

the baptist ministers'
journal



April 2023 volume 358

Between Anniversaries

Stuart Murray-Williams

No-one Shall Make You Afraid

James Collins

Acknowledging Our Grief

Jeannie Kendall

Serving The People Of God

Amanda Pink

Walking from Manchester to Exeter

Robert Parkinson

Reviews

Of Interest To You

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Useful contact details are listed inside the front and back covers.

(all service to the Fellowship is honorary)

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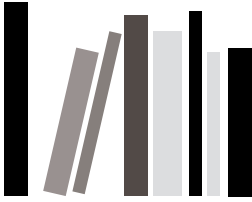
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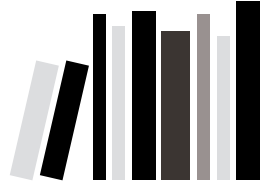
from the editor

Walk and talk

We're often encouraged to 'walk the walk and talk the talk,' meaning to live with integrity and to preach the gospel in all we do and say. I was delighted that this issue of *bmj*, which has a partial focus on wellbeing, contains examples of both 'talking' (therapy) and 'walking' (pilgrimage) as beneficial practices, contributed by James Collins and Robert Parkinson respectively. Ministry can have elements of being a sponge for other people's 'stuff' and it is so important that we find the spaces to nurture our own wellbeing, and our relationship with the God we serve. This means finding places where we can 'squeeze out' (or at least lay down temporarily) the stuff that we carry for others but which is not ours. I am saying nothing new here—indeed, it is all part of the CMD commitment to good ministry practice for those who have undertaken that. But conversations with colleagues suggest that many of us find this hard to manage under the increasing pressures in churches on money, time, and skills.

We are at Holy Week as I write, and have travelled through Lent, which may have been a time of reflection in some way depending on our views of this time of year (Baptists may be adapters, avoiders or adopters of Lenten practices). I decided to adopt a practice of paying attention to small things this year, and each day during Lent I recorded something to which I had paid such attention. Looking back on the 40 days I see the patterns of my life underpinning the things I have noticed: the joys, loss (the death of a friend), and challenges of wider society. It has been refreshing and a deeply spiritual experience, and a kind of pilgrimage within daily life.

I am grateful to our writers for all they have shared. The more personal wellbeing articles, which include a reflection on the emotions of leaving a church by Jeannie Kendall, are interspersed with a fascinating reminder of our debt to the Radical Reformation by Stuart Murray-Williams and a helpful reflection on Baptist identity in chaplaincy by Amanda Pink. I commend them all to you and wish you a wonderful spring and summer of ministry, rooted in the joy of the risen Lord Jesus. *SN*



Between Anniversaries by Stuart Murray-Williams

Author: Stuart Murray-Williams is Director of the Centre for Anabaptist Studies, Bristol Baptist College. His book on Melchior Rinck is also reviewed in this issue.

In 2017, Lutherans and many others celebrated the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation. Although some historians doubt whether Martin Luther actually nailed his 95 Theses to a church door in Wittenberg (he may have simply sent them to an archbishop), this iconic image marks the point at which rumbling discontent with doctrines and practices in the Catholic church could no longer be contained. Across Europe, reforming clerics advocated and instituted changes that would fragment a previously monolithic Western Christendom into several competing mini-Christendoms, provoke decades of religious conflict and stimulate the Counter-Reformation within the Catholic church.

In 2025, Anabaptists and others will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the start of the Radical Reformation. The iconic image is of a small and rather fearful group in a house in Zürich baptising one another as believers, knowing that this act would provoke persecution. They had been supporters of Ulrich Zwingli,

the pastor of the Grossmünster and one of the leading Reformers, but they had grown impatient with the pace of reform and were convinced more radical action was required. In particular, they rejected infant baptism as lacking New Testament support and as one of the mainstays of the Christendom system that needed demolishing, not reforming.

An account of this event reports that after a time of heart-searching and fervent prayer, 'George [Blaurock] stood up and besought Conrad Grebel for God's sake to baptize him with the true Christian baptism upon his faith and knowledge. And when he knelt down with such a request and desire, Conrad baptized him.'¹

Many Baptists participated in the celebrations marking the 500th anniversary of Luther's theses, grateful for the impact of the Reformation and its legacy within their churches. Some chose to remember the Anabaptists as participants in what was a variegated

reforming movement. A colleague and I were invited by Serbian Baptists to speak at a conference in Belgrade that celebrated the start of the Reformation but focused on the role of the Anabaptists in what followed. But perhaps 2025 will give Baptists a further opportunity to remember the courage of our Anabaptist forebears, who paid a huge price for their convictions, and learn from them.

The early Anabaptists were persecuted for various reasons: their non-violence and refusal to take up arms, their reluctance to swear oaths, their economic practices which threatened the emerging capitalist system, their insistence that churches should be free of state control, and much else. But the issue that caused the most anger in both Protestant and Catholic jurisdictions was their rejection of infant baptism and their insistence on baptising as believers those who had already received infant baptism. They did not, of course, designate themselves 'Anabaptists' (re-baptisers), because they disagreed that this was what they were doing. If infant baptism was illegitimate, then they were baptising, not re-baptising. But the name stuck, as have many other names in the history of denominations that were imposed by others, rather than chosen by adherents.

The Anabaptists were not surprised by persecution, although they challenged those who persecuted them that this was not how Christians should treat each other. But they realised that rejecting infant baptism and baptising believers represented a fundamental critique of the prevailing territorial model of church and the assumption that their society

was Christian. The Reformation had not seriously questioned these assumptions, despite occasional hints that some of the Reformers recognised the validity of the Anabaptists' critique. What was at stake was not just the practice of baptism but the revolutionary implications for ecclesiology and missiology.

The Anabaptists rejected infant baptism because they could find no support for it in the New Testament and were utterly unpersuaded by the attempts of the Reformers to justify it by analogy with Old Testament circumcision. As their leading theologian, Balthasar Hubmaier, pleaded with Zwingli, 'For the sake of the last judgment, drop your circuitous argument on circumcision out of the Old Testament.'² But they opposed it for other reasons as well. Their language was often intemperate—as was true of much theological debate in the 16th century—but they were passionate in their efforts to expose its malign effects.

Nobody was more passionate than Melchior Rinck, a significant but relatively unheralded German Anabaptist leader. In almost all his extant writings, whatever subject he was addressing, he included a trenchant critique of infant baptism. My 2022 annual lecture at the Centre for Anabaptist Studies at Bristol Baptist College introduced Rinck and set out the eight reasons why he was so opposed to infant baptism.³

First, not only was there no New Testament basis for baptising infants, which he argued was a human invention, but the explicit teaching of the New Testament was that belief must precede baptism, which was not possible for infants.

Second, there was no theological justification for baptising infants. Infants were unable to seek forgiveness and were in any case innocent of sin. Baptism was unnecessary and inappropriate.

Third, infant baptism was inconsistent with the principle of voluntarism that was so important to the Anabaptists. Faith was a choice that should not be coerced. Infant baptism was forced baptism, an imposition on infants who had no choice.

Fourth, those who received infant baptism were given false confidence that they had already received salvation. Those who baptised infants were damaging their future prospects, hindering them from subsequently responding to the gospel and being saved.

Fifth, infant baptism had a damaging impact on the state churches. In common with other Anabaptists, Rinck was critical of the low standard of morality in the churches. The Reformers struggled to know how to respond to this charge, for which there was plenty of evidence, especially in the light of the higher standards in most Anabaptist communities. Rinck insisted that infant baptism was the root cause of the problem. He argued that the state churches were full of unregenerate people who were actually enemies of Christ.

Sixth, he argued that the practice of infant baptism undergirded a system that kept power in the hands of the political and ecclesial establishment. Those who claimed that infant baptism was an expression of care were the same ones whose neglect of the poor and lack of concern for social justice belied this claim.

Seventh, Rinck believed that infant baptism perpetuated a false Christendom and hindered the emergence of Christ-centred churches. In his most provocative tract on the subject, he declared: 'Satan takes careful note that, as soon as a congregation should arise manifesting obedience to Christ, not only with the mouth and heart, but also with deeds and love, then in the face of such light, his darkness could no longer remain, because it would become obvious that his gospel and Christendom are a grovelling abomination.'⁴

Finally, the practice of infant baptism and the imposition of severe penalties on those who chose to renounce it and who were baptised as believers was discouraging many others from experiencing true Christian baptism. This true baptism was what would create a community of faithful followers of Jesus—a community comprised of those who had repented of their sins, received God's forgiveness, committed themselves to Christ and received baptism as a mark of this commitment.

The baptism of believers is also, of course, one of the distinctive features of Baptist churches. The extent of the historical links between the continental Anabaptists and the English Baptists is subject to debate and there are some significant differences between these traditions, not least in relation to issues of economics and non-violence. But Baptists owe much to the courage of the little group in Zürich on 21 January, 1525, whose baptisms initiated the recovery of the baptism of believers. The 500th anniversary of this event will give Baptists an opportunity to pay tribute to these pioneers.

But in the years between these celebrations, maybe we should also be reflecting on the contemporary significance of baptism in our post-Christendom and much more ecumenical context. Nobody is likely to want to engage in the often vitriolic dialogue that characterised conversations about baptism in the 16th century. Indeed, conversations between Lutherans and Mennonites, which began during the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1980, resulted in Lutherans asking for forgiveness for their ancestors' treatment of the Anabaptists and both traditions committing themselves to seeking further reconciliation.⁵ Furthermore, not all of the criticisms of infant baptism made by Melchior Rinck and other Anabaptists may be as pertinent today. Whether or not we agree with Rinck that Christendom was false and a diabolical invention, that culture is fast fading and with it the prevalence of infant baptism. The baptism of believers is likely to become increasingly normal, as the incorporation of adult-sized baptisteries in some new Catholic churches indicates.

So, should we simply agree to disagree with those who continue to practise the baptism of infants and offer what seems to many Baptists a very strained theological (and sometimes) biblical rationale for this? Should we wait patiently until this vestige of the Christendom era finally disappears and our missional context requires the baptism of believers, the overwhelming majority of whom will not have been baptised as infants? Or might we take the opportunity of the anniversary in 2025 to encourage faster progress in this direction?

