

**the baptist ministers'
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A (new) call to mind

Andy Goodliff

Truth and post-truth

Helen Paynter

Lost but remaining attached

Stephen Walker-Williams

Insights into teams

John Claydon

New BMF Constitution

Anabaptist studies

Reviews

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<i>A (new) call to mind</i>	3
<i>Truth and post-truth</i>	6
<i>Lost but remaining attached</i>	15
<i>Insights into teams</i>	20
<i>New BMF Constitution</i>	27
<i>Anabaptist Study Centre</i>	29
<i>Reviews</i>	31
<i>Of Interest To You</i>	38

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From the editor

Congratulations and commendations

This issue of *bmj* indicates something of the life and vitality of our denomination. Maybe you hadn't thought of it like that—but just read on and see!

First, we have the results of our inaugural *bmj* Essay Competition. In October we placed an advertisement for entries—particularly (but certainly not exclusively) to encourage those in the early stages of ministry or ministry formation. It was delightful to receive several excellent entries and I know that the judges enjoyed the process of reading and ranking them. Our winning entry, by Helen Paynter, and the runner-up, by Stephen Walker-Williams, are published in this issue and are exciting evidence of an articulate and thinking new generation of Baptist ministers. Look out for the next competition in October's issue, and share your scholarship with others (you don't have to be new to ministry).

This leads neatly into Andy Goodliff's article, *A (new) call to mind*, in which he encourages us to think about supporting and engaging in theological thinking for the good of the Kingdom. The BMF and *bmj* are fully behind this move to greater theological literacy, and will be supporting ministers as they engage in this vital task of prayerful thinking—as an expression of Baptist fellowship.

Have a look at the new constitution of BMF—it will be discussed and voted on a meeting on 21 September (see p27).

Finally, we thank Jim Binney for his absolutely excellent years as editor of our column, *Of Interest To You*—easily the best loved part of *bmj*. Jim's other commitments in his local church and area mean that he needs to stand down, but his editorship has been a real blessing in this vital task of communicating news between ministers. Bless you, Jim. We hope to announce a new OITY editor in October.

Now—please read, enjoy, and think—and *bmj* is always willing to consider your contributions.

Have a blessed summer.

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4

A (new) call to mind

by Andy Goodliff

SCM Press recently hosted an event asking the question ‘Does the church really need Academic Theology?’ I wonder what a survey of our churches and Union might reveal.¹ I’m not sure the answer would be a positive one. There is probably still a suspicion of academic theology or sometimes what appears to be an indifference to it. Baptists are generally a pragmatic bunch, we don’t go much in for theological debate.

Back in 1981 a small group of then younger Baptist theologians wrote *A call to mind*.² They believed that with all the excitement then about church growth theory and the charismatic movement, there was also a need to think, to engage in the task of theology, not in the abstract, but for the church: for its faithfulness in a changing world, for its confidence in the gospel it proclaimed, and for its wisdom before the questions of the day. It seems to me that 35 years on, more than ever, we need a theological renewal within our Baptist life and mission.

The past 10 years have seen numerous calls to prayer and to mission, but no one has ever thought to call to us to deeper theological reflection.

This is why it’s exciting to see the emergence of events like TINY (Theology in Yorkshire), the Bloomsbury Theological Reflection Days (which I’ve been involved in setting up in London, still in its infancy) and the BMS-led Catalyst Live days. Simon Woodman and myself are also hosting a day we’re calling Theology Live in December, which will see a number of Baptist scholars and theologians come and share their research. This is why it’s exciting to see those in local pastorate engaged in on going research, like Tim Carter, who has recently published a new book on *The forgiveness of sins*.³ As we continue to grapple with the current presenting issues of pension deficits, disagreement over same sex marriage, and what it is to be a Union of churches in these days (and this is to say nothing of the current political, ethical, economic quandaries we inhabit), I suggest we need a new turn to theological reflection, a new engagement of the mind, that goes beyond sharing a Bible verse.

Take, for example, same-sex marriage. Our conversations thus far have centred around a fairly simple reading of the biblical texts, and I’m not convinced there is enough attention to the hermeneutical questions involved. But beyond what we think the Bible says is the mountain of theological and pastoral work around these questions from both those who affirm and non-affirm. A real theological engagement would take seriously the work of Rowan Williams, Eugene Rogers, Robert Song, Christopher Roberts, Wesley Hill, Oliver O’Donovan, Megan DeFranza and Sarah Coakley—and these names

are just a small selection of the serious theological work being done across the spectrum of views. This kind of reading and thinking might make our different positions clearer, but at the very least, it would help us understand how and why others think and believe different from ourselves. This might help with ‘our tone and culture’ (to borrow two words that were used recently within the Church of England), both within our conversations and those who might overhear them.

We need Pastor Theologians (Kevin Vanhoozer gives a whopping 55 theses on why⁴). We need to do all we can to encourage theological development, not just among ministers, but within the whole body of the church. I still remember a minister in the year above me at college who at the end of his training, ended up giving away a load of his books—saying in all but words: who needs any more of this theology stuff! It reminds me of the Stanley Hauerwas anecdote about how no student training to become a doctor gets a choice about having to do anatomy, but too many ministerial students can opt for counselling over christology!⁵ Christian ministry is more than a caring profession.

Another Hauerwas anecdote is his response to a sermon preached to those completing their ministerial training. The preacher said, ‘They do not care what you know. They want to know you care’. To which Hauerwas writes, ‘Though I am a pacifist I wanted to kill her on the spot’.⁶ We need to encourage Associations to appoint Pastor Theologians as Regional Ministers,⁷ those who can model, encourage, and help form not just missional communities, but theological ones. We need to create a culture of publication and making research more widely available. Our colleges are full of essays and dissertations gathering dust—the best of these we should encourage to be made more widely available for the good of the church. We need to value more highly Baptist publications like the *Baptist Quarterly* (£26 a year), the *Baptist Minister’s Journal* (£20 a year), *Regent’s Reviews* (free to download via Regent’s Park College website). We need to invest more in our Colleges and their research Centres—the Centre for Baptist History and Heritage and the Centre for Christianity and Culture (both at Regent’s Park College, Oxford), the Centre for Anabaptist Studies, the Centre for Family and Childhood Studies, the Centre for Urban Ministry (all at Bristol Baptist College), the Centre for Spirituality (at Spurgeon’s College, London) and the Centre for Theology and Justice (at Northern Baptist College).

What might be the implications of a new ‘call to mind’? At the local level it might be churches setting up reading groups or ministers tackling theologically the contemporary issues of the day.⁸ At an Association level it might be fostering theological reflection groups like TINY. We have people in our Associations overseeing mission resources, mission strategy, finance, children *etc*—perhaps we could appoint someone to encourage theology? At a Union level, we might recover the value again of something like the Doctrine and Worship Committee, which brought together some of our best theologians

to do some work on our behalf. We might, like the Church of England, explore appointing a Mission Theologian in partnership with BMS. This would reflect a new appreciation for those with theological gifts, as well as, ensuring that we were taking the work of theology seriously in all the difficult questions and issues we are confronting today.⁹

The Introduction to *A call to mind* ends with these words:

*What we plead for is a far greater openness to theological exploration and discussion in our denomination. We repeat, it is no answer to say we need less theology and more commitment or more activity. The implicit theology in much of what we do needs to be examined and aired in the light of the greater and more exciting horizons that await us.*¹⁰

To which I say Yes and Amen.

Andy Goodliff is minister of Southend Baptist Church.

Notes to text

1. I think it is also right to ask ‘does academic theology need the church?’ to which I would say absolutely. Steve Holmes remarks how Colin Gunton, Professor of Systematic Theology at King’s College, would say ‘You can always tell when a theologian has stopped preaching; their work loses something vital’.

2. That group of younger Baptist theologians were Paul Fiddes, Brian Haymes, Richard Kidd, Keith Clements and Roger Hayden.

3. Other examples are ministers who are scholars in pastorate are Edward Pillar, Simon Woodman, Ruth Gouldbourne, Robert Parkinson, Rosa Hunt, Ian Stackhouse and Paul Goodliff.

4. <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2015/09/09/kevin-vanhoozers-55-theses-on-pastors-as-public-theologians/>

5. Hauerwas gives this anecdote in several places in his work.

6. Hauerwas, *The work of theology*. Eerdmans, 2013, p105.

7. This was the argument of the 1996 Baptist Union report *Transforming superintendency*.

8. For one example of what this might look like see Sam Wells, *How then shall we live? Christian engagement with contemporary issues*. Canterbury, 2016.

9. I don’t suggest that such a person or any new doctrine committee would mean abdication for the rest of us from the task of theological reflection, but that such a person or group might act like those on a ship who act as lookouts, asking do you see what I/we see.

10. *A call to mind: Baptist essays towards a theology of commitment*. Baptist Union, 1981, p8.

Truth and post-truth

by Helen Paynter

The art of political ‘spin’ is millennia-old: but in recent years, the will to deceive for political purposes has intensified—or so it seems. In the light of the now-notorious ‘£350m/week for the NHS’ claim, and the election of US President Trump, we in the UK and liberal West are now, apparently, in the age of ‘post-truth’ politics.

