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# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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

# Editorial

The falling numbers of reported baptisms in the denomination - less than 4,000 - is disturbing, especially as membership figures hold steady. Already living with the ecumenical observation that we are the only mainline denomination in which members may remain unbaptised, we seem destined to reinforce this message. How ironic, since the sacrament gave us our very name, albeit as a term of derision. Perhaps we are seeing the religious counterpart to the turning away from marriage, and driven by that same reluctance to make a public occasion of what is seen as an essentially private and personal commitment. If so, Christian baptism has fallen victim to the ethos of extreme subjectivism said to colour the phenomenon of postmodernism.

Notwithstanding Paul's own occasional ambivalence towards it, this rite of passage is clearly expressive, in the New Testament, of the essence of what it means to be en Christo, whether one takes the road of ordinance or sacrament. If believers' baptism is indeed becoming outmoded, Baptist identity is not thereby totally lost, but it is obscured. Moreover, a vital element in the total conversion experience is missing; the opportunity to avail oneself of the grace of God in a special way; and to witness to what God in Christ has done. In view of all this, are the depressing figures a reflection of what is passing, these days, for "sound teaching"? We can, of course, all be selective, but surely not on something as central as Christian initiation. In years to come, how many "Baptists" will be able to cry with assurance, as Luther did, baptizatus sum ("I was baptised"), whenever life comes perilously close to tearing them from Christ?

In this edition, we have articles on the two dominical commands, baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the first, John Weaver reviews the practice of believers' baptism, asks some searching questions and poses some theological issues arising out of easily envisaged case studies. Next, Vic Jackopson provides an insight into a ministry characterised by a burden for outsider people groups which most churches just do not reach. We are always pleased to feature articles from outside the United Kingdom, particularly since our publication is truly international in circulation. On this occasion, Valdis Teraudkalns, of Latvia, develops a theology of the Lord's Supper by means of symbol, sign and presence.

Whenever possible, we attempt to keep the U.K. readership apprised of legislation likely to affect church life. In this case John Beaumont provides a helpful article on the implications of the 1993 Charities Act. Following this, Keith Jones, at our request, reviews many of the specialist groupings and networks which cover a wide field of concern and witness to a lively constituency! Perhaps you would like to plug into one or more of them. Our final contribution is the second part of Anthony Thacker's well-timed article on co-habitation. How do we respond to it in the context of marriage and church membership?

# Reconsidering Believers' Baptism

Having been asked to present the Baptist view of believers' baptism to a group of Anglican ordinands, I thought that it might be an informative exercise to repeat the discussion with my fellow Baptists.

So there I was "a Daniel in the Lion's den" perhaps?, or even undergoing a "baptism of fire" along with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? I began my presentation in this way: the t-shirt sold at *Spring Harvest* says "Baptists are wet all over" but Orthodox babies would probably cry out "so are we", if they could talk or understand what is being said. That, of course, is the crux of the matter! from a Baptist perspective the debate focuses on grace and faith and an interpretation of the New Testament practice and understanding. Briefly, let us consider a Baptist view of Scripture and tradition.

## 1. Jesus

Baptists do not see the baptism of John as the mandate for believers' baptism. John's baptism is for the forgiveness of the sins of Israel; a witness to the powerful baptism in Spirit and fire, which the Messiah will exercise at his coming. George Beasley-Murray is right to assert:

"Jesus came to the baptism of John, among the penitents of Israel responsive to John's proclamation, to begin the messianic task in its fullness as he interpreted it from the writings of the Old Testament"<sup>1</sup>

The foundation of Christian baptism is understood in the light of the total redemptive action which the baptism of Jesus set in motion. So we recognise that Christian baptism was commanded (Matthew 28:18f) when reconciliation through the Cross and Resurrection had been accomplished. This certainly appears to have been the understanding of the Early Church, as represented in the central writings of the Apostle Paul.

It is because we understand that Jesus, the Messiah, not only identified with sinners in his baptism in the Jordan, but also continued with the same process of identification in the Cross and Resurrection, that we can share his sonship. Jesus valued baptism enough to encourage it in his ministry. More important than this, the Kingdom was being realised in his ministry, through forgiveness and deliverance. His baptism was an anticipation of this.

## 2. Dominical Command

We are faced with the question of whether the command of Matthew 28:18f is in the words of Jesus or whether it represents the language of the Church after Pentecost? The use of the trinitarian formula may lead us to ask this question, especially as this formula is absent from the Acts of the Apostles. However, there is merit in the conclusion of Stauffer:

"How this Christian practice of baptism originated is a puzzle that only begins to be solved if we come at last once more to conclude that the tradition of the risen Lord giving a missionary charge is to be taken seriously".<sup>2</sup>

When we consider the question: how do you make disciples? the New Testament answers: by preaching the Gospel. To the question: How does a disciple become part of the church? The answer is: baptism followed by ongoing instruction (Acts 2:38-42)

It is recognised by Hebrew scholars that "baptism in the name of", in Semitic language, means an entering into a relationship of belonging. Therefore, baptism in the name of the Trinity, or within a trinitarian formula, is an entering into relationship with the triune God.

### **3. Acts of the Apostles**

Baptism, in the Acts of the Apostles, was seen as: a response to the gospel; it was in the name of Jesus; it involved a confession of Jesus as Lord; and was a public act of submission to Christ (Acts 2:38-40) But it is not as simple as this; there are many questions of practice and understanding that are left unsolved by the various incidents recorded in the Book of Acts. When were the 120 in Acts 1 and 2 baptised? - on the day of Pentecost; baptism in Acts 8 is not connected with the Spirit; Apollos in Acts 18 does not know a Christian baptism; the men of Ephesus in Acts 19 only know the baptism of John. Yet Paul's experience (Acts 9) and his writings (Romans 6: 1-11 and 1 Corinthians 12:13) assume baptism as the norm of entry into the church.

There is also the issue of the connection of the Spirit and baptism. The Spirit is the gift to all who repent and are baptised (Acts 2:38-39), and it is presupposed that everyone who is baptised possesses the Spirit (Acts 19:2). Yet baptism is presented as primarily initiatory and only secondarily is it empowering. One does not enter the new age more than once, but may be empowered or "filled" by the Spirit many times. James Dunn concludes that:

"Water baptism can be a vehicle of faith, but it is not a vehicle of the Spirit. Faith reaches out to God in and through water baptism; but God reaches out to people and meets that faith in and through his Spirit."<sup>3</sup>

It is the giving by God of the Spirit that makes someone a Christian and nothing else (Acts 2,8,10,18,19).

### **4. Paul and a Developing New Testament Theology**

We can begin with Romans 4, not Romans 6, we'll come to that later. Baptism in the New Testament is seen as a sign and seal of the new covenant in a similar way as circumcision was seen as a sign and seal of the old covenant, made out of a faith commitment. In Romans 4, Paul focuses on Abraham (not Moses) because God's acceptance of Abraham precedes circumcision - therefore faith precedes circumcision, and therefore circumcision is a sign or expression of the faith that precedes it. In Judaism, faith is demonstrated in the obedience of the faithful to the Mosaic Covenant, but in Christianity, Christ has replaced this - he is the *telos* of the law (Matthew 5:17-20; Romans 10:4) - the fulfilment, completion or perfection of the law. Christianity is based on faith (Romans 3:21-31) and baptism is seen as an expression of faith.

In Romans 6, Paul uses baptism as an illustration of Christian commitment, of living the Christian life; he is assuming that all Christians are baptised (cf 1 Corinthians 12:13). Romans 6:1-14 essentially appears to be an exposition of "*Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase.*" Paul relates the baptized Christian to the death and resurrection of Jesus, involving him or her in the actual dying and rising of Christ himself. It involves a corresponding event in the life of the baptized believer, whereby an end is put to their old God-estranged life and a new life begins in Christ, his Kingdom and his Spirit. It is a death to self and a rising to new life in Christ, of which baptism is the significant event.(cf Mark 8:34). Beasley-Murray rightly says:

"The believers come to God through the Christ of the Cross and Resurrection and God meets them in the Christ of the Cross and Resurrection - an act of grace".<sup>4</sup>

Beasley-Murray then suggests that because it is believers who are baptized, at their own request, we have to move on a further stage, for the sinful life is renounced and by grace discipleship begins. In Paul's theology of baptism the divine action and human responsiveness are inseparable and enable baptism to be what it is.<sup>5</sup>

The Christian life is rooted in participation in the event of Golgotha / Easter Day through union with Christ - joined to Christ is a death sentence on the old way of life and a seeking of grace for a new existence and conduct, which is possible in the power of the Spirit.

