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# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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

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

# Editorial

## Eureka!

I'd heard about 'Roots'. I was even present at an Inter-Church Meeting when it was no more than a gleam in someone's eye. I'd registered that it was going to replace 'Partners in Learning' and tie in with the revised common lectionary. It all sounded eminently sensible. But it didn't excite me. There are so many resources for Sunday School teachers, all age worship leaders and pastors that another one – while undoubtedly worth knowing about, and maybe trying out once or twice – isn't enough of itself to get me climbing up to the rooftops to shout 'eureka'!

And then one day I was thumbing through the free sample, and it started to dawn on me. 'Roots' just could be different if for no other reason than that it has a companion web site. Since many, if not by now most, of our ministers are connected to the internet this means that users of 'Roots' can access supplementary material Saturday night or even Sunday morning!

Because through the web, 'Roots' promises to provide topical material and prayers to enable pastors and teachers to respond to current events. And that seems to me to be a big plus. According to advance copies of the promotional literature, the internet will also allow 'Roots' users to swap ideas, experiences and resources, as well as accessing far more material than is provided in the bi-monthly magazines.

But even if you haven't personal access to the internet, the magazines have been designed to contain a wealth of material in themselves – and there are two sets, one for those who work with groups of children and young people aged 4 to 14, and one for Worship leaders

For those working with children and young people (starting on Sunday 1st September) there are Bible notes giving a quick explanation of the main points in the readings; suggestions to help create a suitable setting; ideas to help kick things off; ways to get deeper into the word; creative use of craft or other responses for

the under 11s and activities specially designed for the 11 to 14s; help with connecting the Bible's teaching with life today; prayers to use and ways to pray; and a list of songs and resources to use with different age groups.

For Worship leaders there's a similar range of material, but at a level appropriate to adults and all age worship.

Reflecting on the readings for Sept 1st (Jeremiah 15: 15-21; Romans 12: 9-21; Matthew 16: 21-28) one approach offers this comment: 'Where was God when two planes struck the World Trade Centre? God didn't stop it happening. God didn't seek vengeance. But God was there, working quietly through the suffering, bringing feats of heroism from people who never thought themselves capable, rebuilding community amongst New York's fragmented people, turning grief to caring. God didn't take the pain away, but helped people to use the pain creatively. politicians look for quick fixes; God is there for the long haul.'

And for readers of the *Journal* it will be of further interest that one of the names behind the launch of 'Roots' and one of its writers, is the General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Dr David Goodbourn, one time tutor at the Northern Baptist College.

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# End Times Literature

**Vivienne Lassetter, BUGB Ministries Adviser, invites us to face the sobering fact that for many who sit in our congregations week by week it is populist Christian fiction that informs our people's theology and helps to shape their lifestyle, not our preaching!**

'Biblical prophecy is fulfilled at every turn. For many followers this series has become a tangible and thrilling testament to the book of *Revelation*.' So writes Gail Hudson of Amazon.com, just one of the glowing testimonials on the dust jackets of the '*Left Behind*' series which, according to *Time Magazine* 'are doing for Christian fiction what John Grisham did for courtroom thrillers'.

Should we rejoice? Shouldn't Christians of all persuasions be popping the champagne corks in order to celebrate the amazing success of these books? How many Christian writers have been lauded by publishers and reviewers, Christian and non-Christian alike as have Tim La Haye and Jerry B Jenkins?

'Christian thriller, prophecy based fiction, juiced up morality tale, call it what you like, the '*Left Behind*' series. now has a label its creators could never have predicted: block-buster success.'

What is all the fuss about? There are now nine books in the series (number ten is due out in the summer of 2002). They begin with the rapture of true bible believing Christians, and will no doubt end when Jesus returns to inaugurate his thousand year reign. The first novel, '*Left Behind*', sold 3,000,000 copies.

The books sensationalise Dispensationalist teaching in a genre coined by Tom Sine, writer for *Sojourner Magazine* as 'Pop Eschatology'.

In his article entitled '*Who is Tim La Haye?*'<sup>1</sup> Sine warns American Christian leaders that they make a grave mistake 'if they do not take deadly seriously anything (La Haye) writes.'<sup>2</sup> He goes on to argue that academics underrate the influence *Baptist Ministers' Journal* July 2002

that authors like La Haye have with ordinary Christians. 'The *Left Behind* novels propagate his views to an audience that reaches far beyond evangelical culture.'<sup>3</sup>

## sensationalist

La Haye's views were first brought to evangelical attention in populist form through the writings of Hal Lindsay, best known for the sensationalist book '*The Late great Planet Earth*'<sup>4</sup> which propagated Pre-millennium Dispensationalism, bringing the book of Revelation to life for 30,000,000 million readers world wide.

Dispensationalists believe that at the time of the rapture true Christians 'will be caught up into the air to be with the Lord, who comes to meet the true church, his bride. Then follows a period of tribulation (literally 1,260 days) after which Jesus appears again with his saints to judge the living. After that comes the 1000 year reign of Christ, followed by the unloosing of Satan before the final judgement and eternity.'<sup>5</sup>

According To Paula Clifford, author of '*A Brief history of End time*' Dispensationalism creates three comings of Christ, and a number of judgements.

Lindsay's graphic details of the horrors awaiting unbelievers after Christians have

been raptured caused grave concern to many readers. Because he quoted from the Bible they believed what he wrote. Most ordinary Christians have no theological mechanism for testing what they read and hear. Lindsay writes with authority, quoting Scripture, 'unlocking' the bible for ordinary Christians who have the misfortune to be members of churches that do not preach the whole truth. 'It is the complete agreement of all parts of prophecy which makes its study so absorbing, so filled with tingling vitality for the twentieth century that it is a wonder that every preacher in every pulpit doesn't shake the ecclesiastical rafters with this subject.'<sup>6</sup> Lindsay lists the signs of apostasy for those of his readers who are wondering whether they are being taught the 'whole truth':

- Church Leaders, teachers, or preachers who question the visible return of Christ.
- The denial of the deity of Jesus.
- Rejection of the virgin birth.
- Rejection of life after death.
- Rejection of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

### **religious right**

Ecumenism is viewed with deep suspicion. 'The mass movement of The World Council of Churches toward an umbrella-like structure which would cover all sorts of beliefs and camouflage its motives with 'broad-mindedness', seems to say 'Come unto me all ye who are weary and I will give you – controversy.' In May 1969, The World Council of Churches, recommended that the Churches should support violence if it is the last way to overthrow political and economic tyranny. This group also recommended that Churches should confess that they are 'filled with blatant and insidious institutional racism'.<sup>8</sup> Obviously

something no true believer should contemplate!

Tom Sine in 'Who is Tim La Haye?' makes the point that for La Haye, humanism is the enemy. Through his enormously popular novels he preaches the political agenda of the Religious Right. The Evangelical Studies Bulletin named La Haye as 'the most influential Christian leader for the last quarter Century'<sup>9</sup>

In La Haye's first 'Left Behind' novel after which the series is named, the world is thrown into complete chaos when vast numbers of people vanish into thin air. Multiple crashes occur on the roads as drivers simply disappear from behind the wheel. Planes fall out of the sky because pilots are no longer at the controls. The carnage is horrific. Women going into delivery suites in the last stages of labour are distraught on being told by puzzled midwives that their babies are no longer there. (All children everywhere under the age of thirteen are gone.)

One of the main characters in the series is Rayford Steele an air line pilot who had been toying with the idea of adultery with a young stewardess. His wife Irene and their twelve year old son had disappeared. Irene had recently changed churches and Rayford had refused to go with her because the minister preached about prophecy. Irene had warned Rayford that this church taught that true believers, who really believe the bible, would one day be taken into heaven. The opening chapters relate Rayford's shock and grief as he realises his wife was speaking the truth after all. News flash bulletins relay the carnage and chaos to those who have survived.