The phrase ‘post-truth’ was designated ‘Word of the Year 2016’ by the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines it as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’. In bald terms, it means that the factuality (I hesitate to use the word ‘truth’ here, for reasons which will become clear later) of claimed facts is becoming an irrelevant commodity in public, or at least political, discourse. As *The Economist* put it recently, ‘Truth is not falsified, or contested, but of secondary importance’.

An important—and disturbing—cultural phenomenon is arising, and the church needs to understand and address it. This paper will briefly consider some of the causes of our current predicament, and suggest some ways in which the church might respond. First, I suggest five reasons why it matters.

1. As shown by a Mori poll published in December 2016, public confidence in the political process is at an all-time low. Ironically, this begets a vicious cycle: ‘When lies make the political system dysfunctional, its poor results can feed the alienation and lack of trust in institutions that make the post-truth play possible in the first place’.¹

2. History has repeatedly shown that lies are the tools of political oppression. As Hannah Arendt put it, ‘[Truth] is hated by tyrants, who rightly fear the competition of a coercive force they cannot control’.²

3. Psychological studies have proven that false memories persist, even when they are publicly retracted.³ In the light of the commandment not to bear false witness (Exodus 20:16), this should disturb all who take biblical ethics seriously.

4. A recent Demos report showed that online disinformation, a major source of untruth, is disproportionately seen and believed by children and young people.⁴

Truth is the
ground on
which we stand
and the sky
that stretches
above us

(Hannah Arendt)

5. Contrary to the logic of ‘post-truth’, facts matter—in politics as elsewhere. How I ‘feel’ about Europe or the NHS may or may not be important; whether one of these institutions is receiving £350 million a week certainly is.

How have we arrived at the stage where untruth is regarded as acceptable—or at least, unsurprising—within the common consciousness? Some causes will be examined.

Postmodernity

Contrary to common belief, post-truth is not a populist phenomenon.⁵ In fact, the direction of causality seems to be working in reverse; the untruths and ideological emotivism on both sides of the Atlantic in 2016 appear to have aroused a populist involvement in politics unprecedented in recent times. Of course overall numbers are only ‘coarse’ data, and it is hard to compare turnout between election and referendum; nonetheless, the pattern of voter involvement in recent UK elections is striking:

	Voter turnout
1992 General Election	77.7%
1997 General Election	71.4%
2001 General Election	59.4%
2005 General Election	61.4%
2010 General Election	65.1%
2015 General Election	66.1%
2016 Referendum	72.2%

In fact, the roots of the post-truth phenomenon go back to postmodern and deconstructionist philosophers: Jean-François Lyotard’s claim that truth is relative to the person making it; Michel Foucault’s argument for the relationship between discourse and power; and Jacques Derrida’s challenge to the reliability of authentic communication. Consider, for example, these words of Foucault, quoted by Stuart Hall:

*Knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of “the truth” but has the power to make itself true. All knowledge, once applied in the real world, has real effects, and in that sense at least, “becomes true”. Knowledge, once used to regulate the conduct of others, entails constraint, regulation and the disciplining of practices. Thus, “there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p27).⁶*

This philosophical shift has resulted in a generation that is suspicious of authority and wary of metanarrative. Here is not the place to critique these complex ideas, but we note

that their philosophy has contributed to the emerging sense of the irrelevance of ‘facts’. However, these philosophers have helpfully directed our attention to the problem of objectivity on both sides of the communicative act.

Current hermeneutic theory (a term which encompasses the interpretation of any text, not simply the biblical one) teaches that the objectivity of the reader and writer is an illusion; we are preconditioned by our prior experiences and our life situation. For example, journalistic objectivity is now considered an unattainable ‘holy grail’. In addition to presupposition bias, the very act of selecting which aspects of a complex event to report, and which events to cover, is clearly subject to the whim—conscious or unconscious—of reporters and their publishers. The role that powerful ‘media tycoons’ play in influencing the selection and reporting of material has been widely discussed. Indeed, whether ‘objectivity’ is even desirable when commenting on issues which have a clear moral bias, is questionable.⁷

Our digital world

Indeed, the very nature of journalism has changed. The enormous multiplication of news providers, including many amateur bloggers, and the on-the-spot real-time reporting via social media, might be regarded as a double-edged sword. The democratisation of reporting has helped prevent powerful state propaganda machines from controlling information flow. However, the amount of data now available, and its unfiltered nature, brings its own problems. Indeed, one might—provocatively—speculate on whether the appetite for real-time updates of news represents mass consumer prurience.

There is a necessary provisionality about real-time news, and not all sources are equally useful, as the biases of private individuals are indiscernible. And although ‘facts’ may carry the illusion of being value-free, in a mass of data, it is easy to ‘miss the wood for the trees’. Good journalism provides commentary as well as facts. Overall, the changing face of ‘news’ reporting has probably weakened our confidence in the facts we are told, and our capacity to question their veracity and assess their import.

The role of social media in the post-truth problem is wider than this, however. It provides a platform for the rapid propagation of misinformation. For example, in one study a false meme posted on 15 July 2013 was found to have received 1,125,055 re-shares (which is considerably less than the number of people who will have read it) by 24 September in the same year.⁸ Further, users of social media tend to form ‘friendship’ networks with like-minded people, reinforcing their own opinions, and insulating them from dissenting voices—the ‘echo-chamber effect’, described by Jamieson & Cappella.

The metaphor of an echo chamber captures the ways messages are amplified and reverberated through the conservative opinion media. We mean to suggest a bounded, enclosed media space that has the potential to both magnify the messages delivered

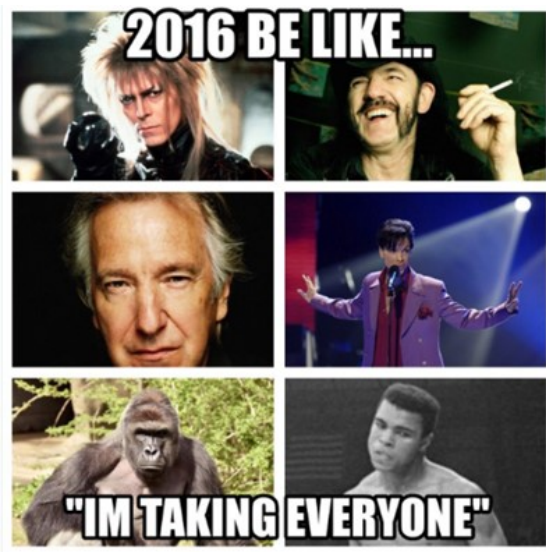
within it and insulate them from rebuttal...This “echo chamber” creates a common frame of reference and positive feedback loops for those who listen to, read, and watch these media outlets.⁹

Indeed, some of this echo-chamber effect is due to deliberate filtering of results by search providers:

Most of us assume that when we Google a term, we all see the same results—the ones the company’s famous Page Rank algorithm suggests are the most authoritative based on other pages’ links. But since December 2009, this is no longer true. Now you get the result that Google’s algorithm suggests is best for you in particular—and someone else may see something entirely different. In other words, there is no standard Google anymore.¹⁰

These wide, loose networks therefore provide very fertile ground for emotional infection. For example, if you are a user of Facebook, you may be familiar with the following type of meme:

As 2016 progressed, an escalating narrative of *annus horribilis* emerged on social media,



probably disproportionate to the actual number of celebrity deaths it had seen. This is strongly suggestive of a positive feedback loop.

Additionally, research has shown that strong ideological investment influences the interpretation placed upon evidence about a related matter—even evidence to the contrary. In fact, ‘direct factual contradictions can actually strengthen ideologically grounded factual beliefs’.¹¹ We are all susceptible to the linked trio of confirmation bias (seeking only what confirms one’s beliefs),

cognitive dissonance (only siding with what is most comfortable) and motivated reasoning (choosing not to scrutinise contrary ideas).¹² In some groups, adhering to certain ‘facts’ is a badge of loyalty.

The ‘affective turn’

Political and commercial persuasion techniques have lately swung towards the appeal to emotion. The role of emotion in politics dates back at least as far as Aristotle, but was

generally seen as secondary to the art of rational persuasion. Now, however, it is widely accepted that voters are heavily influenced by how they feel.

