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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

'Can't you just show a little initiative!' This well-remembered cry from a despairing teacher sometimes comes to mind when a church or deacons' meeting is marked by a degree of inertia. We relate initiative to doing things, to undertaking new and possibly daring enterprise. We are invited to embark on initiatives in mission, or evangelism, or education, and are promised that some 'new initiative' will make all the difference, be it in health care or banking or any other aspect of our daily life. New initiatives may be one of the banes of the (post-)modern church, if they tempt us to concentrate on the 'how' rather than the 'why' of who we are and what we do.

In this issue Simon Perry, coordinator of the Worship Initiatives group of BUGB's Faith and Unity Department, prompts us not so much to be on the look-out for new, relevant and useful material for use in a whole range of services, as to appreciate where the essentials lie. If worship is not restricted to a pie-chart section of life but bubbles up from where we are in all of life, it will reflect God's action in creation and God's creative encounter with the whole world: not become a segment of our 'God time' which we hope will affect our other personal time and priority slots.

This chimes in with Craig Gardiner's reflections prompted by Easter Saturday between lamentation and fanfare. It relates to the stories of Biblical women acknowledged in a Mothering Sunday sermon by Ted Hale.

When Bob Allaway seeks to integrate understandings from clinical psychology and the Bible, some readers will not agree with his results or his presuppositions, but his willingness to share his thoughts in this journal is appreciated. Clearly, the Editor

cannot print everything that she receives from every source, but there is no *Imprimatur* in this publication, only the desire to enable a dialogue between the not only diverse but sometimes contradictory views which are held by Christian pastors and ministers. One of the 'low-level' pains in ministry is caused by those who assume that ministers or preachers think they have all the answers and accuse us of being unwilling to let other voices be heard. If we're honest, most of us at times have subscribed to versions of this assumption about others. We will therefore recognise that we too are oppressed by the spirit of the age which likes to talk about dialogue, but shies away from meeting places which involve recognising the image of God and God's purposeful activity in those with whom we disagree. To counter this by example and activity may yet be one of the richest gifts that the Christian church can offer to a world of increasingly rigid outlooks: providing we can learn to receive it first!

**bmj**

Even the most outstanding genius has not yet invented a unilateral peace.  
Peace is a tango - it takes two to perform.  
Two who respect each other.

Uri Avnery, Israeli Peace Activist [www.gush.shalom.org](http://www.gush.shalom.org) October 2005

# Everyday lessons from Easter Saturday.

Craig Gardiner, Cardiff

Every year I face this same problem: our church wishes to conduct some event of mission on Easter Saturday.

Now the problem is not having a mission event. Such enthusiasm and engagement is to be encouraged. They are wise in trying to do so at Easter, one of the few symbolic dates apart from Christmas that is recognised outside the Church. But what authentic missionary word does our church have to say to the world on the Saturday of Easter? *That* is my problem. Of course it may be argued that the Gospel may be proclaimed at anytime and yet, if Holy Week is the time when we seek to deepen our experience and understanding of that first Easter then on Saturday it is surely premature to speak of the resurrection. In simple linear chronology Sunday has not come. But by that same chronology, word of the crucifixion is no doubt belated. Friday has been and gone.

That first Saturday was of course a Sabbath, but the gospel writers give us little insight on the experience of the disciples. It must have been a difficult synthesis of devastating fear, uncertain waiting and hopeful longing. While such themes do not easily lend themselves to the more traditional messages of street mission or regular worship, perhaps Easter Saturday calls us to think again about the waiting, 'in-between' moments of life.

Easter Saturday is an icon of the in-between moments in life: an awkward pause in which we, almost embarrassed at its presence, tend to rush through from what we ought to have done yesterday to the busy-ness of what we intend to do tomorrow. But to be human is to inhabit the present in-between. It is to know that there was once a beginning before we ever

existed and it is to be aware that there will one day be an end. To be human is to embrace the times and spaces that are found in-between the mysteries of the alpha and omega; it is to be present to our present. Easter Saturday can offer us some important lessons for living in today.

At times Christians want to move quickly from the Triumphant entry into Jerusalem to a victorious Eastertide. Yet a consequence of Eastertide is that the mystery of the Divine must forever hold within God's self, Sunday's celebration of resurrection, Friday's pain of crucifixion and the 'separation of God from God'<sup>1</sup> that marks the experience of being in-between. Saturday is that day when even God is in-between. Not only do death and resurrection echo eternally through the life of God, but so too does the anxious wait and the hopeful longing that leads from one to the other. The tensions that pervade Saturday remain forever part of the God we worship and to whom we seek to bear witness.

So as Jürgen Moltmann argues:

*'The cross was an event between God and God. It was a deep division in God himself, in so far as God abandoned God and contradicted himself, and at the same time a unity in God in so far as God was one with God who corresponded to himself.'*<sup>2</sup>

Moltmann's analysis makes sense to me. At least it helps me articulate the difficulty of planning mission on Easter

Saturday and worship on any other given day. How do I, with integrity, hold together this deep division in the divine and yet affirm God's simultaneous unity?

I might follow the Psalmist in his experience of waiting and longing in the moments of in-between ... *'in the night there may be tears, but the morning brings rejoicing'*? And that would not be a bad beginning. Over the years the Church has been good at our 'mornings of rejoicing', particularly at celebrating a victorious Easter Day and revisiting it in our regular patterns of worship. Some ministers and a selection of our congregation may well arrive each Sunday morning ready to proclaim the mighty works of victory that God has established in our lives this week. But many others will not.

Others may come burdened with guilt or loss and paralysed by doubts and fears. It cheapens our worship and our witness, and it diminishes our relationship with God, if all the church can offer such people is the chance to repeat the chorus of another up-beat anthem to triumphalism. Recently, we have begun to practice that lost art of lamentation, reflecting not just on Good Friday but on our increasing experience of 'nights full of tears'. So, liturgies, hymns and other acts of worship are emerging to address our specific fears over terrorist atrocities, climatic devastation, and other more individual crises.

But what of the more everyday moments that occupy the in-between?

Most people live between the highs and lows of Sunday and Friday. The tests may be completed, and the doctors will soon announce a diagnosis ... but not yet. Not on Saturday. Or perhaps the tickets are bought and the farewells are said, but it is not quite time to depart. Not yet. Or the rings are bought, the church is booked, the

big day is coming, but it is not yet here. Not yet. Prayers have been offered, earnest and persistent prayers, but there is no answer, no conviction and no peace. Not yet. Not on Saturday.<sup>3</sup> For now they are in between.

To offer ourselves in authentic worship to God, to speak to others of the mission of God, means giving time and space to the reality and the diversity of these in-between experiences. If we do not address Saturday issues in our worship and our mission, then we fail in our efforts to reflect the character of the God whom we seek to worship and in whose name we dare to speak.

The difficulty has always been to find a way to describe God that does justice to how such diversity is held in simultaneous unity: a metaphor that might allow me, my congregation and the world to grasp the deep truths of diversity and unity that Moltmann articulates.

One such image came to me, of all places, in the Albert Hall.

It was the summer of 2003 and my wife was singing with a choir in the First Night of the Proms. I had often heard her sing the alto part of this opening piece during the preceding weeks. I knew it well by now. But in the concert, for the first time, I heard it together with sopranos, tenors, basses together with the instruments of a full symphony orchestra. To hear these parts together was for me an epiphanal moment.

Here was that hitherto evasive image of diversity in unity: a number of different voices each singing a distinct part, with none seeking to be the other, nor to overcome the other. In fact each voice supported and enhanced the other. I suspected that this polyphonic performance was analogous to the life of the Trinity, in which three persons perform

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in concert, (*con + certare, to act together*) each with a distinct part, but none seeking to dominate the other. It was a polyphony: 'many (poly) voices (phonos)': - many voices, sounding together. It came to me in that instant: God is polyphonic.

Further theological study revealed that mine was not a unique discovery.

