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A table of contents for *The Fraternal / Baptist Ministers Journal* can be found here:

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# The Fraternal

October 1991

ISSN 0950-1703

Vol. 236

## Contents

<b>Editorial</b> .....	2
<b>Dissent Today (2)</b> .....	3
by Rev. John Johansen-Berg Community for Reconciliation, Barnes Close, Bromsgrove	
<b>When Authorship Matters</b> .....	8
by Rev Steve P. Sims Minister, High Street United Free Church, Tring	
<b>Ministry to AIDS Sufferers</b> .....	10
by Rev Peter J. Clarke Chaplain, Mildmay Mission Hospital, Shoreditch	
<b>My Presidential Year</b> .....	15
by Rev Dr Derek J. Tidball Secretary for Mission, the Baptist Union	
<b>Towards a Theology of Evangelism for Today: Part Two</b> .....	20
by Rev Michael I. Bochenski Minister, Leamington Road Baptist Church, Blackburn	
<b>Review Section</b> .....	24
<b>Of Interest to You</b> .....	29
<b>Holiday Suggestion</b> .....	31
<b>Baptist Response Europe</b> .....	32

# Editorial

At the present time the prospects for theology appear uncertain. Perhaps this is at least in part a fault of theology itself, to the extent that it has lost touch with the community of faith, gravitating to the level of 'in talk' between professionals. Coupled with this is weariness of odium theologium, the arid and bitter disputation which has characterised theological debate in the past. As a discipline, it must accept at least some of the blame for the state of things.

Yet a greater squeeze is coming from the ultimate authority currently given to *experience* in the Church. The immediacy of what I sense and what I feel is being put beyond the realm of examination and critique. It is self-authenticating and closed to question. In such a day theological enquiry appears to be almost an impertinence, certainly something that the Church can do without. And sadly, among the reactionary are some who, by reason of calling and training, should be equipt to reflect upon the nature and significance of such experience. Without a running theological critique we can never hope to discriminate between the psychological and the spiritual, the ephemeral and the lasting. After all, was not this the root cause of the trouble in Corinth, held up as it is today as the absolute model? And if humility prevents us from claiming any kind of theological acumen, what about a peripatetic theologian, available to service groups or districts of churches? At any rate if the queen of sciences expires through sheer neglect, we shall all be infinitely the poorer and the Church "eyeless in Gaza".

But what kind of theology? A generation ago such a question would not have even been understood. The assumption was that it meant *western* theology, the only one there was. Today we are conscious of the multi-form nature of the discipline, especially in the light of Third World theology, thrusting, relevant, passionate, from a culture of deprivation and despair. We are coming to see that there can be no imperialism where theology is concerned, no imposing of ours upon theirs, rather a plurality, culturally conditioned, in which, in humility, we learn from one another within the Body of Christ.

Theology, as it converges and diverges both between the Free Churches and within them, is one of the aspects treated in a guest article by John Johansen-Berg. The second in the series 'Dissent Today', it begs the question is *reformation* a state or a process? In biblical scholarship it is generally concluded that authorship is less significant for authority than content. Steve Sims argues that authorship does matter when it comes to interpretation and application of the text. The World Health Organisation extrapolates that there will be 30 million People HIV positive by the end of the decade and ten million children. But what does it mean to minister to AIDS sufferers day in, day out? Peter Clarke of Mildmay, the first AIDS hospice in Europe, shares his special ministry, its demands and rewards.

In reviewing some of the highlights of his presidential year, Derek Tidball reminds us of the current vitality of the denomination and as a consequence the ever increasing demands upon our presidents. Lastly this quarter we feature the concluding part of Michael Bochenski's examination of the relationship between theology and evangelism. It sensitises us against doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.

# Dissent Today (2)

There is a dynamic in Free Church witness which is ready to learn from the past and ever open to new patterns in the future. This is summed up in the Reformation watchword, 'semper reformanda'. At least, that is the theory; is it also the practice? There has been in the past a distinctive Free Church stance in doctrine, worship and government, even though there have been variations within the Free Churches. Is that distinctiveness still apparent in this ecumenical age?

## The Issue of Doctrine

Let us look first at doctrine. There was a great reformation stress on *sola fide*, salvation by faith alone. This was partly in reaction to the Catholic tradition of a system of penances which offered salvation by works. The Reformers returned to the great foundation statements on faith, such as Paul in Romans 5, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is not by law, not by works, but by grace through faith that we have salvation. The Free Churches have stressed an evangelical experience in religion which puts them firmly in a twice-born category of religious experience. Catholic tradition has emphasised baptism and confirmation as the mode of entry into the Church and this led to much nominalism in church membership. This distinction remains but has become blurred. Growth in traditionalism has led some in the Free Churches too to lay more stress on baptism and confirmation and for some this includes indiscriminate infant baptism. On the other hand the charismatic movement and other influences have led some in Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches to stress a personal response to Christ and receptivity to the Holy Spirit and this has led some Anglican vicars to limit baptism and to favour re-baptism by immersion.

The changes in the sacrament of Baptism are instructive in themselves. The Anglican practice was of afternoon baptism with vows taken by god-parents and little or no part for parents. Now it is quite often part of a family service with parents taking a more active role as in Free Church practice. There remains a much greater stress in the Free Churches on the faith of the parents and stronger resistance to indiscriminate baptism for children. On the other hand many Free Churches have introduced god-parents on the Anglican model. The Baptists have kept to their distinctive approach of believers' baptism only whilst the United Reformed Church now makes provision for the paedo-baptist and believers' baptist traditions. It is also significant that where there has been resistance to indiscriminate baptism for infants the pastoral dilemma has been partly met by the introduction of a service of blessing for children.

The Eucharist continues to be an area of division in the life of the Church. Catholic tradition teaches transubstantiation whilst Calvinism, though emphasising the real presence of Christ in the communion, speaks of spiritual feeding. Zwingli went further in teaching that the meal is a memorial and simply symbolic. These divisions in teaching largely remain but there has been some movement in the Anglican Church in that the minister now often chooses to preside behind the table, as in Free Church tradition, rather than in front of the altar as in High Church tradition. This lessens the priestly approach as does the greater participation of lay people in the distribution of the elements. Division at the table

remains. Whilst the Free Churches generally have an open table for all who love the Lord Jesus Christ and Anglican churches generally offer communion to all who are confirmed in the Christian church, the Roman Catholic Church still limits the invitation to members of their own denomination. This is partly linked to the doctrine of ministry. The Free Churches stress calling by Christ, attested by ordination by the Church, of ministers who hold the apostolic faith received through the Scriptures. Anglicans and Catholics stress an apostolic succession through the historic episcopate. This leads them to question the validity of orders received other than through this apostolic succession.