Another possibility might be to take a fresh look at our own practice of believers' baptism and ask whether we are missing anything. Baptism for early Anabaptists was not for the faint-hearted. Some wrote about three forms of baptism—baptism in water, in the Spirit and in blood. The third form of baptism referred both to the daily and lifelong struggle against sin (mortifying the flesh) and to persecution. Martyrdom was not inevitable, but it was the experience of thousands of baptised Anabaptists. Death by drowning was the fate of many as their opponents decided a third 'baptism' was an appropriate way to be rid of them. Persecution is remote from our experience as followers of Jesus in Britain (except for those who convert from other religious backgrounds), but remembering the cost of baptism for the Anabaptists might attune us to the costly implications of baptism for Baptists and other Christians in many parts of the world. The struggle to be faithful disciples and to live baptised lives, however, is not remote from our experience. Do the baptismal preparation processes in our churches provide a robust foundation in a society that inculcates very different values and priorities? Do we teach and talk together enough about the meaning and significance of baptism? How intentional are we about the post-baptismal discipling that we all need?

Baptism for the early Anabaptists also involved a commitment to what they called 'fraternal admonition' on the basis of Matthew 18:15-17. We might speak instead of 'mutual accountability'. Baptism was an invitation to the community to help those being baptised—and each other—to live baptised lives. Baptism was the

entry point into a community of disciples, who would watch over each other, challenge and encourage each other, and seek reconciliation when necessary. It was not just a confession of faith by individuals at one point in time. Dietrich Bonhoeffer included 'baptism without church discipline' in his frequently quoted definition of 'cheap grace.'⁶ This level of mutuality is highly countercultural in our individualistic western societies, but it resonates strongly with texts in all the main New Testament writings. However, unless our communities understand baptism in this way and commit to it, we are unlikely to achieve this level of mutual support. Recovering this dimension of baptism may not ensure faithfulness or preclude harsh treatment of those with whom we disagree, but it might reduce these behaviours, help to restore us when we go astray and discourage us from unnecessarily prioritising doctrinal or ethical points over our relationships.

But the Anabaptists' recovery of believers' baptism was about much more than the rite of baptism. Despite being labelled as re-baptisers and despite this issue being such a provocation to their opponents, believers' baptism was not an end in itself but was crucial because of its ecclesial, missional and ethical implications. For infant baptism, as Rinck insisted, had damaging effects on the state churches and their engagement with society. It did not take seriously the need to evangelise in a largely nominal Christian culture. It did not produce communities of disciples who lived out the gospel. And it did not stimulate challenges to ethical perspectives that were rooted in the Christendom worldview but were, they believed, contrary to biblical teaching.

Three of the distinctive Anabaptist approaches to ethics that characterised the convictions and practices of what Rinck described as 'a congregation... manifesting obedience to Christ' are as relevant and challenging today as they were in the sixteenth century. None of them are issues on which Baptists have dissented from conventional ethical approaches anything like as much as our Anabaptist forbears. Perhaps the approach of the anniversary of the first believers' baptisms might encourage us to revisit these: mutual aid, non-violence and truth-telling.

We are currently experiencing an unhealthy and deeply damaging mix of rampant consumerism, pernicious advertising, ongoing austerity, a widening wealth gap, food and fuel poverty and exorbitant rates of credit. Fresh economic policies and practices at global and societal levels are desperately needed, but there are few signs of these emerging. During the pandemic I participated in an online conversation with leading philosophers, theologians, economists, psychologists and others. Among numerous fascinating insights, I was struck most powerfully by the comment of an economist, head of a business school: 'We have known for years that the economic system is broken. This pandemic has revealed it even more clearly. Why have we continued to train people to sustain this broken system?' Her comment included language that does not tend to feature in *bmj* articles!

Although long-term analysis demonstrates that globally wars and conflicts have been declining for several decades, comprehensive media coverage

ensues we are aware of violence in Ukraine, Sudan, Yemen, Myanmar, Israel/Palestine, Afghanistan, Syria and numerous other places—although we can quickly forget most of these conflicts as media attention moves on. The hostile environment in Britain and several other nations to refugees fleeing these conflicts exacerbates their trauma and sometimes results in further violence towards them. Many other expressions of institutional and neighbourhood violence, including the racial violence highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement, ruin lives and create distrust and fear. And vitriolic and hate-filled language, especially on social media, represents another form of violence.

In the wake of the election of Donald Trump and the Brexit campaign, the word of the year in 2016 was declared to be 'post-truth'. Many years earlier, a British civil servant admitted that he had been 'economical with the truth', a phrase that has been used in many other contexts, alongside the equally euphemistic 'I mis-spoke'. Public life is characterised by deceit, lying and misrepresentation, as are many relationships and conversations.

None of the above is unfamiliar or new. Much of it is deeply embedded and we may feel powerless to challenge or engage with any of these systems or behaviours. The 16th century experienced similar realities—economic hardship that provoked peasant protests that the Anabaptists supported but Luther urged the authorities to crush without mercy; warfare against 'the enemy from the East' (in this case the Turks) and between Catholic and Protestant territories; and

the ubiquitous use of oaths to try to persuade people to tell the truth at least in defined contexts. Although they were far too insignificant and powerless to effect changes at a political or social level, the Anabaptists advocated and modelled countercultural approaches. Within and sometimes beyond their communities they shared their resources generously and insisted that these were not 'private' but available to those who needed them. Rejecting violence to defend themselves or the gospel, they refused to kill others, choosing if necessary to suffer the consequences. And they generally declined to swear oaths, not only because this was how they understood Jesus' teaching, but because they were committed to truth-telling in all circumstances. Persecution for holding these views and pioneering these practices revealed the authorities' fears that such ideas might catch on and undermine the status quo.

We should not idealise the Anabaptists, whose lives and relationships did not always measure up to their convictions and aspirations. But their opponents were forced to concede, much to their annoyance, that communities made up of men and women who had been baptised as believers were qualitatively different from their own. In *Against the Terrible Errors of the Anabaptists* (1582), Franz Agricola, a Catholic interrogator, wrote about Anabaptists in some confusion: 'As concerns their outward public life they are irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and drinking, no outward personal display, is found among them, but humility, patience, uprightness,

neatness, honesty, temperance, straightforwardness in such measure that one would suppose that they had the Holy Spirit of God! This might perhaps be what we can aspire to as a marginal community in a post-Christendom society —modelling and advocating dissident behaviour that offers hopeful alternatives to the dominant narrative and prevailing culture.

Anabaptists across the world are preparing to mark the 500th anniversary of the first believers' baptisms in 2025. Baptists who participated in the celebrations of the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation, remembering the contributions of Luther, Zwingli, Philip Melancthon, Martin Bucer, Jean Calvin and their colleagues, might seize the opportunity in 1525 to recall the courage of Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, George Blaurock, Margret Hottinger and Margaret Hellwart, and their determination to recover a way of being church that

was more consistent with the New Testament, free of state control, entered by believers' baptism, authentically missional and able to break new ground in relation to economics, non-violence and truth-telling.

Notes to text

1. From the "Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren", quoted in William Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975, 13-14.
2. Wayne Pipkin & John H. Yoder, *Balthasar Hubmaier*, Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989, 180.
3. The lecture had a provocative title: "Melchior Rinck, the diabolical practice of infant baptism and non-heroic Anabaptism". It drew on Stuart Murray, *The Legacy of Melchior Rinck*, Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2022. This book is reviewed in this issue of *bmj*.
4. Murray, *Legacy*, 175.
5. See <https://www.lutheranworld.org/what-we-do/unity-church/lutheran-mennonite-dialogue>.
6. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, New York: Macmillan, 1966, 47.

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No-one Shall Make You Afraid: Peace, Joy and Pastoral Ministry

by James Collins

Author: James Collins is the senior pastor at Purley Baptist Church.

In 2009 my daughter was suddenly taken seriously ill. It all started with a tummy bug which didn't clear up. Several days on we started to get concerned and consulted with our GP, who diagnosed an *e coli* infection. A few days later she was admitted to hospital with an unusual but potentially life-threatening complication called HUS (Haemolytic Uremic Syndrome). Thankfully, with the compassionate and expert care of the NHS she soon started to recover and within a few weeks was fighting fit.

During the progress of her illness my state of mind deteriorated significantly. While my wife (a doctor) bore the brunt of caring for our daughter, I was increasingly unable to face what was happening. As her condition deteriorated and it became clear that she was very unwell, I began to be consumed with anxiety, guilt and sadness. One might have expected these feelings to pass once it became clear that she was on the mend: instead, they got worse.

My church family was very supportive and gave me time off to care for my daughter throughout her illness and her recovery, but it soon became clear that I needed time to recover from the ordeal. I was only too aware that my wife was

bearing the brunt of my deteriorating state of mind and I was determined to get the help I needed to show her that I was doing everything I could to get better. I contacted a psychotherapist I knew and trusted and made an appointment to see her. I remember sitting in the car waiting to go in for my appointment wondering how it had come to this. I considered myself a 'strong' person, well in control of my emotions. Nevertheless, I knew the appointment was necessary.

It took her around an hour gently, but firmly, to diagnose me with anxiety and a moderate case of depression. I left with advice on self-care (exercise, diet sleep, self-compassion), a note for my doctor suggesting a course of Citalopram (an anti-depressant with an anti-anxiety effect) and an arrangement to meet with her weekly for the next few weeks. I found all this a lot to take in (a further blow to my sense that I was immune to such vulnerabilities) but also strangely hopeful. I like action, so the self-care actions were things I could grapple with. More significantly, I caught a glimpse of a brighter future.

I duly went made an appointment with my GP who agreed with the counsellor and prescribed a course of Citalopram. Taking

my first tablet was again both sobering and hopeful. I was keen to get better but not so keen to be the kind of person who needed such medication. It seems that anti-depressants are not effective for everyone, but they have certainly helped me, and I've been taking them, on and off, ever since. I have a vivid memory that around two weeks in I became aware that my anxious thoughts were not gripping me in the same way. The best way I could describe it was that they seemed to be 'sliding off'.

I returned to ministry, part-time, about two weeks after my daughter came home from hospital, feeling very fragile. Pastoral ministry is rarely straightforward, and I was immediately confronted with some difficult interpersonal issues. Nevertheless, with much support my mental health improved slowly and within a couple of months I felt back to normal. However, under the compassionate and wise guidance of my psychotherapist, I began to realise that my 'normal' was less than ideal. The trauma of my daughter's illness had been like an earthquake—now that things had settled down the strata of my thought processes were exposed. My anxious and depressive patterns of thought were now apparent.

