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Editor: GETHIN ABRAHAM-WILLIAMS

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

Details of the Fellowship can be found
on the inside back cover

'The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily
reflect those of the Editorial Board'

Editorial

OURS OR MINE?

Jerusalem then and now are inextricably linked in my mind, particularly at Eastertide. Following his landslide victory in February one of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's first acts was to make a symbolic pilgrimage to the Western Wall. It was not so much the symbolism that worried me, because in a sense such an event was highly predictable. What made me concerned was what he said on that occasion. Sharon promised that Jerusalem 'will always be Israeli'. If he meant by that no more than the first world war poet Rupert Brook when he wrote home from the front line in France that *'there's some corner of a foreign field That is for ever England'* I can go along with it. But if Sharon meant to imply that Jerusalem will be exclusively Israeli then it's a sure recipe for continued conflict in that part of the world where uniquely East meets West, and continents converge.

In a fascinating new book, *'Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?'* (Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity, published by Peter Lang, Frankfurt), Peter Crutchley-Jones has written about his experiences as a United Reformed Church Minister in a Cardiff pastorate. His argument is that once any of us starts to lay exclusive claim or right to a special place or a particular territory we've parted company, whether we realise it or not, with the God of both Old and New Testaments. The thrust of the Biblical story - and heaven knows concepts of Christendom have blighted our Christian history and behaviour over the centuries - is that we're all minorities in this complex, exciting and diverse world. And it's only when we bring ourselves to realise that,

that we'll make any real progress in terms of world peace or of community relations.

When I visited Jerusalem a couple of years ago, like thousands before and since, I stood by the Western Wall and imagined Jesus in that same spot two thousand years earlier. As I prayed there quietly to myself: *'thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth'*, I struggled with the unending difficulty of how to live out that prayer as well as to say it. And I'm still living with the question: How to turn the Western Wall from a site for the bitter divisions we've witnessed all too often in recent history, to becoming a meeting place not only between people of all nations, cultures and languages, but between God and the whole of human kind? **[Smj]**

With this issue, we say farewell to Stuart Jenkins, as chair of this Journal's editorial board. During my time as editor Stuart has been a tremendous support, coming up with practical solutions when suitable copy was in short supply, and feeding board meetings with imaginative suggestions for future issues. Our prayers and best wishes go with him as he assumes the much larger chair of the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship.

The note on Baptists in Europe in our January issue came our way with a bundle of briefing papers for a BWA-ACC conversation. Ruth Gouldbourne, tutor at Bristol Baptist College and author of the note, has asked us to point out her indebtedness to McBeth and Bernard Green's work in preparing what was essentially a memo for a meeting rather than an article for publication. This we are glad to do

A new word for an old labour

Luke Bretherton, research fellow at the St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace, and currently completing a PhD in moral philosophy and theology at King's College, London, reminds us of the importance of preaching amid all the electioneering.

As the next general election approaches, and the two main parties make a claim upon Christians to vote for them, the relationship between the pulpit and politics comes into sharp focus. In this situation, it is imperative to ask what is the political responsibility of the preached word? To answer this question we must understand both the times we live in and what is required of the preacher in these times.

We live after the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ and before his return. In this age, before the age to come, the cry of Jeremiah to Israel in Babylon rings in our ears: 'seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile' even though that city be Babylon. The picture of the possibilities and pitfalls of such a call come to us in the story of Daniel and in his apocalyptic visions we are reminded that politics has an end which it can neither bring about nor fulfil. This is to say that proclaiming Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will come again is to call for a politics of modest purpose that is pragmatic yet moral. In preaching the Gospel we announce both the responsibility of political authority and its limit. Likewise, its proclamation is also a call to all the citizens of Babylon, whether they bow the knee to God or to idols, to take responsibility for their common welfare.

Statecraft

Today, saying politics has a purpose is no longer stating the obvious. The libertarian ideology, in both its social and economic forms, denies any wider purpose to politics other than the promotion of individual liberty and freedom for the market. In effect this denies politics any purpose at all. Politics ceases to have any creative possibilities and becomes a wholly destructive endeavour; that is, the

task of the politician is the removal of social and political boundaries, traditions and constraints that limit autonomous choice and 'free' trade. The logical conclusion of such a view must be the eventual withering away of political authority whence choice and market form some self-constituting entity. This is patently absurd. Even in their darkest formulations of the role of political authority Christians have never envisaged politics as a wholly destructive endeavour. Even if the ruler's sole task is to bear the sword and enforce order this still constitutes a positive purpose. Our preaching must help the faithful discern the proper purposes of politics and resist those who deny such a possibility.

Not only does politics serve a purpose, but the purpose it serves is a moral one. There are those for whom talk of politics and morality in the same breath is an invitation to cynical sneers. On the political right such sneers come from those who call themselves 'realists', who take Machiavelli as their guide, and who see might as right. On the left such sneers come from those who see all forms of power as intrinsically oppressive and all moral claims as masks concealing plays for power. But the Christian cannot keep company with either the overly suspicious or the unnecessarily callous. Christ's life and resurrection affirm and establish the

possibility of moral action in every realm of life, including that of statecraft. Our preaching must help the faithful discern the moral purposes of politics and resist those who deny such a possibility.

British Subjects

That politics has a purpose and is moral does not warrant unlimited possibilities to political authority. After Christ politics should be a modest endeavour. The horrific excesses of various nineteenth and twentieth century political programmes were born out of the messianic and utopian pretensions for what the state could craft. Colonial powers that suppressed and destroyed ancient cultures in order to 'civilise' them, nationalist tyrannies that sought to purify the master race by human sacrifice, and Communist regimes that murdered millions in order to bring heaven on earth are all examples of such pretensions. The book of Revelation depicts this hydra-headed beast with terrible clarity. Reflecting on its portrayal of political authority in rebellion against its Sovereign and Judge – Jesus Christ – trains us to be suspicious of over-ambitious political claims. Our preaching must help the faithful discern the modest purposes of politics and resist those who seek salvation and the 'healing of the nations' through political endeavour.

As well as the responsibility of the ruler, our preaching must encompass the responsibilities of the Christian as a British subject. We live in an age when most people are disenchanted with politics and politicians. For example, today, radical protest is directed toward the economic realm, whereas the fervour of 1960's student radicals was directed toward the realm of politics. Another indicator of this abandonment of politics to politicians is that the numbers of people voting is declining in each election. The reasons for this shift are manifold and complex and

there is not the space to analyse them here. However, we can ask what should be the proper response of Christians? We are counselled in Ephesians 4 to 'no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine', but neither are we to be fooled 'by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.' On the one hand we should be suspicious of simply following the *zeitgeist* and abandoning politics, but on the other hand, we should not simply join parties, vote, lobby and campaign just because these things are possible. Instead, 'speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.' What does this mean in relation to politics today? How does this 'way you learned Christ' that Paul speaks of relate to our political responsibilities as British subjects?

Moral and Modest

It is a vital task of preaching to address these questions in the light of Scripture. The first task of the preacher in this respect is to help people understand what it means to be the church. In learning what it means to be brothers and sisters of the household of God and citizens of the kingdom of God we can properly understand what it means to seek the welfare of the United Kingdom. Schooling in Christian discipleship enables us to form the kind of judgement that can make wise and good political choices. We do not come to see what is wise and just merely by looking. We must develop the necessary disciplines, virtues and judgement through initiation and participation in that community that attempts to live faithful to the story of God. Thus, the primary political task of the preacher is to help Christians know what it is to be faithful and to help them rightly envision the world.

Building up the kind of community that is 'rooted and built up in Christ and established in the faith' (Col 2.7) is to

enable the church to witness to the kingdom of God. Truthful witness, founded on the Gospel, is inevitably political. For in proclaiming that Christ is Lord we say that Caesar's reign is limited and under judgement. In other words, the church in faithfully being the church calls Caesar to be moral and modest. However, truthful witness means the church as church (as distinct from individual Christians) cannot be aligned with one particular party or policy. It can only be aligned with Christ and no one political party or policy can claim a monopoly on such alignment. Politics is a secular activity; this is to say, it is of this age and not of the age to come. To claim any party or policy as the only possible option for Christians is to claim far too much. It teeters on the edge of the kind of messianic pretensions that proved so disastrous in the last century. One might claim that only certain political goods and goals are valid for Christians to seek. But there can be no single definably 'Christian' way or means of achieving these. To say otherwise is to stand against Paul in the debate over circumcision. No earthly mark may be the cause of division in the body of Christ.