*The typical voter makes decisions on small amounts of information which have been selectively filtered. They make little use of abstract categories such as 'egalitarianism'. There may be little consistency in the opinions that they have, and they can be powerfully influenced by how they imagine "people like us" think and feel about the same issues.*¹³

Indeed, in an observation whose roots originate in Nietzsche's 'ressentiment', Slavoj Žižek has noted that in modern post-ideological politics, the only lever for politicians to generate energy and enthusiasm is fear.¹⁴

Accompanying this shift is a decline in the standard of political debate, where 'political writers pursue their task as if their audience was composed of easily distracted children'.¹⁵ For example, an analysis of the presidential debates of Lincoln-Douglas (1858), Kennedy-Nixon (1960), and Clinton-Bush (1992) found that the minimum educational standard required to understand the speeches was Grade 12, 10 and 6 respectively.¹⁶

A similar trend is found in advertising. A recent study showed that brand favourability has an emotional, not a rational, basis. And, in a surprising finding which will not have been missed by political promoters, the study showed that high attention to the advertising lessens this effect. If the stimulus is delivered through subliminal or unattended stimuli, its effect is strongest. Although this might seem counter-intuitive, a little consideration will reveal the logic of the findings, as described here in the *Journal of Advertising Research*:

*If you spend a lot of time thinking about the Andrex puppy, his cuteness is revealed as no more than a ploy to lure you into thinking that the makers are really nice, friendly people who believe in family values and affection.*¹⁷

'Facts' and 'truth'

Public confusion between different types of 'facts', and their relationship to 'truth' compounds this. In an interview on Radio 4 recently,¹⁸ Professor Peter Mandler distinguished between three different categories of 'fact': elementary matters of everyday truth (eg Britain is a member of the EU); more complex questions with multiple answers (does Britain send £350m/week to Europe?); and value statements (Britain should remain in the EU). Confusion between these, he argued, and an attempt to extrapolate competing beliefs into objective facts, has contributed to the public cynicism towards actual, verifiable facts. In other words, when opinion is continually narrated as fact, fact will soon be rejected as opinion. And it is opinion rather than fact, according to Hannah Arendt, that is ultimately important for holding power. Therefore,

she says, ‘the blurring of the dividing line between factual truth and opinion belongs among the many forms that lying can assume’.¹⁹

The relationship of ‘fact’ to ‘truth’ is also complex, as truth is a much larger entity than a mere piece of data can communicate. Consider how a work of fiction can nonetheless convey important truth (the story of the Good Samaritan, for example); or, in the area of historical fact, consider how the factually accurate description of certain events can nevertheless give a misleading overall impression. ‘Adolf Hitler revitalised the German economy and had great respect for family values’ is factually correct, but hardly imparts a truthful representation of the late Nazi leader.

A challenge to the church

So how might we, the UK church, respond to these challenging times? In the spirit of dialogue and not of didacticism, I offer the following suggestions.

We should read biblical wisdom alongside Twitter and Facebook. The book of Proverbs has an extraordinarily contemporary feel when read with social media in mind. For example:

*A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing personal opinion. (Proverbs 18:2)²⁰*

*With their mouths the godless would destroy their neighbours,
but by knowledge the righteous are delivered. (Proverbs 11:9)*

Taking an overall view of the book, Ernest Lucas shows that Proverbs commends the following virtues in speech: honesty, restraint, fittingness, humility and calm.²¹ Drawing upon this wisdom tradition, the book of James warns of the inflammatory power of words incautiously used: *How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire (James 3:5-6).*

During the few years that I have engaged with social media I have seen ‘posts’ that are aggressive, snide, sexist, foul and untrue—from fellow ministers of the gospel. Christlikeness should be its own objective, but the immeasurable social consequences of what we write on these platforms should constrain us even more to caution in writing, responding and re-posting.

An essential element is modelling graceful disagreement. In a public discourse full of sloganeering and cheap point-scoring, Wisdom’s call to restraint and teachability shows a way to demonstrate and live biblical values in the public space. Teachability implies that we trust ourselves a little less.

*Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;
for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness. (James 1:19-20)*

*Give instruction to the wise, and they will become wiser still;
teach the righteous and they will gain in learning. (Proverbs 9:9)*

This wisdom is echoed in the recent words of Dan Kahan, ‘We shouldn’t strive to neutralise [our] sense of conviction... but we should be anxious that in a certain kind of environment... we’re not going to be making sense of the information in a way that we can trust’.²²

We should listen to the voices we are not hearing. In view of the demonstrable danger of functioning only within our own echo-chambers, my second proposal is that we actively pursue the voices we are not hearing. The following list of examples is indicative, rather than exhaustive.

First, dissonant voices may be found among people of other religions, political persuasions, or who inhabit a different culture-space. We will need to listen intentionally; the filter bubbles applied by social media platforms and search providers will not assist us. We might do this by walking across our street or across our city; by learning to listen well; by engaging in crosscultural and inter-religious dialogue. Perhaps the first step to loving our neighbour is to listen to him or her. And the ‘other’-ness of those we seek out may be reflected not simply in their views, but in a lack of willingness to reciprocate. Generosity of spirit may not be met with equal willingness for dialogue. Nonetheless, boundaries must be crossed:

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? (Matthew 5:46-47)

In this regard, we can learn from good mission organisations, which have moved from cultural imperialism to cross-cultural partnership in their fulfilment of the command to ‘Go into all the world’. For example, the 18th century roots of BMS World Mission had links with the colonial expansion of the East India Company; by contrast these days its TED-style conference, Catalyst Live, gives voice to speakers from across national, ecumenical, cultural, theological and ideological boundaries.

The arts can play an important role, too; their power to ask provocative questions, challenge assumptions and conduct interesting thought experiments should not be underestimated. Consider, for example, the way that the seldom-heard voice of the working class northerner is represented in the film and musical ‘Billy Elliot’. (Of course such depictions by directors and actors are open to misrepresentation and stereotype; the voice needs to be authentic. This is a subject for another discussion.)

Thirdly, our embrace of the ‘other’ must be found in our churches. Paul’s wonder at the mystery of a church comprising both Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 1-3) should be reflected in our own experience of churches that is truly inclusive.

But we should also attend to the silent voices. Hannah Arendt has shown that truth is always in danger of being marginalised by power; Michel Foucault has argued that

language is co-opted by the oppressor to enforce power; Eli Pariser has demonstrated how easy it is for internet search engines to manipulate what we read. So in our brave new post-truth world, the church should pay particular attention to the voices which are not heard. We must ‘read the gaps’²³ in the public discourse. Who is being marginalised? Who is being silenced?

We should model good interpretive discipline. The practice of good interpretive discipline—of memes, infographics, speeches and scripture—is vital. I am increasingly concerned by the uses to which scripture is put by well-meaning Christians with a commendable goal. Many should know better. While scripture, like other texts, may (arguably) carry a ‘surplus of meaning’, it does not permit an unbounded range of possible meanings. The term ‘surplus of meaning’ belongs to Paul Ricoeur, who nonetheless says, ‘If it is true that there is always more than one way of construing a text, it is not true that all interpretations are equal. The text presents a limited field of possible constructions’.²⁴ A willingness to bend scripture—or other texts—to our purpose, without due interpretive discipline, speaks of a dangerous utilitarianism where any hermeneutical means may be employed towards a laudable end. But all truth is God’s truth, and we need not practice cognitive dissonance when uncomfortable possibilities present themselves. There is a more honest way.

This will require the teaching, promotion and modelling of good critical thinking skills in our churches and among our young people; rigorous engagement—by those who write and teach—with the best scholarship in all fields; and the faithful and dogged application of the best hermeneutical techniques we can muster, to understand Word and world better. This must happen in the academy and the pulpit, so that it can make its way into the home group and the Facebook page.

We should exercise virtuous scepticism. A marker of faithful Old Testament prophecy was the determination not to collude with a false prevailing narrative. Thus, for example, Elijah confronts Ahab about his illegitimate land acquisition, Isaiah tackles Ahaz about his treaty with Assyria, and Ezekiel speaks against the prophets of Judah and their false assurance of peace. Extending my previous point, I suggest that part of the prophetic role of the church in a post-truth climate is ‘virtuous scepticism’; a refusal to accept without question, or to collude with, prevailing dogmas that do not withstand the scrutiny of good interpretive discipline.

This is not at all the same as a postmodern ennui towards facts or metanarratives; neither is it a throwback to Enlightenment principles valuing reason above all. It will involve attention towards sociological, political and theological currents and it will necessitate rigorous interrogation of those voices which seek to persuade us. Above all it will seek to bring to light what is hidden, to understand the times, and to be truth-tellers in a culture that does not value truth.

Helen Paynter is research fellow at Bristol Baptist College. She is the winner of the 2016 bmj Essay Prize.

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Lost but remaining attached

by Stephen Walker-Williams

The umbilical cord attaches a growing child/foetus to its mother; providing nutrient-rich sustenance; a true lifeline for the baby. The child is unable to survive in the womb without it. After birth (*post partum*), the cord is cut, leaving behind the *umbilicus*, a sign of the intimate and essential attachment that the baby had with its mother. This sign provides a powerful image and a metaphorical understanding of relationship and connectedness in life and in loss: in death and through grief. In a similar way, theories of attachment provide a way of understanding ‘the deep and enduring emotional bonds that connect one person to another across time and space’.¹ Attachment theory therefore rightly underpins understanding of the complexities of grief and although it ‘certainly cannot explain all the nuanced dimensions of our response to loss, it does seem to carry us right to the heart of the grief experience’.² After discussing the main issues surrounding the theories of loss and grief and their evolution, this essay applies the theories to pastoral ministry.

Theorising the mosaic

Grief being like a ‘mosaic’ is a helpful and powerful image, since no sole theory or model can completely encapsulate the unique journey of loss and grief that individuals or groups experience.³ A knowledge of the theory is helpful in ministry to those who are grieving and for the delivery of appropriate pastoral and spiritual care and support.⁴

Any literature review of loss and grief reveals the importance of attachment for understanding loss. It is ‘the most powerful theoretical force in contemporary bereavement research (with cognitive stress theory and social reconstructionism closing the gap in recent years)’.⁵ Worden writes, ‘Before one can fully comprehend the impact of a loss and the human behaviour associated with it, one must have some understanding of the meaning of attachment’.⁶ This does not necessitate deep awareness of the intricacies of attachment theory and disorder, but identifies at least a basic knowledge of attachment as indispensable if we are to understand the grief mosaic and therefore effectively support people through loss.

