would be tempting to give Spirit-filled charismatics whatever they asked in the light of their perceived status and power. A hard-headed, pragmatic response was needed: the very thing the Didachist offered. Was the popularity of the work, evidenced by being translated so widely, a reflection of this valuable church order teaching?

Leaders: local and in transit

It is clear that because local leadership co-existed alongside the itinerant charismatics, rivalry was always a possibility.¹² This we can detect from the fact that locally appointed bishops and deacons are to be honoured by the community along with the prophets and teachers (*Didache* 15:2), for the reason that they conduct a similar and parallel ministry. In this way the *Didache* tries to mediate between two types of authority figures, attempting to reduce the status gulf between them, so diffusing possible tensions. Here is an early example of the age-old conflict in the church between two types of authority, institutional and charismatic. Eventually, the ministry

of the wandering charismatics was wholly appropriated by resident and local leaders, the itinerants themselves eventually disappearing from history: objects of nostalgia, a reminder to the community of its past.¹³

Michael Jackson is now retired from Baptist ministry and lives in Yorkshire.

Notes to text

1. In the judgment of Eusebius and Athanasius, the *Didache* hovered on the edge of that canon finally accepted by most of the churches at the end of the 4th century.
2. S. J. Patterson, *Didache 11-13: the legacy of radical itinerancy in early Christianity*, in *The Didache in context: essays on its text, history and transmission*, Clayton N. Jefford (ed). Leiden, New York/Koln: E. J. Brill, 1995, pp316-317.
3. S. Neill, *The interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*. London: OUP, 1966, p60.
4. G. Theissen, *The first followers of Jesus: a sociological analysis of the earliest Christianity*. London: SCM, 1978.
5. A. C. Underwood, *A history of the English Baptists*. London: BU Publications, Kingsgate, 1947, pp 119-121.
6. J. F. V. Nicholson, *The office of 'messenger' amongst British Baptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, in *The Baptist Quarterly*, XVII (5), January, 1958, p220.
7. Theissen, *First followers*, p8.
8. R. M. Grant, *Early Christianity and society*. London: Collins, 1978, p139.
9. Lucian, *On the death of Peregrinus*, 16.
10. H. von Campenhausen, *Tradition and life in the church*. London: Collins, 1968, p123.
11. G. Theissen, *Social reality and the early Christians: theology, ethics and the world of the New Testament*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992, pp52-54.
12. Does the rise of local leadership reflect back upon the charismatic itinerants in terms of their reputation or influence? See *The Didache: its Jewish sources and its place in early Judaism and Christianity*. Assen: Royal Van Gorcum/Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002, p336.
13. Patterson, p327.

Anabaptists and the English Baptists

by Clive Jarvis

A ‘myth,’ I was taught long ago, was not a fairy tale but a story which, when all the layers of falsity are stripped away, leaves you with a kernel of truth. Take the story of Robin Hood, strip away the 19th century additions of Maid Marion and everything else, and one is left with the possibility, probability even, that there was in the 13th century a criminal by the name of Robbe Hoode.

The Anabaptists were an amazing and courageous people and their story of faith is inspirational. I would be truly delighted as an English Baptist to claim kinship—but can I? Frequently in recent times I have read comments from Baptist ministers that assume this familial relationship and it requires testing.

The first English Baptist church

When John Smyth (1570-1612) and Thomas Helwys (1575-1615) led their little band of dissenters from Gainsborough in the East Midlands to Amsterdam in 1607/1608, they were to join a significant number of English congregations already there—including the Puritan congregation of the ‘English Church’ who would return to England and depart in 1620 for America on board a ship called the Mayflower—famed as the Pilgrim Fathers.

