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'The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board'.

Editorial

A quick flick through the current *Leeds University Union Handbook* is to put one in touch with a parallel world - a world the "greying generation" has all but forgotten exists; "the happy highways where I went and cannot come again". Tantalising are the Societies. What about *Pelicans Society?* (Creative writing); *Ears Society?* (East Africa studies); *Acoustic Roots?* (Folk); and *Juggling and Circus Skills Society?* Diversions enough from the academic treadmill, grotty flat and near penury (Oh! to be a student in Holland).

The usual things appear: Union Services; Academic and Welfare Services; Your Health and Your Rights and ENTS. But a significant chunk is devoted to 'Policy and Campaigns'. And for the record recent Leeds campaigns include Nestlé Boycott, Military Research on Campus, Access for People with Disabilities and, inevitably, Anti-Racism. Indeed, students are virtually defined by their readiness to embrace a cause - from the young William Wordsworth adding his weight to the French Revolution to Tariq Ali manning the barricades in the London of the Sixties. But we all know what happens to such students. They become Tories, read *The Times* and support the status quo.

And yet their dreaming idealism, passing though it be, is strategically important in a society which, one fears, has grown old, even appearing at times, exhausted. A society in which the hope that feeds visions is all too often sold for the pottage of short-term gain. And the cynicism is a cancer. If the young cannot see the problems, thank God they can see the possibilities; and thus the scripture is fulfilled: "A little child shall lead them."

The landslide victory of Bill Clinton is clearly expressive in American society of a great yearning for change and national renewal: the comparison with JFK is both inevitable and invidious. Meanwhile the Southern Baptist Convention remains traumatized by the theological 'McCarthyism' indulged in by a small but effective fundamentalist minority. A life-long servant of the Convention, Darold Morgan, tells the story, and very sad it is too, with the writing on the wall for us all. This is followed by Frank Cooke's attempt to grapple with the persistent charge that 'faith' is nothing more than wishful thinking, pure subjectivism or what we do with our inadequacies.

Next, Stuart Jenkins asks the question, what shall we do with the children? On 11 grounds he argues that the traditional practice of 'Sunday School' is counter-productive and needs a radical re-think for the sake of the health and wholeness of the total Christian community. Is there a rejoinder out there? Our fourth contribution helps to dispel the fallacy that overseas mission is essentially about the strong helping the weak and the rich nourishing the poor. Angus MacNeill is convinced of the mutual nature of all our mission activity, the givers also receiving and learning even as they give.

As a caveat, it is sometimes asked whether we consider unsolicited articles. We certainly do, and currently a generous stock waits to see the light of day. Such articles should be no more than two and a half thousand words, typed, double spaced, and contributing positively to the wide concerns of the pastoral ministry. Articles of a philosophic or applied nature are equally welcome, also the fruits of your special studies or post-graduate labours, suitably adapted. Those willing to undertake book reviews from time to time are also much valued and should get in touch. Finally, any constructive suggestions to improve the value of our Journal would be seriously considered by the Editorial Board.

Life in the Southern Baptist Convention: 1993

Soon the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States will celebrate the 150th anniversary of its founding. Organized in 1845 out of the bitterly divisive slavery trauma, the Convention began with a small number of churches concentrated in the old South. The new denomination came into being with two rather significant and enduring commitments. One was to bring churches cooperatively together to further the cause of missionary expansion, both at home and abroad. The second was to organize the new denomination in such a way that the historic Baptist principle of church autonomy would be protected. The rural setting of most of the churches, combined with the frontier mentality of the new nation, mandated this approach to denominational ecclesiology.

Those who brought the Southern Baptist Convention to life in 1845 would hardly recognize the denomination as it moves toward the sesquicentennial of Southern Baptists in 1995. They would be astounded at the phenomenal growth of the Convention, now totalling nearly 35,000 congregations in every state of the Union. **Thousands upon thousands** of missionaries are supported through the boards and agencies of the Convention and the vital corollaries of the various state Baptist Conventions. The Annuity Board (the pension and insurance agency of the Convention) is a multi-billion dollar operation and ministry. The Baptist Sunday School Board is the world's largest publisher of religious materials. The Convention supports six theological seminaries with a combined enrolment exceeding 10,000 students, in preparation for some form of ministry. The state Conventions support an astonishing array of colleges and universities, hospitals, children's home and retirement centres, as well as aggressive evangelistic and church extension programmes.

This list of achievements, past and present, is genuinely, even substantively, impressive. When these achievements are focused over against some radical sociological and cultural changes in the past few decades that have fragmented many other Protestant denominations in this nation, it becomes more remarkable than ever.

A Sad and Tragic Era

But life in the Southern Baptist Convention has taken a most unexpected and dramatic turn in recent years toward a peculiar fundamentalism that portends some radical changes in the way the Convention does its work and ministry. These changes are shockingly opposed to the basic commitments that the architects of the Southern Baptist Convention had in mind. These leaders framed the obvious biblical imperative as a fundamental tenet, balanced with the local church autonomy.

The year 1979 will be a year to remember when the history of the S.B.C. is written in later times. Despite all the statistics of the denomination pointing to continued growth, health and stability, there surfaced in 1979 a well-organized, well-financed movement to take over the leadership of the Convention with a highly publicized programme to change the Convention from the top, all the way to the smallest church, with biblical literalism as the guide!

One needs to understand what the fundamentalists meant when they announced

publicly and repeatedly that "they were going for the jugular in the Southern Baptist Convention". They planned to control one elective position in the Convention life: the presidency of the S.B.C. The President of the Convention appoints the committee that, in turn, nominates trustees for the boards and agencies of the Convention. Their objective was to control for ten years this position, because this time frame of controlled trustee elections would turn any agency toward an extreme theological conservatism through the trustee-approved policies. The framers of the S.B.C. constitution never foresaw this strange concentration of power in this position. Until 1979 it was regarded as an honour for outstanding pastoral or lay ministry. Then this concentration of power became the cornerstone of savage abuse by fundamentalists for control and dominance.

These rather bizarre announcements of "take-over" were first received with an almost condescending attitude by Convention and church leaders because the charges of theological liberalism in the conservative Southern Baptist Convention, then and now, were unfounded, even ludicrous. But what has happened to the Southern Baptist Convention is another graphic testimony of what a dedicated minority can do in a setting of religious complacency. Rallying around the issues of "theological liberalism", a veritable firestorm of protest against the establishment arose. The key issue was "biblical inerrancy". Liberals were defined as people who would not accept the inerrancy of the Bible. With little regard for accuracy, charges were made that the seminaries had many teachers who were "theological liberals". The goal was to "throw the liberals out" in all the Convention supported agencies, and to bring in leaders who were committed to "the true faith".

Before 1979 attendance at the annual meeting of the S.B.C. was between 15,000 - 18,000 messengers. The election of the President was usually a friendly type of ecclesiastical rivalry. By contrast, in 1985 the attendance at the Dallas meeting of the Convention totalled an astronomical 45,000! Observing this and subsequent meetings was a confirmation of the unbelievable effectiveness of political power turned loose in the almost defenceless structures of the S.B.C. Precinct politics, glitzy publications, promised positional rewards, questionable election procedures, statements obviously taken out of context to prove theological liberalism, all combined to make the decade of the 1980's in the Southern Baptist Convention one of the saddest and most tragic eras in the history of evangelical Christianity.

Some additional factors have come into focus in "this takeover." In all likelihood the Convention had become too bureaucratic and distanced from its constituency. Despite the constant emphasis on the local church as the top of the organisational pyramid, in practice this probably was not the case. Perhaps the success and size of the Convention had bred an isolation and an arrogance that brought on too late a humbling re-assessment of priorities. It certainly is not a classic case of one side being totally right and the other totally wrong.