Over the centuries, the academic understanding of the theories of loss and grief has evolved. Often theories build upon one another, compensating for the missing pieces in prior models. Psychoanalysis has significantly impacted our understanding of grief, with Freud’s work having much influence over the way in which grief was treated

during the 20th century.⁷ He promoted the concept of *decathexis* (a completed removal of emotional ties and energy from the person/object, allowing the search for a new attachment) as the conclusion of grief. Bowlby & Parkes continued the investigation of attachment in bereavement, making significant contributions to the psychological understanding of grief and loss. Among other things, they suggested four Stages of Grief: numbing, yearning and searching, disorganisation and finally reorganisation.⁸ The four Stages evolved from the initial attachment studies by Bowlby & Ainsworth on the way in which infants respond to absence of their secure attachment figure/primary caregiver.⁹

Strongly influenced by this theory, Kübler-Ross proposed a Five Stage Grief Cycle: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, which has become the most widely known contemporary grief theory.¹⁰ These and other stage/phase theories provide ways of classifying/sectioning the trajectory through the grief journey. In contrast, Worden approaches grief more as a process rather than a state with people 'working' through the four 'tasks' of mourning to complete the grieving process and achieve *decathexis*.¹¹

The traditional psychoanalytic understanding of grief along with the concept of *decathexis*, is increasingly being recognised as deficient in encapsulating the emotional experience of the bereaved.¹² Contemporary understanding recognises that a complete detachment from the deceased might never be finished; the mourner cannot 'move on', but learns to live with the scars of sorrow and sadness and when possible begins to rebuild life and meaning.¹³ Furthermore a *decathexis*-focused approach that uses either stage models or tasks can become very linear (though often viewed as cyclical), mainly individualised, and less applicable crossculturally.¹⁴

Continuing challenge

Challenging the gaps in psychoanalytic theory and posthumous emotional detachment, Klass, Silverman & Nickman developed the concept of 'continuing bonds'.¹⁵ Within this theory, concepts of identity and understanding the loss are 'negotiating and renegotiating...over time', allowing for the reality of the way many people grieve.¹⁶ The scars become reminders of the loved ones lost, emphasising the fact of being ever-changed by the bond with the attachment figure. Grief becomes less about stages of 'moving on', and more about 'rebuilding with' after the reality of loss. Through a continuation of bonds, through memories, legacy, in (identity of) relationship/role, grief becomes integrated into one's life.

Parents who lose a child, for example, will cherish the memories of the child, and their identity as parents has not changed despite the death. Yet their verbalisation of their identity will need redefinition (relating to tense). Maintaining an emotional attachment (*cathexis*) for many becomes a powerful way of rebuilding after loss (especially in African and Asian cultures).¹⁷ Yet if the bonds remain at the same intensity as before the loss it can become less helpful; some level of *decathexis* needs to take place.

Furthermore, there is a clear biblical mandate that continuing bonds should not extend to necromancy.¹⁸ The primary relationship and continued bonds through death for a Christian should be with Jesus Christ himself.¹⁹

Stroebe & Schut's Dual Process Model provides a synthesis of the two models of *decathexis* and continuing bonds, suggesting an oscillation between loss-orientated and restoration-orientated concepts.²⁰ Does this provide a healthy middle ground for understanding the mosaic of grief and the journey that individuals, families and groups go through? Even this model, however, implies stages that eventually come to an endpoint: the acceptance and emotional detachment from the deceased. It is clear though, that through an integrated understanding these theories do not mean forgetting the person, but learning to live with a changed attachment: viewing grief as 'a process not an event'.²¹

By applying these theories to ministry, the effectiveness of each theory can be established. Since no one model can fully provide an explanation of loss and grief, an integrated approach is essential. For the most appropriate care to be provided, pastoral skills need to be developed alongside the understanding of theories. A clumsy application of the theories may hinder a healthy grieving process and cause damage to the bereaved.

Pastoral structures

An integrated approach encourages continued care over the grieving process. Within the variety of relationships that make up church life we journey with individuals and families through grief regardless of their 'stage' or 'oscillation'. Recognising the varying timescale that grieving can take, our organisation marks significant dates to recognise and support appropriately the grieving individual (*eg* marking anniversaries of the death).

Increased awareness of attachment styles and of cultural differences regarding attachment after death helps to evaluate bereavement support. For example, for two Asian families, both of which have been UK residents for a number of years, the strength of the bond of attachment continuing after their family member had passed away was underestimated because of cultural differences. Both desired a memorial service and acts of memorial throughout the initial years to continue the relationship and their identity with (or derived from) the deceased. More generally, understanding the variety of attachment relationships that people have (secure, insecure, anxious, ambivalent, avoidant, disorganised/disoriented *etc*) also has an impact on the way they handle grief and rebuilding after a loss.²² For example, an individual who has an avoidant attachment pattern is more likely to 'put on a brave face' while being internally broken, or to 'say the right/expected thing' to the pastor while wrestling in isolation with their true internal feelings.

Enquiring (appropriately and sensitively) of the relationship with the deceased during pastoral support is therefore crucial. In more complex cases of loss and grief, understanding the attachment relationships enables better ministry to those who are finding it hard to stop grieving.²³ Furthermore, attachment led/influenced pastoral support provides insight into

ministry to those whose wounds have not healed, and which might result in the projection and transference of their anxiety of losing others (or fear of experiencing trauma again) onto other situations and relationships. Deeper healing is needed for the bereaved to relate effectively with others in the future. This can take place without involving other professionals, but when the grief is more complex, unresolved or traumatic, the need for referral to counsellors and those with further training is absolutely essential.²⁴

A review of theoretical approaches to loss and grief, especially a deeper understanding of attachment theory, provides an opportunity to develop the teaching in churches around death, loss and grieving—through Sunday sermons, individual discipleship or small groups. Individuals with faith in Christ and hope of resurrection can be inhibited from grieving appropriately, thus not coming fully to terms with the loss. This effect is most likely for those with an avoidant-ambivalent attachment style. Permission may need to be given by pastors for the authentic expression of feelings, doubts and questions, so that through their vulnerability God ministers and brings healing.

Secondly, a person's continuing attachment to Christ needs to be strengthened. We need to recognise that the experience of loss and grief can profoundly impact an individual's attachment to others and to God. Simultaneously, one's attachment to God has an impact on the grieving process and has implications for pastoral care, before and after loss.²⁵ This would be especially true for those with a disorganised attachment behaviour pattern.

Appropriate help is required to 'organise' these individuals' faith in God by reminding them that even when they may relate to him in a push-pull manner, he remains constant, present and loving (Exodus 34:5-9). Thirdly, when loss and grief challenge our theology of suffering, healing and God's sovereignty, we need to approach our concerns by remembering that God has, through Christ, attached us to himself securely and therefore we can approach him with our questions and doubts.²⁶

Conclusion

In this article I have briefly outlined theories of loss and grief, many of which are rooted in attachment theory. I suggest that understanding attachment is essential for ministry, especially in supporting those with more complex cases of grief.²⁷ Through all of this our attachment relationship with God himself, who knows what it is to lose, grieve and continue through life with scars of attachment, needs to be nurtured. Through our attachment with God may strength be drawn, comfort and healing received, until the day loss and grief ends eternally (Revelation 21:1-5).

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Insights into teams

by John Claydon

It has become common to talk about teams in ministry and church leadership. Rather than colleagues in ministry, and fellow deacons and elders, we have become familiar with 'team ministry' and 'team leadership', but what do we mean? What are we trying to convey by the language that we use, and what do we actually expect of such teams? What follows is primarily an attempt to develop our understanding of teams by drawing insights from scripture, theology, and the business world.

According to Schein 'a group is defined in psychological terms as any number of people who interact with each other, are psychologically aware of each other, perceive themselves to be a group and purposefully interact towards the achievement of particular goals or aims'.¹ Similarly it is said that 'a team has a defined task;...[with]... required interdependence, they must help each other do their jobs, individually and collectively...is mostly about relationships'.² 'A team, according to Adair (1986), is more than just a group with a common aim. It is a group in that the collection of individuals are seen as complementary. Collaboration, working together, is the keynote of team activity'.³

Why team?

Clearly, as Christians, we would recognise that collaboration reflects the nature and character of God. It affirms that we are social creatures and are redeemed and called into community for the mission of God. Teams enable people to be stronger together, they facilitate a release of energy in the context of a group that coheres and collaborates for a common purpose. Teams provide for mutual support, enable creative thinking and innovation, facilitate the release of different gifts, skills, abilities, ministries, wisdom and experience so that it is pooled for the common good and its mission. Teams provide a training ground for the development and emergence of future leaders and an enhanced sense of involvement, belonging and accountability. A team may be seen to exist where there is an agreed agenda.⁴ Therefore in a team there is a **vision** of direction and destination, a **purpose** that gives understanding about why the group exists, a **task, or set of tasks**, that give the group actions to perform, a **way of working** that provides the ethos and manner in which the group operate, **membership** that recognises who is part of the team and a **leader** who is responsible for and oversees all the above.