### **rapture**

At a Christian high school soccer game at a missionary headquarters in Indonesia,

most of the spectators and all but one of the players disappeared in the middle of play, leaving their shoes and uniforms on the ground, The CNN reporter announced that in his remorse the surviving player took his own life.<sup>10</sup> Rayford's first officer had lost his two young children, as well as his wife who had been killed in a crash caused by driverless cars veering out of control. He too committed suicide.

Rayford found Irene's bible and contacted her church. The visitation pastor had been left behind along with a handful of the members. Together they watched a video about the rapture which the senior pastor had made years before for this situation. Rayford and his daughter became Christians, and along with the pastor and a journalist his daughter would soon marry, formed the Tribulation Force and pledged to fight evil and bring as many souls to Christ as they could before he returned.

The violence in the novels is unremitting. Nothing can halt it because it is all ordained by God. Sine believes La Hayes writings tend to foster both the politics of disengagement, and the politics of fear<sup>11</sup> If God has decided that the world will slide into moral degeneration in order to bring about the return of Christ, then it is pointless for Christians to interfere. Such thinking has no place for Kingdom Theology.

In *Nicholae*, the third novel, readers are introduced to *Nicholae Carpathia*, a young Romanian of Italian heritage, who is catapulted onto the world's stage at a meeting of the United Nations. *Nicholae* is an ecumenist, and utterly committed to peace making. He moves the United Nations headquarters to Babylon and establishes a One World religion. In a later novel he is revealed as the anti-Christ

when he is fatally wounded and rises from the dead.

## hell

Religious Right family values are preached throughout these novels. Even in the midst of plague and pestilence a good Christian woman never forgets her place. Rayford's daughter *Chloe* is an intelligent courageous woman. She is tired of being cooped up in the safe house while the men have all the fun. Eventually she remonstrates with *Buck*, her husband, who has decided that she should not be allowed to take risks. 'I don't have a problem submitting to you because I know how much you love me. I'm willing to obey you even when you're wrong. But don't be wrong if you don't have to be. You know I'm going to do what you say, and I'll even miss out on one of the greatest events in history. But don't do it out of some old-fashioned macho sense of protecting the little woman.'<sup>12</sup> Ah well, she is a new Christian after all!

The Tribulation Force are joined by *Tsion*, a believing rabbi. He comes to live in the safe house. His wife and two children had been brutally murdered by the global community peace keepers when *Carpathia* found out that he had become a believer. Introducing a scholarly teacher was a very clever move on the part of the authors. *Tsion's* role is to e-mail the true meaning of the prophecies to billions of searchers across the globe all of whom are trying to make sense of the times which are frightening and dangerous for everyone. Although members of the Tribulation Force and other believers are killed or murdered, the message from *Tsion* is clear. They are going to heaven. They will be resurrected in just a few years and will be with Jesus Christ in eternity. But non-believers can only look forward to suffering the judgements sent by God, and, if they still refuse to repent while there is yet time, they will die and spend eternity in hell.

One of the judgements is the swarm of locust like creatures prophesied in Revelation chapter nine. These are the first of three woes. They attacked any who did not have the believers' mark on their foreheads. One of those attacked was a non-believer who was staying in the safe house. "She's cursing God and already wanting to die. Tision says this is just the beginning. She'll be in torment for five months. By then, we're going to want to put her out of her misery ourselves."<sup>13</sup>

### **tribulation**

Buck had managed to trap one these creatures and examine it. 'He couldn't imagine an uglier more nauseating sight than the creature before him, it seemed to glare (at him). In a strange way that made sense, they were demons madly conflicted beings. They would want to kill believers, but were under instruction from God to torment only unbelievers.'<sup>14</sup>

The eighth novel called *'The Mark'* is based around Revelation 13: 11-18. People are forced to take Carpathia's loyalty mark or face the guillotine. Anyone who takes the mark will go to hell. Ignorance is no excuse. In a prison a group of female believers had signalled that they were not prepared to take the mark. They had opted for the guillotine and martyrdom. Some women had responded to the preaching by these believers and signalled that they too, would refuse to take the mark. As they lifted their hands, the sign of the believer appeared on their foreheads. At the guillotine, as the women's heads rolled to the floor, the unbelieving onlookers cheered loudly. The rationale for these novels depends entirely on the readers' acceptance of the rapture, the tribulation to follow, and the courage to face martyrdom.

Hal Lindsay's reasoning for the rapture is that unless the 'restraining power of the Spirit of God (present) within Christians is

removed by the rapture, the world would not be ready to receive the anti-Christ.'<sup>15</sup>

The rapture must occur before the tribulation because 'the prophets have said that God will set up a Kingdom on earth over which the Messiah will rule. There will be mortal people in that Kingdom. If the rapture took place at the same time as the second coming, there would be no mortals left who would be believers; therefore there would be no one to go into the kingdom and repopulate the earth.'<sup>16</sup>

### **tortured**

Although Tom Sine believes that Europeans are, on the whole, more reflective than North Americans and less likely to be attracted to novels of this genre, I think he underestimates the power these novels have. Most of the Christian bookshops I have visited stock these books. They are very popular. They have the same persuasive power of the Frank Peretti novels, so popular with Charismatic Christians in the eighties and early nineties when deliverance ministry was at its height. Peretti developed an angelic hierarchy based on the book of Daniel. Demons and angels abound, influenced and maneuvered by the prayers of bible believing Christians. For many of his readers it was Peretti, even more than the Bible, that influenced belief and practice.

Tim La Haye is already well known in British evangelical and charismatic circles for *'The Spirit controlled Temperament'* and *'The Act of Marriage'* There is no good reason for supposing that his 'prophetic fiction' will not be widely read by a trusting public. Church leaders should read these books. The challenge to some of us is that for many who sit in our churches week by week, it is populist Christian fiction like the *'Left Behind'* novels that informs their theology and helps to shape their lifestyles. It is populist Christian fiction that is measured against our preaching. If we want to preach about 'The

kingdom of God', and the need for social action here and now, but some in our congregations are disengaging from the notion of responsible stewardship because God has already decided the future, we have a struggle on our hands. If we preach peacemaking, and writers like Peretti and La Haye preach just war against the enemies of God, there is incongruity. Our preaching and praxis can seem weak and 'woolly' in comparison. In his 'Left Behind' series La Haye is so sure, so uncompromising. The good are godly and go to be with the Lord, the bad are wicked and will go to hell to be tortured forever. What are the Christians in *our* congregations reading? Who or what is influencing them? Should we care enough to ask, and perhaps, even to read these books too? It might be a wise move; because undoubtedly some of us are being weighed against the 'prophetic fiction' of a Dispensationalist writer and teacher who also happens to be a key leader of the North American Religious Right. What is more, we are being found wanting. It is a sobering thought! **bmj**

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13. Ibid *Apollyon* p314
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## Uncomfortable hearing

Before he died in 1998, Donald Monkcom, onetime President of Calabar College, Dean of Studies and lecturer at the United Theological College of the West Indies, and chair of the BMS 82/83, had almost completed a book on atonement and forgiveness: '*By His Wounds*'. His nephew, Richard Gill, has since edited the manuscript and published it privately as a tribute to Donald.

In his chapter on 'The Cross as Liberating Struggle', Monkcom wrote: 'It is easy to criticise Liberation Theology on the grounds of its divergence from traditional Christian belief and practice, but its case makes uncomfortable hearing for responsible Christian living in security and comparative affluence. We need not go all the way with the theology to recognise its prophetic voice calling us to stand with the risen Christ besides the poor and helpless.'



# A Hard Road to Travel

**Anne Davies, minister of Mansfield Road, Nottingham, outlines the first steps in the journey of one multi-cultural church**

The motto '*Out of many one people*' describes not only the history of the Jamaican people but also the journey of the people of God in the church where I have been a member for twenty-seven years and am now a minister. This latter journey began in the late 1950's as the first Jamaicans came to this large, white, traditional, middle class community on the edge of an area where many of its congregation had begun their lives but an area which was fast becoming the home of the growing immigrant population. From those early encounters the church has become an increasingly diverse community, still large, with over half of its membership coming from the African Caribbean community, the vast majority from Jamaica. The journey we have travelled together is the subject of this article and is written to honour those who have had the courage to make that journey - together.

