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the baptist ministers'  
**journal**

**October 2010 volume 308**

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the baptist ministers'

# journal

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# From the editor

## Lost the plot?

I was amused, in a sober way, to see that anti-war protesters have been covertly moving copies of Tony Blair's memoirs in bookshops across the country. Normally shelved in the 'biography' (or 'bestsellers') section, copies of the controversial book have been found 'inappropriately' (according to one newspaper) placed under 'dark fiction' or 'crime thrillers'. I quite like this subversive form of dissent! No laws are broken, but a point is made with clarity and impact.

Thinking laterally for a moment, it is also a fascinating demonstration of hermeneutical principles! How exactly do we interpret information? If we take a book from 'biography' we will read it in a certain way; but a 'crime thriller' is something else altogether and we come to it with quite different expectations.

One of our most important tasks as ministers with theological training is to 'place' the stories of the Bible for people we meet. The way in which we 'shelve' these stories, not just in our Sunday preaching but in the integrity of our daily living, can have a deep impact on the way in which they are heard. In this issue of *bmj* are four main articles, each of which deals in a different way with the church's mission in the world, and each of which raises some issues of interpretation. Please read them, and respond if you would like to do so—this process of reflecting together on our use of Scripture is vital for ministers seeking to witness to Christ in today's sceptical world, and can help us all in our task.

And here is a thought. Jesus was, among other things, the innocent victim of a plot resulting from jealousy, politics and personal ambition. How's that for a crime thriller? But please don't start moving the Bibles round in Waterstone's... *SN*

Please contact me ([revsal96@aol.com](mailto:revsal96@aol.com)) if you have a contribution for *bmj*. Concise articles will usually be published more quickly (allowing for other constraints), so please try to keep to under 2000 words for main articles and under 1500 for *Points of view*, with minimal footnotes and formatting. Shorter comments are also welcome. If you would like to discuss or submit a longer article, it may need to be adapted or serialised. Thank you. Sally Nelson.

# The minister as missionary

by Glen Marshall

Talk of mission is fast becoming the 21st century ecclesiastical equivalent of bindweed. It gets everywhere. Our understanding of what qualifies as mission has grown and grown and grown—so much so, that we run the risk of sticking the label ‘missionary’ on everything that moves and, this being church, quite a few things that have long since lost the power of movement! On the one hand, this is a good thing: I wouldn’t want to go back to the idea that unless it involves giving out tracts or making an appeal it doesn’t count as mission. On the other hand, there is a problem. What exactly counts as mission? Where do we draw the line? Which activities qualify?

I do an exercise with our students at NBLC called ‘Is it mission?’ The students ask their congregations to fill in a questionnaire, which lists a range of activities—everything from church planting, through political campaigning, to discussing religion with a Hindu neighbour. The congregation has to decide which activities qualify as mission. They soon discover that if you try hard enough you can make a case for virtually anything to be mission.

The problem of course lies in our attempt to define mission in terms of what we do. Becoming missional is not about doing a different thing, a new thing, an additional thing, it’s about doing all that we do with a different view in mind. Mission is not one thing in particular, but everything seen from a particular perspective. In the end I don’t think it’s helpful to think about which activities count and which don’t. Our focus should be on our orientation. Not ‘What are we doing?’ but, ‘What is

Mission is  
not one  
thing in  
particular...

our motivation?’ Not, ‘What is occupying us?’ but, ‘What are we intending?’ Is our concern the furthering of God’s purposes for the world? Then it’s mission.

It’s a matter of learning to see our place in the grand flow of the divine purpose, the Genesis to Revelation movement of God. Creation itself is an act of mission, an act of divine outreach, bringing into being that which is both other than God and beloved by God. God’s determined commitment to the world despite its sin and brokenness is the missionary ground of the reality in which we live.

The people of God have their being and find their identity as part of this reality. We exist for God and for God’s ultimate purpose, the restoration of all things. To the extent that we live contrary to this reality, pursuing self-interest and neglecting the divine project, we live against the grain of reality and in denial of our identity. We also live in contradiction of the very heart of the gospel. Whether you look to the incarnation, ministry, or crucifixion of Christ, what you see is the most profound orientation to the other, a living and a dying for the sake of the world—a radical refusal of self-absorption.

If you want an illustration of my point, consider the second of this year’s televised prime ministerial debates. It was supposedly focused on foreign policy—

yet the questions were all about national self-interest: nothing on international justice, nothing on the global poor, nothing on international development. Sadly this is the kind of attitude that is too often found, transposed into a religious key, in our churches.

If all the talking, writing, conferencing, posturing, and assembling on the theme of mission is to amount to anything, then we need a radical reorientation of the life of our churches. And if our churches are to experience this reorientation then our concept of ministry also needs a shake-up. If we are to nurture genuinely missionary disciples and congregations, then we have to have genuinely missionary ministers, ministers who are oriented

...but  
everything  
seen from  
a particular  
perspective

towards the beyond church, who see their calling as helping God's church prayerfully to pursue God's purpose for God's world.

### **Three models of missionary-minister**

Let me share with you three images of the missionary-minister in the hope that they might help to fund just such a reimagining, reorienting our notion of ministry that we might help to reorient the life of our churches.

*1. The missionary-minister as conversationalist and mission as dialogue.* Missionaries discovered long ago the vital place of dialogue when working beyond the bounds of Christendom. In this country we are also now ministering beyond Christendom: the church is an eccentric minority, and our society is religiously plural. Sadly the response of Christians has often been either hostility or indifference, but what is called for is a ministerial initiative in friendly engagement. One of my regrets about my last pastorate is that I did not give nearly enough attention to discussion with the Muslim community on my doorstep.

In the current climate of brittle coexistence it has to be a priority that we ministers show that the diversity of religion in our society needn't be a problem, still less an excuse for violence. If mission isn't about reaching out in a friendly embrace to those who are different, then I don't know that it is about.

In our relationships with those of other faiths neither crass conversionism nor crass anti-conversionism will do. What we need is mature, open, generous, humble, committed dialogue. If our churches are to be oriented toward those beyond church, not turning our backs on our neighbours but turning toward them so that we might first listen and then speak of our faith in Christ, then we need missionary-ministers who will reach out in friendship and strike up as many conversations as possible.

*2. The missionary-minister as theologian in residence and mission as faithful witness.* In the hands of unreflective activists mission is easily hijacked by alien values and subordinated to unexamined cultural presuppositions. Stories of how this happened in the massive Victorian colonial missionary expansion abound. But you don't have to set foot beyond your own culture to fall prey to such a disease. Our missionary methods at home have, for instance, become chronically instrumentalised. Too often, ends justify means, and we forget that the form of mission



# What is the price of a soul?

matters just as much as the fruit of mission. Having a mission-shaped church is fine as long as we also have a gospel-shaped mission.