Parliament

'For **Christ** is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built

upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.' Thus our preaching must help the faithful discern what it means to be faithful, but resist the temptation to prescribe what faithfulness means in terms of one particular political programme.

Finally, preaching itself is a political act. In an age when public speech, from advertising to political rhetoric, is economical with the truth, preaching maintains the possibility of truthful public speech. The preached word is a Pentecostal word for it is the word that builds up the community and is for the community. It is thus truly free speech: speech that is the gift of God for the good of others. Preaching conflicts directly with contemporary political speech that assumes all are equal (all voices count the same as opposed to some having wisdom and others listening) and competitive (instead of seeking the truth together, truth is supposed to emerge from everyone fighting to have their say; thus parliament ceases to be a place of common deliberation and becomes instead a joust between competing interests). The very practice of preaching holds open the possibility of truthful and free speech and fosters a people that expects such speech from their rulers and who will denounce false speech that aims to conceal and serve itself.

In conclusion, be encouraged but beware! As the next general election approaches, as throughout the rest of the year, preaching the Word of God is one of the foremost and vital political tasks. However, arouse neither the expectation of heaven on earth, nor hopelessness abounding; instead, envision the faithful to seek a good enough and civil society characterised by just generosity as they wait patiently for the full disclosure of God's kingdom. **bmj**

Facing Fragmenting Cultures

John Matthews, minister of Tilehouse St, Hitchin, argues that the witness of the local church in a postmodernist culture is to be inclusive and participatory.

'In a culture which is increasingly fragmented and in which the community we all require for the full development of our humanity is increasingly hard to find, we (Christians) are called to model true human community (Osborn, 181).'

Emphasis on the necessarily communal aspect of Christian commitment is particularly relevant when one of the religious characteristics of our postmodernist culture is 'believing without belonging' (Davie, in Platten, James & Chandler 92). Many people still believe in God, whatever they mean by 'God', but only a small proportion of these belong to a faith community. Such a situation would seem to indicate that people are content simply to believe, whereas *the developing, nourishing and sustaining of Christian faith and practice is impossible apart from the life of a believing community* (Newbigin, 235, emphasis added). Baptist churches have always had people who were happy to be part of the congregation but who did not want to become church members, for whatever reason. Such people may feel that they belong to the church, and, indeed, may show this by contributing to its life in a variety of ways. Some of these who do not 'belong' in one sense show a greater sense of belonging than some who belong, in the sense that they are members, but who do not show this in any meaningful way, and who may not even attend.

Why is that so many prefer to believe without belonging? One reason is the individualistic nature of postmodernist culture, as mentioned above. Another is negative experiences of churches, their services, activities, members or clergy. We know all too well, that *the Church is a company of sinners, and will be prone to failing* (Goodliff, 111), which serves to remind us of how important it is for the Church to be raised time and time again and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to become increasingly Christ-like. *It is above all by the character of its communal life that it witnesses, that it proclaims the gospel and serves the world* (Lindbeck, quoted Clapp, 90). The Church is a test case of its own gospel message (Greenwood, 41). This means that *strengthening distinctive Christian community is at once one of most essential and the most formidable challenges the church faces* (Clapp, 193).

Space

One important aspect of the church being a community in a society where loneliness is widespread is the need to be welcoming; to be inclusive rather than exclusive. *Unconsciously churches reject large tracts of humanity by failing to make provision for them to find a 'space' which they can occupy without automatically denying their culture, music, way of speech, or capacity to handle texts and concepts* (Greenwood, 27f). 'Welcoming the Stranger' is the title of a recent Baptist Union publication on the subject of asylum seekers, but it was previously used as a book title by Patrick Keifert.

He argues that *churches that respond with hospitality (to strangers) will enjoy growth at many levels, including numerical. Those who exclude these seekers ...will experience the opposite* (Keifert, x). That may be so, but the reason to welcome the stranger is not just so that the church may

grow, it is also, and more especially, because in so doing we bear witness to the Christ-like God. *Only by being the kind of people open to receiving strangers as friends of God do we discover what it means to be a community bearing witness to the openness and graciousness of God's inbreaking Kingdom* (Fowl & Jones, 73). The letter to the Hebrews advises *do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it* (Hebrews 13:2). It is interesting to recognise, in this connection, that the three major festivals of the Church - Christmas, Easter and Pentecost - *all have to do with the advent of a divine stranger. ..The child in the manger, the traveller on the road to Emmaus, and the mighty wind of the Spirit all meet us as mysterious visitors* (Fowl & Jones, 73f).

Lesbians and Gays

The notice boards of some churches announce that 'All are welcome', but the experience of some people, not least blacks, gays, lesbians, and people with learning difficulties, suggests that sometimes 'all' does not mean 'everyone' but rather 'people like us'. For the Church truly to be the Church it must reflect the attitude of Christ who welcomed all kinds of people - and was roundly criticised by religious people for so doing (Matthew 9:11, Luke 15:2). So it is right that one of the '5 Core Values for a Gospel People' issued by the Baptist Union of Great Britain is that of inclusiveness.

A question that arises here is exactly what it means to be welcoming. There are those who suggest that our attitude to sexually active gays and lesbians should be that of 'welcoming but not affirming'. Is such a qualified welcome a true welcome? Will it be perceived as such by those concerned? The Evangelical Alliance calls upon evangelical congregations to *welcome and accept sexually active*

homosexual people, but to do so in the expectation that they will come in due course to see the need to change their lifestyle in accordance with biblical revelation and orthodox church teaching (ACUTE, 33, emphasis added). On the other hand, the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement are drawing up a list of 'welcoming congregations', who will let it be known, privately or publicly, that they do welcome lesbians and gays. (This is, of course, one aspect of the wider question of a Christian response to homosexuality, which cannot be discussed here.)

Power Structures

In Baptist ecclesiology the Church Meeting is the place where the local church, which I have argued should be an inclusive community, makes its decisions. A correct understanding of the Church Meeting requires 'Church' to be understood as a noun and 'Meeting' as a verb. That is, the 'Church Meeting' is (members of) the church meeting (together) to discern the mind of Christ and to do his will. This is very different from seeing 'Meeting' as a noun and 'Church' as an adjective, which simply distinguishes this particular meeting from others, like the Women's Meeting or the Men's Meeting.

The process may be 'democratic' in that everyone has an equal voice and an equal vote (if there is one), and the decision made may turn out to accord with common sense, but the primary and explicit aim of the process is to enable the group to be aware of, to invoke, and to respond faithfully to the presence and movement of the Spirit of God, and thus to find 'God's will' for the group (Lonsdale, 104). It is essential to be clear that *the primary aim of communal discernment is not to reach the most sensible or prudent decision, or the one which is most acceptable to a majority, or the option that has received the most persuasive backing*

in debate and discussion (Lonsdale, 104).

The constitution of Wendover Free Church (Baptist/URC) includes the following words: *voting shall not be regarded as the means to determine and follow the will of the majority, but rather as a convenient means of ascertaining the degree of unanimity amongst the members as to the mind of Christ. It shall, therefore, be the responsibility of the Chairman (sic) to advise the church as to its course of action in the case of a closely split vote.*

Perhaps the greatest strength of the Church Meeting as a place of communal discernment is *the way it models power structures that are inclusive and encourage participation by all* (Sparkes, 12). A

potential weakness, and one that must be guarded against, is that the Church Meeting can be *vulnerable to the voices that are loudest but are not necessarily the most discerning, and it is equally possible for the prophetic voice in the midst of a community to be stifled.* ..(Sparkes, 13). One way of helping everyone present to contribute to the meeting is by using small groups, with the groups feeding back, without attributing comments to specific individuals, to the meeting as a whole.