Others had made similar connections too.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer did so in his famous letters from prison.<sup>4</sup> He argued that the way in which music, particularly a *Fugue*, could hold together a melody and counter-melody provided a powerful illustration for the Chalcedonian doctrine of the co-existing divine and human natures in Christ. He spoke of the need for Christians to nurture a polyphony of life. Bonhoeffer could hardly have known it, but Welsh folk music already held a most apposite metaphor for this. In the practice of *Pennillion*, an instrumentalist, usually a harpist begins to play a pre-existent melody. A singer may begin at any point thereafter, not only adding extemporary words and an improvised melody, but also ensuring that the duo conclude the performance simultaneously. In much the same way Christ's belonging to heaven does not restrict his belonging on earth and in the incarnation both 'belongings' can be 'sounded' simultaneously.

The idea of polyphony as a core metaphor for Trinitarian theology has been developed by David Cunningham. In his book, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology*, he explains that the chief attribute of polyphony is:

*simultaneous, non excluding difference: that is, more than one note is played at a time and none of the notes is so dominant that it renders the others mute.*<sup>5</sup>

This image of non-excluding difference is important for understanding how in God, melodies of desolation, separation and victory can be held together. Good Friday, Easter Sunday and the Saturday in-between can inter-penetrate and inform the life of God in such a way that Robert Jenson has argued that:

*'God is a melody. And as there are three singers ... the melody is fugued ... There is nothing so capacious as a fugue.'*<sup>6</sup>

The *Fugue* which Jenson and Bonhoeffer find so fascinating is that form of music composition which usually begins with one single melody, a solid line or *cantus firmus*. To this melody is then added a succession of voices that fragment, mirror, echo and retexture the original theme into a diverse but interwoven whole. Jenson's allusion evokes an image of how God's unity is held in tension with Trinitarian Diversity: how death, resurrection and anxious anticipation are all different parts of the one Divine music.

But if God the Three in One is by nature polyphonic, then each One of the Three, is polyphonic also. Each Person indwells in and is indwelt by the others. So Christ, in so far as One may ever be separated from the Three, is polyphonic, precisely because God in God's own being is so. And if the Church is to accept its call to be the Body of Christ on earth, then its worship and its mission must be polyphonic too. Such worship can offer the Christian no escape into the heavenly realms, for while the divine polyphony is resident in the life beyond ours, it simultaneously pervades creation and is therefore inherently earth-bound too. Equally its earthly mission must carry within it the melodies of heaven. Christ is the *cantus firmus* in whom this music of heaven and earth are bound together. For

in Christ we are offered 'the possibility of partaking in the reality of God and the reality of the world at the same time, but not in the one without the other.'<sup>7</sup>

As Jenson notes, the Christian's enjoyment in all this is that we are taken into the melodies of God and are 'allowed to double the parts.'<sup>8</sup> In effect we sing alone, 'doubling' our voices with the melodies that God has already called into existence for us.

This need not be viewed as unhealthy deterministic. There is immense freedom for human improvisation within the expansive melodies of God. And as such, to become Christ-like, for the individual and for the Christian community, is to participate in the performance of God's melodies on earth as they play out in heaven while simultaneously belonging to each through their relationship in Christ. In this way, as the poet says:

*'Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes  
not his  
to the Father through the features of  
men's faces.'*<sup>9</sup>

Therefore in any act of worship or mission, the responsibility of the Christian community is to join their voices to those already performed in and through Christ. The Church will 'double the parts' in the lamentation sung by God on Good Friday and they will place this along-side heaven's fanfares for Easter day. And all this is done while listening for what God would sing (or not) in the in-between moments, on Easter Saturday.

So perhaps, indeed, Easter Saturday ought to be a day when Christians remind each other of the need for patient waiting and quiet listening. For even amidst the perpetual praise of heaven there is a half hour allocated to silence. Not just the absence of sound, but the deliberate

placing of silence as an integral part of the many melodies of heaven.<sup>10</sup> As any musician will tell you the moments of silence are as important to the music as any notes that are played: these pauses are not to be rushed through, but treasured for their own unique value.

All this is a complex task. But it is clearly one that cannot be shirked if the Church is to worship and engage in mission in ways that are true both to the character of God and to the reality of the lives of the confessing community. Easter Saturday could be the day when such bated silence and polyphonic music finds a home on earth and in the church.

In the silence of Saturday, as we wait and listen, we might acknowledge our belonging to the 'in betweens' of life and appreciate the inherent value of those moments when all that we can do is wait and watch, and hope for the dawn. **bmj**

- 1 Paul S. Fiddes, *Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1989), p218 and *The Creative Suffering of God*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p163.
- 2 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1974), p244.
- 3 These reflections are based on a short liturgy from the Wild Goose Worship Group and may be found in John L. Bell, *There is One Among Us: Shorter Songs for Worship*, (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1998), p92.
- 4 *Letters and Papers from Prison: The Enlarged Edition*, (New York: Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1997), p295ff, 303-306, 311 and 318. See also Hans Urs von Balthasar, trans. G. Harrison, *Truth is Symphonic: Aspects of Christian Pluralism*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987) and Francis Young, *Virtuoso Theology: The Bible and Interpretation*, (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993).
- 5 David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p128.

6 Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: The Triune God*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p236. The master of the capacious Fugue was J. S. Bach. His mastery of polyphony as a vehicle through which the Divine was encountered earned him the title, 'the fifth evangelist'.

7 *Ethics*, p55.

8 Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology, Volume 1*, p235.

9 Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire', in Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Complete Poems with Selected Prose*, (London: Fount Classics, 1996), p52.

10 Rev 8:1. For an excellent examination of this and the nature of silence see Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's Silence: A Theological Ethics of Communication*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

O God our mystery,  
you bring us to life,  
call us to freedom,  
and move between us with love.  
May we so participate  
in the dance of your trinity,  
that our lives may resonate with you,  
now and for ever. Amen.

Janet Morley, Collect for Trinity Sunday, in *All Desires Known* SPCK

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# Forgotten Essentials of Worship

**Simon Perry**, Cambridge.

We might call it a post-modern world, we might live in a post-colonial Britain, we might even worship in a post-evangelical church. But the past is not easily escaped, and has a nasty habit of quietly creeping up on you to sabotage your future by insidiously blinking your view, tinting your spectacles, impairing your vision. For instance, the language of many contemporary thinkers on worship issues is focussed upon how things can change for the future, how we can be bold visionaries, creative dreamers, blue-sky thinkers. But pure 'blue-sky thinking' is impossible in Britain!

We have a history which too readily constrains such thinking. But how?

Among the many great things the Enlightenment brought, was the heritage of a pie-chart world. Life is broken down into separate sections: public and private, spiritual and physical, sacred and secular, rights and duties. The list could go on. And a person's diary can appear on a pie chart – time spent at work, at home, asleep, at church, with God etc, etc. All the different aspects of our lives fit together into a tidy whole. But we must not overlap different sections. Don't get emotional, no need to get personal, don't mix business and pleasure, don't allow socialising to be infected by religion and politics. Keep the different segments of our life separate, otherwise things get messy and we lose control.

As Christians of course, we believe that worship affects every section of the pie chart that is our whole life. So how do we respond to the pie-chart mentality? Do we question it? By no means! Instead we conform to its dictates, but say that the most important category is our worshipping segment, our 'God' slice, our spiritual 'cheese'. That will then subsequently affect all the other segments.

In practice, this makes our worship look something like this: Pure worship is about the individual's unadulterated relationship with God. This will later have an impact

on the other segments of our lives: our church life, our family life, our community life, our working life, our finances, our social responsibilities, our environment. But what really counts is the worship segment, that pure section uninfected by all those others. So if we worship well, then these other aspects of our daily life will eventually be affected. Hallelujah? Not yet!

The problem with such a view is that all these other areas do, in fact, shape our own-most personal identity. Our community, our economic status, our ecological environment, have a profound effect upon who we really are, so that when we come to worship, all these other segments are already in play, whether we know it or not. More dangerously, even with the best will in the pie-chart world, we can't help viewing our social, ecological, economic responsibilities as secondary to our worship. If we are thinking-worshippers, we will get round to addressing these secondary areas; if we are not so enlightened, we will be less concerned by them. After all, it's really the pure heart of worship that counts, and other areas of our lives are secondary.