When it comes to our fearful lusting after church growth, we have not always been as vigilant as we might. Measurable growth, numerical success, and numbers coming through the door have, in line with our culture's obsession with the countable, become almost unqualified measures of ministerial success. And while I would be the first to criticise a neglectful indifference toward to results, I am also convinced that our feverish concern with the response to our missionary endeavours often leads us astray from the way of Christ.

Billy Sunday, the old time evangelist, once calculated the price of a soul by dividing the total cost of his missions by the number of converts. I myself recall one preacher at the end of a disappointing week of mission make an appeal with an interesting twist: 'I'd like everyone here to raise a hand in the air. OK, now if you don't want to become a Christian, put your hand down'. This kind of thing is not effective evangelism, it's false witness.

Of course few take it quite so far. But I do think we need to ask if we have been guilty of purveying 'gospel light', because in our desire to see results we have emptied our 'gospel message' of all substantial ethical content. Too much evangelism sounds too little like a call to join a radical community committed to sacrificial living for the sake of peace and justice, and too much like just another manifestation of our culture's obsession with the therapeutic quick fix.

The truest measure of Christian witness is not effectiveness, but faithfulness to the person and the way of Christ. This is of course much harder to measure, but it is also much more important. This means making sure that our churches embody our tradition, that we know our language, are familiar with our stories, and keep alive our distinctive, defining practices.

That is why a missionary-minister has to be a local theologian, a theologian in residence. The missionary re-orientation for which I am calling, the turning out to the world rather than in on ourselves, must not become pragmatism, an un-

thinking rush to adopt whatever method promises to ‘work’. It is the missionary-minister’s job to ensure that mission is rooted in our identity as a gospel people.

Now of course it’s not all down to the minister. Baptist congregations, of all congregations, should be congregations of all the talents. But there is a particular expertise that we as ministers must bring—an expertise in the scriptures and their significance for shaping congregational life. We have a deposit that we are charged to keep, guard, renew and make available to our people, in the hope that they will never, ever, trade in the blessing of authentic Christian identity for a mess of institutional success.

This commitment is especially important in our pluralistic society, with its tournament of narratives, its bewildering white noise of competing ideologies and identities. Perhaps the greatest danger for an enthusiastically missionary church in our glorious, fascinating, diverse culture is that we forget who we are. We must not allow that to happen. It is the missionary-minister’s job to make sure that the church doesn’t go native. We do this by learning to see ourselves as theologians—an unapologetic, insistent theological presence and resource rooted in our communities, not occupiers of ivory towers, but theologians in residence.

3. *The missionary-minister as host: mission as hospitality.* In a rapidly changing, rootless society, mission is also about generating communities of hospitality, providing for strangers a wholesome place to be while they decide if they would like to belong.

Hospitality is not unrelated to my previous point about identity. One of the things that is essential for true hospitality is knowing who we are, being comfortable in our own corporate skin. It really isn’t about being on our best behaviour, nervously minding our Ps & Qs lest we offend. Too many attempts at hospitality fail because they are uptight. Good hospitality is about unashamedly being who we are while at the same time creating space for others to be with us—to enter into our domestic life, to be at home in our home.

Mission is  
rooted in  
our gospel  
identity

This, I fear, is where, despite all that was good about it, the seeker-centred approach led us down a blind alley. We have to be careful when responding to the rightfully insistent calls reminding us that mission is about going. Yes, *The field of dreams* approach to mission is inadequate—‘If you build it they will come’. Inadequate, but not entirely misguided. The debate between centripetal and centrifugal approaches to mission is ultimately sterile. We need both.

Even as ministers work to grow churches that go, we must also be home-makers, nurturing communities to which it is worth returning and within which space is created for guests. Not just a formal seat in the parlour but a place by the fire in the kitchen. Missionary-ministers will give themselves to fostering a community ethos that is generous towards those who lodge with us, at ease with visitors, appropriately curious about newcomers and always ready with a patient explanation should anyone enquire about our peculiar ways.

### **Ministerial by calling**

This reorientation, this reimagining of what it means to be a minister is both important and urgent. However, it is not without dangers. One such danger is that of mission-motivated ministerial ‘sheep-beating’. I detect an emerging and distressing phenomenon, angry missionary-ministers, ministers whose anger is kindled by their congregation’s failure to get on with the mission programme. These are ministers who feel held back by their congregations. It is as if their people are getting in the way of their own missionary-ministry. And it makes them mad. I sympathise. I think I understand. But I am also alarmed.

God did not call us to into ministry that we might become our congregations’ accusers. That position is already taken. Yes, learning to see ourselves as missionary-ministers matters a lot. But as we start to realise that aim it is also vital that we don’t forget that we are also missionary-ministers, servants of our people, people who are themselves called to serve the world that the world in turn might learn to serve God.

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# Free play for diversity

by Gethin Abraham-Williams

Pastorally, I had always been concerned about those on the edge. As a Baptist, mission in some form or other is always there under the surface. But as a liberal Baptist, my concern was less with getting them into my tent, though that would have made me wickedly boastful, as to seeing how to uproot the stubborn tent pegs of denominationalism and church in order to make the tent much wider!

Ecumenism was an early corollary of my evangelical zeal. This was dodgy ground in the 60s, especially for someone from Wales. The town in which I grew up was part of the Anglican diocese of St David's, which in my 20s had a bishop who pronounced it inappropriate for nonconformist ministers to have a supporting role in Anglican funerals and *vice versa*, which was very much the rural practice. The Roman Catholics just didn't feature on our Richter scale of true believers! Roman Catholicism was held to be an easy religion in which confession allowed you to get away with murder!

The macro-ecumenism of other world faiths was a late flowering. In our little Baptist chapel with its pulpit as wide as a platform, on which the preacher could declaim as he walked to and fro like the Lord God in the garden of Eden, an annual highlight was listening to one of the missionaries on furlough from converting the heathen. I had no concept of other world faiths, except Judaism, which we held had been found wanting anyway!

All the while there was a steady but irreversible haemorrhaging of support from the mainstream churches, increasingly explained away with the 'leaner but fitter' tag. In truth, religion was failing to connect on a significant scale.

Meanwhile, many who had left church, the 'gone but not forgotten' of Richter and Francis' mid-1990s research (and more who had never belonged), were found to be doing their own faith thing. To the purists inside it was all very messy, maybe even dangerous.

Edinburgh 2010

For others, like myself, it was a puzzle. Was God in this? If so, where did we, as church, fit in?

Alongside this drifting away, there were people of other faiths from overseas settling mainly, but not exclusively, in our cities, and staying faithful to the practice and pursuit of those faiths. The Sikhs who kept the corner shop in a village on the edge of Snowdonia, and sent their children to the Welsh school where they heard about Jesus in morning assembly, but venerated the Guru Gobind Singh at home in the evening: where did they feature in the great scheme of salvation?

