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The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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Editor: HAZEL SHERMAN

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

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

By the time this edition of the Journal reaches your letterbox, Mel Gibson's much anticipated and controversial film "The Passion of the Christ" will have seen general release in cinemas across the UK. Most of us at this stage will only have seen excerpts.

The questions that are in my mind before having seen it all are no doubt rather different to the ones that will remain after viewing – but at present, I am conscious of quite an ambivalent attitude to the whole thing. To name just a couple of many questions:

- Huge resources in marketing have been directed towards encouraging churches to make block bookings and to use the film as an evangelistic tool. What assumptions lie behind the screening of gratuitous violence at a time when such horror is only too evident on a world-wide scale? Will any relationship or contrast be explored between gratuitous violence and gratuitous love? If it is not, then there is no justification for the violence.

- Will it bolster anti-Semitism? There is already enough of a challenge to Christian peace-makers who challenge current Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, without muddying the waters even further by going back to a "name and blame the Jews" reading of the passion narratives. In Christ's story, God confronts us *all* as those who collude with violence.

Following part of a huge industry of commentary and review and endless Blogs before the film is on general release in this country only adds to the confusion. The medium of the internet permits complete rubbish and substantial critical comment to be absorbed immediately alongside one another without distinction, in a way that has been unprecedented up till the last few years. Note that I say "absorbed". Of course these things have always *existed*

alongside one another, but hitherto we have not been encouraged to take quite so much at face value without spending due time in critical examination.

It is a film. It is deliberately crafted to be "in your face" whilst leaving an echo which leaves the cinema with you and within you. The use of Aramaic and (oddly) Latin suggests a purporting to be something akin to a drama-documentary, even though it was translated from an English script!

It takes as its starting point four passion narratives in four gospels according to different theological witnesses. Like all previous harmonies of the gospels it will lose out on the richer interplay of possibilities that are found when diversity of experience and interpretation is acknowledged.

The temptation to take a skilfully crafted production enhanced by high-cost special effects as somehow definitive will be strong for many. For some it will simply reinforce their alienation from Christian religion. For others it may add to an unhealthy acceptance of bloody suffering as somehow within the will and purposes of God.

It may also turn us back to the gospels with the will to read and study well. It may help us to remember that one of the tasks of ministry is to help disciples and searchers alike to encounter the story of Jesus in ways that leave plenty of room for God to encounter us and move us beyond former limits.

Of course it may also cause me to have to eat my hat for daring to risk opinion before having seen the film and fully grasped the issues. But perhaps I should be less frightened of that. The forming of opinion (our own and others) is a matter of risk – not the presentation of the complete and unchangeable. It is sometimes hard to distinguish between matters of faith and matters of opinion, and a dangerous mix results when opinion (which may be prejudice or even bigotry under a difference guise) is taken as a

“given” of faith.

Rabbi Lionel Blue tells a typically tongue-in-cheek story, which could give us pause for thought in many matters of unexamined assumptions:

The Nazi said to the Jew: “The Jews are responsible for all Germany’s problems.” “Yes”, said the Jew, “the Jews and the bicycle riders.” “Why the bicycle riders?” said the Nazi, puzzled. “Why the Jews?” said the Jew. **bmj**

Working in a land of passion with a people of passion *or* The audacity to act in a hostile environment.

Geoffrey Whitfield, Executive Director, World Sports Peace Project, considers his personal involvement in Conflict Prevention work, its ‘happenstance’ beginnings, and some of the questions this has prompted.

The situation

It has not always been easy, these last few years, to respond to the question, “What made you go to work in Israel with the Jews and Arabs?” Especially as implicit in the question often lay the thought “You must be mad”, although one lady in church did say, “You could get killed!” “Yes”, I thought - after all, I had missed bus bombings, not once but twice. I have never really answered the questions to my own satisfaction, let alone anyone else’s, because it all seemed so “accidental” and all quite unintentional. I don’t want to say that I felt a sense of call, because I didn’t - but I did have a sense of it being the obvious thing to do – something like Isaiah maybe, but more “Well I’m here and I can give a hand”!

I had little idea that the work would grow to involve hundreds of Jewish and Arab families from different towns and four English universities, along with the British Embassy, the British Council, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, old Uncle Tom Cobleyplus a lot of friends and ex-Baptist Chaplaincy students on the way. I had somehow been drawn in to help a youth work in the Galilee area by new friends who turned out to be from the Greek Orthodox community who had a youth club for Muslim and Christian boys and girls (two barriers down and ninety-eight to go) and I was in a position to act as a catalyst in getting supplies of books for their library, funds for their programme and university students to help with their summer camp. All very background stuff and all quite obvious really, although later, the Muslim elders of the Town Council

generously awarded me the title of Honorary Citizen. I was not at all used to working in a cross-cultural situation and it took me some time to become sensitised in a different direction – from having a natural, positive disposition to Jewish people to becoming aware of other, more painful perspectives. I had not really thought beyond the mind set of the Holocaust and the Jewish backcloth to the Christian position. Only later did I become aware of the Christian notions behind issues of racism, human rights, equal opportunities, injustice, exploitation, humiliation, oppression, fear, terror, hopelessness, desperation and mutual retaliation. Plus a lot of political cynicism all round. All these and more contributed to the cycle of violence and fed the emotional response of the moment, and it took time to begin to find a way of comprehending the different desperations of two afflicted peoples. These issues for both sides have become my daily bread these last ten years.

Occasionally some ask, “What is the church in the UK supposed to do in Israel and Palestine?” That was not a question for me to answer then. But now one has to find how the church is relevant, for how can it be silent or passive in the knowledge of so much slaughter of the innocents - and even the less than innocent perhaps? At the time however, I found myself responding more and more to the obvious needs, whether in training therapists, Jewish and Arab, in specialist forms of psychotherapy or spending time in therapeutic situations helping with the client load. All too swiftly however, the opportunity came to do something on a national and even international basis which opened up new ways of being the invisible servant of God.

By last summer, in 2003, there were Arab and Jewish youngsters playing football

together in mixed teams totalling over three hundred youngsters from six towns in Galilee. This time, for only their third project, there were over twenty volunteer coaches from four UK universities, Brighton, Surrey, Brunel and Southampton Institute. The British Council in Tel Aviv had become sufficiently involved so as to take on the local organisation of the project in Israel, in liaison with the overall planning of the World Sports Peace Project Working Group in the UK. The project had attracted media attention as far afield as Japan, while the media department of the Southampton Institute had sent their own film crew to record the events and to produce a video. The British Ambassador to Israel presented the trophies and medals amidst a huge crowd of excited youngsters and community leaders. All this in three short years.

The background

This project had been born in a Baptist setting in Sussex in 2000 when I extended my existing work in Galilee by creating with others what became the World Sports Peace Project. Having worked for a number of years in encouraging existing youth work in Ibillin, near Nazareth, and gaining support from many people in the UK churches, it seemed an obvious step forward to bring about a project which included the major groups in Israel and Palestine. If a project could be conceived which would bring alienated communities together, it could act as a beacon throughout the region and be relevant to other parts of the world. So the idea grew from the gift of footballs for the annual summer camp to the notion that if Jewish and Arab youngsters could be brought together for a football project and be divided to play in mixed teams against mixed teams, then in order to win they would have to work together, trust each other and leave their prejudices behind. Throughout 2000, I contacted friends from

churches and ex-students from the 1960s and 1970s Baptist Students Federation in Brighton. In June of that year I made contact with one who was already deeply involved in sport, namely the organiser of the Flora London Marathon, David Bedford, an ex student of the Brighton Baptist Chaplaincy. Speedily we created a wide and significant international network of those who saw the potential of the project, as well as making grass roots connections with the existing Christian youth grouping in Galilee. People from within and outside the denomination, together with those of different belief systems and none, became involved in the emergence of a dynamic organism which was skilled, competent, professional and with a vast scale of imagination. David and I agreed to set up a three year project which, if successful, could provide a sufficient track record to encourage an international organisation to take it on in the future.