In my counselling sessions and in personal reflection I began a journey of deeper self-understanding. It became clear that the combination of perfectionism and being a 'completer-finisher' meant that I tended to drive myself very hard without the ability to enjoy my successes. Worse, my active brain was hyper-vigilant for threats and the strategy that I had developed to handle the consequent

anxiety was to assess the threat in terms of the worst possible outcome. I would then disarm the threat by working out how to handle its worst possible outcome. This is exhausting but tolerable. The wheels didn't finally fall off until I was faced with a threat (my daughter's serious illness) which indicated an outcome I could not face. This brush with personal tragedy heightened my anxiety (what other catastrophes are lurking around the corner and must be avoided?) and triggered a range of depressive thoughts and emotions.

Having got the wheels back on, it was now time to learn how to travel more smoothly. Over the next few months, I made several positive strides forward: I got fitter, ate better, learnt some relaxation techniques and started to sleep better. Over time I noticed that my motivation levels were higher and that I was starting to enjoy things (anhedonia or the inability to enjoy activities one would usually find pleasurable is a typical symptom of depression). Through a mixture of self-care, medication and talking therapy I began to emerge from the fog of depression. The sun began to shine again. My psychotherapist was happy with my progress and 'discharged' me, assuring me that I now had a 'toolbox' of techniques and strategies to stay on top of things. She later retired—I will be forever grateful for the help she gave me.

But personalities are tricky things. Anxiety and depression, like sin, are not easily contained. They are ever vigilant for new opportunities. And pastoral ministry offers a rich field of possibilities. I grew up in Pentecostal churches—an

upbringing I thank God for. However, it is a setting marked by spiritual highs and lows; both have been formative for me. I chose to become a Baptist rather than a Pentecostal minister because of my experience of unaccountable and domineering church leadership. Painful childhood experiences of this and of the church splits which bedevil Pentecostal churches left me with a determination to do better. Unfortunately, I fell off the other side of the horse! I developed a deep-seated fear of conflict and an aversion to asserting leadership within church life. In the face of ungodly and unreasonable behaviour, I would tend to avoid any kind of showdown and hope and pray that things might get better. I knew this was unhealthy, and I was swallowing a good deal of frustration and living with a constant sense of dread that I might not be able to contain the various conflicts that I was aware were simmering under the surface of church life.

A combination of this underlying problem and other issues (most notably the challenges of leading a large church during lockdown) brought me to a new low. I was looking forward to a three-month sabbatical commencing in November 2020, but when the time came, I found that I collapsed into a state of crippling anxiety. I sought out another counsellor and began a new course of Citalopram (having stopped taking them about a year previously). This time around, I needed to address how I conducted my ministry. My tendency to overwork, be too hard on myself and avoid conflict all came under the microscope. With the assistance of my new counsellor, I am much more aware of these vulnerabilities and keep a

close eye on myself ensuring that I take time to read the scriptures, pray, relax with my family and find time alone to escape the relentless extroversion that pastoral ministry requires.

Socrates claimed that self-understanding is the beginning of wisdom. He was wrong of course. The beginning of wisdom is certainly to fear the Lord. But it's almost certainly impossible to be wise without self-understanding, so he was almost right. I understand myself better these days. I know some of my vulnerabilities and I know the disciplines I must maintain to make life (and pastoral ministry in particular) sustainable and enjoyable. Do I wish I was not prone to anxiety and depression? Honestly, no. I am as God has made me and these frailties are the shadow side of some strengths—sensitivity, empathy, foresight, reflectiveness—that I would not wish to be without. I am a better man and a better minister for these struggles. Maybe, you, dear reader, have similar vulnerabilities. If so, do not despair. If you will address them honestly and seek help wherever you can find it, you will, by God's grace, find that they are the means of growth, fruitfulness and even joy.

Here are three books which I have found very helpful along the way:

The Imperfect Pastor by Zack Eswine

The Emotionally Healthy Pastor by Peter Scazzero

My Name is Hope: Anxiety, Depression and Life After Melancholy by John Mark Comer

Acknowledging Our Grief: Leaving Churches

by Jeannie Kendall

Author: Jeannie Kendall is a retired (freelance!) minister. She is author of Finding our Voice and Held in Your Bottle and is currently writing a third book.

Last Friday I was present at an event at my current church, to which I have retired. It was an event I had not been to before (being fairly new but still involved in moderating elsewhere) so I am a little sporadic in my availability.

I felt totally lost. Around me were people who knew each other well, and though they were welcoming, I was on the outside. I struggled to stay there, aware of a deep sadness welling up within. It would have been totally inappropriate to have allowed the sadness any house room at that moment. On the Sunday, and not for the first time, my eyes welled with tears in the worship.

Now let me be clear. I am not writing this for therapy, any more than any writer ever does. Nor am I depressed. I have a full life and much that gives me joy. No, this is grieving. Eighteen months ago, I left a church I loved deeply, and where I was deeply loved. I left because I knew I had done all that God had called me to do there. My age meant it was not appropriate to move on to another church. I refer to myself now as 'freelance' since there are still ways to minister, not least as a supportive member of the new church. Yet I am aware I am still grieving for the church I left.

Grief is a complex process and can be complicated or delayed by many things. Certainly it was strange to leave during Covid, at a time when the church was meeting but socially distanced. They did me proud in many ways, but to leave waving from a platform as they filed out was not ideal. The leaving was then followed fairly quickly by an unexpected geographical move which left me no time or energy to process anything. Like us all I carry my own previous journeys of grief and in addition I am an extreme introvert for whom new social gatherings are challenging. Yet, personal variances aside, I wonder if we do enough to recognise the grieving element when we leave churches where we have been heavily invested?

It is the task of the minister to come alongside churches for a season. The church was there before we arrived and will (hopefully) continue when we leave. The group of people we have travelled with, taught, baptised, married, held in their grief, will continue to journey together, but we will no longer be a part of it. We may hear news, but it is from afar. I knew I had to leave the church so that they and I could move on healthily, though I could initially have stayed as a member. I chose not to watch the online services as I need to let go. But it was, and is, hard.

When we move on to new churches as ministers, I suspect the grief is disguised by the busy-ness of the new season and the excitement of change. However, I suspect it is still there. At the first Christmas at the last church, I felt briefly adrift as I started locking up. My sensitive co-minister said simply: 'You're missing home, aren't you?' Yes, I was—the previous church I had also loved. It is the task of pastoral ministry, I believe, to love well the churches we serve: leaving will always be costly.

Now I realise the circumstances of our leaving can vary enormously. Sometimes it is accompanied by anger, regret, or a sense of it being too soon for a myriad of reasons. The research on grief suggests that grieving is not absent where the relationship has been difficult, but more complex. We may feel initial relief at escaping a church situation which was

fraught, but I believe the grief, in all its intricacy, will still be there. I'm not sure as ministers that this aspect of ending ministry, for whatever reason, is spoken of, researched or written about often enough.

Yesterday a friend said to me, via a message, that church would become family again. I'm not sure: at least, not in the same way. When we come alongside a church with a role, relationship building comes more naturally as a part of that. Some will be closer than others: when you accompany people through the dark or joyous times there is a deep bond formed in the heart. As a shy introvert I will see what the future holds in this new setting and stage of my life. I know God travels with me, and I am not afraid.

But for now, I will allow myself to grieve and not be ashamed.

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'Serving the People of God?': An Articulation of a Baptist Theology of Ministry for NHS chaplaincy

by Amanda Pink

Author: Amanda Pink is Team Chaplain at Milton Keynes University Hospital and is undertaking a Masters in Chaplaincy Studies with St Padarn's Institute, Cardiff.

The vision of the Chaplaincy Department at Milton Keynes University Hospital, where I currently minister, is 'to provide, and enable others to deliver, high quality pastoral, spiritual and religious care to all MKUH patients, visitors and staff without prejudice or judgement.'¹ My NHS job description makes it clear that this care is to be sensitively offered to 'people of all faiths and beliefs, including those of no specified faith.'² There is an important and deliberate implication here: despite the historic Christian roots of its chaplaincy services (excellently described by Chris Swift),³ as a modern public service the NHS expects today's chaplaincies to work in line with its wider Equality, Diversity and Inclusion commitments. A narrow Christian agenda must give way to a wider intention, as the current NHS Chaplaincy Guidelines make clear:

The term 'chaplaincy' in the context of this guidance is not affiliated to any one religion or belief system. There have been changes in attitudes and contemporary language driven by changes in our communities. To that end modern healthcare chaplaincy is a service and profession working within the NHS that is focused on ensuring that all people, be they religious or not, have the opportunity to access

pastoral, spiritual or religious support when they need it.⁴

Ministry in this form is the one in which I (and the BU as my accrediting organisation) understand that I am fulfilling my call as an ordained Baptist minister. It is striking, then, to compare the broad multifaith and belief expectations on me as an NHS chaplain, and the vows that I made when I was ordained in July 2016, which unsurprisingly had a much more Christian and church-focused agenda, including:

Will you proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ

Through word and deed, making disciples

And seeking the coming kingdom of God?

As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I will call others to follow him...

Will you serve and pastor the people of God

With gentle nurture and faithful teaching?

Will you set before them the whole counsel of God

As you proclaim Christ, the living Word?

*Will you be faithful in worship and prayer,
And, through word and sacrament,
Will you celebrate the grace of God,
Seeking to pattern yourself and those you serve
After the likeness of Jesus Christ?
As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I will minister in his way.⁵*

These two sets of expectations raise a question that this article seeks to address: How can these be considered compatible, to be fulfilled concurrently by the same person? Or, with a more theological focus, how can a ministry of NHS hospital chaplaincy be legitimately viewed as a ministry in service of the church?

Multifaith Chaplaincy: Reality, Concession or Aspiration?