In our fragmented, individualistic postmodernist culture, the local church's modelling of inclusive, participatory community is a powerful form of witness to the trinitarian God. **bmj**

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Save the minutes

The Baptist Historical Society has been preparing advice on document retention for Associations that may merge in the reform of structures. As part of these changes, it is possible that some local ministers' meetings may disband. Please take care that any formal minutes belonging to these bodies are placed in an appropriate archive, either in the County Record Office or local library.

Feminism: a neglected Baptist issue

Paul Rowntree Clifford, former Professor of Religion, McMaster University, Canada, and President of the Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, argues that sex is an outstanding example of the variety which God has built into the universe.

Feminism is one of the most important issues in the current debate about the future shape of British society, but it seems to have been given little serious attention in Baptist circles where their role has been largely taken for granted. The real issue in the current debate is about the proper balance between men and women and this is something to which Baptists as well as everyone else need to give serious attention. Unless we are seen to be aiming at a proper balance within the church we shall hardly be in a position to influence the public debate.

My principal concern in the debate is to stress that the essential differences between women and men, physical, psychological, temperamental, emotional and in terms of gifts and capabilities tend to be overlooked in the desire to establish equality between the sexes in the light of male domination and exploitation over the centuries. We need to insist that these differences are complementary and in no way justify the domination of one sex by the other. I believe that this conviction about the equality of men and women before God is an inescapable inference from the attitude of Jesus towards women which broke with the conventions of the time and pointed the way to a liberated role for women in society. Throughout the centuries this has been obscured by the patriarchal culture of male domination to which the Church has largely succumbed.

The issue has now come to the sharpest focus in the demand that the partnership of women and men in the Church should be radically rethought in the light of the changes that have taken place in society, but Christians have been slow to see that this is required by the very nature of the gospel they profess, the good news for all irrespective of sex, race, colour or any other classification. It is now at the forefront of the agenda of most of the Churches, and because it challenges inbred attitudes which

have long remained unacknowledged and uncriticized it has stirred up a great deal of resistance and controversy.

Undervalued, underused

The feminist revolt against male domination in the Church has been simmering for a long time even if it has come to be seen as an issue of major importance only comparatively recently when the ordination of women to the priesthood threatened to split the Church of England and has had wide repercussions throughout the Anglican communion all over the world.

Women ministers have long been accepted for ordination in other Churches in all parts of the world, but in practice their place has been grudgingly accepted in many quarters and their full potentiality undervalued and underused. Nearly seventy years ago the issue was raised by my father in his presidential address to the Baptist Union Assembly in Glasgow. The subject was featured on the day of his induction in 1933 on the front page of *The Glasgow Evening News* which carried the banner headline "Women Revolt Against The Church", anticipating by over half a century the recent preoccupation of the national press with the topic. My father spoke against the background of his unique partnership with my mother and

their joint leadership of a staff of over twenty at the West Ham Central Mission which they founded, where women outnumbered men by at least four to one. This address was referred to more recently by Nell Alexander, the first woman to be elected to the Presidency of the Baptist Union, as she looked round the male dominated Council Chamber at one of the sessions and exclaimed "How long, O Lord? How long?"¹

A classic example of the frustration felt by so many able women was expressed by Florence Nightingale before she left for her pioneering work in nursing the wounded of the Crimean war: 'I would have given the Church my head, my heart, my hand. She would have none of them. She told me to go back to do crochet in my mother's drawing room; or marry and look well at the head of my husband's table. "You may go to Sunday School if you like it", she said, but gave me no training for that. She gave me neither work to do for her nor education for it.'

Relegated

Opportunities have improved since then, but the Churches are still patriarchal and male dominated. Women, in spite of the fact that they constitute a great deal more than half the membership are largely relegated to subsidiary roles. They are expected to make tea, prepare meals and clean the auditorium, but as far as leadership and decision making are concerned, these are largely in the hands of the minority of men, and this is reflected in the small proportion of women on the synods and councils of the various Churches. There is an obvious imbalance in this situation unless it is assumed that the proper role of women in the Church is a subservient one. It has to be recognized that a great many women are content that this should be so, but many are not.

It is not always sufficiently appreciated

that the controversy over the ordination of women is bound up with the clerical domination of all the Churches, and we are not likely to make much progress unless the question is viewed in this context. If we take seriously the definition of the Church as the whole people of God, we are bound to ask whether the ordained ministry has been accorded too dominant a role in it. The Church is not to be defined in terms of those ordained to ministerial office. The building called a church is the base where the congregation meet for worship and receiving the means of grace, where it is together as a Christian community. But its mission is where they are every hour, every day of the week. The balance between the two needs redressing if the Church is to be understood as the people of God and express its wholeness in which women and men have an equal share.

Equality

But equality is not to be defined simply in terms of the right to ordination to the full time ministry. Maternity leave and the care of children inhibit the ability of married women to undertake the responsibilities of the pastoral office and while this does not apply to those who choose a single vocation, it underlines the difference in roles between women and men. Moreover, wherever the ordination of women has been regarded as theologically completely acceptable, as in the Church of Scotland and the British Free Churches, the placement of women ministers has proved to be far from easy. It is argued that this is not simply due to prejudice, but springs from an intuitive insight that the office is more appropriately reserved for men.

On the other hand, the case for the ordination of women rests on the deeply held conviction that the inclusiveness of the gospel requires that women as well as men should exercise the complete

ministry, preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments and undertaking pastoral care. The distinctive gifts they bring to the ordained ministry do not simply free them from frustration, but add immeasurably to the witness of the Church and its effectiveness in mission. In the course of time, it is said, congregations will become used to this complementary ministry and the resistance to it will disappear in the light of experience.

Outstanding

The ordination of women to ministerial office is only one way in which full complementarity is to be achieved. They have made a distinctive contribution to the Christian mission in every tradition which has not always been given the recognition it deserves. They have been in the forefront of the modern overseas missionary enterprise; Mary Slessor of Calabar and Mildred Cable and Francesca French of the China Inland Mission are notable examples, and today over 50% of those serving in partnership with the young Churches of the Developing World are women. The leadership of the Salvation Army has been in the hands of the daughters of General Booth and other outstanding women. Women have been canonized as saints of the Church and widely recognized as authorities in spiritual direction of whom Lady Julian of Norwich, St Catherine of Sienna and St Teresa of Avila are striking examples. In recent times Evelyn Underhill, Dorothy Emmet and Olive Wyon have made notable contributions to theology and the philosophy of religion, the precursors of the feminist theologians of today. Women have taken the lead in the healing, educational and caring ministries of the Church, Mother Teresa being the outstanding example in recent years.

The balance of partnership with men may have been out of proportion due to the patriarchal structures in Church and

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society, but we should not underestimate the crucial part which women have played in the ministry and mission of the Church: a solid basis on which more fruitful co-operation can be built for the future. Florence Nightingale's experience has not been wholly typical.

However, more thinking needs to be done about the nature of the complementary roles of men and women and how the feminine and masculine may be more effectively combined in the expression of the gospel as embracing all humankind. Too little attention has been given, particularly in the Churches which stem from the Reformation, to the New Testament imagery of the Church as the bride of Christ and the place of the Virgin Mary in Christian devotion. It is one of the strange anomalies that those who would describe themselves as Evangelicals, affirming their orthodoxy particularly in relation to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, have then largely neglected the subject, fighting shy of any reference to the mother of our Lord.

Honoured, not Worshipped

No doubt this has been largely due to antagonism towards the Roman Church as such and to her veneration of the Virgin Mary which is so clearly a central feature in Roman Catholic devotion. It has been held to be a distortion of her place in Christian origins, resulting in unwarranted additions to the traditional credal affirmations as well as giving her a dangerously co-equal place in Christian worship.

There have obviously been exaggerations leading to actual distortion in popular Roman Catholic practice; in what branch of the Church has this not been the case in regard to some aspect of doctrine? But any unprejudiced and informed observer would be bound to recognize that this rests on a misunderstanding of the essence of Roman

Catholic devotion. The mother of our Lord is honoured², not worshipped, as the representative of the whole Church in acceptance of and obedience to him. 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word'. This is the model of Christian devotion and the essence of the Church's faith. The unique place of the Virgin Mary is that she had the privilege of bearing and giving birth to the Saviour of the world. In doing so she was not placed on equality with him, but was the forerunner of all those who would accept him.