## **starting points**

For some this journey started in Nottingham, growing up in a church which had strong family groups and a leadership team which had grown up together through a vibrant youth group. The church itself was one of the largest in the denomination and had its share of wealthy benefactors. The church had developed a strong sense of mission and set up Sunday schools in the new council estates on the edge of the city but in the 1950's a change was to take place which would have a profound effect on this congregation. The first immigrants arrived in the area in the wake of the Empire Windrush landing in 1948. Among those who came were Jamaican Baptists who brought with them a deep sense of Baptist identity and wanted to attend the nearest Baptist church. The minister at the time was aware of the difficulty that some early settlers had experienced when trying to enter white churches and went out of his way to welcome those who came to live near the church. His desire to reach out cost him the allegiance of some of his more wealthy members but his commitment to the newly

arrived black community won him a well deserved accolade in the annals of the church's history.

## **baggage for the journey**

I believe that neither community really understood what they brought with them into this church setting - but both brought a history of prejudice and racism that was only to be acknowledged many years later. The white members, growing up in the Britain of the first part of the twentieth century inherited a colonial attitude that was made up of Rudyard Kipling's "white man's burden" i.e. that the moral duty of the British and all Western civilisation was 'to exercise a trust over the spiritual and material welfare of people whose racial status was equivalent to that of minors' (Staying Power p109) and the whole gamut of pseudo scientific arguments for racial superiority which had grown up in Britain during the 'scramble for Africa' in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The former would have been constantly reinforced through missionary stories and the latter through popular myth, travellers' tales, the press, and children's literature. The average

church member would not have entertained the self-perception of holding racist attitudes but the prevalent attitudes towards black people at the time were, I would suggest inherently full of prejudice if not overtly racist.

The average Jamaican, educated up to secondary level would have also been encouraged to recite Kipling, would have been taught to be grateful to Queen Victoria for their liberation, and to Queen Elizabeth for the lemonade and bun they received on her birthday. Racism was equally endemic in Jamaican society with its insipient 'pigmentocracy', its hierarchical gradations which established whiteness as the ideal to which everyone should aspire.

### **hang on in**

The common denominator for these two culturally diverse groups of people was their Baptist heritage, but again for the incoming community being Baptist had a different significance, a depth of meaning which gave them the resilience to 'hang on in'. The history of the Baptist church in Jamaica had begun with black slave missionaries from the Southern States of America, George Liele and Moses Baker. They had opened up the First Black Baptist Church in Kingston. Indigenous leadership was encouraged and a black deacon Sam Sharpe was extremely influential in the fight for full emancipation. Post emancipation the Baptist church set up villages for black families, schools for the children. In 1834 the Jamaican Baptists severed their connection with the B.M.S. and became a Jamaican church. At the same time they founded Calabar College for the training of native ministers. The first Baptist missionaries to West Africa included Jamaicans who, celebrating their freedom in Christ wanted to share this with their African brothers and sisters. This rich heritage whether consciously recognised or

not, was deeply implanted in those coming to join this white Baptist church. This rich heritage made their initial exclusion from leadership more ironic and painful. Many could not cope with this level of exclusion or the feeling that they were still 'living in the master's house'. They left to start or join the burgeoning black fellowships, meeting in homes until they could acquire or share a church building.

Those who stayed did so because of their deep Baptist conviction.

### **breaking the mould**

My journey with this church started in 1974 by which time there were a number of black members and two or three prominent members in leadership as deacons of the church. Little changed over the next ten years but a number of significant events in the mid-eighties forced change on this 'comfortable' congregation. A number of professional black women joined the church, women who in their secular work had begun to confront the racism in the health and social services. They were able to articulate their frustration in a way that others before them had been unable to do. Among these was a woman who was for some time a member of the choir but at its demise set up a gospel group which was majority black. This group not only met regularly for singing practice but for prayer and encouragement. It began to be involved in taking services in local churches and its members took leading roles, reading, praying and giving testimonies. At the same time a Sunday evening group was formed of the new Christians who had come to faith following the Billy Graham mission in Sheffield. This group also contained a number of black women who were to become leaders in the church. Confidence grew among the members of both groups and leadership was nurtured.

Arising out of these groups, teams of worship leaders were established, with a system of mentoring, so that in every group of three, one was an experienced worship leader/ lay preacher and the other two new to the job. Many of those early 'apprentices' are now leading worship on their own and a number have taken other leadership roles in the church. The heightened visibility of black people in leadership, I believe had the effect of encouraging more black people who had been worshipping for years in the community to attend more regularly and ask for membership. By the latter half of the 1990's the proportion of black members grew to nearly fifty per cent. This increase was not however reflected in the overall leadership of the church and many black attenders remained 'invisible'.

The white leadership mould however had begun to be broken and when I, as a woman became pastoral assistant at the church it was significant that one of the black women deacons said to me *"If you break the mould we can come after you."*

### **comfort zones**

In 1998 a group from the church attended their first Racial Justice conference in Derby and from that visit a Black Baptist Group was set up in the church, to create a safe space where leadership skills could be developed in the black community. There was a great deal of suspicion and scepticism surrounding that group from both the black and white communities - fear of being seen as segregationist and inability to understand its purpose. The group gained sufficient confidence to nominate five of its members to the diaconate. There were five vacancies but out of the five black members nominated only one was elected. This would have been accepted as the norm a few years earlier, both white and black members voting for white deacons but on this

occasion, hopes having been raised, the group were able to express their anger and frustration. This was a cathartic moment, which had to be seized. In the ensuing meeting black members were invited to 'tell their stories' and share the racism they had experienced in the church, covert and overt. Many white members were shocked and confused but for black members they visibly grew in confidence.

The black Baptist group continued and put its energies into hosting the Racial Justice conference of 2000. This conference drew in many more of the black community. The group then set its sights on developing a Supplementary School for children who struggled in the education system. This project arose out of the observation from a number of its members who taught in Junior Church that the need was self evident among the children who attended the church. This first initiative was also misrepresented in both black and white communities as a school for black children only. The discomfort was growing.

These changes in both the numbers of black members and the heightened expectations arising from these various groups had, as might be expected, an impact on the whole church.

### **what price honesty**

A visit to the Museum of Transatlantic slavery added a new dimension to the changes occurring in the church. In a follow up meeting it became evident that some of the older black members were being encouraged by their children to speak out about the 'slavery' still being experienced. The deacons' elections led to similar calls from the missing generation in the church. Some older black woman in particular went through a great deal of pain in sharing their anger - they didn't want to hurt their white brothers and sisters.

Keeping a low profile was no longer an option for them if they were to hold on to any level of integrity with their children, many of whom had left the church.

A further call for honesty arose out of an allegation by a black employee of the church that she was being dealt with in a racist manner. She chose to take this to a solicitor and the issue rocked the whole church, white members became angry and black members apologetic. It became clear during this episode in the church's development that any behaviour or speech that could be experienced as racist needed to be confronted immediately. We could no longer collude by silence. We needed a Mission statement that would highlight the essential nature of valuing each other and alongside this we needed an Equal opportunities package that could be applied at all levels of church life. The policy would follow the Biblical instruction in Matthew 18: 15-17 but would be adapted to cover anyone from the visitor to an employee.

Many in the church feared that this naming policy would undermine the level of unity they felt existed in the church. It became clear however that this perceived unity had not taken account of the level of accommodation that most black members had made in order to be part of this white church. It was also clear that many white members were genuinely confused and distressed. Some felt, and expressed the view that 'you were O.K. with the leadership if you were the right colour (i.e. black)'. There was an element of truth in this statement - all our energies as new ministers had been directed towards redressing the balance in the leadership and could have been misinterpreted by white members as favouritism. More stories needed to be shared, not in a blaming environment but in the growth of relationships.