Biblical and theological

A cursory look at a few biblical texts provides an opportunity to gain insights into the nature of teams. Jesus chose 12 and designated them as apostles—His ‘team’, into which He invested time and teaching. Jesus also worked with smaller groups within that team such as with Peter, James and John. The 70 (or 72) were sent out in pairs to collaborate and support each other in mission. Similarly, in Acts, we see Paul, Barnabas and John Mark working together, and then Paul and Silas, and other collaborations. Acts 6 identifies the need for different ministries and collaboration in service and decision-making. Similarly, while not a team per se, the decision-making process of the Council of Jerusalem illustrates a community listening to one another, Scripture and the Spirit and collaborating to come to a common view that they recognised as being of the Spirit. Perhaps a clearer illustration of the nature of team is found in the concept of the church as the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12-14; a body in which all belong together having different gifts and ministries, but infused with the same Spirit and living under the authority of the one Lord.

In terms of theological themes we must begin with the Trinity as indicating one God in community as three persons. This is, perhaps, the ultimate team of persons bound together in love, fellowship, creativity, mutual submission and outgoing grace. As Baptists we may naturally want to consider covenant and the nature of walking together and watching over one another, being bound together in fellowship and committed together in mission: a people belonging together with a common commitment to Christ’s mission and living under His authority.⁵ Concepts of ‘body ministry’ reflecting an application of 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 have shaped understandings of collaboration and team ministry, as has the concept of the ‘priesthood of all believers’ which is seen not only as having direct access to God through Christ, without the need for mediation by human priests, but also that all believers share in priesthood and therefore collaborate together in the work and mission of God.

Types of team

There are many types and understandings of team. From sport we would gain very different understandings of team operation from a cricket team, a football team, a golfing team or tag-wrestling team *etc.* Similarly in commerce and business, teams may be nuanced differently to those in the third sector and different again from those in the church. Even teams within a church context may be shaped by the prevailing ecclesiology and culture of a particular denomination. Also a ‘leadership team’ (elders and deacons *etc.*) may operate differently from a building project team or a mission team leading a specific project or period of outreach.

Three basic types of team have been identified: the **Multigifted/Process Team**, which is

essentially a multidisciplinary team, the **Working Group/Virtual Team**, which is established to see a project through from start to finish; and the **Problem Solving Group**, which is a team formed to produce radical solutions to problems or grasp opportunities. How a team views its objective and role will influence the way others members are considered and the manner of its operation.

Team roles

The role that the team member operate within may vary from team to team, but according to Belbin⁶ there are eight clear roles that can be defined that, given an individual's particular inclinations, he/she is likely to adopt.⁷

1. The **Chair/Coordinator**, who focuses on what is feasible and coordinates others, but can be seen as manipulative and as offloading personal work.
2. The **Shaper**, who directly shapes decisions and team thinking, yet can be prone to provoke and even offend other team members.
3. The **Innovator/Plant** brings imagination to the task, but is not always sensitive and may ignore details.
4. The **Monitor/Evaluator** brings significant discernment and analysis making objective suggestions, although may lack drive and the ability to inspire others.
5. The **Company Worker/Implementer** is highly reliable and able to translate general ideas into practice, but may be inflexible and slow to respond to new possibilities.
6. The **Teamworker** enables cohesion and collaboration and is perceptive and supportive in regard to people's needs although can be indecisive in crunch situations.
7. The **Resource Investigator** seeks external resources and develops contacts to support the work, but can be over-optimistic but may begin to lose enthusiasm.
8. The **Completer** gets the job done to a high standard, yet is inclined to worry and is reluctant to delegate.

A further role can be identified: the **Specialist**, who is single-minded, self-starting and provides specialist knowledge and skills, although can be too focused on technicalities and overly narrow.⁸ In developing a team it is useful to consider both the positive and negative aspects of these roles in discovering how the team most effectively functions.

Team problems

Essentially the main problem with teams are people, and the misunderstandings and dysfunctional relationships and behaviour that arise because we are ordinary fallen human

beings. Each team member will bring their own attitudes and personality which has been shaped by many factors. This may include our understandings of the Scriptures and theology, our life experience, the ethos and experience of secular work environments, our formative experience in families and not least our relationship to any siblings, cultural values, educational background and not forgetting personality type, ethnicity, age and gender. As each team member is shaped by different factors and to different degrees it will inevitably have an influence upon the way team members interact for good or ill. However, the more secure and mature the team members are the greater the potential for the team.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs⁹ can be helpful in understanding how people engage in a team. If their needs are fulfilled, they can function confidently and maturely. The base level need is **physiological** including air, food, drink, shelter *etc.* The next level is **safety** including protection, order and stability. The middle level is **belonging and love** which relates to family, affection and relationships. Above this he puts the need for **esteem** including achievement, status, responsibility and reputation. Finally he cites **self-actualisation** which is shown in personal growth and fulfilment. Good team understanding and work will take account of these needs and enable people to flourish within the team which will, in turn, contribute to the well-being and success of the team.

Team members' engagement in the team can also be shaped by the different types of intelligences that predominate their way of understanding and processing information. Gardner¹⁰ has described six different kinds of intelligence: **spatial**, which facilitates creativity, **musical**, **physical** as seen in sports and dance, **practical** as seen in mechanical skills, **intrapersonal** as seen in a sensitivity to the inner being, and the **interpersonal** which facilitates cooperation. Recognising these different intelligence types will enrich our understanding of how teams work and how they can be made more effective for the good of each member as well as the team as a whole.

A team member's experience, contribution and effectiveness within the group will be influenced by their own personal discipleship, the gifts and abilities that they offer, their personality type, their learning style predominant intelligence type, the role and responsibility they have within the team, the sense of belonging, the capacity in time and also communication skills to engage both whilst the team is together and when apart and finally their sense of fulfilment. A deficit in any of these areas could well begin to contribute to dissatisfaction that may give rise to anxiety and in turn to poor relationships and dysfunctional behaviour within the team. Blanchard has listed 10 reasons as to why teams fail. 1. A lack of definition of purpose and means of working. 2. The team's inability to agree on purpose and action. 3. A lack of mutual accountability, 4. A shortage of resources including time. 5. The absence of effective leadership. 6. A lack of the appropriate norms that foster creativity and excellence, 7. An absence of planning. 8. Insufficient managerial support. 9. The inability to deal with conflict. 10. A lack of training in group skills.¹¹

Being a good team¹²

A good team has good relationships, a clear sense of purpose and appropriate leadership. In terms of relationships the team members work for and support each other, enable others to flourish and reach their potential, covers for others when things fail or in times of experimentation and generally motivate and encourage one another. A team which is rich in good relationships will be at ease with itself yet still focussed on its core mission. There will be an openness of communication that allows for difference and dissent, communicating truth in love, with a focus on achieving the best for the task and for all underpinned with a high level of trust and good will.

In terms of purpose the team will have a commonly owned sense of mission, priorities and strategies with clear objectives and agreed goals, sound procedures and regular review. As they engage together they will have clarity about their roles

The leadership of the group will be appropriate to the nature, ethos, size and purpose of the group. It will be offered with positivity, and yet humility, accepting vulnerability and engaging in effective delegation. It will allow for mistakes and be committed to a team ethos.

What makes a good team leader?

John Adair presents a functional model of leadership¹³ which incorporates concern for both the task and the people who perform it. Individual and group needs, as well as the task itself, are fulfilled in the context of the total leadership situation. There are three sets of task for the leader. 1. **Task functions** which focus on the task of the group, sets objectives, engages in planning, allocates responsibilities *etc.* 2. **Group maintenance** whereby the leader engages in team building, ensures motivation, engages in good communication, exercises personal and groups discipline and represents the team in external contexts. 3. **Individual maintenance** in which the leader provides or facilitates coaching, counselling, motivation and personal development for the individual team members.

The needs of the team as a whole, individuals, and the task to be completed have to be held in appropriate tension and perspective. If one begins to outweigh the other two, so that for instance the needs of the group overshadow the needs of the individuals or of the task, there is a danger that the team will fail in its task and suck energy from its members. If the needs of the task over-dominate then team members may become dissatisfied and the relationships of team members will suffer. If the needs of individuals are too strong then the task may suffer and also other team members may become disgruntled and the team dynamics deteriorate.¹⁴

Developing the team

A good team leader needs to combine clear awareness of and care for the needs, gifts, experience and hopes of the team members and bring the gifts of pastor, coach, leader, co-ordinator and chair in order to enable the group to hold the needs of the individual, the group and the task in a healthy relationship.

There is no shortcut to building effective teamwork and team relationships. It requires the investment of time, good grace and the right attitudes, a concern for genuine inclusiveness as well as clear purpose. It needs deliberate focussed action on the part of the team leader to build the team for the individual's personal needs, the task to be performed and the needs of the team as a whole.

Peter Northhouse identifies actions that will help to improve the team's relationships.¹⁵ They include 1. coaching individual members in interpersonal skills, 2. collaboration, 3. managing conflict and issues of power and confrontation, 4. building commitment and esprit de corps through optimism, innovation, envisioning, rewarding and recognising the contribution of others, 5. satisfying an individual's needs through trust, support and advocating for them, 6 modelling ethical and principled practices and being fair and consistent.

Northhouse says that the team's performance can be improved by 1. clarifying and agreeing goals, 2. structuring for results through visioning, planning, organising co-ordinating, etc. 3. facilitating decision-making through informing, co-ordinating and mediating, 4. training team member through education and development, and 5. maintaining standards of excellence by assessing individual and team performance and seeking development and improvement.