Another factor has to be the overwhelming sense of moral decay and cultural change that is challenging the total fabric of American life. This devastating litany of problems, such as the drug problem, the AIDS issue, homosexuality, the abortion problem, the loss of confidence in government, poverty, and racial confrontation, is unsettling to faithful Christians. One way to respond is to retreat into a rigid authoritarianism. In addition, hints of reconstruction theology, an expansion into civil religion, and other issues blatantly in conflict with the historic Baptist position of the separation of church and state, continue

to come from the new array of leaders now in the Southern Baptist Convention.

A Changed Climate

So life in the Convention has radically changed from the friendly rivalries of the past. Formerly there was a respect for diversity; now frequent and sometimes acrimonious debates explode on a variety of subjects. Recall that Southern Baptists now stretch all over the nation, a nation so large that geographical and cultural issues come into force. Several "super churches" in the Convention now influence noticeably the overwhelming number of small churches. The "super church" pastors are the ones trumpeting a new concept of pastoral leadership. Edwin Young, the recently elected President of the S.B.C. and pastor of the rapidly growing Second Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, articulated the philosophy of the fundamentalist pastor when he said recently: "The pastor, as the man of God, is the primary leader of the church. The pastor needs to concentrate on evangelism, leaving 'ministry' or meeting people's other needs, to lay people. **We surrender ministry in order to be leaders**".

Can the "super church" leadership, in concert with the small non-seminary trained pastors (over 50 per cent of the total), extend their militant fundamentalism throughout the entire Convention territory? Is it possible for aggressive, dominating even dictatorial leaders, competing for the positions of influence in the structure, to work harmoniously and to redirect the bureaucracy of the S.B.C.? One conclusion is obvious already: the Southern Baptist Convention will never be the same!

The beautiful avenues of trust that graced the Convention, even in its most tumultuous times in the past, seem to be the initial casualty. Since 1925, when the Convention introduced its method of financial support called the **Cooperative Programme**, the functional prerequisite was mutual trust between the local church, the state conventions and the Southern Baptist Convention. Though the concept was far from perfect, its practice and operation became the envy of the ecclesiastical world. Hundreds of millions of dollars voluntarily made their way annually from local Baptist churches to state and national offices to fund the 1845 commitment of Baptists in their denominational expression of the world mission enterprise.

Giving to missions in this proven way is seriously threatened and, of course, both the Foreign Mission and Home Mission Boards of the S.B.C. will be penalized by this trend. Trust in the Convention system is shaky. When one combines this with the economic conditions of the nation and the constant demands of the local church, one readily concludes that the heralded "Golden Goose" of Southern Baptist mission support may be in danger of shrinking. And this is a tragedy of staggering proportions in a world where mission opportunities are unparalleled.

The question surely must be asked: are all Southern Baptists fundamentalists? Absolutely and strongly the answer comes - No! It is difficult to estimate accurately these theological camps. There is perhaps a hard core of these genuinely sincere fundamentalists who may total (give or take) 20 per cent of the Southern Baptist Convention. They are immensely dedicated to their goals. They are organised state by state, even precinct by precinct. They are vocal. They know how to use the powers of intimidation. To the unsubstantiated claims of theological liberalism they have added the volatile issues of "the right to life" concept of abortion, feminism - women's liberation issues, woman's ordination, prayer in public schools, and gay-lesbian influences in

American life. To put it mildly, the Southern Baptist Convention, like many other religious bodies in American life, is facing contemporary issues that remind us of Winston Churchill's words from another setting: "Our problems are beyond us."

But a majority of Southern Baptists are intelligent, Bible-believing conservatives. If the beautiful word "moderate" had not been wounded by both fundamentalists and liberals, this would be an even better identity for most Southern Baptists, probably. Fewer than 5 per cent would come anywhere near the liberal flag. The traditional, rock-ribbed Southern Baptist flavour of conservatism eliminated most theological liberals decades ago. What we have in the S.B.C. today is larger number of Baptists who refuse to become involved in this political infighting. Sensing the futility of defeating unprincipled politics, the conservative moderates have given up on organized conquest. In 1992 the Southern Baptist Convention attendance in Indianapolis was less than 18,000.

So, life in the Southern Baptist Convention will be one of mutual controversy in the foreseeable future, with thousands of churches reducing their mission contributions through the "now fundamentalistic" Convention, and slowly moving to the concept of societal missions. Career mission appointments will tend downward because of the lack of stability and missiological philosophy now exhibited by a tragically fragmented Foreign Mission Board. The *débaclé* at Rushlikon is mute testimony to this trend.

It is not an encouraging long-range picture, despite the oft-repeated prophecy of "the takeover" artists that "when 'the liberals' are no longer leading the agencies and institutions or teaching in the seminaries of the Convention, there will be, overnight, the most glorious revival in the history of evangelical Christianity". Tragically, that cannot happen because of the preponderant evidences of history that God authors revival, not people. The ultimate tragedy is the blunting of the missionary momentum of the Convention.

Life in the Southern Baptist Convention today does find some basic hope when one remembers that the local church has always been the key in God's plan for ministry and evangelistic growth, not the denominational structure. And many pastors and lay leaders are increasingly aware that time and energies need as never before to be directed locally. Forget the denomination's headquarters and the places of leadership that so often have been used to cultivate one's ego. The local parish is the greatest of all callings. This resurgent truth again commands attention. There is hope in this renewed priority.

In the United States of America today there are a number of writers and researchers in evangelical Christianity who are confirming a less denominationally orientated church life. It is an anomaly that the S.B.C. is moving to a concentration of authority - a concentration that violates all concepts of our Baptist heritage - at a time when pure denominational loyalties are obviously on the wane.

The great leaders of the Convention from previous generations would feel totally out of place today, despite the current peculiar emphasis on returning the SBC to its "theological roots". These leaders would wonder what has turned the Convention away from its Baptist heritage. The early seeds of these events were sown by W.A. Criswell, the famed pastor of Southern Baptists' largest church, the First Baptist of Dallas, Texas. Dr. Criswell has long been an admirer and student of Charles H. Spurgeon. One is rarely in Dr. Criswell's presence unless some reference is made to Spurgeon's ministry. British

Baptists are keenly aware of the divisive "Down-Grade" Controversy, a historic event which Dr. Criswell has compared to the Southern Baptist Convention in current times. In this context Dr. Criswell is regarded as the original promulgator of the Convention's turmoil, brought on by his fear that the Convention was heading down the destructive paths of theological liberalism, a liberalism interestingly identified with the German rationalism of Spurgeon's day. But great British Baptist leaders of that time frame would wonder why Southern Baptist Convention pastors have lost their sense of Baptist heritage and history.

Baptists of all centuries and cultures are not immune to controversy. From the earliest days of our life in the 17th Century until these latest days of SBC tensions, controversies of all varieties have emerged. Often they centre on personality conflicts, in theological disputes, in church polity practices. Controversy is all but synonymous with the Baptist movement. In 1888 one of British Baptists' greatest scholars and preachers, John Clifford, was quoted as saying, "The evils of controversy are all temporary, and its benefits are all permanent". Controversy, as painful and divisive as it is, bears the potential of making us re-evaluate our heritage, our theology, and our priorities. Southern Baptists desperately need to do this today, and many of them are rethinking their perspective in the painful wake of this latest controversy. Some of our best lessons about doctrine, church polity, mission philosophy and practice, and spiritual growth, spring out of the fertile but bitter soil of Baptist controversy.