But, according to Scripture, 'the earth is the Lord's and everything in it' (Ps 24:1). The pie-chart world we inhabit is a long way from the world of Scripture, and if we are to escape it, it will require a deep and difficult shift in our worshipping habits. As

the Israelites tried to escape Egypt, it will be a long and slow journey, but a crucial one.

The easier route, of course, is to provide resources that view worship as the 'God-section' of our lives, and seek to apply that pure worship to the other sections of our lives. To move beyond pie-chart worship will be a much harder, much slower journey, but one that is every bit as necessary as the escape from Egypt.

In what follows, I have tried to describe how worship might look if the economic, ecological, social dimensions of our lives were not temporarily suspended as we worship, but brought to the heart of worship. It is not a comprehensive list, or a fully developed theology. It is an attempt to imagine how worship might look if we escape the tyranny of the pie-chart, so that our whole humanity is exposed to God's transforming presence in our worship. These are aspects of our worshipping life that are essential to true, personal worship, even if they have long been forgotten in our pie-chart world.

### **Transforming Economic Justice**

The demand for economic fairness echoes throughout Scripture, but tragically, to a wealthy society reading through the spectacles of materialist comfort, it is a demand that goes astonishingly unheeded. Poverty often is spiritualised, and the issue of real poverty taken out of the heart of worship and carefully contained in a different section of the pie chart.

And yet, the context of worshipping God as inhabitants of our global village looks something like this. Over one billion people live on less than one US Dollar a day; over two billion have no access to proper sanitation; one hundred million children do not go to school; ten million children die before the age of 5 from preventable disease. For instance, every

15 seconds a child dies of eminently preventable diarrhoea. It is impossible to come before God with such knowledge, and these considerations remain perpetually bracketed out of worship.

When this is the actual context of our present life, the facts of our existence, what does it mean to worship God? It means that every time we worship, we come before God as that tiny section of all humanity living with enormous privilege. We need not pray for daily bread, and that puts us into a tiny minority of the human race. We come before God not as powerless peasants, but as materialist royalty. Obviously this means that we have a particular, unique and privileged kind of gift from God, and worship is the place where our gifts are offered to God for service in the world.

This is not to detract from the particular gifts of the Spirit, which vary enormously within a single congregation. But it does mean that worshippers in our current British churches are stewards of the tremendous gifts of wealth and power. These gifts are given to us by no other virtue than that we were born in a powerful democracy in the modern west. We have not earned them, but they are gifts nevertheless, and as gifts we are not to take them for granted, but in worship, commissioned to use them. To worship God in the world is to take our bearings in relation to him, realising that we are called to glorify him in the time and space where he has placed us. And as wealthy members of an influential democracy, we worship a God who has sided with the poor and the powerless.

### **The wealthy congregation's worship of the peasant's God:**

Our worship is not a private affair that happens in a public space, an individual experience alongside other individual experiences. Any action we take towards

the poor is not a subsequent application of the purely personal experience of worship. Worship is at the heart of our lives, our ministry and our mission. But is not a spiritual compartment that looks for separate practical application. Our full humanity is exposed to the nature of God in true worship, and our prayers, our hymns, our biblical interpretation, our testimonies are (not exclusively preoccupied with, but) constantly attuned to the actuality of our economic responsibilities. Our lives will not regard giving to the poor as 'doing our bit'. As Bono, campaigning for fair trade rules, put it: 'We are not looking for charity, we are looking for justice', that is, not superficial application, but fundamental shifts in the deeper structures of our living. If we worship the God with a bias to the poor, then the action that flows from our worship is not an act of kindness, or charity – as though we were going out of our way to do a good deed. Worship is rather a disturbing (but ultimately liberating) experience, in which our spending habits, our financial priorities, our giving and our time are exposed to God's transforming power. We do not worship God and then go and share some of our wealth with others. Wealth is not in a separate segment of the pie chart than 'God'.

### **Transforming Ecological Righteousness**

The era we inhabit is often referred to as 'Postmodern', a time in which the certainties of the past are disintegrating, leaving uncertainty for the future and anxiety in the present. But we are mistaken to regard this so called 'era' as simply intellectual, social or moral. It is deeply related to the ecological consequences of our history, in which the certainties of the past (unlimited fossil fuels), are replaced by the uncertainties of the future (the cupboard is bare), and anxiety in the present (has our

unrestrained consumption irreparably scarred our environment).

For thousands of years, fossil fuels were undiscovered. In our (not so) long term future, fossil fuels will be exhausted. God has placed us into that short span of human history (less than a dozen generations) in which we have enjoyed the security (and certainties) afforded by unlimited access to these fuels. But increasing numbers of scientists affirm that the sun is setting on our certainties. The obvious consequences of unrestrained emission of greenhouse gasses have a 40-50 year delay, which takes the urgency out of our desire to act now, even while it inflicts an apathetic genocide upon our grandchildren's generation. And responses to our ecological problem often simply compound it (e.g., we can carry on because of our faith that new technologies will provide new energies and neutralise the effects of pollution / climate change). That is, they reflect the desire to live on with the certainties of recent generations. In spiritual language, 'God is not about to let us destroy the planet... hence there is no need to worry.'

Is there a way that worshippers can face up to these realities without giving way to despair? To recognise the uncertainty of the future and receive it with gratitude? What has this got to do with our worship?

1: By the year 2030, our current use of energy needs to be reduced by 90 percent. Alternative uses of energy may provide up to half of the energy resources we currently enjoy. But effectively, at the very least, scientists tell us that our use of energy will need to halve. As stewards of God's creation, in the first instance, before making noise, applying political pressure, praying for new technologies, our daily lives should reflect our prayers. Our life-styles need to change radically. To

do so will require huge sacrifices, but would serve as a powerful witness to the world.

2: Well meaning ecological stewardship: recycling, minimised use of vehicles, thoughtful spending and so on, are necessary but not sufficient. International and national government rules are required for everyone's habits to be changed, but the church cannot apply such pressure to government unless there is a concerted effort to model the ecological responsibility we demand. The political (daily) life of the Church provides the basis for (explicitly) political action to be taken in applying pressure to governments.

### **Transforming Social Context**

Community is a well-used but ill-defined word in Christian circles. Since in recent years it is increasingly used as an antidote to individualism, its late arrival seems to suggest that community is something for which individuals should strive. The fact of our human existence suggests otherwise. We are not individuals first, and members of a community second. We are social creatures through and through, our identity is derived from the community in which we have grown up (with little choice) and those to which we deliberately belong (through conscious effort). We are already, have always been, communal creatures. It is the way that the Triune God has created us.

When we worship God, we do not do so as isolated individuals, but as persons-in-community: essentially, fundamentally, thoroughly embedded in complex relationships that form the core of our human identity. It is impossible to worship God whilst our relationships with other people are temporarily suspended, or bracketed-out from the hub of our praises. We are social beings, linked very obviously with members of our immediate

community, our family and church etc, but linked just as strongly both with the rest of the Christian church, and with the rest of humanity. To worship God then, is not a private individual experience that may lead to social responsibility as the individual is subsequently moved to act. Our relationships with others are already scribed through the very heart of our most deeply personal engagement with God.

To be community in the Christian sense is to be the body of Christ, and to recognise the down to earth presence of Christ in one another. Hence Paul's injunction to be 'members of one another' (Rom 12). It means the capacity to be challenged and encouraged by brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as the readiness to offer that same challenge and encouragement. But this is only half of what it means to function as a Christian community. There is also the importance of being able to challenge and be challenged by, encourage and be encouraged by the world beyond the community.

Worship is where the community is made, and remade. Forgiveness and reconciliation in the common life of the church arise from our worship, declaring that sin does not have the last word in our relationships with one other and with God. Peace, forgiveness, reconciliation are the hallmarks of the Christian community's daily life, but inexorably arise from worshipping the crucified and risen God.

