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The Baptist Ministers'
Journal

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Contents

The Baptist Ministers' Journal is the journal of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship.

Details of the Fellowship can be found on the inside back cover

Editorial

Conquering Evil

I was going to write an editorial for this issue on the familiar patterns of Church life in the last quarter of the year. What made me rethink was the realisation that though the majority of our readers live in Britain, where the skies are becoming increasingly greyer and the temperature is decidedly colder, we also have a significant number of subscribers in forty or more other countries.

Rather therefore than wax lyrical about the present season of 'mists and mellow fruitfulness' and all that the autumn means in British church life, initially I wanted merely to reflect on how some of you reading this will be rejoicing in Spring, and looking forward to Summer! And that Harvest over here is a time for sowing somewhere else!

The interests and concerns expressed in and by the majority of our articles, book reviews, and personalia naturally reflect the Fellowship's predominantly British provenance, hence a challenging piece this month on the Foot and Mouth crisis. Even in the calmest times we also need to to be reminded of the world beyond these shores. It is therefore particularly good also to have a piece from Australia in this issue, just as we had one from Brazil a few numbers back, and hopefully there will be more from other countries in future. Besides being of value in their own right these articles also help to increase our awareness of how inter-related we are - Churches, no less than banks, multinational corporations and governments.

Most of us I suspect (myself included) have yet to take this new reality fully on board. At one level of our minds we know that we are citizens of a global village and that wars, natural disasters, recessions elsewhere are bound in the end to affect us too eventually. But at another level we are quite content to go on from day to day as if this were unlikely.

The horrific attack on New York's symbolic central skyscrapers therefore on 11th September 2001 (a date that will now for ever be etched into history) has already profoundly shaken any temptation to assume a detached approach to the rest of the world. The anxiety in the weeks and months to come (as the perpetrators who masterminded such an unprecedented atrocity are identified and tracked down) is that an understandable but ill considered response by the United States will only exacerbate the situation. Such a response however would only serve to destabilise the geopolitical scene on a global scale – which may indeed be the ultimate mad hope of these ruthless fanatics.

In this tense and fragile period it is therefore vital that Christians in every country exert a restraining influence, recalling the Apostle Paul's advice: *'Do not let evil conquer you, but use good to defeat evil'* (Rom 12: 21). And if there is an Islamic connection (and at the time of writing that has been assumed but not established) we must guard against condemning a great monotheistic Faith and all its adherents because of a few fundamentalist extremists who may claim religion for their cause but whose behaviour betrays it as their excuse. **bmj**

* *Keats: Ode to Autumn*

Foot and Mouth

Hazel Sherman, Brecon, reflects on the predicament of pastoral preaching in the context of the current rural crisis.

In the small market-town of Brecon, as probably in other farming communities which are dependent on a mixture of farming and tourism as well as some light industry and local government infrastructure for economic survival, there is a continuing mixture of concern and helplessness, undirected anger and stoicism. It may seem a curious mix, but perhaps not, given the mixed bag of the area's inhabitants. For some, talk of "the ongoing foot and mouth crisis" has been downgraded to the status of the common cold, whilst for others there is still the waking with the sick feeling at the pit of the stomach before going down to check on the stock at the beginning of another day's uncertainty.

For the preacher who wishes to speak words from within her community, yet not speak in ignorance, there is a question of integrity in public worship. For months it seemed to me that the spread of the epidemic was rightly a matter for our prayers of intercession, but that sermon-statements from the pulpit were not going to help anyone a great deal. Different ministers have taken different lines on this, as much depending on temperament and congregational identity as on theological perspective. One colleague, whose Manse is bordered by infected farms and who now looks out over his neighbours' empty fields, spent considerable time with those protesting at the initial mass burial sites for animal carcasses on the then 'clean' Epynt ranges. There will be a dedicated act of Public Worship in the Cathedral, although whether farmers, Union and Government representatives can gather meaningfully and with humility to be enabled rather than patronised by their priests is open to question. In our different ways, as churches and ministers, I think we are all betraying that unease with situations where we do not seem to be able to *do* anything significant.

Grim

During the first week of extensive testing of sheep on the Brecon Beacons, and the cull that was put into immediate effect, I was preparing to lead worship in our nearest BUGB neighbour church, in Merthyr Tydfil. How could I take the road across the Beacons, past the testing shelters and the wooded areas which shielded the work of the slaughtermen from public gaze, and not pay some attention to it in the evening service to which I sped? The road on which I would travel to church had become the end of the road for some local farmers.

Although there had already been a number of outbreaks earlier in the spread of the disease, the possibility of its presence in the hefted flocks on the mountains had until now been countered by some hope in the face of probability. Now, the implications were grim.

Was it right to lead worship with no acknowledgement of that? What follows in this article is the text of the sermon preached that week-end. Even with considerable editing, it reads as rather stilted and without formal conclusion. It will not 'read' as it was 'preached'. Some may find it wholly unsatisfactory. I can only say in its defence that much of our preaching seems that way to me, and that we can only keep confidence in the appalling task of preaching if we can keep

some sense of balance between our anguishing over conviction, ideas and words, and our recognising that in the end it is the Spirit who interprets between the form of those words and what people need to hear.

Slaughter

Text of sermon preached 29th July 2001, High Street, Merthyr Tydfyl

Scripture Readings Jonah 3.6-4.11 (with summary of preceding story) Matthew 13.24-32

Generally preachers take their text from the Bible, but what happens if, like the prophets of old, we take our text from the world around us? And then bring that into relationship with the insights and questions of Scripture? Travelling between Brecon and Merthyr, there is little option but to come over by way of Storey Arms, alongside the hillsides which have become suddenly familiar to thousands of viewers of TV news reports on Foot & Mouth. These pictures might prompt our thoughts in many ways.

For believers, it is hard to avoid the question of the nature of the relationship between God and the world. We speak of God's steadfast love in creation so often, but for much of the time we are able to ignore the related questions of respect and harmony between humanity and other animals.

Whilst not permitting ourselves the romanticism of 'dear little lambs' which would have gone to the abattoir anyway, we are still taken aback by the scale of slaughter. We are haunted by the perplexity as to whether it is really necessary, and even as we collect our packaged chops from the supermarket, we know some sense of "is this just" – this way we have become used to treating living creatures as commodities.

We recognise too, that it is so easy to say words like this, which make no real difference. And also that some of these attempts at reflection would come across as hollow, or even a slap in the face, to those who, having done all they could to meet what are essentially the current requirements of their industry, are still having their livelihood stripped away.

Suspicion and mistrust

We are conscious of how divisions have appeared within our communities during these last weeks, in some instances farmer against farmer, and in others 'townies' against 'country folks'. Rumours of various scams grow with frequent repetition. We hear of farmers buying £700 pressure washers for the clean up operations and then hiring them back to Defra at £200 per week, and then also making all sorts of unspecified additional profits. One Pembrokeshire farmer broke the news that she had been offered an infected sheep-carcass for sale. Suspicion and mistrust are the name of the game. In the absence of any clearly identifiable moral authority and depth of knowledge, it would seem reasonable enough for some to try to make a profit from the cleaning-up operation or offer infected carcasses for sale as a route to compensation. When no-one knows what's going on you have to look after yourself and your family first!

So far as concerns the town versus country caricature, there was even a letter printed in our local paper commenting on how pleasant it was to see the greenness of the hills, and the beauty of the wild flowers which were never seen when the sheep dominated the landscape. 'Good riddance', the writer all but said, 'let us enjoy the beauties of nature unsullied by the farmers' greed!'

Should we not also spare a thought for those who are employed to do the killing

business? A number of Navy personnel were drafted in to help with the killing around Brecon the first time around. I heard of how one would take flowers to each farm he had to visit. Some might think this rather pathetic – but at least he showed some awareness of the effect of his unenviable task on those who could only stand by and watch.