The old adage was never truer than now that "power corrupts, and total power totally corrupts." Add to that one of Charles Beard's profound observations: "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad with power". Many in the Southern Baptist Convention believe that this "take-over" has been a quest for power because the smokescreen of theological liberalism merits challenge. If it is a "power-issue" - and God is the Judge here - there will be inevitably some very sad results.

So to the Baptists of the world who are watching with incredulity what has happened and is happening to the Southern Baptist Convention, it needs to be said that together we need to weep and watch and pray. Whether the Convention can hold together without a serious fragmentation, the jury is still out. There is hardly any way for it to split. What can happen is a marked decline in support for the agencies and institutions, both on a national basis and through the more regional state conventions.

Even if the great middle-of-the-road balanced conservatives could rise up and throw off the yoke of the radical fundamentalists, it would take a decade for some sense to be made out of the current mess. This will not happen, given the present mood of pastors and churches who really do not grasp the depths of violations against Baptist heritage and polity and doctrines.

But the final note always comes back to the providential purposes of God. Christian history is replete with controversy, charismatic leaders, reformation and counter-reformation. And somehow God's purposes go on being accomplished with "the wine in the new wineskins". The Bible is totally consistent with the emphasis that God will always choose some group to be His witness. The last word in this denominational conflict is far from being written.

Darold H. Morgan

Is It All In The Mind?

I was invited by the Christian Union to speak at a University Medical School on the subject: *Christianity - Merely a Psychological Experience?*

I usually look forward to the challenge of such meetings, and although I had maintained my interest in the study of psychology over the years, I was more than a little apprehensive about this talk.

I guessed that more than one student or member of the University staff would be convinced that Christianity is "All in the mind". This belief reduces the entire history of supernatural experiences, of divine interventions in history, even of God himself (!) to the products of human imagination. Thus all religious faith is an entirely subjective experience. After all, who can be sure that there is an intelligent anyone or anything 'out there?', is the question millions ask. Because I came away feeling I had abjectly failed to make the Christian case plain (not an unusual nightmare for me), I thought I would compound my sense of inadequacy by confessing it publicly.

You see, I can well understand someone who believes that psychology is the key that opens a thousand doors. After all, I have always been fascinated by the subject and have found it of enormous value in pastoral counselling and in distinguishing, for example, clinical depression from self-seeking self-pity. I have never had any time for those Christian opinions which bracket psychology with the occult or with that misleading newspaper term 'brainwashing', chiefly because God used the subject to bring me to Christ. In the inexact science of human behaviour, there are qualified scholars and practitioners of all convictions of belief and of none observing the principles of **average** or **normal** behaviour. The psychiatrists who deal with **abnormal** behaviour patterns also include believers and unbelievers.

Avenues of Approach

On reflection, I probably 'blew it' when I tried to approach the subject in several different ways. In the first, for example, I endeavoured to explore the question **philosophically**. Here I tried to point out that any philosopher arguing that 'Christianity is just a psychological experience' would be forced to deal with the fundamental question of all philosophers, that of how we know anything about anything? They call that subject Epistemology - for it deals with our ability or inability to know. Put another way, it is the basic question involving all human science and learning, namely, How do we know what is real? Can I be sure that what I experience as colour, shape, sound and solidity is not just something my mind is shaping or even creating?

Pontius Pilate put it all in a nutshell when, face to face with the one man in all history who said, "I am the truth", asked, "What is truth?" I had not wanted nor intended to enter that academic maze of subjective idealism versus scientific rationalism because we would be back at once to the old historical arguments about the existence of God. Clang! I ought not to have got involved in the philosophical approach to the subject unless I had intended to allow several hours for unfruitful discussion.

Still not seeing the error of my ways, I went on to suggest that another way of tackling the subject was the method of **Christian Apologetics**. I had to define the term, explaining that it did not mean apologising for something but stating a positive case for something under attack in order to vindicate it. This involved examining and rebutting

the (western) world view of modern scientific rationalism which we have all inherited and which teaches that there is no room for God's intervention in 'nature' except in those current gaps in our expanding knowledge.

You know the kind of thing - once devout and desperate people prayed for the halt of the plague. Then they learned about drains and concluded that prayers didn't work but sanitation did. The inference was clear. If there is anything we don't understand, including our behaviour, "just stick around, we're working on it." I was wanting to show that this apparently solid line of reasoning was itself based on an act of faith as unprovable as any other act of faith held by anyone from Stone Age man to a Nobel prizewinner. I would have had to go into that phrase "the laws of nature", which rationalists treat as the **source** of intelligence and not the expression of it, for what we call "laws" necessarily require a law giver. "Laws of nature never produced a single event... Up to now I had the vague idea that the laws of nature could make things happen. I now saw that this was exactly like thinking that you could increase your income by doing sums about it. The laws are the pattern to which events conform: the source of events must be sought elsewhere." (C.S. Lewis on 'Miracles').

Apologetically, Christians have a great case but it's so hard to present it to the jury simply. So again, I ought not to have raised it.

If your patience has not already expired, you will understand that I finally tried to examine it practically, whatever that means. Under this heading I wanted to dip into the vast store of written evidence of the creativity of prophets, poets and peasants, of those from Abraham and Moses on to this present day who had experienced the *mysterium tremendum* and not only been awed and petrified but totally transformed permanently **for good** by the experience. I wanted to treat this powerful parade of patriarchs, prophets, saints and martyrs as evidence of their being addressed from outside their own skins by a presence which was not only awesome and transforming but personal. I was attempting to establish the ground from which to argue that while we can 'Psychologise' or talk ourselves into a **lowering** of our moral character, we are incapable of **lifting** ourselves into a higher state of moral and spiritual competence. If we did manage to make progress on this, we would become so proud of our psychological self-improvement that our resulting arrogant state would be worse than the condition we imagined we had overcome!

I even advanced one of my pet theories that many of the peer-pressures which can debase and degrade us I see as the 'fellowship of the unholy spirit', whereas the peer-pressure the Bible calls the 'fellowship of the Holy Spirit' can uplift and transform us for good. One kind of company degrades us, making us morally lower than we would be alone, the other lifts us higher than we could ever be alone. For example, few human beings individually would hang someone, but get a crowd of us worked up enough, or drunk enough, and we just might.

All this, of course, was in vain because I had begun at the wrong end. There is no foolproof argument that can demonstrate to an unbeliever that he is wrong when he says, "The only God is in fact your inner longing for a big Daddy or Mummy in the sky. Likewise the one you call the devil is really like Father Christmas. It was your Dad all the time. It's all in the mind!"

By this time you will have seen that most of my usual and favourite 'power-tools' were going into the same grinder. So I thought, perhaps the powerful sense of personal communion sometimes experienced in prayer was a good point, but of course, you can

see at once that even that could be described as a dialogue with my subconscious mind (and, let's face it, sometimes it is!)

Even conscience - "the moral law within", "the voice of God", can so easily be bracketed under the subconscious indoctrination by the society which raised us. Even those mighty prophets who diametrically opposed **all** their social conditioning would be classified as psychological **contra-suggestibles!** Mind you, giving something a label doesn't explain it, but I could see how an unbelieving psychologist could so easily find some alternative solution to most of the mysteries of our faith.

To be perfectly frank, I confess that my greatest single recurring temptation is to see everything at first from a psychological point of view - from demon possession (could this be a case of schizophrenia?), beautiful visions (why are they always clothed in known art forms, such as angels in white having wings, etc.?) to spirit-led free worship which can be as rigidly structured as Compline but with different group 'triggers'. As an ex-jazz musician I find that **some** experiences of 'singing in the Spirit' strike me first as rudimentary improvisations in one major key, for when put into a minor key or a series of more complicated chord changes, the inspiration seems to depart.