Finally

The above is by no means all-inclusive, nor deep and there is much more that could be explored, not least the question of different personality types and how they might meld together in a team. However, it is hope that this provides areas for further thinking that may be useful whatever the nature of team work undertaken.

John Claydon is Regional Team Leader of the NBA and has a research interest in teams.

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Resources from EBF

Readers may like to know that the EBF holds regular consultations and symposia that could be of interest—the link to their site is below and PDFs of many talks are available.

The material of the 2016 Consultation on human sexuality includes a link to the paper, *The courage to be Baptist*.

<http://www.ebf.org/resources-theology-and-education>

BAPTIST MINISTER'S FELLOWSHIP CONSTITUTION

NAME OF ORGANISATION

Baptist Minister's Fellowship

CONSTITUENCY

The constituency shall be defined as the area covered by the Federation of British Baptists.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership shall be open to:

All who are serving Baptist Churches in ministry, or engaged in another form of ministry recognised within the Federation of British Baptists, including those training for such ministry and those who have so served in such ministry; all ministers working for Baptist-linked mission agencies and organisations whether serving overseas or in the UK.

Membership shall also be open to individuals and corporate bodies in the UK and in the world-wide Baptist family with an interest in Baptist ministry, and such others as from time to time request membership or wish to continue in membership of the Fellowship as approved by the Committee.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Fellowship shall seek to:

- * reflect on issues and matters relating to Baptist ministry, and when appropriate to represent these to regional and national bodies;
- * produce journals of academic, practical and contextual theology that encourage reflection on the practice and theology of Baptist ministry;
- * enhance the sense of contact, concern and compassion among those involved in Baptist ministry;
- * encourage members to commit themselves to mutual prayer on Sunday mornings;
- * offer practical care through the administration of a benevolent fund

THE COMMITTEE

The business of the Fellowship shall be conducted by the Committee. The Committee shall be appointed at the Annual General Meeting (AGM); the Committee shall normally meet three times a year. Agendas shall be sent to members of the Committee prior to the date of the meeting and draft minutes of the meeting shall be circulated as soon as is practicable following each meeting. The Committee shall consist of the Executive Officers: the Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Editor; and up to six other co-opted members.

ELECTIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

The Chair shall be elected at the AGM from names submitted by individual members. The person so elected shall normally serve for 3 years, with the possibility of a second term of office.

The Secretary and Treasurer shall be elected at the AGM on the recommendations of the Committee, such appointments shall normally be for a three year period with the possibility of a second term.

The Editor shall be an appointment of the Committee.

Co-opted members shall be appointed by the executive officers for the skills and knowledge that they bring to the Committee.

All appointments to the Committee shall be open to nomination by the members of the Fellowship but in all such appointments maintaining diversity shall be borne in mind.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM shall normally be held during the Baptist Assembly. When this proves not to be possible alternative arrangements shall be made, details of which shall be duly advertised to all members. An annual Statement of Accounts approved by the Committee shall be presented at the AGM, after which the Statement of accounts shall be published in the following Journal.

ALTERATION OF THE CONSTITUTION

Any amendment to the Constitution shall require the assent of not less than two thirds of those present and voting at an AGM or at a meeting called specifically for that purpose. Advance notice of any proposed change shall be publicised.

BMF Committee Meeting

To be held on Thursday September 21st

at Bloomsbury BC, London

Starts at 11.00 am with the approval of the new Constitution

(all members are welcome to the opening part of the meeting)

Centre for Anabaptist Studies

In recent years the Anabaptist vision has inspired Christians from many traditions as we face the challenges of post-Christendom and offered fresh insights on peace and justice, faith and politics, hospitality and community, church and mission, discipleship and biblical interpretation.

There are currently few opportunities or resources for studying Anabaptist history and theology in the UK. We hope that the Centre for Anabaptist Studies will fill this gap.

Bristol Baptist College, the Anabaptist Network (www.anabaptistnetwork.com) and the Mennonite Trust (www.menno.org.uk) are partners in the Centre, based at the College, which was launched in October 2014. In that year the College inherited the library of the Mennonite Trust, the foremost collection of Anabaptist resources in the country. The college has access to scholars with the expertise to supervise research, produce further resources and develop programmes at various levels.

The work of the Centre includes:

- Public lectures and other events in Bristol
- Webinars accessible from anywhere in the world
- MA modules on Anabaptism
- Supervision of postgraduate research
- Visits from overseas Anabaptist scholars
- Projects in partnership with others

Annual lectures. The fourth annual lecture will take place on Tuesday 21 November 2017 at 7.30pm. The lecturer will be Dr Ian Randall, whose subject will be 'A Peace Witness under Pressure: The Bruderhof Community in England, 1936-1942.' Recordings of the three previous annual lectures are available on request.

MA modules. The Centre for Anabaptist Studies offers five MA modules:

- Anabaptist Origins and Distinctives
- Anabaptist Ecclesiology and Missiology
- Anabaptist Ethics and Hermeneutics

- The Life and Writings of Pilgram Marpeck
- Menno Simons' Foundation of Christian Doctrine

Alongside these there is a module on research methodology and students will also be expected to write a dissertation on an Anabaptist topic. The MA can be taken over 1, 2 or 3 years. A Postgraduate Diploma will also be available, consisting of the taught elements of the MA without the dissertation, and we hope to introduce a Postgraduate Certificate, consisting of three modules. In addition, any of the modules can simply be studied for interest. These modules will be taught in two modes: in block weeks to enable students living some distance from the college to attend, and online for students beyond reach of the college.

Modules being taught in 2017-18:

20-24 November: Menno Simons' Foundation of Christian Doctrine

5-9 February: Anabaptist Origins and Distinctives

23-27 April: Anabaptist Ethics and Hermeneutics

Research supervision. Bristol Baptist College offers postgraduate research supervision (MTh and PhD). The director and associates of the Centre will offer supervision of research topics related to the Anabaptist tradition.

Webinars. The Centre offers six or more webinars (web-based seminars) during each academic year. These webinars are free and can be accessed via a home computer. They last between 60 and 90 minutes, and there is a mix of presentation and interaction. The webinars are all recorded and so can be watched subsequently.

For further information about any aspect of the Centre for Anabaptist Studies, to receive invitations to lectures, webinars and other events, or to enquire about studying at the college, please contact: Dr Stuart Murray Williams: Centre for Anabaptist Studies, Bristol Baptist College, The Promenade, Clifton Down, Bristol BS8 3NJ or email anabaptist@bristol-baptist.ac.uk

The Centre for Anabaptist Studies also has a Facebook group, which can be found at www.facebook.com/groups/anabaptiststudies/, and a blog, which can be found at <http://anabaptiststudies.wordpress.com/>

Reviews

Editor: Michael Peat

Sermons on prayer
by Charles H Spurgeon
Hendrickson Publishers, 2015
Reviewer: Bob Little

The preface to this book counsels, ‘As you read, listen. These words were meant to be heard, not merely read. Listen carefully and you will hear the cadences of this remarkable preaching, the echoes of God’s timeless truth travelling across the years. And, above all, enjoy Spurgeon’s enthusiasm, his fire, his devotion, his zeal to recognise and respond to God’s timeless invitation to engage the Creator himself’.

The 12 sermons in this book were delivered between 1865 and 1890. Eight of them take texts from the Old Testament and four from the New, the same number as the sermons based on texts from the book of Psalms.

On one level, all of these sermons, written and delivered by a renowned 19th century preacher, are historical curiosities for preachers, as well as for social and literary historians—since none of them could be preached seriously today without substantial updating and revision. Language, culture and style have changed. No one would preach on ‘ejaculatory prayer’, as Spurgeon did in September 1877, without raising an eyebrow or two from among a modern congregation. Yet, 140 years ago, the word was merely a synonym for ‘exclamatory’.

Yet, on another level, it’s possible to construct a contemporary sermon around the structure—notably the arguments and headings—that Spurgeon has used. As such, these sermons offer many worthwhile insights into the nature, power and value of prayer, as well as into sermon construction.

Moreover, in the sense that any sermon says as much about the preacher as it does about its subject, these sermons also reveal something of the commitment to Christ and his mission, along with the passionate intense Christian faith, that Spurgeon had. It’s these things, not the archaic language in which they’re couched, that today’s preachers would do well to discover.

Sermons on great prayers of the Bible
by Charles H. Spurgeon
Hendrickson Publishers, 2015
Reviewer: Bob Little

In language, style, content and layout, this book is extremely similar to its companion volume, *Sermons on prayer* by Spurgeon—although, naturally, it contains 13 different sermons. These are distinguished from those contained in *Sermons on prayer* by being designated as sermons on great prayers of the Bible.

The focal texts for the sermons in this book show a similar representation in terms of Old vs New Testament competition—from eight vs four in *Sermons on prayer* to eight vs five in this volume. The sermons’ first outings cover a similar period (1858—1890) to those published in *Sermons on prayer* (1865—1890).

All the comments made in the review of *Sermons on prayer* hold good for this volume too. Both books are slim enough to fit unobtrusively on most bookshelves.