We could say that such confusion is God's judgement on a sinful nation: it would be very easy to lift some verses from the prophets which would fit this theme. But I am not at all sure that it is fair to God or human beings to speak in this way. If our society is being judged in this episode, which is disaster for some and completely remote for others, then let it not be said that it is the vengeful work of God – the God who had such compassion even on the cattle of Ninevah. I met a man on holiday recently who was convinced that Foot and Mouth, along with the spread of HIV/AIDS worldwide, was the direct response of God in the face of human sin. Needless to say, he was not directly involved with farmers or rural communities, not did he have any knowing relationship with people with AIDS. How good we are at recognising that God's judgment is always directed at others. Rather like Jonah, we find it easier to spot where divine judgement should be landing in other places, on other people. Unlike Jonah, we also mouth the acceptable words of human solidarity, which may actually make us even more self-righteous than that grumpy prophet!

This judgement thing is not half so straightforward as preachers would sometimes have us suppose. But if there is to be judgement in familiar sense of 'making a judgement', then in its strongest form it should be directed against the global market – not forgetting that in one way or another we are beneficiaries.

There is surely judgement to be made against that economic juggernaut which hurtles across developing countries and their supposedly rich neighbours alike – and reveals us all as somehow helpless in its path, as the demands of international trade transforms local problems into much larger disasters.

Some countries will not buy meat from vaccinated animals – vaccination loses millions of pounds in international export figures, which have been pushed higher and higher, and more than a degree of over-production of meat encouraged to stimulate the market. And in the complexities of international trade, we know that it is not simply a question of some producing more than they need in order to sell it to countries which cannot themselves produce it.

The coming of crisis

It has become harder and harder for farmers to sustain respect for their livestock and the notion of an agricultural system that is fair to the environment .

Farmers take their place on one part of the conveyor belt, however picturesque the scenery in which they are set – seeing their product off in lorries from the farm gate, totally isolated from its next stage in the food chain which may well be hundreds of miles away in a vast abattoir the other end of the country.

Time was when a farmer was able to see his stock through from birth to butchers. If there are vegetarians by conviction amongst us, they have the right and voice to claim that this itself is an evil. But those of us who have no intrinsic objections to eating meat should learn to question rather more closely the means of its coming to us, and ask whose well-being is best served by the huge producers.

There will be no future for many children in a way of life their parents cherished. This might also put us in mind of some fishing fleets, as well as miners, and steelworkers, farming the raw materials of the earth in different ways

To speak of "divine judgement" can be an easy way out for Christian people, and cause us to take sub-Christian attitudes to those who are caught up in the whole business. But we do need to recognise judgement in its other sense of the coming of crisis and our response to that.

Miraculous signs

The phrase "divide and rule" is used to express a way of pitting people against one another, to the advantage of a third party. Without building on any of the current conspiracy theories, there is something very like this happening amongst us today, in the fracturing of relationships and the sapping away of trust. When life is uncertain something in us looks for 'the other' to blame. And of course this isn't restricted to farming communities enthralled to Foot and Mouth – it has been known to happen in churches, too, when things don't go smoothly!

Then we need to remember the other parts of the picture – such as the 'giving' of one farming family to another, in free and costly understanding during a time of hardship. Neighbours by a shared boundary, but not neighbourly at all in former days, have gone out of their way to care for one another. One who used to moan about the other at market has been heard to speak out in defence of his neighbour. These small signs are little short of miraculous, given some deep-seated family issues. Crisis/judgement can prompt the good as well as draw out the bad.Not as a conclusion, but as a final echo, I offer you those two passages from Scripture – Jonah 3 and Matthew 13 - and invite you to consider them again in the context of Foot and Mouth.

God's challenging the people of Ninevah to repentance and renewal involved Jonah first in running away, then going back with a bad grace, then in sulking when it seemed that's God's concern for the animals and humans of that place was far more generous than his.

Where might it lead us, to follow a God of such boundless generosity of spirit?

And second, those pictures of the Kingdom of heaven set one after the other in Matthew's Gospel, are set in insecurity and uncertainty – of people not knowing what to do, when signs of God's way of being are vulnerable and exposed to threat, of needing to let good and bad grow together, knowing that what is truly of God will grow through from the tiniest beginnings to give good shelter. bmj

COUNTRYSIDE PRAYERS

For *suppliers and hauliers* - all those connected with the infrastructure of agriculture, and the many whose livelihoods are becoming increasingly fragile and insecure; for *those in desperate need of help* - the young facing uncertain futures, families and businesses close to bankruptcy, the many who need to retire but can't; for *support networks* - agricultural chaplains and rural ministers, for farming families experiencing stress, for rural businesses, garages and shops, for neighbourly gestures and all that counters isolation.

(Arthur Rank Centre)

Down with Leaders!

Ted Hale, minister at the Northampton Abbey Centre, uses scripture to prove that 'Leaders' is an un-Biblical and unhelpful notion!

In spite of all the letters with which I can decorate my name when appealing for money, I do not claim to be an academic, but sometimes I do discern that something has become acceptable without justification. The word "leader", so prevalent in current Baptist life, is a case in point.

In many churches, and in our denominational life, the title "leader" is applied to, or claimed by, individuals or teams with ever greater frequency. This is so, even amongst those who still in theory view the local church members' meeting as the place where God's leading is to be found, and who claim scriptural warrant as the primary basis for all church structures, including patterns of ministry. I suggest that there is scant scriptural justification for using the title "leader" for any person or persons, and the concept is detrimental to church life.

The King James Version of the Bible (KJV) has its shortcomings, but it can at times be helpful to compare it with modern translations. In the KJV the word "leader" appears just six times in the entire Bible: five times in the Old Testament (translating two Hebrew nouns, *ashar* and *nagid*); once in the New Testament (Gk: *hodegos*). One of the OT references *(Isaiah 9:16)*, and the NT reference *(Matt.15:14)* are negative toward leaders. The three references in Chronicles are descriptions of military functions.

The one remaining OT reference, Isaiah 55:4, is unique in describing a specific person, King David, as a leader: *"Behold I have given him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people".* But in this verse the emphasis in the KJV is surely on the word *witness,* whilst in the GNB the emphasis is on displaying *God's power.* Leadership and authority are within that context: that is, they are witnesses to spiritual qualities not roles of governance.

Resolute resistance

This is not to say that the KJV has no concept of *leadership,* or of *leading,* or that the translators intentionally avoided these concepts. A wide range of words are legitimately translated by the verb *to lead.* With very few exceptions, unsurprisingly, this verb has God as its subject. Even when the great Moses is referred to in the context of leadership, it is noticeable that Isaiah is very careful to make plain who is really leading:

> Then he remembered the days of old, Moses and his people saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he that put his holy spirit within him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? *(Isaiah 64:11f)*

One of the things which surely made Moses, and so many others, useful in God's purposes was that when they or others were tempted to believe that God might be calling them to be a leader, they resolutely resisted that role. God was the one and only true leader. God experienced in fire and cloud led the people - not Moses! Conversely, whenever people yielded to that temptation their effectiveness as God's servants diminished.

This accords well with Jesus' injunction to his disciples in Matthew (23:10), *Neither be ye called master* (GNB leader); *for one is your master* (GNB leader), *even Christ*. There is an apparent paradox in the gospels whereby Jesus issues a call for people to follow him, which might be taken to imply that Jesus saw himself as a leader, but that is to ignore the equally important call for his disciples to be with him (John 12:26; 17:23). It is the way of obedience which is to be followed, not a charismatic personality.

Without warrant

This is not the place to discuss the Trinity or Christology, but Jesus himself, by Paul's reckoning, was raised to the very heights precisely because he did not claim equality with God, even though such a claim would not have been *robbery* (Philippians 2:5-9). And is this not at the heart of the confrontation between Pilate who claimed one kind of authority, and Jesus who was under another kind of authority entirely? At his baptism Jesus says to John, *In this way we shall do all that God requires*: and subsequently Jesus is *led by the Spirit* into the wilderness (Matthew 3:15 & 4:1).