These 30 or more sectarian congregations were the natural confidants for Smyth and his group, and there is ample evidence that they were in regular conversation with one another.¹ However, Smyth led his congregation to a position on ‘true baptism’ that would separate him and his followers even from the separatists themselves. As a result of this fresh conviction they disbanded themselves as a separatist church and reformed as a Baptist church, as a ‘baptised body of believers’. Their fellow separatists in Amsterdam were horrified, and doubly so when the word spread that Smyth had baptised himself before baptising his followers.²

The reaction to Smyth's self-baptism by the other English Puritan congregations convinced him he had been wrong, so he sought to bring his church under the authority of the well established Mennonite (Anabaptist) church in Amsterdam. In his repentance he explained that he had baptised himself because he knew of no other who might have baptised him and no church with whom he could join with good conscience.³ Presumably this included the Mennonites, who were also his neighbours!

Indeed Smyth's appeal to the Mennonites was rejected by Thomas Helwys and others in his own congregation because of concerns about the Mennonites' theological understanding of Christ and their overly hierarchical views. Smyth went ahead and in 1610 along with around 30 others applied to join the Mennonites, but they were not finally admitted until 21 January 1615, by which time Smyth had been dead for more than two years. The Anabaptists no more wanted the English Baptists than they had wanted them! By this time Helwys and his followers had returned to London where in late 1612 they had formed, at Spitalfields in London, the first Baptist church on English soil.

Of more interest must be the relationship between the Smyth group of exiles and those of the Barrowists who came to Amsterdam from Norwich, East Anglia. Their founder Henry Barrow (1550-1593) was martyred in England in 1593. By 1594, leadership of the church (by now in Holland) fell to Francis Johnson (1563-1618). Johnson had been Smyth's tutor at Christ's College, Cambridge and there is no doubt a close connection existed between them with the suggestion that the Smyth group upon reaching Amsterdam in 1607-1608 at first linked themselves to the Barrowist congregation.⁴

The Barrowists are thought to have been Anabaptist in doctrine and practice, if not in name, and the suggestion that they were Anabaptistic persists.⁵ William Lumpkin traces this influence to the 30-50,000 Anabaptists who fled the continent in the wake of the Munster debacle of 1534 and settled in East Anglia.⁶ Yet we must not mistake similarity of doctrine with identification. Powicke concedes on the one hand that, '... Barrow was far nearer to the Anabaptists than he knew...', while on the other that, 'Barrow cherished all the prevalent feelings of horror, with which, in his day, the Anabaptists were regarded. Nothing worse was conceivable than to be an Anabaptist'.⁷

It does seem clear that a number of members of the church adopted Anabaptist views and were excommunicated in 1594 and went on to baptise themselves. One of these individuals, Thomas Odell, was later associated with the Smyth group that eventually joined the Dutch Mennonite church.

The uniqueness of the Smyth/Helwys church is that it was the first formally constituted English Baptist church and, while it is

Are Baptists really Anabaptist in origin?

interesting to note the possibility that some Englishmen before them adopted Anabaptist views and even re-baptised themselves, it does not detract from this uniqueness. There is no evidence that those expelled from the Barrowists attempted to form a church, even if they did undergo baptism on their expulsion. Furthermore, all this occurs 13 years before Smyth arrived in Amsterdam—and one of the reasons given for Smyth’s quick separation from the Barrowists was that they were practicing infant baptism. This indicates that at a very early stage after their arrival the mode of baptism was an issue for the Smyth group; rather than other Anabaptistic views which persisted among the Barrowists.

The Zurich Brethren

In Zurich, Switzerland, a more radical Reformation movement associated with Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1551) came into existence. One of Zwingli’s methods was the use of public disputations in which he relied upon his oratorical abilities and immense intellectual prowess to persuade others to his views. Zwingli also allowed his disciples to engage in debates and to raise the topics for debates.

One group, led by Conrad Grebel, sought ever more radical debates in an attempt to take Zwingli and Zurich into deeper and truer reform of the church. The Chronicle of the Hunterian Brethren expresses it like this: ‘Luther and Zwingli exposed all the deception and villainy of the Pope and brought it to the light of day as if they would strike everything to the ground with thunderbolts. But they put nothing better in its place’.⁸

The difference was that where Zwingli was a reformer, Grebel and the others had become revolutionaries. In January 1525 a disputation was held on ‘infant baptism’ that led to the final parting of the ways. At stake was the nature of the church and the Zurich Brethren’s new understanding of it as a closed community of believers who sought to live in community. The depiction ‘Anabaptist’ (which means ‘re-baptisers’) was foisted upon them as an accusatory and derogatory title. It was not one they chose for themselves and improbable that they understood themselves as a baptising movement.