## **building community**

My own journey of cross-cultural understanding had begun during a training weekend that I shared with one of my black sisters. Travelling though London with her, I began to see clearly the different ways in which we were treated, in other words I began to see the world through her eyes. That relationship continued to develop and an honesty grew between us that allowed both of us to learn and grow. We realised that we needed to share more of each other's lives, not just a pew on a Sunday.

House groups had developed in the church over many years and built individual identities. When we looked at the few that remained we found that there was a clear demarcation, based on colour. The most effective group in terms of growth both numerically and spiritually was a group which had become an all black group, not by choice or design but it seemed by default. As we looked more closely at the group however it became obvious that new black members felt happier joining this group because they received encouragement to express themselves and their spirituality. Some found reading difficult but were helped by the whole group without any sense of shame. The emphasis in the group was on sharing their experiences of God in their everyday lives and on prayer. The immanence of God was so apparent in this group and the leadership was shared - with no-one claiming expertise. This was so different from some of the more established, mainly white groups where leadership was in the hands of one or two well-read people and prayer and testimony was a small part of the group's collective life.

## **anxieties**

This difference was highlighted for us as leaders when we undertook the task of

nurturing those who came into membership, the majority of whom were older black people. It became evident that hearing the Bible was more a part of their experience than reading it. Some were not able to read and others struggled to read aloud. The sessions on the work of the spirit and on prayer came to life in their hands because they could connect both of these with everyday life. We began in these groups to understand why so few black members had joined the more established groups - their spirituality would not have been openly valued. There was also an element of reluctance to share with white people stories which could be misinterpreted, and devalued.

We needed to be proactive in mixing cultures in such a way that both could gain from the other. A geographical Area Group model, where the three functions of relating, growing and serving could be met seemed to be the most effective way of developing the level of trust and life sharing needed to build community. Anxieties were expressed, particularly by those who would have to move out of their present groups but over a period of six months we gradually came to an agreement as a church membership that this was the best way forward. Changing structures needed to be accompanied by changing attitudes. We acknowledged that community building would not happen automatically, there had to be a building of trust. We looked for models and came across such a model in the work of two ministers in Chicago, one white and the other black.

### **safe places**

Their story, recorded in the book *Breaking Down Walls* seemed to us to offer pointers for our situation. Many of the lessons we had learnt over the years were mirrored in this book; the need for safe places to express views, the need for honesty, the

need for sharing lives; the need to learn through relationships. The new Area Group structures are now in place but the cross-cultural relationship building needs continuous encouragement.

Some of this relationship building is happening in the most unexpected places. We have seen for example real friendships developing between some of the older women in the Women's fellowship, a group that until five years ago was almost totally white, with white leadership. The leader is now a black woman and the membership has changed to equal numbers of white and black. Two of the oldest members of the black and white communities meet regularly in the market, for a chat.

The Sunday night youth group, again a group that until two years ago was almost entirely white, is now a mixed group with close friendships being forged.

A number of the missing generation are now coming with their children, rather than the children arriving with grandparents. We have done no research as yet into why this is but can only surmise that sufficient changes have occurred in attitude and leadership to encourage them to return.

### **Inhibiting factors**

The tendency to slip back into our comfort zones is always present, for both black and white communities. Following the trauma of the threatened tribunal hearing the cry went up from both communities that we perhaps needed to 'have a rest', place less emphasis on our differences and more on the unity that we had experienced during the 'battle'.

Changing structures will not guarantee attendance at group meetings and it would be very easy for mono-cultural groups to

develop within each area, with unwritten rules about 'how things are done in this group', 'how we express ourselves here', what patterns of leadership grow. Sharing lives may still prove to be a bridge too far for many because of the degree of openness and honesty needed to promote that level of trust.

The church may continue on its present trend of growth in the black community and in ten years time there could be no need for cross cultural building, because there would be only one culture. Neither community wants that.

### **a mighty long way to go**

My personal journey took me to Jamaica in 1997, as part of my ordination studies, to stay with church members' families. During one visit to an elderly 'saint' to encourage her in her faith I learnt this song:-

*It's a hard road to travel  
And a mighty long way to go  
But Jesus the blessed Saviour  
Leads me all the way I know  
Through many a lonesome valley  
Many dark waters roll  
It's a hard road to travel  
And a mighty long way to go*

It is a song that has come back to me time and time again during the last few years. It would probably have been easier to stay where we were as church, to accept the level of accommodation, to pretend that we were a truly united family. Naming the prejudice and the pain has highlighted issues that had been buried and caused rifts in black families with the next generation either leaving the church or attending black majority churches. Failure to name the prejudice would have frustrated the more discerning young white people who were choosing to come to a multicultural church, seeing it as a model of the kingdom. The hard road to travel

seems to be to have been an essential road to travel but we all recognise that there is still a long way to go.

### **alternative culture**

Our emphasis to this point in our development as a church has been the valuing of each other's cultures and building bridges of understanding that promote this process. This process has been based on the understanding that 'unity in difference, persons-in-community, is only possible, where justice and equality are guaranteed for all' (Kathy Galloway; Getting Personal). We are aware, however that we need to reach a point where our separate cultures can be transcended in order for the building of a new community to be possible. It is in building community, engaging in that demanding common task, that we will be able to reach a place where, without denying our differences, we will belong together.

Miroslav Volf in *Exclusion and Embrace* argues that in order to 'belong' all Christians need to be able to 'distance' themselves from their culture "in the name of God and God's promised new kingdom". He asserts:-

*"There is a reality that is more important than the culture to which we belong. It is God and the new world that God is creating, a world in which people from every nation and every tribe, with their cultural goods, will gather around the triune God, a world in which every tear will be wiped away and pain 'will be no more' (Revelation 21:3). Christians take a distance from their own culture because they give the ultimate allegiance to God and God's promised future."*

### **fear of offending**

Volf adds that this distance does two important services.

■ It creates space in us to receive the other - "the Spirit of God breaks through the self-enclosed world we inhabit .... re-creates us and sets us on the road to becoming .... a catholic personality set in a catholic community. Each needs all to be properly itself."

■ It entails a judgement against evil in every culture. "the struggle against falsehood, injustice and violence both in the self and the other is impossible without distance."

One of the inevitable results of naming racism in any community is the paralysis that it sets up in the alleged 'oppressor'. During this process that I have described there have been periods where white members have expressed a fear of speaking to black members for fear of inadvertently offending them. Black members have been aware of this paralysis and have called for honesty and the opportunity to engage in open dialogue. As white ministers we are aware that we have found it much easier to confront white members than black, but often we have failed to confront either. This was a particularly painful issue as we all faced the possibility of a public hearing. A day of prayer and fasting was called and as a result of that 'common task' we were for a short time able to distance ourselves from our separate cultures and both black and white leaders received the same wisdom, based on scripture, wisdom that helped us to proceed in a spirit of unity. We were able to see the injustices in each of our cultures and apply God's word to the situation.

### for this moment

In changing our church structure to an Area group model we have spent a great deal of time grappling with the instruction given to the church at Ephesus, a church that was dealing directly with the issue of

building "out of many one people". We have tried to balance the instruction to "make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace" with the assertion that "speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up unto him who is the head, that is Christ." We are trying to create a community where no-one sees her or himself as 'foreigners and aliens' but all as 'members of God's household' where each has been given grace, where each is being prepared for works of service, where as each part does its work, "the whole body grows and builds itself up in love".

### the future

"If you break the mould, we'll come after you". That comment held all the pain of years of invisibility but also held a challenge. Are we now at the point where the mould has been broken and the time is ripe for shared black/white ministry, ministry that will reflect the many people who are trying to become one? I am aware from various conversations that this will be a difficult decision for both black and white members but one which I believe we have to face sooner or later. We need to continue breaking moulds that have been imposed by our separate and shared traditions. As a church which stands at the meeting place of many different cultures we have a unique, God-given opportunity to model kingdom living that could be an effective, witness to the transforming grace of God, building out of many one people.