This reminds us that the centrality and authority of Scripture is another Free Church emphasis. The other traditions of the Church accept Scripture as an authority, but also stress church tradition. The growing importance of bible study in Anglican and Roman Catholic churches shows that there is movement in this area. The stress on personal conviction and openness to the Holy Spirit in churches affected by the renewal movement is also important in the whole area of authority. There is change in the attitude to authority and the spiritual life. In the past Catholics have laid great stress on spirituality and retreats; this is increasingly part of the experience of Free Church members.

In summary there remain distinctives in doctrine, especially in emphasis, but there has been a gradual growth in mutual understanding as each group has learned something from others.

### **The Issue of Worship**

For many people worship rather than doctrine is of more immediate importance and here we see differences. Anglicans and Roman Catholics have formal worship, set down in a book and with much that is repeated week by week. If dissent in doctrine was one plank of the Free Church platform nonconformity in matters of worship was certainly another. Freedom in worship included scholarly and often lengthy sermons, extempore prayers, scripture readings to suit the theme and a wide spectrum of hymns. The difference remains but has been somewhat eroded by developments in church worship. Many Free Churches make use of books of services, read prayers and a lectionary. Even charismatic churches have a liturgy; they do not write it down but their members know what to expect. Anglicans and Catholics often include prayers led by lay people, a wider range of hymns and longer teaching sermons. The renewal movement has led to the incorporation of a variety of spiritual gifts in the worship of all traditions. Healing Services and the use of a wide range of musical instruments and dance are signs of this movement. It remains the case that emphasis in these areas is more often associated with the Free Churches, especially the Baptist and Pentecostal, but none can deny a much greater variety in the worship in all denominations. Alongside this we have the development of ecumenical projects in which there is a greater mix of traditions; this has encouraged the process of mutual learning and will probably exert a greater influence in the future.

### **The Issue of Government**

What then of church government? The Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches are episcopal and hierarchical; the Free Churches are independent or conciliar and reject the episcopal model. This historical tradition remains largely the case but here too there has been movement. The Anglican now have synods which bring lay people into the decision-making process. Bishops retain a vital role in

that process and it is complicated by the effects of establishment, but there clearly has been modification. The Free Churches have continued to stress lay participation in government but have introduced an element of personal episcopate with the role of Moderator, Chairman and President. For example, The Provincial Moderator is full time, presides at Synods and at ordinations and has a strong influence on selection and deployment of ministers. The equivalent national post changes annually but within the Free Church Federal Council there are discussions about the desirability of having a person in such a post for a longer period both because he or she has to serve alongside the Archbishop and the Cardinal in national matters and within the new Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland. Differences in style of government remain and were a large part of the reason for the failure of the Covenant proposals, but the distinctions have become blurred and there could possibly be some mutual recognition across the boundaries of the Anglican, Methodist and United Reformed Churches. The Roman Catholic and Baptist approaches to government raise greater problems in terms of mutual recognition or union.

### **The Issue of Conviction**

It is important to note that there is another division in the life of the Church between those who take a liberal ecumenical approach and those who favour an evangelical charismatic approach. These tensions are found within all the major denominations. The fact that the Gospels point to a synthesis embracing both a stress on social and community action and solidarity with the poor and oppressed on one hand and evangelism which calls for personal trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and an openness to the Holy Spirit on the other has not as yet resolved these differences. Jesus' High Priestly prayer, recorded in St. John's Gospel chapter 17, should lead us to humility in seeking unity 'that the world may believe'. Such a unity has to be based on truth as revealed in Scripture and should make the Church more effective in service and witness. At the beginning of a Decade of Evangelism we cannot avoid the challenge that Jesus presents to us in his prayer and his commission.

### **Responding to the Age**

What then shall we say of the current situation? We are at the close of a period of great decline in church going in the United Kingdom. We are in a time of great spiritual searching as people seek to find a deeper meaning in life after the disillusion experienced in an affluent society. What is called for?

In the first place renewal in the churches. So often we talk of outreach mission when we have not yet experienced renewal. Christians have good news to share with a waiting world but this can be diluted by nominalism, traditionalism and inertia in the church's life. We need to be open to the renewing power of the Holy Spirit and available to be equipped with the gifts of the Spirit. The relative freedom and spontaneity in Free Church life should make us particularly helpful in this. I now belong to an ecumenical Community for Reconciliation. By invitation we go out to share with groups of churches in mission and evangelism. Often these take the form of celebration Festivals. It is frequently the case that such a group of churches is at the stage of needing renewal and the Festival proves a time of re-commitment and of recovering the lapsed.

Second, reaching out with the Good News. The Decade of Evangelism is significant and we all have a part to play in it. We find that Festivals of Faith are

one expression of this but there are many others. "One Step Forward", "Good News down our street" and Person to Person evangelism are a few of the ways in which Christians are responding to current opportunities. In this renewed evangelism the Free Churches have much to offer because of their history and tradition. The great evangelical revival at the time of the Reformation and in the nineteenth century owe much to the Free Churches. But effective evangelism needs the contributions of all our churches. A Festival of Faith often brings together Anglican, Methodist, United Reformed, Roman Catholic and Baptist churches. Sometimes one or both of the latter two are missing and we are the poorer for their absence. The energy, enthusiasm and spontaneity of the Baptists is needed in our common proclamation. None need compromise their own faith or tradition in agreeing to join together in a common announcement of the fundamentals.

Third, there is a common response to need in the community, near and far. The commission from Jesus is to preach the gospel and to heal the sick. This second part of the commission embraces all that is involved in seeking the welfare of our neighbours. It will include the healing ministry through prayer, the expression of compassion in community action and response to hunger, poverty and oppression in far places. In the Community for Reconciliation we have learned that peacemaking needs to take place within ourselves, our neighbours and in our own church and locality as much as in the wider scene, nationally and internationally. In all of this we discover that Christ "is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing walls of hostility," (Eph 2: 14). And he engaged in making peace through the cross by which he reconciles us to God. We live in a world of many divisions and many needs. It is part of our heritage in the Free Churches that we see the link between evangelical witness and social action. We see it in the lives of some of the evangelical social reformers and of many missionaries.