Two other passages underline the points made above. In Galatians 3:26-27, believers are seen to be heirs of Abraham through faith. Their experience of baptism is the experience of faith; and faith receives what grace gives. The old life is stripped off and they share the sonship of Christ. In Colossians 2:11-12, Paul states that there is no need for circumcision; they have been baptized into the circumcision of Christ on the Cross, which is the stripping away of the whole body, not just one little part. Baptism is the unity of the believer in the suffering and death of Christ, and also unity in his Resurrection.

### **From Church Tradition**

It is believed by New Testament scholars that catechesis was part of baptismal preparation for the early church, and 1 Peter and the Gospel according to Mark have been suggested as material used in such instruction. Infant baptism becomes more common from the time of Cyprian (AD 246-258). The case of sickly infants and the question of original sin encouraged the growth of the practice of infant baptism during the 3rd-5th centuries. With the adoption of infant baptism, catechesis became a preparation for confirmation.

The Reformers held that the word and sacrament belonged together. Luther said that a sacrament was a word of promise combined with a sign instituted by God - the promise of forgiveness of sins as a divine word; a word that is received and accepted in faith - it is not the water of baptism that forgives sins, but the word of God connected with the water.<sup>6</sup>

Calvin taught that a sacrament is "an external sign, by which the Lord seals in our consciences his promise of goodwill towards us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and we in our turn testify our piety towards him, both before himself and before angels, as well as men."<sup>7</sup> The elements become sacraments when the word is added. In attacking the theological inconsistency of re-baptism, both Luther and Calvin were driven to defend infant baptism. They did not find this in Scripture but in church tradition - Luther implied that God could not have allowed something incorrect to have existed for over 1,000 years<sup>8</sup> - to us an ironic statement for one who had attacked a Church that had done just that! he believed that God secretly enabled babies to understand the word.

The central focus of a sacrament is an encounter with God. According to Duncan Forrester, Edward Schillebeeckx<sup>9</sup> sees sacraments as loving encounters between the believer and God, which, like loving encounters between two human beings, reveals truths which are not apparent on the surface or accessible to the detached objective observer. To understand sacraments as ways of introducing and intensifying the experience of encounter with God in Christ involves the necessity of holding

together the Word and Sacrament, as the Reformers also maintained. Without the Word the symbols would mystify rather than reveal the mystery of god's purposes in Christ.

There are a number of questions that arise from the development of baptism in church history. Firstly, did the first century church find itself in a missionary situation, which naturally led to believers' baptism? Secondly, does the emergence of a Christian New Covenant community (like the Old Testament Covenant community) make infant baptism both a possibility and a safe and justifiable development? Thirdly, as the Church again finds itself in a missionary situation does this revive the need for believers' baptism? Lastly, we might ask if the definition of "Church" is at the heart of the debate? One fundamental Baptist principle is the Radical Reformation's understanding of a believers' church.

## **6. A Believers' Church Today**

One central issue for a believers' church today, especially in ecumenical dialogue, is the relation of faith and grace. We need to understand in what sense the sacraments are a means of grace, and ask whether their efficacy depends on faith. In the New Testament, Paul explained grace as the free forgiving love and mercy of God. In the Middle Ages, this became seen by some to function in a mechanical way - God's grace was infused through the sacraments. It was this misuse or misunderstanding of the sacraments that drove the Reformers back to Scripture, where they recovered the Pauline view. Protestants would suggest that the efficacy of the sacrament depends on the faith of the recipient, but this has the inherent problem of making the human response prevenient. As faith is a gift of God it may be better to suggest that the sacraments operate through human faith. They are a means of grace employed by God in his relationship with us, although we would not wish to suggest that they initiate this relationship.

In preparing candidates for baptism we could suggest four sessions: i) *Baptism and the Cross* - including the recognition of sin; the need for repentance; and trusting in Christ alone for forgiveness and new life. ii) *Baptism and the Spirit* - the promise of the Spirit to all who become Christians, iii) *Baptism and the Church* - membership of Christ means membership of his people. iv) *Baptism and the Kingdom* - baptism is taking on the blessings and responsibilities of the rule of God for our Christian discipleship.

In a typical Baptismal Service, it would not be our usual practice for the candidate to renounce sin, flesh, world and the devil and all his works, although I believe that this would strengthen baptismal practice within our Baptist churches. There would instead be an account of conversion, which would include a penitent response to the Gospel, followed by an affirmation of faith in God, and a vow of commitment to serving Christ in his Church and in the world. As baptism is into Christ, reception into membership, together with the celebration of the covenant community in the eucharist, would be normal practice. We are incorporated, by baptism, into Christ and his body on earth, the Church.

## **7. Questions for Baptists to Consider**

There are a number of questions and areas of weakness in our theology that Baptists need to address. The first is that of our approach to children within the church. How are unbaptized children to be viewed? At what age is an expression of faith acceptable? Do we have the problem of treating young, undecided children as Christians when we are not prepared to mark them as Christians through baptism?

Is there a place for the unbaptized within the Church?

Are Baptists, as non-Baptists often say, in danger of making faith a work in our emphasis on believers' baptism? Are signs of grace looked for before the means of grace is given?

If baptism is once-for-all, do we have to differentiate between the "efficacy" and the "validity" of baptism? Does validity only depend on correct performance of ritual? If it were not efficacious we need to ask serious questions about grace and faith - is grace absent when faith is absent?

Can re-baptism, as non-Baptists might describe the baptism of a person previously baptized as an infant, be allowed? If so, on what grounds? When, as a believer, the infant baptism is confirmed in both words and lifestyle, we may need to take great care lest we run the danger of denying grace, if we insist on further baptism as a believer.

What theological questions are being raised in the following case studies:

1. A group of church leaders in a Baptist church are to discuss the baptizing of a mentally handicapped person. As that person's mental age has been described as five, some church members are asking questions about the possibility of describing this as "believers' baptism", questioning this handicapped person's capacity for faith.
2. The husband of a deacon asks to become a member of an open membership Baptist church. He says that he was baptized and confirmed in an Anglican church at the age of 17 years, but now wishes to be baptized by total immersion as previously he had been "sprinkled".
3. The husband of a leader within an open membership Baptist church has asked for church membership. He has always been an attender of the church and has not been christened or baptized in any other church. He asks to become a church member by the profession of his faith - at his age he does not want to go through "the performance of baptism", he just wants to commit himself to the church.
4. A woman in her early thirties comes to a Baptist minister to ask for baptism. In the initial conversation she discloses that she was baptized as a teenager. Since then she has lapsed in her faith, had a number of casual sexual relationships, and was date-raped by the last man she went out with. Now, some years later, she says that she has discovered Jesus Christ, afresh, as her saviour. She would like to be baptized and make a fresh start.

**John Weaver**

**Footnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> George Beasley-Murray: *Baptism in the New Testament* (Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1962) p.55
- <sup>2</sup> quoted in Beasley-Murray *Baptism in the New Testament* p88; see also *New Testament Theology*, E.T. 1955, p160
- <sup>3</sup> James D G Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London, SCM, 1970), pp 224-229
- <sup>4</sup> George Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* op cit, p142
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p143
- <sup>6</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia Press, 1966) pp351, 369
- <sup>7</sup> John Calvin: *Institutes: 4:14:1* quoted by Ronald Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1953) p.131
- <sup>8</sup> Paul Althaus op cit pp 360-361
- <sup>9</sup> D. Forrester, J.I.H McDonald & G. Tellini, *Encounter with God* (Edinburgh, T and T Clark, 1983) p.60



# Mission to the Outsider

It was then a very respectable church. The cream of South London Baptists were to be found in their hundreds listening, Sunday by Sunday, to one of Britain's outstanding preachers. The sermon was about talents. To me it was all new and very moving to hear. "You all have a talent. God has gifted each and every one of you to minister. Discover what God wants you to do and do it."

I was just out of prison and still serving out my time in a probation hostel, but, undaunted, I approached one of the important looking men of the church and asked if I might do something.

"What do you do?", he asked, with a haughtiness natural only to those who haven't yet made it anywhere except in the church.

"Nothing", I quaked.

"Come, come lad: Were you not listening to Mr Goodwin? We all have a talent".

I had none. But I was a good scrapper. After all, I had survived homelessness on city streets, even prison. "Perhaps I could teach the young people how to box."

"Oh no. We don't do that kind of thing here. Anyway, if you want to do anything you must first ask the deacons."

