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From the editor

Be thou my vision

I was interested to hear on a media discussion recently that the constant exposure on Zoom, seeing oneself (albeit reversed!) on camera all the time, has been the cause of considerable unhappiness for many people. It is an unusual experience of intensive self-exposure, and in addition, 18 months of an unprecedented level of introspection as a result of being at home—possibly alone, but certainly without normal levels of companionship—may allow small things to become bigger than they should in our inner landscapes. There are many theories and theologies of the human person that explore our need to determine our sense of self through what is 'reflected back' from others. As we gaze for hours at the screen, what do we see and what do we seek? Left to ourselves too much, we lose perspective.

Many comparisons were made at the start of Covid with the national emergency of WWII, not all of which now seem appropriate. However, there may be a parallel in that the floods of post-Covid theological reflection could offer some helpful revelations about human being (as did the extensive theological reflection on Nazism) after this strange and unchosen way of life.

Above all, as ministers of the gospel we have the good news of Jesus to offer the world. We ARE made in God's image (not just the image we see on Zoom); we ARE forgiven; we ARE called to the ongoing work of justice and peace. The church probably will not be the same after Covid: but as long as Jesus is our vision, that will not matter.

I hope you enjoy the articles in this issue of *bmj*: further reflection on Brexit, our winning Prize Essay (congratulations to Misha Pedersen); articles on being Baptist, on corruption and a biblical exploration of Psalm 79. Plus news of colleagues and reviews of books. Please encourage others to join BMF and receive *bmj* regularly: we need one another more than ever.

Every blessing for the summer and for a new start in the autumn. *SN*

Brexit: a moment of revelation?

by Stephen Heap

Author: Rev Dr Stephen Heap is Emeritus Professor at the University of Winchester.

In January 2021 we had an excellent edition of *bmj* on Baptists and Brexit. At the time I was reading and reflecting on the Brexit debate and vote. I wanted to move beyond the polarities, to ask what Brexit revealed about Britain and England, and think through what response Christians might make. This paper is one fruit of that reflection. It is part personal story, part drawing on the literature.

During the Brexit campaign I was shuttling back and forth between the south-east of England and the old mill towns of Lancashire. I live and work in the former. My family live in the latter, including, at that time, my mum, increasingly in need of care. That life is different in the two areas is clear, as explored below.

I heard the messages from the Leave and Remain camps in both parts of the country. Both campaigns seemed shallow, inadequate, one obsessed with money, the other parroting near nonsense sound bites, each talking past the other without facing the issues their opponents raised.[1] Both were an insult to any proper democratic process.

I voted not to leave. My desire was to remain in the EU as an expression of the internationalism I perceive to be part of the neighbourliness the gospel calls for. I was also aware the EU is a flawed institution (inevitably so because human, and no more flawed than many others), and was worried by its democratic deficit. I am concerned about that as a Baptist, a tradition I see as creative and supportive of individuals having a say in shaping their lives. Democracy is as near as we have got to embodying that in systems of governance.

My first response to the referendum result was shock. Had people really been persuaded that Britain could 'take back control' and that this was the way to do it? There was probably some anger in me also, particularly around the inadequacies of the campaigns and their leaders. In the days following I read reports of increasing attacks on people from ethnic minorities with horror, shame and fear. I could easily see the whole Brexit movement as mired in racism and xenophobia. It became clear also that the result was raising questions about the future of the Union, which concerned me.

In time I began to take more stock of what was happening. I have been thinking about all the nations of the

UK. This paper is particularly about England, where I am and on which I have done most work.

Reports following the referendum showed that in England there was some correlation between areas which have suffered economically, such as the mill towns, and a strong Leave vote.[2] Of course, correlation does not establish causation. Even so, I came to suspect that listening to the views of people in such areas might reveal some important things about Britain, things needful of work whatever their connection to Brexit. Listening also seems a proper response to the gospel call to love the neighbour, including the neighbour who takes a different view, and the neighbour who may feel marginalised. The blessedness of the poor may lie in their ability to see things others do not. I therefore began to ask what was being said by people in those areas with concentrations of Leave voters, and what might result from bringing their perspectives into dialogue with the gospel.

Commentators such as Philip North, Bishop of Burnley, have highlighted something which seems important. Among Leave voters the rallying cry of the Leave Campaign, 'take back control', was influential.[3] My own sojourns in the mill towns around Burnley, trying and too often failing to get under-resourced, austerity-hit public services to do things for my mum, gave me enough experience of a lack of agency to know why people might warm to a campaign to gain more control over their lives. Getting work done on mum's ouncil flat or navigating my way through the health service was a nightmare, not usually through failures of the local staff, but of those who created policy and held power far away in the south-east. At times I felt powerless to get things done. This is, of course, nothing to do with the EU, but I reflect that the referendum provided an opportunity to raise a voice against the way things are in society. Some may also have seen a link between the EU, immigration, and poorer services. Whilst EU membership only had a direct impact on some forms of immigration, leaving the EU may have been seen by some as part of 'taking back control' of national borders with a view to reducing immigration from anywhere. Immigration is returned to later.

The issue of control has a significance beyond my own experience. Those towns were once mill towns. The mills provided jobs, money, nourished identity, gave people a place in the world and a way of contributing to society. The mills have gone, with fewer and different jobs replacing those lost; the mill where my mum was a weaver now houses a self-catering holiday agency.

When they were in trouble, the mills, unlike the banks more recently, were not considered too big to fail. Nor was the necessary resource put into regeneration when the mills closed. The choice was made to support some places in transition but not others. These towns, with all they had contributed to the wealth of the nation

through working 'king cotton' towns made up of people, families, homes, with traditions and culture, places I treasure, were powerless to stop the changes reshaping their lives. They have come to be called 'left behind' to use an evocative if patronising phrase. No doubt some did alright as society changed. Others did not, with negative impacts on health, power, wealth, opportunity, and control.[4] This was no longer the country the latter had known. They voted Leave.

They did so, suggests North, with a desire to 'take back control.' Maurice Glasman, quoted by North and someone who did research in the north -east of England, comes to similar conclusions.[5] Both indicate the defining issue for Leave voters was control, not money. It was about having a say in shaping life, even if they were hit financially. Having a say matters.

Some will doubt whether there is any connection at all between leaving the EU and control over the matters mentioned. It may be important to explore that, and to call people to account for things said in the referendum campaign. Truth matters. All are accountable to God and others for their actions and words. There are other things which can be done also. One is to recognise that, whether connected to the EU or not, there is a real problem here. People have less control over their lives and communities than they would like.

That is an issue in part to do with democracy, for in a democracy if people feel they not have enough say something is wrong. Democracy is, after all, about having a say, some agency, if not always control.

Research by the Bennett Institute Centre for the Future of Democracy is illuminating. It finds increasing dissatisfaction with democracy in many democratic countries, including the UK. It also finds a link between dissatisfaction and rising inequality, 'and the effect may be especially strong where entire regions of a country feel left behind'.[6] The discontent is also higher under some democratic systems than others; proportional representation systems fare better than 'first past the post' for example.[7] Listening to what people are saying suggests there may be things to address about how democracy is working. That may be an agenda Leavers and Remainers (who also need listening to!) can work on together.

The work of David Goodhart may help in pursuing such issues. He has researched and written on the characteristics of Leave and Remain voters. He uses the terms 'Somewheres' and 'Anywheres' to describe two 'tribes' inhabiting Britain.[8] The latter, he says, although forming only about 25% of the population, are the dominant group in society. Typically, they are graduates, mobile, with successful careers. They create their own sense of identity, based on educational and career

achievements rather than where they live or were born. They are 'citizens of the world',[9] internationalists, comfortable moving round and meeting new people, comfortable also with immigration in a globalising world. They have commitments to human rights and equalities, to causes such as the expansion of higher education and gay marriage. Their agendas tend to get taken forward.

'Somewheres' constitute around 50% of the population. Being rooted in a place and having a sense of belonging in that place, be it local community or nation, are important to people in this group. Goodhart characterises their identity as 'ascribed...Scottish farmer, working class Geordie, Cornish housewife'.[10] Rapid change, including groups moving in with different ways of doing things, can threaten their sense of belonging and identity; a stable, ordered world is more amenable than one marked by change. Many in this group have not had a university education. The jobs they would once have done have often either disappeared or now require a degree. With the disappearance of jobs comes a loss of economic security, loss of wellbeing and of a place in society associated with work. Such people are not surprisingly often uneasy about the trends which have brought these disturbing changes, so evaluate things such as globalisation, internationalisation, immigration and university education ('experts') in more negative ways than 'Anywheres'.

Broadly, 'Anywheres' voted Remain and 'Somewheres' Leave. Lest anyone be tempted to overstate what conclusions might be drawn, Goodhart is clear these are broad and fluid categories. Some individuals are rooted in one while also displaying characteristics of the other. Goodhart also has a third 'tribe', the 'Inbetweeners',[11] who sit somewhere between the other two. Life is always complicated! His work can, however, be a useful tool to aid deeper, if cautious, thinking about what the Brexit vote reveals about Britain.

Michael Sandel has done work along similar lines.[12] He focuses on the US but sees similarities with the UK and cites evidence from both. A central theme for him is 'ordinary citizens feeling disempowered'.[13] Sandel says that comes in part from the loss of older industries and the skilled, semiskilled and unskilled jobs they provided. He emphasises the loss of a stake in society and the ability to shape society which comes through the loss of a job and the collapse of the voluntary associations around the workplace which helped raise a voice for people. Their collapse weakens democracy.