The stated aspiration of spiritual care for people of all faiths and worldviews in our department reflects the direction of travel within the wider community of NHS chaplaincy in the UK. I would argue that at present, certainly for our department, a multifaith/belief service without prejudice is still more aspiration than it is reality. A cursory glance at our recorded referrals compared with the recently released 2021 national census dataset on religion in England and Wales initially seems promising. In the month of December 2022, for example, out of 24 referrals, in 13 the Christian religion of the patient was mentioned (about 54%), no mention of religion was made in nine (about 38%), and just two were for patients identifying with a religion other than Christianity (Jewish and Muslim, which translates as about 4% each). This small sample is fairly

compatible with the national averages of people's identified religions, with Christianity at 46.2%, no religion at 25.2%, and Islam and Judaism at 4.9% and 0.5% respectively.⁶ Nevertheless, although all of these referrals were responded to, there is a significant disparity in the quality of specialised care that is offered. For the Jewish patient, the handful of LED tea lights offered to mark Hanukkah can hardly compare with the multifaceted provisions made for Christian patients marking Christmas. Similarly, the Muslim patient was dependent on the availability and goodwill of an unpaid contact from the local Islamic community—one who would not have the same knowledge and expertise in bridging the gap between religious and hospital contexts that the Christian patients have in having access to a full-time Christian chaplain employed and working in the hospital.

I have heard one Christian chaplain in an equivalent public sector speak of the requirement to make multifaith and belief provisions as a necessary concession to 'hold space', a trade-off that is regrettable but ultimately acceptable for access to a potentially rich mission field, in the hope of worthwhile returns in the form of those who will be inspired to follow Christ. From other conversations I have had, I am aware that this instinctive view—which essentially reduces multifaith/belief chaplaincy to a subversive notional assent to NHS EDI requirements, to 'promote the brand'—also exists in our own Baptist family. I, however, find that approach lacks integrity in its underhanded use of public money, and contrary to Jesus' instruction to 'render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's' in Matthew

22:21. Rather, as I have outlined more fully in a previous article,⁷ I find the person-centred expectations and boundaries of the NHS, resisting the temptation to use the advantages of one's position for missional conquest, thoroughly compatible with an emulation of Jesus who showed costly loving restraint in his ministry and mission. So then, I would argue that multifaith/belief chaplaincy is not yet a reality, and that for the Christian minister serving in this office it is not to be viewed as an unfortunate but necessary concession but as a worthy aspiration with theological foundations.

A Baptist Theology of Ministry?

I have established (1) the multifaith expectations of my chaplaincy role and (2) my reasons as a Christian disciple for fully assenting to those aspirations. The question that follows, and the principal question of this article, is how the fulfilment of those duties can be viewed as a legitimate expression of ordained Baptist ministry.

In the introductory chapter of *Tracks and Traces*, Paul Fiddes observes that 'Baptists have always resisted the idea that there is a distinctive "Baptist theology"'.⁸ This makes sense, given our origins in the Reformation, emerging from suspicion of monolithic church institutions, authority and tradition which might be experienced in such a way that seemed to obscure rather than reveal God. Fiddes argues that there is nevertheless a Baptist way of doing theology⁹ in which covenantal relational community plays a significant role. This of course reflects our grassroots congregational approach to 'interpreting and administering Christ's laws...in all

matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures...under the guidance of the Holy Spirit' which forms part of the shared basis upon which we covenant together.¹⁰

It is not possible, then, to name a definitive Baptist theology of ministry, so much as a range of different interpretations by those identifying as Baptists. This is recognised and helpfully laid out in the *Theology for Sector Ministry* document produced for the Baptist Union in 2012:

Some of us, seeing our heritage as part of the Reformed tradition of Christianity, would have a 'high' doctrine of ordination and a stress on the ministry of Word and Sacrament as central and non-negotiable. Others, drawing on a more Anabaptist tradition, would be uncomfortable with any notion of ordination, and would rather undergo a service of commissioning for a particular role, with no notion of a separated ministry implied. Some others, influenced by charismatic renewal, would stress the many ministries of the body, and would see the core role of the minister as leading and enabling this corporate service. Yet others, looking to the heritage of radical Christian groups, such as the Society of Friends or the Christian Brethren, would not call a minister but only a 'teaching elder', who would nonetheless occupy a central position in the life of the fellowship.¹¹

Variety is to be expected in Baptist theology in general, and in Baptist understandings of ministry in particular, but this does not preclude the existence of some streams of thought which

gain particular traction and influence. A predominant and normative view of ordained ministry among us is one which is 'understood essentially as the ministry of Word, sacraments, and pastoral oversight, exercised in the context of the local church'.¹² Nevertheless, a variety of other roles are practised, accepted and supported within our Union as qualifying offices of ministry, including translocal regional ministry, the educational ministry of college tutors, and the specialist or sector ministries of evangelists or chaplains. Indeed, the commendation of the work of Baptist chaplains in Lynn Green's General Secretary Christmas Greetings email demonstrates that there is currently recognition of chaplaincy as an important ministry within our Union at the heart of our national structures.¹³

Despite this acceptance within our denomination of chaplaincy ministries as qualifying offices, the *Theology of Sector Ministry* report perceptively notes that there is a lack of theologising over how and why this might be seen as legitimate in relation to normative theologies of ministry.¹⁴ The next section of this article offers an attempt to close that gap. In what follows, I will examine one way of conceptualising ordained Baptist ministry. I will then suggest how this has scope as a framework for understanding multifaith and belief chaplaincy as ordained Baptist ministry in service of the church.

Representation, Baptist Ministry and Chaplaincy

In *New Baptists, New Agenda*, Nigel Wright considers some of the opposing emphases on ministry that have existed in Baptist thought.¹⁵ He helpfully notes

that apparently opposing 'dualities' also appear in Christ's teaching to the apostles as he sends them out in ministry (such as in Matthew 10:40 and Matthew 23:8-11), before suggesting his inclusive representation model for understanding the offices of ministry.¹⁶ The model is inclusive in that the 'sacramental actions' undertaken by a minister can in fact be undertaken by any believer provided, says Wright, that they do this within the oversight and the discipline of the local church.¹⁷ At the same time, he argues that the minister can be understood as distinctively representative in three main ways.¹⁸

- (1) **Representative of Christ:** Ministers are called and sent by Christ, and so though they may be servants of the church, 'the church is not their master': they are directly accountable to God as well as accountable within the congregation.
- (2) **Representative of the wider and local church:** Specialist training enables the minister to help a congregation find their place in a wider church context, and the minister is also able to represent the experience and testimony of one local church to the wider church family.
- (3) **Representing the church congregation to itself:** 'As ministers minister to their people they incarnate the love and authority of both Christ and of the whole congregation, making present in bodily form the God who is with us and the Body of Christ in which we participate.'¹⁹

Wright founds this model of inclusive representation in his explanation of ministerial authority:

Christ is present in the Word that is preached by those he sends and in the reception and propagation of the Word that is believed in the congregation. We have authority when our testimony is weighty and it is weighty to the extent that we bear the Word of God. Bearing the Word of God is the essence of ministry and its defining core. Those who are called, gifted and sent by God to be bearers of his Word and who do so in the Spirit of Christ have an authority to minister that Word in his name.²⁰

As has already been shown, a ministry of NHS hospital chaplaincy has a broader remit than Wright's depiction here, which we will take as one significantly mainstream Baptist understanding of ministry (although it might be legitimately critiqued as not having enough outward focus, even for ministry in the local church). Nevertheless, I would certainly argue that chaplaincy is a ministry of representation in a multifaceted, bidirectional way.

Viewed through a secular NHS lens, we can say that the chaplain, whichever religious tradition they come from:

- Represents the needs of and appropriate considerations for communities and individuals with a religious worldview in a secular organisation and represents the hospital when engaging with and building fruitful relationships with local communities of faith.

- Represents, with others but perhaps in a particularly symbolic way, the understanding that patients, as people, are more than 'a body to be fixed' and that staff, as people, are more than cogs in the organisational machine.

Viewed through the lens of the church (universal), we might say that a recognisable clerical-collar-wearing Christian minister in the role of chaplain:

- Represents the church in a secular setting and in partnerships with other faith communities as a credible and trustworthy partner in contributing to the wellbeing of others, especially those who are vulnerable (and thus the vision of the Kingdom of God);
- Represents the wider church to Christian patients and staff who by illness or by work commitments are limited in their access to congregations in the community;
- Represents the loving presence, action and occasionally, when appropriate, spoken word of Christ to all those to whom they minister, whether this is overtly acknowledged or not.

The particular denomination of a Christian chaplain is less immediately obvious, but in conversations in which the variety and particularity of Christian domination is discussed and in their essential ecumenical relationships with those of other faiths and those of other Christian traditions, the Baptist chaplain of course represents the Baptist church in particular as well as the church in general as credible and trustworthy.

Furthermore, just as in Wright's model the minister can represent the local congregation to the wider church as well as representing the wider church to the congregation, I would argue that the minister who serves as a chaplain offers a fruitful opportunity for representation between church and their context that is similarly bidirectional, if and where they are given a platform to do so. This might come in the form of sharing reflections from hospital life and ministry when preaching as a guest speaker in congregations, and in opportunities to contribute to reflection in the wider life of the denomination, such as in publications, in contributing to the training of new ministers, or at regional and national events. For example, the regular experience of seeking to offer spiritual care to those with reduced capacity due to illness might lead to theological reflections on suffering, on where we find the image of God, and on the place and problems of language within our worship and discipleship which are not simply niche subjects but relevant to the people of God as a whole. Similarly, and of particular pertinence at this present moment in a nation whose Christian adherence has been shown to be in decline,²¹ the chaplain's daily experience of navigating ministering in a secular context and the training which aids them in reflecting theologically on this experience might offer a very great resource indeed for helping the church reflect and discern its God-given identity, credibility and mission in today's context. In this way, NHS hospital chaplaincy meets the criteria of 'justifiably [being] regarded as "ministerial"...[when] not directly and specifically related to the local church' asserted by the BU *Ministry*

Tomorrow report in 1969 because it is 'service undertaken at the request of or with the consent of the Union with a view to the building up of the wider life of the churches.'²²

All this goes to show that the chaplain's ministry can certainly be thought of in terms of representation, but what of the inclusive part of Wright's model? This too is apt for the chaplain's ministry. Just as with ministry in a local church, so too with Christian chaplains that 'the functions of ministers do not in principle exclude [the ministry] of others.'²³ In a way that might challenge particularly narrow Christian thinking, this is often true for multidisciplinary working, in which a chaplain might observe a palliative care nurse gently and kindly tending and championing the humanity of a dying patient and conclude that Christ's work is being done here, whether that nurse is also a Christian or not (cf Matthew 25:31-46). Perhaps more palatable to some Baptists, (although equally controversial to some other Christians), it is also true in the way a Baptist chaplain does not prohibit a non-ordained Christian volunteer, for example, from administering the sacraments, where need arises and the suitability of that person's character and capability are recognised.