The beginnings

The following year, in 2001 the first project was organised together with people rooted in their local community. Preparatory work and discussions with Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders in the UK, including the Chief Rabbi, took place over twelve months. The Olympic movement and other sporting organisations like Arsenal FC were consulted and became involved. Business people and voluntary organisations were also welcomed into the discussions. A team of sports enthusiasts from Brighton, led by a member of Florence Rd Baptist Church, raised the first funds in the Flora London Marathon of 2001. By the end of the first twelve months, the University of Brighton raised a team of coaches, which would continue through each year thereafter. Everyone worked as a volunteer. The project was incarnational at base, stemming from the conviction of the need to go to the region

and work in it rather than extract people to come to the UK and work here. It was costly in terms of time, energy and commitment and people gave without counting the cost. Funds were sought and raised for the first project. The British Embassy and the British Council were consulted and became increasingly involved as they realised the crucial nature of the project. Soon that involvement was to take significant substance as they became proactive with support, advice, organisational skills and personnel. Communities were coming together and families who would not otherwise have allowed the intermingling of the communities involved, responded to the opportunity of working together.

Development and growth – today and tomorrow

By the third project in 2003, the Israel Sports Authority also became involved and six towns took part, with over three hundred children and over eighty unpaid volunteers. The funding and range of the work had exceeded what could be managed by the Working Group in London, and changes were perceived to be necessary as early as the second project. The overall project was going according to plan, as obstacles were being overcome and lessons learned. After the third successful project there were a number of explorations and discussions with international organisations to see if it could be incorporated into their own work. Although, without exception, they were all impressed by the project, none could see how it might be included within their own range of operations. Eventually however, we agreed to entrust the future of the project to the British Council in Israel and the University of Brighton in the UK, both of which were eager to take responsibility for the development of the project.

Already in 2004, an even larger project

is being planned for the summer. It is expected to extend beyond the Galilee region. And who knows where it will end.

Meanwhile, the West Bank has not been ignored but actively included. A similar project was to be held in Bethlehem in the summer of 2002, involving the Greek Orthodox community and others. However, the political situation prevented any implementation of the plans that were being made against a background of gunfire and explosions in March 2002. Nonetheless it is intended that, when the political situation allows, a similar project will be held there, beginning with the Arab Christian and Muslim communities. And one day, hopefully, the Jews in the region will also hopefully become involved. Unlikely? "Where there is no vision..."

Perceptions and questions

A very pleasant Baptist pastor from Nazareth came to the football pitch in Galilee in 2002 where Jewish and Arab youngsters were playing football for the second year, at a time when elsewhere there were atrocities on both sides. There were about 150 youngsters from three Arab and Jewish towns, being coached by ten football coaches from the University of Brighton. The pastor asked me, "Have you made any believers?" It seemed a strange question for me at the time and I had to say that it was not the point of the exercise. The point was to bring together alienated youngsters to be on the same team, Jew with Arab, to learn to play together so that if they worked together they would achieve harmony and victory. This could become a template for cross cultural connections relating directly to the prayer "Thy will be done on earth". Moreover the ramifications could move far beyond Israel to any part of the world where there was division and hatred. It was the logical consequence of the gospel for Christians to

be so involved. The local pastor, however, was puzzled because what was the point of the exercise if it was not to make believers? And so there were different motivations for different circumstances. But what were the local believers doing themselves about the political divisions? What are the implications for the church of the proactive work of Conflict Prevention and Peace?

So the questions arise. This project could have been done by a humanist, not a Christian, so what is the difference? Well of course it could but it wasn't! And when we were there we did not ask who was the Christian or the Jew or the Muslim or the Druze etc -the labels were less important than the task - and although it may have caused some comment that the Executive Director turned out to be a Baptist minister, no one seemed to mind.

Other questions are more important. For example, how far do we understand what makes for a suicide bomber and where is the difference between such a person, so-called, and a freedom fighter or a member of the resistance? And is there a difference between the appropriate action of The Israeli Defence Force intent on the security of a nation and the use of force on such a scale that it could seem to be close to being itself an agency of state terrorism? I wonder how far do we understand the nature of Judaism as distinct from the actions of the State of Israel? It seems odd how little we know of racism in a country that takes part in the Eurovision song contest, European football competitions and has intentions of joining the EEC? What is the relevance of the Gospel for the Middle East and how do we show it? How do we encourage the involvement of the grass roots Christian community in Conflict Prevention activities with which the UK church can be conjoined?

Theological dynamic

On becoming involved in peace work in Israel and Palestine, there is no escaping questions about the theological nature of the work. Is it Evangelical? - whatever that means! Is it Political Theology? Is it Radical Theology? No, it's Conflict Prevention work. OK but where does that fit into the gospel? What is the difference between what you are doing and that of the humanist? Well, maybe it is Practical Theology -or Applied Theology? All very uncomfortable – yet perhaps it's simply the consequence of hearing the words of Christ - "Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these.....". Or perhaps its roots are in the parable of the sower. It is certainly incarnational because it goes to where there is need and seeks to bring about a result that reflects the nature of God embodied in particular people's lives.

Whatever, certainly the church has

done something significant and relevant in a place where there has for too long been a surfeit of bitterness and destructiveness. And the generations will not forget it. Each year, we took the volunteer coaches from the UK for a trip around Lake Galilee and after I had given a few words of introduction at the Mount of Beatitudes where it is said that Christ gave the Sermon on the Mount, they were left to take in the experience for themselves. One of the coaches came to me and asked, "Geoffrey, what is the Sermon on the Mount?" I paused before saying, "Well, it's where Christ said a lot of things including *"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God - so you know what that makes you"*. It was quite a silence that followed. Those who have taken part from the UK and in Israel will never be the same again and will tell their grandchildren about it. And the Holy Spirit is surely sufficiently able to take this and use it. **bmj**

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Bt
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Some exegetical signposts on the road to Emmaus.

Michael Ball, Caerphilly

Luke was clearly an enthusiastic traveller. He delighted in passing on details about winds, ports and the technicalities of travelling in the first century Mediterranean world. Indeed, in Acts, he is a prime source of information about such matters. So it is not surprising that journeys make up so large a part of his two extant books. His gospel shows us the three journeys to Jerusalem made by Jesus, those made as an infant and as a twelve-year-old foreshadowing the journey to his passion. As commentators have often noted, the final journey occupies over half of the gospel, and makes little sense geographically. However, most of the teaching on discipleship to be found in Luke's gospel occurs during this section, so the final journey of Jesus symbolises the life of discipleship, following Jesus on the way to the cross.

There are further journeys in the parables, from Jerusalem to Jericho for the one who fell among thieves, and into a far country and back for the younger son. Acts is more or less a succession of significant journeys, from Jerusalem to Damascus, from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, from Jerusalem to Rome, among many others, as the disciples begin to fulfil their task of witnessing to Jesus in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8). Clearly, journeys for Luke have a theological and symbolic significance, and influence his choice of stories and his starting point in some narratives, although his use of journey narratives for literary, theological and symbolic ends says nothing about historicity. True stories can perfectly well be used for such purposes. The Dunkirk evacuation became a highly meaningful and symbolic story for the British people during the Second World War.

Luke in his transfiguration narrative (9.28-36) has a unique detail. Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about "his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (9.31 NRSV). The word translated "departure" is "exodus" in the Greek. It can, unusually and poetically, mean "death" and C. E. Evans (Saint Luke,

SCM London 1990 p.418) believes that this is all that is meant. However, the word "accomplish", *pleroun* in the Greek, seems unusual in this context. Luke uses the same word in, for instance Acts 14.26, to describe the completion of an extensive mission by Paul and Barnabas, and it is a strange way of talking about a death as being completed or accomplished. So G. B. Caird (Saint Luke Penguin Books. 1963 p.132) is probably correct in understanding Luke's meaning when he writes:-

"At Jerusalem, Jesus was to accomplish the New Exodus, leading God's people from a greater bondage than that of Egypt into the promised land of the kingdom. Like Moses of old, he was now standing on the brink of a great sea, the ocean of iniquity through which he must pass and in which he must accomplish another baptism (12.16)."