From this reading of the KJV, the title and role of *leader* applied to a person within the company of God's people is without scriptural warrant. Indeed, it is expressly forbidden, because the leading of God's people is reserved for God alone.

Unfortunately, it is only too easy using modern translations of the Bible to seem justified in using the word "leader" for individuals. Only a minority of people now refer to the KJV, and fewer still set versions of the Bible alongside the "originals" which they claim to translate. In fairness, some translators openly acknowledge that their primary purpose in translation has not been accuracy, but accessibility for the widest possible readership. Where it is deemed necessary for ease of understanding, the most accurate word-for-word translation gives way to approximation. The results of this can be most unfortunate; and the use of the word "leader" as a substitute for a range of other more accurate translations is a case in point.

Huge differences

It is highly significant that just five uses of *leader* in the KJV have become nearly two hundred in the RSV, and over three hundred in the GNB! For those who only use such translations it would seem that people were called leaders throughout the history of the Israelites and the early churches. A well-respected minister, invited to share his thoughts on "leadership" with Abbey Centre's Bible study meeting, used the GNB references to leaders in a totally uncritical way to justify the concept of "leaders" in our denominational life.

A possible difficulty in contrasting the huge difference between the KJV and the GNB in choosing the word "leader", is to know why the choice has been made. The Hebrew word *nasi*, is best translated as "prince" (cf. Genesis 23:6 where Abraham is a *prince among men*) yet it is widely rendered as "leader". The Hebrew word *zagen*, which best translates as "Elder", thus conveying something of the respect which some societies have had for wisdom accumulated over years, is almost universally translated by the inadequate and inaccurate word "leader". Neither "prince" nor "Elder" are difficult to understand, so why have they been replaced by "leader"?

Ease of understanding can only account in part for the frequent use of "leader" in modern versions. Translators are not immune from current trends in contemporary church life and secular

thought. In spite of the twentieth century's overwhelming evidence that the best leaders (Hitler, Stalin, Chairman Mao, Mussolini) have produced the worst results, people still cry out for a "leader", who will relieve them of responsibility for their own lives and that of their neighbours. The *El Duce* of this world have generally speaking led countless others to disaster and even death.

Unhealthy tendency

In church life the charismatic movement has had a major influence over the past thirty years. The concept of leadership by individuals and teams is a major feature. So, in charismatic circles the term elder can be applied to relatively young people, because the role they fill is not one of wise counsellor, but one of leadership. Furthermore the appointment of designated "leaders" in the life of the church tends toward an authority which is often divisive rather than inspirational, and deprives other church members of their legitimate Baptist inheritance to equally share in the discernment of the moving of God's Spirit. Translators who use the word "leader" extensively have failed to distance themselves from an unhealthy tendency in human nature, and a (hopefully) passing trend in church life.

The foregoing paragraph begins to indicate disadvantages for the company of those who would be worthy of the name "God's People" which stem from a widespread use of the word "leader", and the acceptance of leadership roles. The spontaneous and natural function of older people as counsellors, and the recognition of other people as inspired and inspiring at certain times and in particular situations, are replaced with institutionalised authority structures with all the tendencies of institutions (which Foucault so accurately identified) to be inflexible, rigid, and ultimately dis-empowering for everyone. John Barry Dyer in the April 2001 *Journal ('The ineffectiveness of the church as an instrument for change')* says, *"For the church to become more effective, it will need to be mobilised. This will require changes in the way ministry is understood"*. The designation "leader" is at least in part old-fashioned clerical domination in a new disguise.

Missed opportunity

Jesus, according to John's Gospel, described the action of God's Spirit as being like the breeze; free, uninhibited, with a mind of its own and tied to no specific place or tradition. How seldom our churches manage to reflect God's spirit. How much we want to set up systems, so that we know who is in control, and are reasonably sure as to how God's spirit will move. The ascription "leader" fits perfectly into a system.

Authority and responsibility are apportioned to either one person, or a small group, and everyone else is relegated to a minor role, absolved from making decisions or taking a lead. This is not a division of labour such as is found in Acts 6, which subsequently saw Stephen and Philip engaged in other forms of ministry, but an impediment to God's freedom to use any person at any time in any way that God sees fit. Put quite simply, to say that one person is "leader" is also to say that others must follow this human leader. That is un-biblical.

I offer just two practical examples of how NOT having a leader can enrich ministry and church life.

The first concerns worship. When we, as ministers, are involved in services of worship, what is our role? Are we there as leaders? At a recent service the preacher knew he was there to "lead" the worship. As it happens, there were a couple present

celebrating a very significant event in their lives. The preacher knew it, but no mention was made of it. It did not fit in with his preparation, or his objectives. The preacher was leading the worship, and others were there to follow him in trying to find God. As leader he completely missed the opportunity for God's Spirit to shine out through the faithfulness exhibited over many years by two members of the congregation who were quite capable of sharing their joy in the context of worship.

Conductor

In marked contrast, on another occasion a preacher was conducting the worship not leading it. From a well ordered time of sensitive sharing added to a few sensible enquiries before the service a number of things became apparent. Some of the younger people had learned to sing *Kum Ba Yah* in two-part-harmony, a man was attending for the first time to find strength following the death of his wife, someone's son was just leaving for a year's backpacking in Australia, and so on.

As conductor she had little difficulty in drawing together what the various members of the congregation were contributing from their own lives to this shared experience - and the living God was celebrated by all who were there!

Understanding the role of minister as "conductor" in preference to "leader" can also affect how inclusive the scope of church life can be. Sadly there are ministers and/or diaconates or "elders" who have to retain control or oversight of everything, because they are the leaders. To some extent this principle may have been embodied in our constitutions, *The minister shall be ex-officio the president of all societies .....etc.*

In my experience for churches to have the widest impact on, and involvement with their local communities this must be abandoned. In the first place it is impractical when, for example, a church has 48 regular user groups, but secondly, that particular role in respect of most groups will almost certainly be fulfilled better by some other person who has the relevant know-how. The statutory involvement of, and deference to the minister because they are the "leader" is crippling. This is quite different to the kind of active interest and overarching guidance of the "conductor" which can be encouraging and liberating for both the minister and those whom the minister is called to serve.

Alert to God

People, like William Carey, have genuinely led others so that great things have been done for God as a result. But those people have not been called "leader". Godly leaders are humble people who eschew titles. Their worth has been recognised by others, their advice has been sought and taken, and in company with others they have set about a task, but always alert to hearing what God has to say and to do through any and every co-worker. This, I believe, is genuinely honouring the scriptural tradition within which some us still try to act - a pilgrim missionary tradition which has no place for would-be "leaders". So, the great apostle Paul:-

But of these who seemed to be somewhat [GNB "leaders"], (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me; God accepteth no man's person); for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me .....And when James, Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars [GNB "leaders"], perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen and they unto the circumcision. (Galatians 2:6,9). bmj

Chocolat and Church

Michael Frost, foundation Director of the Centre for Evangelism and Global Mission at Morling College, Sydney, has a different angle on the film *Chocolat* to that taken by many critics.

I think we have much to learn about the church and about people's yearning for a healing community by watching Lasse Hallstrom's delicious comedy/ romance *Chocolat*. The film is set in a small French village completely dominated by an austere, overbearing form of Catholicism as championed by the intimidating mayor, the Comte de Reynaud, played by Alfred Molina (don't be too hard on the Catholics - to me it looked a lot like Protestantism too).

The Comte is a controlling and frightening character and the whole town lives under a blanket of fear and uncertainty. Halstrom's art director has created a town centre without a single tree or flower. The stone walls and cobblestones are almost completely shrouded in dust or snow or wind. Everything is grey; mirroring the dryness associated with the strict form of religion that the Comte uses to silence everyone. As a result of this blanket of austerity, the relationships of the townspeople are fractured and strained.