The decision the Brethren took that night was to form a true Gospel church. The re-baptisms took place because they were declaring their previous church membership and affiliation void and Baptism was simply the door by which one entered the church and what they were doing was forming a new church. A baptism that conformed to the method of New Testament baptism did not lie at the heart of their action as it would with the formation in 1609 of the first English Baptist church in Amsterdam, who formed themselves as a ‘baptised body of believers’.

The Beliefs of the Brethren

Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528) is perhaps the most renowned early Anabaptist and his 18-article doctrinal statement of the true nature of the church (the Achtzehn Schlussreden) is the earliest Anabaptist statement of faith. Two articles (8 and 9) refer to baptism, but only in passing. Indeed at the time it was written in 1524 Hubmaier was a year away from his own re-baptism.

The Schleithem Confession was compiled in 1527 by Michael Slatter and is brief, with only seven articles, the first of which is on baptism. However the issue addressed is not the mode of baptism but the faith of the believer that is absent in an infant. For the earliest of Anabaptists the mode was of no importance.

For Smyth and Helwys, the mode of baptism was of great importance and early English Baptist statements confirm this. The 1644 Confession of Faith, issued by the seven Particular Baptist Churches of London is at pains to point out in its title that it is the Confession, 'Of those CHURCHES which are commonly (though falsely) called ANABAPTISTS...'. Articles 39 and 40 make clear that baptism is both of believers and by immersion. The 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith also ensures in its articles on baptism that the mode and method is made clear. The earliest General Baptist Confession of Faith of 1660 also begins with a denial of any connection to the Anabaptists, with Article X denying the validity of infant baptism and Article XI stating that baptism by 'dipping' is the only valid baptism.⁹

Writing of Balthassar Hubmaier, the Baptist historian Jack Hoad says that he '...displayed in all essentials the major principles of the English Baptist movement of the following century'.¹⁰ This general argument that English Baptist and Anabaptist beliefs about the nature of the church were of the same ilk is advanced by others.¹¹

Common ground is not the same as union and churches are distinguished not by what they share in common but by distinction, and at no point in their long histories have the Anabaptists and the Baptists been drawn together or sought union. At heart, Anabaptists in the 21st century remain characterised by their commitment to community living and simply share with Baptists and increasingly other new church groups the practice of believer's baptism.

Conclusion

It is important to note that England was not isolated from developments on the continent. As we have seen, after Munster some 30-50,000 Anabaptists settled in East Anglia.¹² The name 'Anabaptist' in its association with the fall of Münster and with events surrounding it were revolting to the sober-minded English, and while they

were prepared to harbour refugees they were not prepared to adopt their church. In May 1535, a group of Dutch Anabaptists was condemned to death (but not executed) at St Paul's in London, under laws passed by Henry VIII against Anabaptists.¹³ In July 1575 a further group were brought before the courts and this time some were executed.¹⁴ Clearly Anabaptist views were known in England and roundly condemned—not first and foremost because of their views on baptism, but on separation of church and state.

There is no direct evidence that Smyth and Helwys were influenced by the views of their Anabaptist neighbours. The fact that he baptised himself, seeing none other to perform the task, confirmed this lack of influence or even contact, despite being neighbours. Certainly, as we have seen in the 1644 and 1660 Confessions of Faith, early English Baptists were quick to disassociate themselves from Anabaptists. The term Anabaptist was flung quite widely to encompass all who adopted radical views on the nature of the church and early English Baptists fought hard to distinguish themselves from the Continental Anabaptists.¹⁵ The fact that John Wesley habitually referred to English Baptists as Anabaptists illustrates how 'mud' sticks!