Perhaps most problematic in Wright's work discussed above for the Baptist minister serving as a chaplain is his suggestion that the authority of the minister is measured in the weightiness of testimony bearing the Word of God.²⁴ If this is understood as the spoken Word of God, then clearly this is difficult in the hospital setting in which active proselytisation is agreed to be inappropriate.²⁵ Even so, if

the chaplain maintains a role in speaking to the church from their experience of serving in the hospital setting, then they may be seen as contributing a weighty testimony to the word of God. However, if we understand 'bearing the Word of God' in incarnational terms, as we find in John 1, we find that the authority—or perhaps we might use the word credibility—of the chaplain may be demonstrated in the full range of their ministry. With this in mind, I suggest a reworking of Wright's assertion on ministerial authority that is appropriate for ministry that is served in both congregational and chaplaincy settings:

*Bearing the image and presence of God is the essence of ministry and is its defining core. Those who are called, gifted and sent by God to be bearers of God's image and presence who do so in the Spirit of Christ have a credibility to minister that image and presence in God's name.*²⁶

Summary and Conclusions

The principal question of this article has been how a current ministry of NHS hospital chaplaincy can be understood theologically as a ministry in service of the church. In answering that question, I have shown that despite what might appear at first as current incompatible expectations from the NHS and from the Baptist Union on the minister serving as a hospital chaplain:

(1) The person-centred, multifaith/belief approach expected by today's NHS is compatible with an emulation of Jesus who showed costly loving restraint in his ministry and mission;

(2) The influential inclusive representation model of ordained ministry proposed by Nigel Wright provides a helpful framework for conceptualising the work and ministry of the chaplain; and

(3) If and where the chaplain is given a platform for bidirectional representation between the NHS and the church, they can certainly be a valuable resource in service of the church.

Having drawn these conclusions, I return to where I began, with a job description and with ordination promises that seem at first at least partly incompatible. What I have discussed and concluded therefore raises a question that I will finish with for further reflection, and I invite others to take up this question that we might consider it together and in dialogue. Indeed, it was in dialogue that the question itself was very helpfully articulated by my colleague and fellow Baptist minister, Head of Chaplaincy at Milton Keynes University Hospital, Sarah Crane: 'How do we move congregational ministry from being so normative in our structures, that it is in fact, exclusive?' Perhaps broadening the language we use in our ordination patterns might be a good place to start.

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Walking from Manchester to Exeter

by Robert Parkinson

Author: Robert Parkinson is the minister of Didsbury Baptist Church.



Photo by Lacey Raper on Unsplash

In the spring of 2022, I spent part of a sabbatical walking from our front door in Manchester to our daughter's front door in Exeter. I walked over 350 miles in 28 days. It was meant to be a challenge, but not an ordeal. I wasn't climbing Everest or running a marathon every day. I just wanted to walk; nothing heroic, just a long but manageable walk for an able bodied 63-year-old like me. In fact, it turned out to be a sheer pleasure and a great joy.

I thought of the walk as a kind of pilgrimage. I was not sure if I had the right to call it that but I still think it the right word. It is true that pilgrimages often follow a recognised route like the Camino de Santiago, for example. They

often have a holy site as the destination. My walk would involve neither of these. However, I like Guy Hayward's approach to pilgrimage (religious or secular) as a walk with 'purpose' or 'intention' perhaps 'to a place where you have felt loved'.¹ That is exactly what I would be doing.

I made it my intention to reflect on life and ministry in the later years—to prepare to finish well as a person in pastoral charge and to reflect on the future of life and ministry beyond retirement. Of course, I could do that sitting at my desk, reading books, and praying, but that is what I do (some of the time) when I am not on sabbatical. I wanted to escape from my study, the page, the internet, my chair. I

wanted to get outside and do some blue sky thinking.

Furthermore, I wanted to walk my own route rather than one that had been determined for me by someone else. So, I drew a line on a map from Manchester to Exeter then started to modify it according to what I thought could be interesting and achievable stages and detours. I used OS Maps and Google Maps during about a six-month period of leisurely planning. I found that part of the fun of a multi-day walk is preparing the route.

Of course, a journey from Manchester to Exeter would not pass through anything like wilderness. Still, I found there was plenty to see as I travelled along a green corridor through villages, towns, cities, and countryside. I tramped down paths, ways, disused railway tracks, canal towpaths, roads, and trails to wend my way from the northwest to the southwest of England. I strode through towns and cities such as Stoke-on-Trent, Telford, Worcester, Tewkesbury, Cheltenham, Bath, Glastonbury, and Taunton, and I discovered quaint and sleepy villages and small towns nestled in quintessentially English countryside in places I had never visited before.

In the planning stages, I wondered about carrying a tent and sleeping under the stars, but I could not see myself lugging all the necessary equipment. I wondered then about seeking accommodation from Baptist friends, churches and networks but decided against that too. I felt I needed to take a break from all church-related social contacts and immerse myself in a completely different kind of experience.

I decided then simply to spend each night in a guest house, hostel, or hotel. It would mean finding and booking them well in advance, but it would give me a planned destination for each evening. I liked the idea of contributing to the economy of each place I would stay in even if it did make for a more expensive trip than I would have liked. So, I carried a backpack and hiked from one place of accommodation to the next over 28 days.

Weirdly perhaps, I did all of this alone. I received plenty of support from my family. My wife, Dawn, met me every weekend. At the half-way point, Dawn and all our children, their spouses and our grandchildren, joined me for a wonderful weekend in Cheltenham. Yet, except for three very enjoyable stages of the route, I walked the entire distance alone.

At no point during the walk did I feel afraid. To be sure, there were dangers. I avoided two fields where there were too many feisty looking cattle for my liking. I had a couple of near collisions with cyclists, and I fell once, backwards into a bed of nettles, but I never once felt afraid. My one injury was inflicted in a Premier Inn bedroom, when I stubbed my toe on the foot of the bed. This confirmed my prejudice that, by-and-large, there is more to fear from being indoors than ever there is from being outside.

Being outside was one of the truly great rewards of taking a long walk. Even on the first day I could feel improvement in my breathing, and in my mood. What a wonderful thing it is to feel the sun on your back and the wind on your face. What is more, I slept well every night,

all night—and I think that was largely because I spent most of every day in the great outdoors.

I learned much during my 28 days on the trail. I learned first the absolute necessity of slowing down. I set off on day one at a leisurely three-miles-an-hour, but I soon learned that even this was too fast. I had underestimated the impact on my 63 year-old body of walking all day with a heavy pack on my back. By the end of day one, everything hurt! So, I did two things. First, I slowed down. The result was that I enjoyed it more, saw more, and felt better, much better. The second thing I did was to reduce the number of items in my pack by half. I do not know whether it was the adjustments I made or whether I would have felt better just by sticking at it, but from the third day on, I felt no more pain or discomfort in walking. Now, I am trying to keep those lessons with me. For I am learning that life is better lived when I travel light and slow right down. The truth is, I do not need all the stuff I too easily accumulate, and my mental health declines when I live at too frantic a pace. I like the sign I kept spotting on the canal towpaths, put there by the Rivers and Canals Trust, 'Stay kind, slow down!'

As I walked, I found myself thinking about the walkers of the world: the refugees and asylum seekers; those who must walk to fetch water, or food; the workers walking to and from work; and the ancient preachers, and the first Baptists who walked to bear witness, to preach and to visit the flock. I thought about those who walk because they must, those for whom walking is not a leisure activity but a necessary part of living. I thought of those

who had made, tramped, and traversed the routes I was taking: the navvies, the canal builders, boat builders and barge dwellers of years gone by. I felt a sense of solidarity with the world's walkers whose footsteps I was following.

I tried to be present in each moment and to pay attention to whatever was around me. I saw birds and animals, plants, crops, and trees. I saw wildlife but not as much as I had expected. Was I walking too late in the day? Was I blind to what was there, or was I witness to the dismaying decline of UK wildlife that all the studies now document?

You could say that for 28 days I was outside enjoying nature. In truth, however, I was often more aware of the presence and impact of human beings in and on the landscape. I saw some glorious wildflower meadows, but noticed just as much, field after field of monoculture crops. I marvelled at the industrial heritage of our towns and waterways, but I also could not help noticing far too many washed-up plastic bags and other detritus littering the riverbanks. Still, it was a joy to meet people: farmers, fellow walkers, canal barge enthusiasts, cyclists, dog-walkers, hoteliers, and innkeepers. As I walked, I also came to be very grateful for those who maintain our footpaths, and for the marvellous Cotswold Way Wardens.

Almost as soon as I set off on the first day, I was painfully aware that the end was approaching. Thankfully, the end was not a bad thing. I was going to see our daughter, our son-in-law, and two of our wonderful grandchildren. Yet, there it was. From day one I knew the trip would soon

be over! And so it proved. Twenty-eight days is nothing. It was over in no time.

So, had I made any progress with my intended themes for reflection? Had I learned anything about life and ministry for the later years? To be honest, I had no blinding revelation, no Damascus Road experience or Emmaus Road encounter. Yet, I had set out at something of a low ebb. I was suffering from something like imposter syndrome. I was doing all the minister-things that ministers are supposed to do. I was doing them joyfully, but I was also beginning to wonder if I was only kind or attentive because my vocation required it of me. Being on the road without any sense of obligation to others or to my calling felt strangely liberating. Yet, what I discovered was that instinctively, I sought out the company of others, and I was genuinely interested in

them and their stories. It turns out that I am more gregarious than I thought I was, and am a better, more genuine people-person than I knew. And this small revelation did a power of good for my confidence and self-understanding. I began to think that this old dog can learn a few new tricks yet. I can continue to serve God and others in one way or another, not only today but also in the future, even after the official retirement that now looms. I am planning my next pilgrimage now, both on the footpaths and into later life. I do not know what it will hold, but I have some sense that the God who, inconspicuously, held me on my walk, will direct me in the way.