I would wish to suggest that even this does not exhaust the meaning of 9.31. The first Exodus under Moses was both an act of liberation from slavery in Egypt, and a journey into a new country and new way of life; in an analogous way, the new exodus accomplished by Jesus includes both liberation from sin and evil brought

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about by his death, and also a journey out of Jerusalem into the whole world, led by the risen Jesus and the Spirit. This second phase makes the whole plot of Acts. This exodus involves literal journeys, to Samaria, to Joppa and Caesarea, to the Mediterranean world and to Rome. The journey out of Jerusalem also symbolises the liberation of God's people from the Law and Temple, and the constraints of Jewishness. Luke's purpose in Acts is not to hero-worship Paul, but to show that this second exodus is now unstoppable. By the end of his book, Christians represented by Paul are at the heart of the Empire, bearing witness to Jesus (Acts 28.31) and are set to witness to the Emperor himself (25.10-12).

If this exegesis is accepted, then it throws a new light on the familiar story of the resurrection appearance on the road to Emmaus (24.13-35). The implications of this story are often overlooked. The risen Jesus affirms the discipleship of those who have not given up home and job to follow him. Resurrection appearances are by no means confined to the Eleven, and by choosing as his major resurrection story one that does not include them as major protagonists, Luke is consistent in his down-playing of their role (see also the mission of the 70 compared with the mission of the Twelve and the leading roles

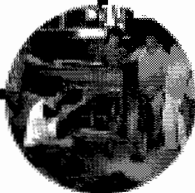
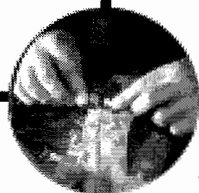
of Stephen, Philip, James, Paul and Barnabas in Acts). It is at the very least interesting that Jesus joins disciples who are on a journey away from Jerusalem, disciples who had hoped he would "set Israel free" (24.21 NRSV alternative translation). They are premature in moving out from Jerusalem, that stage must wait for the power from on high (24.46-49), but they have the right idea. Disciples on a journey out of Jerusalem into the wider world are joined by their risen Lord, and will be many times again. The Ethiopian eunuch meets Jesus through Philip on the return journey from Jerusalem, not on his way there.

24.28 tells us that Jesus "walked ahead as if he were going on", and only comes into the Emmaus home because Cleopas and companion "urged him strongly" to do so. Was Jesus just pretending, to test their love or put pressure on them to invite him? Or is Luke telling us that the Risen Jesus will soon begin to lead his disciples on a journey which will take them not seven miles to Emmaus, but to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8). The Emmaus road is often seen as a parable of the journey of faith. Perhaps we need to see it too, as a parable of the beginning of the journey of witness on which the Risen Lord takes his disciples.

bmf

"If we simply repeat the formulas of the past, our words may have the character of doctrine and dogma but they will not have the character of good news. We may be preaching perfectly orthodox doctrine but it is not the gospel for us today. We must take the idea of good news seriously. If our message does not take the form of good news, it is simply not the Christian gospel."

Albert Nolan, O.P.



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BMF – our fellowship matters:

“Contact, Concern and Compassion”

The BMF committee has spent some time considering the purpose of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship. This has not been a navel gazing exercise. It is a recognition that things change – including ministry – and it is helpful to have a clear idea of what role the BMF can and should play today.

The following is offered by the committee as a basis for the work of BMF. It is published in this edition of the Journal so that any member can offer their comments or suggestions to shape the BMF future agenda, and the recruitment and membership materials we produce.

The committee are agreed that:-

1. the constituency of BMF shall include any person involved in Baptist ministry.
2. the main focus of the BMF will be the exercise of pastoral ministry and related matters: but any member or group of members shall be free to raise issues or concerns for the BMF's attention.
3. the primary aim of BMF shall be to:-
 - serve as a means of mutual support for its members;
 - to represent its members to the BUGB, BMS and other associated bodies;
 - to provide help for members through the benevolent fund;
 - to encourage members to meet with, and pray for others in ministry.

(A suitable logo might be devised in line with the points above. Suggested logos will be welcomed – but there are no prizes!)

4. current regular features of the BMF which promote these aims are:
 - the Sunday morning pledge to pray for each other;
 - The work of a committee of representatives and appointment of officers to facilitate the work of BMF;
 - the work of an editorial board to provide the BMF with a journal;
 - the holding of an annual business meeting (usually at The Baptist Assembly);
 - the arrangement of events, conferences, etc., which promote mutual support and encouragement;
 - maintaining an international dimension to the work of BMF.

Now it's over to you. Please tell us:

- what we have missed;
- what we have got wrong – or not quite right;
- do you think we should have priorities? If so, what and why;
- are there ways BMF could serve you, or ministers in general, better?

Please send your thoughts (and/or logos) to

Ted Hale (ted@halesnorthampton.plus.com)

134, Towcester Road, Northampton. NN4 8LH

before the end of June, so that they can be included in the committee's discussion at the next meeting.

Digest of matters discussed at the BMF January Committee Meeting

2004 Pastoral Session and AGM: This year, the BMF will host one of the Main Seminars at the Baptist Assembly in Cardiff. There will be three seminar 'streams' and ours will be the first seminar in the 'ministry stream.' We have invited Michael Quicke to speak on 'Preaching Jesus.' This will be on Friday 30th April at 3.45pm.

We heard from Malcolm Goodspeed about developments following the Department of Trade and Industry's investigation into **employment rights and 'office holders'**. As has been reported in the press, the Church of England is intending to give certain rights to its clergy. They will be able to go to an industrial tribunal in case of alleged unfair dismissal, and to claim redundancy where appropriate.

There will be a special meeting of the Baptist Union Ministerial Recognition Committee, to which members of the National Settlement Team, and three representatives of the BMF committee have been invited, to discuss the Baptist Union's response to these developments. In particular, a grievance procedure, a model tenancy agreement for manses, and the collating of all relevant MR procedures.

Meeting of BUGB Senior Management Team with three members of the BMF committee:

Talks covered the proposed changes to BU Presidency, the homosexuality guidelines (clarifying that they are not intended to inhibit debate), the Pension Fund, and the sale of Arundel House and the use of the proceeds.

We are hoping to arrange a reception for delegates to the **BWA Conference** in Birmingham next year.

Personnel:

Michael Cleaves has become the International Secretary of the BMF. He brings many contacts and much experience to this position.

Geoff Colmer has agreed to be the next chair of the BMF.

I would prefer to speak, not of the impotence or powerless of God but of his defencelessness, because power and powerlessness contradict one another, whereas defencelessness need not *per se* contradict God's power. We know from experience that those who make themselves vulnerable can sometimes disarm evil...

... the liberating power of God was absolutely near to Jesus on the cross, as he was during the whole of Jesus' career. However, that was a presence without power or compulsion...

The 'must suffer' of Jesus is not a 'divine' must: it is forced on God by human beings through Jesus; nevertheless God and Jesus are not checkmated by it.