Sandel holds the neoliberal marketisation and globalisation policies pursued by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher as responsible for much of this disempowerment. He also argues parties of the left, including New Labour in the UK, have not helped. While they did take some

steps to ameliorate the worst excesses of neoliberalism and provide help for people to succeed in a marketised society, they also accepted the neoliberal ordering of society in a way their traditional support base did not. Left-leaning parties on both sides of the Atlantic became distant from their natural supporters, leaving those for whom they once spoke disinherited and disempowered.

One thing Sandel emphasises is the idea that society has become more meritocratic. Those who have 'got ahead' are seen as having done so through their own efforts. They have put the work in, gone to university, been prepared to move, learned to live in the world as it is; a mobile, globalised world. They deserve their success. They have got there on merit. They might look down on those who have not got ahead in those terms, who may in turn come to think of themselves as having failed.[14] Sandel points out how different people fare is based on more than merit. People have different talents, some more marketable than others. Some are luckier than others. The affluent can buy support for their offspring; others cannot. It is not a level playing field. Typically, those who have not 'got ahead' in the meritocracy voted for Donald Trump and for Brexit.

Immigration has been alluded to already. It was an important part of the Leave campaign, with its 'Breaking Point' poster gaining notoriety and being rightly condemned. Goodhart argues that while 'there is a core of…racists' who are anti-immigrant, a much larger group of his 'Somewheres' are 'pro-immigrant but anti-mass immigration'. They are comfortable living alongside individuals or small groups who move in alongside them but object to the 'macro changes to their city or country' which mass immigration brings.[15] That is an important distinction, but it does not allow us to avoid questions about what role, if any, racism plays in creating dissonance with larger groups. Anthony Reddie's words in the January edition of *bmj* must not be forgotten.

The above is inevitably a partial and under-nuanced picture. I hope it aids reflection on what Brexit says about Britain and stimulates further thought, and articles. I turn now to some brief thoughts on the role of the church.

The church's work must always be rooted in its faith. The church therefore needs to engage theologically as well as analytically with our post-referendum context to shape its responses. Sandel has a fascinating section on how meritocracy arises from and is countered by Christianity; what might a Baptist evaluation of a meritocracy look like, and what action might that evaluation lead to?[16] Arguably, early Baptists in England helped foster moves towards democracy; what lessons emerge from that for today and what actions to enhance democracy might they lead to? Mindful that Brexit for some seems to have been about the nation taking

back control, over immigration for example, how do we Baptists evaluate the role of the nation-state? Are we moved by our faith towards nationalism and, if so, in what form? In England an important emerging question is what does it mean to be English?[17] What faith comment do we make into that question, and how does it relate to the work the BU is doing on diversity, ethnicity and discrimination which are clearly pressing? How does it relate to us being part of a church with members in all nations? What message do we wish to give to the wider nation out of these reflections? What actions might we take? Here are a few suggestions.

This article began with reflections on how divided Britain is. Within that some are suffering in material and other ways. The church must continue to care, running its foodbanks, debt counselling and other services. They provide lifelines for people in need. It is important also to analyse why people are suffering in these ways and to lobby for the change needed.

I have sought to explore the nature of the divisions England faces, suggesting that listening is important. Listening reveals how people see the world and enriches understanding of difference. The church is itself divided. It has within it rich and poor, Leavers and Remainers. It does not float above the conflict or provide a neutral space. It does provide a faith space in which members of one body might be encouraged to engage with the other who sees things differently and seek ways forward, however hard that might be. Within that, the gospel might suggest giving particular attention to those who feel not to have a voice. Perhaps twinning between churches in 'Somewhere' and 'Anywhere' communities could lead to growth in understanding and, with careful enabling, discerning of ways forward.

If such interactions give people a voice, they might be one way of contributing to revitalising democracy. At its best, democracy is about more than voting. It is an ongoing conversation between different parts of society about what good society might seek. Such a conversation might lead to action, to practical steps to bring change. The church, through bringing together people from different parts of society, can be a facilitator of such deliberative, or communicative, democracy and ensuing action.[18]

Seeking the good involves asking questions about what being a good society might involve. That cannot only be to do with national society: God's Kingdom is bigger than that. Our work for the good must involve thinking globally. It might be expected that a church following a Lord whose message centred on the ultimate good society, the Kingdom, would be focussed on such work. Sadly, that seems to be not always the case. Some refocusing of mission might be needed, carefully discerning what is our God-given mission in our divided

post-Brexit Britain. I hope this paper gives resources for working on that, as did those earlier in the year.

I am grateful to Professor Andrew Bradstock, Dr Jonathan Chaplin and Mr Peter West for comments on an earlier draft of this article. Remaining errors are mine alone. Andrew, Jonathan, Peter and I are working together on a project to theologically explore concepts of Englishness and English identity within Brexit Britain. If anyone would like to know more, please contact me on Stephen.heap@winchester.ac.uk

Notes to text

1. They both left voters 'woefully unprepared' argues Jonathan Chaplin. J. Chaplin, 'Absent without Leave. The case for the EU you never heard' in *The Future of Brexit Britain*, J. Chaplin & A. Bradstock (eds). London: SPCK, 2020, pp19-30, p19.
2. See for example, M. Goodwin & O. Heath, *Brexit Vote Explained: poverty, low skills and lack of opportunities* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016). https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/brexit-vote-explained-poverty-low-skills-and-lack-opportunities [accessed 3.6.21].
3. P. North, 'Brexit. Competing visions of nation' in Chaplin & Bradstock (eds), pp9-18, *eg* p9.
4. See R. Wilkinson & K. Pickett, *The Spirit Level,* London: Penguin, 2010, for research showing how inequality impacts negatively on many aspects of life.
5. North, 2020, p9.
6. R.S. Foa *et al*, The Global Satisfaction with Democracy Report 2020. Cambridge: Centre for the Future of Democracy, 2020, especially pp18-19. https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/media/uploads/files/DemocracyReport2020_nYqqWio.pdf (accessed 23.5.21).
7. Foa *et al*, p19. A. C. Grayling offers useful critiques of contemporary British Democracy. See his *The Good State,* London: Oneworld, 2020. Useful recent theological works on democracy include L. Bretherton, *Christ and the Common Good,* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019 and J. Chaplin, *Faith in Democracy,* London: SCM, 2021.
8. D. Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere. The New Tribes Shaping British Politics,* Penguin, 2017, especially pp3ff for an outline of how he characterises the two groups.
9. Goodhart, 2017, p5.
10. Goodhart, 2017, p3.
11. Goodhart, 2017, p4.
12. M. J. Sandel, *The Tyranny of Merit. What's Become of the Common Good?* London: Allen Lane, 2020.
13. Sandel, 2020, p17.
14. Michael Young showed in a prescient work that meritocracy has its dark side. See his *The Rise of the Meritocracy,* London: Thames & Hudson, 1958.
15. Goodhart, 2017, pp119-120.
16. Sandel, 2020, pp35ff.
17. A. Henderson & R. Wyn Jones, *Englishness: The Political Force Transforming Britain,* Oxford: OUP, 2021, is well worth reading about Englishness, though not a theological treatment.
18. Ideas about democracy as an ongoing conversation in pursuit of the common good are important in the work of Luke Bretherton. See L. Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics,* Chichester: John Wiley, 2010, including p52, where he draws on I. M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990, on deliberative and communicative democracy, and Bretherton, 2019.

Reshaping spiritual architecture: decentred worship and virtue in a post-lockdown world

by Misha Pedersen

Author: Misha Begitte R. R. Pedersen is an MiT at South Wales Baptist College, and a member at Kensington BC, Brecon. She won the bmj Essay Competition 2021.

In *After Virtue* (1981), Alasdair MacIntyre argues that morality has become detached from its underpinning teleology, leading to a highly emotive and subjective use of moral terminology, unmoored from its previously shared anchor points. MacIntyre (2007 (1981)) proposes that to escape the arbitrary and interminable nature of a morality built solely on private preferences, a return to virtue ethics is necessary to recover a coherent morality. Only in our communal context can we recover an understanding of virtue that is based on goals which transcend what is practically self-deception (McIntyre, 2007 (1981)).

This essay explores worship as a source of ethics in a world where, at least for a while, church left the building and familiar structures were disrupted. It does so by first introducing some main lines of the turn to liturgy in Christian ethics from the liturgical and the ethical perspectives in response to MacIntyre's claim. Secondly, it considers the critique of the turn to liturgy offered by Scharen (2000) who calls for engagement with, rather than rejection of, social science methods to test the proposed conceptual link between liturgy and morality. Finally, inspired by Blackburn's suggestion (2003) that just as we inhabit physical environments, so we also find ourselves in ethical environments that shape our values and responses, a brief exploration of the idea of sacred architecture in a spiritual sense follows, along with a recent example of decentred worship and virtue post lockdown. This essay concludes that the turn to liturgy in Christian ethics offers valuable insights and would benefit from continued research to explore the link between liturgy and ethics in various contexts and ends by proposing a tentative methodology for one such endeavour.