### **Worship and the Mission of the Church**

Worship and mission are not different slices of the Christian life. Mission flows and can only flow from the heart of worship. As such, Mission is the church's invitation to the world to join her in restoring the Created order. In fact, the

word for worship in both Greek and Hebrew could readily be translated as work. This means that Mission is not an attempt to address the 'spiritual' compartment of a person's life, but addresses the whole life, presupposing a full-blown reorientation of believers around the purposes of the creator God.

In this context, the ministry of the local church has little to do with saving souls (if a soul is just one element of the pie-chart life). The ministry and mission of the church is the restoration of the created order, at the heart of which lies the restoration of real people, healed, loved, forgiven by God. But this personal experience is not an end in itself, nor a necessary stage of evangelistic pyramid selling, so that others can experience that same individual forgiveness, so that eventually the whole world may have the spiritual slice of its life evangelised. The church's message is rightly rejected when

it fails to embrace the economic, ecological, social realities that shape our identity. But if we worship the God of creation, if our proper human context is taken seriously, it becomes immensely attractive to those who share our concern about the state of the world. Mission is the invitation to join the church in worshipping (and therefore working with) a God who in Christ is lovingly, graciously, forgivingly, powerfully, reconciling the whole world to Himself.

This means that issues like economy, ecology and social justice are not slices of a pie chart, nor are they simply 'big ideas' removed from our personal life. Our personal lives have always entailed these dimensions, and as we plan our Worship Initiatives for the next few years, our intent is to address these dimensions in such a way that our most personal worship rejoices in and challenges all aspects of our actual human context. **bmj**

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# Some Biblical Women and Mothers - an encounter

Ted Hale, Northampton

The context for this sermon was Mothering Sunday. This year we have abandoned the lectionary, and all the related material. Instead we are looking at what I call the BIG stories and characters of the Bible - (you know, David & Goliath and all that!). Setting out the themes for the year last October, we decided that on Mothering Sunday it would be good to look at Jesus' mother. In the event it so happened that the service was also to include the dedication of two small children.

So as part of the Dedication I précis Hannah's story in 1 Samuel 1 as that of a woman who was childless and longed for a son. In her prayers to God she promised if God gave her a son she would dedicate him to God's service. She had a son and called him Samuel, took him to the priest in the temple and 1 Sam 1 :26-28 sets out the keeping of her vow to God, "and Hannah said to the priest, "As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. 27 I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. 28 So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." And they worshipped the Lord there."

That worship of Eli and Hannah, and ours, included the remarkable prayer of Hannah which was read by a friend of the couple whose children were being dedicated! She read 1 Samuel 2:1-8:

1 Then Hannah prayed and said:

*"My heart rejoices in the Lord ; in the Lord my soul is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. 2 "There is no one holy like the Lord ; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. 3 "Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. 4 "The bows of the warriors are broken,*

*but those who stumbled are armed with strength. 5 Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. 6 "The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. 7 The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. 8 He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour. "For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's; upon them he has set the world."*

This led to my comment that seriously dedicating children to God should change us as much as them, if not more; because to really recognise God is to want to see the world changed for the better. We don't know what God has in store for the children brought here for blessing, or for their parents, but we pray that (today) they, and we all, will be filled With God's spirit and moved to make the world more fit to be called the Kingdom of God.

The Act of dedication and other things followed before the second Reading, Luke 1: 46-55:

*46 And Mary said: "My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 48 for he has been mindful*

*of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. 52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. 53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful 55 to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.”*

The sermon which followed was preached from the following notes:

We have heard readings of words spoken by mothers. Hannah, the mother of the great prophet Samuel, and Mary, the mother of the even greater prophet and son of God, Jesus. And I hope you couldn't fail to notice the similarities - in fact there are those who say that Luke's gospel uses Hannah's prayer as a basis for expressing what Mary, Jesus' mother, must have felt.

It must be said that what Hannah and Mary say (or sing), however, is a long way from what most people think mothers should be saying. It's political, it's revolutionary, it's uncomfortable, it's full of vigorous faith in God who acts decisively in favour of the underprivileged, it's full of rejoicing that even someone like a woman of low social standing can be used by God as a channel for justice and truth and what is right, it's full of a sense that the children women bear and birth are born to be used by God, to be mothered, not smothered (or even grandmothered!).

The Bible is full of gritty women, but the shame is that the church rarely lets women

(or men) know that! The church by and large hears readings which do not include the story of Tamar who was raped by a relative and risked her life to get the justice she deserved from the leader of one of the tribes of Israel. It doesn't include Rachel and Leah fighting for their sons' proper place in their father's affection, nor the song of the warrior Deborah (the biblical equivalent to Boadicea warrior queen of the Iceni in 1st century Britain). The diet of passages prescribed in the Revised Common Lectionary doesn't necessarily include the story of the Moabitess Ruth who risked her life and then her reputation in order to find security as an immigrant in a foreign land; let alone the story of Esther the Jewess who used her good looks, sexuality/seduction and her place in a King's harem to defend her people and defeat their enemies. And Jezebel might have been a wicked woman in the eyes of the editors of the Jewish Scriptures, but she is nonetheless a gritty and determined woman defending her own faith; whilst the Queen of Sheba is a stateswoman to be reckoned with.


How many of these stories do you know? Or do you think even regular church attenders know? And even those who know them, how high a priority do they have, how much do they influence the ways in which we see the legitimate roles of women and mothers in life, not just in the church, but in wider society.

Given the consistent ignoring of Biblical women in our worship, is it any surprise that when we come to Mothering Sunday in the church, the worship is likely to present an impoverished view of womanhood and motherhood? And is it any surprise that it took 2,000 years in so-called Christian countries for women to have the political right to vote, or for even a part of the church to recognise women priests or ministers (and the debate still goes on about women bishops). And is it

any surprise that some of the fiercest opponents to women's advancement in the church are women? Because they've been fed the masculine/patriarchal biased diet of a slimmed down (injudiciously edited) Bible.

Are you watching *The Apprentice*? I must confess that seeing the way some of the women act who want to become Alan Sugar's apprentice, I'm uneasy. Some of that may be legitimate, because I'm just as uneasy about the men acting in the same way. But I'm reasonably sure that some of my unease is because they are women, and my upbringing in church and British society in the second half of the 20th century taught me that women shouldn't be aggressively determined to achieve their objectives. Women are supposed to be passive and decorative. But I hope, as soon as I say that, you realise what a ridiculous thing that is to say, and that it is completely alien to the role of women in the scriptures - especially those women and mothers who are most obviously filled with God's Spirit.

I'm assuming this year we shall follow our normal procedure of showing our appreciation for the role women play in the church, in society and in our family life by giving out small bunches of daffodils. I was recently with a group consisting mainly of women discussing this, and it was noted that if you cut daffodils and put them in a vase with tulips, the tulips die - unless you stand the daffodils on their own in water first; because then the acidic sap in the daffodils will be drawn out and the tulips will survive mixed in with them. Sometimes it might be helpful to draw out the acidic side of a woman or a man's character, but healthy growing daffodils need that sap, and sometimes it is good to leave them to stand on their own because they don't really need the tulips to be beautiful for God in their own right.

Incidentally, we are finding these BIG stories and characters such an inspiration, and a refreshing change from the repetition of the 3-year cycle of lectionary readings, that I commend it to anyone. 

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# A Pastor's view of 'the Mind'

**Bob Allaway**, Wood Green, North London.

An article previously published in *Faith and Thought* 38, October 2005

'I cannot face going to church and having to put on a "happy-clappy mask". I ought to be able to be honest about my feelings, but I fear people will treat me as lacking in faith and make me feel guilty and even more depressed.' 'My husband wants me to stop taking my medication. He thinks I am like a drug addict. He says a Christian should find her joy in the Lord.' Similar stories of such unsympathetic treatment came pouring out to me, when people learned what I was doing for my Sabbatical study in 2003. This grew out of the pastoral care to the clinically depressed that my wife and I have been led to provide, on many occasions, over the course of my ministry.