Fourth, though we have much to give from the heritage of our past, we also have much to receive. In an age of so much secularism, materialism and violence it would be wrong for us to stay in our denominational camps and present a picture of disunity and even mutual hostility to the world. Differences of teaching and approach there may be but we are united in worshipping one God, accepting one Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, being filled with the same Holy Spirit whose gifts are so gloriously varied and belonging to one Church, even though we have experienced many divisions. We can and should learn from one another and together wait upon God so that he may guide us in the challenges and opportunities of this generation. We should be thankful for the past in our Free Church teaching and witness but we should not be imprisoned in the past. Whilst our divisions remain there will still be times when we need to be represented as Free Churches and we see this even in the new ecumenical Councils. But there are many more times when we need to implement the Lund principle not to do separately those things which we are able in good conscience to do together. Our history and tradition should help us here for the cry of the Reformers was 'semper reformanda'. We must always be ready to change our church structures, worship and government at the bidding of our Lord. We must ever be open to the Spirit in seeking new paths of service and witness. Much can change as God directs our missionary strategy but the glorious gospel is the same in all generations. May we learn from the past and give to the future as we carry out our missionary task today.

**John Johansen-Berg**



# WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

York House, 409 Barking Road  
Plaistow. E13 8AB  
Tel. No: 071-476 5065

Patron: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother

Dear Partner in Mission

I have lived in West Ham since 1965. First as minister of the Plaistow Baptist Church which was the mother church of West Ham Central Mission; then as Warden of Lawrence Hall, a residential/community complex — and now as Director of Aston Charities which has teams working in Newham in Community involvement, a hostel for the homeless, two large urban centres and a holiday hotel for the elderly. Now I have been drawn into the work of West Ham Central Mission as co-ordinator of the work at the West Ham end.

As you will know, we have developing ministries at Bodey House and a continuing task at Greenwoods.

Now we are to enter into partnership with the Christian Alliance as we seek to re-open York House in Plaistow as a Christian nursing home in 1992. While plans are drawn up and funding established York House is currently being used by the Urban Learning Foundation — a Christian agency training teachers and missionaries in urban work. The place is packed with young people preparing for future service in the cities!

All round us there is work to be done. At one end of life we have two thriving Children's Centres in our networks, at the other end we are seeking to set up a Bereavement Counselling Service.

Remember us in your prayers as we move into the future through a time of changing structures and strategies. If you can, urge your church to respond to the annual appeal for the continuing and developing work of West Ham Central Mission.

Shalom,

**Colin Marchant**



# When Authorship Matters

The identity of the biblical writers is one aspect of scholarly study whose value for the preacher is sometimes doubted. The present article suggests that, far from being a redundant issue, the questions of authorship and original setting are of vital importance if we are to allow the Bible to speak to and through us as the Word of God. Furthermore, the decisions we make about the authorship of a book can alter radically the import of the text with which we are faced.

“And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live”.  
(Deuteronomy 30:6, RSV)

Whilst a number of scholarly approaches could be followed with regard to the above verse, we shall focus on those presented by Craigie<sup>1</sup> and Mayes<sup>2</sup> in their respective commentaries. Craigie argues for a Mosaic origin (late 13th century B.C.) for virtually the entire book of Deuteronomy, primarily on the basis of a similarity of its form with that of Hittite vassal treaties. Within this scheme he includes chapter 30, and thus views the verse with which we are concerned as part of a prophetic speech of Moses in which he looks ahead to the exile and beyond. Mayes, on the other hand, argues that chapter 30 derives from the exilic period (6th century B.C.), being the work of an editor of the Deuteronomistic School. On the basis of this approach, the conditions of the exile are presupposed by the passage, which urges the repentance of the exiled community and offers hope for the future.

## Mosaic Authorship

If the approach of Craigie is adopted, Deuteronomy 30: 1-10 represents the scene envisaged by Moses on the edge of the promised land as he looks ahead, through and beyond the history of the settlement, to the exile and its conclusion. Moses, by way of prophetic foreknowledge of a time beyond his own death, has foreseen the failure of the covenant made on Sinai, and has warned of the exile that will be the culmination of the people's breaking of God's laws. But Moses' vision of the future extends even beyond the exile, foreseeing God's plan of salvation for the restoration of the people to the land of Israel. Within that context, Deuteronomy 30: 1-10 declares God's great plan of salvation for his people, a plan of salvation established from before the time of the settlement, which he would bring to fulfilment when the time was ripe, some centuries later. Within such an understanding of the passage, 30:6 declares and underscores the resolve of God to bring about the salvation of his people when the time is right. God himself will bring about a transformation of the people's hearts that will make a new covenant possible, a transformation that will enable the obedience that previous history would, by that time, have declared impossible for man to attain by his own efforts. The remainder of the chapter (vv11-20), then appears as an exhortation to the people of Moses' day to choose obedience to God and his laws lest they be the generation to experience the curses that the law's breaking will inevitably bring.

For the preacher who accepts Craigie's views about authorship, the major force of the passage would seem to concern God's predetermined plan of salvation. Alongside the passage might be set a New Testament reading from 1 Peter 1<sup>3</sup>, which talks of Christ being "destined before the foundation of the world" (v20, RSV) to be the agent of God's salvation. A sermon preached from such an understanding of the passage might stress the inevitability of human failure, the certainty of God's plan of salvation, and the sure nature of the hope deriving from it. The latter part of the chapter might also lead the preacher to include reference to the quality of life expected from those who have been assured of God's salvation.

### **Deuteronomic Authorship**

If, however, Mayes' suggestion of deuteronomic authorship for chapter 30 is adopted, the passage takes on a very different tone. The passage is then addressed to those in exile who have experienced the fulfilment of the law's curses, and who understand themselves to be cut off, not only from the land of their fathers, but also from the God who had given it them. To such people, Deuteronomy 30 represents a glimmer of light in the darkness: God will save even those in such dark circumstances as theirs. The temptation at this point is to equate the salvation thus declared to the exiles with God's pre-determined plan of salvation, about which we have been talking above. However, such a step would be invalid for it would import into the passage something that is not present if Mayes' understanding of authorship is correct. If the chapter derives from the time of the exile, and is read with that in mind, it will be seen that there is no reference whatsoever to a pre-determined plan of salvation. Certainly, God's plan of salvation is declared, but there is no reference to its predetermined nature. Indeed, within the context of Deuteronomy, whose message Mayes has captured in the statement that it is "a call to the service of the one God by an elect people centred around one sanctuary, through obedience to the law in the land which God has given" (pp 57ff), the declaration of salvation in chapter 30 is almost the last thing the reader expects to encounter since the covenant has broken down, seemingly irretrievably. Thus, if Mayes' understanding of authorship is accepted, this chapter becomes an announcement that God is about to do something new.