Burrage concludes a section on discussing the influence of continental Anabaptists in England by saying, 'It would seem that Anabaptists during the sixteenth century never appealed strongly to the British mind. We may add to this that with the rise of the wholly English phenomenon of Separatism or Dissent any possibility of Anabaptist influence on English religion ended completely'.¹⁶

A further point is that in contrasting the Brethren with the Amsterdam General Baptists we have paid no heed to the quite separate evolution of the English Particular Baptists, who emerged in London from independent/separatist roots in the 1630s with no Anabaptist influence whatsoever. By a ratio of 7:1 they would be the larger of the two English Baptist groupings.

Furthermore, by the turn of the 18th century, the General Baptists were floundering theologically and by the middle of the century most would have succumbed to Unitarianism, ceasing to be either orthodox Christian churches or Baptist churches. Those British Baptist churches today who by their ancestry are General Baptist belong not to the churches that claim Amsterdam as their forefather, but those who look to the emergence in 1770 of the New Connexion of General Baptist churches under the ministry of Dan Taylor—a separate development with an altogether more evangelical and evangelistic orthodox position than their predecessors, owing more to the Wesleyan Revival than Continental Anabaptists.

It would also be fair to say that in general Baptists historians have followed this same path of refuting any such link. This includes Evans, Whitley and Underwood. In Whitley's case his denial of a link between English Baptists and Anabaptists is the opening sentence of his book.¹⁷

Clive Jarvis has served several Baptist churches and now works itinerantly, supporting ministers and engaging in mission. Clive has produced a bibliography and a longer article on this subject, from which this article has been edited.

Notes to text

1. See for example; Frederick James Powicke, *Henry Barrow, separatist (1550?-1593) and the exiled church of Amsterdam (1593-1622)*. J. Clarke, 1900; W.T. Whitley, *A history of British Baptists*, 2nd edn. London: Kingsgate, 1932, pp 20-21.
2. Thomas Crosby, *The history of the English Baptists from the Reformation to the beginning of the reign of George I, Etc.* London: 1738, pp91-92; A.C. Underwood, *A history of the English Baptists*. London: BUGBI, 1947 (1970), 1947), p38.
3. Champlin Burrage, *The early English Dissenters in the light of recent research: (1550-1641)*. Cambridge: CUP, 1912, p237; Powicke, p251.
4. Powicke, p249.
5. See William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist story*, 3rd edn. Grand Rapids: 1996, p273.
6. William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist confessions of faith*. Valley Forge: Judson, 1969, p79; Robert G. Torbet, *A history of the Baptists*, 3rd edn. Judson: 1973, p26.
7. *ibid*, p201.
8. Brethren Hutterian, *The chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*. Rifton, NY; Robertsbridge: Plough, 1987, p41.
9. *ibid*, p228
10. Jack Hoad, *The Baptist: an historical and theological study of the Baptist identity*. London: Grace, 1986, p57.
11. Torbet, pp30-31.
12. Lumpkin, p79; Torbet, p26.
13. J. M. Cramp, *Baptist history: from the foundation of the Christian church to the close of the eighteenth century*. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1869, p231; Crosby, p39.
14. Powicke, pp206-207; Cramp, pp233-234.
15. Burrage, p41; Torbet, pp26-27.
16. Estep, p282.
17. See, for example, B. Evans, *The early English Baptists*. London: Paternoster, 1862, pp16-17; Whitley, p17; Underwood, p27.

Back to college

by Ron Day

I left Spurgeon's College in 1994. The four-year period of ministerial training and formation was, for me, a difficult but worthwhile road. I went into ministry with a BD (specialising in Greek, Hebrew and church history), and a Diploma in Pastoral Studies.

My first pastorate, in Stradbroke, was a great challenge and saw the fruit of some useful joined-up thinking. After a year I finished my probationary studies (a mere 15 book reviews, no mentoring, no senior friend, just a sympathetic Area Superintendent who was delighted he had another minister on his patch). Soon I missed the discipline of study, so I signed up for a part-time MA in Pastoral Theology in Cambridge.