Why is it that caring people, who would think nothing of a fellow Christian having to take regular aspirin to prevent blood clotting, or insulin for diabetes, will treat it as a spiritual defeat if, say, a believer has to be on constant medication for a mental condition? Could an over-spiritual view of what the mind is be one reason for this?

There are, of course, equal dangers for pastoral care in an over-physical view of the mind. Some believers are fearful, and rightly so, of a reductionism that would treat spiritual experiences as 'nothing but' symptoms of mental ill health, or a determinism that would enable people to claim they 'can't help' their actions.

In addition, some may wonder if such a view of the mind undermines fundamental Christian beliefs about our origin as human beings and eternal destiny as individuals.

In my Sabbatical study<sup>1</sup>, I undertook to find a view of the mind that can accommodate the insights of modern neuroscience and clinical observation while retaining the outlook of the Bible. I had both an evangelistic and a pastoral purpose in this.

As an evangelist, or apologist, I wanted to show where supposed conflicts between science and Biblical Christian faith are false, to eliminate unnecessary stumbling

blocks on the path to Christ. As a pastor, I wanted to help believers come to terms with their own, and others', mental conditions and any treatments they may need, while being able to discern where some therapies may be incompatible with our faith.

As a starting point, let us begin with a 'common sense' view of the mind, that many mistakenly imagine is the Christian one.

## **Mind as soul**

We are conscious of ourselves as looking out from our bodies and controlling them - 'I' am my mind, and my body is something outside of me in which I live. It is natural to think that the mind is a function of some independent, spiritual entity - conventionally, a 'soul' - that works through the body. This, as I said, seems to correspond with our experience, and gives Christians a way of defending humanity's unique status 'in the image of God' and their eternal destiny. 'We may share 99% of our DNA with chimpanzees,' we can say, 'but we have souls, that no genetic scanning can detect, and they haven't, and though the body may die, the soul can live on.' Yet both science and the Bible contradict this.

It is a sad fact that things that afflict the body can damage the mind. From time immemorial, alcohol has been known to hinder mental function. Perhaps it might

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### **THE GRASS NEEDS CUTTING - WHERE IS THE MOWER?**

This question is likely to be on the lips of many of you this year, as Spring has at last arrived, and everything is bursting into life. Many things come with spring, the daffodils are out, the bluebells are on their way, and the birds are singing. However, a less well known creature ventures out in the spring, the greater spotted, greasy haired lawnmower thief. He is habitually shy and is very hard to spot. Normally a nocturnal creature he will be seen increasingly as the days get longer. He normally travels by car, pick-up or van and is commonly seen with others of his ilk. He is strongly attracted to sheds, and outhouses in his pursuit for his main prey, the lawnmower. Although the lawnmower is his main target, he is also attracted to other garden implements and tools, in fact he will steal anything he can pick up that will fit into his vehicle.

A visit to any Car Boot sale will soon reveal why he is active in spring and early summer. He knows that he can easily sell lawnmowers and garden tools at this time of the year, particularly to someone looking for a real bargain. Although it would be wrong to assert that all such equipment has been stolen, one certainly needs to question why some perfectly good equipment is up for sale at bargain prices!

It is important to remain aware that any easily portable property is always at risk from thieves. A quick look at any local paper will always contain a few examples of those unfortunate enough to have had thefts involving lawnmowers, power tools and the like! Therefore, for peace of mind please do what you can make sure that your lawnmower and other tools are secure when not in use and do not become a news item.

As a simple start on security of your garden equipment try to ensure that as many items as possible are security marked with a Postcode. A particularly valuable deterrent is to paint the postcode on in large letters with brightly coloured paint. Who would buy an item like this? It may not be that pleasing to the eye but certainly might mean the property is left behind!

Give some thought to the security of sheds, boiler houses and any other external storage areas. Ensure the fabric of such structures is reasonably sound and fit good quality padlocks and locking bars to doors.

And finally, do you know the make, model and serial number of your lawnmower, strimmer, leafblower, hedgetrimmer, chainsaw etc? At least then if it is stolen it may aid the police to catch the offender and also recover your property.

Yours Sincerely

Alf Green ACII  
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be argued that this is only harming the 'mind/brain interface'. But there are conditions that can seemingly change the person, the conscious mind. A familiar example is Alzheimer's Disease. This is so distressing for carers, not only because of having to see dementia afflict a loved one, but because sometimes the personality seems to change as well. People will say things to me like, 'It is as if the person I knew and loved has already died, and I am living with a stranger.'

A better, but rarer, example is damage to a particular area near the front of the brain. Cases are known where this has transformed the personality, but without any loss of mental function, as in dementia.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible also contradicts this 'common sense' view of the mind as a function of 'soul'. In the Old Testament, '*nephesh*' (translated by *psuchê*, 'soul', in the New) seems to mean 'life', or a creature having it, and applies to animals as well as humans. (eg Genesis 1:21,24; 2:7). It can die the same as the body (eg Ezek 18:4,20). Mental function is located in the *leb* (or *lebab*), translated 'heart'.

While there is an occasional vague hope of life with God beyond death, as in Psalm 73:24, the few places where this hope is more detailed speak of resurrection rather than immortality (Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2,3).

By New Testament times, something like the 'common-sense' idea of the soul seems to be envisaged (e.g. Revelation 6:9?), to preserve the person between death and resurrection, but the latter is still the ultimate Christian hope. It is clearer that the believer's body will be raised in a new form, 'spiritual', where any damage to body and mind will be no more. By contrast, its present 'weak', 'perishable' form is said to be *psuchikon*. (1 Cor 15:42-44) NIV translates this 'natural', but the literal sense is 'the

nature of the soul'!

Modern computing provides us with an improved version of the 'common-sense' model that overcomes many of these scientific and Biblical objections to it.

### **Mind is to brain as programme is to computer**

The programme needs a computer to run; it exists as a pattern of electrical signals within the computer. Consequently, damage to the computer's circuitry is likely to damage the functioning of the programme. If the computer is destroyed, the programme will be destroyed with it. However, a smart operator will keep a backup copy of the programme on disc somewhere, up-dated with improvements. In the event of the computer being lost or stolen, a new and better machine can be bought and the same programme loaded up from backup, to run just as before or better.

In the same way, our minds are but a pattern of electrical signals in the brain, that can be destroyed along with it. However, God, who knows all, can keep a backup copy in his memory, retaining all that is worth preserving (and leaving out whatever is not). When this body has died, he can create a new and better body for me, that shall never die, and in which my mind can run for evermore. This model overcomes previously expressed objections, and rightly stresses the Biblical view that our eternal life is contingent on God's eternal life (Romans 6:23; 1 Timothy 6:16), but it needs to be refined in the light of scientific and Biblical views of origin and development.

The programme and the computer are two independent systems. The programme cannot change the computer's circuitry, and the computer cannot change the program (except by some glitch disrupting its function). On the other hand, in the case of the mind and the brain (and the body of which it is part), there is a mutual interaction.

## Mind as a function of body

If we think about what marks us off from other animals and has enabled human civilisation to develop to the extent that it has, one thing that immediately springs to mind is language. As is, I think, well known, Noam Chomsky has postulated the existence of an innate human 'language instinct' (or more correctly 'grammatical instinct'). This is something separate from ability to speak, as it has been demonstrated in deaf children learning to sign.<sup>3</sup>

Language is very much something that we see as a mental operation. Yet such an innate ability, emerging at a particular stage of development, suggests a product of a child's genetic code, just as much as the hormones that start to circulate in his or her body at a later age, which will set off thinking about sex! On the computer analogy, we are 'hard-wired' for language.

It could be argued from anthropology and archaeology, that we also have a sort of 'God instinct'. Carl Jung noted this "collective idea" of God that is pervasive throughout human history' and is 'a force as real as hunger and the fear of death'.<sup>4</sup> Does this mean that, to use the computer analogy again, we are also 'hard-wired' for worship?