We meet a couple whose marriage has drifted into a passionless arrangement of cleaning house and preparing meals. Another couple, who own the lease on the town's cafe, are torn apart by violence and alcoholism.

The Comte's secretary won't allow her frail son to see his grandmother because of a simple disagreement years before. An aged man who longs for a local widow cannot express his love because society dictates that she be still in mourning for her dead husband, even though he died over 40 years before.

The Comte himself has been abandoned by his wife. Unable to be honest with the town, he tells everyone that she is holidaying in Italy. Deceit and fear are the products of the rigorous and stern religious beliefs of the Comte.

Into this austere, grey community comes a woman called Vianne Rocher (Juliette Binoche), blown in by a 'sly wind from the north.' She arrives unannounced with her young daughter, both shrouded in bright red capes. In fact, the redness of their appearance against the grey bleakness of the stone village is striking.

Antithesis

It is her foolhardy intention to open a *chocolaterie* in this sad town. What's more, she has arrived just as the Catholic season of Lent is beginning. The townsfolk are to deny themselves certain pleasures as an act of contrition and devotion to Christ. The Comte is so rigorous about Lent that he virtually refuses all food.

Vianne's chocolate shop is the antithesis of everything the town stands for. Her store is soon stocked with the most decadent and exotic chocolate creations ever seen. She and the Comte are headed for a showdown over the souls of the village people. Some reviewers noted that the Comte represents traditional Christianity while Vianne represents classic paganism. The showdown, as they saw it, was a contest between Christ and hedonism.

But I see it differently. I see the Comte and the stone Catholic Church that stands

in the middle of the Town Square as symbolising the traditional-attractional model of church. It has positioned itself in the centre of things and demands allegiance and attendance. Vianne and the *chocolaterie*, on the other hand, represent a more incarnational, missional understanding of church. She is positioned at the edge of the community in an old disused *patisserie*.

Instead of insisting on absolute allegiance, Vianne sets about building friendships with the community. She creates a strong web or net of friendships. She has an astonishing knack of guessing each potential customer's favourite chocolate.And she prescribes certain chocolate remedies to mend the town's ills.

To the sad middle aged couple whose marriage has grown cold, she prescribes a chili-laced chocolate treat to "awaken the passions". Soon their love has been reawakened. She uses her creations to bring the old man and his love, the widow, Madame Audel (Leslie Caron) together. And she eventually secretly reunites her landlady Armande Voizin (Judi Dench) with her frail grandson against the wishes of his mother.

A haven

In her efforts to mend relationships and create an atmosphere of honesty and openness, Vianne faces her greatest challenge with the lot of the oppressed Josephine Muscat (Lena Olin). Her husband, Serge (Peter Stormare), is viciously violent toward her. So horrid is his oppression of her that at first she seems incapable of normal human relations. She is frightened and completely broken by Serge's abuse.

When she presents herself at the *chocolaterie* to escape from Serge (note her choice of sanctuary), Vianne takes her in and rehabilitates her, teaching her the trade of chocolate making and rebuilding her self- confidence. When the Comte hears of this situation he is galvanised into action. As a committed Christian man he cannot abide the severing of the sacrament of marriage, but neither can he accept domestic violence.

As Vianne is rebuilding the broken Josephine, the Comte accepts the challenge to reorient the violent Serge and make him a good Christian man. He forces Serge into the confessional box, buys him a new suit and gives him elocution lessons.

A contest has been enjoined. Vianne is redeeming Josephine with love, acceptance and mercy. The Comte is redeeming Serge with education, penances and discipline. It might not surprise those who haven't seen the film that Vianne is successful with loving Josephine back to life, while the Comte's efforts with the despicable Serge fail hopelessly.

Vianne Rocher's *chocolaterie* is my vision of an incarnational church. She is warm and compassionate, offering grace and peace to the troubled community. Her shop is a haven, but she doesn't simply wait for people to enter. She engages the lives and troubles of her community and offers practical help as well as space for honesty and truthtelling to happen. She celebrates life, good food (Armande's seventieth birthday party includes a devilishly exotic menu), loud laughter, love, romance, storytelling, fantasy and imagination.

In fact, Armande's birthday party reminded me of Matthew's party for Jesus (Mark 2:15) where the outcasts, sinners and tax collectors celebrated with the Messiah. Like Jesus, Vianne has collected the outcasts, the misfits and created a

veritable feast in their honour, where all are welcome. The church on the other hand is a closed set. In a telling moment of truth the parish priest, Father Henri admits that the town has "measured goodness by who we exclude."

There is a secondary storyline in the film when a group of gypsies arrive by boat and camp by the riverbank. They share Vianne's vision of a life of passion and celebration, acceptance and love.

But they are itinerants. Their leader Roux (Johnny Depp) coaxes Vianne to leave the stifling village, but Vianne is a true missionary. Though finally enticed to leave when the next north wind blows through, she resists the temptation at Josephine's insistence. Roux is like an itinerant missionary. His impact on a village is limited. He questions their worldview and makes the village people feel uncomfortable, but he motivates no change in their behaviour.

Vianne, because of her commitment to the village, her preparedness to live in close proximity to them and her compassion, ultimately transforms the village. This is how the incarnational church thinks. When you next watch Hallstrom's film, remember that the depiction of the traditional church in his film is not far from the way many people in the West view the Christian community.

We should rightly shudder with embarrassment and be all the more galvanised to fashion churches that look more like the *chocolaterie* than the cathedral.

If you liked this film, see Hallstrom's other gems *'My life as a Dog'* and *'Cider House Rules'*. bmj

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Reprinted by permission from 'Mosaic', the Quarterly Journal of the New South Wales Baptist Minister's Association, edited by Rod Benson. The latest book by Michael Frost (**mike_frost61@hotmail.com**), co-authored with Robert Banks, *'Lessons From Reel Life: Movies, Meaning and Myth-making'* is published by Openbook.

Other Books

In ***Born into Violence***, by Inger Hermann, tells the story of children from three special needs schools in Stuttgart. The children are the victims of abuse, deprivation and crime. Many are refugees. The book offers an authentic account of the exploration of faith in difficult circumstances. It is published by SCM Press. £11.95.

The Westminster Collection of Christian Quotations, is what the title suggests! The books is well produced in a hardcover. Full indexing makes it easy to use. Published by Westminster John Knox Press. Compiled by Martin Manser. It costs £20.

Michael Green has chronicled the growth of the Anglican Church in ***Asia in Asian Tigers for Christ***. Published by SPCK.

Face to Face is a book of mediations on heaven and the life to come. They were written by G Thompson Brown who served as a missionary in Asia before teaching at Columbia Theological Seminary. He is as also a Presbyterian minister, now retired. Published by Westminster John Knox Press at £7.99.

Preaching from Matthew

Sean F Winter, New Testament Tutor at the Northern Baptist College, Manchester, provides an annotated bibliography for the Gospel in the new Church Year.

Advent 2001 marks the return to Year A in the Revised Common Lectionary cycle of readings. The Gospel for the year is Matthew and so, as in previous years, this article offers a guide to some of the secondary literature on that Gospel in the hope that preachers who use the lectionary readings will discover new resources to help them in their study and preparation. In line with previous articles on Mark and Luke [*Journals* 269 (1999) and 272 (2000)] the focus will be on more substantial academic discussions.

This article begins by surveying some of the recent commentaries on Matthew, identifying and illustrating their strengths and weaknesses. We then move on to suggest other volumes on Matthew that provide a helpful orientation to the Gospel, or a significant analysis of its central theological themes.