Over the years a number of my fellow students had left church ministry for different reasons and it became a concern of mine to see what could be done to prevent the fall-out and burn-out of ministers. This year, as part of my sabbatical, I went back to Spurgeon's to see how ministerial formation and training have changed. I learned some remarkable things.

First, the education of ministers is different now—the courses are far more engaging and relevant to ministry. Each course has its goals and success criteria enumerated and there is a clear statement of how it will contribute to ministry if the student passes. The lecturers are also part of the learning community—they seek answers too, and are not afraid to say when they don't know: and thus an example is set on how to deal with the real world of questions in an engaging manner. The focus is on lifelong learning for all, not just preparation for ministry. The different courses are designed to help ministers think biblically, theologically, clearly, openly and outside the box. There is also a commitment to helping the student beyond the newly accredited period of three years.

Secondly, the colleges seem to take ministerial formation more seriously now—the staff members are more concerned with the whole person than with individual course grades; the student's prayer life and family and church base are just as important as academic studies. There is a sense that students are being equipped for the future, whatever challenges it may bring to the church.

Thirdly, there is joy in the chapel services. Creativity is encouraged and the 'Word' is sought not just from the speaker's mouth, but from the spirit of the event. That is

something I have made a habit of doing when reviewing services and events and it is great to see this taken into account alongside the technicalities of leading people through encounters with God.

Finally, the students are different now! Many are not ministerial students, but pre-ministerial ones looking for ‘something more’ and willing to pay for an academic course. As they study, they discover more of ‘who’ they are, the impact of their choices and their calling. There is a hunger to know God and the way he leads, but often relatively little background knowledge to the Bible, theology and church; the college has to cater for the needs of a much more varied set of students and does well in seeking to stretch each without breaking one.

It was a pleasure to sit in on lectures and to engage with students and staff. It was a personal triumph to be able to keep up with the ideas and terminology they were using and to be able to contribute to discussions despite being long in the tooth. There were some students who looked at me in awe for being in ministry for 21 years and still being passionate about the church and not being cynical about it. Their questions about sustaining themselves in ministry gave me hope for the future, which will look radically different from the church I signed up to, as it engages with the issues of the 21st century.

Ron Day is chairperson of the Baptist Ministers’ Fellowship and minister at Histon.



Reviews

edited by John Goddard

Truth that never dies: the Dr G.R. Beasley-Murray Memorial Lectures 2002-2012

Nigel G Wright (ed)

Pickwick Publications

Reviewer: Peter Shepherd

These 11 lectures were originally delivered at the Baptist Assembly, and many readers of the *bmj* will have heard at least some of them. Beasley-Murray was a world-renowned New Testament scholar, and Principal of Spurgeon's College (which established the series after his death in 2000) from 1958 to 1973. The collection as a whole stands firmly within the academic tradition of the College. It opens with Paul Beasley-Murray's tribute to his father and ends with Nigel Wright's defence of his stand for doctrinal orthodoxy within the denomination in 1971-2. Other themes include baptism, preaching, church unity, ministry and mission—all matters of vital interest to Beasley-Murray.

There is much to stimulate, and the book is a valuable guide to Baptist evangelical thinking in the UK over the past few decades. David Coffey and Brian Stanley reflect on Baptist mission, and offer suggestions and challenges for the

future. Their contributions are particularly helpful.

There is a general tendency to keep to the safety of traditional evangelical orthodoxy. The contributors are British Baptists, mostly former or present tutors at Spurgeon's College—three of them former Principals. Apart from Ruth Gouldbourne, they are all men, and none is from a black or ethnic minority background. The volume's title, *Truth that never dies*, suggests that there is something fixed and unchanging about our theological statements and interpretation of the Bible. We cannot tell, of course, how Beasley-Murray would have engaged with all the issues facing British Baptists today. It would have been interesting, however, to hear a little more about recent developments in New Testament eschatology and ecumenism, particularly between church traditions who differ over baptism, and to learn something of his ministry in the USA.