Note to text

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2021/jan/13/how-intention-turns-a-walk-into-a-pilgrimage-5-british-walking-pilgrim-trails> [accessed 7 December 2021]

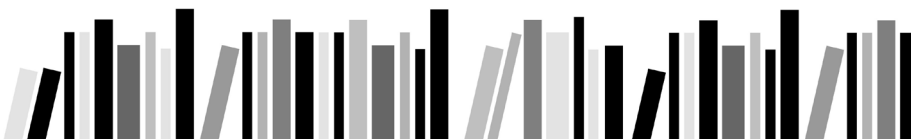
Research into Baptist life

Did you know that there is a free-access archive of all available past *bmj* issues, including its predecessor, *The Fraternal*?

These journals provide a lens into the life of Baptist ministers and their churches back to 1907, and could help you in your research. Our friend Rob Bradshaw, librarian at Spurgeon's College, scanned all the back issues that we have been able to locate and hosts them for us on Theology on the Web, which itself is an amazing resource and worth a look. The *bmj* archive does not include the most recent year or two, but is updated periodically.

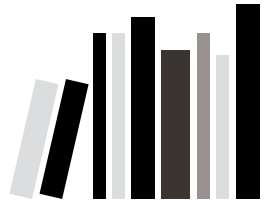
You can find the archive here:

https://theologyontheweb.org.uk/journals_baptist.html



reviews

edited by Michael Peat



The Legacy of Melchior Rinck: Anabaptist Pioneer in Hesse

by Stuart Murray

Herald Press, 2022

Reviewer: Michael Bochenski

When appointed as the founding director of the then new Centre for Anabaptist Studies at Bristol Baptist College, in 2014, Stuart Murray undertook a new project. This was to reintroduce a remarkable but neglected pioneer leader of the early Anabaptist movements: Melchior Rinck. This stimulating book is the product of that undertaking. It was written in partnership, for translation purposes, with the eminent Anabaptist historian Leonard Gross and a professional translator, Ellen Yutzy Glebe. Their translations conclude the book. They have provided fresh translations of Rinck's surviving writings, letters about him, contemporary accounts of his interrogations, examples of opposition, and several moving testimonies to Rinck and the faith he helped his followers and colleagues to find. Murray draws on these translations as he examines Rinck's legacy, after exploring his life and times, writings and theology.

Rinck's journey into Anabaptism was a familiar one in the early years of Europe's 16th century reformations—from Catholic priest to Protestant pastor to imprisoned Anabaptist. Unusually, however, for that generation of Anabaptist leader, Rinck

lived a relatively long life. This was largely due to the untypical tolerance and leniency of Landgrave Philip of Hesse, an unusual noble with a commendable aversion to using the death penalty against 'heretics.' Murray examines how this very different treatment of an Anabaptist pioneer opens up some interesting new directions for Anabaptist studies. If more Anabaptists were engaged in meaningful dialogue by some of the more tolerant representatives of Christendom—in Rinck's case, Landgrave Philip and the wonderfully irenic Martin Bucer—might different outcomes for these believers and movements have resulted? The usual response from Christendom's leaders was to include all Anabaptists with the terrorists of Münster, in the early 1530s, and to imprison, exile or exterminate them. The then rulers, civic and religious, of the central German state of Hesse and *sometimes* Saxony attempted, we discover, some very different approaches. Rinck's lenient imprisonment and the return of many radical believers to state churches, following hearings and invitations, were among the results.

Rinck comes brilliantly alive for us as Murray skilfully unearths what is known of his life. He was, it seems, dubbed 'The Greek' in his lifetime—indicating his renowned skills in classical languages. He was married—but very unhappily (on

both sides), we learn. He was also, like Luther, famously prone to use choice language and phrases when taking on opponents; this did not often help his cause. His earlier involvement in the Peasants' War, under Müntzer's influence, similarly hindered him when under interrogation. Rinck wrote—and one presumes spoke—clearly and powerfully on topics as diverse as baptism, the Lord's Supper, nonviolence, civil authority, ecclesiology and discipleship. As Murray notes, Rinck longed to see churches free from state control and containing only those taking discipleship seriously: 'he aspired to a life of loving obedience and urged his followers to embrace this.' After a two-year interrogation, while imprisoned in the Haina monastery, Rinck was found guilty of heresy. Thereafter he was to remain an Anabaptist prisoner in Hesse for perhaps as long as three decades: '[Rinck] persisted and refused to give way throughout his relatively brief years of ministry and lengthy period of imprisonment'.

Rinck, we read, engendered considerable levels of commitment and loyalty from those he had baptised, taught or led into faith as the book's translations amply demonstrate. That said, Murray also explores another fascinating divergence from Anabaptism's developments elsewhere—the fact that many of Rinck's converts returned to state churches. Murray suggests a number of reasons for this including Philip's lenient and benevolent oversight of his territories, and the painstaking and irenic dialogue Bucer modelled when debating with Anabaptists. As Murray reminds us, Bucer 'listened carefully and sympathetically to their concerns, took these seriously,

and introduced the kinds of reforms in the state churches that addressed their concerns.' The widespread collapse of Anabaptism in Hesse was also, in part, the result of Moravian missionaries attracting some away from Hesse altogether. Murray also reminds us that evangelists are not always pastors or church planters. Rinck was 'an itinerant evangelist rather than a community builder'.

In outlining his legacy, Murray makes a strong case for a rediscovery of Rinck and his times for contemporary discipleship and mission. Characterising his response to many of Christendom's representatives as 'subversive respect,' Murray commends such an approach today for those of us on the margins of power and of political or religious influence. For Murray, 'Rinck's most significant legacy consists in his... warnings about the pastoral and ethical consequences of infant baptism, his demystifying of communion, his nuanced views on the role and limits of civil authority, and his emphasis on the love of God.' Rinck faced the issues we do. Where there is disagreement how can meaningful and constructive debate take place? When does compromise cease to be acceptable? Can there still be constructive cooperation where Christians disagree strongly? Gradualism or revolution? Reform from within or something new? Violent schism or peaceful co-existence? Where too, we may ask, are today's 'Bucers,' helping opposing factions to listen to and learn from each other?

It does not take a huge leap of imagination to see how important these questions also are for Baptists Together in the 2020s.

Appointments with Bonhoeffer

by Keith Clements

T&T Clark, 2022

Reviewer: John Matthews

Of few 20th century theologians would it be more true to say that 'he being dead, yet speaketh' than Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed by the Nazis in 1945, aged 39. So it is good to see the publication of a series, *New Studies in Bonhoeffer's Theology and Ethics*, which aims to publish research illustrating his continuing significance for these areas and engaging with him in addressing contemporary issues.

It is especially good to have this book by a fellow Baptist minister who is, arguably, the doyen of British Bonhoeffer scholars. Keith Clements has been writing about Bonhoeffer for many decades, but this volume is different from the others, comprising 14 lectures, addresses, articles and sermons from 2011 to 2021, with a concluding chapter in the context of Covid 19. These are prefaced by Clements' letter to Patriarch Kirill, Head of the Russian Orthodox Church, following the military attack on Ukraine, whom he had met in 1999.

The word 'appointments' in the title has been deliberately chosen, in preference to 'encounters' or 'dialogues' because, says Clements, an appointment with someone is a meeting about something important; it involves taking time to listen and then thinking about what has emerged in the meeting. In this spirit Clements believes that Bonhoeffer has much to say to us, but does not offer quick fixes to our problems. He hopes that even seasoned readers of Bonhoeffer will find some

elements of novelty here, as indeed they will, especially the chapters that place him alongside Thomas Traherne and Friedrich Von Hugel.

He notes that the bulk of the work done on Bonhoeffer in Britain during the past 50 years has been either on his *Ethics* or the ethical implications of his corpus as a whole. Among the particular aspects of his theology which are of lasting importance are the distinction between ultimate and penultimate things and, especially, the concept of *stellvertretung*, previously translated as 'deputyship' but in the edition of his *Collected Works* as 'vicarious representative action', described by Clements as 'a contextual ethic of responsibility'. This is most fully expressed in Christ, but is also to be shown in the life and witness of the church, which is only the church when it is there for others, and is the foundation of all responsible human action.

Some of the chapters express Clements ecumenical sympathies, which reflect Bonhoeffer's own, and draw on his own knowledge and experience, not least as General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches.

In a lecture given at Whitley College, Melbourne, Clements reflects on Bonhoeffer's wisdom for ministry in a post-Christian world, and notes his emphasis on the need for pastors to listen: 'we should listen with the ears of God, so that we can speak the Word of God'. For Clements 'Ministry means sticking with this world where we are now...not the imagined world of yesterday nor the dreamt-of world of tomorrow...the world where we find and serve Christ as the

stellvertreter...The post-Christian world is still Christ's world and must be inhabited in Christ's way. That is Bonhoeffer's basic wisdom for ministry today.'

Bonhoeffer's persistent question 'Who is Christ for us today?' is as relevant to us as it was to him. Clements' contributions in this volume help us to wrestle with it and to answer it for ourselves. The book is a well produced hardback, with the slightly small text supplemented by a bibliography of primary and secondary sources and an index of names and subjects. Unfortunately, at £85 it is priced beyond the reach of many who would find within it much of value for conversations, discussions and sermons in ministry today. So why review it here? Because it is worth reading, because it reminds those who know Bonhoeffer of his continuing relevance, as well as offering fresh insights, and because it will, hopefully, prompt some who do not know him to explore him, not least through Clements' other books.

Being Interrupted: Re-imagining the Church's Mission from the Outside In

by Al Barrett & Ruth Harley
SCM Press, 2020

Reviewer: Robert Draycott

This is a book that is earthed, and it also 'marked' in that the main biblical material comes from Mark's gospel. It is earthed in recent events such as the Grenfell tragedy, and the referendum vote. It often seems that Christians are unaware of what is going on in the world—at least in terms of some sermons and some opinions on issues which seem like non-issues to

many people. *Being Interrupted* references 'Me Too', Windrush, and the school strike for climate, before considering who 'we' might be.

At this point I was interrupted and am returning after about a month to take up the thread again. Being 'earthed' and 'marked'—in a nutshell this is the basic reason for my recommending this book to this people who will also face a wide range of interruptions in their ministry. It is both biblical, and aware of current events that should form a backdrop to preaching, teaching, and leading.

Let me focus in on section two, entitled *Being Interrupted*. Here are five chapters which examine five stories in Mark's gospel which 'interrupt or disrupt Jesus' activity, his direction of travel, his agenda.' The authors offer four possible 'ways in', each of which 'approaches the biblical text as a living thing to be encountered.' Each chapter concludes with 'Questions the story asks us.' One example: 'How do you tend to respond when challenged or criticized?' The final question in each chapter begins, 'What might need to change...' There is material for five Bible studies.