This has been obscured by controversy about the later dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Bodily Assumption which continue to be stumbling blocks for those who do not accept the infallibility of papal decrees. But that is not the point. The question I am asking is whether Christians of other traditions may not have much to learn from Roman Catholic

devotion to our Lady and whether this may not be one of the ways of establishing a better balance between the masculine and the feminine in the life of the Church.

Mother Church

Prejudices and misunderstandings die hard, and in the new climate of mutual acceptance and co-operation following the Second Vatican Council the time has come to explore with open minds all the issues which hitherto have proved to be stumbling blocks in the expectation that new insights will emerge which will lead to our common enrichment. This was the motivation of the late Martin Gillet, a remarkable Roman Catholic layman, who persuaded bishops of his own Church as well as leaders of the Anglican and Reformed Churches to sponsor the establishment of The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary.³ He believed that by bringing people of different communions together to study a subject

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BAPTIST TIMES

The year 2001 is many things. It is:

- the 150th anniversary of the Great Exhibition.
- the first year of the new millennium (not 2000!).
- the 100th anniversary of the birth of Walt Disney.
- the year Arthur C. Clarke chose for his popular space odyssey.
- the 100th anniversary of Queen Victoria's death.
- the probable year of a General Election.
- the 100th anniversary of the patenting of the Gillette safety razor.
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which had hitherto kept them apart, the cause of Christian unity and mutual understanding could be advanced. The society has now been in existence for a number of years and notable contributions to the regular conferences have been made by theologians of all Christian traditions. So far it has made little impact on the Churches at large, perhaps because the subject has seemed too esoteric. However, it is at least an imaginative beginning for pointing the way forward in combining the feminine and the masculine in creative partnership.

It may be more fruitful to explore the relationship of the masculine and the feminine partnership of women and men in the Church by concentrating on their difference and complementarity than by looking for neutral terminology in thinking and speaking about God and about their relationship to one another. Rather than trying to reform the traditional language of addressing God, it may be more fruitful to pursue what is implied by calling God our Father and the Church our Mother with Mary as the focus of its faith and obedience.

Heaven and Hell

This depends on emphasizing the acceptance of difference as the essence of creative unity; its contrast is the belief that differences necessarily imply disunity and separation. In his famous allegory, "The Great Divorce",⁴ C.S. Lewis portrayed hell as miles of empty mean streets surrounding the bus stop to heaven: empty because, if you quarrelled with your neighbour in hell you could always move into the next

street. On earth you have to continue to live alongside your neighbour and that is why Jean-Paul Sartre could bring down the curtain in one of his plays with the line, 'Hell is other people'. The Christian understanding is the precise opposite: heaven is other people related to one another, their differences brought together in unity through reconciliation with God wrought by Jesus Christ on the cross.⁵ This is the basis for understanding the complementary relationship between women and men, and it has the widest implications which go far beyond partnership in the Church. The controversy over the ordination of women, like all other theological differences can only be resolved by holding together in communion, learning from and listening to one another until we have come to deeper insights under the guidance of the Spirit of God. Unless we do so, we have nothing to say to a world torn apart by nationalist idolatry, by racial, ethnic and sectarian strife.

To return to the limited theme of this article. Every insight is finite and partial, and we have much to learn about the way God is leading us into the future. Behind everything I have written are two basic convictions. The first is that women and men are essentially different and that sex is an outstanding example of the variety which God has built into the universe. The second is that the sexes are complementary and that the nature of this is what requires patient exploration. In this world the ideal is always beyond us, but for Christians the lode star is the promise that all things will ultimately be gathered together in perfect harmony in Christ. **bmj**

Notes

¹ Letter to Dean Stanley in "As Miss Nightingale Said", ed. Monica Bailey, Scutari Press, 1991, p.56.

² 2. Luke 1.38. (AV)

³ For information about activities and publications consult The General Secretary, The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 11, Belmont Road, Wallington, Surrey SM6 8TE. England

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (London, Bles, 1945).

⁵ Cf. Eph. 2. 13-16.

The ineffectiveness of the church as an instrument for change

From a Latin American perspective, John Barry Dyer, serving with the BMS in Brazil, casts a critical eye over the traditional models of pastoral formation and their failure to engage with the prevailing culture.

My intention in this article is to undertake a retrospective of the principal models of theological education through the centuries. In the process I want to examine each with a view to identifying the theological purpose they served, the socio-political and cultural context in which they functioned and the ecclesiastical traditions they safeguarded.

Sidney Rooy has identified four major traditions in theological education dating from the Early Church to the present day.¹ He describes how the church had initially progressed by proclaiming the gospel message as received from the apostles, witnessing to the saving acts of God and inviting people to follow Christ and submit to his authority. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the Third century there began a slow process of change in the way that the Christian faith was transmitted.

The Catechetical Model

Changing circumstances obliged the church to depart from its, hitherto, informal approach to theological education. The advent of Christological controversy meant that accepted truth had to be passed on through formal instruction in order to distinguish between Christian doctrine and Gnostic error which was by then proliferating in the church. The original practice associated with formal Christian instruction, known as the catechetical model, consisted of oral teaching by way of questions and answers. The creeds are an example of how the original gospel message was summarised and transmitted from generation to generation. This change of circumstances also brought about the need for 'a constitutional ministry of bishops (*episkopoi*) and elders (*presbuteroi*) in order to maintain the unity and integrity of

the Christian community'.

Nevertheless, it was not the exclusive privilege of the bishops and elders to give instruction to church members and new converts.² This would have been, for all practical purposes, impossible in any case. Moreover, instruction was given to the whole church, according to this model of theological education, with a view to preparing the *laos* for effective mission. Manuals, such as the *Didache* and the writings of Justin Martyr and Tertullian were among the principal materials used.³

Today, catechism or its equivalent is generally reserved for new converts, although in Brazilian Baptist churches All Age Christian Education is still the norm. Without wishing to deny the basic value of this form of instruction, it is only rudimentary and has not resulted in the mobilisation of the church. Rather, the longstanding relationship between pastor (*cleros*) and people (*laos*) has been carefully safeguarded, thus preventing the latter from assuming personal responsibility for ministry and mission.

The Monastic Model

The Edict of Milan (313) was a watershed for the church. It not only signalled the end of almost 250 years of persecution, but also the metamorphosis of the church into a state recognised institution.⁴ An

important consequence of this was the emergence of clerical elitism and (in due course) institutional theological education.⁵

As the clergy moved up through the hierarchical ranks of the church, so the ordinary members (erroneously called 'the laity' from the Greek *laikos*), were forced down. Indeed, it was no longer expected that they (the laity) should be theologically literate. Their place was to obey the clergy (a sentiment still held by some Brazilian Baptist pastors towards church members), receive the sacraments and have no pretensions to leadership within the church (Council of Seville, 618).

Officially this ecclesiological hermeneutic ceased to hold sway at Vatican II and the primacy of the people was restored. The dominant concept of the church as the 'body of Christ', with its emphasis on unity (but also hierarchical structures), gave way to the concept of the 'people of God' with an emphasis on equality throughout the Christian community.

However, according to Dr. F.J. Laishley, 'that does not solve half the problems of the differentiations in regard to leadership within a fundamental unity/equality'.⁶ Whilst a return to a biblical concept of the primacy of the people has been agreed in theory by the higher echelons of the church, it still has not been applied on the ground either in the Roman Catholic or Baptist churches. There are several reasons for this: firstly (for Roman Catholics), the ambivalence of Vatican II toward *Lumen Gentium* and indeed the 'inherent ambivalence' of some of its documents concerning the nature of the church;⁷ secondly, the continued emphasis on educating the *cleros* to the exclusion of the people of God in general.