A long gospel, Matthew is now the proud subject of that recent scholarly phenomenon: the 1000+ page commentary. While it is often the case that two or three volume commentaries make up in sheer bulk what they lack in insight, the fact is that the two best commentaries on the work of the first evangelist are shelf-bending, wallet-stretching affairs.

Influence and Reception

Pride of place here must go to the work of Ulrich Luz which, while complete in German, is still in the process of English translation. His *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990) appeared over 10 years ago, and only now has the second volume *Matthew 8-20* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) reached the light of day. The third volume on Matthew 21-28 is eagerly awaited in translation.

In many ways Luz's work is a model of Germanic scholarship. Each section of the Gospel is translated and followed by three types of comment. First the "analysis", which considers in detail issues of structure, redaction and context; then the "interpretation", a verse by verse commentary offering detailed linguistic and exegetical commentary; and finally a section entitled "history of influence". It is the latter which makes this commentary on Matthew stand out. In these sections Luz employs the hermeneutical tool of *Wirkungsgeschichte* to considerable effect, demonstrating how a grasp of the reception of Matthew in the history of the church can help the contemporary reader to new understanding. For example, Luz identifies the ways in which Jesus' teaching in Matt 6.25-34 has been domesticated by means of an application which either emphasized its relevance for a special *type* of Christian (radicals, monks, priests) or reduced it to the trite message "keep working, stop worrying!". In contrast, Luz finishes his exposition with these words:

> "[T]he church today also must be asked what significance poverty, the forgoing of vocation, or renunciation of work could have in the service of the kingdom of God. The text does not prescribe a solution, but it does give obligatory directions and opens up alternative possibilities which we ourselves have to actualise" (p.412)

Luz's commentary is my first choice for the preacher on Matthew, unfinished though the translation is. If Baptist ministers need any further encouragement then I should perhaps also mention Luz's sympathy for free church / Anabaptist readings of the gospel, a feature which shines through at many points (not least the discussion of Matthew 5-7 and Matthew 18). This is a landmark commentary to which people will refer for years to come.

A Scholar's Commentary

Luz expressly indicates that he wants his commentary to be read and used by preachers, pastors and teachers. No such hope is expressed by W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr. in their *Matthew* (3 volumes; International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988-1997). This is a commentary for scholars. It is over 2000 pages long, exhaustively detailed, based on the Greek text which is largely left untranslated (as, incidentally is the Hebrew, French, German and whatever other language comes to hand).

So why include it here? The answer to that is quite simple: if you have a question about any detail of Matthew's gospel, you will find an answer here. Davies and Allison is always my first stop in seeking to understand the text, because of the care with which they have gathered evidence, sifted opinions and stated their own, usually convincing conclusions.

The commentary is similar to Luz's in format. Each section of the gospel is discussed under the headings "Structure", "Sources". "Exegesis", "Concluding Observations" and "Bibliography". Here the preacher will find a vast wealth of exegetical information, including a helpful discussion of the way that Matthew's language echoes that of the Old Testament and other Jewish and Greco-Roman writings. Every now and again, however, a more contemporary tone is struck. Here is their comment on the same Matthew passage (6.25-34):

> "Concern over food, drink and clothing unavoidably belongs to the natural order of things, so how can it be wrong? Is irresponsibility being inculcated? Is Mt 6.25-34 not in truth bordering on enthusiastic fantasy? Is it not just one more religious flight from solid reality? ... Our passage is, obviously, not filled to overflowing with level-headed common sense. But then faith and worldly wisdom often go their separate ways." (Volume 1, page 658)

I recognise that commentaries such as those by Luz and Davies and Allison will be beyond the pockets of most ministers (although only volume 2 of Luz is available at the moment, leaving time to save up for the other two). They are, however, the most complete tools for a preacher who is serious about understanding and interpreting the text of Matthew's gospel. There is good news, however.

Help in One Volume

Craig S. Keener has taken the alternative route and published his 1,000 page commentary in one volume, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). Rather than aim for comprehensiveness Keener identifies two key foci for his reading, namely the "social-historical contexts of Matthew and his traditions" and "the nature of Matthew's instruction to his Christian audience". In other words Keener elucidates the key themes of context and content in a way that will be of enormous assistance to the preacher.

To achieve these aims, Keener garners an impressive quantity of illustrative data that establish a plausible first century

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To the readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal

SNAKES & LADDERS

As youngsters we will have taken great pleasure in a game of Snakes & Ladders particularly on being able to reach the top of the ladder. We have also experienced the slide down the Snake when we really did not expect it.

Church life similarly has many ups and downs and it is evident from our surveyors' visits that many churches have equipment that is well past its sell by date and an accident is just waiting to happen. I believe that the following few words received from one of them provide a very simple message.

"Our Church newsletter is now giving notice of the arrangements to be made for Harvest Festival. "Volunteers wanted to decorate the Church—-" etc.

Long and protracted meetings have been taking place about what "theme" the decoration should follow.

The usual result is a lot of activity by volunteers, as well as members of the flower-rota, employing all kinds of raw materials, balls of string, and use of tools, including LADDERS.

It is this point (LADDERS) which has prompted me to note that our own Church ladders (wooden) were built some time before the first world war, and on close examination are frankly lethal. They are rotten in part, with failing joints, no rubber (non-slip) feet, and are not long enough for the work to be done.

When was the last time your Church steps or ladders were examined?

Do volunteers know how to safely pitch them? E.g. the correct angle. Is the floor surface safe for this? Do they lean against something which could fail with the weight? Are they long enough to reach the height wanted safely?

I went down to our local village DIY store, and purchased a good quality set of extending aluminium ladders, fitted with extra non-slip stand-off feet at the top and bottom.

Expensive, I know, but a lot safer in the long run, especially when pitched on slippery or uneven surfaces."

If this has a ring of truth with your own church please try to ensure that action is taken without delay. That feeling of regret when sliding down the Snake becomes very real when a Volunteer has fallen off the ladder!

A.J.GREEN ACII ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

context for Matthew. He then examines how Matthew's presentation of the teaching of Jesus might be seen to address that context with the good news of the gospel. This is all done in the hope that "when we consider the contexts in which Matthew's exhortations find their greatest relevance, *we* are better positioned to hear the true force of his exhortations" (page 5, emphasis mine).

If we turn to the details of the commentary we discover Keener's ability to summarize Matthew's teaching in ways that are immediately suggestive for the preacher. Thus, the discussion of our example passage (Matt 6.25-34) revolved around three key assertions:

1. "God promises the basics"
2. "Jesus shames his hearers by reminding them that even Gentiles seek material things."
3. "Anxiety does no good."

I am just getting to know this commentary, but it increasingly looks like a strong choice for the preacher or teacher working with the first Gospel.

Matthew and the Margins

Readers of the *Journal* may be familiar with the work of Ched Myers on Mark's gospel, *Binding the Strong Man,* which reads Matthew's source in explicitly political terms. We now have a Matthean equivalent, Warren Carter's *Matthew and the Margins: A Socio-Political and Religious Reading* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000). Newly published, I have had little time to acquaint myself with this commentary (I only got my copy 2 days before writing this article). However it is worth quoting from the Preface to give you a feel for Carter's approach:

> "Matthew's gospel is a counternarrative. It is a work of resistance written from and for a minority community of disciples committed to Jesus, the agent of God's saving presence and empire. The gospel shapes their identity and lifestyle as an alternative community. It strengthens this community to resist the dominant Roman imperial and syngogal control. It anticipates Jesus' return when Jesus will complete God's salvific purposes in establishing God's reign or empire over all, including Rome" (page xvii, emphasis removed)

Reading this most Jewish of gospels in the light of a Roman context is challenging and new and leads to some fresh interpretations of the texts. Again Matt 6.25-34 offers a suggestive example. In his commentary on 6.28-30 Carter suggests that there is a clearly anti-monarchical polemic in the reference to Solomon who is the model of the distrustful and anxious person who "employs the typical unjust and exploitative strategies of imperial powers which God had forbidden" (page 178).