Along with all this I really do believe in miracles, in baptism of the Holy Spirit and in God-anointed ministries, and yet I hear of so many outlandishly unsubstantiated claims, so many medically unchecked 'cures' and hysterical opinions called 'miracles' that I worry. We all know how the term 'psycho-somatic' is used to describe those interactions of body, mind and soul. (As the medical man said, there is 'no such thing as purely physical medicine'). For example, we know that the 'broken heart' syndrome is the grieving which appears to switch off the body's immunity system and the desire to live. We also know first hand, of a few undeniable organic physical changes not explainable by any means known to modern science in which bones are at once marvellously mended, cancers shrivel away and psychoses banished, but these are so few compared with all other statistics of 'normal scientific treatments'. Like you, I am intrigued by the recorded accounts of post-death experiences ('life after life') in which a person sees himself in the crushed car or on the operating table and notes the details such as the time and people present and then 'returns' to tell the story, but I do listen with great interest to the psychological explanations of such events for I have known quite a number of people who, after days of deep coma and after I'd prayed over their unconscious forms, startled their grieving relations with a clearly spoken "Amen" and a firm squeeze of the hand.

Limits to the Search

This rambling reflection does not contain the documented evidence which I produced at the lecture of 'life-transforming experiences' nor the paradox of our human longing for what our earthly environment cannot supply. This asks the question, Why should we humans, of all creatures, be alone in being unable to find satisfaction and harmony in our cosmic environment? All other life forms are 'at home' on planet earth and harmonise into their background, but not we humans. So I reverted to a model which should not be pressed too far.

It was that of a simple telephone handset. A Telecom engineer can test my set, take it apart, check its responses and machinery. He can tell me how it works as do a million others like it. He can even improve the reception; but he can say nothing about the source of the voice at the other end of the line. The psychologist does help me to understand the mind mechanisms but when it comes to the source of the messages I

receive, he has no more authority than any other mechanic once he steps out of his particular field of expertise.

Now this is where I exasperate you by telling you what you have known ever since you saw the question, "Christianity - merely a psychological experience?" I concluded that to a Christian believer, the answer is "No, it is so much more", despite the fact that to a humanist it is nothing more.

Our fathers were right in underlining the scriptural revelation that it is by faith in Christ that men encounter the Living God - within and beyond their skins - who know forgiveness and the dispelling of guilt and not merely explaining away the reasons why we feel guilty. I trust completely that the living invisible God has revealed himself perfectly in Jesus, whose every recorded word deed and nature, is what the mysterious God is saying, doing and being everlastingly. He has transformed my life by the Holy Spirit but I cannot demonstrate it psychologically any more than I can explain the BBC merely by analysing my radio set. Because of my faith in Jesus, I do not believe that humans are self-explanatory and I still find sense in Studdert-Kennedy's poem "*The Psychiatrist*"

He takes the saints to pieces
and labels all the parts;
He tabulates the secrets of
loyal loving hearts.
His reasoning is perfect,
His proofs as plain as paint.
He has but one small weakness,
He cannot make a saint.

Frank Cooke

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Eleven Reasons to Abolish Sunday School

Nearly every Baptist Church has a Sunday School or Junior Church where children go to be taught during the greater part of Sunday morning's hour of worship. There may also be a Boys' Brigade Bible Class or similar organisation. These are such familiar institutions that we rarely question them; nor did I until a fashion for resignation swept through the teaching staff of my church. This article sets out some of the criticisms I came up with and offers some pointers for reforming the way churches work with children.

1. Sunday School distorts the worshipping community

On Sunday morning in many churches, the end of the second hymn is the cue for a quarter of the congregation to leave. Out go the children and, to work with them, a fair proportion of the adults.

The teaching staff will probably include many of those whose presence at worship would be most valuable. Sunday School creams off those who are younger, more energetic and imaginative, good at dealing with others, mature in faith, gifted at communication, and committed enough to prepare and contribute every week.

Left behind, seated towards the back of the building, is a congregation in which the retired predominate. The active have gone to their activities; the passive remain. Out in the halls, a team of people share their gifts with small groups. In the church, one person ministers to many. So, for the majority of the main act of Sunday worship, the worshipping community is diminished and distorted. It is not a whole family.

2. Sunday School segregates the church.

Children have different attention spans from adults, different concerns, and different tastes. We cater for these by making separate provision for them. The result is that the church is fragmented. For most of worship the children are out, engaged in activities that are a mystery to the rest of the church. When they are in church they are seated in a group, often at the front where they feel most conspicuous and least included (who else likes to sit at the front?)

Those who teach the children are also isolated from the rest of the church. Unless they come twice on a Sunday they are denied preaching, Communion, and the full diet of worship. Instead, week by week, they must minister to others. Sunday School divides children from adults, and those who receive from those who give.

3. Sunday School impoverishes worship.

When the children leave the service, with them go our most valuable resources. The planning and the preparation of the teachers could benefit the whole congregation; and so could the children themselves.

It is not easy to devise worship which is both deep enough to suit adults and lively enough to appeal to children, but when we manage it we discover that children bring a priceless spontaneity, passion, and sense of fun that infects the whole congregation. Their presence can set a church free to worship in a new way. We rediscover why Jesus invited us to learn from children.

4. Sunday School damages the place of teaching in the life of the church.

Although we would probably say that a full Christian life should include both worship and teaching, the Sunday School pattern of church life militates against this. Children come into church only for peripheral portions of the service and miss out on the central acts of worship (such as preaching and Communion). Meanwhile, teaching has been displaced. It is likely to be rare within worship, and will be seen as mainly for children.

Teaching, it is implied, is only for those who, like children, are in some way incomplete as Christians.

5. Sunday School is anti-evangelistic

We say that faith must be caught not taught, yet we subject children to years of teaching about Christianity whilst insulating them from the experience of faith in practice. Children acquire a good knowledge of Biblical history, the teaching of Jesus, and the culture of New Testament times, yet never stand next to a believer moved to tears by an Easter hymn, never know the intense wonder of some celebrations of the Lord's Supper, never feel a congregation stirred by the challenge of a timely sermon. Children are likely to conclude that Christianity is something one learns rather than lives.

6. Sunday School inhibits Christian growth.

Despite its defects, some of the children in Sunday School have the beginnings of a real faith, and may have a genuine commitment. But the greatest obstacle to taking their place as part of the church is the gulf between Sunday School and adult worship.

After many years in which Sunday mornings gave them the opportunity to talk, question, and discuss with friends and church members, they have to make the transition to the entirely different pattern of adult worship. As they make the step they will leave behind the one group of church members they know well and whose care has become important. We should not be surprised when young people, instead, become Sunday School helpers and then teachers themselves, and so manage to avoid making the transition altogether. Or when they simply disappear, their faith disturbed not by secular challenges but by the forbidding readjustment we require them to make.

7. Sunday School gives the wrong message to children.

Children who are sent by their parents inevitably infer from this that the Church, like school, is something they will eventually grow out of. They will tolerate it for a few years, and may complete the curriculum, but their parents' example teaches them that church going is not part of adult life. In one hour a week the church has little chance to compete with the lessons of family life, and we do indeed find that a large majority of children who are sent rather than brought, leave before they are 18 years old.