For Christians, this can serve as a confirmation of our beliefs. One of the things that marks off the creation of humanity in Genesis 1:26 is that for the first and only time, God says, not, 'Let there be ..', but 'Let **us** create .. in **our** image and **our** likeness ...' - an astounding statement to appear in one of the most monotheistic portions of the Old Testament. 'In the image of God created he him, male and female created he them.' It is not sex that is part of the image of God here, as the animals have that as well. One aspect of this statement is that the female is shown to have God's image as well as the male, which is good. But may not their being in relationship be part of that image, also? 'It is not good for the man

to be alone' (Genesis 2:18).

Thus, what distinguishes us from other creatures is not that we are smarter than they are, but that we are made for fellowship with one another and with God, and since the latter is eternal, so is the fellowship. (Once it is restored through Christ.)

If bodily processes can shape mental ones, does this mean that mental functions are genetically predetermined? No, because mental processes can also shape bodily ones.

## Mind is to brain as chicken is to egg

Sternberg and Gold have demonstrated how the mind can affect the immune system so that 'our state of mind can influence how well we resist or recover from infectious or inflammatory diseases'.<sup>5</sup> Yes, as the body lives or dies, it preserves or kills the brain and with it the mind, but the mind can also keep alive or kill the body (and hence the brain).

Our minds can also determine the physical structure of our brains. Up until the age of sixteen, our brains are growing. They do not just do so in accordance with some preordained pattern recorded in our genes. Rather, connections between neurones increase to support those things on which the mind is concentrating. 'The key factor is stimulation of the brain. In [a] study with rats, it was found to be learning and memory ... that resulted in the greatest changes in the brain.'<sup>6</sup>

All the above are examples of what philosopher Nancy Murphy<sup>7</sup> terms 'top-down causation'. She gives as an example 'a simple feedback system' described by 'neuropsychologist Donald MacKay' in which 'the brain becomes a self-modifying system, modifying its own neural structure'. This would seem to be the same sort of process as that mentioned above. Such 'top-down causation', she argues, saves a 'physicalist' explanation of the

mind from determinism, leaving space for 'rationality, morality and free will'.

### **Pastoral Implications of this Model**

I have sought to demonstrate that mental processes are the same things as brain processes, and thus are as much affected by physical illness and treatment as any other bodily process. If, as is generally reckoned, monopolar clinical depression is caused by chemical activity in the brain, it makes sense to treat it with other chemicals that inhibit that activity.<sup>8</sup> Lithium treatment of Manic-Depressive illness (Bipolar Disorder) also seems to control the cause of that condition (even though it is unclear how!), since, for example, it prevents the manic phase rather than simply sedating it.<sup>9</sup>

Christians should not be afraid of such drugs. That some drugs can be used to manipulate the brain in evil ways does not mean that all drug treatment is wrong. Food can be used for gluttony, leading to obesity, but that does not mean that food is wrong.

This is not to say that we should be happy with **any** such treatment. It is one thing to use a chemical remedy for a condition with a (probable) chemical cause. It is another matter when dealing with a reactive condition, with an external cause. (And even a clinical depression can have an external trigger.) Nevertheless, emergency treatment may be needed to overcome the immediate problem (and in the case of clinical depression, this may include ECT<sup>10</sup>). Once things have been stabilised, however, pastoral conversation and discernment may be more valuable, for reactive conditions, at any rate.

This is recognised in the popularity of much 'counselling' nowadays, but Christians should be as questioning about different forms of this as they often are of physical treatments. Over two decades ago, Oden<sup>11</sup> expressed concern that much pastoral care was taking its lead from modern psychotherapies. Many, if not all,

of these, he claimed 'produce results which are no better than those which occur through spontaneous remission,' and 'some psycho-therapies may even induce injurious dependence on themselves'.

The Christian pastor has the advantage over the secular counsellor that he (or she) also recognizes that there can be spiritual triggers to mental conditions, such as a previous involvement with the occult.

Mention of the occult raises the question of spiritual experience. A Christian may claim that the Holy Spirit has spoken to her. (Similarly, a medium may claim to have a communication from the dead, though a Christian would say it was from a demon.) Now, a classic symptom of schizophrenia is 'dissociation'. Thoughts intrude themselves on the mind, and are perceived as coming from outside. A sceptic may ask, what is the difference between this and a claimed supernatural revelation?

Physically, there may be no difference. Both involve hearing, and hence activity in the same areas of the brain. Nevertheless, a Christian psychiatrist once remarked to me that he could certainly tell the difference. The psychotic spoke rubbish; the inspired Christian spoke sense. Thus an apparent similarity between a spiritual and a mental happening does not mean that one is 'nothing but' the other. We simply need to exercise discernment, as Christians have throughout history.

What about the argument that recognizing physical influences on the mind will enable people to excuse their actions, and avoid taking responsibility for them? It is certainly true that people can be predisposed towards certain behaviour, by nature (as with a genetic predisposition towards alcoholism) or nurture (as with experience of abuse within a family being perpetuated). Can those battling against such influences be held responsible for their actions?

Yes, for there is, of course, one inherent  
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tendency that we all share, and that is Sin itself. Biblically, we are born sinners [Psalm 51:5]. Yet we can be held responsible for following that tendency (once we are old enough to know what we are doing), because there is One who did not do so.

When 'the Word of God became flesh' in Christ, the Second Adam, he took on himself the human nature with its inherent tendency to sin that we all have<sup>12</sup>, otherwise, he could not have 'been tempted in every way - just as we are' [Hebrews 4:15]. 'Yet he was without sin', he never gave in, but stayed faithful to his Father's will even to death.

To one seeking to excuse his actions by his genes or his upbringing, I would argue that he still has a will, he still **chooses** to give in. To resist when his whole body cries out for a particular need, or memory seems inescapable, may involve great suffering. But Christ 'suffered when he was tempted' [Hebrews 2:18], yet **he** chose to resist for our sake. It is to him that each of us must answer on the day of judgement, not to some distant deity untouched by human suffering. He bore that suffering in our place, so he could offer us forgiveness. If we accept what he did for us, then, as the Holy Spirit helps us be made like him, we can find 'grace to help us in our time of need', to resist as he did.

An affective disorder, such as depression, might appear to excuse lack of will. Telling a clinically depressed person to 'buck up' is like telling a cripple to 'stand on your own two feet'! One first needs the 'crutches' of anti-depressants, or even ECT *in extremis*. Yet, even without such help, I would still appeal to the will: not to **do** anything, but to resist despair, especially the temptation to self-destruction.

Once again, it is to Christ we need to appeal. In Gethsemane and on the Cross, he knew anxiety and despair that we could never begin to imagine:

and none of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed, or how **dark was the night** that the Lord went through ere he found his sheep that was lost.<sup>13</sup>

He knows; he understands. He could have escaped all that, but he chose to endure it for our sake. And beyond the darkness was the light of his resurrection.

For his sake, he wants us to endure in the darkness, not take the easy way out and deny his love for us by self-destruction. The light will come. **bmj**

- 1 The result of my study was read as a paper at the *Baptists Doing Theology in Context* Consultation held at Regent's Park College, Oxford in August 2003. It may be found on the college website.
- 2 Susan **Greenfield**, *The Human Brain: A Guided Tour*, London: Phoenix, 1998, p21f
- 3 Stephen **Pinker**, *The Language Instinct: The New Science of Language and Mind*, London: Penguin, 1994
- 4 James W. **Heisig**, *Imago Dei*, Associated University Press, 1979
- 5 Esther M. **Sternberg** and Philip W. **Gold**, *The Mind-Body Interaction in Disease*, in John **Rennie** et al (eds), *The Hidden Mind* (Scientific American Special), 12 (1), 2002 p82
- 6 **Greenfield**, *ibid*, p150
- 7 Nancy **Murphy**, 'The Problem of Mental Causation', *Science and Christian Belief*, 14 (2), 2002 p144
- 8 Alun **Morinan**, *Antidepressants and the biology of depression*, *Nursing and Residential Care*, 3 (6), 2001, p271
- 9 Mogens **Schou**, *Lithium treatment of Manic-Depressive Illness: A Practical Guide* (5th rev ed), London: Karger, 1993
- 10 M. David **Enoch**, *Healing the Hurt Mind*, London: Hodder, 1983, p73
- 11 T.C. **Oden**, 'Recovering lost identity', the *Journal of Pastoral Care*, XXXIV (1), March 1980
- 12 R. H. **Allaway**, *Expository Times*, 97, 1986, 108-110; *Faith and Thought*, 113 (2), 1987, 125-130
- 13 Ira D. **Sankey**, *There were ninety and nine* ...