**dmj**

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### Further suggested reading

Clinton V. Black, *History of Jamaica* (Longman Group UK 1988)

Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The history of Black People in Britain* (Pluto Press, London 1984)

Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: the Irresistible Rise of Multi-racial Britain* (Harper Collins 1998)

Robert Beckford, *Jesus is Dread: Black Theology and Black Culture in Britain* (Darton, Longman and Todd 1998)

Anthony G. Reddie, *Faith, Stories and the Experience of Black Elders* (Jessica Kingsley, London 2001)

Raleigh Washington & Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls: A Model for Reconciliation in an Age of Racial Strife* (Moody 1993)

Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Abingdon Press, Nashville 1996)

ed Cain Hope Felder, *Stony The Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Augsburg Fortress 1991)

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## When God vanishes

**Edward H B Williams wonders if his experience is shared by others in retirement.**

It was almost unheard of for William Temple not to be an effective speaker. Once it happened, when he spoke at a boys' camp on the theme, 'Why I believe in God'. The leader, who knew him well, asked him the next morning what had gone wrong. Temple replied, 'You might as well know – as I was speaking, I realised that I had never really doubted and I thought "What right have you to speak to them on this topic?"'

All through my ministry, although I had wrestled with various questions, I had felt myself to be basically in Temple's position of having never really doubted the existence and reality of God. Since retirement, that has drastically changed – I have reached the position that I think I do believe, but much of the time it is with an effort!

Is this a common experience or unusual? I am writing this article, describing my particular doubts, in the hope of finding out and perhaps of encouraging others. First, let me set the scene.

My first love was always Physics, but there came a strong sense of call to the ministry, followed by a leading to the BMS, and I did my Theology training at Regent's Park. To my delight the BMS sent me to teach in the Physics Department at Serampore College, India, where my colleagues for nearly ten years were Bengali Hindus of high calibre. There followed sixteen years as minister of a church, Sparkbrook, in inner-city Birmingham. I became much involved

with Muslims, the local *imam* becoming a close friend, and I was in at the beginning of JOPPA, the Baptist group concerned with interfaith issues. My last twelve years of ministry were spent in the small market town of Alcester. At this stage, to make up for moving out of a multi-faith area, I became secretary of JOPPA

Apart from certain difficult stretches, all these spheres were happy and fulfilling, and I retired to Malvern on a high. Resolved to find new avenues of service, my wife and I have become home teachers of English to Bangladeshi Muslims in Worcester, and are still much involved with JOPPA and with 'Friends of Serampore'. I take occasional services elsewhere, but mainly we are fully engaged in the life of our local Baptist Church (and also of the parish church at the end of our road). And I enjoy reading *New Scientist*, and books in the field of science and religion.

### After the High

About nine months after retirement, quite unexpectedly, I suddenly found myself wrestling with doubt. There is a doubt of



the heart and a doubt of the mind. They overlap, but are not the same. The latter was chiefly to do with my reading and my scientific bent of mind. After a few weeks of this first crisis I found myself thinking in anguish, 'You don't any longer really believe, do you?' The thought was horrible. Did I have to deny all that I had spent my life for? However would I explain this to those around me – above all to my wife, with whom I had shared so much in faith for so long? How could I possibly give her such distress? Then, with enormous relief, I realised that the shift was only in my *feelings*, and that nothing fundamental in the *arguments* had changed. So that first crisis passed.

But in the next phase of the crisis, a month or two later, the arguments *did* change.

I have for a long time been satisfied, almost passionately, with the way science describes what has happened since the 'big bang'. No doubt much of the detail may be wrong - but physics first, and then biology, give a *possible* account, needing no intervention by God to fill in gaps. [I am not trying to argue with *you*, dear reader – I am setting down the arguments as they appear to *me*!] I do not in fact find it very congenial to believe in a Deity who 'fixes' things! I warmed to Dawkins' book, *The Blind Watchmaker*, and had a job to discover any point of disagreement! I parted company only at the end, when he dismissed belief in a 'Mind behind it all' as the needless introduction of 'something complicated'.

Surely there must be something behind it all? Or, as Polkinghorne puts it, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' The renewed crisis came when I realised that to say 'God' is only to give a name to ignorance. It does not explain anything.

Our materialist friends can just as reasonably ask, 'How did God begin?' There is no way we can conceive how God began (any more than we can conceive how God, or matter, could just always be). So we cannot argue from the fact of the universe to the existence of God. Belief in God must be rooted elsewhere altogether.

In the end, I have come to find that conclusion liberating. I liked the words of the cultural critic George Steiner, in the recent TV series, 'Testing God' – he spoke of 'the respectful acknowledgement of the extreme limitation of our own means of understanding'!

### **After the Low**

If belief in God must be rooted elsewhere, where is that? I think it turns on consciousness, or mind. Is there any real *meaning* in our existence as thinking beings? What about our sense of wonder? Either such things are 'epiphenomena', that just happened to emerge as brains became more and more complex in the course of evolution – or they are of primary significance, mind emerging because of Mind behind it all.

I find C S Lewis convincing when he argues from the fact of instinctive intuition. Although the instinct of hunger does not prove that we shall find food, it would be very odd if such a sense evolved in a world where there was no such thing as food. It would similarly be very odd if sexual desire arose in creatures without sexual functions! In the same way it would be very strange if so widespread an intuition as belief in God did not correspond with reality.

On this basis I find that I *can* with integrity believe. But still it is belief that has to be held on to with a struggle. As a recurring torment, I struggle with the difficulty that has always perplexed: the problem of suffering. Does the world look

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## **Broadmead Revisited**

At 6pm on 30th October 2000 after days of torrential rain the River Roding in Essex burst its banks with devastating effect on the locality of Broadmead Church in Chigwell Road Woodford.

I had reason to be outside the church that evening and was able to experience at first hand the power of a river unencumbered by its banks flooding all the local roads, gardens and buildings within its path. First in line were the church buildings which were quickly encompassed to a depth of some three feet in everything the river could throw at them. There was absolutely nothing anyone could do except flee to safety and pray that the torrents would stop.

The next day started dry and bright but the river had not yet receded and the streets were a hive of activity as the locals came to realise what had hit them. I waded thigh high through the flood waters towards the church sympathising with the odd householder here and there. From some of their fairly cheerful responses, considering they were surrounded by water, I got a great feeling that a real community spirit had emerged in their adversity. Nothing was going to get them down!

That same spirit was much in evidence with members of Broadmead Church when it came to attending to their own problems. Their buildings were unusable and certainly would not be so for some months and all the church contents had been saturated beyond repair. They clearly needed all the help that they could get to supplement their own willing resources.

Baptist Insurance would help to recover their premises but nothing had prepared them for the disruption to all their activities on such a massive scale. Led by their Minister, Ken Hyde, church members set to in seeking somewhere to try and carry on as near normal while restoration work was carried out. Their prayers were quickly answered with suitable accommodation being made available nearby.

The restoration of the buildings presented somewhat greater and longer term problems, not least that the premises needed drying out first! However after what must have seemed a lifetime the church was finally brought back to sparkling newness and I was so pleased to accept the invitation of the church to attend their rededication service.

The ceremony was quite an uplifting experience for everyone, including me, a hardened insurance man! Thanks were given to all those who had helped and in particular Ken Hyde went out of his way to be generous in his praise for the help given by Baptist Insurance.

It is not often that Insurers are honoured with such praise as thankfully most policyholders do not need to realise the tangible benefits of their insurance policy. When however they are unfortunate enough to suffer a loss I do hope that their experience will also enable them to appreciate the benefits of being with Baptist Insurance.

Yours Sincerely

Alf Green ACII (Assistant General Manager)

as we might expect it to look if there really were an all-wise, all-loving Creator? There seem too many 'nasties' in the world of nature and in the world of human beings, along with so much that is wonderful. Another perplexity, which I have seen described alongside the above as 'the other great question for Christians', particularly affects me: the continuing existence and strength of faiths with radically different understandings about God. On both these issues, I can only take refuge in that 'respectful acknowledgement of the extreme limitation of our own means of understanding'.