When the 1200 representatives of the churches and foreign missionary societies met in Edinburgh in 1910, these had been the issues uppermost in their minds. At Edinburgh 2010, *Witness to Christ today*, 100 years on, the UK and indeed the world are very different places. It's the same challenge: how to tell 'our story' of faith, but now it's also how to get it heard in the public square, above the distracting noise of church pronouncements and failures, which jar and often offend a generation that is suspicious of fundamentalist answers or slick presentations.

### **The emerging shape of Christianity**

Comparing and contrasting the two conferences, 1910 was by far the more significant. 'With the possible exception of Vatican II', Kenneth R. Ross, Secretary of the Church of Scotland World Mission Council, believes that no event was 'more definitive for the emerging shape of Christianity in the twentieth century'.

Though there were no Roman Catholics or Orthodox present in 1910, Anglo-Catholics mingled with the more predominantly evangelical group of previous international conferences. The attendance might have been heavily weighted in favour of the West (500 from the UK, and another 500 from the US), but at least there were some Asians present and one from Africa, so that it had 'less of a colonial "white man's burden" feel to it than some other similar events!'. A sizeable proportion was also what could be termed 'lay', thus grounding the whole endeavour of mission in the daily lives of ordinary women and men.

The 2010 meeting, though a quarter of the size of the earlier one, was far more representative of the world church. Delegates now came from 60 nations across the globe, and there were many more women present from the mission agencies, networks, denominational mission departments and academia. This time, too,

there were Roman Catholics and Orthodox, among the Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Independent and Uniting Churches present. But there were noticeably fewer lay workers than in 1910.

Edinburgh 1910 is generally regarded as launching the modern ecumenical movement; while 2010 has been a reappraisal and a repositioning of that vocation. The heady expectations of the former have been tempered by the more sober estimate of the latter. What follows are reflections on observations and impressions from meetings I attended in anticipation of 2010, and its immediate aftermath.

### **In the public square**

The first meeting, with the subtitle *Called to be one: what now*, had been convened by Keith Clements, former General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, as ‘an informal meeting of individuals committed to the movement for Christian unity in Britain’. Convened at Wesley College Conference Centre, Bristol, this meeting revealed the extent to which, since 1910, changing circumstances have adjusted the parameters. Even the hope during the 1960s and 70s of some kind of episcopal/non-episcopal convergence has receded as a precursor to a wider unity of the body of Christ

At the end of 2010, there is rather an assertive reclaiming of the root meaning of ‘ecumenism’ as something global and environmental, coupled with a commitment to relate it to justice. The premise now is that the credibility of our mission is not dependent on our first being in some kind of visible, organic union, but on our relevance in the public square. Moreover, it will be out of that mutuality of witness that we may eventually stumble upon unity, ‘as Christ wishes and by the means he desires’, to quote the memorable, but insufficiently pondered phrase of the great French ecumenist, the Abbé Paul-Irenée Couturier.

What Bristol also showed up was that, even after the Churches Together experience of the past 20 years, we have relatively little self-awareness. How do we come across to others within, let alone outside, the churches? Thanks to an intervention by Myra Blyth, we began to grasp what a confusing mess we Protestants can appear to Roman Catholics, for whom the concept of the unity of the body of Christ is so central. We may rightly dispute the price of that ‘catholic’ unity, as I would want to, but we are not making much of a fist of offering a very convincing alternative either!

The other significant and comparatively recent element in world Christianity today is the emergence of Pentecostalism—a global phenomenon that taps into conviction and exuberance as legitimate expressions of spirituality in an age that extols rationality as the supreme virtue. We may differ over our interpretation in Newman’s hymn of ‘a higher gift than grace, should flesh and blood refine’, but there is a yearning, even in the least demonstrative, for an acknowledgement of the transformative mystery of the Godhead.

### **A purpose beyond itself**

The other gathering in which I shared was post-Edinburgh 2010. The venue this time was the Benedictine Abbey of Glenstal, in Co Limerick. Here, every year for the past 47 years, have been brought together ordained, religious and lay Christians, mainly from the Church of Ireland, the Methodist and Roman Catholic churches, to pray, and to listen to God and to each other in ecumenical enquiry and yearning.

In a scholarly and devotional address on the mission imperative of ecumenism, Martin Browne OSB recalled that the focus of Edinburgh 1910 had been ‘largely pragmatic—about how various mission societies and organisations might better work together. It wasn’t about Christianity *per se*, it was about mission.’ What he found particularly fascinating and encouraging, however, was ‘that it was in concentrating on this missionary priority that unity was discovered and named—and so thirsted for,’ reminding us ‘that Christian unity has a purpose beyond itself.’

What the meeting in Bristol and the conference in Glenstal reinforced for me was that Edinburgh 1910 and Edinburgh 2010 both affirmed this fact: that mission, prayerfully and conscientiously pursued, creates the environment in which unity becomes a natural flowering. Also, that mission is not something we do alone, but in pairs (or in 12s or in 70s or in 72s), and that effective mission takes account of the diversity of the mission, as well as of the world.

Britain today is certainly more multiform than at any time in its recent past. Our congregations are more mixed, ethnically and certainly denominationally. People attend church on the basis of whether such a community or style of worship meets their current spiritual and social needs. As those needs change, staying out of some sense of loyalty to a building or a brand, seems strange and pointless to today’s pilgrim. Similarly, the Christian communities that grow, locally and in net-

works, are those which are most adept at handling change, which know how to cooperate with likely allies in the public square, and which are responsive to where people are at.

Dana Roberts, codirector of the Centre for Global Christianity and Mission, Boston, US, pithily summed up the challenge in her address at the opening plenary of Edinburgh 2010. 'How is it possible to attain that unity for which our Lord prayed,' she asked, 'and yet to leave free play for the diversity which alone will give to unity comprehension and life?'

***Gethin Abraham-Williams held pastorates in Coventry, Sutton Coldfield and Sutton (Surrey), and served as ecumenical officer in Milton Keynes; then as general secretary successively of the Anglican-Free Church Covenant in Wales and of CYTŪN: Churches Together in Wales. Gethin's new book, on the tension of creative transformation, is due out next year under the O-books imprint. He can be contacted at [gethin@theaws.com](mailto:gethin@theaws.com).***

### **Notes to text**

P. Richter & L. J. Francis, *Gone but not forgotten: church leaving and returning*. London: DLT, 1998.

*Called to be one—what now?* Report of a meeting in Bristol 12-13 November 2009 (e-mail [whatnow@theaws.com](mailto:whatnow@theaws.com)).

For information on the Glenstal Ecumenical Conferences, e-mail [ecumenical@glenstal.org](mailto:ecumenical@glenstal.org).

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# Carey and Serampore

by Edward H. B. Williams

*Young man, sit down!* was the title of a book for children in which I first read the story of William Carey. Little did I imagine then that I would teach for nearly 10 years (with my wife) in the college which Carey, Marshman and Ward founded, living in the very house in which they lived. To serve at Serampore was a very great privilege.