The turn to liturgy in ethics

During the late 1960s, James Gustafson called for a return to virtue ethics in response to generic and largely detached principles within ethics (Scharen, 2000). Around 1980, a turn to liturgy in Christian ethics emerges almost simultaneously from two of Gustafson's students, liturgist Don E. Saliers and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. Gustafson's engagement

with Catholic moral theologians in the wake of Vatican II had laid the foundation for a sufficiently shared frame of reference for protestant theologian Gustafson to have a significant impact on several of his Catholic students (Cahill, 2012). It is perhaps unsurprising that this move originated among those with a more sacramental view of worship, as Christian ethicists who turn to liturgy do so with an expectation that God will reveal Godself there (Hauerwas & Wells, 2006).

In *Liturgy and Ethics*, Saliers (1979) presents the claim that liturgy has an intrinsic, conceptual link with ethics. As affections are changed through participation in worship 'before the face of God', in a continual orienting oneself towards God, worshippers are formed into a radically different people (Saliers, 1979; Scharen, 2000). However, it takes careful examination to discover how and to what degree this takes place, for three main reasons: First, not everyone who takes part in liturgy approaches it as intended; secondly, other communities vie for worshippers' loyalty, making their lives contested space; and thirdly, only a thick description can reveal the intention and result of words and actions, which on a surface level are ambiguous (Scharen, 2000, pp279-281). Saliers encourages empirical work to examine how affections are changed through more or less faithful liturgies (Scharen, 2000).

Influenced by MacIntyre, ethicist Stanley Hauerwas calls for 'communities of character' (Hauerwas, 1981) to take themselves seriously as Christians (Hauerwas, 1983), so they reflect the shared values of people who serve a different Lord than the secular 'Caesar'. Worship is eschatological, ethical, and political in that it defines the space and time in which God reigns and God's values reflected. Hauerwas presents the view that rather than *have* a social ethics, Christian communities *are* a social ethics (Hauerwas, 1983, cited in Scharen, 2000). Hauerwas proposes that as communities explore the sort of communities they must be, best to convey God's stories to the world, and as they participate in and enact the story of God, they make that story *their* story too. In fact, they *become* the story and live it, whether they are in a situation of formal worship or not. For Hauerwas, character, not principles, is at the heart of things: the question is not so much one of determining how we should act as one of determining who we should be, individually and communally (Messer, 2006).

Like Saliers, Hauerwas calls for descriptive work in local contexts to understand how this takes place (Scharen, 2000). Hauerwas' initial formulation of these ideas in language specific to his Christian context gave rise to the claim that he was sectarian and that his theory did not correspond to reality in local, particular congregations (Messer, 2006), a critique which Hauerwas initially addressed by describing a board

meeting in his church as an example of how what might traditionally be termed 'worship' and 'social action' are in fact seen as the same story (Scharen, 2000). As we shall see, Hauerwas' reply does not satisfy all his peers, but rather gives rise to a more fundamental critique of his methods in this subfield, a critique to which we now turn our attention.

Evaluation of the turn to liturgy

In *Lois, Liturgy, and Ethics*, Scharen (2000) addresses an underlying conflict in Hauerwas' thinking. While calling for investigation of ethics in local churches, Hauerwas surprisingly rejects the very social science methods which might be used to achieve this task, as he finds them unsuited to theological research. He argues that the paradigm on which they are based cannot be reconciled with theological enquiry as the methodology precludes the insights being sought.

Scharen's critique of Hauerwas' stance centres around the inconsistency he perceptively uncovers, that while Hauerwas recognises that no description is value neutral, yet he claims that a 'naïve description' is not only possible, but preferable (Scharen, 2000, p284). Scharen laments this 'thin description' by Hauerwas for two reasons: First, his description of the liturgical practices in the local congregation is not detailed enough, and at times even all but absent, and secondly, a lack of complexity in Hauerwas' view of the surrounding culture means he fails to recognise the cultural plurality in which these local congregations exist. To address these issues, Scharen (2000) advocates critical engagement of, rather than rejection of, social science methods to test the proposed conceptual link between liturgy and morality in their particularity of context, and a rigorous listening process which gives worshippers a voice in the research in which they themselves are 'the data', a view further developed with colleague Vigen (Scharen, 2000, p285; Scharen & Vigen, 2011), in their book on Christian ethnography. With a reflexive awareness of bias and privilege, we can engage in a dialogue in which the researcher learns from the community in which she participates as observer and shares ownership of the outcomes, rather than approach communities as 'objects of study'.

Hauerwas, along with Wells, in the 2006 *Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, has compiled a number of contributions to Christian ethics structured around the eucharistic liturgy. Among them is Katongole's *Greeting: Beyond racial reconciliation* (Katongole, 2006). Referring to highly localised and personally lived experiences of racism and of the ethics of the practice of sharing the peace, Katongole beautifully engages in a more grounded approach, as he unpacks one of Gustafson's initial concerns: the detached ethics of rules and principles. Mere principles, Katongole argues, will tend to perpetuate and legitimise issues around race, because it is assumed

that racism is and always has been part of the human condition. Unless some way is discovered of going beyond this idea, even proposed solutions become mapped on this flawed assumption (Katongole, 2006). It is in our practices that ethics is at work and solutions are found, Katongole proposes, as, using Sallie McFague's terminology, he describes worship as 'Wild Space' (Katongole, 2006). In the potential of wild spaces that do not conform to the dominant societal narrative, opportunities exist to unlearn racism as we learn to see ourselves as God's gifts to each other. As congregations gather which have already been gathered by God, God's initial greeting of peace vertically results in horizontal greetings which open doors to a world beyond mere racial reconciliation and 'tolerance' as an alternative ethics is enacted which transcends mainstream expectations and may enable a wider range of responses in everyday situations (Katongole, 2006).

As 'informal ethnography', Katongole's experiences and insights are valuable, yet Scharen and Vigen (2011) argue that a more rigorous ethnographic approach is required to confront researchers (and practitioners) with the hidden issues and unconscious biases that may perpetuate existing injustice and power structures which should righty be challenged as the reflexive researcher (and practitioner) seek to overturn their own privilege and answer questions not only around 'what is' but also of 'why' and 'what ought to be' (Scharen & Vigen, 2011).

Indeed, as we have seen, worshipping communities are storied communities whose members are part of an ongoing struggle for power and truth. Depending on the stories which are told and enacted, loyalties may shift, worship become less faithful and idolatry creep in. Drawing on research by Penny Edgell Becker into what she terms 'congregational models', Scharen (2000) suggests that it is the dominant identity of the worshipping community which shapes the morality of its members in tension with competing identities in other spheres. Scharen further proposes that liturgies are most formative during periods of personal or congregational flux, while in more stable conditions, liturgies can be more helpfully thought of as embodiments of existing narratives (Scharen, 2000). He centres the conversation on a less linear view of the link between communities, liturgies, and ethics than he perceives Saliers and Hauerwas to have done.

According to Scharen, communities legitimise and frame their liturgies, even as they are also shaped by them (Scharen, 2000). Scharen thus highlights the importance of the wider social and structural context which influences the witness of worshipping communities, as participants are simultaneously part of many narratives which may overlap or conflict in innumerable ways. It is to this idea of the lives of worshippers as contested space that we now turn our attention.

Spiritual architecture of spaces

In *Being Good*, Simon Blackburn introduces the idea of 'ethical environments' (Blackburn, 2003). Just like we are surrounded by physical environments, so we live in ethical environments that provide a sense of what is acceptable, what we ought to give and receive, and when we should feel proud or ashamed of ourselves (Blackburn, 2003). It is, Blackburn says, 'a surrounding climate of ideas about how to live' (Blackburn, 2003, p 1).

If Blackburn is right, then it may make sense to also talk of the spiritual and ethical architecture and landscape of these environments. As we move through our liturgies, performing and rehearsing them, we encounter something of God's character and will in that space. Increasingly, we develop a sensitivity to sacred values, obstacles, pillars, vaults and walls as we navigate this domain, sometimes, as it were, bumping into an unexpected feature, learning the number of steps from one position to another, and becoming familiar with the optimal pace for intelligibility in the particular acoustics of this space. As an unseen building, continually being extended, collapsing, and needing repair, the kingdom, the place where God reigns, is nestled between other structures, in places partly overlapping on different levels with neighbouring domains, in other places almost indistinguishable from the very earth from which it seems to grow.

If we think of worship as 'Wild Space' (McFague, cited in Katongole, 2006) and if we accept Scharen's claim that change takes place during periods of flux, then online worship during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown meets the criteria. Instead of the usual layout of chairs and lectern at Kensington Baptist Church in Brecon, Wales, Zoom presented us with visually equal squares for each person and decentred our usual expectations. A desire for more multivoice participatory worship had already emerged and as lockdown became a reality, this process was accelerated by seeing the situation as a 'difficult gift'.

Rather than opt for livestreaming, every worshipper was encouraged to bring an song, verse or testimony to the service in a 'bring-and-share' format. In part born out of necessity, it was also a reflection of our understanding of what it means to be a Spirit-filled body of Christ. Values were continually modelled, debated and refined in an iterative process of listening, doing liturgy and reflecting together on what we encountered in this new worship space—treasured old wineskins, hoped-for spaciousness, and voices suddenly heard in the new acoustics as walls were knocked down and the ceiling raised, but also the limitations of imagination and technology we bumped into.
Worshippers normally silent or silenced in worship gradually found their feet, as we all felt our way forward together. New viewpoints were offered that brought life to all. The occasional awkward silence was, with a touch of grace, generally

blamed on the software or, at times, received as a God-given moment to listen. A need to 'dethrone' ourselves to make room for true, life-giving diversity and joint discernment of the landscape God has placed us in and the best way to travel through it has become less easy to avoid, and worship is, in a more real way, the place where we rehearse for life (Duck, 2013). As lockdowns ease and worship spaces are recontested by other allegiences, how much of this new architecture will be kept? Time, and hopefully more research, will tell.