# Baptism and Church Membership

**Roy Dorey**, South London

At a recent meeting in South London three churches considered the question: How does the church pastor those with whom it feels uncomfortable. It was introduced by a member of one of the churches, looking at what pastoring is, and who in the churches should do it. We then split into four groups to consider four scenarios. These were:

- Pastoring the divorced, when seeking membership.
- Pastoring those who jobs dishonour the Lord.
- Pastoring those who are living together outside of marriage.
- Pastoring the irregular attender who, when present, dominates.

The groups fed back their 'findings' and these were discussed by the total group.

A major theme that arose from the discussion was the need to include but at the same time to safeguard the church from behaviour and values that could discredit it. This has led me to look again at the way in which we practice baptism and church membership. It seems important that we do not separate these two importantly linked, but rather different components of our Christian life. It seems right that the two should be closely linked, and anyone being baptised in a church, unless they were from a church which did not practice biblical baptism and were returning to it, should be a member of the church where they were baptised. If I understand Baptist theology right the church makes the decision about 'fitness for baptism' and therefore for membership. If we were to say that someone can be baptised because of their faith in the Lord Jesus, but not become members of the local church then we are in effect saying – to quote someone I discussed this with, that 'they are good enough for the church universal but not good enough for us.' It is a somewhat simplistic response but it has much in it. What it leaves out is the third element of theologically important factors which need to be considered.

That third element is the Christian commitment that has been made on an individual basis, which in our tradition we describe in different ways. 'Confessing Christ as Lord.' 'Believing in the Lord Jesus.' 'Being born again.' I have yet to meet a Baptist who thought that baptism made a person a Christian, even amongst those that would say that belief is not complete without the commitment of baptism.

This leads me to look again at what is required for baptism within our churches. Over the years I have been asked a number of questions by people enquiring about baptism. Some of those questions are enshrined in the scenarios given above at our local meeting. Re-stating them we could ask if being divorced, living together without marriage, running a bingo hall, selling arms around the world, and behaving in a selfish and arrogant way would make us say that they should put these things right before being baptised, and subsequently becoming church members.

In looking at the Scriptures it would seem that if we require anything else but a turning to God in Christ then we are in difficulties. The great commission (Matthew 28. vv.16-20) speaks of 'making disciples' without any other qualification.

Essentially discipleship is a learning position. The sequence seems to be 'make disciples, baptise, teach.' It is accepting people as they come to Christ, and including them within the church fellowship as part of their nurturing and growth. It is not putting up barriers to that positive and even sacramental relationship. If we find fault in their way of life it seems safer for them that they are within the fellowship where they can be nurtured.

When we look at the Pentecostal response (Acts 2. vv.37-41) then we find a mass movement towards Christ. There is an immediacy of response as the story is told. No mention is made of preparation classes, or the examination of marriage certificates, an enquiry about their employment, how they are identified on a psychological test, or anything else. Perhaps the baptisms took place over a few days, or even weeks, but the impact of the story is a move from hearing, to seeking help, a call to repentance, and baptism. For some time I have been anxious about the Biblical credibility of long sessions for baptismal preparation, and have seen them more as the building of a relationship in Christ and a confirmation of faith. The teaching is left to a structured teaching for the whole church, and sometimes to appropriate literature. What we are considering is an experience which has taken place, and the bringing of that person into the growing and learning environment of the church.

In that extraordinary event recorded in Acts 8. vv.26-40 when the official and Philip are brought together by the Holy Spirit we have a contrast with the Pentecost story. The official seems to know much about the Old Testament Scriptures, he has been worshipping in Jerusalem, and he is unsatisfied in his spirit. He is on his own, he has help with his reading of Isaiah, and he comes to belief

in Jesus as the Christ. He requests baptism and is baptised. At that time he was not part of the community of Christians, as were the Pentecost event believers. Philip was prepared to baptise him, immediately, and without two visitors from the local church validating his faith. Certainly not validating his way of life.

So I am left with a sense of unrest. I am aware that the cultural background of the New Testament is not our cultural background. Further I am aware that the cultural background of our society in general is not that of the generation when I was baptised. The cultural background of the Christian community into which I was baptised was very different from that in which, in a small way, I minister now. Four continents are substantially present as part of our local Christian community. Their ways of expressing their faith is often not only different, but in some form of conflict. It is this Christian community into which people are baptised, not as complete Christians, but as those learning at the feet of the Lord.

I am moved by the official's question 'what prevents me from being baptised?' Also, I am aware that some 'irregularities' are seen as important and others are set aside in our present way of doing things. The moral issues are not unimportant, but I have a sense that I want to respond with Philip's words. It seems like risk taking, but perhaps we have been avoiding risks too long, and then the story of so many people in our local church is that being a Christian is not a safe thing to be. **bmj**



# Book Reviews

Edited by Michael Docker

**Philip Clements Jewery**, Ashgate Press, ISBN 0-7546-3828-5; 166pp; £40

In his book Philip sets out a dialogue between 'modern theological Biblical teaching and philosophical thought' that seeks to answer three basic questions – How is prayer possible? How does prayer work? Why is it necessary to ask God for his gifts?

In seeking to answer these questions, Philip is certain that intercessory prayer works – that in addressing our hopes and concerns to God, things can and will happen. Thus prayer is more than 'therapeutic meditation' which changes the individual by aligning his or her will to that of God. But how much more? And where does prayer fit in the balance between a God who is building his kingdom and a scientific explanation of the world, which is rapidly filling all the gaps where this God can build?

As part of the answer Philip argues for the need to modify some of our traditional understanding of God, in particular our understanding of God's impassibility. Whilst God cannot be overcome by 'gusts of feeling', for intercessory prayer to have any meaning it is clear that God must be affected by it. Here Philip quotes Bonhoeffer's words, 'Only a suffering God can help.' It is clear that in his grace God allows humanity to enter into the work of the Trinity, thus sharing his creative power with us and allowing our actions to affect him. Again Philip uses a quote to make his point, this time from David Jenkins: 'God can be God without men... none the less, God will not be God without men.'

Having addressed the issue from God's side, Philip addresses the issue of how God works in a world where the gaps are closing fast. Here he turns to

A.N.Whitehead and his fellow Process Theologians. God works through persuasive love, drawing out the possibilities that are already present in creation. As Philip puts it, commenting on the work of Karl Barth, 'What is needed to balance Barth's teaching is the insight that God's grace is not only undeserving and condescending, but also persuasive and accommodating. God as love seeks to win without dominating.' Drawing an analogy from the world of art, Philip sees God working with the grain of creation to bring his vision to completion.

Of the book Philip says, 'It is my hope and prayer that those who read this book will find, not only that their understanding has been increased, but that their practice of prayer has been enhanced.' Overall I came away from reading the book feeling that my understanding of prayer had been stimulated and challenged, but little had been done to enhance my practice of prayer.

**Peter Baines,**

Llanwenarth Baptist Church, Govilon

*The Hospital Chaplain's Handbook*

**Mark Cobb**, Canterbury Press, ISBN 1-85311-477-4 188 Pages £14.99

Mark Cobb's "handbook" gives a thumbnail sketch of hospital Chaplaincy - aimed at a newly appointed chaplain or one considering a move to hospital Chaplaincy. It is intended to be a practical guide, but also gives insights into the life of the hospital which will be of value to any minister's hospital visiting. The extensive bibliography organised by subject is a useful resource for the more experienced chaplain.