Deacons! I had no idea what they were. I thought they were something which people burnt on hillsides to say trouble was coming. My superior volunteered to make representation for me. But when the answer came a few Sundays later I was devastated.

"Certain parents have given us to understand that they do not want their children led by an ex-convict." It was like a sock in the eye. I retreated to the prayer chapel, fell on my knees and sobbed. No future for the likes of me here, I thought. There I prayed to God that He would save me from going back to the streets.

Ironically, it was that same church which sent me back to the streets; not to crime but to preach. It was only a few weeks later that another member invited me to go with him to the London Embankment Mission, where we served soup to dozens of tramps and homeless men.

"Go and give 'em the gospel", says John Pudney.

"Who me? I'm not a minister".

"You don't have to be. Just tell someone about Jesus".

I looked nervously along the line and was relieved when I spotted a little old man almost bent over double with arthritis.

I sauntered over and croaked, "Ere mate, I'm supposed to give ya' the gospel".

"Yea, I know", he says without lifting his head, "I gets it every week".

"Well", says I, "You know more about it than I do. To be honest, I don't even know where to start."

"That's it mate. You're on your way".

He looked up for the first time and though he looked so much like any other down and out, to me, it was as if he was a messenger from heaven. I knew from that moment that my life would be spent telling others about Jesus.

## A Developing Ministry

USA. America was in turmoil in the year of '68. Martin Luther King had been shot. Race riots, anti-war demonstrations and psychedelic drugs. I worked the Haight-Ashbury, Sunset Boulevard, Bourbon Street, Peachtree and Greenwich Village. By the time I returned to England to take up my first pastorate at East Hill in Wandsworth, I had become quite a radical.

Space does not permit to tell of the blundering inconsistencies and appalling lack of any disciplined philosophy of ministry which dogged the next six years. It should have been a recipe for disaster to have a couple of hundred skin-heads and Hell's Angels meeting at the same church, let alone mixing them on the same premises with one of the largest Boys' Brigades in London. Whatever had been achieved in reaching, befriending, even baptising these street kids was in danger of being lost because I had more zeal than wisdom, more ego than intelligence.

It was not until I moved to my second church and on to directing Evangelism Explosion, that my burning desire for the total stranger was matched with a proper appreciation of, and love for, the Church. How could I have missed the point for so long. The Church is God's primary base for evangelism. However enthusiastic one person may be; however evangelistic; however successful, it is the church, the local body of believers, who must be loved, nurtured and trained to become a disciplined, caring body reaching out into the world.

The birth of Hope Now Ministries in 1985 coincided with this much clearer understanding; and the publication of my book, *Good Morning, Disciple*, in which I seek to unwrap Paul's theology of Mission, details my thinking.

In studying Colossians, on which the book is based, I came to see the importance of priorities put in the right order. God first, God's people second, and God's world last. Too often my order had been the world, God and then the Church a poor third.

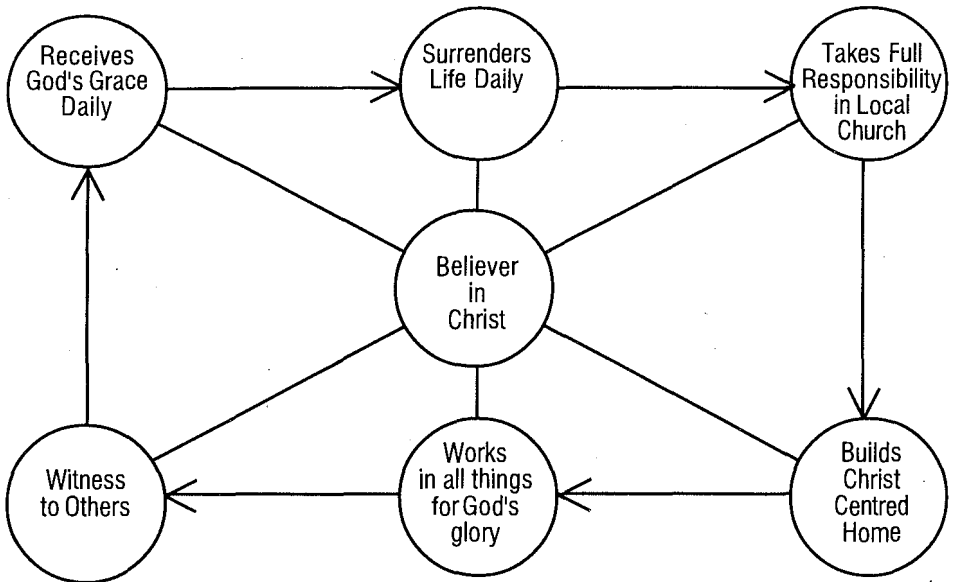
Each of these priorities has two active ingredients. Our relationship with God is based on receiving, not once, but continually, His grace. But this is matched by our response of self sacrifice toward Him: daily worship. (Romans 12)

Our relationship with God makes us members of His body, the Church, in which all former distinctions and prejudices are sacrificed on the altar of oneness in Christ. (Colossians 3) Here, we learn that in spite of the many differences, such as race, education, social status, wealth or the plethora of things which, in the world, tend to divide, we must learn to get along by forgiving when it is necessary, serving selflessly and loving actively.

The second ingredient in relation to God's people is the development of Christian homes: families in which the love of Christ becomes the test of behaviour.

Only when priority one is consistent can priority two become a possibility. Only when church and family are functioning as God intended does priority number three become truly feasible. God's world is to be reached through the active ingredients of both work and witness, but unless the fruit of that outreach is brought into a healthy church where its members are at one with each other and their families, the fruit will not grow to bear more fruit. (See diagram opposite)

With such a philosophy / theology of mission, Hope Now Ministries seeks to work with local churches. Currently, much of that activity is in the Ukraine where it supports Baptist believers in several churches as they take advantage of the new freedoms to preach the gospel.



### The Ukraine and Prison Ministry

Ukrainian Christians have much to teach the western church about devotion to God and family life, but they have been weak in the areas of love within the body and toward the outsiders. Therefore, we have focused our attention on these areas of weakness

My preaching is deliberately targeted on topics such as love, tolerance, gossiping, how to forgive, accepting newcomers, indeed anything which encourages them to be more Christ-like toward each other. This may not, as first, appear to be the work of an evangelist, but without a dramatic change within some churches new life will simply shrivel.

The urgency of the hour, however, does not permit us the luxury of perfecting the church before mission. Both processes must work simultaneously. Therefore, we facilitate the churches by assisting them to run summer camps for children, building new churches, establishing new ministries such as music schools, language schools and prison visitation.

Such has been the success of the latter that we are now working directly with the believers in Prison number 62. Using the three priority model, we are building a church on the inside. Murderers, rapists, racketeers and robbers have a vibrant relationship with God, and have created the most amazingly loving relations with each other. Even at a distance, through letters and occasional visits from their families, wives and children are seeing the change and, in some cases, are themselves becoming Christians.

Now we are at the most difficult stage. How do these men take their responsibility towards God's world? Their world is confined to three thousand inmates. They live, 240 men to a cell, with little or no supervision. The cells are overcrowded, smelly, dirty and violent, and yet the believers are learning how to serve by cleaning up the mess of others. Every time I visit there are more men,

new in the faith, who want to be baptised in the rubbish skip which serves as their unusual baptistry.

The governor of the prison has been so impressed with the change which has come over the prison that he has gained permission from the Minister of the Interior in Kiev to allow us to build a 350 seat church and recreation facility so that the church will become the focal point of the prison.

Hope Now Ministries also delivers humanitarian and medical aid to hospitals and orphanages, but always through the local Baptist churches so that the church is seen to be caring for its community.

If you would like more information about Hope Now you may contact Vic Jackopson at 14 Chetwynd Drive, Bassett, Southampton, SO16 3HZ (tel 01703 - 768900).