Grassroots

As limited available resources are dedicated to even higher standards for the

ordained ministry, precious few are made available for other categories of leadership within the church; thirdly, the preoccupation with the academic formation of the church's leadership continues to prevail over against tested ability in local church situations. This, in my experience, has been detrimental to the spiritual and numeric growth of many Baptist churches in Brazil⁸ - a point which is reinforced when one compares the training strategies of the Baptist denomination and Pentecostal churches. The former requires evidence of high academic performance, whereas the latter accepts for the pastoral ministry those who have proved their aptitude for the task at grassroots level. Only then is the role of the theological institution contemplated.

Rooy refers to monasteries and cathedrals as centres of theological education in the early part of the Middle Ages.⁹ Evidently, they enjoyed a harmonious relationship in which the monastery schools provided teachers for schools attached to the cathedrals. An example of the former is the school in Fulda, established by Boniface (744). Among the cathedral or episcopal schools, the one at York was particularly important and counted among its students a certain Albino Alcuino who later spent 15 years (781-796), establishing other schools for priests. Some schools belonging to the royal courts were also established.

At the same time that theological institutions were multiplying in northern Europe, training opportunities for the *laikos* became virtually non-existent. The rare exceptions were a few schools connected to the royal courts. Generally, the only requirement laid upon the *laikos* was that they learnt the Creed and the Lord's Prayer,¹⁰ thus effectively confining ordinary church members to a role of ecclesiastical subservience.

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To the readers of the Baptist Ministers' Journal

The last few disastrous months of awful weather, notably the floods, which seem to have affected most of the country have demonstrated the prudence and importance of property maintenance. Well done to those churches who heeded the advice given in my last message and have had a troublefree winter.

Its now time to think ahead again and I would like to draw your attention to a rather different problem than too many leaves - too many thieves!!!

It Is Now Lawn Mower Stealing Season!

As spring approaches, many gardeners' thoughts turn to that first cut of the grass, and whether their lawn mower will still be working after the winter lay-up. Regrettably, some thieves' thoughts turn to selling a stolen lawn mower at this time, as the market is probably at its best. The usual place of sale is a car boot sale, mostly on a Sunday. Some simple, inexpensive steps may be appropriate now. If you have not already done so, please arrange to check the following: -

1. Does the Church equipment shed/store have a good solid door?
2. Does it have a decent close-shackle padlock?
3. Are the other walls, roof and windows secure?
4. Is your Lawn Mower distinctively marked with more than the Manufacturer's name?

At the cost of a tin of bright (yellow?) paint - mark the Church name in large letters over the casing of any attractive equipment - mower, strimmer etc. In other words, check physical security, and mark your property. Time spent now will save hours of frustrating inconvenience

A.J. GREEN ACII ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

The Scholastic Model

During the second half of the Middle Ages (1000-1500) a further development took place with regard to theological education. Whilst the earlier catechetical and monastic models continued to direct attention to matters of discipleship and spirituality respectively, the founding of the first universities (Paris and Oxford) brought about a concern for the intellectual dimension of Christian faith.

Interest was now focused on the relationship between reason and faith, on the one hand, and natural theology and revelation, on the other. This brought about a further distancing of theological education not only from the ordinary church member, but now from the great majority of the clerical class as well. According to Rooy, the scholastic model had little to do with the practical needs of the local church or the pastoral duties of the *cleros*.¹¹ So far as the 'people' were concerned, theological education was mediated non verbally through art, music and architecture. Consequently, the stress on visual and symbolic forms of communication, also created a situation in which superstition and magic replaced the Word of God at the heart of the Christian faith.

Even so, the scholastic or university model of theological education has played an important role with regard to the study of theology as an intellectual discipline capable of standing its ground among the rest. In view of Rooy's negative critique of the rationalisation of Scripture - with its emphasis on a symbolic and allegorical interpretation of the text - it should be mentioned that the Fourth Gospel makes ample use of symbolic and allegorical language, whilst treating the miracles as '*signs* displaying the glory of Jesus and the wonder of his redeeming love.'¹² However, there is a difference here

between 'interpretation' and 'meaning'. For example, a symbolic or allegorical interpretation would be clearly unjustified if the writer had in mind a literal meaning. Furthermore, in this context, it is significant that a more direct approach to historical truth was adopted by no less than three out of the four gospel writers.

Whilst recognising the specific contribution of the university to the development of theological discourse, I would argue that it ought not to be regarded as the primary place of theological education. Rather, the university context is a secondary context to that of the local church and should, therefore, be oriented by the local church. The reasons for this are principally two-fold: firstly, theological education should, ideally, *serve the whole people of God* and the needs of contemporary mission; secondly, theological education should *be accessible to the whole church* in terms of academic levels, financial costs and geographic distances and as such, participate effectively in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ for the advancement of justice and peace in the world.

The Seminary Model

The shortcomings of a purely academic approach to theological education were alarmingly evident by the beginning of the 16th century. An approach to the study of theology devoid of practical or moral application was clearly inadequate as a model for the training of spiritual leaders for the church. Following an initiative by Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros to reverse the increasing decadence among clergy, Ignatius Loyola created a new concept in theological education. The earlier scholastic model was reformed to include, among other things, biblical studies and moral theology. Moreover, a decree of the Council of Trent issued in 1563, required every cathedral and

metropolitan church to establish a seminary for the training of future priests.

Within the churches of the Reformation, however, theological education was extended to the whole people of God. The reason for this was the newly embraced doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Following the example of John Wycliff over a century earlier, the 16th century reformers pursued the idea of Christian education for *cleros* and *laikos* alike. Similar changes were initiated by Luther in Germany, while Melancthon put the flesh on the bones of his mentor's proposals for educational reform. Also strategic for the Reformation was the founding by Calvin of an institute of higher education in Geneva (1559), which produced many of the next generation of Protestant leaders.¹³

These schools of Christian education were the forerunners of the seminary model which has survived, if not thrived, to the present day. The years following the initial impetus of the Reformation witnessed a decline in the quality of Protestant theological education.¹⁴ This situation continued until the 18th century when the evangelical revival brought about a reversal of the religious decline in Britain. This was followed by the founding of six Baptist colleges in Britain during the 19th century, to add to the one in Bristol which was founded in 1679. These are now all attached in one way or another to British universities, for the purpose of examinations and the validation of courses.

Clerical elitism

This very same model of theological education has also been implanted in Latin

America by missionaries and mission agencies from Britain, continental Europe and North America. Perhaps, it would be more correct to say that the seminary model has been transplanted rather than implanted, since it has retained all the marks of a Western institution.¹⁵ These institutions have relied heavily on foreign missionary personnel and foreign funds. However, a change of mission policy by the Southern Baptist Convention has led to its financial support being gradually withdrawn, supposedly, in an attempt to encourage these institutions to become self sufficient. Needless to say, it will not be easy for Brazilians to maintain Western style institutions in the prevailing economic climate of Latin America.

The seminary model is clearly something with which Brazilians and Latin Americans have struggled during the latter part of the 20th century. Brazilian Baptist theological institutions do not correspond to the aspirations of Brazilian theological educators today. At the same time, the Baptist denomination's leadership seems unaware that the predominant model of theological education in Brazil has little in common with Brazilian culture or the needs of the Brazilian churches.

What is more, the theological institution has been largely responsible for the clerical elitism which is prevalent among Brazilian Baptist pastors and the consequent relative ineffectiveness of the church as an instrument for change in Brazilian society.¹⁶ For the church to become more effective, it will need to be mobilised. This will require changes in the way ministry is understood and therefore, changes in the way our pastors are trained. **bmj**

¹ See 'Modelos Históricos de la Educación Teológica'. *Nuevas Alternativas de Educación Teológica*. pp. 43-58.

² Sidney Rooy, op. cit., quoting Eusebius from *The Layman in Christian History*. Eds. C.H. Neill and H.R. Weber. SCM Press. London. 1963. pp. 42-44.

³ The greatest catechetical school of that period was the School of Clement in Alexandria. It was

started by Pantaeus as a centre for the instruction of new converts and the children of Christians (c. 180). Under Clement, the aim (though still evangelistic) was broadened to include the reconciliation of Christian faith with Greek philosophical concepts (see Sidney Rooy, op. cit. and W.H.C. Frend, *The Early Church*. pp. 94-96).