If you were able to see a copy of this book, turn to chapter 15, *At the Cross*. The sub-sections ask two questions, 'Where is God?' and 'Where are we?', before looking at Relocation, Relinquishing, Receptivity and Repentance. The following insightful chapter is naturally entitled *Resurrection*, about 'the uneasy tension of living between the world as it is and the world as it should be, in the now-and-not-yet of God's kin-dom.' Yes, it is 'kin-dom,' (another insight to explore).

There is so much more that this review has not touched on—buy this book and discover a rich stimulating resource, thoroughly recommended.

The Bible in Cockney

by Mike Coles

BRF, 2022

Reviewer: Bob Little

Mike Coles, a former head of religious education at a Stepney secondary school, found the children he taught responding well to his use of Cockney rhyming slang. This book is the product of taking that idea one step further in the hope—as he says—of people of all ages being able to ‘enjoy reading Bible stories in a down-to-earth way’ and, especially, reaching those who wouldn’t normally read the Bible because they see it as out-of-date or dull!

Dull isn’t an adjective that could be applied to *The Bible in Cockney*. The use of the Cockney vernacular adds pace and, at times, even greater immediacy and earthiness to familiar Bible stories. Incidentally, on a linguistic note, Coles opts for the traditional Cockney ‘geezer’ (= man) rather than the more modern ‘Mockney’ ‘freezer’ (fridge-freezer = geezer). This reviewer was both amused and intrigued, among other things, to find Jesus referred to as ‘God’s currant’ (bun = son). The rhyming slang produces some surreal and entertaining images—and, maybe, some deeper insights into spiritual truths which other Bible translations fail to reach. Perhaps, for example, thinking of Jesus as God’s **currant** could also prompt thoughts of him being God’s **current**—connecting God and humanity in a new and electrifying way.

At less than 200 pages, the book can’t contain the entire Bible. Part One contains seven Old Testament stories: Adam and Eve; Noah; Abraham; Joseph, David; the Judges, and Jonah. Part Two is a more cohesive text: translating Mark’s gospel—and ably capturing that gospel writer’s urgency and immediacy in telling the story of God’s currant. Part Three provides an insightful version of the Lord’s Prayer.

Thankfully, there’s a glossary at the back of the book for those who might be tempted to dismiss Coles’ paraphrase of sacred texts as cherry (ripe = tripe) and, frankly, horse’s (= not a polite word to use in the *bmj*). Cockney speakers and Cockneyphiles should welcome—and be delighted by—this book.

Bob’s Exploratory Theological Adventures

by Robert Little

The Endless Bookcase, 2022

Reviewer: Robert Draycott

This is a delight which ought to be put in the hands of every Baptist. That is a rather OTT statement, but having feared having to damn with faint praise, I am impressed and excited to come across something that is theological, insightful, instructive, and readable.

I can hardly improve on Sir Les Ebdon’s review—that recommendation forms part of the book’s introduction and I will deliberately not read it again until I have completed this effort. The author himself says that this collection of short pieces, written for a church magazine, is intended for preachers, for those who have to stand in at the last minute when

planned speakers fail to turn up, and for students and disciples of all ages who are (key quote), 'interested in applying biblical teaching to living effectively, practically and successfully in the modern age.'

That sentence should be recommendation enough and I believe the book lived up to it. I will, however, enthuse and inform further, offering gems chosen at random. 'Incarnation refers to the synthesis of matter and spirit...The dualism (splitting and separating) of the spiritual and the so-called secular is what Jesus came to reveal as untrue and incomplete.' Then, from another article, 'Irenaeus was concerned (presciently, as it's turned out) that the doctrine of creation out of nothing would lead to humans abusing creation...' This illustrates an important truth: bad theology has consequences. Across the page in another article Robert Little says Teilhard de Chardin 'came to acknowledge that the Darwinian revolution and contemporary cosmology have important implications for theology'.

High quality, great relevance, stimulating, thought-provoking, and above all, theological and biblical. What more can I say, except to add that there is a very helpful index at the beginning. Then at the end there is a Bible references index, which indicates a very wide coverage of both Testaments. Thoroughly recommended.

To readers of bmj: until the end of 2023 you can get a discount of 25% on this book by using the coupon code BLETAMP23 through the website <https://theendlessbookcase.com/>

Ecclesianarchy: Adaptive Ministry for a Post-Church Society

by John Williams

SCM, 2020

Reviewer: Bob Allaway

The title of this book could be misleading. *Ecclesianarchy* and the combined cross and anarchist symbol on the front cover might suggest it is about Christian Anarchism. I will explain later in this review why I believe this would misunderstand that position. As for the sub-heading, might not *Post-Christendom* be better than *Post-Church*? The only baptistic writer mentioned a number of times is Stuart Murray (sic) because of his work on that topic. You might think the *Adaptive Ministry* is that of church to society. In fact, this is about the Ministry (the Anglican Ministry, to be precise) and how that needs to adapt.

The first five chapters are a survey of how traditional Anglican structures are becoming increasingly unable to cope with changing social conditions, and the various bright ideas that might have helped, from the 1960s onwards, that have been sidelined with depressing regularity. For most of you reading this review, the assumptions underlying these chapters would be utterly alien. Even though I am part of an Anglican church-plant, in my retirement, I have trouble relating to them. Female ministers may find a possible point of contact. Williams wishes that, now they have been admitted to the previously male preserve of the Anglican 'priesthood', women would not allow themselves to be used simply to shore up those existing structures, but would use their previous experience as outsiders to challenge them.

At chapter 6, I finally found something to which I could relate, as Williams deals with the impact of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement, and gives some autobiographical detail of his own encounters with the latter. Like most folk, he traces the origins of Pentecostalism to the revival at Azusa Street, Los Angeles, in 1906. (Historians of revival see this as a particular manifestation of a worldwide outpouring of the Spirit, that began with the 1904 Welsh Revival.) He rightly stresses that what shocked people at the time was not just the use of 'tongues' but the way the revival broke down divisions of race, sex and class.

Chapter 7 deals with chaplaincy, a topic on which he has done much practical, academic research. Of all the different forms of ministry, this is surely the one that is best able to touch the 'unchurched', as he would like. Yet, with the honourable exception of the Methodists, he found denominational leaderships seemed to have trouble knowing what to do with it. This was partly because it could take so many different forms, but mainly because, particularly for the Anglicans, it often did not fit in with the patterns of ministry for which its 'ordained' ministers were trained.

Chapter 8 deals with Fresh Expressions (of which my church might be seen as an example). This was the one bright idea that Anglican leaders had seemed happy with. Was this because they thought the free-wheeling initiatives could eventually become 'proper' churches, rather than allowing them to challenge existing concepts of 'church' and 'ministry'?

I will speed over chapter 9, looking at attempts to apply Derrida's 'deconstruction'

to theology and ecclesiology, to arrive finally at *Ecclesianarchy* in chapter 10. The archai that Williams wants to challenge are those shaping how we do church. For Christian Anarchists, such as the late Jacques Ellul, or the Catholic Workers (who have a community near me), they are the capitalism, consumerism, militarism etc, that shape our existing society. Far from adapting to that society, they want Christians to live as an alternative society, shaped by the communal, peaceful values of the Kingdom of God, as a challenge to existing society.

The final two chapters look at how 'the training and ongoing support of ministers' might be changed, before a conclusion draws his thoughts together.

If you want to research chaplaincy or Fresh Expressions, you would find this book useful to help your initial literature search. Otherwise, you would probably find it too Anglican.

Followers of the Way

by Simon Reed

BRF, 2022

Reviewer: Bob Little

Taking as its premise the view that Christian discipleship is the most strategic issue facing the Western church today, combined with the feeling that we're not very good at doing it, this book begins by making the case for discipleship—and why it really matters. Drawing on the wisdom of the Celtic and desert Christian traditions as well as on Old and New Testament practices, Simon Reed explores what discipleship means and how Christ's followers can help other

people become true disciples of Jesus—along with offering tips and techniques for living an overtly Christ-centred Way of Life.

Having discussed the way to be a disciple of Jesus, Reed sets out 10 discipleship 'waymarks': being a lifelong learner; journeying with a soul friend; maintaining a rhythm of prayer, work and recreation; living simply; celebrating and caring for creation; healing whatever is broken; being open—and listening—to the Holy Spirit; praying for good to overcome evil; pursuing unity, and sharing Jesus and justice.

While most people might not read the Bible, they do read Christians. This, alone, Reed says, should be a spur to discipleship. His book concludes by exploring what he calls three life-giving principles of discipleship: simplicity, purity and obedience. Having offered some thoughts on 'getting started' on discipleship, Reed concludes by explaining why discipleship matters. He writes that Christian values of love, welcome, generosity and compassion have been the foundations which, in theory if not in practice, have shaped Western (and other) societies' values. He argues that, although the way of Jesus is the 'better way', a post-Christian world will only recognise this when such a way is lived out.

From an overtly Christian standpoint, it's hard to argue with Reed's logic—and the tips and techniques he espouses fit the pattern of discipleship he sets out. There's much here for the discipleship novice but also much of value to remind—and, hopefully, re-energise—existing but flagging disciples.

Neoliberal Religion: Faith and Power in the Twenty-First Century

by Matthew Guest

Bloomsbury, 2022

Reviewer: Stephen Heap

Neoliberalism is a major force shaping our world. Emerging first as an economic theory, it became more than that, especially once embraced by political leaders, notably Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. They thrust neoliberalism upon their respective nations as an all-embracing ideology which, in their view, would shape a new and better life for all who lived under it. The key to that better life was the market, conceived by neoliberals not just as a means of exchange but as an organising principle for the shaping of society. Neoliberalism as an ideology carried much before it, overturning the political and economic consensus of the post-war years in western Europe and the US, and impacting nations across the globe. Many in ministry will have seen its impact on more local situations, and on individuals. Here is an important and timely book to help us reflect on these things, in particular the relationship between neoliberalism and religion, which also has influence as a shaper of society.

Matthew Guest approaches these questions as a sociologist of religion who self-confesses as a Quaker. His work will be of interest to any concerned about current societal trends and the work of the church. While the book is about religion rather than Christianity, there is a fair bit in it about the church, and about interactions between the church and important aspects of contemporary society.