**Vic Jackopson**

## **In Procession with Corpus Christi**

During the time I spent as a visiting research student at Northern Baptist College, I used to attend a nearby Anglo-Catholic parish. I was touched by the beauty of the worship and the building itself. One of the services has remained in my memory as especially meaningful. It was the feast of Corpus Christi - a festival which dates from the mid-thirteenth century. From the fourteenth century the major part of the feast became a procession after Mass. In those times the feast was aimed as the veneration of the Eucharist and was linked with the doctrine of transubstantiation. I came to the service wondering what I could expect from this highly doctrinaire Roman Catholic feast. However, I felt not an observer but a participant. The sermon was at the same time biblical and modern - the minister spoke of Corpus Christi as Christ's physical body, the universal Church, and Christ's presence in the Eucharist. It was not an attempt to define the Eucharist but an open invitation to be part of this acted salvation drama. I had to think about views present in my own denomination where theology of the Eucharist has not been well developed. It has often been formed as the reaction against distorted sacramentalism. As a result, the role of the Eucharist has often been minimized. At the same time, in practice, many Baptists would not hesitate to go along with the belief of ancient churches in the real presence of Christ in the Communion. Moreover, the postmodern shift from the written text to the visible and active message puts the sacraments in another light.

### **Symbol and Sign**

I understand that, for some, such an introduction can sound pro-Catholic. Therefore, I would like to remind readers that modern Catholic theology has brought new insights which can be interesting also for Protestants. For example, E. Schillebeeckx speaks of transsignification - "the new significance of the form of bread and wine means that the believer actively gives the phenomenal a place in his orientation towards, and his openness to, what really appears - the "body of Christ" in the sacramental form of nourishment". It goes back to P. Schoonenberg and L. Smits from the Netherlands who, in the sixties, published some articles about transsignification (called also 'transfinalization').

Before touching on these issues, we should carefully investigate the basic meaning of terms we often interchangeably use in connection with Communion - sign and symbol. Of course, the distinction between sign and symbol, in practice, is not always clear. However, there is a difference between these terms - the symbol is closer to the thing signified. If nothing else, the etymology of the word 'symbol', which comes from certain usage in ancient law, points to that - two parts of a ring; staff or tablet served, when they were brought together, to identify legitimate guests, messengers and partners. As P. Tillich has written, "while the sign bears no necessary relation to that to which it points, the symbol participates in the reality of that for which it stands."<sup>2</sup>

Baptist understanding can be linked with the Reformed as well as Anabaptist tradition. Adherents of these traditions have often been accused of downgrading sacraments and promoting 'real absence'. In order to break free from stereotypes in which we have trapped ourselves, we should look into the past. For example, the document written by Calvin and presented to a Diet of the German Empire has a chapter with the title "Of the Real Receiving of the Body and Blood of the Lord", where we can find the following words: "Under the symbols of bread and wine our Lord presents us with his body and blood, and we are spiritually fed upon them, provided we do not preclude entrance to his grace by our unbelief"<sup>3</sup>. He also agrees with the Augustinian concept of the sacrament as the visible word because "it represents the promises of God as in a picture".<sup>4</sup> But this word is not a magical incantation but the word received in faith. Here again, Calvin goes along with thoughts we can find in the early works of Luther: "No eating can give life except that which is by faith" (*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*<sup>5</sup>). Calvin has a dynamic concept of sacrament; for him it is a meeting of persons. In spite of the gap which exists between God and human beings, Communion opens to us horizons of experiencing the close and intimate fellowship between the great invitee and the invited. Concerning Anabaptists, there are challenging insights in the works of Pilgrim Marpeck who writes of the Lord's Supper as co-witness of the gospel. For him, Eucharist is "a true participation in the suffering and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ".<sup>6</sup>

I would describe Eucharist as encounter between God's especially focused grace and human faith. It is a celebration of the real presence of Christ. What does it mean?

## **Presence**

First, it is Christ's presence among the community of faith. As Peter Forsyth has put it, "The essence of the Sacrament in the Church in the common act, the act of community inhabited by the 'common person' of Christ".<sup>7</sup> We, as Baptists, can contribute to the richness of this aspect by showing how, at the Lord's table, lay presidency is not an exception to the priesthood of all believers if it is done by people authorized by the local church. This principle should not be a theological problem for us. Let us remember also that, as a corporate rite, the Eucharist brings together our own particular, often broken, story of life to the story of Christ. We can get from it a sense of self-understanding and of community. Thus Eucharist transcends the boundaries of commemorative event and brings to us and among us, healing. The Church is led beyond its own present existence and it is called to be an open fellowship. The Eucharist is not a symbol of exclusiveness designed for a self-righteous religious ghetto.

In spite of the importance of this first aspect, we should not deny another aspect,

i.e. Christ's presence in the elements. It does not mean we go along with the medieval dogma of transubstantiation, which has more to do with Greek philosophy than with biblical theology. Likewise, definitions given by Protestant orthodoxy are products of Western rationality. Modern use of the concept of sign and symbol help us to grasp new dimensions of these old words. As Gadamer has written, "the representational function of a symbol is not merely to point to something that is not present. Instead, a symbol manifests as present something that really is present...it makes the past itself present again and causes it to be recognized as valid."<sup>8</sup> in this sense Christ's presence in the bread and wine is real.

Sacramental symbols cannot be reduced to being mere signals or sign-posts. Instead of robbing ourselves by denying everything which is not a 'pure' rational religion, we should recognize God's presence in sacraments. The sacraments prove to be real symbols established by God and moulded for human beings in the history of salvation.

**Valdis Teraudkains**

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<sup>1</sup> E. Schillebeeckx *The Eucharist*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1988, p.149

<sup>2</sup> P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 1. Digswell Place: James Nisbet & Co Ltd, 1968, p.265

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises* p.158

<sup>4</sup> *Institutes* 4:14:6

<sup>5</sup> *Luther's Works*, Vol 36, Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1980, p.19

<sup>6</sup> John D. Rempel: *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, Waterloo: Herald Press, 1993, p.120

<sup>7</sup> P. Forsyth, *Lectures on the Church and the Sacraments*, London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1917, p. 223

<sup>8</sup> H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.136

# Baptist Churches and the Charities Act 1993

Baptist churches have complex legal structures which experienced lawyers find hard to understand, and so it is no wonder that Baptist ministers and deacons find it daunting grappling with the legal basis on which Baptist churches operate.

A Baptist church in law is a charity (or more usually a "bundle" of charities), and as such has all the advantages of relief from tax and business rates. However, there is no general relief from VAT. A church, like all other charities, is subject to the general requirements of charity law, the main purposes of which are brought together in the Charities Act 1993.

A Baptist church is, in law, "an unincorporated charitable association", that is to say, it has no legal existence apart from its members. This means that all its property or assets must be held by trustees. The trustees of the church's premises and its manse are usually one of the Baptist Trust Corporations but many churches still have private trustees. The use of private trustees is sometimes retained in the mistaken belief that this gives the church more independence. Experience shows that this is usually the opposite. The "premises" trustees function as "custodian" trustees until they are called upon to take some action, for example a sale, on behalf of the church. The bank accounts of the church and any other investments, although they may be in the name of the church, are operated by named persons on the authority of the diaconate which usually is the pastor and the deacons, which body is the "managing trustees" of the church. For the majority of purposes the members of the diaconate are regarded in law as the "charity trustees" of the church.

Baptist churches are usually governed by a set of rules, sometimes called the church constitution. However, historically, most Baptist churches have written into the trust deed for the church premises what amounts to a basic constitution, which sets out, among other matters, the doctrines to be held and proclaimed, the qualifications of the minister, deacons and members, how the premises are to be used or sold and what happens if the church fails. The provisions in a church's trust deeds cannot be contradicted in the church's rules which generally deal in more detail of how the church is to be administered and which detail can usually be amended from time to time as provided for in the rules.