Conclusion

Perhaps part of the work of resident ethicists and theologians as well as researchers is the art of coming to know the crypts, the crevices and the choir well enough to introduce others to those wild spaces where unseen doors can be opened and to allow for collisions. Some of us are more perceptive to these unseen structures than others, and so can interpret, as all good guides, certain qualities of this sacred architecture which would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Comparing the here-and-now with the eventual eschatological ethics; and comparing the 'deposits of grace' in particular locales (Kapolyo, 2019) with each other might usefully sharpen our awareness of our ethical and spiritual environment and the ways in which the lordship of Christ is expressed and has yet to be expressed, as along the lines of MacIntyre's original call for a return to a teleologically based virtue ethics, communities continually assess their current state and their potential in a way that is, ideally, highly contextual and anchored in the character of God as revealed in Christ. As storied communities continue to perform liturgy and be a living ethic in spaces that offer both limitations and opportunities, with attention it may become clearer how being good disciples of Christ will look in this particular place—whether online or in a building.

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Christians and corruption

by Martin Allaby

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Corruption is an uncomfortable subject for many Christians because, when we take a hard look at ourselves, we discover that we are part of the problem more often than we are part of the solution. If that shocks you, please read on!

What do we mean by corruption? There is no universally agreed definition, but many people use this one from Transparency International: 'the abuse of entrusted power for private gain'. This definition includes both legal and illegal behaviour; the public and private sectors; and visible forms of corruption, such as bribery, as well as less visible forms, such as cronyism. The damaging effects of corruption on whole economies, and especially on the poor, is summed up succinctly in this statement from the president of the World Bank:

Corruption is, quite simply, stealing from the poor. It undermines growth and prosperity twice over—not only in the act of siphoning away resources from their intended purposes, but in the long-term effects of services not delivered—vaccines that are not received, school supplies that are not delivered, roads never built. In my travels around the world, I have seen the corrosive impact of corruption on the lives of the poor and the resulting sharp decline of trust that citizens have in their governments.[1]

The Bible and corruption

A Christian spent a year reading through the Bible twice, noting the passages that are relevant to corruption.[2] These passages appear in a wide range of the books in the Bible. They are found most frequently in Proverbs and the Prophets, followed by the New Testament, the five books of the Law and the Psalms. He concluded that the Bible passages that talk about corruption fall into five main categories:

Bribery. For example, Micah 7:3—*Officials and judges alike demand bribes. The people with influence get what they want, and together they scheme to twist justice.*

Denial of justice, particularly in relation to rulings in court. For example, Isaiah 10:1-3—*What sorrow awaits the unjust judges and those who issue unfair laws. They deprive the poor of justice and deny the rights of the needy among my people. They prey on widows and take advantage of orphans.*

Oppression, including arbitrary behaviour outside the law. For

example, Ezekiel 45:9—*For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: Enough, you princes of Israel! Stop your violence and oppression and do what is just and right. Quit robbing and cheating my people out of their land. Stop expelling them from their homes, says the Sovereign Lord.*

Gaining wealth by unjust means. For example, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10—*Don't you realise that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who…are thieves, or greedy people…or who cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God*.

Dishonesty. For example, Zechariah 8:16-17—*But this is what you must do: Tell the truth to each other. Render verdicts in your courts that are just and that lead to peace. Don't scheme against each other. Stop your love of telling lies that you swear are the truth. I hate all these things, says the Lord.*

Two kinds of kingship

In recent years secular social scientists have come to see corruption not as a problem of a few bad apples deviating from the norm of integrity, but as the normal way in which power is exercised in most societies. This should not surprise readers of the Bible. 1 Samuel 8 provides a succinct description of the corrupt way in which rulers have operated throughout most of history, and continue to operate in many countries today, which is as a kind of legalised protection racket: people accept being economically exploited by their rulers, in exchange for a degree of protection from violence. In 1 Samuel God warns them (vv11-17) that any king will commandeer their sons and daughters, confiscate their land, tax them, take their servants and their animals for his personal use, and ultimately they will all become slaves of the king; 'When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day'. God's warning cuts no ice with the Israelites, because their overriding concern is physical security (vv19-20): 'We want…a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles'. The Israelites accept being economically exploited by their king, in exchange for a degree of protection from violence.

As Christians we rejoice to know that Jesus is nothing like the selfish king predicted for the Israelites by Samuel. He is instead the king who perfectly reflects the character of God: 'He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty'.

Even when self-interest and selfish use of power seem to have the upper hand, we should still be confident that justice will ultimately prevail, because Jesus will bring it about when he returns as King. My favourite way of expressing that hope is through (a slight adaptation of) something that Archbishop Desmond Tutu used to say while holding up his Bible during the years of apartheid in South Africa: 'I

have read this book to the end, and God wins!'

Why aren't Christians more involved in fighting corruption?

A few years ago, a Christian colleague published this critique of the lack of engagement by religious, including Christian, organisations in the fight against corruption:

Surprisingly, corruption is receiving far more attention from 'secular' organisations than religious ones. While faith leaders and organisations are increasingly engaged across much of the development agenda, particularly in the areas of HIV/AIDS and education, they are generally less active in the governance and anti-corruption arena. Given corruption's profound moral and social justice dimensions, religious groups should be at the forefront of this struggle.[3]

For nearly 20 years I have been listening, either informally or as part of a formal research project, to explanations about why Christians are not particularly engaged in fighting corruption. Although a limited theology (the idea that God is only interested in saving souls to send to heaven) is often part of the problem, there are a number of much more down-to-earth explanations, as follows.

- *You might be accused of hypocrisy.* Many Christians I have interviewed admit to problems of corruption within churches. It has been estimated that US$50 billion per annum may be stolen from money that Christians give to churches, para-church organisations, and secular organisations around the world.[4] I vividly remember having lunch with an African evangelical leader in 2006, as I was about to design some country case studies looking at ways in which Protestants might be helping to reduce corruption. He warned me that I might be disappointed if I came to Africa, telling me that in his country the churches were high on the government's list of institutions that should be investigated for corruption.
- *Your church might lose money.* A Nigerian Christian told me that any pastor who knows that a wealthy member of their congregation obtained their wealth through corrupt means will be reluctant to preach against it, because they know that wealthy member can move to another church that won't make them feel uncomfortable.
- *You might be killed.* Among the 101 people I have interviewed formally about fighting corruption, three were survivors of assassination attempts. Jovita Salonga, former President of the Philippine Senate, was critically injured in a bomb attack after conducting enquiries into government corruption. David Gitari, former Anglican Archbishop of Kenya, survived an attempted lynching after campaigning against electoral abuses. A Zambian church leader described a drive-by shooting after he refused to support the president's campaign for re-election.
- *You might lose your job.* A South Korean Christian who worked as a tax

official described what happened after he decided to stop asking for bribes. He no longer had any bribe money to pass up the line to his boss, so he was punished by being transferred to a remote region, with no schooling for his children.

• *It takes too long to change anything.* Although there are exceptions, such as Singapore, commentators observe that real improvements in the control of corruption typically take one or two generations. This is not an activity for those who demand quick results.

• *It is difficult to evaluate impact.* Even when measures of corruption improve, as happened with Transparency International's CPI score for the Philippines in the context of substantial anticorruption efforts by Christians, it can be challenging to prove cause and effect.

• *It is much easier to ignore corruption and start an aid project instead.* Not only can you avoid all the problems above, but the beneficiaries of your project will be grateful, and if you get donor funding you can create jobs for local Christians. However, there are two big problems with this approach. First, in most countries the resources that the government raises locally from taxes and charges vastly exceed the total amount of aid the country receives from all sources. So if Christians really want to help the poor, then focusing on aid, rather than on what the government does with its own resources, is missing the main issue. The second big problem, is that corruption hinders economic growth and perpetuates poverty. In short, when Christians allow themselves to be preoccupied by aid, rather than focusing on fighting corruption where that is a realistic option, they may actually be perpetuating poverty.

How can Christians help to control corruption?

Recent scholarship by a leading researcher in this field (who, as far as I know, is not a Christian) indicates that both strong values and collective action, involving both a majority of active public opinion and at least a fraction of the elite, are essential to progress in controlling corruption.[5] Reform depends on the presence of widely diffused social norms that constrain corruption: people need to feel that their peers will think less of them if they behave corruptly. Reform also depends on local elites who spur progress by adding their voice to demands for better governance, or by facilitating improvements to governance from positions of power within the state. Change typically takes decades not years, and is often fiercely opposed, so sustained effort and courage are required.

These research findings indicate that a spiritually healthy global Christian community can help to reduce corruption in several different ways.

1. Churches can help constrain corruption by internalising anticorruption values through teaching and modelling good governance; by promoting responsible and engaged citizenship; and by leveraging their

social networks to foster collective action. For example, Beza International Ministries have established the Africa Arise Ethical Charter and the Africa Arise Network—a database of business people who want to conduct their business affairs with a high level of personal integrity and excellence.[6] This opens up the prospect of a corruption-free alternative to doing business in Africa.