Guest describes neoliberalism in terms of a set of 'norms and values.' They 'may be summarized as a heightened individualism that prioritizes the freedom of the consumer over shared identities, a taken for granted assumption that market competition is the best measure of value and a tendency to treat cultural objects as commodities' (p1). While his approach is that of a professional sociologist, he argues that does not mean being 'value-free.' He clearly sees neoliberalism as divisive and leading to 'social inequalities' (p2). He also relates it to the growth of, for example, populist politics, the post-truth phenomenon, the idea of the individual as entrepreneur and, despite small state rhetoric, an increased role for the state as an agent of security. All these things have interacted with religion in complex and diverse ways. It is that interaction, and the approach sociology of religion needs to take in considering it, which are Guest's particular concerns.

In Guest's view, neoliberalism and the related societal features referred to above have become so powerful that it is at least partly in interaction with them that religious (and non-religious) groups shape their lives. That does not mean that religion is passive; it in turn influences some aspects of the neoliberal society. The main body of the book interrogates the nature of those interactions between neoliberalism and religion. So, for example, Guest explores how marketisation impacts on the ways religious groups present themselves, and how in a neoliberal world possible adherents might make choices between religious groups (and between religious and non-religious groups). He finds neoliberal norms at work, with advertising

images used by some churches indistinct from those considered winning in the secular world, and possible adherents making choices as if religion were a consumable and they were customers rather than disciples. Equally, other groups reject any such marketisation of religion, perhaps reject neoliberalism itself as oppressive and unjust. They too are being formed in interaction with neoliberalism. Similarly, says Guest, there are interactions between other aspects of neoliberalism and religious groups. Looking at populism and religion, for example, he argues there is a somewhat complicated relationship at work, with some religious groups supporting populists as a way of advancing particular religious agendas, and populists drawing on religious ideas to advance theirs. Where power is in these interactions is an important matter, and with questions of power go questions of ethics which sociologists should not ignore.

Neither should theologians, including ministers. Guest provides useful insights which bmj readers might want to use as grist for a theological and missiological mill which considers what the gospel says to the church in the present context where neoliberalism is such a force, and where religion might also play a role in shaping society. It is likely to raise some questions worth thinking about, around whether our own churches and denomination are being unhealthily shaped by neoliberalism for example, and whether the societal trends they are supporting are of the gospel.

Opening Our Lives

by *Trystan Owain Hughes*

BRF, 2020

Reviewer: Bob Little

Opening Our Lives aims to show that Lent isn't about giving up or taking up but, is rather about a radical opening-up of our lives to God's transformative kingdom. To facilitate this process, Trystan Owain Hughes' book provides daily devotional readings for Lent, from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day.

The first 11 of these daily readings focus on 'open our eyes to your presence.' The next seven explore 'open our ears to your call'; seven more cover 'open our hearts to your love'; followed by seven examining 'open our ways to your will', while the next seven look at 'open our actions to your compassion.' The readings scheduled for Holy Week focus on 'open our pain to your peace' and the reading for Easter Sunday is 'open our world to your hope.'

While this book has been written primarily for individual readers, the author—a regular contributor to BBC Radios 2 and 4, as well as a lecturer and Anglican priest) accepts that small groups can also use it as devotional study material. With that in mind, there are some helpful notes—and suggested group questions—at the book's end.

Each day's 'reading' begins with a Bible passage. There is then a discussion of that passage, expanding on some of the ideas and issues it raises. Finally, there is a 'reflection' section which is, essentially, a call to some form of action.

Valuable as a source of ideas for those (perhaps especially for over-worked, pressurised clergy) looking for fresh perspectives on the concept that Christ's kingdom is in the now as well as the not yet, this book's contents are particularly—but not exclusively—applicable to the main themes of Lent. As such, this book can provide year-round food for the spiritually fainting, insights for those seeking inspiration and help for the harassed.

Parenting Teens for a Life of Faith

by *Rachel Turner*

BRF, 2022

Reviewer: Bob Little

Subtitled *Helping teens meet and know God*, this book begins with the caveat that it won't help readers 'conquer the entirety of parenting.' Instead, it claims to be solely about equipping readers to 'enable teenagers to have a vibrant, two-way relationship with the God who loves them.'

Previously a full-time children's and families' worker and the National Children's Work Coordinator for New Wine, Rachel Turner is the pioneer of Parenting for Faith, the author of the *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith* series and the presenter of a video-based resource called the *Parenting for Faith* course.

Her book covers the place of parents, the power of providing 'windows' for teenagers so they can see God in ordinary life, tying truth and experience together, practising conversational prayer, unwinding warped views of God, using opportunities created by teenagers to help them on their spiritual

journeys, empowering teenagers to follow God, enabling them to be confident in following God, and effectively connecting teenagers to church.

No one doubts that parenting teenagers is challenging. As these young people grow in terms of independence, they make the decisions that will shape their lives. Yet they needn't make these decisions alone, particularly when it comes to matters of faith. Parents can still be a significant influence on a teenager's spiritual life. This book aims to help parents, carers, grandparents and others involved in teenagers' lives to understand the teenage faith journey, and to find positive ways to influence this.

Running throughout the book is the thought that developing a personal, vibrant, resilient faith in God is something that's too important to be left entirely to teenagers. Their parents, carers and grandparents—as well as those connected to their church—should be demonstrating, by example and by word, just such a faith. Those who want some pointers in how to do this, along with some basic tips and techniques, should find this book both of interest and of help.

Pastoral Care of the Mentally Disordered

by Laurence J. Naismith
Faithbuilders Publishing, 2022

Reviewer: Phil Winn

The title of this book may come as a surprise to those used to the term 'mental health problems', but as a practising psychiatrist, Laurence Naismith chooses to devote

most of his book to those suffering from problems which merit a clinical diagnosis. In a slim volume, Naismith concisely demystifies some of the diagnostic terms used by professionals. This is not to enable pastors to become amateur psychiatrists but to help them, and others in the church, to better understand and support those who have been diagnosed with these disorders.

An emphasis is placed on the need for the whole church family to understand and support those with a psychiatric disorder, but he also details the role of leaders. Although he states that there are many models of church leadership, he concentrates on only one and, in passing, maintains that elders should be male. This is unfortunate as it is irrelevant to rest of the book and might unnecessarily alienate some readers.

Chapters are devoted to various psychiatric conditions, from schizophrenia to alcohol dependency. The symptoms are detailed and the various treatments explained. Each chapter ends with example scenarios for consideration which would make excellent discussion starters for a group considering how best to support those with psychiatric conditions in the church.

Although bereavement is not a psychiatric disorder, a helpful chapter is devoted to the grieving process, helping the bereaved, and the difference between normal and abnormal grief. A chapter on subclinical issues gives practical advice about more common causes of emotional distress and the responsibility of church members to care for one another by looking out for the

signs of abnormal stress.

A chapter on the various kinds of support offered to people with a diagnosis of a mental health disorder are explained, together with how the church can help those making use of them, brings some clarity to what could seem a confusing picture. It is a shame that support offered by voluntary organisations, such as MIND, is not mentioned, but this provision varies from place to place.

A chapter on Mental Disorder in the Bible cites many examples of individuals displaying symptoms of the various disorders explained elsewhere in the book, but I was surprised that there were no examples from the gospels. Are afflictions attributed to demonic powers really examples of mental disorders, as some commentators maintain, or genuine spiritual possession which often happens today, as some Christians teach? I can't be the only pastor who has dealt

with patients who fear that they may be under the influence of demons, or who have been told by another church that their problem is caused by the devil. In a chapter on schizophrenia and psychosis the author says that some people who hear voices may attribute them to the devil; a little more advice on how to help those who feel they are demonically oppressed, beyond ensuring they take their medication regularly, would have been helpful.

I would have appreciated some mention, in the section on psychosis, of religious delusions. A full discussion of all these topics would, however, be beyond the scope of this book.

It is refreshing to read a book on mental health disorders by a committed Christian medical expert who can communicate complicated clinical issues in simple language and encourage the church to help sufferers in compassionate and practical ways.

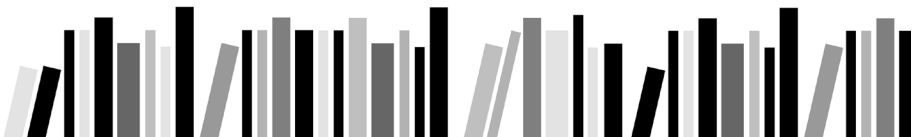
Research into Baptist life

Did you know that there is a free-access archive of all available past *bmj* issues, including its predecessor, *The Fraternal*?

These journals provide a lens into the life of Baptist ministers and their churches back to 1907, and could help you in your research. Our friend Rob Bradshaw, librarian at Spurgeon's College, scanned all the back issues that we have been able to locate and hosts them for us on Theology on the Web, which itself is an amazing resource and worth a look. The *bmj* archive does not include the most recent year or two, but is updated periodically.

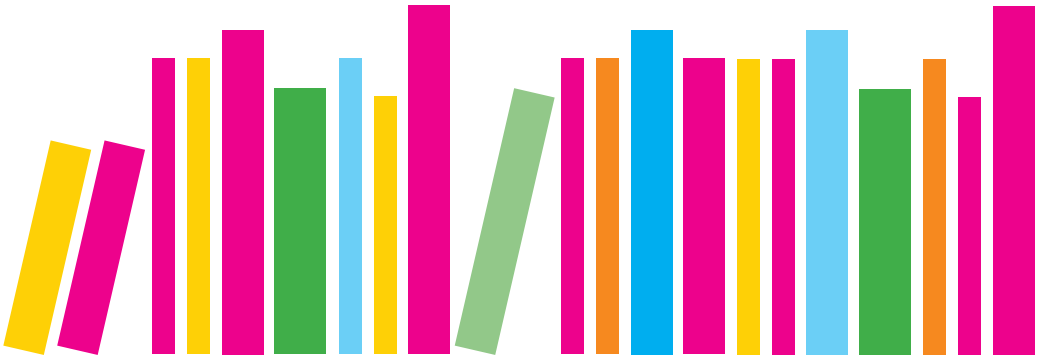
You can find the archive here:

https://theologyontheweb.org.uk/journals_baptist.html



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