This excellent book honours one of the outstanding British Baptist scholars of the 20th century.

Sustaining leadership: renewing your strength and sparkle

Peter Shaw

Canterbury Press, 2014

Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery

First: what this book is not. It is not a book about how ministers can support

and encourage and grow leadership teams in the life of the church. Nor is it a book only about the minister's own leadership role, although there are case studies in the book to do with ministers.

In fact, this is a book for any leader—in the church, business or a profession. It is aimed particularly at those in mid-career who might feel they are flagging and losing their spark, and might even contemplate a career change. This may or may not be relevant to *bmj* readers.

The author is an executive coach with extensive experience in leadership skills. The four main sections of the book help readers to reflect on where they might be and what matters most to them; to reframe the present situation and open up to new possibilities; to rebalance the ability to stay professional and focused and to renew energy by bringing a light touch and building a good foundation for the future.

Within each of these four main sections there are eight short chapters, each concluding with a case study and some points for personal reflection. It is all quite simple and very accessible, needing to be read and used in short bites. Ministers who are wondering where God might be calling them next might find the book helpful. It might also be a pastoral resource to give to people asking similar questions. I must confess that as a retired minister the book did not address my situation, which explains why I can't work up much enthusiasm, but some readers might find it a useful tool for ministry or for their own self-appraisal.

Was the tomb really empty? A lawyer weighs the evidence for the resurrection

Graeme Smith

Monarch Books

Reviewer: Pieter J. Lalleman

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is at the heart of the Christian faith, and this is a good book on the evidence for it. I warmly commend it to be given to all those who are interested in Jesus. Smith is a committed Christian but not a fundamentalist: he presumes that the Easter stories in the Gospels cannot be harmonised and makes no attempt to do so, but instead hails the fact that the differing stories testify all the more powerfully to the same thing: Jesus must have risen.

Smith is a UK judge and his book reflects this in a helpful way: There is not much detailed exegesis of the biblical texts here, but rather a careful argument which considers the circumstances and the characters of the stories, and exposes many fallacies in people's handling of the evidence. Summaries at the end of each chapter help the weaker readers and some technical issues are relegated to five appendices.

As a New Testament specialist I found Smith's knowledge of the Bible and the ancient world impressive. He states rightly (p141) that any explanation of what happened needs to take into account three issues: the empty tomb, the reports of resurrection appearances, and the spectacular growth of the early

church. In passing he also reveals that Frank Morison, the author of the well-known book *Who moved the stone?* (originally published in 1930) was not a lawyer or a judge—and that Frank Morison is a pseudonym! Jesus is alive and Smith helps us all to stop doubting.

Mothers on the margin? The significance of the women in Matthew's genealogy

E. Anne Clements

Pickwick, 2014

Reviewer: Andy Goodliff

A few years back I preached an Advent sermon on the women mentioned in Matthew's genealogy. I think the sermon was OK, but I wish I had read this book by Baptist minister Anne Clements.

Clements provides a detailed study of the five women named in Matthew's genealogy. The second half of the book explores the significance of these women in the rest of the gospel, the implication being that Matthew's naming of these women is intentional and says something about discipleship as the gospel writer understands it.

If you have shared a puzzle about why Matthew includes Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah in his account of Jesus' family tree, Clements offers wonderful and convincing insights into Matthew's reasoning, that pushes against the grain of interpretation that suggests it is because they all offer an example of scandalous

sexual activity in Israel's story as a precursor to Mary.

Clements argues for a more positive reading, seeing Tamar, Rahab and Ruth demonstrating the virtues of righteousness, faith and mercy, all of which are aspects of Matthew's vision of discipleship. She goes on to suggest that the women are also examples of those on the margins of Israel and so foreshadow the ministry of Jesus to those on the margins. Her final argument opens up the way these five women named at the beginning of the gospel are part of a 'counternarrative that focuses on women' in Matthew.

There is a lot to be learned here for an Advent sermon, but Clements also makes an important contribution to the wider work of recovering the importance of women in the Bible as examples of faith and discipleship. I hope she continues to make further contributions and that this first book gets a wide readership.