Within such an understanding of the chapter, 30:6 again forms the focus within which God declares the nature of the new work which he is to perform within the hearts of his people. The response that this new action of God will provoke is outlined in 30:8, which stresses that there is a part for the people to play alongside God's initiative. The remainder of the chapter (vv11-20) then becomes the presentation of a choice to the exiled community, to co-operate with the new work that God has declared he is about to do, or to reject it.

For the preacher who accepts Mayes' understanding of the origin of chapter 30, the emphasis is upon God's ability and resolve to perform a new and unexpected act of salvation. For such a preacher, an appropriate theme to follow might be the way God encounters people in the midst of their forsakenness, offering hope where the human perspective sees only darkness and despair. Alongside might be set a New Testament passage such as John 3, in which Nicodemus wrestles with God's saving activity made manifest in a way that he did not expect or understand, but which nevertheless results in light for a dark world.

This article has not attempted to provide an adequate or exhaustive exegesis of Deuteronomy 30. Indeed, there are many aspects of the passage upon which we have not even touched. Our concern, rather, has been to look at the issues of

authorship and original setting, and the difference they make to the way a passage is interpreted. If we are to take the Bible seriously as the word of God, the original intention of the biblical writers must be allowed to play a part in shaping the message we preach. The intention of this article has been to show that there are times when our decisions about authorship can make a substantial difference to the tone and message of a passage. In such cases, I suggest, authorship does matter.

## **Steve Sims**

### **Notes**

(This article derives from preparatory work for an exegetical seminar for ministerial students at Regent's Park College. I should like to acknowledge the insight gained from the students who contributed to the seminar.)

1. P.C. Craigie *The Book of Deuteronomy, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976

2. A.D.H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy, New Century Bible*, London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979.

3. See also John 17:24

# **Ministry to AIDS Sufferers**

There is a great deal of emphasis today on church growth and church planting. My ministry to the dying and disadvantaged, where the "success" rate is small, may be viewed by some as a waste of pastoral time and gift. In 1987 when I was finally sure that God was guiding me to the chaplaincy of the Mildmay Mission Hospital in Shoreditch, little did I realize that by 1991 the hospital would specialise solely in AIDS hospice care. The earlier vision was of a varied health care package offered to the East End community where the hospital is situated. Both in-patient and out-patient care was to be offered, mainly to the profoundly physically and mentally handicapped. The growing London AIDS statistics gradually changed that initial plan and now Mildmay offers 17 in-patient beds for terminal and respite care, similar to the care offered by established hospices.

To supplement this in-patient care, there is a small team of district nurses who care for a growing number of home care patients and there is a day centre. A recent development in the day centre is a "ladies day" where a number of women, often with children, spend from mid-morning to late afternoon once a week. The majority of these ladies are from Africa and one of them has personally taken on the job of introducing me to African culture, history, geography and religions.

Mildmay is a developing institution and what the hospital will be doing in another four years' time, literally – only God knows. There are plans afoot for an increase of present facilities to match the increase in the need for AIDS hospice care. We run with a waiting list most of the time. Within a year or so, in-patient beds will rise to 40, which will include a special unit for families where mothers and children will be cared for. Already we have cared for some women, with children who are fit and well.

As development continues there is a constant need for appropriate education and Mildmay has two experienced nurse tutors who maintain a constant programme of lectures and seminars for staff and health care colleagues.

In all of these areas I have many challenging and interesting opportunities to minister to patients, their families and friends, as well as to staff colleagues.

Since January 1988, when I took up my post, the pastoral work with our patients has developed as the institution has grown. The first and obvious areas of concern for me were methodology, mortality and the moral issues surrounding AIDS. Latterly, two other issues have emerged, namely multi-faith ministry and mental health.

It has been a personal journey in discovering my pastoral identity for this period of ministry and has sometimes been confusing, sometimes incredibly sad, with touches of guilt and frustration. There have been moments, though, of joy as one senses God at work. Not a few patients have found faith rising and Christ becoming real. Some have confessed Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Great sensitivity is required for the dying are vulnerable and some, very confused about spiritual issues, could make desperate responses that are an attempt to bargain for longer life rather than true repentance and faith.

But let me share with you some of the pastoral and theological thinking that has taken place to bring me to this point as I complete nearly four years of pastoral AIDS ministry.

### **1. Ministry, AIDS and Morality.**

The first issue I felt I wanted to address was the one of morality and sexuality. In our first year most of our patients were gay men and I felt somewhat uncomfortable in their presence. I am convinced from Scripture that erotic love is a gift from God and intended for a man and a woman who are united in marriage. My lack of confidence stemmed from never clearly facing my own fallenness and knowing personally the grace of God that works His sanctifying change. For the first time I was confronted with the need to be totally honest before God and experienced a new release given through God's loving power. This experience allowed me to work and hold together my Biblical insights about relationships while reaching out to gay men with compassion and the willingness to listen and respond appropriately. "Judgementalism" and "moralising" are words of criticism in AIDS pastoral care, but the sensitive pastor does not have to abandon all properly formed judgements and moral convictions. But what seems more important to me is a recognition of a common broken humanity rather than to focus on a person's sexual orientation. Many of our patients are no longer practising homosexuals, but would still describe themselves as gay. For them it is an important matter of identity.

Over my time at Mildmay we have cared for IV drug users and haemophiliac patients. In recent months we have cared for more female patients, indicating changing trends.

### **2. Ministry, AIDS and Mortality**

The sexual identity or morality question was top of my agenda when I began this work, but it wasn't on the top of the patients' agenda! For them, the distress

of suffering from a debilitating disease is the most important issue. For them trying to cope with a weakening physical condition, having to live with troublesome symptoms and knowing that life is ebbing away, is the priority challenge facing them. All this has often been compounded by the death of friends. Some of our patients have been to as many as 20 funeral services of close friends and a number have collapsed mentally, severely enough to need psychiatric treatment. Looking into the faces of young men, not that much older than my own sons, and knowing they will die soon, is a disturbing experience. However, I have watched patients come to terms with their prognosis and re-prioritise their values. I have seen examples of great courage and some wanting to specify details of their own funeral service.