2. Christian NGOs in a few majority Christian countries have been effective advocates for better governance. For example, ASJ Honduras has trained thousands of citizens across the country to know their rights and to hold governments schools accountable for providing their children with an education. By monitoring the attendance and performance of teachers across the entire country, the number of days children spend in class each year has increased 125 to over 200, and teachers missing from classrooms have dropped from 26% to 1%.[7]

3. Elites in many majority Christian countries define themselves as Christian, and when they learn to connect their private faith with their public role, they can help to facilitate improvements to governance from positions of power within the state. For example, in the Philippines the Fellowship of Christians in Government works with generals in the armed forces and the police, and with senior public servants in key government departments. This approach helped to ensure a free and fair presidential election in 2010.

All of these examples depend on many people working together to fight corruption, which is what we mean by collective action. All the evidence suggests that individuals acting in isolation are unlikely to make an impact on corruption; collective action is the key.

A call to repentance and action

Despite the inspiring examples described above, the sad fact remains that, on the whole, the global Christian community is failing to realise its potential contribution to fighting corruption. The subject is rarely addressed in Christian teaching; church leaders may even be benefiting from corrupt practices; the behaviour of Christians at all levels of society often reflects prevailing norms rather than Christian ethics; and only a very small minority of Christian NGOs are engaged in advocacy for better governance. God can use the global Christian community to help control corruption, but only if we do three essential things.

1. Model values of fairness and honesty in our leadership roles and social interactions.
2. Promote a socially engaged theology that emphasises both justice and integrity.
3. Build sustainable collective action against corruption norms and structures in our societies.

May God help us to glorify Him by being salt and light in our communities! If you would like to find out more about this important but neglected topic, please take a look at any of the resources listed below.

Christian resources and networks for integrity and anti-corruption

*The Faith and Public Integrity Network https://fpinetwork.org/

* The Lausanne and World Evangelical Alliance Integrity and Anti-Corruption Network https://www.globalintegritynetwork.org/

* G. Gordon & M. Lawson, *Why Advocate on Governance and Corruption?* Teddington: Tearfund, 2012. (https://learn.tearfund.org/~/media/files/tilz/topics/why_advocate_on_governance_and_corruption.pdf)

* R. Osburn Jr, *Taming The Beast: Can We Bridle The Culture Of Corruption?* St Paul, MN: Wilberforce, 2016.

Notes to text

1. Jim Yong Kim, 'Tackling Corruption to Create a More Just and Prosperous World'. Speech to the Anti-Corruption Summit. London, 2016. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2016/05/12/remarks-by-world-bank-group-president-jim-yong-kim-at-anti-corruption-summit-2016.
2. R. King, *Confronting Corruption: Letting the Bible Speak*. Oxford, Regnum Books, 2018.
3. R. Laver, '"Good news" in the Fight Against Corruption' in *Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 2010, **8**(4),49-57.
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7. For a short video describing this initiative, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8GOPfCGHFI

Death of a 'Baptist' Union

by Ted Hale

Author: Ted Hale was baptised in 1953. Hated school, but since leaving he never stopped studying. Ordained 1970, semi-retired 2007. Aim in life and ministry: informed by the life of Jesus, to be a critical, pastoral companion.

Recently I have examined three constitutions. First, the model Constitution recommended by the Baptist Union for any Baptist church applying to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). Second, that of a Regional Baptist Association. Third, the proposed 2021 shortened form of the BU Constitution. All three confirm for me that the life I once shared in a 'Baptist' denomination has been taken away. Baptists have been disenfranchised, not by any act of

malice, but by uncritical conformity to cultural norms.

Wendell Berry: *The Art of the Commonplace*

Alongside reflecting on these constitutions, I was reading *The Art of The Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry.*[1] Berry's work is American, and in some ways dated. But I would highly commend it as a perceptive, challenging, Christian critique of the dominant, dominating and destructive economic and pseudo -political culture of late 20th/early 21st century, in which large and unaccountable corporations strip the land and rob people of their heritage and the freedom of involvement in shaping their own lives. Berry speaks with a prophetic voice out of first-hand experience of the demise of the small farms and agricultural communities (or commonwealths) in which he was raised and to which, after a notable academic career, he returned. My empathy with Berry was instinctive, because the 'Baptist world' in which I was raised has been destroyed by parallel forces.

Berry asks (p267) if we can remove cultural value from one part of our lives without destroying it also in the other parts. His answer is, although such distinctions can be made theoretically, they cannot be preserved in practice. Values may be corrupted or abolished in only one discipline at the start, but the damage must sooner or later spread to all. It can no more be confined than air pollution. If we corrupt agriculture, we corrupt culture, for in nature and within certain invariable social necessities we are one body, and what afflicts the hand will affect the brain. If we, as Baptists, lose our principles—our values—the church as a whole will be the poorer—and so will the lives of our members, churches, our local communities, and national and world politics and economies. Some might recognise this as closely related to 'the butterfly effect'. Others will recognise the message in 1 Corinthians 12.

Make no mistake, all levels of Baptist life have been subjected to unhealthy cultural accommodation. The whole denomination needs to repent—by which I mean to change to a direction and values which are more in keeping with being servants in God's kingdom—not imitators of the world's fallen idols and institutions.

'Baptist?' Assemblies

Let me give some examples of where the world's culture has taken over our denomination's life. For many years I went to the Baptist Union Assembly. This was a gathering of representatives of churches for shared, reverent worship, to elect the officers of the Union, and to conduct business relevant to the life of Baptist churches and often proposed by them. All this was gradually, though not slowly, eroded. I went one year and the worship had turned into a pop-concert—with the people conducting worship 'magnified' by a

large array of illuminated cubes. It seemed so demonstrably countercultural to 'My soul doth magnify the Lord'! Out of loyalty, I continued to attend Assemblies; but then attended an Assembly which turned into something akin to a Nuremberg rally. We were told by the chair of the meeting that it would be good if we all stood and applauded to confirm the re-election of the 'Secretary'—just as the BU Council had done! The intended spectacle of mass enthusiasm was deflated at least a little by raising a point of order, asking if such behaviour was really acceptable. There were clearly those who agreed it was not—but the die had been cast.

The 'Baptist?' Union/'Baptists?' Together

Highly significant, is that Baptist Assemblies no longer include a business meeting with any items proposed by the churches. Why? Because the Baptist Union is no longer a union of churches in name or practice or constitution: the business of the amorphous 'Baptists Together' is no longer 'the churches' business'.

This is very clear in the shorter BU constitution proposed for adoption in 2021. I quote:

4. THE OBJECT OF THE UNION 4.2 To spread the Gospel of Christ by ministers and evangelists, by establishing Churches, forming Sunday schools, distributing the Scriptures, issuing religious publications, and by such other methods as the Council shall determine.

6. ALTERATION OF THE CONSTITUTION This Constitution may be amended by a resolution of BUGB CIO acting by its trustees.

7. THE CHARITY TRUSTEE The administration and governance of the Union shall be the responsibility of BUGB CIO (acting by its trustees) as sole charity trustee.

If you read the whole constitution, you will find that there is no place or role in the constitution for churches. Paragraph 2 says it all:

2 CONSTITUENCY The Union shall consist of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (charity number 1181392 and its successors in title) ('BUGB CIO') as its sole member.

Regional 'Baptist?' Associations

Sadly, this centralisation of control and decision making is institutionalised by constitution at all levels of British Baptist life, including our Associations. I recently discovered that our Baptist Association 'Council' has ultimate, unquestionable authority to determine who can be members of the Association, and what business the members may conduct. I suspect that when this constitution was adopted, it was a 'model' constitution, which others will have also adopted in good faith that it would be 'Baptist' in spirit and letter. It is not. Just a couple of examples.

First, if a church applies to be a member, paragraph (iii) reads:

An application for membership will be considered by the Council, which is

authorised to accept or reject. A decision on new members will be ratified at the following general meeting.

Not only does the constitution give this absolute power over membership to the Council, it determines in advance that a general meeting will agree with their decision, and it gives no avenue for appeal by the applicant if the council decide to reject an application. Even our in-house drama group has an appeal procedure.

Second, you might think that if some of the member churches of the Association felt the decision should be questioned, they could bring the matter to a general meeting. You would be wrong. With regard to Meetings of the Association, the constitution says:
The business of the Annual General Meeting shall be to appoint Moderator and Treasurer, to receive annual accounts and ratify elected Council members and such other business as is from time to time agreed by Council.

In other words, the Council have complete control of the Agenda. There is no constitutional provision for member churches to even request an agenda item at any meeting of what is supposed to be their Association.

The regional Association Constitution states that a requirement for membership is that a member church:
Hold the members' meeting central to the decision-making of the church. Unfortunately, this principle does not apply to the Association itself (or the BU). At both national and at regional level the constitutions support a totalitarian regime.

'Baptists?' Think Big
Of course, I have to say 'regional' not 'local' level. In our Baptist structures: we do not any more have a local level. I won't rehearse the arguments I made for the retention of county associations when for 'economies of scale' they were abolished; but I have seen no evidence which suggests the upsizing of associations resulted in any upgrade in associating, Indeed, in a number of ways this 'economy of scale' has been detrimental to inter-Baptist church relationships. How can a church in Hertfordshire possibly share the kind of intimate history of mutual respect and pastoral concern with a village church in Northamptonshire which county associations fostered?