It would come as no surprise to me if Carter does for Matthew what Myers has done for Mark, and enables preachers to understand Matthew as a gospel deeply concerned with the need for vision and resistance by faithful disciples in a hostile environment.

Other Commentaries

A brief mention of other commentaries will have to suffice in this survey. Donald Hagner's *Matthew 1-13, 14-28* (2 volumes: Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word, 1993, 1995) is detailed and represents the best of evangelical scholarship. But, as with many of the Word volumes, it lacks spark and originality. A useful and cheap volume from the same perspective is R. T. France, *Matthew* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Leicester: IVP, 1985). Robert Gundry's idiosyncratic *Matthew: A Commentary on*

His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution (2nd ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) was controversial in its time (due to Gundry's claims about the midrashic character of the birth narratives) but its detailed redactional analysis will be too much like hard work for most preachers. Margaret Davies', *Matthew* (Readings; Sheffield; Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) offers a literary reading of the gospel, but the preacher will want more background information. Eduard Schweizer's *The Good News According to Matthew* (ET; London: SPCK, 1976) contains good things but is definitely out of date and probably out of print.

My other key recommendation would be to consider some of the useful commentary resources now being published as companions to the Lectionary. Those for year A contain commentary on all the relevant texts including that from the gospel. My own favourite comes from the States, *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV – Year A* (ed. W. Brueggemann, C. B. Cousar, B. R. Gaventa; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995). You may prefer, however, the forthcoming British offering, *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts* (eds. C. Gunton; R. Burridge; London: Continuum, 2001).

In the midst of all these recommendations you will note that I have omitted any discussion of cost. These days, such a thing is difficult to pin down, however, for any of the first four commentaries mentioned or the Lectionary commentaries you should reckon between £30-40 per volume. Other commentaries will be cheaper than this.

Preaching the Seasons

In the article on Luke in *Journal* 272 (2000) I mentioned several volumes that are recommended as reading relevant to the seasons of the church year. Some of these relate not simply to Luke but to Matthew as well, and I stand by those recommendations. There are volumes specific to one section of Matthew, however, that can be mentioned here.

The Sermon on the Mount

From the 4th Sunday after Epiphany (February 3rd 2002 by my reckoning) the Lectionary steers the preacher to the Sermon on the Mount and keeps her there for at least 5 weeks. This is an ideal chance to tackle this Everest of gospel texts and a sure guide is needed. My own recommendation would be Robert Guelich's *The Sermon on the Mount: A Foundation for Understanding* (Waco: Word, 1982) which is less daunting than Hans Dieter Betz's *The Sermon on the Mount* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1995). A shorter commentary is Georg Strecker's *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988). The reflections on the sermon in Bonhoeffer's *Cost of Discipleship* (many editions) are as challenging now as they ever have been.

Introductions and Major Studies

The commentaries noted above all contain introductory sections discussing the setting, date, theology etc. of this gospel. However the preacher who wants to get a quick overview of these issues and of recent scholarship on the gospel has several options. I would recommend Luz's *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) which is, in a way, a mini-commentary exploring Matthew's theology. John Riches has written the section on Matthew in the newly issued *The Synoptic Gospels* (ed. Scot McKnight; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) and a recent textbook on the Synoptics also provides a

useful overview, D Wenham and S. Walton (eds.), *Exploring the New Testament Volume 1: Introducing the Gospels and Acts* (London: SPCK, 2001), chapter 10. This work would be especially helpful for a bible-study leader, containing as it does suggestive exercises for group and individual study. The best overall discussion, however, is by R. T. France in a companion volume to his commentary, *Matthew – Evangelist and Teacher* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1989). This volume, with its emphasis on Matthew's theology of fulfilment, is more detailed than the others and presents a clear and often convincing account of the gospel in its setting.

The setting of this gospel, and more specifically the relationship between Matthew's "community" and Judaism has been the subject of a number of studies of which the best is Graham Stanton's collection of essays, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992). This is a model of clear and convincing exegesis and is, I think, the book that most helped me to understand Matthew during my student years. Two other works cover similar ground: J. A. Overman, *Matthew's Gospel and Formative Judaism: The Social World of the Matthean Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) and David C Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Studies in the New Testament and its World; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

Matthew's Narrative power

The other scholarly "growth" area in Matthean studies are analyses of literary aspects of the gospel. These volumes will help the preacher to grasp not so much the *what* of the gospel (its theological content) as the *how* (its narrative power). Such volumes include those by J. D.Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) and the older *Matthew: Structure, Christology and Kingdom* (London: SPCK, 1976) and more recently David Howell's, *Matthew's Inclusive Story: A Study in the Narrative Rhetoric of the First Gospel* (JSNTSup 42; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

Other studies of the gospel include the volume of essays edited by Graham Stanton, *The Interpretation of Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1983) and the ground-breaking redaction-critical study of Bornkamm, Barth and Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (London: SCM, 1963). Many, many more individual volumes could be cited, but there is enough here for the preacher to get truly acquainted with her text.

As before, I would recommend shopping around. For new books the www.bookbrain.co.uk website will compare all the online bookstores and give you the best price. For second hand volumes, I use www.bibliofind.com, although books often can only be found in USA 2nd hand bookstores.

Matthew is, as Paul Minear once put it, "The Teacher's Gospel". But the best teachers are themselves the most committed learners and it is hoped that the purchase and perusal of one or some of the volumes mentioned here will enable such learning to take place in the study, the pulpit and the pew. bmj

J-Mail

The Celtic Church

from Crawford McIntyre, Wincanton Somerset
Crawford_theclan@btinternet.com

Dear Journal, I was interested to read Ruth Gouldbourne's helpful article in the January issue of the *Journal* on European Baptist, while Ken Stewart's review of 'Colonies of Heaven: Celtic Models for Today's Church' reminded me of a publication given by a friend during a holiday in May. It was by her late husband who was interested in Celtic Christianity and it's history in Gt Britain: 'Modern Celtic Spirituality' by Paul Fauy (St Matthew Publishing, Cambridge).

In his introduction, Fauy is grateful for any lively interest in Celtic history and the faith of our forefathers. He also extols the band 'Iona' whose music, he believes, is encouraging good Celtic and Gaelic themes along with Biblical perspectives. However Fauy warns of the dangers of gullibility and the lack of the critical faculty in seeking to find a Celtic Christianity.

The author is also concerned about the influence of New Age thinking. Some may scorn this but the spirit of the age can influence even the thinking of the Christian. [I John 4v1] This short but discerning booklet is a timely reminder to be on our guard against anything that may hinder our worship and spiritual growth in the guise of progressing it. What gives "feel good" factor should never be the criteria for Christians grounded in Biblical Truth. There is deep emotional experience for God's people which is known by all who seek after Christ which we cannot discount but all we do, say and think should come to the touchstone of Scriptural principle. Paul Fauy reminds us that the Celtic Saints of the Ireland had "veneration for the Bible; A pure love for Jesus ; A passion for mission; baptism by immersion; An honouring of the 10 Commandments and A clear message of salvation" Sorry, I did not mean to give a book review. just thought it would add to the ongoing discussion to help us in our understanding of the Celtic church. Thank you for the magazine.

I am a new boy to the BMF and look forward to continued fellowship and stimulus through the magazine.

School Chaplaincy

from Kath Lawson, 23 Broadstone Street, Todmorden, OL14 8AL
kath@lawsonfamily.freeserve.co.uk

Dear Journal, Thank you for another excellent issue, particularly for the article about hospital chaplaincy, written by Carol Nolan. The article sparked off a thought that perhaps the readers of the *Journal* may be able to help me with. I have recently taken on a chaplaincy role in the local High School in Todmorden. This is uncharted territory as far as I can see, and to a degree I am struggling as to how best to make it work. The school has a high percentage of Muslim children, and a higher than average number of children living not only in one parent families, but in no parent families (they are either in foster care, living with a relative other than a parent, or living with a boy/girl friend in the case of older pupils). The social problems within the school are horrendous, which was what prompted me to offer my services to the school. You will appreciate that one is not quite so free to get involved within what is effectively a work place, and that places restrictions on what I can do. I would be grateful for input from anyone who has had any experience of similar work in schools for suggestions.