As I write, I have just taken part in a simple and sincere service of adult baptism (Anglican style) where a patient renounced evil and declared his faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. By the time you read this article, I will probably have shared in his funeral service. But conducting so many funeral services of people I've come to know quite well, gives me the marvellous opportunity of declaring the victory of Christ over death at the service itself and offering pastoral support in the preparation. These opportunities of supporting patients, families and friends, including staff, have brought a further challenge – that of discovering the most appropriate way or method of functioning as a pastor to the dying.

### **3. Ministry, AIDS and Methodology**

When some evangelicals talk to me they expect my style to be direct and confrontational. There are several reasons why this is inappropriate. Patients come to Mildmay physically weak and psychologically fragile. Often they are confused and anxious. A confrontational approach simply drives such damaged people into withdrawal and fear, where they cannot hear the Word, let alone understand and accept it.

My method is to build a bridge of trust and friendship, across which we can meet and share. I need to hear patients communicating to me first and then to respond with understanding and compassion. Only then, I have discovered, will the good news be meaningfully heard. Gay patients sometimes start with a diatribe against the "Church's" attitudes to homosexuals and declare their gayness. This, I have found, really is a means of testing my reaction not only to homosexuality as such, but my reaction to the questioner himself. "Will I continue visiting? Will I be shocked to meet the partner?" My attitude has to say something about the Lord Jesus Christ who was comfortable with those on the edges of "society". Because Jesus was with them, he could speak to them and they heard him gladly.

Unexpectedly, I have found that the more formal opportunities have become useful tools in speaking about "redemption". Communion services are a very clear and graphic way of explaining and applying the good news of forgiveness on the basis of repentance and faith. Prayers of commendation include obvious references to the God of all comfort and mercy. Services of remembrance echo themes of hope and allow for a presentation of Biblical ideas of heaven. But it is the pastoral encounter that provides the opportunity of actually discovering just where a person is in their own spiritual quest. Many are trying to climb an insurmountable mountain face of self-effort and have not understood the grace of our Lord Jesus, that He has come down into our brokenness to bring us to God.

# English Churches Housing

## APPEAL FOR HELP

This page used to be headed Baptist Housing Association Limited. On 1st July BHA merged with Church Housing Association to form English Churches Housing Group. That of course is a fairly drastic change, but it does not change the fact there are over one hundred properties between Falmouth and Preston which were built on Baptist property with the active help and encouragement of Baptist churches. This also does not change the fact that we still need volunteers to help run those Local Management Committees who are, by their work for those less fortunate than themselves, expressing in the most practical way their love of God and man.

If one of these properties is near where you live, and you are willing to help, please either contact the Local Management Committee, or write to the Deputy Chief Executive of English Churches Housing Group at the address below. If you don't know where the properties are, we can send you a list of them all.

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#### **4. AIDS and Multi-faith Ministry**

In these personal encounters I have met people of different Christian traditions and also people of different faiths. Here was a challenge indeed. How could I maintain a belief in the uniqueness of Christ when offering pastoral care to Jews and Muslims? Equally, what attitude should I adopt when I found myself working alongside Anglo-Catholic and Catholics? I felt I had to put myself in the shoes of our patients and their loved ones and ask myself what would they think. My experience has been that pastoral concerns have enabled me to work closely with other clergy. Differences in theology have been acknowledged and discussed, but a real effort has been made to cooperate with me, with no pressure to change to their theological frameworks. A Roman Catholic colleague asked for my advice on the way of baptising an adult and then asked me to preach on the "new birth" at the baptism. As an evangelical, I have discovered a friendly welcome to work and worship together with other traditions in a way I have never extended to others while in the pastorate. Somehow the nearness to death simplifies and clarifies a pastoral approach that crosses the traditions and exhibits many common features. While playing a supporting role to a caring Rabbi, who was working with a Jewish family, I found myself present when the patient died an hour into the Jewish Sabbath. The hospital could not contact the Rabbi, so I was left to suggest a Psalm to be read (Psalm 23) and silent prayer was offered so the family could "leave appropriately". The dead man's sister, a confessed atheist, left Mildmay nearer God for she said to me: "I've seen God in you all – I did not believe there was a God. I do believe now. I am intending to visit a church to find out more."

#### **5. Ministry, AIDS and Mental Health**

Over the last year, it has been increasingly apparent that many of our patients, including their loved ones, are suffering from profound psychological distress. When you consider that our patients are young adults (average age between 30 and 40), facing serious ill health and premature death, this type of distress is hardly surprising. A number of patients have had difficulties in earlier years and some have been misused and abused. Many do not find it easy to make or maintain stable relationships. But to see the future running out, like sand in an hour glass, tests the mental resilience of the strongest. Most remain remarkably robust, but some collapse. HIV occasionally destroys mental function, presenting a senile dementia-like state.

All of this is a further challenge to pastoring in the AIDS field. It has made me more aware of the plight of the mentally ill – the lack of resources, the failure of the present "care in the community" strategy. Friends and relatives often ask me to visit patients who don't recognise them, let alone me. Yet it is important to sit with the patient and talk to him even if only to make the point that the patient is always of value and worth whatever his mental state. Here touch is so important. For we can communicate by touch where it is impossible with words. This is equally true in profound weakness or deep distress. There is a non-erotic touch that signals the accepting affection for Jesus' sake.

No doubt these five areas will expand as my experience progresses. In all probability, other areas and issues will suggest themselves for thought and prayer. In all this I have gained a deeper sense of God's sovereign activity in

people's lives and learnt to trust more in God and, through prayer, to commit people to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

**Peter Clarke**

## My Presidential Year

The two most frequent questions I have been asked as my year as President of the Baptist Union has come to a close are, "What was the highlight of your year?" and "What have you learned from it?" The second question will be answered elsewhere. It is the first to which I will give some attention here.

How can there possibly be one highlight from a year which was so packed, so varied and which seemed to unfold constantly from one highlight to another. 28,000 miles in the car; a £2,000 rail bill; planes to several destinations; 123 beds; 245 sermons (no, not the same one 245 times); attendance at numerous public engagements (and committees) and you talk of one highlight! The only response I can make is to say that at the very least there was a highlight a month – so let's start there.

**May:** The Assembly in London made sure that the year started on such a high note that it could have been all down hill from then on! The warmth of people's response; the quality of music and worship; the value of the addresses given; the election of a new General Secretary and his deputy... and the sunshine.