8. Sunday School gives the wrong message to the community.

When people become parents they start to use a new set of community resources. They see far more of Health Visitors and G.Ps. They send their children to playgroup, nursery and school. They may patronize swimming clubs or ballet classes. And they may use the church.

Most Sunday Schools contain far more children than the congregation is biologically responsible for. We actively encourage parents to send their children, and are happy to look after them for an hour until they are collected. The unchurched are more likely to encounter a church as somewhere to send their children than in any other way. As a result the Church and the Christian faith are seen as primarily for children.

9. Sunday School diverts churches' investment in the future.

Most churches prize their children as the church of the future. They are not. Church growth appears to come mainly from new adult members, perhaps especially from young adults who move to an area, begin a family and start to put down roots.

Children, in contrast, are the most unstable of people. In their immediate future lies the turbulence of adolescent self-discovery, possibly three years at a distant university, then finding a job - and maybe a partner - either of which may require them to move far

away. Yet, in this high risk area of work churches unhesitatingly pour immense resources.

How many people's commitment, how many weekly hours of planning, how many expensive square feet of hall space, how many cupboards full of materials, how much heartache do we invest in children? Our major commitment of energy and ability is misdirected. It is the easiest thing in the world to get children to come to church, and the hardest to turn them into future church members.

And what does it say to children that we prize them for what they may one day become rather than for what they are today?

10. Sunday School inhibits church growth.

If everyone went to church all their lives it would not matter so much that we cram all the learning into the first dozen years and all the doing and worshipping into the rest. But what happens when the unchurched adult begins to sample church life?

Adult worship tends to presuppose Sunday School. We may run special enquirers' classes or nurture groups, but Sunday by Sunday we take too much for granted. Biblical knowledge and familiarity with the forms of worship are assumed. In fact, as we often lament, there is no good reason to assume that a newcomer to the church today will even know the Lord's Prayer. This is not a reason for putting yet more effort into teaching children, it is an inescapable argument for making teaching a central part of all worship. Because, instead, we have downgraded teaching into a children's activity we make it very hard for unchurched adults to become familiar with the faith.

11. Sunday School enshrines an un-Christian view of children.

Children are welcomed into church, but as learners. They are under instruction. We do remember that Jesus used a child as an example of the way to enter the Kingdom; but we prefer to see children as empty vessels which need to be filled by the knowledge of their elders. We make children receivers of Christianity. It is hard for children to contribute to the life of the church, unless it is to perform a song or nativity play (probably chosen and taught to them by adults). As a result, children are unlikely to feel that they are valued for themselves. They have not been welcomed for what they are, but for what we may be able to make of them.

These criticisms are mainly directed at the traditional Sunday School pattern. The invention of the term *Junior Church* marked a reform in our thinking about the place of children in the church which would accept many of the points above. Nonetheless, Sunday School, Junior Church, or Bible Class - we are still working with a school model.

A better pattern, where children are more fully included in the life and worship of the church is not easy to find, but I believe that the search for it is of great importance. I suggest a few pointers:

1. Parents of young children often consider church attendance for the first time in many years. It is important to welcome any approach and to encourage families to attend, but we should make it clear that sending children is of little value.
2. Children should feel they belong to the church, not a department of it.
3. The normal place for children in church should be with their families.
4. On at least some occasions, and for part of every service, the worship of the whole church should be so structured that children can enter into it, and not be forgotten or restricted to a children's slot.
5. Everyone should have the opportunity to contribute to the worship of the whole church. Children should be able to share their insights and interests for the benefit (not

THE BAPTIST INSURANCE COMPANY PLC
1 MERCHANT STREET
LONDON E3 4LY
Telephone No. 081-980-9411

To the Readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal

You will have read in the newspapers that insurance companies are increasing premiums significantly to offset the increase in the number and cost of claims.

We have found it necessary to make increases in three areas of our business. One arises from the change in the physical nature of the risk. A series of years since 1976 when rainfall has been below average has caused damage to buildings by subsidence of the site on which they are built. We cover this risk under our private house policies and the cost of these claims is usually very expensive. From December we are increasing premiums for house building insurances according to postcode area to reflect this risk. Some premiums will not increase whilst others will increase substantially.

The other two areas of concern arise from the change in our society. People have become much more conscious of their right to be compensated if they meet with injury or their property is damaged. Claims under our Church Liability policies continue to become more frequent and more costly. We are responding to this with a modest increase in premiums but at the same time increasing the public liability sections from £1,000,000 to £2,000,000. Requests for this higher limit are being asked for quite often.

Thirdly, as the published crime figures reflect, theft continues to increase and we are now paying over £2 in claims for every £1 of theft insurance premium. Clearly this state of affairs cannot be accepted for very long and further increases must be applied in the coming year.

I am sorry for this unhappy letter but we owe it to the Denomination to maintain the Insurance Company on a viable economic basis. I am certain from my enquiries that we shall remain competitive in a market where our increased terms are comparatively modest.

Yours sincerely

M. E. Purver

amusement) of adults.

6. It is probably essential that we provide some alternatives to normal worship, but we should prefer to divide by interest rather than age. If some children find art work more effective than listening to a sermon, so will some adults. By dividing according to interest rather than age, there is opportunity for more of the adult congregation to meet with the children.
7. Whatever work is done outside the "adult" service should relate to and benefit the whole church. That is, its results should be shared with the full congregation.
8. No one, child or adult, should be designated a "teacher" or a "learner"; we are all both.

God is not the property of the Church, nor do we have a monopoly of insight into his truth. To acknowledge this, is the best way to include children into the life of the church, and the best way to share with them and others our faith in Christ and in the God in whom all people live and move and have their being.

Stuart Jenkins

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The Relationship Between Mission Partners

There are two extremes which have to be avoided like the plague. The first is that of the Mission Partner who imposes and dominates, confident in a sense of power and superiority. The second is that of the Mission Partner who cringes and begs, confident of nothing except the need to be helped. Unless there is a central controlling factor, mission partner relationships tend to swing to these sort of extremes.

The Malvern Experience

Following the BMS BiCentenary Services of Thanksgiving and Dedication which were held in London and Kettering on 2 October 1992, there was a meeting of Mission Partners at the St. Edwards Conference Centre, Malvern, from 6 -9 October. For three days, South and Central Americans, Europeans, Africans, Asians and people from the Caribbean talked and prayed and worshipped together. Our overall theme was "The Way Ahead Together in Mission". It gave us an opportunity at times to identify the negative aspects of relationships which lose their central controlling factor but, happily, it stimulated us and gave us a vision of partnership held in place by the affirming, but humble, love of Christ.

As we discovered, yet again, the word *Partnership* does not translate too easily or acceptably into some other languages. "Too Anglo-Saxon a word" is how a Zairian pastor put it on the occasion of a special consultation between BMS and the Baptist Community of the River Zaire in 1989. *Co-operation* or *Collaboration* sound better in French, Portuguese and Spanish, so avoiding the overtones of business, which some

non-English speakers seem to associate with the idea of partnership. Mission Partners within the context of the Kingdom of God ought to have a fundamentally different relationship between them than is to be found in any High Street branch of the "Smith and Jones Partners, Ltd" variety.

During our time at Malvern, we were not engaged in pointing accusing fingers at each other, but it was sad to reflect that the spread of Christianity in parts of Africa, Asia and the Americas in the last four hundred years, has a very chequered history. "American and African colonization, by the cross and the sword, annihilated cultures and entire populations" said Mary Kalil of El Salvador. People were used as a means to an end to acquire greater wealth or greater power and control over others. Unfortunately, the Western Christian missionary sometimes becomes tainted with subtle and not so subtle variations of these attitudes. When this is so, 'partnership' or 'cooperation' ceases to be a mutual sharing and growing together. It takes on some of the negative characteristics of the hard-headed world of business and commerce that has little to do with the Kingdom of God.