- ⁴ By virtue of the Decree of Thessalonica (381), Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.
- ⁵ Sidney Rooy dates the beginning of institutional theological education from the time of Augustine who, 'after his return to Africa in 388 recognised the need to prepare an elite, given the lack of educated priests' (op. cit., p. 47).
- ⁶ Dr. Laishley is tutor in Systematic Theology at Heythrop College, University of London. Here quoted from a personal letter to the present writer, dated 26 April, 1997.
- ⁷ Edward Schillebeeckx, in the preface to H. Rikhof's, *The Concept of Church*, pp. xi-xiii.
- ⁸ See Chapter 5.2 of present writer's doctoral thesis, *Theological Education and the Local Church*, London, 2000.
- ⁹ op. cit., p. 48.
- ¹⁰ Decree of the emperor Carlomagno, 802 (Rooy, *ibid.*).
- ¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 49.
- ¹² R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John*. p. 55. For a useful discussion on the purpose and style of this Gospel, see pp. 24-38.
- ¹³ See Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation*. p. 92.
- ¹⁴ See Sidney Rooy, *Nuevas Alternativas de Educación Teológica*. p. 54.
- ¹⁵ David Suazo (Guatemala) claims that many Latin American theological institutions have a "foreign" image. See transcript of address given at the AETAL Conference (Diálogo do Milênio), Águas de Lindóia, 25 to 30 September, 1995.
- ¹⁶ Institutional theological education has, in fact, been associated with clerical elitism since the mid-fourth century (Sidney Rooy, *Nuevas Alternativas de Educación Teológica*. pp. 45 and 47-48). See also, Chapters 7.1 and 8.4 of the present writer's doctoral thesis, *Theological Education and the Local Church*, London, 2000.



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In House

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome to the Secretary's annual review of the year. I hope that many of you will be able to be at the AGM itself, during the Assembly – this year we're looking forward to an address from Myra Blyth, and our Assembly session will be shared with the Baptist Forum of Preachers – a first for both organizations.

I know I did this last year, but once again I would like to thank Michael Bochenski, our Chair since 1997. As Michael hands over to Stuart Jenkins it's right for us to pay tribute to the hard work and valuable contribution he has made over the past four or more years.

As I look back at last year's report, the list of issues we've been discussing seems very much the same - the new arrangements for caring for Probationer Ministers; the new form of the 'Accredited List'; possible forms of appraisal for ministers; the effects of stress on Ministry Marriages; and the progress of 'Relating and Resourcing.' We've continued to keep a careful eye on pension issues, stipends and retirement housing. Gethin Abraham-Williams and the editorial board have produced many splendid issues of the Journal, and have recently revised its presentation. The pre-retirement courses we arrange have gone from strength to strength, and continue to develop. But our new partnership with the BFP has also turned our attention to issues such as the training of preachers, and the transitions between ministries.

During the last twelve months there has been a developing discussion on the status of ministers – employees or office holders

– which will no doubt continue and develop. It does remind us that if we (the BMF committee) are to continue to be an effective voice for ministers in discussion with the denomination and the wider church, we need to encourage as many of those in ministry as possible to join; so please do your part in such encouragement. Literature is always available from me or from our UK Membership Secretary, Andrew Henton Pusey.

Can I finally mention two other aspects of the work BMF does. During the past year many gifts have been made to those known to us who are in need from our benevolent fund. This work is quiet, unobtrusive and vital – so thank you to those who have given and made this possible. Secondly, many letters of encouragement and support have been written; I understand that the membership Secretary and the Treasurer have handled over 500 letters just in the first few months of 2001. Of such is the ministry of the BMF composed.

So please continue to pray for and support the BMF in the year ahead.

With much love in Christ,

Bob Almond

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GENERAL ACCOUNT				General Reserve	2000
Income	1999		2000	Balance @ 31.12.99	1,800.54
Home subs	4,887.00		4,781.50	Deficit on 1999	1,579.58
Overseas subs	80.00		64.00	Balance @ 31.12.2000	220.96
BMS subs	7.00		37.00	Benevolent Fund	2000
Journal	556.00		821.30	Balance @ 31.12.99	3,864.29
Interest	1,193.00	793.00	1,404.65	Income during 2000	3,501.50
From life No1			1,000.00	Interest added	200.00
Total	6,323.00		7,698.45	Grants made 2000	3,100.00
				Balance @ 31.12.2000	4,465.79
Expenditure	1999		2000	Pre-retirement courses fund	2000
Journal,printing	2,669.59		2,579.31	Balance @ 31.12.99	2,060.89
Journal envelopes	0.00		189.46	Income from fees/BU	2,910.27
Journal postage	1,842.36		1,826.76	Interest added	50.00
Gen Committee	1,721.90		1,383.06	Expenditure 2000	2,847.33
Editorial board	509.13		215.74	Balance @ 31.12.2000	1,636.29
Past session	299.50		50.00	Life membership No1 Account	2000
Whitley lectures	70.00		70.00	Balance @ 31.12.99	5,135.00
Officers expenses	490.10		522.01	Trans to Gen Acc	1,000.00
Stationery	0.00		126.20	Balance @ 31.12.2000	4,135.00
Other	300.00		0.00	Life membership No2 Account	2000
Total	7,902.58		6,962.54	Balance @ 31.12.99	13,523.00
				New subscriptions	1,500.00
Balance on year	-£1,579.58		735.91	Interest added	160.00
				Balance @ 31.12.2000	15,183.00

Summary of Balances

	1999	2000		1999	2000
General	-1,579.58	735.91	Bank CIA	571.00	109.97
Reserve	1,800.54	220.96	Bank FSA	1,211.94	3,265.46
Benevolent Fund	3,864.29	4,465.79	NS Bonds	23,000.00	23,000.00
Pre-retirement			Petty cash	21.20	1.52
courses fund	2,060.89	1,636.29	Total	24,804.14	26,376.95
life No1 account	5,135.00	4,135.00			
Life no 2 account	13,523.00	15,183.00			
Total	24,804.14	26,376.95			

J-Mail

A brief retrospective from Michael I Bochenski, outgoing chairperson of the Baptist Minister's Fellowship

I wonder if through the J-mail columns, I might express something of the privilege of chairing the BMF over these past four years? I have been a member since 1980 - and still remember David Piggott's note as he acknowledged my first subscription. That sense of pride in being, at last, counted as a Baptist Minister has never left me. I have also read, I think, every word of the Journal over those twenty years and remain grateful to God and the editors for a quality publication quarter by quarter.

I remember fondly too some of the great Assemblies of the 1980s and looking up at an august body of - usually - men on the platform at our AGMs. Never did I imagine then that one day I would both chair and help to lead a new such body into this new century. The three key meetings of the BMF each year - in March and September and at Assembly have become much anticipated diary dates for me. They have provided valued opportunities to explore, with concerned others, some of the key issues of ministry and to hear some of the Union's finest speakers and thinkers reflecting on ministerial praxis among us.

Your readers will excuse then I hope a brief retrospective here - nostalgia is not what it used to be! - as I have looked back over some agenda papers since the mid 1990s. The wisdom of our AGM decision back in 1996 to refocus the BMF as a proactive campaigning group, whilst stopping short of becoming a professional association, has I think been borne out by subsequent events. We have been consulted on and contributed to several

BUGB discussions and debates over these years. The past, present and future role of our Superintendents. Stress in ministry. The vagaries of our settlement processes. The need for a nationally consistent scheme of support for those in what we used to call the 'probationary' years of ministry. The need for a guided self-appraisal scheme among us all. Changing trends in ministry. Ongoing discussions about what it means to 'hold an office' and the related issues.

In ending this j-mail letter might I wonder aloud, good sir? How many of your readers realise the quality of the team which serves them through the national Committee of the BMF? It has been my privilege to work over these years with two other chairpersons, three fine secretaries, one indefatigable treasurer, two membership secretaries and two very able editors. Also, of course, with dozens of area representatives and, as the apostle Paul would express it? 'the rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life'.

I wish and pray the BMF well indeed as I hand over the chair to Stuart Jenkins at the Blackpool Assembly.