Berry has a chapter (pp81-90) called *Think Little* in which he says, big corporations will never be bound to the land by the sense of birthright and continuity, or by the love that enforces care. He also has a chapter (pp262-69 with the title, *A Bad Big idea*. Throughout Berry's work there is a damning indictment of the thought that 'Big' is better *per se* and stacks of evidence that it is most commonly disastrous. Incidentally, the much vaunted 'clusters' never materialised. We were told 'big will be better'. It was a lie, and we are the poorer for it.

The Local 'Baptist?' Church

Even if they no longer have any significant role in national or regional institutions and constitutions, we do still have local Baptist churches. However, they are not safe from the infection of creeping totalitarianism.

Many churches with good reason will be applying to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). But they should be wary of the constitution the BU is advising churches to adopt. For example, in this new constitution, which will govern the way the church functions, the word 'deacon' has been replaced almost completely by the word 'Trustee'. True, there is a footnote which says that a trustee is either a minister or a deacon, but tellingly, (I quote) paragraph 13.3.4 'The notice for the AGM must include…details of persons standing for election or re-election as charity trustee'.

We are no longer electing 'Baptist deacons' whose spiritual wisdom is paramount, we are electing 'legal trustees' who can demonstrate administrative competence. When a church stops electing people to be deacons and elects them to be trustees, it has stopped being 'Baptist'.

But there is worse to come. The purpose of these 'trustees' according to the constitution is clearly stated in 14.1.1. 'The Church Members' Meeting shall appoint Charity Trustees…to be responsible for the governance of the Church'.

Notwithstanding that Baptist churches do not appoint trustees, they elect deacons, in this paragraph at least, the church meeting is central. But the BU chose to alter this balance in the succeeding paragraph (14.1.2.):

Subject to any specific or general directions of the Church Members' Meeting and the provisions of this constitution the Charity Trustees shall take responsibility for the control management and administration of the Church.

So, the church meeting is there in the background, but the trustees under this constitution will 'take control'.

In fairness, the BU (in discussion with the consulting solicitors) will agree to para 14.1.2 reflecting 14.1.1 rather than increasing the power or control of the trustees. My question is, how could such an 'un-Baptist' paragraph be inserted at all? My answer is that this totalitarian mentality is systemic. And I suspect the BU will only respond to an individual church's request to amend this constitution. It is unlikely to be redrafted for all those seeking CIO status.

Control

Berry is instructive with regard to 'control'. He says (p230) 'control' is a word more than ordinarily revealing, for its root meaning is to roll against, in the sense of a little wheel turning in opposition. The principle of control, then, involves necessarily the principle of division. William Blake understood this as evil, and he spoke of 'satanic

wheels' and 'satanic mills': 'Wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic/ moving by compulsion each other'. By 'Wheel without wheel', Blake meant wheel outside of wheel, one wheel communicating motion to the other in the manner of two cogwheels, the point being that one wheel can turn another wheel outside itself only in direction opposite to its own. This, I suppose, is acceptable enough as a mechanism. It becomes 'satanic' when it becomes a ruling metaphor and is used to describe and to organise fundamental relationships. But this is increasingly what we have in all our so-called Baptist relating.

'Baptist?' Leaders

I began this article by suggesting that an uncritical submission to cultural conformity is found at all levels of Baptist life. I shall not go so far as mentioning how this is true for many church members: but it is irritatingly true of us, Baptist ministers. Again, I will not rehearse my long, passionately held, and biblically based objections to being called a 'leader'. I do my best to be a pastor, a preacher, a minister, a servant of the church, a witness in the community, a faithful 'follower' of Jesus. To be called 'leader' gets in the way of every one of these. Partly because there are many people who would gladly press me into such a role and thus avoid their own calling and responsibility towards their neighbours—and to work out their own salvation in fear and trembling. But also, because it is a misnomer. In these roles I am not a leader—I am a co-worker, a companion, a servant, a Baptist minister!

The title 'leader' implies the right to exercise or take 'control' and determine the direction of travel for those who will be expected to follow. That is completely in keeping with the dominant, centralised-control mentality in our un-Baptist union. Jesus did say 'follow me'—but it was a call to follow his example of a healing ministry, to follow his way to the Father, to take to heart his message that he was among them as 'one who serves'. Just as he ministered to them as he washed their feet, so they were to be ministers to each other—and any idea of being a 'leader' showed how little they had understood of Jesus' countercultural living and dying.

A 'Baptist?' Future for the UK

If I am honest, I do not expect to see significant 'repentance' in Baptist life any time soon—there are too many people who have been nurtured, and whose lives are invested, in the present system. But as one of the prophets said, 'If no one preaches, how will they hear?' Mind you, the prophet also said, 'They have ears, but will not listen in case they should turn and be converted!' Berry, in his work, extolled the value of wilderness. Perhaps I am just the voice of one crying in it. But at the moment, I would rather be outside the system than in it.

Note to text

1 *The Art of The Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2002.

Psalm 79: a cry for revenge or for justice?

by Hetty Lalleman

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The entire Old Testament discusses issues of justice and injustice, but also retribution and vengeance. For this article I have selected a rather unknown Psalm, namely Psalm 79. Is this a psalm of revenge? That is how many people read it, and then they conclude that the Psalm is irrelevant for us Christians. Yet the Psalm is definitely worth a closer look.

The psalmist immediately addresses God, and throws at him a whole list of problems that have overcome him and his people:

- 'the nations', pagans (*goyim*), unclean people, 'have invaded your inheritance';
- they have desecrated your holy (!) temple (v1);
- the corpses of your (!) servants, of your favoured people have simply been left for the animals (v2);
- they have carried out a massacre around Jerusalem (v3).

If something like this happens in the US or Afghanistan, the newspapers and social media are full of it, and we will be talking about it for years to come. When we read this in the Old Testament we think, 'Oh well, that's the Old Testament, that's full of wars...'. What the psalmist describes is heartbreaking. It's not just about those who lost their lives, it's about the people of God and God's honour that is deeply offended. What was sacred, is disgraced and trampled.

In our time Jews read Psalm 79 aloud in the synagogue on the 9th day of the month Ab, when they commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem (including that of AD70). This song was probably written by an eyewitness not long after the fall of Jerusalem in 587BC. The complaints in vv1-4 are followed by the pressing question in v5: 'How long, Lord?'.

The Psalm has the following pattern:

A vv1–4: complaint
B v5: question
C vv6–9: prayer for retribution
B v10a: question
C vv10b–13:prayer for retribution and recovery

The prayers to God which follow v5 have several aspects: they contain requests for atonement, redemption and retribution. The poet does not deny the guilt of his own people (v9). At the same time he begs God to

intervene. This intervention will work both ways: it will bring judgement on the enemies of God's people, and for that people themselves it will mean rescue and salvation.

God-centred

The intercessions in this psalm often make the connection with God himself: the nations who acted in this way do not know God and his Name (v6). The contempt that has come upon God's people (v4) is in fact contempt of God (v12). Therefore salvation and retribution of the evil done will affect the honour of God's name; as v9 says, ‘Help us for the glory of your name, deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake’. ‘Why would the nations (Gentiles) say, "Where is their God?"’ (v10a).

The result of God's intervention will therefore be that God is praised forever (v13). Throughout the psalm, the covenant between God and his people is present in the background. They are called 'your servants', 'your faithful', 'your people', 'the sheep of your pasture'. And it is the honour of God himself that is affected when his children are afflicted.

It strikes me that the author of this psalm has no intention to take the law into his own hands. The address of his complaints is God, who will eventually act as judge. What the poet asks from him still seems harsh to us, but we should not confuse it with what he himself would really like to do to the enemies. He cries out his own helplessness to God. The enemies have ‘poured out’ blood, now let God ‘pour out’ his wrath (vv3,6: the same Hebrew verb). It is clear that this psalm is not about personal resentment or vengeance. It's not about one person hating another. These are collective issues, community issues, which are closely linked to God's covenant with his people; a people that has been hurt in their deepest being.

God’s judgement

It is striking that similar prayers occur in Revelation, a book in which many Old Testament expressions are picked up again. Here's what Revelation 16:5-6 says:

You are just in these judgments, O Holy One,
you who are and who were;
for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.

And in the song on the fall of Babylon it says: 'He has avenged on her the blood of his servants’ (Revelation 19:2). The martyrs cry out in Revelation 6:10: ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’

The Bible leaves no room for human vengeance, not even in Psalm 79. People in the Bible leave revenge to God. Revenge in the sense of just retribution and restoration of justice. In his dissertation, our friend Professor Eric Peels has clearly shown that the

'vengeance' of God has nothing to do with unleashing feelings of revenge, but with justice being done and with the redemption of God's covenant people. Nothing is lost from what people have suffered in silence at the hands of others. Even though noone saw the injustice done to that child (whether incest, child abuse or any other kind of violence), one day it will come to light. God will bring it out and deal with it.

Conclusion

Does this mean that as Christians we should pray Psalm 79? Few people do so, and it is not hard to see why. Traditional churches in the Netherlands sing the Psalms in their services, all 150 of them; but the impression is that Psalm 79 has hardly been sung since WWII.

In my opinion, the contemporary message of Psalm 79 is not that we should use words like those in v12 as part in our worship services or in personal prayers. What this psalm does teach us is that we may call for God's righteous judgement. We may strongly believe that the great injustices on this earth do not go unnoticed and unpunished. Secondly, this ancient song tells us that it is God alone who can truly judge righteously. That task is not entrusted to us as humans. Our calls for retribution are too often mixed with other motives.