The sentence with which I began comes from a famous incident when, as a young pastor in England, Carey was asked to suggest a topic for discussion at his local ministers' meeting. He proposed that they should consider 'whether the command given to the apostles to teach all nations was not binding on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world'. A senior figure shut him up: 'Young man, sit down! When God pleases to convert the heathen, He'll do it without your help or mine!'

My next encounter with Carey was at theological college, when I had to write an essay on his theology. That older minister had represented a doctrine of the sovereignty of God in which we are left helpless: whether a soul goes to heaven or hell is God's choice alone, and we can do nothing. As I explored the books that most influenced Carey, I discovered a reaction against such extremes: faced with the challenge and invitation of Christ, we must choose.

And as for those who lived before Christ, or had not heard the Gospel, God could not and would not condemn them for what was not their fault. Therefore the Gospel must be preached. Within five years, through Carey's persuasion, the Baptist Missionary Society had been born and he was on his way to India.

Even as I prepared my essay I realised that, in cold logic, such preaching would result in many hearing but not accepting the Gospel, and therefore (presumably) going to hell! The preaching of the Gospel would make things worse for them, not better. But did such a

Young  
man,  
sit  
down!

thought even enter Carey's mind? No—because first and foremost he was filled with wonder at the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ—to know Him is what counts above all else.

Thus we come to our text, Matthew 16:16ff: Blessed are your eyes because they see—many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it. That blessing puts all strict logic aside. Yes, already they were described and counted as 'righteous'—but they had not seen Christ, the treasure, the pearl of great price.

My wife and I knew one former Brahmin very well. He put it like this: 'I have sometimes regretted joining the Christian church, but I have never, ever, regretted following Jesus Christ'.

Let me tell you about our arrival in India. I had degrees in physics and theology, and when we offered ourselves to the Baptist Missionary Society, they decided that Serampore College, and in particular the physics department, was just the place for someone with that combination of subjects. I was young and full of zeal. I had a theme text, from Acts 26, To open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God—and then I met the head of physics at Serampore!

Prof Radharaman Ganguly was an impressive Bengali Hindu figure: impressive to look at, with a magnificent beard; impressive as a teacher, with a profound influence on his students; impressive as a physicist—when he took his MSc from Calcutta University, he took second place—the one who came first was C. V. Raman, a future Nobel Prize winner in physics. Then in his 'spare' time from running the physics department at Serampore, he accepted a challenge and began to read history—eventually, still in his spare time, standing first in his MA! He was widely known for his integrity. As for his spirituality, when my wife and I were invited to his modest home, he showed us the first room inside the front door and said 'This is my prayer room'.

As a zealous, eager young missionary I had to do some very hard thinking, and do it quickly! I had to be honest about what I saw, and honour that man—but I also had to honour my calling as a missionary of Jesus Christ. What about 'turning them from darkness to light'? I found my first clue in the presentation of Christ in the Temple. The old man Simeon took him in his arms and said with such joy, 'Now my eyes have seen'. All his life until this moment he had lived

without seeing Christ, and he was described up to this point as ‘righteous and devout...waiting’. Could I not speak of my head of department in that way? True, he was not living before the time of Christ, and he did know Christians, but somehow his eyes had not yet been opened to Jesus. If only he could see, what a blessing for him! In the meantime, I could wholeheartedly speak of him as of Simeon ‘righteous and devout’. We do not make Christ greater by not appreciating goodness wherever we find it.

Then I discovered this same principle in the text I have chosen today. Prophets and righteous people existed before the time of Christ, and apart from Christ, yet Jesus did not hesitate to describe them thus. And I was so glad.

I found an illustration in my own subject of physics. I have seen through telescope and microscope things that Isaac Newton never saw, wonderful things that would have thrilled him beyond measure. He never saw; but I have seen. Does that make me greater than he was? Do I have to belittle Isaac Newton and say, ‘He wasn't much of a scientist, was he?’.

So, no boasting is appropriate for us—only privilege, only blessing. As Jesus said, ‘Blessed are your eyes because they see...Many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it’. We do not magnify Christ by belittling anyone else.

We do not  
magnify  
Christ by  
belittling  
others

My wife and I count fine Sikhs and Parsees among our friends also but, in the UK, most of our friends from other faiths have been Muslims. Yes, within Islam there are fanatics, as there are in every faith, our own included; but equally there are some among our friends who can only be described (if we are being honest) as ‘righteous and devout’.

I have a problem about Islam, as I do about Sikhism: these faiths were founded many centuries after the time of Jesus Christ. Why in the providence of God did he not overrule it? I still cannot see the answer, and it has to take its place with life's other great unanswered questions. But you do not solve the

problem, and you certainly do not magnify Christ, by belittling Muhammad or Guru Nanak. We have a neighbour and great friend who is from Malaysia, married to a British man. Her wonderful, radiant smile is unforgettable. If Siti were a Christian, you would say she was a fine advertisement for her faith. But she is a righteous and devout Muslim. We will not magnify Christ if we diminish her.

Even after saying all this, the big issue remains: what about our commission to preach the gospel to every creature? How do we uphold the heart of our faith, that by his death on the cross Jesus is the Saviour of the world, uniquely? Two texts, often cited, are crucial here, and we must be honest with them.

The first is Acts 4:10-12: By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...this man stands before you healed...There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. This is where a little bit of Greek helps!

Unlike English, and unlike Bengali (which is the Indian language I know), Greek uses the same word for 'healed' and for 'saved'. You have to tell from the context which sense is uppermost, but the meanings overlap and affect each other. Read these verses in Greek and you find that Peter is saying, 'How has this lame man been healed so wonderfully? By the name of Jesus, that's how—there is no other name by which we can be healed in this way'. Thoughts of salvation blend into that, but it's not primarily a doctrinal assertion, it is about the healing of a lifelong cripple.

The second passage is more fundamental, John 14:6: Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. How can our friends, like Prof Ganguly, like Siti, fit into this? I believe the answer is, again, to read carefully what is actually said and also to be alert to what is not said. Jesus did not say, 'No one comes to the Father except through knowing me'. What is the difference? Let me give you another story from my experience.

I once travelled daily to work by bus, in and out of Birmingham city centre, along a street that was lined from end to end with fine buildings of several floors, with no spaces between them. Then, about 30 years ago, they demolished many of these in order to build a fine modern concert hall, and did not fill in all the gaps—and now you can see that the road passes over a canal.

You can see it! All those times I had crossed it, and never even knew it was there. I did not need to see the bridge, or know that it was there, for it to carry me across. And in the same way, may it not be that by his death on the cross Christ

has built a bridge, 'suffering and dying to make atonement for our sins', and that bridge is strong enough to carry us even if we do not know it is there?

May it not be that some who are reckoned as 'righteous and devout' may come into 'the Father's house', not knowing until they arrive that they have come there only because of a bridge? And they will turn round and look, and see the Jesus who suffered and died to bring us to God. They will see, and the seeing will be such a blessing and a joy. They will share that blessing which is yours and mine already. How much more is it a blessing to know, than to be in ignorance—to see, than to be blind! That is the story we have, to tell to the nations.