### **An Even Keel?**

So do I in fact believe? On most days in my prayer time I have to re-convince myself, 'Yes, I believe' – but that is in the mind, and still leaves me a long way from feeling the sense of One who is always near, longing to hear and ready to answer prayer beyond all that we ask or think. I am reassured by the fact that when I do conduct services, I do not feel a nagging sense of hypocrisy, and my preparation and preaching 'come' as they used to.

Why have I found myself facing these crises of doubt so drastically, after all those years in ministry when it was not like that? Is it anything to do with my change of direction, in that I have not continued preaching most weekends as if little had changed with retirement? Perhaps regular sermon preparation had helped to keep doubt at bay! Or perhaps it is the providence of God: these are issues that

needed to be faced, but I could not have coped with them earlier?

It astonishes me that profoundest convictions, which stirred me so deeply and felt so rock-like, should now seem so fragile and vulnerable. I sometimes wonder, 'Am I trying to convince myself that I believe, only because I cannot bear the thought of not believing?' It could be so. Yet when I pursue that line of thought, I remember times when I *have* experienced evidence of God in matters of guidance and providence. In spite of all seemingly unanswered prayer, and the possibility that apparent answers are 'just coincidences', I can testify using words of William Temple again, that 'when I pray, coincidences happen'.

Over the years, there are a few things which I have recognised to be my most basic beliefs, and have told my congregations so:

- God can be trusted
- Jesus' death on the cross is of ultimate significance
- He did rise from death
- 'When God wants me to do or not do some thing, He finds some way of letting me know'.

These are the things that matter most to me; but when believing in God at all becomes a struggle, then these beliefs have to be held on to by faith. This may be a sign of growing up into a more mature faith, but I do miss the old simple certainties! **bmj**

### **RETIREMENT:**

BUGB's Ministry Department is holding the annual Preparation for Retirement Course at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, from 10-12 June 2003. This is for ministers retiring in, or before, June 2005. For further details please contact Ian Millgate in the BUGB Ministry Department by post, or by e-mail at [imillgate@baptist.org.uk](mailto:imillgate@baptist.org.uk), or by 'phone on 01235 517705.

# When all in our garden is not rosy

**Michael I Bochenski, St Albans, describes some of the findings of a BUGB task group on the role of local church Moderators and the possible transferability of the US concept of Transitional Ministers (TMs) to the UK scene.**

The practice of appointing a local church Moderator is, relatively speaking, a very recent development. Telephone conversations with long-serving Ministers among us, such as Frank Cooke, Bill Hancock and David Russell all confirmed that, in many ways, the appointment of a local church Moderator for a pastoral vacancy is a post second world war practice. Before the 1950s, and indeed still often today, the role of a Moderator was filled by either the Church Secretary, by an experienced member of the Diaconate or by someone of equivalent status in the local church. This means that, generally speaking, the practice of appointing an external local church Moderator during a pastoral vacancy is less than fifty years old; that the practice has become commonplace – though never universal – in our Union in a relatively short period; and that some consideration of the topic by the Baptist Union Council, with some guidance on good practice, is overdue.

The importance of local church moderatorship had been recognised during the BUGB Council's discussion and debate of the BUGB Report *Transforming Superintendency* in 1996 and 1997. Even though there were more pressing debating points from the report at that time, attention was drawn to several recommendations on local church moderatorship within its pages (1) These recommendations were eventually referred to the Ministry Department for reflection and action. One of the purposes of our task group was to reflect together on the TS recommendations and to incorporate its wisdom into both our own report and recommendations.

These were the relevant TS recommendations: that every church (seeking a settlement) be encouraged to appoint a Moderator, in consultation with the Superintendent and the Association representative, who will begin work with the church in drawing up its profile and will take some pastoral responsibility during the vacancy; that the Ministry Department prepares in partnership with the Superintendents and the Colleges a possible training programme to be used by

Associations for Moderators; that Moderators ought not to be members of the churches they are serving; that Ministers interested in the vacancy should be free to approach the Moderator of a church to discuss relevant issues; that the Superintendent does not act as Moderator of a Church seeking a pastor; that Associations with their Superintendents identify a group of people, Ministers and other church members, for training as Moderators; and that the Union produces a video for use in churches facing a pastoral vacancy

## **damage**

Our group soon came to realise that there was a need for some clear good practice guidelines for those exercising this role among us and also that some courage is needed, not least to experiment with some new approaches here. On the one hand, we recognised that we are not in a crisis state when it comes to Moderatorship and to the routine settlement of Ministers. On the other hand, we also soon acknowledged that not all in our garden was rosy. Damage is being done among us. Sometimes by Ministers unsuitable for the church that appoints them and sometimes

by churches with recurring habits of what amounts to abuse towards Ministers over several years. Whatever the circumstances few among us who have served churches as Moderators would question the need for training in the increasingly complex role of local church Moderatorship. Or for some experiments in short-term oversight of some of our churches. That is to say in transitional ministries. 'A stitch in time...'

The group had heard good reports of the pioneering work on local church Moderatorship being undertaken by James Ashdown on behalf of the London Baptist Association (LBA). We received draft copies of two fine handbooks he had been developing : *When a Pastor leaves – enabling pastoral transitions in the local church* and a *Moderator Training Pack*. (London Baptist Association © 2001) (2) As Convenor, I also attended a Training Day organised by the LBA on June 7<sup>th</sup> 2001. The LBA Training Programme is a comprehensive one and it soon became quite clear to us all that the LBA handbooks are excellent pieces of work and that there would be no point at all in our re-inventing the wheel. We soon agreed then that one of our recommendations to the Ministry Executive, and to the BUGB Council, would be to encourage Associations to purchase and use the LBA handbooks as the basis for training events in their own regions. Also that local churches approaching a pastoral vacancy should be encouraged to purchase a copy of the LBA handbooks alongside the better known *Advice for Churches in a Pastoral Vacancy* booklet. It is my hope that this article in the *Journal* will help to further commend these documents to others in ministry.

### **trapped**

Frank Boyd's sabbatical work *Transitional Ministry* (3) was known already to several of us on the group. In it, he argued the need for such ministries e.g. after a major

breakdown in church life or after a particularly long ministry. All of us were open to experimenting here, but wondered aloud where we might find such people? We did think that there was mileage in the concept of a category of Transitional Ministry open to all but drawing, especially perhaps, on the expertise of older Ministers. We also came to share the conviction that our Union and its new Associations need also to have the courage and confidence to recommend experiments of this nature. Paul Hills, Team Leader for the Eastern Association, helped to guide our thinking here. His definition of a Transitional Minister came to be accepted by the group: 'A suitably qualified person who will take pastoral responsibility for a church for a set and limited period of time in order to prepare it for future ministry and mission'. How though might such a role differ from that of a more traditional local church Moderator?

It was suggested that a TM might well be needed after e.g. a long pastorate, a history of conflict and splits or significant pastoral breakdown. Also where there were recurring problems: 'Sometimes a church seems to develop a habit of destroying ministries! Sometimes the reason for this seems obvious (e.g. in entrenched power groups in the congregation). At other times the reasons are far from clear, but may be embedded in the spiritual and social culture of the church. Whatever the reason is, such churches seem unlikely to thrive unless the recurring problems can be addressed. Once again, a TM could be a way forward. The clear aims and limited tenure of a TM means that no minister will be "trapped" into another destructive situation without a clear escape. The church would also see that something constructive is being done without placing heavy expectations on a new minister'. (4)

## professional

The following terms of appointment were suggested for such a role among us:

*That under no circumstances will the Transitional Minister become a candidate for the office of permanent Minister; that any agreement will be reviewed after six month of such ministry;*

*that at least 3 month's notice is necessary in the event of the termination of such an appointment;*

*that the Transitional Minister will conclude his/her ministry with the church at a mutually agreed time upon the settlement of a permanent Minister; that the Transitional Minister will be directly responsible to the Deacons; that s/he will be open to running repairs being undertaken on the property and will be prepared to move out into other accommodation a month before the new minister arrives to allow for redecoration.*

In our further explorations of topics the necessity for some kind of covenant document and for a code of good practice for Ministers grew upon us. We learned that a guide for professional good practice is being prepared by the Head of Ministry and will become available to ministers in due course. The following headings, adapted from a code of conduct in use in the USA, offer an outline of what it will contain: Responsibilities - to God, to Self, to Family, to the Congregation, to the Union, to Colleagues and to the Community

A briefer covenant paper, to which both minister and church may commit themselves, at e.g. an Induction Service, is also in preparation. All of us were sure that this could prove to be a useful tool in focussing on the importance of healthy relationships in local church life.