So this psalm does not beg God for revenge, but it does ask for his righteous judgement in good time. The psalm surrenders our revenge to him. The final judgement will bring everything to light. Until then we pray passionately: 'Your Kingdom come.'

Literature

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Eric Peels, *Shadow Sides: the revelation of God in the Old Testament.* Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003, the popular version.

Hetty Lalleman, *Close to Us. Reflections on the Psalms.* Chichester: faithbuilders.org.uk, 2020.

bmj Essay Competition 2022

This competition will run again next year with a prize of £250 for the winning entry. Full details will be in October's issue of *bmj* but, meanwhile, if you have written an essay or article of 2500 words that might fit into a category of theology, biblical studies, or Baptist history, begin to think about submitting it for the competition. The deadline will be in March 2022. Further details from the editor, Sally Nelson on revsal96@aol.com.

Reviews

Edited by Michael Peat

Becoming Friends of Time
by John Swinton
SCM Press, 2017
Reviewer: Martin Hobgen

This book proposes a practical theology of time, for individuals and communities of faith, with particular attention to those who live with the experience of 'forms of disability that emerge from some kind of damage to the brain' (p15). Swinton argues that instead of focusing on clock time (linear, dynamic, forward facing, measurable and controllable), we can helpfully shift our focus to what he calls God's time, which 'is holistic, all embracing, mysterious and ever present' (p11).

Opening with a critique of the nature of clock time, Swinton examines how this has shaped society's attitudes towards both the euthanasia of people with dementia, and prenatal testing for the likelihood of impairments with subsequent abortion. He shows that, in contrast to the exclusion fostered by clock time, the concept of God's time enables relationships with disabled people to be continued or re-established. The discussion about what this means for people with dementia, brain injury and how non-disabled people relate to them helpfully draws on the experiences of disabled people. These show the importance of slowing down, showing love and paying attention to those who are overlooked in the haste engendered by clock time.

There is a significant challenge presented for the way that churches relate to disabled people, particularly those with significant learning disabilities or injuries. It is too easy for the church to see such people as objects of care and for inclusion to be limited to enabling their presence. Swinton argues, persuasively, that rather than inclusion the focus should be on discipleship. This shapes not only how churches perceive people with significant disabilities but how they are enabled to participate in the life of the church.

Swinton's reconception of memory has particular significance for pastoral ministry to individuals and families who are experiencing the dramatic changes brought by dementia, Parkinson's or brain injury. This underpins the continuity of persons despite the outward discontinuity suggested by changes in personality and character.

Although the focus of the book is on people with some form of damage to the brain, it has important applications to those who become physically disabled through accident or illness. Whereas clock time emphasises a discontinuity between the 'before' and 'after' the acquisition of a disability, God's time enables us to find continuities which can help us to realise that our identity was and remains in Christ, rather than our

ability or inability.

This book provides a refreshing and challenging way of relating to a diverse range of people who are often on the edges of church and society. I do however have one minor disagreement with Swinton's suggestion that the relationship between us and God is not mutual in any sense. Following Paul Fiddes' proposal of a relational trinity set out in *Participating in God*, it can be argued that God allows for a significantly greater level of mutuality between and participation with God than Swinton countenances (see Swinton p101 onwards).

A Pastoral Theology of Childlessness
by Emma Nash
SCM Press, 2021
Reviewer: Esther McManus

Still too often in the church and in wider theological reflection, a veil of silence surrounds core elements of the human experience, such as abortion, pregnancy loss, infertility, menstruation and menopause. These subjects are often considered to be deeply personal, to which some might respond, 'too personal for public discourse'. It is into such topics of silence that Emma Nash's book *A Pastoral Theology of Childlessness* enters.

Nash is a Baptist evangelist, currently in post as the Mission and Community Engagement officer in the Methodist Church's Evangelism and Growth Team. This accessible and moving book is written from her own personal experience of infertility, offering an extended reflection on the experience of those who are involuntarily childless. Nash states her aim 'that followers of Jesus might respond to the crisis of involuntary childlessness in ways that are life-giving and that point to the presence of the living God' (p3). She desires to 'give people who do not have any direct experience of childlessness an insight into the issues involved, so that they may better support those going through it' (p130).

The book is structured around five themes: *Alone*, *In pain*, *Powerless*, *Barren* and *Guilty*. Each chapter is based loosely around the pastoral cycle, exploring the 'experience', 'consolation' and 'practice' of each topic. Nash engages across various disciplines, from biblical engagement, through to medical ethics. She carefully weaves her personal stories throughout, grounding the work in lived experience and taking readers behind the closed door of silence around involuntary childlessness. The final chapter *So, What Now?*, offers excellent suggestions for good practice in churches and provides a number of liturgical prayers for various church festivals—although more liturgies could have been offered and her exploration into dealing with all-age worship felt out of place. This decidedly practical finale leaves readers challenged to consider how the previous discussion could affect practical changes in church life and encourages considerate care for those

effected.

The insights presented are plentiful, thought-provoking and pertinent for pastoral carers. Nash highlights the sheer range of effects of involuntary childlessness including the practical, emotional, financial and physical struggles. She also explores the deep shame, pain, isolation and longevity many feel on the journey of childlessness. Her cautions against focussing on stories with more palatable endings, emphasising success, rather than on hearing stories 'from the middle' without a happy end, were also well received.

Incorporating stories from other couples struggling with childlessness may have been helpful. I would have also preferred greater attentiveness to terminology, such as combining 'childlessness' with pregnancy loss, as many bereaved parents consider themselves to have a child. Concern was raised at the casual description of life beginning when a baby's heart begins to beat rather than at conception, with insufficient theological reasoning as to why. I was not always thoroughly convinced at those biblical characters whom she describes as offering company and consolation, and the bleeding woman as potentially being childless was a stretch. However, other accompaniers were compelling: 'I found the Teacher of Ecclesiastes, crying out along with me at the senselessness of life, and challenging the smug certainties of the wisdom tradition. I found Rachel, crying out along with me, "Give me children, or I shall die!" I found Ruth and Naomi, suffering appalling loss and financial ruin, and creating a new family that transcended biological ties, through love. And I found Jesus, lying dead in the tomb, sharing my brokenness' (p139).

Although I wouldn't rush to recommend this book to couples struggling with childlessness, possibly offering the impression that they need to resolve themselves theologically to the experience, if they found this book for themselves, they would discover many helpful avenues of discussion. However, this is a must-read for anybody in pastoral care, whether knowing someone struggling with childlessness or have friends and family walking this journey. This honest and thought-provoking book will encourage greater consideration and awareness of the great personal cost involved for so many couples for whom this is a personal struggle and offers insights into what is otherwise an unfamiliar experience.

***The Predestination Problem: Did God Choose Me, or Did I Choose God?* (2nd edn)**
by Robin J Giles
Independent, 2019
Reviewer: Philip Clements-Jewery

Robin Giles has written what at first sight appears to be a large (400 pages) and impressive work of scholarship, supported by an extensive bibliography and three indices. Footnotes are also at the foot of the page, which is helpful. Much of the

book contains an exhaustive and painstaking examination of the relevant biblical texts.

Having been asked to review this book, I had better state my position from the start. I am no Calvinist. Nevertheless, I think I agree with the view that the author reaches, that double predestination is to be rejected, and that it is not individuals who are the object of election; rather it is Jesus Christ the Son who is the Elect One and that we become members of the elect people of God when we believe. This, of course, has affinities with the view of Karl Barth.

But that, for me, is about as far as it goes. In his introduction to the first edition Robin writes of 'a burden that needs to be shared...with ordinary believers in the pew'. I doubt if people so designated would get far beyond the first 10 pages after the two introductions, because readers are immediately plunged into a very detailed account (with which I also struggled) of the debates between Beza and Arminius at the Dort Synod in 1618.

There is also the claim on p40 that 'the clearest division in today's Church does seem to be on this precise issue—is your doctrine Reformed or not?'. However, it seems to me that over time the 'predestination problem' might have become increasingly less in important in the wider church.

I do find troubling the assertion on p133 that panentheism is heretical, and the suggestion on p202, in a discussion of divine foreknowledge, that to pose limits to what God knows leads us into 'perilous terrain, even blasphemy'. Of course, Robin has a perfect right to disagree with such opinions and to argue against them, but to designate them as heretical or blasphemous seems to me to be dismissive and uncharitable, at the very least unscholarly.

As mentioned at the beginning of this review, a great deal of space is devoted to a minute examination of the biblical 'vocabulary' of election. Almost every relevant text is discussed in an impressive word study that takes in both Greek words and their Hebrew antecedents. However, the particular chapters given to this are quite heavy going as the reader is plunged into the minutiae of New Testament word meanings in their context.

As also mentioned above, Robin argues for a concept of election *en Christo*, depending on a concept of corporate solidarity which is certainly biblical and may have been part of Augustine's thinking too. But by the time of the Reformation and the onset of enlightenment thinking individualism became predominant. Robin thinks that this is why Calvin and his contemporaries probably misunderstood what the biblical writers were trying to say. I am happy to agree with him on this.