Edward Schillebeeckx For the Sake of the Gospel SCM 1989 p 96-97

Baptist Ministers' Fellowship:
Statement of Accounts 2003

General Account	2003		2002
Income		int. distributed	
Home subscriptions	£6,030.50		£5,719.00
Overseas subs	£56.00	£120.00	£66.00
BMS subs	£0.00		£0.00
Journal	£533.00	£160.00	£951.37
Interest	£956.19	£676.19	£662.30
From Life No 1			
Total	£7,295.69		£7,398.67
Expenditure			
Journal, printing	£2,744.72		£2,629.22
Journal envelopes	£164.26		£190.67
Journal postage	£1,547.02		£1,642.34
Gen Committee	£1,611.90		£1,201.15
Editorial board	£390.06		£184.35
Past session	£0.00		£300.00
Whitley lectures	£140.00		£70.00
Officers expenses	£211.92		£197.55
Stationery	£187.38		£78.00
other	£0.00		£0.00
Total	£6,997.26		£6,493.28
Balance ort year	£298.43		£905.39

General Reserve	2003	2002
Balance @ 31.12.02	£2,087.95	
surplus on 2002	£905.39	
Balance @ 31.12.2003	£2,993.34	

Benevolent Fund	2003	2002
Balance @ 31.12.02	£4,211.57	
Income during 2003	£3,833.18	
interest added	£120.00	
Grants made 2003	£3,390.00	
Balance @31.12.2003	£4,774.75	

Pre-retirement courses fund	2003	2002
Balance @ 31.12.02	£406.45	
Transfer to Benevolent Fund	£406.45	
Balance @ 31.12.2003	£0.00	

Life membership No1 Account	2003	2002
Balance @ 31.12.2002	£4,135.00	
Balance @ 31.12.2003	£4,135.00	

Life membership No2 Account	2003	2002
Balance @ 31.12.2002	£17,315.00	
New subscriptions	£1,125.00	
Interest added	£160.00	
Balance @ 31.12.2003	£18,600.00	

Summary of balances

General	£298.43	£905.39
Reserve	£2,993.34	£2,087.95
Benevolent Fund	£4,774.75	£4,211.57
Pre-retirement courses fund	£0.00	£406.45
life No1 account	£4,135.00	£4,135.00
Life no 2 account	£18,600.00	£17,315.00
Total	£30,801.52	£29,061.36

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Many years ago the BMF suggested successfully that Baptist ministers should be given the choice of where they would like to live in retirement and not be restricted to whatever accommodation is becoming available. This policy is still followed but to safeguard limited resources there is a ceiling limit which has been £120,000. There is the option of adding an extra 25% which becomes an interest free loan that becomes available at the end of the tenancy. There is an appropriate reduction on rent so there is some return on capital. The big advantage for the minister of this IFL rather than a shared cost of purchase is that it saves the minister a lot of money when you can least afford it, as in not being responsible for legal fees etc and all improvements and repairs are paid totally by the RBMHS. The other on-going advantage is that when the tenancy comes to a close for whatever reason, the property, greatly enhanced in value, does not have to be sold but can be offered to other retiring Baptist ministers. Properties inherited by the RBMHS are usually offered to applicants even when the value can be above the ceiling price. The definition of Baptist minister includes not only those on the "Accredited List" but also those who have served (in the past taken as being not less than 18 years) as a minister in a Baptist Church in membership with the Baptist Union.

VIC SUMNER retired. (a member of the RBMHS Committee)

When Abraham sat at his tent door, according to custom, waiting to entertain strangers, he spied an old man, stooping and leaning on his staff, weary with age and travail, coming toward him, who was an hundred years of age. He received him kindly, washed his feet, provided supper, caused him to sit down: but observing that the old man ate, and prayed not, he asked him why he did not worship the God of Heaven. The old man told him that he worshipped the fire only; and acknowledged no other God. At which Abraham's anger grew so zealously angry that he thrust the old man out of his tent, and exposed him to all the evils of the night, and an unguarded condition.

When the old man was gone, God called to Abraham and asked him where the stranger was. He replied "I thrust him away because he did not worship Thee." God answered him, "I have suffered him these hundred years, although he dishonoured Me; and could'st thou not endure him one night?"

Jeremy Taylor 1613-1667

Why Social Responsibility? A brief commentary – in retrospect and anticipation.

Don Black, Amersham.

Why Social Responsibility? No question has been put to me more often than that. Sometimes I was asked while shaking hands at the end of a service of worship; sometimes as visiting preacher over Sunday lunch, sometimes, the answer took five lengthy sessions in a week-end Church Conference. It is quite right that I should be challenged on this point because nearly a quarter of a century ago I was commissioned to be "Social Responsibility Secretary to the Baptist Union". A friend recently saw my name and responsibility on the weekly leaflet and the question came up again.

This will not be a definitive answer. Over the years the answer has obviously differed in emphasis. Theology like the theologian must accept change. I am saddened when I hear people say, "I've not changed in 30 years". So all I claim is that this is where I stand *today* in the pilgrimage of my reply.

If there is any justification for Social Responsibility, it must take its rise in the Crucifixion/Resurrection. I wish that was one word. Of course they may be examined separately but they are inextricably linked. You can't have one without the other.

Patently, the resurrection is proof that there is life after death. That is magnificent and we live by it. Yes, the resurrection is proof that Jesus Christ is alive. You don't need to look any further. There is all the proof you need. I don't detract anything but I want to draw attention to another aspect. Let us affirm that the first Easter Day is the birthday of God's New World. There is creation, the first Day and God has seen that that is good. But now because of the cross/resurrection, there is a New Creation. John's Gospel is full of it. Mary saw the Risen Christ and she called Him the "gardener". She was right. He is the gardener - the gardener of the

New Creation. The greeting that the Risen Christ gave to his frightened disciples was "Peace". That was not some usual greeting like we say good morning. It was a statement. There is a new dawn. "Then He showed them His hands and His side" Through Cross/Resurrection the age has dawned. With that new creation tremendous new possibilities, new hope are open for all.

The church is that part of society that acknowledges that the God's New Age has dawned. It has dawned for all but their eyes are blinded that they do not see. Mark gives us a summary of the Gospel, "The Kingdom of God is here". The new age is here NOW. The kingdom does not depend on the number of people who acknowledge it. The kingdom is here through the resurrection in all its fullness. The Church lives in the confidence that the Cross/Resurrection has brought in the new age, the new creation. Therein lies the basis of social responsibility.

So we no longer look at society and seek to see what makes it tick. When I first took up this Social Responsibility Office I used to consider that my specific task - which obviously I shared with all - was to point out what is the reality in society. But (horror of horrors) I was just putting the finishing

touches to 4 lectures for a week-end conference and I had to scrap the lot because of this, to me, new interpretation. I realised that my task, again shared with millions, was to look at the present from the future. I was not to look at society and see what it is. I was to look at society and see what it became or rather what it had been made by the direct action of God in Christ. Then having seen what it could become my Social Responsibility Secretary's task was to help others to see that action and encourage them to work with others to bring about the change. Evangelism is acknowledging what God is doing and learning how to co-operate with Him there and Social Responsibility is 'social evangelism'. It is not some option in which we may become engaged if there is time and energy left. It is not a derived activity. It is central to the Gospel - the Gospel is of change (*metanoia*).

Now I am knocking three score years and twenty, one of my regrets is that I did not see this earlier and having seen, expressed it more convincingly. But I did seek to encourage congregations wherever I was invited to "become what they had been made by God". They had been given this message to proclaim not only to Church people but also to the whole world. God has declared through the Cross/Resurrection that the new age is here. "Now" God says, "bring in that new creation".

So what is Social Responsibility? It is evangelism which is dependent on faith in the Christ of the scriptures; it is eschatological, it is totally shot through with hope and it is political because it is action in love to all people.

I hope that the use of the first person singular has not offended any but it represents a personal struggle in a direction you may not wish to go.

Just by way of illustration and briefly -

because I don't want to lose the truth above, let me fix that star to a wagon.

The Social Responsibility message of Christmas is "Let us "Send back the song which now the angels sing". The message of Easter is the same "He breathed on them and said, "Peace". Peace is the commission to the disciples. Peace is the purpose of human living. God has opened up society in the sense that it is not bound to any unchangeable political, economic or dogmatic system. The watchword of the church is 'Reformed and always in need of reformation'. Having applied that ruthlessly to ourselves we work to re-form our society - our world. Yes we may have to condemn society but we recall that that is what Martin Luther called "the strange work of the Gospel". Not only or even mainly condemnation but rather the affirmation of those things that make for its peace and pitch in there to encourage its growth. We see society as being 'on the way' and most threatened when it says, "We've got there".