## **Trustee Status**

The law has always regarded the persons who actually have the day-to-day control of the running of a charity as the "charity trustees", regardless of whatever name is applied to such persons. In a Baptist church there may well be "charity trustees" apart from the diaconate. If separate funds or property are held by a specially appointed committee who administer these funds, for example for young people's work, this committee will be the "charity trustees" for these funds. In some circumstances these funds will be regarded as "special trusts" of the church and in other cases the funds will be a separate charity from the church. Even if funds or projects are, in law, separate charities, it is sensible for the committees or persons who operate the activities to be appointed by and report to the church meeting. As a general rule, all activities which are under the direction of the church meeting, via the diaconate, should be regarded as coming within the charity envelope of the church. The diaconate must take care that, if within this envelope it is operating "special trusts",

the funds are applied for the appropriate purposes. From time to time the church meeting may decide to “ earmark” or designate funds for a specific purpose, but if such designation can be changed by the church meeting the funds are not “restricted”, as understood by charity law. Some funds, for example, those coming from the sale of part of the church site, will be regarded as “permanent capital”, and although the income may be used by the church for its general purposes, the capital can only be used as provided by the church’s trust deed. The church may promote a special project and it is likely that the committee responsible for the project will be “charity trustees” of this special project. Where a church does undertake a “social project”, for example a playgroup, clothing exchange, a bookshop or care scheme for the elderly, it is sensible for this activity to be set up as a separate charity with a recognised structure so that it can be clearly seen who are the “charity trustees”, and under what authority they operate and who appoints the trustees. If the project involves employment of staff, purchase or lease of property it might well be appropriate to form a charitable company (usually a company limited by guarantee). By this means the “trading” liabilities of the charity trustees are limited to the assets of the company.<sup>2</sup>

“Charity trustees” have a duty to make sure that the charity is being conducted in accordance with the trusts or constitution of the charity and they must always act reasonably and prudently in all matters relating to the charity, bearing in mind the interest of that particular charity. They should exercise the same degree of care in dealing with the administration of the charity as a prudent business man would exercise in managing his own affairs or those of someone else for whom he was responsible. A charity trustee is generally not entitled to receive any payment or any personal benefit from the charity’s funds, unless this is provided for in the charity’s trust documents. However, charity trustees can receive proper reimbursement for all their out of pocket expenses. Although a Baptist minister is usually one of the charity trustees of a Baptist church, it is accepted practice that this does not disqualify the minister from receiving a stipend. However, it should be the invariable practice that when a minister’s remuneration is discussed, either by the deacons or the church meeting, the minister should be absent and not take part in the discussion or decision.

The Charities Act provides that a person cannot serve or continue to serve as a charity trustee (and this therefore applies to a minister or deacons) if that person:

- has been convicted at any time of an offence involving deception or dishonesty, unless the conviction is legally regarded as spent.

- is an undischarged bankrupt or a person who has made a composition with creditors and has not been discharged

- has at any time been removed by the Charity Commissioners or by the Court from being a trustee because of misconduct

- is disqualified from being a company director

- has failed to make payments under a County Court Administration Order

In certain circumstances the Charity Commissioners can waive these requirements, and if a waiver is required in respect of a Baptist church the recommendation is that this application should be submitted through the Baptist Union.

Charity trustees may, under certain circumstances, be personally liable for obligations of the charity if they have acted in excess of their authority, or applied charitable funds for purposes not allowed for under the trust they are administering, or they have entered into obligations which the charity cannot meet. No one should



be put off from taking on the responsibilities of a charity trustee unless that person has reason to believe that the other trustees are operating the charity without proper regard to its trust provisions or have or are about to enter into obligations which a charity may not be able to meet. A charity trustee will normally be entitled to an indemnity from the assets of the charity for any liability undertaken on behalf of the charity. The problem arises if the charity has not sufficient assets. The Charity Commissioners have the right to take proceedings for the recovery from the trustees personally if funds are lost to a charity as a result of breach of trust, but such action would only be taken in cases where there was a significant disregard for the proper operation of the charity. The clear message for a minister or the deacons is that they should make sure before any obligations are entered into, for example, a building contract, that the funds are in hand or that there is available to the church a loan if the expected giving to fund the project does not materialise. Great care also should be taken to ensure that the provisions of the church's trust deed and rule are complied with particularly in connection with any significant project, for example, making sure to call a special meeting to pass the necessary resolution authorising a building project or the purchase of a property. The diaconate must be careful to ensure that funds are only used for "charitable purposes" which means, for example, that a charity must always seek the best possible bargain or return and cannot therefore "be generous" with charity funds. It is the responsibility of the diaconate to see that the funds under its control are correctly managed and invested and that they are applied in accordance with the terms of the trusts on which they are held.

### **Charity Registration**

Charity trustees, if empowered by the trusts under which they operate, may insure themselves out of the funds of the charity against personal liability arising from acts properly undertaken in the administration of the charity or for acts undertaken which are in breach of trust but made under an honest mistake. There is usually no power in the church's rules of a Baptist church for this to be done and for ordinary Baptist church activities insurance is not necessary. On the other hand, it is very important for the diaconate, as the charity trustees, for the church to make sure there are adequate insurance policies in force for the buildings, contents and for public and employers' liability. Failure in this respect could involve personal liability.

Most charities are required to be registered with the Charity Commissioners, except very small charities, that is those which do not have the use of occupation of land, and have no permanent capital and income from all sources which does not, in aggregate, amount to more than £1,000 a year. No charity is required to be registered in respect of a registered place of worship, but this exception only relates to the property trusts relating to the church building, and not the general or other funds of the church. However, under the provisions of the Charities (Exception from registration) Regulations 1996, Baptist churches are excepted from the need to register in respect of their normal church activities. If a church is sponsoring some special social project which is likely to be of a permanent nature and has an income of more than £1,000 per annum, this project, as previously indicated, should be regarded as a separate charity and registered with the Charity Commissioners. Registration has the benefit of enabling other charitable trusts and individuals to make gifts to the charity without enquiry with regard to its charitable status, and if property is occupied charitable rate relief will be given without difficulty. Separate registration also makes it clear to those outside the church that their donations will be applied for that project and not go into the church funds.

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

**To Readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal**

**WARNING: ARE YOU OR YOUR CHURCH AT RISK?**

**Winter Weather can cause burst pipes with millions of pounds worth of damage to homes and other properties.**

Most burst pipes could easily be avoided with a few, simple precautions, However, many people do not think the cold weather will affect them or do not know what they should do to protect their property.

To help people, the Association of British Insurers has devised a Cold Weather Code. Copies of the information sheet which gives practical advice, in a humorous way, are available from us on request. If you would like a copy, please phone Baptist Insurance Company on our local call telephone number 0345 697 414 for your free copy. In the meantime the following useful tips are worth remembering:

- find your main stop cock and make sure you can turn it on and off,
- arrange for any dripping taps to be repaired.
- fully lag all pipes and tanks in the loft space or anywhere else which may be liable to freezing.
- leave your heating on while you are away from home,
- ensure a frost stat is fitted to the Church central heating system,
- if pipes or tanks are frozen,, turn off the water at the main stop cock before attempting to thaw the system,

**DO NOT USE A BLOW LAMP OR HEAT GUN TO THAW THE PIPE, GENTLE HEAT FROM A HAIR DRYER OR HOT WATER BOTTLE IS APPROPRIATE.**

- if a pipe has burst and your wiring or any electrical appliances have been affected, have them checked by a professional electrician before they are used. **DO NOT TOUCH THEM UNTIL THEY HAVE BEEN CHECKED.**

Yours in His Service,,

T E Mattholie

A church should not use a Baptist Trust Corporation's charity registration number or its income tax reference number, except in respect of deeds of covenant which operate through that Trust Corporation. If a church has difficulty with the Inland Revenue or any other body who refuse to recognise the church as a charity, it should be made clear that the church is excepted from the need to register and therefore does not have a charity number.

Once a charity is registered, if it has a gross income of over £5,000 a year, then it must state that it is a registered charity on

All notices and advertisements which solicit money

Cheques and orders for goods and services

Bills rendered, invoices and receipts

A registered charity is required to file annual accounts and annual reports with the Charity Commissioners in the form required by the Commissioners. A Baptist church, not being a registered charity, is not required to prepare an annual report or file accounts.

The Charities Act, and the regulations made under the Act, provide that all charities, whether registered or not, must comply with the law relating to the preparation and examination or audit of its accounts. These accounting rules therefore apply to a Baptist church and any other separate charities it operates. The Baptist Union has issued "Accounting Guidelines" which explain how these rules can be complied with by Baptist churches and how the requirement for independent examination, or in some cases audit, of accounts should be undertaken. It is a new requirement of the Charities Act that a church must be prepared to provide a copy of its annual accounts, on request, subject to payment of a reasonable fee.

The requirements of the Charities Act are seen by some as irksome burdens unnecessarily placed on hard pressed ministers and deacons, but it should be remembered that church, as charitable organisations, enjoy very significant financial advantages and have a duty to all who support their work to be properly accountable. Paul reminded the Roman Christians that "rulers hold no terror for those who do no wrong but for those who do wrong" (Romans 13:3) and in his letter to the Corinthian Christians he said "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14: 40).

**John V Beaumont**

# Specialist Groupings and Networks

The list below is a selection of Baptist and ecumenical groupings that exist, focused around specific areas of concern. The list is only intended to be a selective sample of some of the specialist groupings who exist to help the wider church in specific areas of life and mission.