But better was to come. Early days seem to have been spent in the North West and one highlight was a visit to Leyland Baptist Church, featured subsequently on a Home Mission Video. To meet the people who had been recently converted, to see a church which had almost gone into oblivion revived, to stay with a pastor and his wife, Adrian and Pam Argyle, who had such commitment to church planting was a highlight. It eclipsed the numerous Association Assemblies which were to follow.

**June:** Although not part of my patch, both Northern Ireland and Scotland were in the diary this month – three days each. Ostensibly I went to Belfast to speak at a conference arranged by the Evangelical Alliance to launch their 'Singularly Significant' programme (a great resource for churches, if you've not seen it.) But it was visiting The Bridge, a community programme run by Baptists in the shadow of Harland and Wolf Shipyard, that was the real highlight. Touring the city, both protestant and catholic areas, meeting our Baptist brothers and sisters, getting greater understanding of their complex and difficult situation made me want to redouble my efforts to keep in touch, pray and support them.

The destination in Scotland was Stirling University. A beautiful setting in June for the Baptist Union of Scotland to meet, not for their Assembly, but for a weekend away, to listen as a whole denomination to the voice of God and to discern his direction for them for the next few years. I had been invited to lead their Bible Studies on Haggai. A video sequence "Welcome to the real world" made a real impact. Why do we not have such a conference; just to listen to God?



**July:** The month saw me preaching to several flourishing churches which were all, in their different ways, an encouragement. But it was one of the smallest churches which served as a highlight for me. Sunday 8th July, afternoon service at Walderslade Baptist Chapel, Kent, meeting in a portacabin because their church was still being built. (It has since been opened.) It was a blustery afternoon and the cabin shook as the service proceeded. It may not have been the Holy Spirit that afternoon but He had obviously been around. His handiwork was much in evidence as I talked to the congregation of 30 afterwards, many of whom, had come to faith in Christ in the last year. Thank God for gifted evangelists in our ministry, like Trefor Jones, their pastor, and for Home Mission and its support to such pioneer situations.

**August:** You would think the highlight of the month should have been the visit to Korea for the Baptist World Alliance Congress, especially since it enabled us to visit Hong Kong en route and spend a day in Canton. The one word in my diary for Saturday 4th August when we first saw Hong Kong harbour from our hotel window is, "Wowee". In spite of that, however, the highlight of the month occurred just after we came home.

On a hot Saturday we made our way to Southampton to join with David Coffey, Steve Chalke, the Baptist Youth Orchestra and Cambrensis for South Coast Praise. It was a programme repeated the next day in Poole. Above Bar Church, Southampton, was packed. And what an atmosphere of praise it was, with some, at least, I heard later, coming to a commitment to Christ as a result. What struck me was what potential we have within our denomination for evangelistic tours and events like this. May be an idea to pursue for the Decade of Evangelism. It was a joy to work with such gifted people.

**September:** It seems to have just been one continuous round of meetings this month. My journeys took me to London, Worthing, Oxford, Birmingham, Haverfordwest, High Wycombe, Ealing, Bedford, West Wickham, Lymm, Liverpool, Suffolk and Slough, with several trips to Didcot and the occasional return to Plymouth. As well as Sunday Services there were Minsters' Fraternals and a Lay Preachers' Conference.

The Highlight? It must be the launch of Churches Together in England. Something of great significance for the future of the churches in England was clearly taking place that day. I spent some of the service reflecting on the irony of it all, and of my tiny place in it, as the one who signed the Covenant on behalf of the Baptists. I am known to be very cautious about the ecumenical movement and am no great lover of processions, robes and candles. But due to my election as President it was I who was participating in the launch of the new ecumenical partnership. Had God arranged it deliberately?

**October:** The month started on two high notes...and got even better. On the first day I attended the opening of year service at Spurgeon's College. What a tremendous occasion it was. How glad we must be for the strength and sense of purpose of the college. I enjoyed every moment of it, despite the interference from BBC Radio2 (or was it the local police?) over the PA system that threatened to wreck my address. The next day it was a glittering occasion at St. Paul's Cathedral to join in a Service of Thanksgiving for the Queen Mother's 90th Birthday.

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One insurer has recently reported that a break-in at a Church is occurring every four hours. There are a number of reasons. We do not live in a God fearing society and miscreants have no qualms of conscience when breaking into a Church and stealing. The recession clearly makes it more difficult to earn an honest living. An important feature is the nature of the property in our Churches. Increasingly they contain sophisticated electronic equipment – amplification units, tape recorders, electronic musical instruments etc., for all of which there is a demand for uses other than the worship of God.

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Yours sincerely,

M.E. Purver

But the highlight was a visit to Romania, later in the month, to participate in the launch of the Evangelical Alliance of Romania. The country was still in a mess. But it was an amazing experience to join with 4,000 evangelicals from all over the country, Baptists, Brethren and Pentecostals, meeting in Ceausescu's old palace in Bucharest, in conditions of freedom. It was in that very place that ten months earlier Ceausescu had pledged continuing loyalty to his branch of Marxism and tyranny. But now the tyrant had fallen and the cross of Christ had triumphed. Not only was I able to bring them greetings but go with some of their leaders to talk with President Iliescu about human rights and religious toleration in Romania.

**November:** Being President gave me the opportunity to call a Consultation on the subject of "Gospel and Culture" which we held at Gorsley Baptist Church, Herefordshire. Forty of us gathered for 24 hours to hammer through some issues, led by Lesslie Newbigin, Andrew Walker and Rob Warner. The consultation set us all a long agenda of thought and action. Some of it was to be referred to the mission office at Didcot. Little did I anticipate then who would be occupying that office soon and who would have to follow things through. The consultation highlighted the fact that we cannot speak of one culture in Britain, only "cultures".

The service at the Cenotaph was another highlight, and even more the opportunity to meet a number of our political leaders at the reception afterwards. Mrs Thatcher asked perceptive questions about us Baptists, and listened to the answers too!

**December:** A quieter month, made even quieter by the cancellation of a trip to Yorkshire because of snow. Before the snow came however I went to St David's Hall, Cardiff, to join with my friends from Cambrensis once again. The Baptist Churches across the city had closed down for an evening to come together for an Advent Service. The hall was packed and some could not get tickets. It was an inspiring evening. The numbers attending the celebration lifted the spirits of many who were used to struggling with just a small number in their churches and hopefully prepared them for Christmas.