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Rev. Clive Doubleday with a needy Kosovan family outside their tent

DR DAVID RUSSELL, former General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and a member of Smile International's Council of Reference, writes:

I was reading the Epistle of James when the first Smile magazine dropped through my letterbox. I was intrigued, for the one read like a commentary on the other! They both seemed to say the same thing: *Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead' (James 2:17).* The foundational faith is there all right: but so are the works - widows' houses restored, schools repaired, medicines supplied, milk cows provided, hope restored! It is faith expressing itself eloquently in the language of loving care, inspired and promoted by the love of none other than Christ himself."

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Book Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

Creative Styles of Preaching. Mark Barger Elliott. Westminster John Knox Press 2001, x + 173pp £12.99.

Preaching like Paul. James W Thompson. Westminster John Knox Press 2001, xii + 177pp £12.99.

Both these books recognize the postmodern context in which contemporary preaching takes place and seek, in very different ways, to address this situation, in the belief that preaching does still have a place.

The premise of Elliott's book is that "our congregations have grown, or will soon grow, restless with one preaching style" (ix) and that to keep their attention we need to use a variety of styles. In this 'travel guide of the homiletical landscape', he describes nine sermon styles, indicated by the chapter headings; Narrative Preaching, African American Preaching, Evangelistic Preaching, Topical Preaching, The Four Pages of the Sermon, Preaching the Literary Forms of the Bible, Pastoral Preaching, Biblical Preaching, and Imaginative Preaching.

Most chapters begin by describing the approach of one of more exponents of the style under consideration. (An exception is 'Topical Preaching' which includes an eighteen point checklist!). The descriptions are brief, mostly about a page, but sufficient to give some idea. There follows two sermons in that style, varying in length from four to ten pages, one of them by one of the preachers whose approach has been described. No attempt, however, is made to show how the sermons illustrate the approach described. The reader is left to work that out for herself or himself.!

Whether the various styles of preaching are as distinct as their separation suggests is arguable, as is the description of them in the title as 'creative' – there are certainly more creative ways of preaching than those listed here. But the book is a useful guide to some of the different styles and your reviewer found some of the sermons temptingly usable!

Thompson is critical of the current emphasis on narrative preaching, which avoids Paul because "Pauline texts do not fit easily with the postmodern fascination with story". He accepts that Paul is not the only model for preaching but believes that he is a forgotten mentor in this area. To the objection that in discussing Paul we are dealing with letters rather than sermons, Thompson asserts that Paul's letters "present a very strong echo of his preaching ministry" (27), and, of course, the letters would have been read aloud to congregations and so been heard, not read, by most people. His book contains detailed analyses of Paul's letters, including similarities to and differences from other letters of the time.

The author is convinced that Paul's epistles "provide the dimension that is lacking in narrative preaching" (15), namely, the dialectical relationship between evangelistic witness and pastoral care. He argues that in his preaching Paul employs theological argument in support of exhortation, the indicative preceding the imperative, that he is speaking not to individuals but to churches, and crucially, that he is primarily concerned with the "continued formation of a community that awaits the parousia" (90). Whilst our eschatological outlook may be different from Paul's, Thompson believes that the formation of Christian communities is still a fundamental task of preaching, albeit a

counter-cultural one, and therefore a difficult one to carry out in our individualistic society.

The book ends with seven 'sketches', as the author calls them, in which he brings together exegetical reflections on Pauline passages with the pastoral and theological task, with material that indicates the movement of his text. There are indices of names, scripture references and Greek and Latin sources, but a subject index, which would have been useful, is lacking.

How useful these books will be to ministers depends to large extent on whether or not one feels that preaching still has a place. If, like your reviewer, you feel that it does, but that it also needs to vary in style, then you will find some help, as well as some good sermons, in Elliott. If you want to think about the agenda and aims of preaching, Thompson's advocacy of Paul's homiletical approach will give you food for thought.

John Matthews,
Tilehouse Street Baptist Church, Hitchin

Baptism and the Baptists. Theology and Practice in Twentieth-Century Britain. Anthony R Cross. Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs, Paternoster Press 2001. Paperback £29.99. ISBN 0-85364-959-6

Books which start life as PhD theses are rarely so accessible or (dare one say) useful. Anthony Cross has provided a wealth of resources and information drawn not only from Baptist systematic theological writing but also from his meticulous research into occasional writings such as articles and letters published by the Baptist Times. His concern is not solely with Baptist scholarship but also with 'grass-roots'. During the twentieth century, discussion of issues around the theory and practice of baptism have been amongst the most contentious, not only in Baptist participation in the ecumenical sphere, but also amongst ourselves. This timely volume maps out the last century from a British Baptist perspective, with contours of landscape clearly marked and plenty of pointers to follow for more specific information. It is packed with detail and provides a useful interpretation for anyone wishing to investigate our own recent history.

Cross commences with a brief review of the theology and practice of baptism amongst British Baptists in the Nineteenth Century, during which time the surge of missionary and philanthropic concerns brought denominations into relationship in a new way. He indicates common ground in the mode (immersion), subjects (infant or believers of more mature years) and theology (how does it connect with our understanding of the Gospel?) underlying Baptist perspectives concerning baptism through the twentieth century. He then charts his territory in three broad chronological segments, 1900-1937, 1938-1966, 1967-1999, drawing out theological themes in each in connection with broader ecumenical developments, before concluding with an extensive overview of the practice of Baptism between 1900-1999 as it has been affected by these developments.

The length, 530 pages, may put some people off - but to my knowledge there is nothing to currently to compare with this and available in one volume. It should be required reading for anyone preparing for Baptist Ministry - and if it were on the reading lists for ministerial students of other denominations it might help them to understand something of Baptist diversity and the potential richness and complexity of attempts between Baptists and others to deal well together.

At £30 it's not a cheap paperback, but as a planned spend out of a book budget it would give good value for money. Would I think it worth buying if I had not been

given a copy for review? Yes!

Hazel Sherman,
Brecon Baptist Church

Integrity of Pastoral Care by David Lyall. New Library of Pastoral Care. SPCK. 2001. xviii + 190pp. (no price) ISBN 0-281-05026-0.

This book offers far more than its title suggests. David Lyall affirms that there is a ministry of pastoral care which, while incorporating many of the insights of good counselling and other secular therapies, is not the same as these, but has its own distinctive integrity because it is rooted in the life and worship of that community of faith shaped by the story of Jesus Christ. While recognising the pastoral care offered by many so-called layfolk, the book focuses deliberately on the work of the ordained ministry. As such there is much to encourage those ministers of Word and sacrament who feel intimidated by the certificated qualifications of others working in the caring professions. Pastoral ministry has both its own professional integrity and a theological integrity rooted in the Christian gospel.

The theology underlying pastoral care is part of the wider discipline of practical theology which is essentially dialectical in character. Therefore, as well as grounding our understanding of pastoral care in the narrative that constitutes the community of faith, we must also seek to understand the wider culture within which that community "lives and moves and has its being." – and yes, that does mean grappling with postmodernism! Even if most folk haven't a clue about the technicalities, we're all influenced by its worldview and it touches many aspects of the social, ethical and religious contexts of ministry today. While we don't have to fold meekly in the face of postmodernism's claim that there is no metanarrative, no *big story* to link and explain everything, we do have to learn how to make use of our stories (our own and those of the faith community) in the reality of the postmodern world.