It was Ram Singh from North India who reminded us that:-

"We have been inducted into the Church, the Body of Christ. Therefore we should aim at harmonious functioning with an appreciation and support for the co-workers in this great task of *Mission* (my italics). We should share with them in joy and sorrow. No hypocritical or superficial relationship, but a real commitment to one another and with living concern".

This was a plea for inter-dependence and not independency. A far cry from the "guns, gold and Gospel" confusion of the immediate post Columbus years in Central and South America or from the "commerce - and here is the Bible too" approach of some missionary endeavour in the 19th Century as it has appeared to be to later generations of Africans.

At the end of the Malvern Consultation, as is the way of such gatherings, we tried to put down on paper some of our shared feelings and insights. The Mission in which we are engaged, we said, "has its origins in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who reached out to His world in love through Jesus Christ". As a consequence of this, the people of God are called to engage in a mission to the world which is "living and dynamic" and which speaks to a sinful humankind immersed in a welter of problems, about "Good News of redemption and reconciliation". We talked about "identification with people" and "affirming the Kingdom of God", even as we recognised the challenging and, at times, painful and dangerous prophetic role that is ours in today's world. Such affirmations and talk draw from a different understanding of human relationships than comes from 'conquest and imperialism' or 'commerce and neo-colonialism'. Ram Singh's vision has its roots in this different understanding that keeps co-operation and working together in Mission within the frontiers of Kingdom values. Martin Adhikary from Bangladesh summed it up nicely by saying:-

"Theologically, our motive for mission is the love of Christ, 'for the love of Christ compels us' (2 Peter 5:14)...we should ourselves be incarnations of this wide love, for others to see and experience".

The working out of all this is the hard part, and the North American Indian prayer is not inappropriate for any of us - "Great Spirit, grant that I may not criticise my neighbour until I have walked a mile in his moccasins". Culture, theology, money, paternalism/subservice and power in decision-making are some of the sharp-edged stones that often hurt our feet and lame us as we walk along the road of cooperation in Mission.

A Wealth of Perceptions

The lighter moments which we enjoyed at Malvern, including, of all things, a Thai dance together welcoming the arrival of the rain, helped to underline what we all recognise in theory, that there is immense richness in the cultural diversity of the peoples of this world. To this was linked the matter of language. Constant translation into Portuguese and French, reminded the English speakers that there were other ways of saying things. Even those who were using English as their second or third language were able to make us aware that the Western European thought patterns are only one way of ordering our perceptions and reflections. For any of us to have looked another in the eye with condescension because of the lower level of their cultural background, would not only have been wrong, it would have been ridiculous. Of course, in the artificial setting of a Conference, it is easier to recognise this fact than it is 'out there' where the irritating rubs and dangerous clashes are more part and parcel of life. Nevertheless, the truth remains that co-operation in mission means that we have to be accepting of each other as we are - differences and all. The redeeming love of Christ touching the life of an Angolan is not the first step on his or her way to becoming a replica of a London middle-class suburban dweller or, for that matter, a Bangkok commuter. It is surprising how this sort of assumption sometimes lies simmering under the surface, in an ill-defined way, in the churches of the western world, or even within the generous supporters of a missionary society.

Although most of us at Malvern came from Baptist Churches, there were one or two from a united church background. Inevitably, this led to different outlooks. Yet, not to our surprise, we found different priorities in emphasis amongst the "true blue" Baptists amongst us. "Passionate and urgent evangelism" was the Brazilian message to us. "A pilgrimage into a fresh understanding of the Gospel via identification with suffering and poverty and the acceptance of a prophetic role," was the word to us from Central America. "A better understanding of our non-Christian neighbours for the sake of the Gospel" was one of the pleas from India. It was not that these emphases were held to the exclusion of all other definitions of the main task ahead of us in Mission, but they illustrated for all of us that profound theological thinking is going on in many different parts of the world. At Malvern, it was a learning experience and a recognition that we had a responsibility to each other to share our insights. For some, the need may have been to hear the Brazilians talk, to reflect on what the Indians or Zairians were saying. Certainly, none of us felt inclined to weigh in with our own definitions of mission and claim prime place for them, as though God's spirit had chosen us specially for the gift of true understanding.

What we were sensing in all of this, was the need to emphasise that in "co-operation and partnership" there has to be an acceptance of separate growth in the understanding of our faith and of the responsibilities which this then puts on us. The demand for orthodoxy has too frequently been a demand for one person to accept another person's outlook with the stronger person always gaining the day. It was a reaction to this sort of theological domination, that no doubt made Dr. Sint of Thailand say:

"The Thai Church wants to move beyond the cultural traditions which it imported from the West and develop a theological approach which reflects indigenous traditions and culture."

It goes without saying that there will always be plenty to discuss between 'partners' who give liberty to each other to think and reflect without shackles. At times, it may be quite difficult if serious divergences arise, but acceptance of the controlling role of the

Spirit of God ought to enable 'partners' to recognise unperceived truths in each other's thinking and so be the richer for it. Just as the Apostle Peter said to the Jerusalem Council about the Gentiles - "God gave the Holy Spirit to them just as he did to us" (Acts 15: 8) - so we must be able to make this affirmation with confidence about each other.

The Tendency of Money

During our three days at Malvern, we kept clear of money matters. Nevertheless, everyone recognised that if it had not been for BMS funding, the majority of those present would not have been able to travel to Britain for the BiCentenary celebrations and then on to Malvern. This was no great embarrassment to BMS or its guests, since everyone realised that this was a special occasion, and on special occasions generosity is acceptable without anyone having to feel demeaned. However, it did illustrate yet again that within the Mission partnership which was represented at Malvern, there is great disparity in economic wealth and power.

The problem with money is that too often "he who pays the piper calls the tune". This is so in the business world of partnership, where the person who puts the money up front wants to be assured of specific and profitable results. On the other hand, refusal to come forward with money can mean that nothing happens. In a Mission partner relationship the possible appearance or non-appearance of money on the table can give rise to these kind of attitudes, where mutual demands are put on each other by giver and receiver. The giver demands accurate requests and strict and detailed accountability. The receiver demands freedom and trust, without financial policing.

To surmount the money problem, with its tendency to introduce divisions between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', there has to be a recognition of riches that cannot be equated with money and there has to be a responsible joint approach to decisions about the use of resources in Mission. What happened at Malvern was an attempt to set in motion a better system of sharing resources amongst this particular group of partner bodies. The suggestion coming out of the Malvern Consultation is that an international group should meet to devise a workable scheme that will bring this about. Out of respect for each other as fellow human beings of equal worth and out of love for each other as sisters and brothers in Christ whose "love compels us", the Consultation wished to say a firm 'no' to domination, paternalism, sycophancy and begging. All of these things demean, corrupt and undermine the work of the Kingdom.

From Africa we were told:

"In all the evangelised countries of the world, there are people burning with desire to proclaim the Gospel".

From India we were told:

"The basis of mission is not an 'imperial power', but the 'slain lamb'"

It is into the future of our Mission Partner relationships that we carry these twin insights - renewed, burning conviction that the Gospel is for today's world and an accompanying methodology of mission-in-partnership that is based on self-denying love. No mean task.