The fatal omissions (beware hobby horse coming up) in what is called "The Just War Theory" which proposes reasons for Christians to go to war, is that it makes no mention of world poverty and neither does it mention the environment. So in my book it is as outdated as bows and arrows. Peacemaking takes us not only into working against war but also into racism, nationalism, globalisation and much more. Even actions which has served well in the past are open to scrutiny, for 'Time makes ancient good uncouth' nay even more demonic.

Again, the Social Responsibility message is that society is the place where we work with others for freedom. In Hall at Regent's Park College each of the five points on a star is named. One is titled

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JUNK - A WASTE MANAGEMENT PROBLEM?

I recently visited a church which, though generally well managed, had become a depository for cast-offs from well meaning church members. I mentioned this to one of my other Surveyors, who told a similar tale:

"A few years ago, I (reluctantly) took the job of Fabric Chairman in my own church. I started to look at our building and what was in it with a different perspective. In dim and dusty school-rooms, now rarely used, I discovered quite a few cast-off objects - some used but replaced by the church, some "donated" and for which no use had (yet) been found. These included some old electric fires, an old Hoover, a very old TV and assorted carpet pieces. In the kitchen I discovered three ancient electric kettles with 40-year-old plugs and flexes, and a water boiler full of scale and missing a foot.

It struck me that at some stage a member of the church might recall these items and employ one of them. Suppose a group was in the church on a very cold day with the heating not been programmed to come on for them. That church member may think - "We've got some fires stored in the old school room - I'll go and get one".

Those old one bar electric radiant fires are improperly guarded, the flex may be on its last legs and the plug may be cracked - a recipe for disaster. I removed all the plugs with wire cutters, ordered a skip and requested volunteers for a "clean up" session. We nearly filled that skip. We also ended up with a lot less cluttered areas and room to use for better things."

My Survey team all too often see old items of equipment which have been "donated" to a church - "A pity to throw it away, there's still some life left in it even though we've replaced it - let's give it to the church, I'm sure they can use it!!" Bits of old carpet laid across other tattered remnants in some dusty corner is another frequent hazard. And what about those old wobbly and potentially dangerous wooden chairs stored for a rainy day?


Perhaps no one feels they have the authority to throw away what has been given. Or there is a feeling that "It may come in useful - we had better keep it". My advice is - Be Firm. Throw it out and avoid any possible future accident and be very careful what you accept in the future - all electrical goods must be safe to use and tested (and do you actually need it?). You may also get the incentive to use the liberated space more productively!

Yours Sincerely

Alf Green ACII
ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

"freedom". It used to be a watchword for Baptists. (Has it gone today?) Just after the second world war, Eleanor Roosevelt proposed the four freedoms for the world (from want, from fear, of speech and of religion) and still today in spite of many further declarations many in our country and many more in the world have not even got a small fraction of them. Freedom is one of the most slippery words in the English language and deserves a more detailed examination than can be attempted here. But, back to our calling, the Cross/Resurrection has set people free,

now let us work together to enable them to become what they have been made.

Overwhelming - certainly. But if we are not been overwhelmed by what Christ asks of us we have not heard the full call. Don Quixote asks us "to dream an impossible dream". He is not anywhere near what Christ offers. Christ doesn't say "dream the impossible ". He says, "Go. Go and proclaim the impossible (with human beings) - as they say when broadcasting the daily news - "where you are" as also to the whole world. 

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Alan Ecclestone and the Parish Meeting: some questions for Baptists

John Houseago, Broadmead Baptist Church, Bristol

Biographies are probably my favourite reading. Dr Morris West commended them to his students as a rich source of incarnational theology. Two years ago I came across a remaindered copy of Tim Gorrings's biography of Alan Ecclestone (*Alan Ecclestone: Priest as Revolutionary*, Cairns Publications, Sheffield). I knew Ecclestone's name as the author of *Yes to God*, but little about the man. When I read the book I discovered not only details of an unusual life, but much to my surprise, some powerful thinking from a 'high' Anglican about building a church community and the possibilities of the Church Meeting. Much of what I found resonated with my own thinking. However I was also made aware of the narrow focus of the Church Meetings for which I am responsible. The Church Meeting as I experience it is largely to do with Church Life. The Parish (Church) Meeting was "a meeting whose character is implied in the New Testament word "fellowship". It is a meeting, the agenda or business of which is the whole life and work of the Christian Community in the world." (Ecclestone 1961:8). Gorrings commented, "The meeting was the place where "the mind of the church" was shaped preparatory to action, and where the action was later reflected on." (Gorrings 1994:108). This sounded distinctly Baptist to me!

Mindful of the importance of biography let me begin by outlining the life of Alan Ecclestone.

Life and Career

Alan Ecclestone was born June 3rd 1904 and died December 14th 1992. He was an Anglican priest for 60 years, a lifelong socialist, and a member of the Communist Party for 40 years. He was born into a working class family in Stoke-on-Trent. The family did not have much to do with the church, but Alan was confirmed and thereafter continued to attend the 8 o'clock service.

Ecclestone's interest in Christianity really began when he came across a church that had the reputation of being politically 'red'. This church, which he began to attend, was the church of the Holy Trinity, Sneyd, Burslem (about 2-3 miles north of Stoke). The church was in the High-Anglican tradition and was one of a small number of High-Anglican Churches

that was strongly socialist. The worship was according to the Roman rite, rather than the Book of Common Prayer.

The vicar, Jim Wilson, was a former army chaplain. He went to Burslem in 1920, quickly losing the middle-class congregation, but replacing it with a working class one. In 1932 Harold Mason became his curate. Mason was a friend of Conrad Noel of Thaxted in Essex, probably the most Socialist church in the country at that time. Mason, who eventually succeeded Wilson at Burslem, had helped to write the manifesto of the Catholic Crusade. The Catholic Crusade had been formed in 1918. Wilkinson (1998:164) describes it as "small ... and (with) no political influence".

Ecclestone never joined the Catholic Crusade, but he was deeply influenced by it. His understanding of the nature of God, which shaped the whole of his life, was derived from the concepts of community in

God and society. His theological emphasis was practical, "God is a 'group of persons' living in perfect harmony with one another (Trinity). Human life when perfected, made and remade in the image of God, is the life of a group living in perfect harmony with one another. In this time, the church must be striving to be that - to enter into that life." (Gorringe 1994:70). There is in this a strong presaging of the concept of the 'Missionary Congregation' associated with Lesslie Newbigin.

In 1922 Ecclestone went to St Catherine's College, Cambridge to read History and English. He was one of a small number of students who refused to break the General Strike of 1926. After graduating he obtained a Certificate of Teaching, taught at King Edward VII Grammar School in Kings Lynn for one year, and then became a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Durham in 1927. He also lectured for the Workers' Educational Association from then until his retirement. In 1930 he was offered a permanent position on the staff at Durham, but declined as he had resolved to become a parish priest.

He trained for ministry at Wells, entirely at his own expense. At college he pursued an interest in Judaism and wanted to introduce Marx to the curriculum! He served as chaplain to the local workhouse. Though very hesitant about ordination, when he completed his studies he was ordained and appointed as curate at Christ Church, Carlisle.

Whilst in Carlisle he met and married Delia Abraham, the Diocesan Sunday School Advisor. Delia was the 10th daughter of Charles Abraham, former bishop of Derby. Eight of her sisters married clergymen! However, Delia's choice of Alan was deeply shocking to the family, who were well connected and pro-

establishment. A communist son-in-law was not entirely welcomed! Before meeting Alan, however, Delia had already chosen to live at the level of the unemployed and therefore shared Alan's passion for identifying with the poor. They were both very intense people of immense conviction. It was said of Delia, "She would say 'Amen' in church as if to say, "If you haven't done it by next week I won't be here"." (Gorringe 1994:54). The marriage was sometimes stormy, but endured and was the single most important experience in Ecclestone's life and a rich source of theological reflection.

In 1936 Ecclestone moved to St Paul's, Frizington, an area of high unemployment 5 miles from Whitehaven. He understood his role to be fostering community formation. Within the church he wanted to overcome the ingrained passivity of the congregation; they were accustomed to being instructed but not to participate. To encourage participation he changed the monthly women's meeting to a weekly discussion group without visiting speakers. No one should doubt this man's courage!