The March 2002 Council unanimously agreed that our report should be forwarded to Colleges and Associations for information and for active consideration of the following recommendations:

*That every church seeking a settlement be encouraged to appoint a Moderator who will begin work with the church, in consultation with a Regional Minister on behalf of the Association, on drawing up its profile and who will take some pastoral responsibility during the vacancy.*

In the view of the group, there is wisdom, where practicable, in appointing a Moderator towards the end of a ministry rather than after it has concluded. It was also felt by the group that some broader involvement with the church other than simply chairing the meetings where settlement is on the agenda is vital. Hence our support of the phrase 'and will take some pastoral responsibility during the vacancy'.

## warnings

*That, usually, Moderators ought not to be members of the churches they are serving.*

This was our view, whilst noting that each local church would continue to make its own decisions here. Our reasons for supporting this good practice recommendation include a) the need to demonstrate interdependence within our Associations and Union; b) the value of networking in facilitating settlements; c) the growing complexities of the settlement processes; d) the availability of a broader selection of names and ministries to consider than – perhaps – was the case in previous decades; e) the problems of being sucked into factions in local church life e.g. on charismatic, ecumenical, worship or age issues; f) the importance of an objective and independent perspective.

*That, after nomination, Ministers interested in the vacancy should be free to approach the Moderator of a church to discuss relevant issues*

This happens already, of course. We wished to make it clear that this is acceptable practice – or should be. The reasons for such an approach may vary from developing an awareness of the key issues facing the church at the time through to understanding ‘warnings’ the Minister may have heard about the church and being helped to interpret them.

*That, usually, a Regional Minister does not act as the Moderator of a Church seeking a pastor*

The group’s view is that there should be as little ambiguity as possible in the relationship between a Regional Minister and a Minister or local church in settlement matters. Conflicts of interest must be avoided. It is not difficult to envisage a scenario where a ministry goes quickly wrong and the Minister is wary of consulting a Regional Minister who recently helped to settle him/her or of a church failing to trust again someone who ‘set us up with the wrong person.’ The allocation of so much time to just one local church may well be disproportionate for someone in such a role. In the new arrangements for the BUGB Associations, the logic of this recommendation would be that a Regional Minister, and especially one who serves on the National Settlement Team, should not agree to serve as a local church Moderator. We can, in the end, however, only suggest good practice. We cannot insist on it.

## **video**

*That the Ministry Executive & Baptist Union Council endorse for use in Associations, Colleges and Churches the training programme prepared by the London Baptist Association.*

It is hoped that the new Associations will, in time, incorporate local church Moderator training into their programmes, drawing on the LBA materials. See also R6. It was our view that these fine workbooks will provide helpful resources for the new Regional Associations in implementing this recommendation.

*That Associations with their Regional Ministers identify a group of people, Ministers and other church members, for training as Moderators.*

This is self-explanatory. Creating such a group could become part of a job description for a Regional Minister with special responsibility for the pastoral care of ministers for example.

*That the suggestion that the Union produces a video for use in churches, facing a pastoral vacancy be ignored for reasons both of cost and doubts over its lasting value.*

Our initial discussions on this recommendation suggested that the 1990s enthusiasm for video training might be waning! Experience suggests that such videos can be very expensive to produce and can all too quickly go out of date. A training pack such as that prepared by the LBA may well be far more helpful here. It may be that some of the LBA materials could be introduced in PowerPoint or ohp formats instead.

*That a covenant document between minister and church and a code of good practice for ministers be drawn up and circulated widely as soon as is practicable.*

The covenant document might well be added as an appendix in future printings of the *Guidelines for a Pastoral Vacancy*.

*That Moderators as well as Regional Ministers need to be familiar with the support programmes and schemes the Baptist Union uses for ministers.*

# J-Mail

## Baptist Seminary gains Czech Accreditation

from Keith Jones, Rector, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague.  
Jones@IBTS.CZ

Dear *Journal*, Last month, we graduated seventeen Certificate in Applied Theology students and Valedicted nine Master of Theology students. The ceremony in the IBTS chapel was very special for us as we had present a representative of the Czech Accreditation Commission to formally present the letters granting us status as a private higher education/ university sector institution in the Czech Republic. He also gave us the documentation which states we have the right to grant a Czech Magister in Theology. We are the first foreign institution to gain this right and only the third to gain the right to grant a Magister in any topic, so this is an excellent boost to us.

We are now hoping that some of our UK friends will start an official group "Friends of IBTS", to channel support for the seminary.

We are processing many new applicants to study at IBTS, but, as always, those from the east need scholarship help. With the downturn in cross Atlantic traffic this presents us with an interesting paradox. At time when academically we are beginning to fulfil the potential envisaged when we moved to Prague in 1996, the resources to help all the people who need assistance are getting harder to come by.

Please pray with us that funds might be found to enable people to study at IBTS, this unique international Baptist institution.

**bmj**

Much good material is relatively unknown to some of our ministers. The Group is aware that the Union's publications are currently under review and hopes that one outcome might be more opportunities to commend such support programmes and schemes.

## demanding

That the BUGB Council in partnership with the new Associations encourage some Pastors to serve as Transitional Ministers.

As those called to serve within the Union, Ministers are more than 'private chaplains' to one church congregation. Associations might actively seek out those who could fulfil the demanding role of a Transitional Minister and both release and affirm them in such a ministry.

Finally, we appealed that, wherever practicable, consistent terminology be used for these ministries in our Union – we suggest (Interim) 'Moderator' and 'Transitional Minister'.

It is our hope that our report's several outcomes will be constructive ones in the life of our Union for the good of the Church's ministry and mission. **bmj**

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## Notes

- 1) See *Transforming Superintendency* (BUGB Publications 1996) 10.12 and 10.13 pgs. 36-7.
- 2) Enquiries to the London Baptist Association via Paul Martin 0208 445 9418
- 3) Copies are still available from Frank Boyd 023 8043 1150
- 4) From a paper by Paul Hills 'Intentional Interim Ministry: a Superintendent's Perspective'
- 5) A copy of the full report is available from the Convenor 01727 856537.





# Book Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

*Philippians and Galatians*, **Stanley P. Saunders**, Geneva Press, 2001, vi + 103 pp. Paperback,

ISBN 0-664-50102-8

The book is part of the Interpretation Bible Studies series, an offshoot of the Interpretation commentaries (John Knox Press). The introduction describes them as being "designed for ease and flexibility in use for either personal or group study". They aim to help readers learn about the history and theology of the bible, understand the difficult language of the bible and accept the challenge of the bible's call to discipleship. I used the book for personal reading and group study in church. It covered familiar ground in an interesting, thought provoking style, earthed in present day experience and issues. Avoidance of specialist theological jargon makes it accessible to most readers.

Set out in ten units, each study give an overview of the books, with detailed exposition of key points, and study helps such as maps, photos, background information, questions for reflection and suggestions for further study. It concludes with a group leaders' guide, and the offer of further help from the Geneva Press website.

The studies are not convenience food. Used in the context of the evening service, I had to do quite a lot of work to be selective without losing the wider perspective. The scope and depth of the questions impressed me. There was never time to cover more than one question, so the material could be used again, varying the focus each time. They earthed the study in present day issues. That they did

so in a North American context was only a minor drawback. British equivalents were easy to find.