Angus MacNeill

Vacation Term Bible Study - 1993 Advance Notice

The term will take place at St. Anne's College, Oxford,
between 24 July and 7 August

Inaugural address - 25th July, 5.15pm
Dr. John Zeisler, *Vice-Chairman, V.T.B.S.*

1st Week 26th - 30th July

Main Courses

David's dynasty: A Synoptic View

Dr. A. Graeme Auld, *University of Edinburgh*

Mark's Gospel and Oral Performance

Revd Dr John Ruddiman, *Mansfield College, Oxford*

Two lectures 28 & 29 July

A fresh Survey of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Professor Geza Vermes, *Professor of Jewish Studies, Oxford*

Single lecture: 26 July

Galatians.

Dr John Ziesler, *formerly reader in Theology, Bristol.*

2nd WEEK - 2nd - 6th August

Main Courses

Paul and Controversy.

Professor David Catchpole, *University of Exeter*

Approaching the New Testament from the Second Century

Dr Christine Trevett, *University of Wales College of Cardiff*

Two lectures: 4th & 5th August

The Samaritans

Dr Richard Coggins, *King's College, London.*

Single Lecture: 2nd August

Liberation Theology

Revd Professor C.C. Rowland, *Queen's College, Oxford*

Hebrew and Greek readings will be arranged both weeks, and there will be classes in Hebrew and N.T. Greek, at various levels, including beginners', daily, Monday to Friday.

Chairman: Miss Freda Johnson, B.D.

FURTHER DETAILS AND APPLICATION FORMS:

Hon. Sec., Miss Gloria J. Guest,

32 Stanbury Crescent, Folkestone, Kent, CT19 6PD

Book Reviews

The Unfinished Story: A Study-Guide History of the BMS, by Basil Amey (CTP, M3, 1991, 164pp, £7.00)

Encountering Other Faiths: by Alan Woodfield (CTP, M4, 1990, 140pp, £7.00)

No doubt a composite review was suggested in expectation of many fascinating connections between these two books on Christian witness: one in a multi-faith world, and the other in multi-faith Britain. In fact, it was **lack** of connection that astonished.

Both books refer to Carey's efforts to translate the *Ramayana*, underlining the need for serious study of another's religion. Both disparage 'hit and run' evangelism; Amey tells of Robert Arthington's instruction to his own private India missionaries to 'preach and pass on'. Lorrain and Savidge were castigated for lingering more than three months in the Lushai Hills (now Mizoram) in order to master the language and translate the Bible; time was short and people must be saved!

Basil does not reflect that this was a different theology from Carey's, but the continuing (and enormously effective) work of the two under BMS auspices does lead to the one deeper connection that I discovered between the two books. **Woodfield** writes of tribal religion (p.132):

"Deliverance from fear even before deliverance from sin is the first need... The evil spiritualities and powers are very real to tribal peoples. Christ can become for them the victor of perfect love, casting out demons and fear."

Amey (p109) quotes Lorrain:

"Our first message, as soon as we could speak the language, was of a Saviour from sin. But people had no sense of sin and felt no need for such a Saviour. Then we found a point of contact. We proclaimed Jesus as the vanquisher of the devil - as the One who had bound 'the strong man' and..made it possible for his slaves to be free. This, to the Lushais, was "Good News" indeed and exactly met their need."

Only at this one point (peripheral in terms of other faiths in Britain) do the two books overlap because Basil does not, surprisingly, regard beliefs as relevant to missionary history. As his title indicates, he tells a **story**, and he tells it fascinatingly. The events, the personalities and their clashes (but not their theologies), the circumstances - courage, martyrdom, Providence - great expecting and great attempting - all find a place.

Readers will, by the end, have a clear picture of the history of the BMS. The "To Think About..." boxes on every page are exceptionally stimulating. Should ultimate control be exercised on the field or by the subscribers at home? How far can missionaries stand back from politics? Can the Gospel ever be preached without appearing in some sense to "offer inducements"?

Basil must have had a very difficult task deciding what to leave out! I wished for less minute detail on the later days in India, and a fuller account of medical and agricultural work. China surely deserves a larger telling in the story. But it is a great story, well told, and it deserves to be very widely read.

By contrast, Alan Woodfield's is a textbook, which is what it needs to be. Many Baptists are meeting those of other faiths, and this book gives a very adequate and interesting introduction. Those who use this book will gain a good working knowledge of other faiths; they will be unlikely to drop clangers, and will greatly value the practical advice about how to behave when visiting others' places of worship. Readers will have learned the importance of fairness in making comparisons. All this is vital.

My chief regret is that the title too accurately describes the book. **Encounter** need not mean conflict, the tone may be cordial, but it does not describe deep relationship. All through the book there are "Think About" boxes inviting comparisons between Christianity and different aspects of other faiths. This is just what many readers will want; but they should have been discouraged! The way to "get under another's skin" is first to listen very, very patiently.

I give high marks for the clear account of Hinduism; less high for understanding Hindus. High marks for an able description of Islam: but to use the language of 'head-on clash' is not helpful.

I was once present in a conference of Muslims and Christians. Among the Christian speakers were Prof. Montgomery Watt, a very distinguished scholar of Islam, and Kenneth Cragg, formerly Bishop of Cairo. Both 'knew their stuff'; both were fair. Both held profoundly to Christian tenets that Islam denies. Yet there was no mistaking the perception among the Muslims: 'Cragg understands us, Watt doesn't.' Sadly, Kenneth Cragg, with his well-known *Call of the Minaret* among many others, is not mentioned in Alan Woodfield's book list.

But no book can ever take the place of personal contact. This book will certainly encourage and enable many to make that contact, and I hope it will be widely used.

Edward Williams

Jesus: A Question of Identity by J.L.Houlden (SPCK, 1992, 144pp, £5.99)

This is a very interesting survey of how Jesus Christ has been viewed over the course of 2,000 years of history, and as such approaches the subject from the standpoints of both history and theology. In fact, the main idea of the book might legitimately be summarized in precisely those terms; that Jesus Christ can indeed be assessed in historical terms, but that all historical knowledge remains conditional and must always be tempered with faith - it must be **interpreted history** (Chapter One). In pursuing this theme Houlden adopts a basically chronological approach and offers a thought-provoking summary of a wide variety of materials and periods of history (Chapters Two through Eight). Beginning with the Pauline letter and the Gospels, moving through the great credal declarations, the flowering of mediaeval devotional interpretations, the rise of belief in the autonomy of humankind (with its subdivision into rationalism and romanticism, reason and imagination), the rise of modern scepticism, Houlden holds the reader's attention well. The final chapter is an invitation to contemplate what the future holds for us in light of the legacy that two millennia of history and Christian belief have left us.

The author is Professor of Theology at King's College, London, a well-respected and highly creative Anglican New Testament scholar; perhaps we will not mind that he rarely strays too far from the NT in his discussion. The contents of the book were originally a series of lectures given to King's College students drawn from all disciplines, and something of the introductory nature of the material inevitably comes through. This means that although there is nothing here that is stunningly new, it does provide a fine overview. Some familiar with Jaroslav Pelikan's *Jesus Through the Centuries* (1985) will detect more than a hint of influence upon Professor Houlden's effort, but one could hardly do much better for inspiration!

One final comment is in order: it has to do with the choice of Albrecht Durer's *Self-Portrait* (1500) as a cover illustration of the book. Apart from being one of the most memorable of Durer's paintings, the choice is of import, in that Houlden deliberately associates it with humankind's search for Jesus. As he explains, the painting is "a depiction of Jesus in which the artist used himself as a model." As a metaphor of what

theology invariably entails, this provides much food for thought and serves as a suitable summary of the book as a whole.