Always anxious to keep the congregation looking to the wider world Ecclestone arranged Conventions, drawing people and speakers from other parishes. Both Conventions and Parish Meetings were focused on particular issues or projects. One example of this was sending food parcels to Spain during the Civil War. Discussions ranged over issues in Palestine, Germany and India, revision of liturgy, and local problems. Needless to say the discussions could be heated and divisive and some people left the church.

1942 Ecclestone was invited by Alan Hunter, Bishop of Sheffield, to go to the industrial parish of Darnall in Sheffield, specifically to start Parish Meetings. He remained there until he retired 27 years

later. This was not entirely by choice. His political views blocked any chance he might have had of holding higher office in the church.

In 1969 Alan and Delia retired to live in Gosforth in Cumbria. In retirement he wrote some influential books. *Yes to God*, a book about prayer, is probably the best known of these. He believed that prayer was a discipline that had to be learnt, which consisted of learning to pay attention, seeking the truth and elucidating the truth of our own lives. In *The Night Sky of the Lord* he drew together some of his thinking on Judaism, and particularly on the Holocaust. *The Scaffolding of the Spirit* is a series of reflections on John's gospel, exploring how the gospel can be used as a foundation of prayer. In *A Staircase for Silence* he drew heavily on the writings of Charles Péguy to explore the meaning of community and the vision of God.

In 1974 Delia suffered a stroke and after a brief time at home she spent the next 8 years in a nursing home in Whitehaven, where she died after contracting flu. In those 8 years Alan made the 24 mile round trip by bus everyday bar one. The only day he missed was when the snow was too deep for the bus to make the journey.

After Delia's death he resumed travelling to lecture and to preach, and produced a number of pamphlets. Around Easter 1992 he suffered a slight heart attack, and then a stroke in September. He died in December.

Parish Meetings

Ecclestone did not originate the concept of the Parish Meeting, which had been running in some parishes for 20 years before he went to Sheffield. In the first issue of *The Leap*, a series of occasional pamphlets, he explained the purpose of the Parish Meeting quoting J H Oldham who described the need for

something "midway between a prayer-meeting and a parish whist-drive". In the same pamphlet he also drew on the Malvern Conference, chaired by William Temple, where it had been said that the "whole congregation habitually worshipping together should regularly meet to plan and carry out some common enterprise ... for the upbuilding of its community life". In the same place he also quoted at length from the Congregationalist, Daniel Jenkins. Jenkins offered him an understanding of the Church in which admission to the sacraments entails a commitment to "the responsibility of membership of the Church Meeting".

Ecclestone encouraged Parish Meetings throughout his ministry, but it was in Sheffield that he had the greatest opportunity to develop them. Parish Meetings, which are also referred to as Church Meetings in some of the church newsletters, were held weekly. When he arrived in Darnall Ecclestone allowed the Parish to choose on which day of the week they would be held. There would be no choice, however, as to its continuation; he made it clear that the meetings would continue come what may! This resulted in the immediate resignation of one of the churchwardens. In the 27 years that Ecclestone was in Sheffield there were about 1400 meetings.

Attendance at the meetings varied from about 15 up to 80. They were held in the Vicarage, with Ecclestone sitting on a low chair beside the fire keeping a low profile. He did not see himself as the key figure in the meeting, but as one whose job it was to encourage others. Speaking of the qualities of the chairman he wrote, "He is there in the position of a learner like everyone else, and is just as likely to make mistakes." (Ecclestone 1961:16).

The Parish Meeting was an attempt to understand and reshape the nature of the

Christian Community. "The Parish Meeting is simply the calling together of the worshippers, not to be addressed by a speaker, not to be a study group, not to be a working party ... but to be the Church facing its daily work and ready to find out just how it is to be tackled." (Gorringe 1994:98).

The Parish Meeting enabled this to happen in several ways. Because it met regularly and over a long period of time it was a place for honesty, where grievances and misunderstanding could be faced. Meetings could therefore be explosive and some people were deeply hurt by the experience, but over the years deeper relationships were built. When one particularly difficult member, known for her carping criticisms was challenged as to why she bothered to come, she replied, "I come here because I know that I am loved." (Gorringe 1994:104).

It was also an educational forum, with the emphasis being placed on learning through experience and research rather than teaching. Over the years the subjects covered included congregational matters, local and national politics (delegates were sent from the Parish Meeting to all events in Sheffield), nuclear power, international politics, gender issues, and sexuality. Groups went regularly to the Sheffield Playhouse and to Art exhibitions, and produced book reviews for discussion. Bible Study was more difficult. Ecclestone believed that people were intimidated by the text and were therefore inclined to replace hard thinking with pious phrases, such as "We must have faith"! (Ecclestone 1961:38). When the Beveridge report was published at the end of the War it was discussed for several weeks by the Parish Meeting.

The Parish Meeting also facilitated the development of an understanding of the incarnational Christ by direct action. Holy Trinity Darnall welcomed German

Prisoners of War in the immediate post-war years, marched against the nuclear bomb, and affiliated to Amnesty International when it was founded. Throughout the years of Ecclestone's incumbency the congregation were encouraged to campaign on local issues such as the location of road crossings and bus shelters, the provision of public libraries, and Green Belt protection.

In an unfinished autobiography Ecclestone said of his own life that there had been "no great achievements ...and no extraordinary occasions". In a sense that is true. He was a rather eccentric parish priest at a time when the Church of England was able to accommodate such people. He was a man with a burning passion for human community and who believed that the church was means a to take the vision and make it reality.

I have to confess that I have not put into practice what I have learnt from Gorringe's interesting book, or from my subsequent research. But that tells you more about me than about Ecclestone. If anyone has read this far they might be able to make the practical steps that will breathe some fresh life into Church Meetings. If so, please let me know! **bmj**

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May we (over-) welcome you?

Colin Sedgwick, Lindsay Park Baptist Church, Harrow, Middlesex

I read an article recently about the role of cathedrals in modern British Christianity. I might just say that I'm not really myself the cathedral type. Stained glass windows and stone knights on tombs, distant high altars and dark-stained choir-stalls don't, as they say, do a lot for me. I don't find them spiritually uplifting or relish them as aids to worship. A 15-minute stroll around the place, just to soak up some of the history and see anything there is to be seen, and that's usually enough for me.

But even a Christian barbarian like me couldn't help but be struck by the fact that, according to the article, many cathedrals are seeing an increase in numbers - and that's for their services, in case you're wondering, not just as sight-seeing centres.

One of the reasons suggested for this trend was that cathedrals, by virtue of their very size and splendour, are easy places to get "lost" in. I don't mean lost in the literal sense, of course, but in the sense of being anonymous. It appears that many people are looking for some kind of spiritual meaning for their lives, but are reluctant to seek it through the local church, Anglican, Baptist or whatever. They find it helpful to have somewhere they can go virtually unnoticed to sit, pray, think, listen. They know that no-one will hassle them or intrude on them.

The problem with your average local church is that it tends to gobble people up. Just as (I am told) undertakers mentally measure people up for their coffin on first meeting, so church members instinctively size up the visitor. Is he/she a Christian? Do we have a potential Sunday School teacher here? I wonder if they can play the keyboard? Do they look the sort to help in reaching out to the local yoof? Even (God forgive us! - say this in a whisper) might they be good for the church's finances?

And, of course, so much have we been urged by the minister to be loving,

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welcoming and inclusive, that very often the visitor is virtually pounced on and smothered in emotional syrup. How many first-timers in church have stumbled out into the mid-day sunshine after ordeal-by-welcome breathing a massive sigh of relief and vowing never, ever, to visit that church again? We will, of course, never know.