A mild irritation was that the bibliography was predominantly from American publishers. In my experience American publications tend to be expensive unless they have been taken up by a British publisher. Otherwise a useful resource for personal and group study, and sermon preparation.

**Kathleen Lawson. Vale, Todmorden**

*A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches*. **Alan Jamieson**, 2002, SPCK, London. £10.99.

ISBN 0-281-05465-7

This refreshing and compassionate book challenges the 'traditional' image of the church-leaver as a 'backslider' or personal failure. Jamieson uses extensive interviews and participation in group work to conduct a competent and useful piece of research into the faith and struggles of those who have left evangelical, pentecostal and charismatic (EPC) churches. He weaves their stories with reflections on faith development theories and suggests that many EPC churches fail to offer an environment that encourages meaningful growth.

His sample group are not fringe 'malcontents' or transient adolescents, but respected church members and leaders with many years track-record of maturity and commitment at the heart of church life. While some 18% of Jamieson's sample left hurt or angry because of 'specific church grumbles', the vast majority had left church for what Jamieson calls 'meta-

grumbles' - a dissatisfaction with the whole 'package of church', far wider than one particular event or aspect of church life.

'Meta-grumbles' are directed at the meta-narratives produced by the EPC church, and question the very foundations of the taken-for-granted core beliefs, values and expected behaviours of the church community. Yet far from 'losing' their faith, the turbulent journey of these leavers has involved a deepening sense of ownership of their faith, and a more coherent, self-aware and confident faith, integrated into all aspects of life and grounded in connection with others. Sadly they have felt they have had to leave the church in order to make this faith journey.

As a pastor of an EPC church, Jamieson is keen to listen and learn from these leavers, and to help church leaders to understand and accommodate the dynamics of growth and faith development. Rather than resign ourselves to 'leakage' through the back door, or pin the blame on specific events or the pressures in people's lives, we need to recognise the signs of a person who is feeling alienated and struggling with their faith because they are in a period of transition and growth. Rather than putting our energy into 'keeping' them in the structures of church life, we can better help by releasing our grip and proactively providing time, space, resources, acceptance, understanding, validation, courage, companionship and loving support for the inner work of their spiritual journey.

Jamieson doesn't provide blueprints, but suggestions and pointers for creating a practical and emotional environment that is sensitive to potential church leavers. It is an accessible book which might be helpful to give to church members who are wanting to make sense of their faith

journey and who may well be encouraged to find that they are not failures or 'backsliders', but that their struggles are part of a 'normal' Christian life.

**Jo Harding**, on leave of absence to study at Northern Baptist College

*Waiting for Godot in Sarajevo.* **David Toole.** pp xix + 332 SCM Press £17.95p

I found myself sometimes exasperated and sometimes fascinated by this book. Exasperated because of the derivative nature of the writing and its somewhat self-indulgent use of material. Fascinated because the central idea is an excellent one. These are what it says on the tin – theological reflections on nihilism, tragedy and apocalypse.

The reflections begin in Sarajevo, that remarkable city where for nearly a century Christian, Jew and Muslim lived peacefully side-by-side until the terrors of the 1990s unfolded. Sarajevo featured near the beginning of the twentieth century as the place where World War One, to all intents and purposes, began and again near that century's end as a city in ruins. What was the Director Susan Sontag doing and saying then when, in 1993, she produced and staged a version of Samuel Beckett's classic 'Waiting for Godot' in war-ravaged Sarajevo? Waiting for some one who never turns up to sort things out is all too common! Toole suggests that '...to wait for Godot in Sarajevo is to await a decision on the character of the universe.' He places Sontag's actions within a long tradition of practical political acts, which are themselves part of 'a politics adequate to the tasks of living the good life in the face of suffering.'

In the process of arguing the need for more such acts, Toole's reflections range over the writings of a few of his favourite thinkers at considerable length. Nietzsche, John Milbank, John Howard Yoder and

Michel Foucault especially. Drawing on Yoder's insights, he reminds us of the provocative character of many of Jesus' words and actions such as the exorcisms and parables, the healings and the table fellowship. Toole also suggests, to my mind unconvincingly, that Jesus was, in fact, issuing a call to arms and encouraging the landless poor of His day to rise up and protest. 'Jesus the wandering radical was engaged in a campaign of every day tactical resistance.' The logic is clear: the Church today must engage in exactly such provocative, purposeful, political acts in our attempts to make sense of suffering in the contemporary world. Hence staging an existentialist play in the middle of a war zone. Making death meaningful is the ultimate challenge for political activist and philosopher alike. We must all find ways of expressing non-acceptance of injustices happening all around us.

In the end, the fascination won over the exasperation. As an insightful guide to some profound thinking about appropriate responses to evil and suffering, this read justifies the necessary effort.

**Michael I Bochenski,**  
Dagnall St, St Albans

*Making Good.* **Helen Oppenheimer** SCM Press, London. ISBN 0334 02832 9, 2001, £13.95, 124 pp + notes, index, further reading.

This was a compelling and often gripping reflection on the joys and sorrows of creation, asking what does it mean to believe in a good God in a flawed and painful world. Can we ethically worship such a Creator? No easy answers here and a wariness of theodicies which excuse God or look to a guaranteed happy ending. As Iris Murdoch reminds us, 'Almost anything that consoles us is a fake.' Oppenheimer writes from the perspective of an Anglican Christian but is able to draw on a wide range on literary and artistic traditions from

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Fra Angelico to Lewis Carroll, all enrich her discussion.

Do not be put off by the unpleasantly sentimental cover or the first couple of chapters which I found slow going. Some of the foundations for the book were set by some material from other papers which are perhaps condensed here. The chapters that follow offer reflections on beauty and glory in creation and their value. I particularly enjoyed her section on glory and discussion on kitsch and creation and her valuing of human creativity - 'Is it more important to rescue a painting by Michelangelo out of a burning building than to rescue a drunken tramp?'

Her poignant discussions on the quality of tragedy ask why we can understand unhappy endings as satisfying and acceptable. How can it be that in a tragedy the sad ending is the best ending? Taking Shakespeare's 'King Lear', Oppenheimer explores the fatal flaws in humanity that not only make tragedy inevitable but also allows us to move from blame to understanding and the possibility of reconciliation to tragic fact.

It's a book that raises many questions and whilst willing to leave a certain ambiguity, hope persists. An enjoyable and stimulating read.

**Sarah Parry**  
Shoreditch Tabernacle, London

*He kissed him and they wept'* edited by **Tony Bayfield, Sidney Brichto and Eugene Fisher.** SCM Press London 2001 £16.95 ISBN 0 334 02826 4

To whom will this book appeal?

To those who are intrigued by the title, whether they know the text from the book of Genesis or not.

To those who are engaged in Christian - Jewish dialogue at whatever level -

neighbour; councils of Christians and Jews; at faith leadership or scholarship level.


To those who are bewildered by the poison of enmity between Judaism and the Christian Church over the centuries manifested most horribly in the Holocaust.

To those who so desperately desire a cleansing of the sense of guilt which endures.

In May 2000, a three day gathering was held in the Sterberg Centre in North-West London. Forty-four Catholic and Jewish scholars took part, each chosen by their respective faith members. Only the first session, addressed by Edward Cardinal Cassidy, Sir Sigmund Sternberg and Richard Block was public. There were six pairs of papers, all pre-circulated and pre-digested to give maximum time for discussion. This book is the record of that momentous occasion. You can read for yourselves the papers given and a

summary of the discussion. It will be of interest for those engaged in interpretation of words e.g. covenant and election. The section, 'Reading our sacred texts today and the challenge of Modernity and Post-modernity' I found informative and challenging; Protestants engaged in dialogue will be helped by this. The final pairs of papers are entitled 'A partnership for the glory of God', they offer a challenge to each and everyone of us. As Christians we often struggle to get alongside each other when our denominational tag is different. The contributors to this section help our thinking. The book reveals how much can be done when goodwill and conviction are present.

**Janet C Ruddick,**  
JOPPA group



**BMM**

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