## Spirituality

**The Baptist Union Retreat Group (BURG)** draws together people interested in the development of spiritual life, individual, guided and group retreats. BURG is a member of **The National Retreat Association** which publishes an annual document *Vision*, listing retreat houses, specialist retreats and resources for those seeking retreats. **The Northumbrian Community** is an ecumenical community involved in the development of spirituality, based on a Celtic pattern and in a wide range of mission and community activities. The work is principally in the "historic" area of Northumbria. **The Society of Mary and Martha** is an organisation dedicated to helping those engaged in full time ministry and service in spiritual reflection, appraisal etc.

## Mission

**The Baptist Mission Network** is organised by the Baptist Union Mission Department and seeks to draw together a wide range of specialist groupings. This year the Baptist Mission Network is reflecting on the concept of the Missionary Congregation. Within the Network there are specialist meetings for **Missioners, Evangelists** and those engaged in **Industrial Mission**. Other significant groups in the Baptist Mission Network include **Baptist Rural Group**, looking at life and mission in rural situations; **Baptist Urban Group**, drawing together those engaged in mission in inner cities and urban priority areas; **Joppa**, a network of those reflecting on the multicultural and multifaith nature of our society and how we relate to those of other faiths; **Church Planting Strategy Task Group**, developing national strategy and planning, together with evaluation and reflection on church planting; **Industrial Missioners' Meeting**, part of a wider ecumenical grouping drawing together those engaged in specialist forms of chaplaincy and mission in industry, commerce, at airports etc; the **Inner Cities Religious Council**, which is part of Churches Together in England and relates to various government department; **Build**, a network consisting of people with learning difficulties and those who support them in their Christian life and mission; the **Christian Enquiry Agency**, an agency of CTE which seeks to provide material for those who have questions about the Christian faith.

## Worship and Preaching

There are various groups who look at different aspects of this topic including the **Joint Liturgical Group**, a network of CCBI; the **College of Preachers** and various adult training and education groups. The **Baptist Music Society** has a particular interest in music in worship, as has **CHIME**, an ecumenical grouping seeking to encourage the development of Christian music in worship.

Many have an interest in the ministry of healing through worship and the **Baptist Health and Healing Group** and the **Churches Council for Health and Healing** provide valuable reflection, meetings points and resources in this area.



# No! It's not the logo of a political party

Registered Charity No. 250334

It's the flaming torch of truth denoting the Baptist Men's Movement - a dynamic organisation established nearly 80 years ago and still very active in helping men in their Christian living. Its main aim is still to promote the gospel amongst men and help those in need both at home and abroad.

It provides:

- regular regional and national conferences which consider important issues and provides opportunities for friendship and fellowship;
- ways in which practical help can be given to those in need at home and abroad through its auxiliaries: Operation Agri, Tools With A Mission, the Missionaries' Literature Society, and Tapes for the Blind.
- a free quarterly magazine called *WORLD OUTLOOK* and other useful publications including books of devotions.

Why not join us and share this common interest in fellowship, friendship and stewardship amongst men? For literature and further details, please contact the National Secretary

*Clifford Challinor, Kingsley, Pontesbury, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY5 0QH*  
(Telephone or Fax: 01743 790377)

## CORRYMEELA

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It works to break down barriers and build bridges between individuals and groups. "If Christianity has nothing to say about reconciliation, then it has nothing to say" (The Revd. Dr. R.R. Davey, OBE., founder of the Corrymeela Community)

**CORRYMEELA LINK**, based in Great Britain, seeks to spread the vision and support the work of the Corrymeela Community: it needs your help if this aim is to be realised.

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Telephone 01734 589800

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## Peace and Justice

The **Baptist Peace Fellowship**, one of the constituent bodies of the ecumenical **Fellowship of Reconciliation**, which draws together those who have concerns about peace making. Additionally, **Clergy Against Nuclear Arms** has a specific focus within this whole area.

It is generally recognised that there are many issues to be addressed in the area of racial justice and the Baptist Union has a **Racial Justice Task Group** working on these issues, which relates to the **CCBI Churches Commission for Racial Justice** which does much investigative and campaigning work in this area. The Mission Department also has a **Theology of Social Action Task Group**, which seeks to offer theological reflection in the whole area of social action, peace and justice.

## Support Services

The life and work of any local Christian community is focused in worship and mission. In order to do this effectively there are needs for certain organisational and management skills. The key ecumenical group in this area is **MODEM (Managerial and Organisational Disciplines for the Enhancement of Ministry)**, though the churches are now in the process of forming **CIRCUIT** which will be a database resource. There are specialist groupings such as the **Churches Advertising Network** and **CACLB**, which brings together those involved in local broadcasting.

## Families and Education

The umbrella organisation **Churches Together for Families** draws together a whole variety of interest groups in this area; the **Association of Inter-Church Families** is a network, particularly for married couples and their offspring, where the partners belong to different Christian traditions (principally if one partner is a Roman Catholic and the other partner Protestant).

Keith Jones

## USA Exchange Ministries Opportunity

Would anyone be interested in a deeply rural US pastoral exchange in the summer of 1997? A Mennonite pastor in Iowa is enquiring about an exchange with a Baptist minister with family. This may not be as quiet as it sounds as the small town was flattened by a tornado several years ago, Please contact Vic Sumner or Dr Alan Kreider, Regent's Park College.

Would any Baptist minister and spouse only be interested in an exchange with a Baptist minister and wife in a small church (325) in Birmingham, Alabama? He writes that the British minister "would have to be pretty good in the pulpit and not to be intimidated by the high degree of professionals in the congregation. They are not intimidating - but some folk who are not secure in themselves might find them so".

For further encouraging details for both these requests for exchange please write to Vic Sumner, 6 Middle Onslow Close Ferring, Worthing, BN12 5RT,

# Co-habitation 2: Pastoral Response

In the first part of this article we argued that while co-habitation is something we cannot ignore, we should not simply accept it, in that unlike with mediaeval practices of 'marriage by consent', life-long commitment is missing. We now turn to pastoral issues.

## 1. Co-habitation and Marriage

The most common form of conflict arising from this practice is in relation to requests for marriage coming from co-habitees. This is apparently relatively simple, in that both partners have made the same approach to the Church (and thus to God) for marriage, though in practice the degree of being pledged to the commitment of marriage, and even more so to the value of a church wedding, may vary considerably between partners.

Broadly, four types of approach may be discerned, which have some similarity to responses to requests from divorcees:

**i) Indiscriminate acceptance.** There are those who feel we ought to welcome, unconditionally, all who approach the Church (and the Lord) without making any problems. If that is added to an attitude that co-habitation (or divorce) is common, and "not a particularly serious sin" or indeed not a sin, just a cultural variation, then such people will always marry co-habitees and all others requesting marriage, more or less 'on principle' - though some may follow this line with a degree of unease. I suspect this approach is fairly common.

**ii) Rejection of all 'sub-Christian' requests.** At the opposite pole are those who reject all applications from divorcees, co-habitees, and, indeed, all non-Christians, outright. The rationale for this approach is that anything less than totally uncompromised, fully Christian marriage, morally and spiritually, undermines the true Christian practice. This approach, I suspect, is not common.

**iii) Conditional acceptance (or qualified rejection).** Typically, the approach of some is to say that co-habitation is unbiblical and wrong, couples who wish to marry must repent of their sin, and show a strong expression of that repentance by, e.g., living apart for a month, and / or making a public confession of their sin, and of their contrite desire to live in obedience to God in this area of life. Such an approach is recommended by the Revd E. A. Pratt in his booklet, *{Living in Sin?}*! this approach is more common among Baptists and others. As with the second view, those who take this line tend to be less open to requests for marriage from couples whose approach is sub-Christian in other ways, e.g., where one partner or both are not Christian.

This line corresponds very roughly to the position of those who would only marry divorcees on certain conditions, e.g., they ascertain (somehow!) that they were the 'innocent party', or were not Christian at the time of their divorce, or they insist the candidates must repent openly and publicly.

Personally, I do not go along with these views, even though I understand something of the motivations behind them. I would support a fourth line.

**iv) Qualified acceptance.** With the first view I would want to take a positive and open attitude towards those who are coming to the Church (and however dimly are approaching God), and do whatever I can to help them discover the Lord. I do not think rejection will help them. But with the second and third, I would want to maintain a

distinctively Christian attitude to marriage. Thus I would express to the couple Christian views that sex is for marriage, and better reserved for marriage, discussing this as openly as possible. And on that basis I would welcome the co-habitees who want to get married, because, from a Christian point of view, they are moving in the right direction. This maintains the Christian ideal, and yet welcomes those who are progressing towards it - as Alastair Campbell comments (in his agreement with Clifford Longley's article in *The Times* of 11 July 1992), "God is more concerned with the direction in which we are moving."<sup>2</sup>

### **Co-habitation and Church Membership**

There is a difference between this issue and the last one, in that the request for Church Membership (with or without baptism) must come from a committed Christian. What's more, whereas issues of divorce and co-habitation are often left (as 'difficult', 'messy' or 'pastoral') to the individual pastor to decide on, Church membership is inevitably an issue about which the Church Meeting must come to a conclusion. As we are dealing with Christian commitment, then, the Church must be assured of the individual's Christian faith.