In season and out of season: crafting sermons for all occasions

Jeremy Davies

Canterbury Press

ISBN 978-1-84825-602-6

Reviewer: Robert Draycott

As a way into this book let us start with a quote, 'Sad to say my experience of episcopal preaching at confirmations is not very edifying'. This indicates the Anglican provenance of this book, the

author having been precentor of Salisbury Cathedral for 26 years; secondly it introduces the reader to a preacher who can analyse and assess that which is offered from the pulpit; and thirdly it illustrates an underlying conviction about seeking to engage those who come for the special occasions.

I have noted over 30 'pearls of wisdom' that make me eager to recommend this book. Out of those let me select a few, starting with 'The sermon is also pivotal in the sense of the preacher's responsibility for an appropriate hermeneutic. That is, a way of understanding scripture that takes it seriously as the word of God, that tries to understand the context of the texts and the prevailing culture which shaped them and then tries to draw out their contemporary significance and implication in such a way that scripture becomes a resource for living'.

Do our efforts measure up to this? Briefer quotes include 'preaching is theology'; 'imagination... is one of the gifts without which we cannot do;' 'preaching is an awesome responsibility.'

There are eight chapters, including *Preaching the scriptures*, *Preaching outwards*, *The sermon as story*, *Preaching and rites of passage*, and *Preaching for special occasions*. Jeremy Davies' method is to present one of his own sermons, following it with an enlightening commentary. He is aware of the flaws in his efforts but has not

tried to revise them, in part because, as he says later, a sermon cannot say everything, and there will always be loose ends.

Nor, more importantly, has he tried to 'exclude the particularity of time and place that occasioned them'. In passing this is one of my disappointments when you feel that, as the author says, 'sermons should ideally be fresh baked and minted new on each occasion,' but you have a very good idea that what may have been good 'then and there' has merely been rehashed leaving the people unfed. The point of this volume he writes is 'to convey the sense of immediacy and locality and contemporariness within which the preacher tries to incarnate the sense of the eternal and the holy and the utterly other'. Thus preachers are pointed back to their high and holy calling.

Having had occasion to listen to a variety of preachers over the past few years, often at special services, I would say that lack of edification is not confined to listening to 'episcopal preaching'. Some seem unaware of an 'appropriate hermeneutic,' others would profit from 'inward digestion, or chewing the Scriptural cud'.

This book is thoroughly recommended whether one is an experienced preacher or one daring to take up the challenge of the third sense of Barth's explanation of the phrase 'the word of God.'

The drama of living: becoming wise in the Spirit

David Ford

Norwich, Canterbury Press, 2014

Reviewer: Stephen Heap

David Ford values conversation. He regards it as central to the academic life which is his daily milieu, and, perhaps, to life itself. To read this book is to eavesdrop on a conversation Ford is having with the gospel of John, on which he is currently writing a commentary, and the poetry of his friend Michael O'Siadhail. Ford brings together those texts, which he advocates reading and re-reading, with sometimes difficult life experiences, in a creative and illuminating interplay.

The life experiences include being in Rwanda not long after the genocide, in a L'Arche community, in scriptural reasoning groups and with loved ones living towards death, including Ford's father-in-law Dan Hardy and O'Siadhail's wife Brid. As Ford says, the book contains 'a good deal of autobiography'.

It also contains profound scholarship presented in an accessible way and is an invitation to engage with rich resources in art, scholarship, scripture and with Ford's own reflections, the whole coming together into a kind of spirituality in which the imagination is resourced towards wiser and more loving living. Those who have read Ford's *The shape of living* will recognise

the style.

Reading this book can be an inspiration to delve more deeply into life with the aid of scripture and the arts. Busy ministers who may have enough of delving deep into life day by day may also like to know that I read *The drama of living* during Lent, while preparing a series of sermons for Passiontide and Holy Week, when John featured large in the lectionary. This book resourced those sermons enormously, sparking so many thoughts, deepening engagement with the text and making links between the text and contemporary life. The pay-back from reading the book was immediate.