Christmas was spent at Mutley, which meant joining in, as much as I could, our Christmas Cracker Restaurant and Christmas Evangelism programme. It was a great time. The Restaurant netted £8,000. Even more thrilling was that it was run by a group of people who had all been converted in the last couple of years. Our Carols by Candlelight was fuller than ever, a fact which was perhaps not unconnected with the Restaurant.

**January:** The highlight has to be the Dinner at No 10, Downing Street, in honour of the retirement of the Archbishop of Canterbury. If you are as interested in politics as I am, the chance to go into that famous house, and see it, is a real treat. Then there was the opportunity to meet the new Prime Minister, who was a very congenial host, and numerous other political leaders as well as Dr & Mrs Runcie and other religious leaders. Oh, and the meal was good too!

You never know where you are going to end up during your year as President. Much of it is dictated by public events beyond your control, and beyond your imagining at the time you are elected. This was a real bonus on top of an already thrilling year.

**February:** I was in Yorkshire when the snow came down – “the wrong type of snow”, you will recall. But the programme was only curtailed a little and it did not stop me seeing the amazingly diverse work of the churches in the Mid-Calder Valley. It led to an appreciation of the ethnic diversity of our nation.

February is also the month for ministers’ conferences and I had the privilege of going to a couple. A highlight must be the Southern Area Ministers’ Conference, not only because of their warm reception but because I could share the platform, for once, jointly with my wife who had also been invited to speak. Thank you, Geoffrey and Frank, for giving us the chance to be together for 48 hours or so.

**March:** One of the advantages of being President is that you have an excuse to make space in your diary for old friends. March saw the 150th Anniversary of Northchurch Baptist Church, Berkhamsted, the church which I had pastored from 1972-77, thanks to a home mission grant. It certainly does not need home mission support now since it has grown and become a thriving concern. It was great to be able to return and to thank God for what He had done there over the years. It was also great to catch up with so many former members who had returned for the celebrations. It was reassuring, and a further cause for praise, that so many who had been converted during my ministry were still going on with the Lord and active in Christian service.

**April:** Right to the end, the highlights still came. A few days in Sunderland gave me a very diverse experience. They began with my speaking to a charismatic leaders’ conference; continued as I spoke at Northumberland Bible College’s chapel service; had lunch with a contemplative and prayed at a postillion; visited the new pastor of Alwick Baptist Church and his wife; took part in an evangelistic cabaret in a night club; talked with the BU’s incoming Vice-President about his hopes for his year as President; went to see ICI with the Industrial Chaplain, Bill Allen; spoke at the Northern Baptist Association Assembly at Stockton and then drove to Leeds for a lively and rewarding Sunday at Moortown Baptist Church.

Still more was to come. The Friday before I was due to induct my successor happened to be the day chosen for the enthronement of the 103rd Archbishop of Canterbury. So off I went to Canterbury to join with the thousands of others to thank God for the election of George Carey, to be thrilled at the mission-minded nature of his sermon and to pray that under his leadership all the churches of Britain might benefit from a renewed sense of confidence in the gospel. It seemed entirely appropriate that he was the one chosen to hold office during the Decade of Evangelism.

From first to the very last it was a thrilling year. Thank you for doing me the honour of electing me as your President and so of giving me such amazing experiences, the half of which has not been told. I am grateful to God that throughout the year I enjoyed good health and stamina, ease of travel and a constant spirit of expectancy. I am grateful too for an uncomplaining church who released me and a supportive wife who joined me when her own responsibilities permitted. But it is good now, to see her a bit more regularly.

**Derek J. Tidball**

# Towards a Theology of Evangelism for Today: Part Two

## **5. A theology of evangelism for today will need to respect and expect the response of "NO" as well as 'YES'.**

The experience of rejection, said Jesus, is to be expected: "When you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say 'even the dust that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you'. Yet be sure of this, 'The Kingdom of God is near'" (Luke 10:10-11) This was the OT prophetic experience as well as being that of Jesus, Paul, the Early Church under Nero etc. "To evangelise in NT terms does not mean to win converts. Evangelism is the announcement of the Good News about Jesus *irrespective of the result*" (John Stott). We need in evangelism to recognise more the right to say "NO". Put another way, we need more courtesy in evangelism. Appeals that really do present alternatives and respect those who in the end – sadly – say "No". Some, today, take Pascal's wager quite seriously, "Let us weigh the gain and the loss involved in wagering that God exists. Let us estimate these two possibilities: if you win, you win all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager then, without hesitation, that He does exist"<sup>1</sup>. There are those who have thought it through and have taken the risk / wager that "Christ has not been raised; our faith is futile and we are still in our sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). They must be allowed the freedom to be – as we see it – wrong, even if, in fact, in the end "it is too late to repent in the grave". Not all of those outside the Churches are there because they have "never heard". Some have and have rejected it, especially in a culture so permeated with the trappings of Christianity as ours is. As Pascal also put it: "There are only three kinds of persons: those who serve God, having found Him; others who are busy seeking Him, but who have not yet found Him; and others who spend their lives without either looking for or finding Him"<sup>2</sup>. For some it is a lifestyle they are not prepared to change that hinders them. For some it's more won't than can't believe. For some the cost would be too high, eg. to come out of a Muslim background (with its undergirding family, financial and community support networks) and see it replaced in our Churches by an occasional handshake on Sunday and a few white friends. For some, let it be clearly said, it is the poor evidence of Christians' lives or the Church's record and / or priorities that are to blame: "His disciples will have to look more saved if I am going to believe in their Saviour" (Nietzsche). If they are not willing to bow their will to Christ, we must not make them bow to ours. Would that more evangelists would heed these words.