This is a real problem for churches like my own. We have quite a tiny building - a hundred bodies about the place on a Sunday morning and it's getting uncomfortable. There is, quite literally, nowhere to hide: no pillar to sit behind, no nook, cranny or comer to retreat into. No-one is more than 6 rows from the platform. Of course, for the regulars it's great. But for the outsider I suspect that "close fellowship" can easily become suffocating over-familiarity - "one more meaty, knuckle-crushing handshake and I'll scream!"

Of course, someone will say that surely church is all about closeness and involvement: just look at the end of Acts 2. And yes, who would argue with that? But the fact is that not everybody is ready to dive straight into the heart of things. They need time. Above all they need sensitivity, a respect of their space, a recognition of their individuality. How good are we at allowing these things?

My cheeks still burn with shame when I think of one of my own mega-blunders

in this area some years ago. I was a bit concerned about how little inter-action seemed to go on on a Sunday morning, especially regarding the "fringe" people. So, from the platform, I urged everyone not to leave the building after the service until they had said hello to someone they didn't know. I didn't exactly lock the door and stand there jangling the key, but I laid it on pretty heavy.

Well, a lady who came just very occasionally was first out (as usual) into the lobby where I was standing, friendly-pastor style, at the door. As I extended my hand she took one look at me, realised with dismay that she had not obeyed my instructions, turned round and *went back into the church* to say hello to someone - anyone. She had taken me absolutely literally. I wanted to grab hold of her and shout "No, it's not you I was getting at! - it's the *regulars* who should be greeting you! But it was too late. That lady never came again. I had embarrassed her out of church.

In America a few years ago my family and I got used to the effusive generosity and welcome of friends and strangers alike. It seemed you could barely move without being urged to "have a nice day". We loved it, of course, lapped it up - at first, at any rate. But after a time we found it could get just a tinsy bit, well, - *wearing*. In the city centre, though, there was a shop with a message proudly displayed on the

window: "In this shop we promise not to tell you to have a nice day". We used to like visiting that shop...

Perhaps a few of our churches could do with a similar notice: "We're really glad to see you, but we promise not to over-welcome you". No, we can't be cathedrals, and probably wouldn't want to be. But we can, hopefully, be like Jesus. He, after all, loved people with a perfect love. But he respected them for who they were. And he never forced himself on anyone.

Of course, where the big anonymous churches miss out is that the fringe person can remain permanently fringe - a situation which may be understandable but which is not good, and certainly finds no sanction in the New Testament idea of church. To belong to Christ is to belong to his church; and belonging to his church must mean involvement, service, fellowship, you name it: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," said Jesus - and you can't remain on the fringe and be true to that command. So yes, fringe people must, at some point, be drawn into the life of the church.

But that is another story for another day... **dmj**

Pastoral Exchange – Australia 2005

Two months, either April/May or June/July 2005. Information limited but could be Tin Can Bay Baptist Church, Queensland.

Please contact (s.a.e.) Vic Sumner, 6 Middle Onslow Close, Ferring, BN12 5RT

Book Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

LISTENING TO THE PAST: the place of tradition in theology. Stephen R Holmes Paternoster Press / Baker Academic. 2002, 170 pp. £14.99

Ministers face situations where fellow Christians appear to read literal answers to problems off the page of Scripture. Once, in dealing with a case of adultery of a Christian leader, I was confronted by a church member with the story of David and Bathsheba, and the demand that leaders who are repentant should be forgiven and allowed to continue in post. When challenged, I was then asked, in terms of Stephen Holmes' book 'Why can't we just read the Bible?'

Stephen Holmes, has put us in his debt with a most challenging and yet frustrating book. The challenge is in the very important questions this series of independent chapters poses - the frustration is not that Holmes gathered from various sources papers of his own for this purpose. It is, I suspect, that those who need his challenge most, and are looking for answers, will be frustrated because they lack Holmes' spread of disciplines in their training. An unwitting challenge of Holmes' book highlights current deficiencies in basic Ministerial academic training that now appertain, not just in Baptist Theological Colleges, but ecumenically.

The learning of the past, in regard to Scripture and its meaning, has an important part to play, and Holmes sets this in his understanding of the communion of the saints. Those from yesterday's Body of Christ, have an ongoing ministry for Christ, through the

Holy Spirit, for today's. Although separated by 500 years or 500 miles they are as near as contemporary believers.

Holmes presents us with a few of his own favourite people and themes to heed. We are taken into a discussion of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* and 'the upholding of beauty' and then a 'defence of the doctrine of simplicity'. He comes nearer to most, with a chapter on 'Calvin against the Calvinists' and then Jonathan Edwards on the will. This is followed by 'patristic resources' on Baptism as a resource for ecumenical dialogue. Karl Barth's doctrine of Reprobation, provides a 'reprise' on Calvin and Edwards. He concludes with 'Neoplatonism and Politics: Samuel Coleridge Taylor On the Constitution of Church and State.

These chapters, despite their difficulty, are a good example of what Honest John Robinson taught his Cambridge students. The first vital part of the theology is knowing what the questions are, rather than finding the answers. As any GP will tell you, any doctor should know what the remedies are for illness or where to find them. But if the diagnosis is wrong, remedies will be of no effect. This book is strong on diagnosis, and therefore its remedies are worth consideration. Unfortunately, we live in a day of 'quick fixes' and an almost complete lack of concern with diagnosis.

Holmes illustrates what listening to the tradition involves; sets theological reflection at the heart of the Church's life, and then demonstrates what this might mean for understanding the atonement, human freedom and election, heaven and hell, if disregarding time and geography,

we listen now to the real questions and answers of fellow believers from the past.

As a Baptist family we need to cherish and nourish our brother minister, a lecturer in Christian Doctrine at King's College, London, and Senior Researcher in Mission and Theology at the Bible Society, by accepting the discipline of reading this book.

Roger Hayden

Too Deep for Words: A Theology of Liturgical Expression. Clayton J Schmit. Westminster John Knox. 2002. £10

This was one of those books that I began with every good intention of enjoying, but as I read it found that I wasn't quite sure what all the words meant. It was quite hard going and reminded me of a friend in college who used so many quotes that more of his essay was in the footnotes than the main body. There is at least a very clear structure and each chapter has a clear introduction and summary conclusion.

Schmit obviously is widely read and tackles some important areas that are worth examining for those who are preachers and leaders of worship. His starting place is worship as art, with an attempt to explain the intangible; the human response to God's presence in worship. He is concerned with how that experience is created. 'All human expression is symbolic', and so he goes on to explore a theology of presence, performance and the power of words, as well as then exhorting the practitioner to excellence in performance.

Part two then is focused on the specifics of preaching, prayer and finally some ideas on other forms of communication within our 'liturgy'. There are also some exercises to encourage having a go at employing what he's suggesting which may encourage you to think a little deeper about the words

being used and their ability to move people.

I think I liked this, even though the first half was hard going. It's worth a look if you're a bit bored with your preaching and leading of worship. If you're bored, think what it must be like for those sitting listening! And if nothing else, at the least I agree with Schmit, 'performing with excellence, that is, serving with diligence, authenticity, and humility, enables the minister to remain hidden so that the promise and presence of God can be disclosed.' That makes it worth working at!

**Rachel Haig, Associate Minister,
Horfield Bristol**

Bible and Mission: Christian Witness to a Postmodern World. Richard Bauckham Paternoster Press, 2003, 112 pages. £5.99

This material was originally presented as the Easneye Lectures at All Nations College, near London. The chapter divisions represent the contents of four lectures that discuss different themes that contribute to an understanding of our mission within a secular postmodern culture.

The opening chapter, 'A Hermeneutic for the Kingdom of God' sets the scene outlining the approach Prof. Bauckham will take in the other three lectures. It is clear that the events of '9/11' 2001 serve as the backdrop to this work, alongside an interpretation of their significance by Jonathan Sachs, the Chief Rabbi of Britain, who, in a newspaper article shortly afterwards, had pleaded for 'diversity and particularity' in contrast to what he called 'universalist cultures'. The Chief Rabbi was arguing that political and religious powers that claimed to possess universal truth and as a result sought to convert the world to this truth, possibly by force, were guilty of a form of imperialism. Although the

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religious example used in the newspaper article was Islam, not Christianity, Bauckham has sought, in the light of such criticism, to demonstrate the importance of the Christian story and the means whereby we may legitimately seek to evangelise all peoples.