There is no better end than to return to William Carey. Many a time I have stood in the cemetery at Serampore and read again the words on his tomb. The words are old-fashioned, the thought is profound: 'A wretched, poor and helpless worm, on Thy kind arms I fall'. He has been described as 'an awestruck, surrendered personality'.

The story has often been told how, near the end of his life, he was visited by a younger person who talked about his many achievements, 'Dr Carey this, Dr Carey that'. And after a while Carey gently reproached him, 'You have spoken much about Dr Carey. When I am gone, speak not of Dr Carey—speak of Dr Carey's Saviour'.

Amen to that—from me, and I hope from all of you, always.

*This article is the text of the commemoration sermon for William Carey, which I was privileged to give at the Convocation of Serampore College (University), held this year in Bangalore. I was invited to preach while receiving an Honorary DD both for service there and as an expression of 'gratitude to the Baptist Missionary Society, the institution which Carey himself founded'. Why Bangalore, not Serampore? The royal charter which Carey and his colleagues obtained in 1827 is now the basis of theology degrees for 50 institutions throughout India.*

**After leaving Serampore, Edward Williams was minister in Sparkbrook, Birmingham, and in Alcester; he is now retired, in Malvern. He can be contacted by email on [eandrwilliams@btinternet.com](mailto:eandrwilliams@btinternet.com).**

# A point of view

## Going forward as a minority church

by Roy Dorey

Since the mid-19th century, the Christian church has been in decline in terms of attendance, and Christians have used two ways of modifying the impact of these statistics.

One way is to collect and interpret the figures in such a way that they do not look as bad as they really are. We may add up the Easter and Christmas attendance figures and suggest that they indicate the fellowship of those who are seeking to live Christian lives. Or we may add up the monthly attendances, and gain a more realistic picture, but we are still including people for whom the life of the church is peripheral. I am not denying the real pressures on time which exist, but want to ask whether the 'duty of attendance' has to take its place in a queue of other duties. If allegiance to Christ and his church has real meaning, it is more like a love affair and a deep relationship than a box to be ticked on a to-do list. Strength and encouragement for the rest of one's responsibilities should be drawn from such participation.

The second way is to speak about the influence of the church. Recognising that there is such an influence, albeit overrated, I am reminded that the Great Commission is not to go out and influence people. It may be argued that we have to influence people before we can fulfil the Great Commission—but the figures, with all their faults and contradictions, show that it is not happening. As Baptists, one of our criticisms of infant baptism is that it is often not what Anglican clergy say it is (a step towards faith), so much as the end of any involvement.

It is much easier to gather figures for what people do, than to analyse the meaning of what they do.

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Attendance can cover many underlying attitudes. People who turn up only at funerals may assume that the only way of handling this situation is with the help of the Christian minister, and incidentally, the church resources. I would suggest that this response is anthropological, not Christian. This drift is even clearer for weddings. Registry office weddings, followed by a reception; and weddings in beautiful country houses and hotels, access the drama without the embarrassment of Christian intervention. The anthropological need for ritual is being acknowledged.

### **Membership and identity**

When we consider the spasmodic or infrequent attendance of some people at church, we are looking at something different. I want to ask how much their attendance at church on such a basis is a reflection of their self-identity. These attendees are avoiding affiliation and involvement: they cannot commit themselves to the ongoing life of the church and we must question the value they place on the Christian enterprise. Commitment is at a low ebb in our society generally—it requires people to move from self-preoccupation to preoccupation with others. It requires a value shift in terms of how we relate to the world.

Baptists are strong on intellectual propositions. An ‘applicant’ for membership is ‘tested’ for personal faith, but it is in the context of expecting orthodox answers—we expect people to be ‘sound’. I worked with an emerging church in the Middle East, and saw it grow from a few tens to a couple of hundred. They have since affiliated to a restoration movement and would now exclude me from membership because of the propositions or ‘beliefs’ to which I would be required to assent. These beliefs may be important to the organisation and even for many in the local church, but they seem peripheral to my faith, and contrary to the inclusiveness of the Lord Jesus. The Ethiopian eunuch was not quizzed by the church visitors, or directed to the appropriate evangelical website. Nor was he required to undergo several weeks of study, or submit to a leadership which was self-appointed. His simple cry of understanding of God’s grace was enough. Of course we live in a more complex world, and of course the Christian faith has suffered so many divisions that we need to retain our identity, but let us not create more hurdles than the Scriptures require.

Part of our emphasis on intellectualising the faith has meant that we have not incarnated the gospel, engaging with the hurts and joys of those around us. It is

easier for us to give time, money, and energy to relieve suffering in other parts of the world than to allow ourselves be seen with and alongside the marginalised in our society, or even the hurting in our own churches.

We live in a country in which many institutions have been shaped by Christian teaching, the origins of which may not be visible now—but the quasi-Christendom of the past is still evident in architecture and social structures. As Baptists we dissent from effective state control over our church. If we understand that the only authority we have for church life and ministry is to be found in the Lord Jesus, then we should begin to take seriously the incarnational, cross-bearing and resurrection truths, and make them our own.

Of course this is nothing new, but we must move on from knowing the stories of Jesus, to being on pilgrimage with him, and entering into his grief and suffering in his encounters with people. We must adapt our lives to reflect the purposefulness of Jesus—more than ‘living simply’ because the strength of love and purpose of Jesus direct us. For Christians this means more than ‘spirituality’ because this way of life has living through the redemption and forgiveness of God for others at its heart. If it is true that our society is shaped by the Christian institutions of the past, then how much is our Christian faith shaped by that institutional past and how much is it rooted in the living experience of a relationship with the Lord?

### **Listening to others**

In our English language the word ‘cry’ has two meanings. One is ‘to call out’. To ask for attention to something being said or a situation that has arisen. After the earthquake the rescue team listens carefully for the slightest sound of someone calling out. It seems to me that too often we know what we want to say, we have been trained to speak to people, and we look for opportunities to say it. There is something that should precede it all: we should listen to what those who make up our unbelieving circle are saying to us. ‘Christ is the answer’, undoubtedly, but what is the question?

The other meaning of ‘cry’ is that of weeping. There is a problem about listening to people weep, because it makes demands upon us, implicitly if not explicitly. If people let us hear their weeping they want us to do something about it. The cries of the children and their parents were rejected by the close disciples, but they



were heard and responded to by Jesus in a powerful way. So much of what we see as the rejection of the Christian faith is, I believe, actually people calling out from a sense of being lost, and the weeping of inadequacy in the face of what life is doing to them.

Of course, to listen and to respond to weeping takes time, and our busy lives mean that we have little time. We pay a minister to have time to serve us in the church, but there is a danger that we expect him or her to be the chaplain to the faithful, rather than to be the fulcrum of the life of the church in faith. Every minister knows that a significant factor in his/her acceptance within a church is his/her involvement with the pain of people.