Stand firm in the Lord, dear friends.

Reviewed Book

from John Cole, Esher, Surrey

Dear Journal, The review (October 2000) of the Revd Harry Young's Book *Understanding the Holy Spirit* seemed to me to be unnecessarily hurtful to a good man, and lacking in Christian charity.

As a lay member of the United Reformed Church, I would not dare to argue about theology, especially in the *Baptist Ministers' Journal*, with either the author or your reviewer. Let me simply say

Continued at bottom of page 24

Book Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

The Letters of John (Pillar New Testament Commentary) Colin G. Kruse. Leicester: Apollos, 2000), xxii+255 pp., ISBN 0-85111-776-7, £14.95.

The Pillar New Testament Commentary series seeks "above all to make clear the meaning of the text of Scripture as we have it". As such the volumes in the series, including this latest offering, tend to have an old-fashioned feel about them. Solid, learned, broadly conservative exegesis is the name of the game, with little or no overt awareness that the whole notion of "the" meaning of Scripture is increasingly being called into question.

Kruse's discussion of the Johannine epistles has its merits. The author writes clearly and the main exegetical alternatives and secondary literature are discussed. In addition there is a useful introduction to each letter and a full bibliography. Especially helpful are the 22 Notes in which issues of special significance are discussed in greater detail. A pastor preaching on these letters and not already possessing a commentary on them will find much to help in these pages.

However, I have some major reservations. First, Kruse is over-confident in his reconstruction of the situation that gave rise to the letters and, as a result, I think

he misunderstands their purpose. Kruse uses 1 John 2.19, 4.2-3; 5.6-7 and 2 John 7 to posit a group of heretical opponents who claim, among other things, that Jesus did not come "in the flesh", and that there was no need to obey his teaching. This leads to a "mirror-reading" approach to the letters in which many of the key positive statements are believed to counter the opposing view. Such readings are insufficiently attentive to the rhetorical dimensions of the text and fail to see that the main purpose of these letters is not to refute opponents but to encourage faithful obedience within the congregation to which they are written.

Secondly, the use of the NIV as the basis for this commentary is misguided. Granted, this is the version that many readers will be using. However, Kruse regularly points to ways in which the NIV is unhelpful or even mistaken in its rendering of the Greek text.

Finally, Kruse's theological conservatism gets in the way from time to time. This affects not merely his discussion of authorship (he defends but adds no new arguments in favour of apostolic authorship), but also key theological ideas. For example, there is much more to be said about the meaning of *hilasmos* in 1

Continued from page 23

that when I read the book, before writing a foreword, it came to me as a sincere effort to provide some thoughtful guidance to lay people on an often perplexing area of Christian thought and practice.

Clearly Harry Young has a different view of the Toronto Blessing and of the charismatic movement from your

reviewer. I acknowledge that nobody can prove either Harry or Philip Mader-Grayson 'right' or 'wrong' about these matters. But can there be any doubt that disagreements among Christians, when pursued too vehemently, are inimical to Christian witness? Anyone who doubts that should look at my native land, Ulster. **bmj**

John 2.2 than Kruse allows and his introduction of such categories as "sinless perfectionism", "assurance" and "pre-existence" tend to be anachronistic.

This is a "sound" commentary (in every sense of the word), but I would be concerned if it was the only work consulted by those seeking to understand the message of these letters.

Sean Winter.

Lecturer in New Testament,
Northern Baptist College

Finally Comes The Poet - Daring Speech For Proclamation. Walter Brueggemann. Fortress Press. £8.99. ISBN 0-8006-2394-0

If the life-long ambition of Bultmann was to demythologise the Scriptures, the corresponding aim of Walter Brueggemann is to put it back again. Brueggemann comments that we live in a 'prose flattened world' - a world in which the media have saturated our capacity for wonder. From the marvels of the latest special effects movie to the horrors of the latest news images we take it all for granted - even the possibilities of the new world promised in the Gospel becomes 'too readily heard and taken for granted, as though it contained no unsettling news and no unwelcome threat.'

In this world Brueggemann calls us to be subversive poets, preachers who probe beyond the accepted truths and declare the possibility of God's alternative world. As the book unfolds he gives four examples of how this alternative world can be made available through our preaching. In each case he takes a text and shows how it can lift us from the prosaic world of mere fact into the alternative world of God's transforming presence. In this he moves us from the 'drama of guilt and forgiveness', through the renewal of Sunday worship in the expectation of God's presence amongst us, to the evangelical witness of

God's commands against restlessness and greed, and finally to the freedom that is ours as we resist the call of modernity to assert our individual autonomy and acknowledge the sovereignty of God in our lives.

Brueggemann subtitles this book - *Daring Speech For Proclamation*. As we read it, we who proclaim the Gospel week by week are challenged to dare to be subversives once more, so that we do not soothe our congregations with easy answers to hard questions; but provoke them into action by telling them that the world need not be like this.

Like other books by Brueggemann this is not a book to enjoy, but it is one to challenge and excite.

Peter Baines.

Llanwenarth Baptist Church.

Liturgies for the Journey of Life - Dorothy McRae-McMahon. SPCK 131 pages £9.99

This interesting collection of liturgies is written by a minister from the Uniting Church in Australia. Although coming from a different cultural and liturgical background, the language is refreshingly accessible and thought provoking. It also contains a number of imaginative yet workable suggestions for use of symbol and music.

There are a few complete liturgies for regular Sunday worship and communion and just five covering the Christian calendar. Other occasions covered include a simple funeral service, healing service and worship with a special focus on the family, mission, justice issues and creation.

What I found particularly interesting are the liturgies that the author had devised in response to specific pastoral needs during her ministry in Sydney. For example, there is a liturgy to help a person dealing with

the pain of past abuse and another for those feeling marginalised. By creating such focused liturgies, she feels that individuals can find healing within the framework of corporate worship. They are encouraged to realise that they are not alone in the journey of life and faith.

As the price indicates, this slim volume is not an extensive resource, but it will be a useful addition to my collection of worship material. Whilst I may not use many of the liturgies as whole units, I will certainly want to borrow some of the ideas and use some of the creative prayers, blessings and responses. To help such dipping-in, the book is well presented in clear sections with two brief but helpful indexes.

David Ronco,

Minister of Hertford Baptist Church

Resurrection People: Studies in the Resurrection Narratives of the Gospels.

David Catchpole. Darton Longman and Todd. 2000. xi + 236 pp. £14.95. ISBN 0-232-52376-2

This is a fine book.

It is involved and demanding biblical scholarship. It is a slow read: you need a Bible to hand, and time to think through the implications of the things you are reading. It leaps all over the place: starting from the resurrection narratives Catchpole effortlessly encompasses the Magnificat, John chapter 1, the Beatitudes, the Prodigal Son – much of the four gospels, in fact. It places great faith in the ability of reason to reconstruct the ways the gospels came to be as they are, and then to build arguments on that reconstruction. The moderate number of pages is misleading: a great deal of thought has been condensed into this volume.

But it is full of wit and enthusiasm. David Catchpole is a gifted communicator: he

explains himself persuasively and attractively. The book is an action-packed narrative: you will find many things to enjoy and savour. He goes deep into the resurrection narratives, yet relates his discoveries to the big picture. He wants to understand certain passages in the New Testament, but he also hopes to change the way you and I think, and the way the Church lives.

I found this a very productive read: it will feed into many sermons. I warmed to Catchpole's candour and commitment. I enjoyed the literary starting points for each chapter. It was instructive to see him giving Luke such a hard time, and reflect on his reasons. It was exciting to find him naming the Beloved Disciple. It was moving and inspiring to follow his honest research into what he thinks really happened that first Easter. If you are up for a rigorous yet reflective read, this is a book for you.

Stuart Jenkins,

Minister of Cheadle Hulme.

Participating in God; A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity, by Paul S. Fiddes (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000, pp.viii + 312, ISBN 0-232-523378-9, £14.95)

This is a splendid book, simply first class. It is an outstanding work of theological reflection, relating doctrine and the work of pastoral care. What makes it so good?