I suggest we should turn down, put off, or defer any request that comes from someone who, for example, does not hold to core Christian teaching, like the reality of God, and the need to follow Jesus as Lord and Saviour; similarly with anyone who does not accept the need for involvement in and commitment to the local church; and also to anyone who will not accept the need for a Christian life-style, based on love for God and our neighbour, and expressed in Christian standards. To come to the point on this one, we need to work out whether co-habitation is a sufficiently serious enough departure from such Christian standards, that an applicant for church membership who not only practices co-habitation, but approves of it, and refuses to see things otherwise, should for that reason not be eligible for church membership.

But if we take this approach, would we take the same line with someone who continues to engage in premarital sexual relations, like the co-habitee, but who actually lives in a different dwelling to their sexual partner, i.e., their fiancé(e)? It is much harder to be aware that your applicant for church membership is engaged in secret behaviour! The difference with co-habitation is that it is essentially public, whereas sex before marriage can be secret, like many other sins. Should it be singled out? A further problem with applying a ban to such applicants, is that we then run up against the next question: should we exercise church discipline against those who are already church members, who enter a similar co-habiting or pre-marital sexual relationship? If so, what form of discipline? These are tough areas.

I believe we should try to present and maintain a Christian perspective on this. However, this presents great difficulties, because, in our Sunday congregations, we can expect an increasing number of co-habitees, and we can be sure that there will be an even larger number of young people who have already experimented sexually in various ways, but secretly, including some who are church members. Somehow, we must try to be clear about this and speak up for Christian attitudes to chastity before marriage, fidelity within it, and the need for strong life-long commitment.

Secondly, we should ensure that leaders within the church promote Christian lifestyles. Perhaps some sort of simple, Christian basis of faith and life could be promoted, and agreed with by all new leaders, whether ministers, deacons, official leaders of and within organisations, including children's and youth groups (uniformed or non-uniformed), and adult, like House Groups, Men's and Women's groups.

And thirdly, we should make it clear that someone who follows, and approves of,

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a form of lifestyle which is seriously at odds with Christian morality should normally be put off when making membership requests. It would, of course, be wrong to single out co-habitation (which would send out a signal that the Church still holds that what it sees as sexual sins are 'uniquely worse' than all other sins.) But why shouldn't other problematic and affirmed lifestyles meet a similar response, say deliberate and persistent drug-taking, shop-lifting, and adultery?

As for disciplining those who are already member, that is even harder. The above contains things that will be hard enough, perhaps too hard for many. To apply this to some clear form of church disciplining will go beyond the point where members in most churches are. However, I would want us to remember the teaching of Matthew 18:15ff, which indicates that where there is clear sin within the congregation, it is first of all something that ought to be taken up face to face, preferably by the individual(s) hurt or otherwise affected by the sin; only if that fails, do we take others long; and only if that fails does it become an official church matter, which the whole church needs to decide on. I feel that many of the problems which consume vast amounts of church time could be stopped in their tracks if this process were applied clearly.

And fourthly, we must face the increasingly likely case of the applicant for Church membership who was already in a co-habiting relationship at the time of his or her conversion. Let us assume this person now accepts the need for marriage, and is keen to be baptised and become a Church Member. However, the partner is resisting both - or at least is not ready for them.

I do not think that we should normally be promoting the break-up of such relationships - particularly as, in an increasing number of them, the couple have children! A conclusion which we came to on this one, locally, was that there would be no blank refusal to all such requests. Instead, each case would have to be taken on its merits. But the decision should not be left to the pastor alone, but shared by the deacons. Where the domestic situation is well known, it might be possible to have a sane debate in the Church Meeting. However, the fact that the couple is co-habiting rather than married, will sometimes not be known generally. In such cases, we felt the diaconate should share the responsibility for any acceptance or deferring such a request, on the basis of adequate knowledge. So that in at least some cases, it would be possible and right to recommend such a candidate for baptism and church membership.

**Anthony Thacker**

#### **Additional Bibliography includes:**

- Jeremy Collingwood: *Common Law Marriage: the Case for a Change in the Law*, (Grove Books, 1994)
- Andrew Cornes: *Divorce and remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (Hodder, 1993)
- Jack Dominian: *Marital Breakdown* (Penguin, 1968)
- Gary Jenkins: *Co-habitation: A Biblical Perspective* (Grove Books, 1992 and 1993)
- Charles Read: *Revising Weddings* (Grove Books, 1994)

#### **Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> E.A. Pratt: *Living in Sin?* - private publication from St Simon's Vicarage, Southsea, Hants. See also his article in the *Baptist Times* of 30 July 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Letter in *Baptist Times*, 23 July 1992.

# Book reviews,

## Note:

If any readers would like to become reviewers, please drop me a line, indicating areas of particular interest, Your reward will be the undoubted fame of appearing in print, plus a copy of the book. My address is inside the front Cover, John Houseago,

### ***Science and the New Age Challenge* by Ernest Lucas Apollos (IVP) 1996, 190pp, £10.99**

Fritjof Capra, James Lovelock, Rupert Sheldrake ... Do these names mean anything to you? In the field of science and religion, we are fortunate to have among our colleagues Dr, Ernest Lucas, now tutor in Biblical Studies at Bristol Baptist College.

Lucas' book will be of interest to many who are concerned about the increasing influence of "New Age" thinking in our society, He writes as a scientist and a Christian (how sad we have been robbed of the phrase: Christian scientist!) and challenges New Agers' use of science to justify their own world-view, His convictions (set out in the introduction) are that their appeal to science is "sincere but superficial", that those scientists invoked by New Agers are muddled and mistaken in their arguments, and, finally, "that an orthodox Christian world-view provides the most satisfactory framework for doing science",

The format of the book is, generally, helpful. There are chapters on issues such as Physics and Eastern mysticism, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and New Age thought, the Gaia hypothesis, Green Christianity, Solid scientific analysis is broken up by sub-headings and a generous sprinkling of quotations (referenced in the end-notes) and there is an extensive bibliography, The six-page index ensures that you'll be able to find a scientific allusion to spice up that otherwise mediocre sermon! (e, g. A reference to the Principle of Complementarity (p. 37) might be used to illustrate our different ways of thinking as Christians.)

For the scientifically minded, this book will give you valuable support in the continuing dialogue with people of differing views - and for the rest of us it may give us confidence to join the debate.

**Peter Slee**

### ***Things to do in Children's Worship and More Things to do in Children's Worship* by Susan Sayers. Pub. by Kevin Mayhew, £9.99 each, 95 & 97 pages respectively,**

These books, of one-per-page things to do, are designed for 4-9 year olds, for use in Sunday School, They include two or three bible readings, an activity based on one of these, and a list of three or more appropriate songs. Photocopying for use in children's work in one's own church is permitted. The indexing is by theme, the church year, biblical characters and bible references, and improves from the first to the second book by including the page numbers in the indexes,

My own interest arises because we have chosen to follow the Revised Common Lectionary, and I need ideas to accompany the set reading. In the eight-week period I looked at, the books provided material for half the weeks. They would also be useful to supplement an organised programme, especially for those weeks when the teacher says "I couldn't possibly use that!".

As with all Sunday School material., not all examples are useful for all classes or to all teachers. The books provide a useful jumping off point, a bank of ideas which can be developed as appropriate to the particular class. There is not a lot of detail, and work is required to translate the ideas into viable action.

I was impressed by the fact that the visual aids or activities remained subsidiary to the point being made. The lessons have a clear idea of what they wish to communicate, I would recommend them as a supplement to any Sunday School system for the appropriate age group, but not as a sole source for a programme, Ros Houseago (Sunday School teacher)

*Worship File, Resource Material for Worship Leaders, Second Series, Issues One and Two, February and May 1996, Published by the Baptist Union,*

Worship file continues to aim at providing additional worship materials to stimulate ideas, rather than ready-made forms to be followed. This series also includes material requested by subscribers in a recent questionnaire. It follows a basic format including: articles reflecting on various aspects of worship, (in these issues, on preaching, experiments in evening worship and handling lectionary readings,); prayers for various occasions; seasonally linked hymn guide,

Emphasis is on the practical. The material is produced in A5 format, loose-leafed and drilled for filing in a two-ring binder, making it possible to remove pages for use in worship if desired.