### **Prophetic church**

We must find the prophetic voice of God for this day. How much we enjoy the words of Amos, of Ezekiel, and of Jeremiah when they are the voice of God against corruption and self-interest. We find it difficult to see how we can speak with the same authority because we have not had the same personal revelation and impetus to speak out. What we do have is the resurrection assurance of the dismissal of corrupt social institutions through suffering and the empty tomb. We have the scriptures and the presence of the Holy Spirit to help us to consider the situation we live in. We are sure that there are things wrong with our society, yet it still seems we cannot speak out. Of course Christians do not agree on what should be said, but that is no excuse for saying nothing. We may be opposed in what we say, but that is consonant with the prophetic ministry of the scriptures. It is unlikely that we will suffer as the prophets did, but we may well be marginalised, and it may be that our contribution will help others to find a voice.

Saying something about what is happening in our society requires us to be consistent in our own living. Perhaps our reticence in holding local and national government, organisations, and institutions to account is because we know our own vulnerability and inconsistencies. It is so much easier to stay within our comfort zone on the basis that 'everyone is entitled to his/her own opinion'—a good motto if it is tested out against gospel understanding and insights. It is unlikely, but not impossible, that God will call us to speak out on those issues which will change the shape of our society, but perhaps we can make some small difference to some people and make visible a church that is not emasculated and irrelevant.

We must challenge the hierarchical and clerical domination of the church in its life and practice. The holding of power by a few is contrary to our Baptist, and to the New Testament, way of being church. The church can hold onto a power structure which has perverted the reading of scripture and sanctified it as a tradition handed down through the centuries. More recently we seem to have moved to a reliance on management courses to provide a more up-to-date leadership structure. The 'restoration churches' have moved to a self-perpetuating oligarchy which closely resembles papal structures. Another phenomenon of hierarchies is that of 'charismatic leadership,' normally meaning a person who draws people to him. All of these leadership methods may, or may not, be applicable to large organisations, multinational companies, and entrepreneurial endeavours. They seem to have little to do with the self-giving humility of the New Testament, and with our Baptist heritage.

No organisation can continue in a complex society without some administrative support, but a problem comes when administration takes over or is given too much authority by others, because it is simpler to do it that way. We have succumbed to an assumption that because Christ is the head of the church, we can create an hierarchical chain that owes more to a typical class structure than it does to the graciousness of God towards all people.

Our society is comfortable with a structure that is based on power domination at all levels. I heard of a 'Baptist archbishop' in one of the states that was part of the USSR conglomerate. The only way the state could relate to the Baptists was to insist on such a hierarchy being set up. I find the response of an unbelieving society to church structures very significant. Rowan Williams was hounded recently because something was inaccurately attributed to him. He is the fairy on the top of the Christmas tree: no authority, but looked up to above the trivia which comprises so much of the church. Looked up to, and then rejected. That seems consonant with the New Testament.

Part of our problem is that we are tolerated so easily within our society. We are no threat. It is like the Studdert Kennedy line, 'when Jesus came to Birmingham they simply passed him by'. We are also privileged, and ministers are accepted by the nature of their office, rather than by who they are, and what their contribution is. We need to escape from this comfort zone and take some risks, which seems to be what Christ expected of his followers. We need to move into a new 'pre-Constantinian' era in which we are accepted or rejected for what we are and

what we do, and not for some assumed social respect.

Of course life will be more difficult, but it will bring us back to a place in society that is appropriate to our numbers. Moving out of our comfort zone will also set the agenda for our way of life and church practice. It is difficult to be specific, but the contexts we are in will, with the concern God has for us and our society, guide us and empower us.

*Note: Walter Brueggemann explores the issues discussed in this article in The prophetic church (Fortress Press 1978), especially chapters 6 and 7.*

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## Leaving the ministry

by Elaine Cockbill

Every year, on the anniversary of my induction/ordination, I would ask the Lord: do I stay or do I go? Some years it was easy to ask that question; others, it was harder. The year when my answer was finally 'go', it was hard to hear it: I had helped the church through a major church plant and transformation, things were going very well; we were seeing the results of all our hard work and I was looking forward to the future.

Sadly it was not to be, so my name went on the list of ministers seeking to move. The church was told and a mission trip to India was planned. Then, my fiancé died, suddenly and unexpectedly. Since I knew part of my fresh call was to go to India and Pakistan for three months, I persevered and went anyway: maybe I was to work there full time now I had fewer ties back home. Nothing firm developed however, nor was there a call to ministry back in the UK. Was it my age, or gender? In some cases it was probably both!

I was suffering from three major losses: of church, home, and partner, and life was tough. I had to lean on God as never before and He was always there for me, in ways I wouldn't have discovered had I not lost so much in other ways.

Finances dictated that I needed to work, so I got a job back in my old line of business: training teachers. I was given this job on the strength of my work in India and Pakistan—no coincidence, I am sure! However, the hunger to serve God as a minister would not go away. No matter what is said about the priesthood of all believers along the lines of ‘we’re all in ministry’, it was a really painful time—fortunately in a good place with good colleagues, but feeling very discouraged and rejected at not being a ‘proper minister’. Being a visiting preacher only made me feel worse. I didn’t belong: I had ‘left the ministry’.

So why am I writing this piece for *bmj*? It’s because I now see what God knew, and perhaps what friends and family saw but didn’t tell me. My ministry NEEDED those two years out and I believe I shall be a wiser, more compassionate servant because of them. The life-changing losses I experienced have taught me to rely on God as never before. Our desert experiences can check us and re-make us.

I was very fortunate: being led to leave that first church before I broke down with exhaustion and probably before that exhaustion caused me to damage myself or the church in some way. Despite my best intentions, I had got into a way of ‘doing ministry’ which, with success and increasing activity, didn’t involve as much waiting on the Lord as it should have done. Also my grief at the loss of my future husband needed a fuller working out through my life than I realised at the time. In addition, my gratitude to those church members who do a full time job and volunteer for the church work has increased tenfold, because I have seen church life afresh from their point of view.

I hope reading this will help others in a similar position who may perhaps be feeling devastated at the sorts of losses I have experienced. ‘Leaving the ministry’ might seem at the time the worst thing that can happen to you, the worst desert you’ve ever been through, but good can come out of it—it can and will, and God is faithful.

***Elaine Cockbill is a Baptist minister.***

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# Reviews

edited by John Houseago

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## ***The selfless gene—living with God and Darwin***

by Charles Foster

Hodder & Stoughton 2009

ISBN 978-0-340-96436-1

**reviewer: Brenda Morton**

Foster's answer to Dawkins does not take issue with Dawkins' argument in the way that Alister McGrath does in *The Dawkins delusion*. Foster takes seriously both Dawkins' objections to faith in a loving God, and the struggles of those with faith to embrace the theory of evolution. This latter he portrays as a personal struggle to make sense of the idea of a loving God having created a world where nature is 'red in tooth and claw'. The implications is either that God is not good, or is not responsible.