If you want to pay homage to one of ³this

denomination's 'larger than life' figures; you want to gain an insight into 'what the fuss about Spurgeon' was all about; you want to refer to some examples of memorable sermons from history; you want to gain inspiration for your own series of sermons on prayer, or you even want to plagiarise—and, hopefully, update—some of the inspiring and insightful ideas to be found in these sermons, then these are the books for you. As the old limerick says:

*There once was a preacher called Spurgy,
Who really detested liturgy.
But his sermons are fine;
and I use them as mine!
And so do most of the clergy!*

With the publication of these books, this piece of ancient doggerel may not yet be completely out-of-date.

Pope Francis: tradition in transition
by Massimo Faggioli (tr Sean O'Neill),
New York: Paulist Press, 2015
Pope Francis' revolution of tenderness
and love: theological and pastoral
perspectives
by Walter Kasper (tr William
Madges)
New York: Paulist Press, 2015
Reviewer: Bob Allaway

I review these two books together, as one can throw light on the other. For example, Faggioli draws attention to 'The preparation of the synod on the family of 2014, with ... the role given to a theologian like Cardinal Walter Kasper' (p33).

That Cardinal Kasper has an important role in interpreting Pope Francis' thought is clear in a statement like the following from his book: 'For the pope,

Pentecostal Christians are brothers whom we have rediscovered...To bishops from the Southern Hemisphere, when they came to Rome for their *ad limina* visits and complained about the difficulties and challenges caused by the proselytism of the Pentecostal churches, I was accustomed to say that we should not talk about what we judge to be wrong with the Pentecostal churches, but should above all ask ourselves what is wrong with us that our own faithful run away from us' (p58). Note how he quotes himself where we might expect a quote from Pope Francis!

The style of Kasper's book can be disconcerting, particularly the way he keeps quoting papal and conciliar documents the way we might quote biblical prooftexts. He can also use some abstrusely academic terms, such as 'multipolarity' and 'transversality' (p 85). What is plain, however, is that he is putting a strongly ecumenical 'spin' on Francis' views. Even Martin Luther gets a good word (p26)! According to Kasper, Francis no longer sees the church as a series of concentric circles at varying distances from Rome, but sees Rome and other churches as sides of a polyhedron that have their own forms and are centred on Christ (p57).

If you are an 'ecumaniac', you will be thrilled by this book. Just be warned that Kasper is latching on to aspects of Pope Francis' teaching that agree with his own views, but that do not necessarily indicate the direction of the Catholic church.

On p43 he says, '...it appears to many that the pope has laid the groundwork for allowing Christians in irregular situations, such as divorced and remarried individuals, after examination of their respective situations, to the

sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist'. This was the agenda of the synod on the family previously mentioned, and Faggioli reveals that it did not work out the way Kasper and his fellow European liberals had hoped, because of 'objections...from the representatives of English-speaking Catholics from the United States, Africa and Australia' (p68). Incidentally, it should be noted that what was proposed was not a change in church rules, but giving an easier time to such Catholics when they came to confession. Pope Francis' comments to journalists about 'welcoming gays' seem to have envisaged something similar.

At first sight, Faggioli's book is more readable. It does, however, have its own peculiarities of language, such as a tendency to say 'scientific' where we might say 'academic historical', and a passage on p xiv is surely mistranslated.

Faggioli is less Eurocentric. He points out that Vatican 2 was dominated by European intellectuals. If the Latin American church that Francis represents appears to realise the vision of Vatican 2, it is actually expressing grassroots concerns rather than working out a top-down theology. Those sympathetic to 'liberation theology' will be delighted to read of Pope Francis' meeting with Gustavo Gutierrez in 2013, and sending a message to the 'base ecclesial communities' in 2014 (p17). Kasper also mentions how Francis 'has now put in motion again the process of beatification [of Oscar Romero], which had been blocked' (p70).

Faggioli stresses how, whatever other popes may have been saying theologically, power remained firmly in the hands of Vatican civil servants. But when Francis had only been pope for one month, he appointed a special committee of eight cardinals (only two of them Europeans) to assist his reform of the

Roman Curia...starting with finance (p15, 33)!

Both Kasper and Faggioli mention how Cardinal Bergoglio (as he then was) preached to his fellow cardinals, before the conclave, on the need for the church to reach out to those on its margins, rather than simply maintaining itself.

Why did the publisher think that these books would be of interest to Baptists? Certainly, those involved in ecumenical discussions would find much of interest in Kasper's book. But what I suspect most of us want to read about are the earlier experiences that made Pope Francis the person that he is, and neither book has much to say about those.

Walk with Jesus: 25th anniversary edition
by Henri Nouwen (with illustrations by Sr Helen David)
Orbis Books, 2015
Reviewer: Michael Peat

Twenty-five years after its original publication in 1990, Henri Nouwen's 15 meditations on contemporary images recalling the Stations of the Cross, drawn by Sr Helen David Brancato, still speak powerfully to followers of Jesus today. As the publisher notes in a preface to the new edition, 'Sister Helen David's drawings depict specific circumstances—in Nicaragua or the Philippines—that may have changed. But the reality of global poverty, violence, and suffering remains'.

For Nouwen, this modern reality in which extensive suffering, for all its potency, cannot eradicate moments of joy and hope, is truly the 'ongoing revelation of the unfathomable mystery of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday' (p xi). Hence, 'walking' with Jesus, with all the sense this image evokes of being earthed, exposed, and

yet well placed to attend carefully to companions on the road, calls us to solidarity with suffering people in all places of the world. In doing so, barriers of fear can be overcome as we discover connections between their suffering and our own, and experience more profoundly the hope that comes from knowing that Jesus enters into the world's pain, transfiguring it through suffering love.

Sr Helen's drawings for each station vividly communicate this message: they depict modern scenes involving oppressed people from various countries, each one seen through the frame of a stylised cross. Nouwen's accompanying meditations weave together each experience pictured with analogous experiences familiar to those of us living with more material prosperity, and with that of characters in the gospel accounts of Holy Week. Like the passion narrative itself, grasping the deeper meaning of Nouwen's reflections entails journeying through the book from start to finish, rather than cherry-picking meditations in isolation.

In sum, both the words and the art in this book are moving, challenging and spiritually enriching. Being less than 100 pages, it can easily be read in an evening: easily, but less profitably! As befits its title, I recommend a walking pace, one that allows the book's meaning to be taken more deeply to heart. Perhaps read one meditation a day through the latter part of Lent, thereby preparing, with deeper understanding and commitment, to pray the last words of the prayer that ends the book: 'Dear Jesus...as your passion, death, and resurrection continue in history, give me the hope, the courage, and the confidence to let your heart unite my heart with the hearts of all your suffering people, and so become for us the divine source of new life. Amen'.

Servant ministry: a portrait of Christ and a pattern for his followers

by Tony Horsfall

Abingdon: BRF, 2013

Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery

The subtitle of this book by Tony Horsfall accurately summarises its purpose and contents. Basing his argument on an exposition of Isaiah 42:1-9, Horsfall comprehensively deals with the Servant's identity, calling, character, confidence and attentiveness. Christ-centred from the very start, this is a book not only for people in 'full-time' ministry, but for every church member, for all need to understand their role as a servant of God as well as their motivation for service. Even so, it would be useful for leadership teams and deacons (however a particular local church's leadership might be designated) to carefully study and reflect upon the teaching and insights offered by Horsfall in this book.

Readers are assisted by searching questions for personal reflection at the end of each chapter. There are also some equally helpful questions for group discussion at the end of the book. For instance, Horsfall is not afraid to address himself to issues such as the abuse of power in the life of the church (and the motivations that lie behind it). He also displays a healthy balance between the application of Isaiah 42 to individual life as well as to justice issues. Horsfall insists that a true faith has both moral content and a social conscience. Another helpful insight provided in the book is the distinction between *doulos* and *diakonos*. Horsfall suggests that the former term has to do with the servant's relationship with God, while the latter is concerned with relationships on the human level.

This, then, is a book that deserves to be read and re-read slowly and reflectively (more so, I suspect, than a quick reading for the purpose of a review). It should

stimulate much prayerful self-examination, however long anyone has been seeking to follow Christ. I certainly will return to it in due course.

Recommended, then, not only for those in pastoral ministry, but for all who seek to grow in their discipleship of the Servant of the Lord.

Rhythms of grace: finding intimacy with God in a busy life
by Tony Horsfall
Abingdon: BRF, 2012
Reviewer: Rosa Hunt

Of late, there has been a real resurgence of interest in contemplative prayer among Baptists, and as a result many of us have been reading books emerging from contemplative traditions. This book is very different, in that it covers all the ground that you would expect, but it does so explicitly from an evangelical/charismatic perspective. Thus, it explores the reasons why evangelical and charismatic churches have traditionally been rather suspicious of this type of prayer.

One reason, which the author particularly emphasises, is that 'doing' and 'busyness' are seen as desirable in many such churches. Thus, even though we may preach Sabbath and rest, our church practice often gives that the lie with burnt-out ministers, over-stretched volunteers and a list of notices which is as long as the sermon. Our services rarely contain silence, and are often very 'busy' events.

As an antidote to all this busyness, Tony Horsfall offers a gracious and wise book, which commends the ancient prayer practices in language which will be familiar to those who are new to contemplative prayer. All the traditional practices are here: centring on Jesus, practising silence, *lectio divina*, contemplation, and more. Horsfall

writes in a way which puts these practices within the reach of the ordinary mortal, with practical tips at the end of the book for putting them into practice.