Each issue has a list of contents, though this is so brief as to be of dubious value. I found the prayers and Communion liturgies useful and stimulating, I would caution against using the Communion liturgies unadapted - I suspect many congregations would find them a bit esoteric as they stand. However, as *Worship File* aims to provide not ready meals, but suggestions for a menu, this is no criticism, I believe the material will help congregations and ministers alike to expand their understanding of Communion.

I liked the article, Bible Reading with a Difference, (Issue Two, p 11). Imaginative suggestions using visual aids, drama and music bring Bible reading alive in a way necessary for this multi-media generation, The prayers and meditations on specific scripture passages I found helpful.

On the down side, the hymn guide is of limited value to me, since it does not include hymn numbers for, among others, *Mission Praise*, the book I use most. Since *Mission Praise* lacks any thematic index of its own, references for it would be helpful.

Being unfamiliar with the original series, I cannot compare the two, but believe the new series, used creatively, will prove a useful resource for worship.

**Kathleen Lawson, (Northern Baptist College)**

### ***Sociology for Pastoral Care* by George Furniss. SPCK, 1995, £14.99.**

For many years our understanding of pastoral care has been held in a 'psychological captivity'. The common assumption was that it was a one- to-one, or at most, a one- to small group or family unit activity. The major discipline that shaped it and the skills that were required to practise it were psychological. Then people began to see that those seeking care and counsel were social beings enmeshed in a network of social and political relations.

Now George Furniss has done us a major service by writing a systematic treatment of the role of sociological factors in pastoral care. He examines how people form and

maintain a religious world view (a sociology of knowledge perspective), how individuals find their identity through reference groups and plausibility structures, the dynamics of power in relationships, questions of secularisation, the institutional (hospital) context of pastoral care, the role of conflict experienced by chaplains, and pastoral care as a social process.

The book will introduce the reader to major themes in sociology, especially in the area of sociology of religion, and it will do so with competence and clarity. But, whilst well-founded theoretically, it is also well illustrated from practical experience and contains extracts from many pastoral conversations to illuminate the points made. Some interpretation is needed since the book relates more directly to the role of a full-time chaplain in an American hospital. But so much is to be gained in our understanding of the social dynamics of pastoral care and of the average pastor's caring role that we should not be put off by that. And as a bonus, the reader will learn much - but, not all - about sociological views of religion,

Oh, don't be put off by the opening few pages! They seem to me to be overwritten. But the book soon gets into its stride and sheds light in a whole dimension of care which is vital if we are to do it constructively.

**Derek J Tidball**

***Possible Dreams: A Personal History of the British Christian Socialists* by Chris Bryant. Hodder and Stoughton, 351 pp, £25 (cased)**

Chris Bryant has written a history of the Christian Socialist Movement of which he is chair. He seeks to portray a body of Christians relaying a tradition of moral and social teaching rather than an economic ideology. An opening chapter deals with those he considers forerunners of the movement. Then he charts the course of the Christian Socialists from F. D. Maurice and friends, as they responded to the Chartists through to New Labour. On the way he takes in Stewart Headlam's Guild of St Matthew. The Christian Social Union with particular reference to Gore and Scott Holland, and the rise of the Labour Party seen through the lives of Keir Hardie., George Lansbury and Arthur Henderson. The response of the Roman Catholic Church to the Labour Movement is described through the political career of John Wheatley and the life of Cardinal Manning. Temple and R.H. Tawney are presented as key figures of the inter-war period. The various Christian Socialist groupings are explored; fortunately a glossary is provided to help us keep track of C.S. L.,

C.S.U. etc. As the Labour Party achieves power, parliamentarians, such as Cripps and Acland, come to the fore. Then on through the fifties, the period of the Wilson governments and, ultimately, New Labour.

Bryant writes narrative history coming at the meaning of the movement through story rather than from abstract principles. As he is a master of summarising and there is a vast array of characters, well known and not so well known, the book is an enjoyable read. There are delightful touches of humour. His presentation of the leading figures is honest. Two icon-like figures of the community of my youth, Keir Hardie and John Wheatley, are portrayed "warts and all".

Those seeking to find their way in this area of study will find Bryant a helpful guide, and all of us will meet a goodly fellowship of prophets. Libraries should be amenable to purchasing this book as a standard work.

There are a number of misprints, including one on the cover, and two mistakes in the details about John Clifford.

**Bob Smart,**

***Not Angels but Agencies: The Ecumenical Response to Poverty - A Primer* by Michael Taylor SCM Press, 1995, 174 pp, £7,95,**

With 'voices of the ecumenical movement' from the last fifty years, Taylor, writing in Christian Aid's 50th year, challenges us with the reality of Jubilee.

'The Debate about Holism' considers the balance between aid for proclamation and that for development. Instead of missionary societies moving churches from one part of the world to another, Taylor advocates holism - "The agencies would openly resource and fund the church of the poor across the whole spectrum of its activities without hesitation" (p 40). He notes how the rift between mission and development may have its roots not in the drifting apart of two aspects of a single whole, but in different understandings of that whole' (p 42). With increasing religious polarization, this is a worrying factor - do we bring good news for the sinner or good news for the poor?

'The Debate about Power' calls for ecumenical sharing. The reason why power is so often hard to shift or share is seen to reside in 'the sinful egoist in each of us..., too frightened to share power, let alone hand it over' (p 98).

'An Agenda for Jubilee' notes two futures, 'inching forward' and 'imaginative leaps', with each alone incomplete - 'we need to be just as imaginative and creative in adapting and rearranging the familiar for the sake of the poor as in dreaming of totally new possibilities' (p 165).

The good news for the poor, the unity of humankind, and Christ's prayer for the churches to be one, cannot be viewed as separate agendas for Christians of differing theological persuasions, 'If we are to seek unity for the sake of the poor., we shall hardly be good news for them unless we free each other from the blindness and captivity of our separate churches' (p vii. Those concerned for the shape and direction of the Baptist community in the next millennium may learn much from this welcome primer.

**Keith G Riglin.**

***The Ministers Manual, 1997 Edition* edited by James Cox. Harper Collins. £12.99. 345pp.**

I have a twinge of conscience having such a book on my shelves! However, the plain truth is that there are occasions when I need an idea to start my brain working. This book is a very good 'pump primer'. It contains two sermons for each Sunday of the year, one of which is based on the Common Lectionary, two brief sermon outlines, prayers, children's addresses, illustrations and more extended treatment of preaching on special occasions. This is a hardback volume, which makes it easy to use.

The material is American, and some of it does not cross the Atlantic well. In particular I felt the children's addresses had a high cringe factor. The sermons, like all sermons, are a mixed bunch. I have not found one that I feel I could preach - but I have found many that have started my thinking off and that is surely the value of this book. Only a very arrogant preacher believes that she or he could not learn from other practitioners of the art.

The prayers can also help introduce freshness into the language of worship. Few books of prayers published in this country provide material for the prayer of praise and thanksgiving that most of us use near the opening of worship, The Americans call this the 'pastoral prayer' and the book contains an example for each Sunday. Again there are very few that can simply be used from the book, but I have been able to Anglicise a number of them.

I have no hesitation in commanding this book, conscience notwithstanding. I do

not think it needs to be bought every year, but a copy or two on the shelf can enrich our worship and reduce the hours spent looking at a blank sheet of paper or rearranging the odds and ends on the desk.

**John Houseago**

### **Important Study Now at Special Price**

Paternoster Press is pleased to announce that *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* by G.R. Beasley-Murray is now available at a special price. The book was enthusiastically reviewed in the *Baptist Ministers' Journal* by John Maile, the New Testament lecturer at Spurgeon's College when it was first published,

This significant study is now available at the special price of £6.99 through our *Nota Bene* catalogue (Jan /Feb issue) and can be purchased, either through participating shops, or directly on 0345 581 278 (UK only). If you would like to be added to the mailing list for *Nota Bene* or receive our complete catalogue, please call the above number or write to: Michael Abbs, Paternoster Publishing, PO Box 300, Kingstown Broadway, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 0QS, *Pieter Kwant*, *Managing Director of Paternoster Publishing*,

## **Holidays 1997**

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