But it is what Robin says (or, rather, doesn't say) about how one may be incorporated into Christ that causes

me concern. Quite rightly, he says that it is by faith. But that is as far as he goes. I find it quite extraordinary that a Baptist minister writing about such matters fails to mention baptism. But according to 1 Corinthians 12.13 and Galatians 3.27 it is both by faith and by baptism that a believer is incorporated into the body of Christ. I do feel that a better discussion of these issues would include a wider range of thinkers and theologians, both ancient and modern, although I am glad that N.T.Wright is given some space. It might also have been helpful to have made at least some reference to the contemporary debate concerning determinism and free-will between philosophers, neuro-scientists and quantum physicists.

I am sorry not to be able to provide a more positive review of Robin's work. I am sure that there will be some for whom the issue of predestination ignites their passion and who will find much in this book to support or challenge their point of view. But it's not for me, I'm afraid.

Running to Resurrection
by Clark Berge
Canterbury Press, 2019
Reviewer: Bob Little

Yes, this is a book built around the framework of running. It is written by Clark Berge, an American who has served as the Minister General of the Society of St Francis, an Anglican religious order with communities around the globe, including the UK.

Realising, at the age of 45, that he was overweight and unfit (something many of us realise), Berge took up running. This book catalogues running's spiritual benefits—not least in terms of allowing space for contemplation and meditation, combined with pain to help focus the mind—which is not dissimilar to approaches allegedly favoured by some mediaeval monks and mystics. Moreover, thanks to his itinerant ministry, Berge documents and provides spiritual commentary on his running exploits around the world, including the US, Europe, Australia, Africa and the Middle East. Those who like a happy ending will be delighted to know that the book concludes with chronicling Berge's completion of a marathon in California in 2016—in a commendable time of 5h 58min 2sec.

However, this book also affords Berge the opportunity to explore his calling to the priesthood; his succumbing to alcoholism; his continuing battle to remain sober; as well as his struggle with, acceptance of and then celebration of his homosexuality.

It's difficult to decide, at times, whether the author's self-indulgence is done with any sense of irony or self-deprecation (for example, on p72, choosing a reference to the 'gay icon' film, *The Wizard of Oz* as a simile). In any case, what emerges is a strangely compelling tale of one man's struggles with the vicissitudes of life, within the fellowship of the church. It may provide insights for those identifying in some way with Berge's physical and spiritual demons but it could also widen the horizons of those who don't.

The Bible on Violence. A Thick Description

by Helen Paynter & Michael Spalione (eds)
Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020

Reviewer: Pieter J. Lalleman

Not long ago in this journal I warmly recommended the book *God of Violence Yesterday. God of Love Today? Wrestling Honestly with the Old Testament* by Helen Paynter of Bristol Baptist College. The Bristol-based Centre for the Study of Bible and Violence, which Paynter leads, has now published a collection of the papers presented at its first academic conference. The book's outer appearance is great, with a moving painting on a nice hard cover. Inside we find 17 essays by as many different authors. Many sentences don't run well, and the content is a mixed bag in terms of subjects and of the points of view of the authors. The book is full of footnotes and contains some Greek and Hebrew.

To me the book's title suggests that it somehow covers the entire Bible or provides something of a handbook on violence in the Bible, and I am disappointed that this is by no means to case. To give an example, Genesis 19 and 34 are mentioned on numerous occasions, but Revelation is largely ignored. Many essays deal with sexual violence, several made me think hard, but the overall result is unequal. The Bible regularly comes in for serious criticism, and I miss a discussion of the nature of biblical narrative, which would remind us that biblical authors often report events without commenting, so that we know that the authors by no means approve of what they report.

Three of the essays deserve a positive comment. Peter King helpfully discusses how Samson was and is (mis) understood by commentators. Daniel Drost briefly compares how J.H. Yoder, J. Denny Weaver and Gregory A. Boyd handle violence in the Bible. And Valerie Hobbs holds up a mirror with her discussion of sermons on divorce. Yet even these three, and the various critical essays on how others have (mis) read parts of Scripture, tell us more about these other readers than about the Bible. They made me wonder how we can act (better) in church, but they did not provide much positive help. I will go back to Paynter's own book mentioned at the outset.

Reconciling Rites: Essays in Honour of Myra N. Blyth

by Andy Goodliff, Anthony Clarke & Beth Allison-Glenny (eds)
CBS Oxford, 2020

Reviewer: Leigh Greenwood

I kept this book on my shelf for some months, looking forward to reading it, but putting it off through the mind befuddled days of pregnancy and maternity leave. In the event, I flew through it in less than 24h, even while nursing a baby and amusing a four-year -old. That is not to say it is lightweight, because there is much to grapple with here, but to praise it as immensely engaging, in no small part on account

of its great variety of content and style.

Reconciling Rites is a festschrift in honour of Myra Blyth, with chapters picking up on the various aspects of her eclectic career. Through reflections on preaching, liturgy, communion, gender, ecumenism and more, both the authors' affection for Blyth and their passion for their subject is clear. The latter seems to me to be as much a testament to her impact as friend, colleague and mentor as the former.

The essays on reconciling with interpretative diversity by Helen Dare and the relationship between charity and faith by Michael Taylor particularly caught my interest, as they spoke to conversations and thoughts already in my mind, but there is such breadth and depth here that other chapters will resonate with other circumstances and in other times, and it is a book I am confident I will return to.

I was also struck by the inclusion of sermons (two of a political leaning by Andy Goodliff), prayers (a selection by Sian Murray Williams) and liturgies (for table fellowship by Anthony Clarke and for the environment by Deborah Rooke). Not only are these pieces powerful and provocative in their own right, but their place here amidst more traditional academic fare is a reminder that the forms we as ministers engage with on a regular basis are vital ways of 'doing theology', as capable of challenging and stretching our thinking as any essay. That should perhaps be obvious, but it is possible to take them so much for granted that we do not always recognise or realise their full power and potential.

Baptists may not command the same voice or presence as other denominations in the sphere of public theology, but as this book demonstrates, that is not due to any lack of quality within our ranks. This, and other similar festschrifts of recent years, are well worth your time, even if you are feeling a little mind befuddled.

Recapturing an Enchanted World, Ritual and Sacrament in the Free Church Tradition
by John D. Rempel
IVP, 2020
Reviewer: Bob Allaway

After I had submitted my first draft of the review below, I received the following notification from the Anabaptist Network: 'On 20 October 2020, The Mennonite Church Eastern Canada (MCEC) announced the termination of the ministerial credentials of John D. Rempel following an investigation into multiple complaints of ministerial sexual misconduct'.

Should this undermine his theological views? Certainly! No matter how brilliant someone may be, academically, such misconduct indicates a lack of spiritual wisdom that, for me, at any rate, undermines any authority his views might carry.

However, that is not the end of the matter. When I looked into this in

more detail, it appears that the 'ministerial sexual misconduct' (which Rempel acknowledges) took place before 1989, when he was a chaplain to undergraduates. While it is right that his denomination should follow disciplinary procedures, does acknowledged sin over 30 years ago annul the views of an older, wiser man now? So here is my review, somewhat toned down:

This book is written in English that any reasonably educated church member could follow. It is also written in an irenic spirit. Rempel genuinely seeks to understand the good in those with whom he disagrees and build bridges to his own views.

Reading it was also refreshing. Rempel is prepared to follow historical evidence where it actually leads, rather than looking for what supports preconceived theories, and this can produce 'out of the box' conclusions.

First, I should explain the title. 'Enchanted' is a formal sociological term for a world-view in which 'everything physical and spiritual was part of a larger whole held together by God' (p5). This means the universe can be 'sacramental', 'matter can mediate spirit'; for Christians, the 'presupposition' of this 'is the incarnation' (p6).

By contrast, the Enlightenment 'disenchanted' the universe. The physical universe was seen as nothing but matter following scientific laws. Zwingli and the early Anabaptists, though they reacted against Catholic 'superstition', still recognised a 'spiritual', 'mystical' presence in the sacraments (p45). Unfortunately, their successors too easily bought into the Enlightenment worldview, which reduced the sacraments to human witnesses to our faith, in which God does nothing. Rempel wishes to restore the sacraments to their place within an incarnational, trinitarian faith, particularly as elaborated by the Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck.

Sacramental actions also meet human need. When we meet a long absent friend, we don't just say 'Hello', we express our feeling physically by shaking hands or embracing (until the Covid-19 virus!) This ritual reinforces our words.

In the third chapter, he refers to Christian worship he has experienced in different denominations around the world, pointing out the rituals that they all have (even if they don't admit it) and the useful functions these serve. His fourth chapter, *The Sacramentality of Time*, explores the Christian week and year.

Rempel is a Mennonite, a denomination that is, like ours, in the Believer Baptist tradition. For him, water baptism marks both our turning to Christ (and away from the false loyalties of the world, p66) and God's enabling us by the Spirit (p68). This, with other insights, gives Rempel a strong standpoint for ecumenical

dialogue with paedobaptists, rather than simply condemning them.

One traditional division among Believer-Baptist denominations is between open or closed communion. Rempel argues we should maintain both! There is evidence that early Christians had two, different, ritual meals. One was our Lord's Supper, which being rooted in the Jewish Passover was a covenant meal, and therefore, in some sense, closed. But there was also a separate, communal meal, the *agape*, (which Rempel argues was a distinct meal, not an alternative name for communion). The best gospel model for this would be Jesus' feeding of the multitude, but that was open (p167). Hence, Rempel argues, we should hold services based around both kinds of meal, and he provides model liturgies for both, as an appendix.