Larry Kreitzer

A Baptist Perspective of Interfaith Dialogue: Joppa Publications, 1992, 24pp, £1.00)

"For some the word 'dialogue' is rather technical and not a little off-putting; it conjures a vision of high-powered theological debate, far removed from daily life and experience. We hope that by reading this booklet you may discover that dialogue really does begin when ordinary people rub shoulders in everyday life".

So says the preface to this booklet published last year by the Joppa Group.

Such an attempt has to be welcomed in an area where much of what is written seems to be so far removed from the experiences of ordinary Christians who live and work in a multi faith milieu.

Beginning with a short introduction giving a brief overview of the development of attitudes towards other faiths during the 19th and early 20th centuries, the first section culminates in the British Council of Churches' adoption of the "four principles of dialogue".

The major strength of this booklet for Baptists is that it attempts to bring together these four principles with five distinctive Baptists emphases in a creative conversation.

The third section looks at some practical issues surrounding the subject of dialogue and the Decade of Evangelism and the much more thorny issue of worship with people of other faiths.

The booklet is short (24 pages, including bibliography and resource list); easily readable, and draws as much from personal experiences as from academic sources; reading it would benefit anyone who meets people of other faiths in their daily life.

Quite rightly the booklet, like many of its counterparts produced by other denominations and by ecumenical structures, focuses on positive experiences of dialogue. As one living and working in a multi-faith area, I do wish this positive outlook could be balanced by an acceptance of, and a wrestling with, the problems surrounding dialogue.

This being said, it is an excellent contribution, with a good bibliography, and I would encourage you to buy it and read it.

Pat Holmes

Good Morning, Disciple by Vic Jackopson (Marshall Pickering, 1992, 240pp, £4.99)

Praying with God's People by David Pountain (Marshall Pickering, 1992, 190pp, £4.99)

What a good thing it is that God has made us all so different! Here are two books to appeal to completely different personalities! *Good Morning, Disciple* by Vic Jackopson is aimed at those new Christians who want to engage in thoughts and ideas: a devotional book to get one's mental teeth into! *Praying with God's People* by David Pountain is a treat for the heart and will be enjoyed by those who want to share the emotions and feelings of fellow-Christians as they stand alongside them in prayer.

Good Morning, Disciple is a series of daily thoughts based on the book of Colossians and during the six months of the course all the major themes of the faith will have been covered. Each day's study consists of a few words from the text, commented on by the author, and helpfully illustrated with anecdotes and stories. Technical terms and Greek

are explained in the glossary. A longer reading from Scripture follows, then suggestions for prayer, a quotation from another writer and a Bible promise for the day.

The style is chatty and personal, but the book is not an easy read and despite Vic Jackopson's assertion in his introduction that language "is a friend to those who would grow deeper in their understanding", I know new Christians who would be quite bemused by the technical phrases used, like, for example, 'The efficacy of the Cross', 'the winds of false doctrine', 'the elitist philosophies of the false teachers'. But for those who are able to engage with ideas expressed in this type of language here is six months of solid Biblical teaching.

Praying With God's People is quite different: a book of prayers to celebrate the BiCentenary of the BMS, many written by missionaries, about themselves and their own experiences.

The collection takes us from the Home church, where the initial vision for mission is caught, through training and preparation, into the experiences of the early days abroad, and the growing confidence and different questions of later years, finishing with prayers for specific groups of people, countries and occasions.

Many of these prayers are intensely personal and reveal fears and joys, hopes and doubts, that missionaries, self-effacing people that they are, would rarely speak of in person: "No, not me, definitely not me, for your mission!" "Lord, I can't wait for the children to come back.." "Food is scarce, and I'm 'different'...O Lord, I miss Tesco's" "Father, teach us never to forget that mission is about human beings" "Lord, Brazil amazes us..." "They shame us, Lord, these Christians in Angola..." "Such a tiny group of Christians in Thailand..." To pray these prayers, either as a group or as an individual, is to share the privilege of seeing into the heart of a fellow-Christian.

If I were to choose which of these two books to give to a new Christian, I would give *Praying With God's People* to anyone without any hesitation. I would be much more selective with *Good Morning, Disciple*. But maybe that says as much about my personality as it does about the two books!

Sue Thompson

20/20 Visions: The Futures of Christianity in Britain ed. by Haddon Willmer (SPCK, 1992, 164pp, £9.99)

How will Christianity in Britain change over the next 30 years? Why will it change in the ways you expect? How do the changes you expect fit with the changes you would like to see? How should we cope with the tension between what we expect and what we would like?

These are not, I suspect, the kind of questions that busy Baptist ministers have the time to ponder, so it is interesting to read the contributions of those who were asked to 'bear them in mind' in giving a series of Open Lectures at the University of Leeds, namely Adrian Hastings, Barry Rogerson, Andrew Walker, John Vincent, Kim Knott, Bernard Crick, Monica Furlong and the editor.

Several chapters mention the growing importance of the inter-faith dimension. Knott, who discusses this at length, asks whether we will just hear the different voices or allow them to make a difference. This is not unrelated to the question of tolerance which, Crick suggests, "is not complete acceptance, still less permissiveness; it is modified disapproval". (112)

Another emphasis is the growth of charismatic churches, with which Walker deals most fully, suggesting they have a winning formula. For Vincent they will represent one

strand of future Christianity, alongside the denominational church, which Willmer also believes will still form a major part of the scene, and (Vincent's own preference) a people's church as a movement of the poor.

Willmer and Furlong mention wider issues like Ecology, Furlong suggesting the need to recapture a sense of wonder: "If we find the world wonderful we shall become reluctant to destroy it." (p124) She also has important things to say about not denying our feelings, especially anger, and reminds us, fittingly, of 'God continually breaking in from the future'.

All in all, a thought-provoking book, worth reading.

John Matthews

New Publication

We would bring to your attention an important new contribution in the field of Biblical studies.

Sacred Space: An Approach to the Theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews

It was published last year by one of our leading scholars, Marie Isaacs, Head of Department of Biblical Studies, Heythrop College, London.

It is issued by Sheffield Academic Press in its JSNT Supplement Series and is priced at £35.00

Holidays 1993

Mid-Wales Cottage

Pied beauty. 'Inglenook' village cottage, south of Dolgellau, near Snowdonia. By babbling brook, not far from sand and sea. T.V. Sleeps 4/5. Tuesday to Tuesday bookings. £99 per week for those in ministry. Mrs D.F. Abraham-Williams, 13 Millbrook Road, Dinas Powys, South Glamorgan, CF6 4BZ. Tel: 0222-515884

Caravan, Bognor Regis

Bookings are now being accepted for the seven-berth fully-equipped caravan on an excellent site near Bognor Regis, belonging to the Surrey and Northeast Hants Baptist Association. Priority and special rates offered to ministers.

Apply Mrs Price, 24 Weston Lea, West Horsley, Surrey, KT24 6LG tel 04965 3905.

Bungalow, Whitstable, Kent

The bungalow, 'Seacot', at Seasalter, overlooking Whitstable Bay and the Isle of Sheppey, will again be available for Ministers and Missionaries all the year round, as it has been for the past ten years.

It is a detached bungalow on a private road, facing the sea, is comfortably furnished and centrally heated. Close to Canterbury and all Kent resorts.

We have to ask a contribution towards costs, and for a family with children of school age we will try to keep it to £46 per week, inclusive of everything, which covers heating, lighting and the rest. There is a small sliding scale for other family members or friends who accompany.

Bookings from Saturday to Saturday now being made. Details from Sydney Clark,

High Meadows, Fernfield Lane, Hawkinge, Folkestone, Kent. CT18 7AW. Tel: Hawkinge 892580