Foster is bothered by the suffering and waste inherent in creation as we see it—which is difficult to blame on the 'fall' of humanity, since dinosaurs suffered from cancer. He answers many of

the fundamentalist objections to the evolution of, say, the eye—in mammals it is not the perfect model one would expect if designed by God! In the end his only answer is the Cross, and I'm not sure he entirely solves the problem.

But it is a cracking good read. Foster studied veterinary medicine, and is currently a tutor in medical law and ethics at Oxford. He is able to give a scholarly explanation of the processes of evolution, yet writes with a wry humour. I found myself chuckling several times.

As a non-theologian he looks with a fresh eye at the Genesis creation and fall stories, and tells us what he thinks the Bible actually says rather than what evangelical theology thinks it says. He says that if there was a fall, it was a fall 'up'—what died was innocence. Humans became like God, knowing good and evil. In other words, they grew up.

Foster quotes a 15th century song that suggests that the fall was a blessed event, for it led to the incarnation. He suggests that the solution to the fall goes beyond mere fixing, it is re-creation, as if you called a workman in to fix a broken tap and he rebuilt the whole house. By the end of Revelation, 'God has abandoned his preference for

nomads and come to terms with civilisation'. Something has been lost on the journey there, but has been restored, nay transformed, many times over.

I need to read it again, alongside McGrath, because I'm not sure I could yet distil what he says into a sermon, but it will bear a second reading because it is so entertaining. I thoroughly recommend it.

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***Vision upon vision. Processes of change and renewal in Christian worship***

by George Guiver

Canterbury Press 2009

ISBN 978-1853119927

£21.99

**reviewer: Martin Gillard**

The author is on the teaching staff at the College of the Resurrection at Mirfield, West Yorkshire, and the Superior of the associated Community of the Resurrection, an Anglo-Catholic religious community within the monastic tradition.

The book looks at the changes and developments in Christian worship from the 'high church' perspective and asks 'How may we find true worship, the worship God has in store for us?'. Guiver attempts to do this by tracing

the changes in liturgical Christian worship with broad sweeps of history encompassing the early Christian basilicas, the liturgical reforms under Charlemagne in the 9th century, the Enlightenment and the Reformation and then the reforms of the 19th century liturgical movement. Alongside this he examines side questions such as the influence of local culture on worship and consideration of worship as drama.

The book falls into two clearly divided parts: *How we became this kind of worshipper*, dealing with the historical and social developments of worship, and *What kind of worshippers do we need to become?* In the first section the author does not hide his fondness for the liturgy of the 4th century basilicas, which he sees as a time when the Christianity had sorted and sifted the various early church processes and had come to a uniformity of practice he believes worth emulating. In the second section the author focuses more broadly on how to restore a sense of drama and experiential encounter to the liturgy while avoiding the danger of creating worship that simply satisfies our own personal desires.

This was not an easy book to read. The author seems to be talking in a language and about a subject far removed from average Baptist church life. Do

you know what an ‘ambo’ is, or a ‘ciborium’, a ‘synthronon’ or a ‘hebdomadery bishop’? Neither did I, until I got my dictionary out to help me! An ‘ambo’ is a kind of pulpit, a ‘ciborium’ is a canopy or arch over a church altar, and I am still trying to find out what the others actually mean.

More importantly for me, the book lacked any real engagement with the Bible as the foundation for Christian worship. The New Testament was dismissed as having too little to say and too diverse a pattern of worship—where perhaps we Baptists may argue that our worship is meant to be unrestricted by set forms and diverse according to culture and environment!

There was also no real engagement with the worship of the Old Testament, the Temple, and its continuing influence on Christian worship patterns. Celtic Christianity was seemingly dismissed as largely pagan, and the Reformation and Enlightenment both signified ‘catastrophe’. The great changes in contemporary Christian worship in the past 50 years were almost completely ignored. The author’s idea of worship is clearly very different from that of most Baptist Christian and perhaps this book could be more accurately described as ‘tradition upon tradition’ rather than ‘vision on vision’.

Having said that, it was well written and presented and may help answer some of the contemporary questions being asked about liturgical reform in the wider Anglo-Catholic community.

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***Reverse in ministry and missions: Africans in the dark continent of Europe***

Israel Olofinjana  
AuthorHouse 2010  
ISBN 978-1-4490-9549-9  
**reviewer: Olu Ogundiran**

Reading through this book reminds me of my first day in Britain. As I was waiting for the National Express bus that would take me to Bristol from the Terminal 3 bus station in Heathrow, I saw two young men engaged in a physical fight, and no-one made any attempt to separate them or intervene. As I waited there in shock, I remembered the word of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 5:9 and wondered if there is at least one Christian among the bystanders who desired to be called the ‘son of God’. Unfortunately, no-one seemed to be interested. This experience was a turning point in my life; I decided to answer the call of God into ministry without any further delay.

Although this book might look like an

historical rendition by an insider; to me it is more of a reminder of the challenge of our own time. The European missionaries who risked their lives to explore the unknown terrains of African, Asian and Arab continents for Christ in the past did so because of their commitment to the gospel in response to the challenges of their time. Now it is our turn. It does not matter where we come from or where destiny throw us or where the economic challenge of this global trend directs our search for greener pastures; we are there for God's mission.

Now is the time, God has invited Christians not only from Africa, but other continents to join him at work in Europe at a time when the continent is drifting away from the core values of its founding fathers. It is absolutely not an accident, but a divine plan necessitated by economic drive to be where God wants some missionaries of African origin to be. It is also very obvious that God has also prepared some of his British sons and daughters to facilitate this divine plan—for example, Nigel Wright and Pat Took have worked tirelessly to train and support some of these African missionaries in preparing them and facilitating ministry and mission works in Britain.

While the presence and influence of

African missionaries in Europe is a welcome idea, it should not be seen as an opportunity to build black congregations. Our missionary assignment should be open and within the context of our environment to attract indigenous people to come in and see, so that they can belong to the church of Christ. Any attempt to build 'African congregations for Africans' in Europe is contrary to the purpose of God for his church.

I commend this book to anyone who desires to have an informed understanding of African spirituality.

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### ***Christian doctrine***

Jeff Astley

SCM 2010

ISBN 978 0 334 04324 9

***reviewer: Colin Sedgwick***

I enjoyed this book. I was a little daunted at first by the title—was it something to knock Barth off his perch, perhaps, something to rival Moltmann or Rahner, Gunton or McGrath? The answer is no. Indeed, the full title conveys the book's much more modest aim: it is an SCM study guide, complete with questions, exercises and inset panels highlighting various aspects of Christian thinking. The style is easy and



readable, even colloquial.

That doesn't mean it is always plain sailing, and it is certainly not facile. But when you are dealing with topics such as the Trinity or the person of Christ or the complexities of religious language, nor should it be. The reader is expected to concentrate and to work hard.