Drawing on the ideas of Brueggeman, Bonhoeffer (conformation with Christ), Rogers (therapeutic relationships), Fowler (stages of faith) and Schoen (reflective practice), and using case material supplied by other ministers, Lyall offers guidelines for models of ministry in the postmodern situation, calling for "collaborative" styles of ministry, with ordained ministers being reflective practitioners and life-long learners. In short, a useful text for those currently in training for ministry and a potential tonic for those already doing the job.

Ken Stewart,
Horfield Baptist Church, Bristol.

The Radical Stories of Jesus – Interpreting the Parables Today. Michael Ball. Smyth & Helwys & Regents. £12.99.

It is always pleasing to receive an edition of the Regent's Study Guide and this is no exception. Originating in sabbatical study, this work has resulted in a deeply thought provoking and challenging book. Michael Ball argues that the parables were originally intended to be subversive and shocking and goes on to say they still are, challenging our stereotypes, forcing us to see new truths and making us rethink our cherished presuppositions.

Not surprisingly he sees the roots of the parables in the Old Testament where he finds many allusions, particularly in the prophets and in Nathan's classic story in 2 Samuel 12 which has many of the features found in the parables of Jesus. He gives a very detailed analysis of the parables in the synoptic gospels, admitting it is difficult to get back to the original ideas of Jesus and suggests Jeremias was over confident

claiming that we can get to the very words of Jesus, but he does say we can still hear the voice of Jesus through the whole collection of parables.

In asking the question "What is a Parable?" in chapter 5 he makes it clear that parables do not present us with tidy theories or theologies. He says: "we must look below their surface and allow them to speak. They challenge us to repentance, and to the possibility of experiencing grace and being children of God within ordinary everyday life."

This concept is amplified in the latter part of the book where he presents "A Method of Approaching the Parables" which really does enable the reader to "look below their surface" by using eleven guidelines amongst which are: remove presuppositions, read the text carefully, find the main comparison, and be alert for the unexpected. This method is then illustrated with reference to three parables, the Mustard Seed, the Labourers in the Vineyard and the Judge and Widow.

In the final chapter Preaching the Parables there are some excellent examples of how the parables can be re-located and their possibilities explored within a contemporary setting. This is a book I thoroughly enjoyed and am happy to commend it, especially to those who are seeking to work out the parables in the pastoral ministry.

Peter Webb,
South St, Exeter

The Art of Teaching the Bible. Christine Eaton Blair. Geneva Press. £9.99. 136 pp.

This book is not for dogmatic bible teachers who know the "truth" and the "truth" has locked them in the prison of their own understanding. These teachers, from conservative evangelical circles, as well as fundamental, catholic and charismatic circles, will despair in chapter one where four models of Biblical Interpretation are critically reviewed and shown to have equal validity.

Die-hard preachers will similarly despair in chapter two which suggests that "the sermon" is not necessarily the best way that adults learn. Rather that we learn in various different ways and that some "Children's" learning methods may not be altogether inappropriate. As Blair says "We are so concerned with orthodoxy and being right that we try to make our God a tame, safe God. But our God can work to save us through many interpretations." that is interpretations of both Scripture and adulthood.

This is not a "How to..." book written from one perspective, but a deeper look at foundational principles for integrating the "Text of Scripture" with the "Text of adult life". Nonetheless, Blair offers very practical suggestions as to how to apply the principles, and encourages deeper exploration to enhance the teacher's skill.

Sceptics who have read this far could begin the book at the end: "Tips 9 & 10: Pray. Be open to the Holy Spirit" in Chapter 5. One feels this section is too short, but then it really is the foundation from which good teachers and teaching grow; a presupposition mentioned to conclude the teaching of the book.

This is a refreshingly rounded approach to biblical interpretation, teaching philosophy and their integration, with the aim of allowing the text of scripture to engage with the text of adult life thus preparing the "good soil" in which the word of God may grow and be fruitful.

Philip Mader-Grayson,
Wallingford Baptist Church

The Legacy of Sovereign Joy. John Piper. IVP. 158 pages. £9.99 ISBN 0851119794

John Piper offers three potted biographies of Augustine, Luther and Calvin to challenge and inspire today's pastors by the stories of these great but flawed saints.

The title, *Sovereign Joy*, is taken from Augustine's *Confessions* and provides the theme for the book, namely that of grace. According to Piper, the infusion of grace into Augustine at his conversion brought a fullness of Sovereign Joy that led to victory over sex and immorality. Here Piper finds a key for pastoral preaching about holiness and Christian discipleship. The Sovereign Joy of God's grace should outweigh the pleasure of sin providing a powerful motive for obedience and holiness.

In Luther, the key to the Christian life was the Word of God, the Bible. Six lessons from Luther at study are given to encourage diligence in sermon preparation. For example, Luther elevated the biblical text above commentators or the Church Fathers; reading the text in Greek and Hebrew was the privilege and responsibility of the Reformed Preacher! Luther considered trials and suffering as God's means of making a theologian, and that temptation and affliction are hermeneutical touchstones for preachers.

The core of Calvin's ministry was "unrelenting exposition of the word". During his 25 years of ministry at St Peter's Church in Geneva he preached 46 sermons on Thessalonians, 186 on Corinthians, 353 on Isaiah, 200 on Deuteronomy, and so on. Calvin believed the Church was made effective and the glory of God revealed through expository preaching.

The heavy reliance on secondary sources means that there is probably little here that Baptist ministers didn't know before. However the enthusiasm of the author for his subject, the clarity of his writing, and the desire for pastors to learn best practice from those who achieved great things in their own day will encourage all who read it.

Ian Birch,
St Helens Baptist Church

The New Testament Which Way In? Kenneth Grayston. Darton, Longman & Todd. £8-95

Why did Kenneth Grayston write this book? He answers that question for us, ' Because it seems that people are no longer familiar with the Bible. If they worship on Sundays they hear passages read and perhaps explained. But such passages are seldom part of their own familiar knowledge' And so he sets out to help people in their reading and understanding of the New Testament.

Along the way he deals with the need for context, which translation to read, and then a short precis of the writings which make up the New Testament. He writes in a clear and easy to understand style, which is scholarly, but at the same time, uncomplicated.

Some readers might feel that he doesn't go deep enough or only skims the surface but he has the ability to leave you with a desire to find out more, and 127 pages doesn't allow for deep reflection.

This is an ideal book to give to those whose understanding of the New Testament is scant and who wish to discover more. Ideal also, perhaps, for those studying RE at school or considering studying Theology at college. It is an ideal first step to deeper learning.

Stephen Baker,
Downend Baptist Church.

On our way?

The theme of this year's One Word Week starting 21st October is 'we're on our way' - to respecting the dignity of each human being and the integrity of the Earth. But this year that aspiration is likely to be tested more severely than ever before. The week is built around United Nations Day (24th October) and is an agency of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. The aim is to learn about what's going on in the world (on our doorsteps and beyond); to celebrate the good things about being part of one diverse but interconnected world; and to take action to change the things that cause injustice, poverty and degredation. Further information can be had from the OWW office: PO Box 2555, Reading RG1 4XW. Tel 0118 939 4933 www.oneworldweek.org

RICHES OF DIVERSITY

If you want to find out about the beliefs, history and spiritual nourishment of the Cherubim and Seraphim Churches, or of the Churches in the African and Afro-Caribbean Council, or of those who belong to the International Ministerial Council, or to the New Testament Assembly - then the book to consult is *'Such a feast'* edited by Judith Lampard (CTE 2001, 176 pp £8.50). It also lists the beliefs, history and spiritual nourishment of the mainstream denominations and Churches, including BUGB.

'Such a feast', says Judith Lampard, is part of an 'ongoing process to help churches and individuals discern and share their "spiritual treasures"', and it 'reflects the wonderful variety of Christian spiritual nourishment in England at the beginning of the twenty-first century'.