Instrumental

James Rhodes

Canongate, Edinburgh 2015

Reviewer: John Goddard

This might seem an unusual choice for review in the *bmj*, but this autobiography deals with real issues in our messy messed-up world, and as such I believe it could be of help and inspiration to some ministers. However, please do notice the warnings about content and language. This is an adapted version of a review I posted on Amazon just after the delayed publication. Publication was delayed by legal injunctions brought by the author's ex-wife which sought to stop this story being told. I, for one, am

grateful that we got to hear this account.

Tocatta and fugue of an extraordinary life...

This is a beautifully well written, heart-breakingly poignant and frank autobiography. James Rhodes is a concert pianist with a troubled back story and mental health issues—this much I already knew. But the story of how he came to be this person is extraordinary and brutal.

This is not a book for the faint hearted. The language used could make a sergeant-major blush, but the story itself might make that same sergeant-major weep. Rhodes speaks about the life-changing event of his early childhood when he was raped—repeatedly and violently—at school. He does not speak euphemistically of abuse. This is not an account of 'kiddie fiddling' or child molestation. He calls it what it is. Rape. And as his book unfolds we see time and again how this alters everything for him. He writes with the brutal self-awareness of someone who has lived on the very edge of the abyss, and yet—somehow—is still alive and living.

Music holds this book together, and is credited by Rhodes as saving his life. Each chapter names a particular piece of music and a specific recording and performer, and the reader is invited to stop and listen (thank you Youtube, Spotify...). A story is told of the composer's own life, and time and again

we hear of bruised and broken people composing music that will outlive us all. The story of how Rhodes himself came to be a concert pianist is perhaps the most remarkable part of his whole account.

This is not a religious book, although reference is made to the religious nature of some of the help that was offered—particularly by a clinic in the US—and of the pseudo-religious character of programmes like AA. I think Rhodes would probably self-identify as an atheist, or at least a deeply sceptical agnostic. And yet, for me, there was a deeply spiritual thread throughout this book—not least in the need for the truth to be known for any sense of release and freedom to be experienced.

James Rhodes tells us about his relationships, loves and passions. He does it with wild abandon. He invites us to try to understand how something brutal and evil changes everything, but that broken people (we know who we are) can still find a way to be. He writes with passion and charm, with eccentric wit and breathtaking clarity. He discusses issues of drug taking, self-harm, child rape, family breakdown, and the pitfalls of the overly elitist classical music world, with the same passion and flare with which he plays his beloved piano. Read him and weep, and laugh, and learn a little more compassion for those all around us.

Psalms redux: poems and prayers

Carla A. Grosch-Miller

Canterbury Press, 2014

Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery

This is a real gem of a book. The author, a URC minister in Oxford, is clear that these poems are intended as an imaginative restoration and refreshment of the ancient texts. That is what the word 'redux' in the book's title is meant to convey. She found that she stumbled over the images and metaphors in the Book of Psalms, and so sought, as part of her own prayer life, the discipline of a weekly rewriting of a psalm. She admits that this was for her a process of wrestling that led to the emergence of new understandings of 'the God who gives us life and invites us to flourish'.

Fifty-five psalms have been subjected to this treatment. Also included are a number of other psalms and prayers of her own composition for the days of the week and other times and seasons. Many of the Biblical psalms redux bear an obvious relationship to the original, but with some I did struggle to see the connection. No matter. This is not a book to be read in a single sitting, but one to be read

slowly and meditatively, taking each psalm in one at a time. I read one of these poems a day as part of my own praying the Daily Office, and found that they did indeed lead me more deeply into the life of the Spirit and open my heart and mind to perceive new depths in God.

So, not so much a book to be read, but a resource to be used—above all in private devotion, but possibly also in the larger settings of prayer groups and worshipping congregations. Highly recommended.

Book reviews

What would you like to see reviewed? There have been some different types of books reviewed in this section recently—what do you think?

And would you like to review?

Contact John Goddard