Two aspects in particular appealed to me. First, Astley bends over backwards to be even-handed, refusing to push any party line: his emphasis is on description, not evaluation. I naturally gravitate to the hell/annihilationism debate, and was impressed by his fairness here (though interestingly John Hick gets literally the last word). But the same is true throughout. Names as diverse as Don Cupitt and C. S. Lewis, Schleiermacher and NT Wright rub shoulders in the index.

And that leads to the second thing: the book serves as a good introduction to the history of theological writing. Especially for those of us who have been away from formal study for a few years (or more!), it is helpful to be brought a bit up to date with the matter of who has been writing what since those far-off student days.

Who would benefit most from this book? I would confidently put it in the hands of someone about to embark on

a first degree in theology, though with the proviso that that they won't always find it easy and will need to return to certain parts of it for greater understanding after a year or two. But, as I have suggested, I also found it extremely helpful as a refresher for someone no longer fully in touch with scholarly theology.

Of course one could find fault. Occasionally I felt Astley hadn't explained something clearly, and once or twice perhaps he took a little too much for granted. But these are small quibbles about a very helpful book.

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***Bridgebuilders: workplace chaplaincy—a history***

Malcolm Torry

Canterbury Press 2010,  
ISBN 978-1-84825-036-9

***reviewer: Stephen Heap***

Malcolm Torry knows workplace chaplaincy from being a practitioner. He has written a readable and informative history with reference to key organisations, including the South London and the Sheffield Industrial Missions. He sets his history in the context of the church's response to secularisation, or, as he prefers, secularisations; this is a multifaceted phenomenon.

A helpful first chapter explores the secularisations which have taken place. Torry distils a lot of thinking into a clear and accessible overview, with subsections on, for example, state secularisation, the secularisation of ideas and desacralisation.

The book traces the history of workplace chaplaincy from the priests who served in Henry VIII's navy, through those who worked with the 'navvies' in the 19th century and the padres of two World Wars, to the major growth of industrial mission work post-WWII. He records the years of decline in the 1960s and 1970s with changing work patterns, increasing distance between the people and organised religion, and changing priorities in the church.

More than once he comments negatively on good work being stopped on the whim of a church leader. He ends on an optimistic note as he discusses recent and current work in shopping centres, the Millennium Dome, and the redevelopment of the Greenwich Peninsula, which is Torry's current work place. Due mention is made of Baptists such as C. H. Cleal and Thornton Elwyn, whose work was later built on by Ministry Department staff and others to help create a more positive attitude to sector ministry amongst Baptists than was once the case.

Perhaps Torry does not know of that work. Whether he does or not, he is critical of the denominations for 'cutting what can easily be cut, which means industrial mission posts'. He comments that 'the companies which do well during a recession are those which look around for new opportunities and pursue them passionately. This is precisely what the church has not been doing' during its 'recession'. Perhaps that is unfair bearing in mind, for example, 'Fresh expressions'. However, his pointing to the danger of a declining church focusing on its own survival rather than engaging with an increasingly secular world is timely. This book tells a story of how workplace chaplaincy has engaged, and continues to engage, with such a world.

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***Pastoral supervision: a handbook***

Jane Leach & J. Michael Paterson,  
SCM Press, 2010  
ISBN 978-0-334-04325-6

***reviewer: Jeannie Kendall***

I suppose every college tutor has a hobby horse, something on which every student will know his/her position because it is so regularly expressed! Mine is supervision. Pastoral ministry is perhaps the only helping

profession where one deals both with complex personal issues, often in very distressing circumstances, and with teams (deacons, elders *etc*) in which the dynamics are highly complex, yet one may have no form of supervision—no-one wiser and more experienced with whom to offload and share concerns; or to challenge one.

Though mentoring and supervision are not the same, the strengthening of mentoring in the NAM period has perhaps begun to help more ministers see the value of supervision. Pastoral supervision is defined on page one of this book as a 'relationship between two or more disciples who meet to consider the ministry of one or more of them in an intentional and disciplined way'. I can only hope that more and more ministers, throughout ministry not just in the first few years, will consider it as a vital part of ministry. I would not minister without it.

So having yet again espoused that particularly strong view, what of this book, addressing as it does this essential subject? (It is especially topical with the launch last year of the Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators (APSE).) It really is excellent. It is aimed at those who practice supervision in a wide sphere of ministry, including the training of students and supervision of

staff teams, but also to those who are thinking about its value. It does so with a clear explanation of supervision's function (as distinct from line management, counselling or spiritual direction); its context (each chapter begins with scripture and there is clear theological reflection throughout the book); and very helpfully looks at the practicalities (including exercises at the end of each chapter). The book does not shy away from difficult issues, such as those of power and the complexities of confidentiality where a supervisor (such as with a minister in training) may be expected to report back. The two authors, clearly experienced practitioners, have included a number of very helpful examples and the book, though including some quite complex theories, is very accessible.

Such is the scope and detail of this book that such a brief description does not really do it justice. I have already bought copies for my two colleagues and recommended it to the principal of my training institution. Perhaps the place to end is the calling, taken from a phrase in the Methodist ordination service and used in the dedication of the book, to 'watch over one another in love'. Would that we all had someone who did this for us: ministry would be a richer place.

# A letter about OI2U

by Graham Warmington

Sally Nelson, our editor, suggested that I write a short article about the *Of interest to you* column, or ‘OI2U’ as I tend to term it, to address (a) some critical remarks received over the past 12 months or so, and (b) concerns about confidentiality.

We know that OI2U is greatly appreciated—dare I say that it is often the first thing that readers of the *bmj* look at! Thus we don’t really want to lose the community aspect of the BMF that the column encourages, both in terms of keeping up with news of members, and for matters of prayer support.

At one time, the compilers of OI2U regularly contacted the Area Superintendents (now Regional Ministers) to ask for contributions, and would also receive direct contributions from readers. Because of confidentiality and the busy schedules of our RMs, I no longer contact the Associations on a regular basis. I now use three main sources: information sent from the Ministry Department (and therefore the National Settlement process); items in the *bt*; and the small number of individual requests sent directly to the *bmj* by BMF members. It has been suggested by some readers that all inclusions are personally checked before inclusion. I am afraid that such a requirement would probably mean the end of the column, because no-one could reasonably find time to do it!

I sometimes include items that may go beyond the normal brief, for pastoral reasons or because the matter is thought to be of general interest to the readership. I do not include matters for prayer regarding health or bereavement unless it comes directly from the person concerned or from the more public pages of the *bt*, though I do include matters of congratulation (golden wedding anniversaries *etc*) that have been sent by interested parties.

May I please ask the readers to bear with us regarding these issues? Mistakes are sometimes made, but generally speaking OI2U provides a wonderful service to the membership of BMF and therefore to the wider Baptist family.

If you have an issue with the column, could you contact me directly rather than sending your comments to Sally, the editor—and I will deal with them as soon as I can. Thanks for bearing with me, and may the column long continue.

Yours in Christ, Graham Warmington (warmington49@btinternet.com).