First, the book is profoundly theological. It has as its central concern the doctrine of God in Trinity. With reference to the Bible, the tradition of the Faith, with the work of modern writers, Paul Fiddes explores the theme of the "persons" of the Trinity in dynamic mutual relating. It is into the movement of divine relationships that we are called, to nothing less than participation in the life of God. This theological vision takes us way beyond any formal expositions or merely exemplarist applications of the doctrine of the Trinity

into bold and exciting possibilities of our sharing the life of God. The author has clearly engaged deeply with much recent thought on the Trinity. The range of authors cited is astonishing.

Second, because it is so positively theological, the book is seriously pastoral. Unlike those "how to" manuals where modern techniques are brought to influence the Church's functional tasks, often with no serious awareness of the theological implications, this book sets the life and work of Christians in the life and mission of God. Participating in the Triune God involves a way of being which is expressed in particular functions. Being and doing are inseparable. The reflections on power and authority, on the nature of community, the reality of death, suffering, prayer, charisma, ministry and the sacraments, are always stimulating and often inspiring. Again and again I found myself recalling pastoral situations of my own and looking at them afresh. The chapters on intercessory prayer, the fact of suffering, and the Incarnate God and the sacramental life I personally found especially helpful. The illustrative material and case studies chosen are, again, extraordinary in their range and the reflections full of surprises.

This is one of the most important books of theological reflection on pastoral practice I have read for a very long time. I know I shall return to it often. It is demanding at times because, of course, its focus is on God. I hope it will be widely read because it is such a fine gift and will enrich the life of every local church and minister. It is, above all, the vision of God, who invites and sustains our participation in the divine relating, that is so profound and leads to such gratitude.

Brian Haymes

Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church,
London

Poverty and Christianity. Michael Taylor. SCM. 1999. £10-95

Christian belief can be demanding. Suffering, conflict, injustice and the poor are contexts for sharing Jesus' good news, in word and deed, but in the raw they can challenge faith. Michael Taylor wrote *Poverty and Christianity* having been 'theologically traumatised' as a result of face-to-face experiences of world poverty in Rwanda and other places.

This is a slim book to be read and reread by those who struggle with belief, particularly when encountering the unbelievable. As it is written in the first person responses to it will be personal. What I admire is Michael Taylor's openness and questing nature which enables the reader to accompany him on what is a never ending but hopeful exploration at the interface between faith and experience.

Drawing on lectures he has given, he considers what he describes as 'the normality of suffering', the limited impact of Christianity on 'the ills and sins and sorrows it claims to redeem', the demands of relating Christian doctrine to development policy, and how we can best behave in ways that are creative in the struggle to replace poverty and injustice with a fairer world. It is the way these subjects are handled that delight or infuriate, the latter because the explorations are brief and he is not readily at hand to question. He writes as if there is more to say. There are numbered sections and paragraphs, always helpful when handling challenging ideas.

Key words given for understanding the life and ministry of Jesus are participation, confrontation, solidarity, and sacrifice. They are also the themes both of stories of creativity about people in Somalia, Brazil and South Africa and of Michael Taylor's understanding of the atonement.

Recently I took a copy to a churches' consultation in Uganda about HIV/AIDS in Africa. *Poverty and Christianity* has a place where suffering challenges faith.

Gordon Holmes,
Bristol Baptist College Secretary.

The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ. Martin Hengel
(transl. John Bowden) SCM, 2000 ISBN 0-334-02759-4 £14.95

This volume re-investigates the sometimes perplexing relationship between one Gospel and four Gospels. Two questions are raised: (1) of the connection between 'the Gospels' as discrete narratives and 'the Gospel' as Paul's proclamation, (2) why there should be four Gospels with correspondingly different perspectives, rather than just one. This has pastoral as well as academic significance to anyone who has come unstuck in church study groups whose members find themselves both uneasy and excited at discovering contradictory elements in close reading of biblical texts.

Hengel's work should not be inaccessible to any minister who has maintained a working knowledge of New Testament studies and the bare bones of Early Church History – but don't bother to buy it if you only want easy cribs and illustrations! There is, however, much to be quarried if you are willing to do the work. It is essentially a positive book, which has helped me to follow through some discussion about 'Unity in Multiplicity' as a deliberate policy and insight amongst those who recognised and formed 'Scripture' from the earliest days of the Church. OK – so we didn't start a discussion about 'Unity in Multiplicity', but when people ask "Isn't it the thin end of the wedge, when you start noticing the differences?" this is a pastoral question. When they find that their reading of the Gospels has been based on an unwitting

harmonization and are caught between wanting to stay that way because it's easier, and needing to follow the path of discovering them more fully, this is a pastoral issue.

John Bowden's translation makes, as always, for good reading. Over one third of its 354 pages are given to end-notes and indices, which give plenty of fuller textual and historical information whilst not disturbing the flow of reading.

Hazel Sherman,
Minister of Brecon Baptist Church

God for the 21st Century edited by
Russell Stannard. SPCK 2000.
ISBN 0-281-05342-1 £12.99

We live in a time when less and less people opt to study science in any depth, although depending more and more upon it in daily life. Recent public debates on animal experimentation, cloning, genetic modification of food, vaccination programmes, and environmental issues have uncovered both an ignorance and a fear of science in the population, which renders any meaningful discussion of the associated ethical issues very difficult indeed.

As pastors we are required to engage with the issues of our times and to bring, if possible, godly wisdom to bear on some of these important and possibly painful subjects. *God for the 21st Century* could be a real help in providing a general feel for the interface between science and religion. The 50 short, readable contributions will not make you an expert on anything, but might open some doors or blow away some myths. The contents are incredibly wide-ranging, so I can only pick out some of my favourite bits.

If you have ever experimented with setting the nativity story in a modern context to bring home its impact, you will like Ted

Burge's 'new' version of Genesis 1, which might also offer helpful angles on the creation-evolution debate. Or, for those who are Trekkies at heart, the section *Life in the Universe* offers thoughts on life elsewhere, if it exists at all. For example, would other inhabited planets mean that God's attention is 'diluted' - maybe we are less special than the Bible writers suggest? What would the incarnation, so central to our faith, mean for 'aliens'? Would we find that all intelligent life is marked by sin and failure and the need for redemption? Or are the conditions for life so specific that we are truly alone in all creation?

Several authors deal with the scientific tendency to reductionism in different contexts. Some take on Richard Dawkins and contend that there are good reasons

why we are NOT simply the product of our genes. Others discuss the limitations of science itself, and how the perceived war between science and faith is actually more to do with asking the wrong questions than a real conflict. As one writer puts it, 'God reportedly has said, "Seek me," not "Seek evidence of me."' Perhaps that is really the message of the whole book: we cannot prove that God exists - but neither can we prove that he doesn't, because God cannot be the subject of his own creation's experiments.

Sally Nelson,
formerly minister of
Beechen Grove, Watford,
now studying for a PhD.

Payne Essay Prize

Readers of the Journal may be interested to know that the Baptist Historical Society is organising 'The Payne Memorial Prize Essay Competition'. Closing date is December 31st 2001. Original essays up to 10,000 words are invited on any subject illustrating the theme of 'Baptists in the 20th Century'. The winning author will receive £100. For more details contact Stephen Copson, 60 Strathmore Avenue, Hitchin, Herts, SG5 1ST (01462 431816 or: slcopson@dial.pipex.com)

BMF and Gift Aid

In our letter accompanying the January journal, we commented on the question of gifts to the Benevolent Fund being given under Gift Aid. I am now able to report that the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship is registered with **Stewardship Services**, the operating name of United Kingdom Evangelical Trust, through which we will be able to recover Income Tax on gifts to the Benevolent Fund.

Probably almost all of the giving to that Fund have been made for this year, approximately £3,000 has already been received for which are so grateful, but in future anyone wishing to make a gift, minimum £30, to the Benevolent Fund, who will have paid sufficient income tax, can do so using a special form; we will then receive via **Stewardship Services** the recovered income tax.

Copies of the form will be sent to all members with the January 2002 Journal, but if you would like further information before that, please contact Jim Clarke.

We are also grateful to the greatly increased number of members who have sent gifts via **Charities Aid Foundation**.