This book contains much familiar material, but it is presented in a fresh and creative manner. It is very easy to read, but will also stimulate the minds of its readers to engage with the issues raised. I particularly enjoyed the third chapter 'Geography- Sacred and Symbolic', because I cannot recall any other book that addresses this issue, with respect to mission in the Bible, in the style of this author. I would have no doubt that every pastor who reads this book will appreciate its insights, as well as gain some material for use in sermons on some of the more challenging passages of Scripture.

Brian Talbot
Cumbernauld Baptist Church

Keep Yourselves From Idols. Terry Griffith. Sheffield Academic Press, 2002. £55 Hardback.

Terry Griffith is the minister of Trinity Baptist Church, Bexleyheath, Kent. The initial part of the book concentrates on the ending of 1 John within the concluding section (5.6-21), discussing its rhetorical strategy, proving that the *eidol-* group of words is used of literal idols and their cult, but here is used for Judaism, and so 5.20-21 provides an effective and powerful antithesis to terminate the writing. Then the book widens out to make its noteworthy contribution: following the lead of some scholars (including Griffith's supervisor, Professor Judith Lieu), Griffith attacks the view that 1John is polemically directed against gnostic-docetic opponents who have just withdrawn.

Griffith's case is twofold. Firstly, he shows that the phrases 1.6-2.9, 4.20 ("If we say that"; "The one who says (that) ") occur in debates within secular philosophical schools. In 1 John, they reflect internal community debates on how to deal with sin, not slogans of opponents. Secondly, the doctrinal issue at stake is whether the Messiah is Jesus: 2.22 which is crystal clear must control the discussion before the more obscure 4.2-3; 5.6-8 (if the author were attacking opponents, why didn't he express himself more clearly?). The problem is Jewish Christians, uneasy at Johannine 'high' Christology, returning to the synagogue (not gnostic docetists seceding to form conventicles). "Jesus as the Messiah come in the flesh" (4.2) simply emphasises Jesus' presence in the human sphere, while 5.6 uses an intensifying grammatical construction ("not only..but also") to focus on the end of Jesus' ministry (blood = atoning death). This approach enables Griffith's to offer his solution to the 1 John paradox of Christians sinning and yet being sinless. When Christians sin, they can be forgiven through the blood of Christ (1.7;2.2), but one sin is unforgivable - apostasy (this is the "sin unto death" 5.16) and it is this sin which the true Christian, born of God, does not and cannot commit (3.6,9; 5.18).

This book makes an important contribution to Johannine studies. Griffith has landed some heavy blows on the 'dominant' gnostic opponent interpretation. Has he landed the knockout blow? Much will depend on how convincing one finds his exegesis of 4.2 and 5.6, because the internal community debates on sin could have been sparked off by those who left.

The price is prohibitively high. Do as I did - use interlibrary loan, or obtain Tyndale Bulletin 49 where Griffith summarises the main thrust of his book.

He is to be congratulated warmly on this excellent book. We hope this talented scholar will make further contributions to Johannine studies.

John Morgan-Wynne

Recovering the Scandal of the Cross, Joel B Green and Mark D Baker, Paternoster 2003, ISBN 1-84227-246-2, 232 pp, pb. £14.95

"In the early decades of the Christian movement, the *scandal* of the cross was far more self-evident than was its *meaning*."

That sentence (with my italics) sums up the main burden of this book. Green and Baker believe that in searching analytically for a rationale of the cross, a "theory of the atonement", the church has often failed to grasp what really matters - the simple fact that it happened at all.

They offer an overview of the New Testament's teaching, highlighting the various images the different writers employ - the altar, the market-place, the courtroom, etc. There follows a survey of the main theories put forward through the centuries - *Christus Victor*, moral influence, satisfaction, penal substitution. None, it is stressed, is to be regarded as definitive.

The church's mistake, they assert, has been to take models that may have made sense in one culture and assume that they are equally valid for all time. On the contrary, it is vital to find new metaphors and presentations appropriate for new situations.

Two of the examples given are Japan, where a sense of *guilt* is virtually meaningless, but where the idea of the cross as signifying *shame* makes far more impact; and feminist theology, where many see in theories such as penal substitution an endorsement of parental

abuse. (A striking feature of the book is a sustained assault on the penal substitution view.)

Thought-provoking stuff! Do my misgivings arise from the impression that the authors have developed a blind spot in their search for relevance and contemporaneity? - or simply because the more traditional views flow in my theological bloodstream? That's something I'll have to work out. I'm not sure that reading this book will add much to my preaching, but it has certainly stimulated me to grapple afresh with key issues in Christian thinking and proclamation.

Colin Sedgwick.
Kenton Baptist Church

12 Days Out With God: A Hands-on Guide to Rediscovering God. Chris Gidney & Mike Elcome. Zondervan. 2003. ISBN 0-310-24885-X £8.99

The 'days out' range from an art gallery to a theme park, from gardens to a restaurant, and each of them has something worthwhile to offer in reflection, although individuals will find some chapters more helpful than others. The writers maintain that the days out may be done in any order, however I would suggest that the first chapter on 'Taking a Journey' would be the best place to start and the final chapter, a days retreat, is a logical conclusion to the experience of using the book. For those who find travel difficult information is given to enable them to benefit from the book.

This is not a textbook, nor is it a book of prayers, rather the writers have provided an outline for a guided spiritual journal. It is a workbook and each chapter is focused on one of the days out with God. The chapters follow a format, namely, introduction, practical preparation, questions about the experience itself,

questions guiding spiritual reflection, resources for prayer and biblical reflection together with space for notes, pictures etc. The spiritual exercises also draw on modern illustrations, poetry and individuals such as Augustine and Brother Lawrence.

The 'spiritual check up' at the beginning and end of the book is not my cup of tea, and neither are some of the graphics, however the quality of the work is evident.

It will prove to be of use for people following on from a basic Christianity course, or those who feel the need to explore their spirituality in more depth. The questions are such that they will elicit useful reflection wherever a person is on their spiritual journey. Moreover the ideas and approach are adaptable for use with individuals or groups of any spiritual outlook, background or age.

Gareth Dyer. Chaplain to Higher Education in Manchester

NICENE CHRISTIANITY - The Future for a New Ecumenism. Ed. Christopher Seitz. pp240. 2001. Paternoster Press/Brazos Press ISBN [UK] 1-84227 154 -7. £14.99

A series of essays first presented as papers at an ecumenical [Anglican and Lutheran] conference in America. The premise is that only the whole Nicene Creed - not a reduction of it, nor our tradition's favourite 'bits' of it - can provide a way forward for ecumenism. The opening essay obviously written at the end to draw common threads together, insists that only this creed enables Christians to read the Bible with a common mind.

15 essays, 15 different authors, 15 tenets to the creed. Inevitably they vary in style and appeal. So, ignoring the plea to reduce it or go for favourite 'bits' I was eager to read Susan Wood on baptism.

She was predictable on difference of practice - also in drawing out what is good [acceptable?] from other traditions. She redeems herself by exploring the concept of one baptism - derived not from human effort but from one Lord.

Carl Braaten on the resurrection convincingly claims that loss of resurrection faith led to the collapse of the world missionary movement since the mission imperative derives from it. From Alan Torrance there is a brave, complex, essay on Jesus being of one substance with the Father and a very succinct treatment of the significance of the crucifixion by David Yeago.

Even as a dedicated ecumenist I would not have been automatically drawn to this volume, nor is there much material here that can be put to direct use in daily pastoral ministry. It does offer decent background reading if preaching a series through the creed. And it may help Baptists to understand some of the stances taken by sisters and brothers from other denominations. That said, these are theologians not necessarily representing the mainstream of their own traditions and perhaps our ecumenical explorations are better done face to face.

**Alan Mason.
Newton Abbot**