Cobb explains the role of chaplains today. In quoting the chaplains' Code of

*Baptist Ministers' Journal April 2006*

Conduct, Cobb defines "Spiritual Abuse" as "the imposition of a chaplain's values and beliefs on those in their care, proselytism or a failure to respect their spiritual interests." (p158). Chaplaincy is not an opportunity to evangelise (in the narrow sense). Rather Cobb explores what "spiritual care" means in today's multi-faith and secular society. A patient's beliefs, meanings and values can be disrupted by illness leading to spiritual needs. Meeting these is an integral part of holistic healthcare. Cobb speaks of the need to conduct a "spiritual assessment" of a patient, but fails to recognise the difficulty of this when many nurses are not even willing to ask a patient's religion. He gives a good list of spiritual assessment questions - but who is going to ask them?

The book shows how fully healthcare chaplaincy has integrated into the mainstream of NHS care - chaplains have to be able to get involved with the management styles (and speak!) of the NHS. He also highlights the benefits of working with a "community of care" in multi-disciplinary teams with fellow professionals.

However, Cobb fails to explore some of the tensions this can cause for the chaplain who is "working in two worlds", the secular world of the NHS and the religious world of their faith community.

The importance of the chaplain maintaining his/her own life balance is mentioned throughout the book. The chaplain needs self-awareness and self-knowledge when visiting in intensive care or dealing with bereaved relatives. "Self-awareness in the foundation of effective practice" (p88) says Cobb.

Cobb notes the important role liturgy can play at some of the most uncertain and distressing times in life and there are useful Liturgical resources in this book. These include confession, anointing,

communion, emergency baptism (an interesting quandary for a Baptist in the case of infants), affirmation of a relationship, prayers of commendation and the naming and commendation of a dead baby. I especially liked the naming ceremony. However, in line with much of the book, some of these resources do have an Anglican feel - many are drawn from "Common Worship".

This book is a must for anyone recently appointed as a chaplain or thinking of applying for a chaplaincy role! For the rest of us it is a useful read although the sections on bereavement care, boundaries and confidentiality would be familiar territory to most.

**Mark Burleigh**

Head of Chaplaincy,  
University Hospitals of Leicester

*Truth and fiction in The Da Vinci Code. A historian reveals what we really know about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine*

**Bart Ehrman**, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004; xxiv + 207 pp., £11.99 hb (ISBN 0-19-518140-9); £6.99 pb (ISBN 0-19-530713-5).

With the Da Vinci Code film on its way this is a timely book for pastors because even more people will be getting in touch with Dan Brown's fiction about Jesus, Mary and Constantine. How will they be able to separate facts from fiction? New Testament scholar Ehrman admits to liking *The Da Vinci Code* very much as a story but he sets out to correct the factual inaccuracies and mistakes in the novel, restricting himself to early Christianity and so omitting Leonardo Da Vinci, the Vatican etc. On pages xiv-xv he lists ten grave factual errors and in the rest of the introduction he explains how a critical historian works, which is all about carefully handling the sparse sources.

The first main part of the book is

devoted to what we know about Constantine and his handling of the Scriptures. The origins of the canon of the NT are discussed and Ehrman presents the facts about the Dead Sea Scrolls and the books from Nag Hammadi, as well as about the extra-canonical gospels that Brown pretends to have used. Thus the Gospels of Thomas and Peter come to the fore. Time and again it becomes evident that *The Da Vinci Code* contains much fantasy and little fact. Despite Brown's claim that his descriptions of documents are accurate, they are not.

The second part focuses on the lives of Jesus and Mary. In two chapters Ehrman offers a good reconstruction of what we know of Mary Magdalene and of the situation of women in the first Christian centuries. Here the Gospels of Mary and Philip are discussed. The other two chapters of this part argue that the canonical gospels contain much about Jesus that isn't historical and go on to describe what we do know. According to Ehrman's reconstruction Jesus was not much more than an apocalyptic prophet. If that was all, one wonders how and why Christianity began in the first place. Behind Ehrman's low view of the historical reliability of the gospels are assumptions such as an underestimation of literacy in Galilee, a lack of confidence in the reliability of oral transmission, and late datings of the gospels.

Ehrman's approach is to quote from the novel and to present corrections and clarifications; in this way his book can serve as a companion to novel and movie. At times his introductions become a bit repetitious but his style is accessible so that many ordinary people can read this book. The tone is fair and factual throughout. In the endnotes suggestions for further reading appear, largely references to Ehrman's own books. In fact it seems that the present book is largely a compilation

of relevant parts from these books.

It struck me that in the meantime at least three other books have appeared to counter Dan Brown, each by evangelical New Testament specialists; I just list them here:

- Darrell L. Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code. Answers to the questions everybody's asking* (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), 208 pp., £19.99, ISBN 0-2004- 905591-5.
- Michael Green, *The Books the Church suppressed. Fiction and truth in The Da Vinci Code* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 192 pp., £7.99, ISBN 0-8254-6096-4.
- Ben Witherington, *The Gospel code: novel claims about Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Da Vinci* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 208 pp., £9.99, ISBN 0-8308-3267-X.

**Pieter J. Lalleman**  
Spurgeon's College

*Lent with Luke*

**David Thomson**, Authentic Lifestyle, an imprint of Authentic Media, ISBN-1-85078-597-X pp x,117

This is a gentle, but penetrating guide to Luke's Gospel, specially meant for Lent, but usable at any time of the year. It covers from Shrove Tuesday to Easter Friday, as 'our own journey of faith does not suddenly stop on Easter Day, but like Luke's story carries on into the Acts of our life through the year' (p.viii)

We journey with Luke from the announcement of John the Baptist's birth to Jesus' Ascension. The familiar story is lit up with testing questions. We are not allowed to remain observers, but are drawn into the story.

For instance, commenting on Peter's Denial and Jesus' penetrating glance, David Thomson writes, '*...are we content not just to look on Christ, whether in admiration, anguish, disbelief or disgust-but to let him look on us. Now that's scary. As the doggerel poem puts it: 'I think I'd sooner frizzle up, i'the flames of a burning 'ell, Than stand and look into 'is face, And 'ear 'is voice say "Well..."'*

More seriously, it is a look which is full of love but which demands we accept accountability for our own lives- be we Judas, Peter or David.'(p.65)

Deeply orthodox, but never dry, the author both challenges and encourages people of all Christian traditions. Talking about 'Waiting for the Spirit' on Easter Friday', he observes that, *'the disciples are explicitly commanded both to stay in the city and to look to be clothed with power from on high'*. He comments *'I find this hugely encouraging. I was brought up in a serious Christian commitment to the city, to social concern and a lived-out faith. And I have experienced the work of God's spirit in personal renewal as well...as the church experiences renewal it is called and even driven to seek the renewing and transforming of the society around it- until that too is caught up into the kingdom of God and returns the glory to him in praise and thanksgiving'* (p.105)

Each day's commentary concludes with helpful prayers and meditations from a variety of sources, including the 1662 Prayer Book.

Ministers will be renewed at a personal level, find helpful 'starting points' for preaching, and be able to consider using the book as a Church Lent Course. Suggestive study material is provided each week for that purpose.

Two queries emerge for me. Why, in environmentally conscious days, spend pages on printing out the Bible Text? And just how helpful are black and white reproductions of famous paintings?

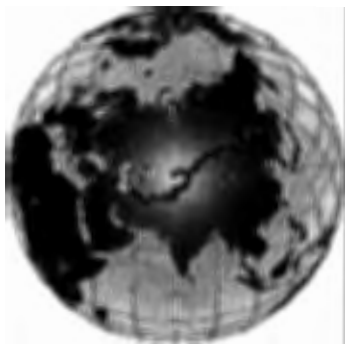
However, these are small points. This is a book to treasure, and from which to derive an ever-deeper insight into Luke's Jesus.

**Sam Sayer**

Foots Cray Baptist Church, Sidcup



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