There are so many gems hidden in this book, even for those who have read many books like it before. To name just one, Horsfall's chapter on 'learning to sit' is a chapter on imitating God's way of working, by working out of a place of rest, rather than towards one. This insight was quite transformative in my own prayer practice, and Horsfall quotes some wonderful exegesis by Watchman Nee to make his point. Indeed one of the book's many strong points is the wealth of other books it points the reader to.

I would thoroughly recommend this book to anyone who desires to deepen their prayer life—especially if they nurture some deep suspicions about how 'sound' all this contemplative stuff is!

The gift of leadership according to the scriptures
by Steven Croft
Canterbury Press, 2016
Reviewer: Bob Little

This book, by Steven Croft, currently the Bishop of Oxford and formerly the Bishop of Sheffield, comprises 10 reflections on passages from the Old Testament on the theme of leadership in communities. As such, the book is intended not merely for the clergy but for all Christians who exercise some form of leadership within their community.

In writing this book, Bishop Steven keeps in mind his four-domain leadership model, covering: watching over myself; working with individuals and teams; guiding and guarding a community, and leadership in the wider

world. It's helpful for the reader to bear these domains in mind when reading the book's ten sermon-like reflections on leadership.

These reflections begin with Rehoboam in Shechem (1 Kings 12: 1 – 19). Having outlined three things about leadership that Rehoboam got right, Steven identifies the king's failure to lead through service to his people. Prompted by Psalm 23, he then considers the leader as a shepherd and, exemplified by Ezekiel, as a bringer of hope.

He moves on to focus on Elijah, Moses, Ruth and Samuel, as well as providing insights into leadership from Proverbs and even Genesis chapter one. There's also a chapter on visionary leadership, inspired by the 'old translation' of Proverbs 29: 18 ('Where there is no vision, the people perish'), using Caleb and Joshua (from Numbers 13 and 14) as examples.

This slim volume punches above its size in terms of providing perceptive comments which help clarify key qualities of Christian leadership. Offering challenging and instructive insights based on secular as well as biblical and Bible-influenced sources, this book deserves careful, and repeated, study, both for private and group use.

Parable and paradox: sonnets on the sayings of Jesus and other poems
by Malcolm Guite
Canterbury Press, 2016
love kindness
by Barry H. Corey
Tyndale House Publishers, 2016
Reviewer: Robert Draycott

I went up to Southwark Cathedral a couple of years ago for one of their Good Friday services and found Malcolm Guite leading our thoughts *via* his powerful and

intriguing sonnets. His poetry was accessible on a first hearing and was able to communicate something of the weight of the gospel accounts in a way that made me think, 'I must look out for other writings of his'. But events overtook my good intentions until the opportunity came to review this collection.

The back cover informed me that this is 'an eagerly awaited companion volume to his bestselling *Sounding the seasons*'. Those who have read that one will need little encouragement to get hold of these meditations subtitled *Sonnets on the sayings of Jesus and other poems*; there are fifty of these including, for example, the seven 'I AMs', five dialogues on the two great commandments and so on. They can be used for personal devotions, in small groups and, given a suitable introduction, in public worship.

The other thing that intrigued me was to discover that at the beginning of that Holy week, Malcolm Guite had been speaking at Biola, a leading Christian University in Los Angeles. How had (what I took to be) a high church Anglican been invited there? The answer is probably that Barry H. Corey, the President of Biola, was involved. This link between what could be considered opposite strands demonstrates that Guite's book could appeal across the theological spectrum. The same could be said of Barry H. Corey's book, which is well worth reading because it is so easy for Christians to be unkind, especially to those whose theology and stances on challenging issues is very different, not to say plainly wrong in our humble (would that it were so) opinion.

Barry Corey writes engagingly and simply, without being simplistic, on what he describes as a forgotten Christian virtue. He illustrates his 13 chapters vividly from his own experience and, as we would expect, with a wide-ranging

grasp of scripture. The latter is not dragged in to beat people over the head with, but is explained and explicated expertly. In other words, this book about kindness is kindly written. Part of the appeal for me was the way in which, as President, he has sought to grapple with the issues in sexuality that have been raised by some students during his time in office. His basic stance is to hold to a 'firm centre' but to have 'soft edges'. One or two quotes may give the flavour: 'we need new and more conversations that build bridges and not walls'; 'Living to be receivable focuses on how we open ourselves in new and sometimes uncomfortable ways for others to receive us, whether they choose to or not'. A timely book written very graciously, I thoroughly recommend both it and *Parable and paradox*.

Reduced laughter: seriocomic features and their function in the book of Kings

Helen Paynter

Brill, 2016

Reviewer: Richard Matcham

In this book, Helen Paynter uses a hermeneutic of carnivalisation and mirroring to offer a radical, satirical re-evaluation of the Elijah-Elisha and Aram narratives in the Book of Kings.

Reduced laughter develops the work of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, who, with reference to the societal role-reversals which were a characteristic means of mockery in medieval carnivals, presents the seriocomic genre as 'playful, irreverent, multivoiced, subversive and outrageous' (p11). Paynter applies his insights to the biblical texts, demonstrating persuasively that Kings reveals all the identifiable features of the seriocomic, and as such reflects 'universal human expressions in the face of power structures unassailable by conventional means' (p42). But because it's in the Bible we 'are more likely to under-diagnose humour than over-diagnose it' (p6).

Bakhtin interprets the medieval carnival's subversive actions and mocking dissent found in societal role-reversals, where normal society is turned upside down, inside out and parodied to extremity. Thus, 'the beggar becomes a king and the king a beggar' (p36). Paynter suggests it is this joy, freedom and creativity that help the reader to see the different strata within the text.

The middle section of Kings is notoriously difficult hermeneutical territory. So Paynter takes Bakhtinian theory and asks, 'Are there seriocomic features within this text, the identification of which will enlighten our understanding of it? If so, what function do they serve?' (p58). Having established the criteria and the hermeneutical process, Paynter consistently demonstrates, with meticulous detail, the complex multilayered meaning within a text in which mockery, insult and innuendo abound. Paynter suggest her proposal 'allows us to understand these narratives, not only as humorous or intriguing in their own right, but also as key threads in a nuanced, complex fabric of texts, woven together by a master storyteller whose subtlety perhaps exceeds that of the scholars who consider him naïve' (p188).

A key example of this appeals to the '*mise-en-abyme*' (literary mirror), 'a device whereby the whole of the narrative is reflected within one distinct portion of it...which thus acts as an internal mirror, which functions to interpret the whole' (p62). Helen reveals how this device is integral to understand the central portion of Kings, arguing, with regard to the relationships between Israel, Judah and Aram, that 'within the book of Kings the subversive and critical representation of Aram functions as a *mise-en-abyme* to comment upon the nation of Israel, and thence, by subtle and unexpected extension, to subvert our opinion of Judah herself' (p158).

The concluding remarks are wonderful: 'Into this world comes the carnival, led by Elijah and Elisha' and here, anything might happen, and it probably will. In this world, little is certain, few can be trusted, and no-one—peasant, king or prophet—is without fault or folly' (p202). This is because the whole time, YHWH, whether, seemingly silent or inactive, is the only one who 'is trustworthy to those who genuinely seek truth' (p196). So, 'rather than being a 'voice from the sky', making monologising edicts, YHWH enters into the fray as a participant, withdraws from the fray in articulate silence, and

functions as a combatant, a voice of dissent and an agent of subversion against kings and armies, even (perhaps, especially) his own' (p197).

Reduced laughter is demanding but so richly rewarding. A thorough understanding of Kings is important, and a working knowledge of biblical Hebrew advisable, but a carnivalesque funny bone absolutely essential. This approach allows us to treat the scriptures so much more seriously that we may actually see the hidden but quite intentional humorous side!

The Centre for Anabaptist Studies 2017 Annual Lecture

‘A Peace Witness under Pressure: The Bruderhof Community in England, 1936-1942’

Dr Ian Randall explores the experiences of the Bruderhof, a Christian community which began in Germany in 1920 and which had to escape from the country in the 1930s because of Nazi pressure. With the start of WW2, the German members came to be regarded with suspicion, and British members were unpopular because they were pacifists. The result of these pressures was that by 1942 over 300 community members had left England to try to forge a new life in South America. This period of Bruderhof life shows Anabaptist convictions being worked out in England during a time of great political uncertainty.



After formation at Regent's, Ian held two pastorates and then lectured and supervised at Spurgeon's and IBTS for *ca* 20 years. More recently Ian has been a research associate of the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide. He has written extensively on renewal, mission and Baptist and Anabaptist history.

The annual lecture will take place at Bristol Baptist College (The Promenade, Clifton Down BS8 3NJ) at 7.30pm on **Tuesday 21 November**. This event is free and no booking is required – unless you want to join us for a sandwich meal at 6.30pm, which does need to be booked and for which we'd request a £3.50 donation. Recordings of previous annual lectures are available on request. The Centre also offers an MA course, available via taught block weeks in Bristol or online, and postgraduate research degrees.

For further information about any aspect of the Centre please contact Stuart Murray Williams at the above address or email anabaptist@bristol-baptist.ac.uk