## **6. A theology of evangelism for today will need a broader understanding of Conversion.**

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17) "A second birth created me a new man by means of the spirit breathed from Heaven" (Cyprian). Conversion, I believe, is the coming alive in and through Christ of the human spirit with subsequent effects on both body and soul (intellect, will, emotions) and therefore the whole life and personality. Hitherto the spirit has been, as it were, latent. It may have had glimpses previously of the Risen Lord. A hunger for right living / God / Heaven may well

have been dimly, even strongly, felt. (John 16: 8-11) We were, though, once "dead in trespasses and sins" until God Who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:5). Max Warren sees conversion differently: "The mission of the Christian is not to take Christ into some place from which He is absent but to go into all the world and discover Christ there and in a Christly way, there to uncover the unknown Christ. The uncovering will be as much of a surprise to the Christian as to the Hindu or the Buddhist"<sup>3</sup>. Or, more radical still, Fred Brown challenges many of our presuppositions with these words: "What concerns me is the ready assumption that individuals need to be converted...They experience the same Love that we symbolise with the letters G-O-D and interpret that experience in ways meaningful to themselves"<sup>4</sup>. You choose: 1) The Risen Christ bringing alive the spiritual dimension and transforming gradually human life and personality; 2) uncovering a Christ already present but dimly perceived if at all; 3) the naive (?) belief (the book is a product of the 1960's) that conversion is not necessary because God is already present and working in those who love and therefore know Him already, even if they don't realise it. We need some understanding, at least, of what happens at conversion to "do evangelism", be it gradual or immediate:

"Whether at once, as once at a crash Paul,  
Or as Austin, a lingering-out sweet skill,  
Make mercy in all of us, out of us all  
Mastery, but be adored, but be adored King".  
(G.M. Hopkins, "The Wreck of the Deutschland")

We also need to remember that conversion must be of the mind too. We have personalised it so and made it to do with the heart and behaviour. Lesslie Newbigin in his book *Foolishness to the Greeks*, (recommended at Spring Harvest no less, but don't let that put us off as we prepare for another annual bout of "how boring the local Church is!") not only argues for this but demonstrates superbly in the book what this means in practice. "...the missionary encounter of the gospel with the modern world will, like every true missionary encounter call for radical conversion. This will be not only a conversion of the will and of the feelings but of the mind – a "paradigm-shift" that leads to a new vision of how things are and, not at once but gradually, to the development of a new plausibility structure in which the most real of all realities is the living God whose character is "rendered" for us in the pages of Scripture"<sup>5</sup>. As Colin Marchant has strongly reminded us, too, in his recent Presidential year, conversion must also be **to** service in / of the world. Much Evangelism Today, I wish to suggest, is cramped by a far too individualised and narcissistic concept of conversion.

## **7. A theology of evangelism will need to honour both the Sovereignty of God and the freedom yet responsibility of women and men.**

traditionally, this debate has taken the form of pre-destination: Calvinism versus Arminianism. Calvin: "We call pre-destination God's eternal decree by which He determined with Himself what He willed to become of each man....eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore as any man has been created to one or other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or death". Such theology affects evangelistic practice as Carey found among the opponents of his missionary vision! What really is the point of prayer or active evangelism if all is pre-determined anyway? Much the same charge, of

course, can be levelled against contemporary universalism. As for Jacobus Arminius, the celebrated 17th Dutch Reformed theologian, he argued that divine sovereignty is compatible with a real freewill in women and men. Jesus Christ died for all and not just for the elect. This too has practical implications for evangelistic endeavour. As Carey's (supportive) contemporary Andrew Fuller puts it: "I therefore believe free and solemn address, invitations, calls and warnings to be not only consistent but directly adapted in the hands of the Spirit of God to bring them to Christ. I consider it part of my duty which I could not omit without being guilty of the blood of souls." A blend of respect for God's sovereignty AND for human freedom and choice is needed. I personally find Calvin's stark predestinationism both immoral and sub-Christian. My sympathies are Arminian and yet I admire Spurgeon's fine prayer: "Lord hasten to bring in Thine elect and then elect some more"(!)

## **8. A theology of evangelism for today will need to be related to and fully integrated with the rest of Christian Doctrine and experience.**

Some hints only of what I mean here must suffice.

**Creation:** God so loved the Kosmos – the planet and not just its individuals. Environmental issues. Romans 8: 18-25 suggests clearly that the Good News is for Creation too. Again, as David Coffey is increasingly reminding us, we need to "think globally and act locally" in our Evangelism.

**Incarnation:** God became human. In the world. Solidarity with humanity. Liberation theology and the bias to the poor. Relationships with unchurched friends if we have any left.

**Eschatology:** Christ is the focal point of history; its touchstone; its measure; humankind's goal and judge. Alpha and Omega. We are accountable to Him.

**Sanctification:** Conversion is an ongoing process. Past, present, future.

**Pentecost:** The claims of Power Evangelism may be a theological minefield but cannot be ignored. The many evidences of the charismata in the contemporary Church. Their evangelistic impact. The growth of the Healing Ministry and concomitant broader concepts of salvation and wholeness.

**Evil:** The personalized concept of evil that Jesus Himself had. The realities of persecution, from rejection through to martyrdom. The NT dimension of spiritual battle and warfare. The victims of the occult. (Lk 10: 18-20; Acts 19: 17-20; Acts 26: 17-18; Col 1: 13-14; Eph 6: 10-18; Rev 2: 12-13 etc.)

**The Cross:** "Forgiveness aims at reconciliation, and that requires the offender to come back into the relationship in sorrow and penitence. Atonement is not simply the issue of a pardon; it is a process of healing in the person's life; forgiveness is offered without conditions, but it must be accepted for atonement to take place"<sup>6</sup>. See *The Suffering God* : 2 Cor. 5: 17-21.

**The Trinity:** "Evangelism arises inevitably from the nature of God. God is not self-absorbed for His being and life are ever outgoing and outflowing in Creation – in grace, judgment and love. That outgoing nature is within Himself as a Trinity. His life within His people is therefore outgoing by its very nature. It will always be outflowing and outgoing"(Lewis and Molly Misselbrook)<sup>7</sup>

## Summary:

A theology of evangelism for today will need: an agreed content; acceptable motives; an accessible eschatology; to be complemented by a theology of mission; to respect and expect the response of "no" as well as "yes"; to have a broader understanding of what is happening in the mystery of conversion; respect both for God's sovereignty and human choice; to be related to and fully integrated with the rest of Christian Doctrine and experience.

## Michael I. Bochenski

### Notes:

1. Pascal *Pensees* (Everyman Edition) p343
2. Ibid p336
3. Quoted in *Expository Times* 92: 1 p32
4. Fred Brown *Secular Evangelism* (SCM 1970) p91
5. L. Newbigin *Foolishness to the Greeks* (SPCK 1986) p64
6. P.S. Fiddes *The Suffering God* p185
7. L & M Misselbrook *Love Won Another* (Marshall Pickering 1987)

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# Book Reviews

**Mastering Contemporary Preaching** by Bill Hybels, Stuart Briscoe and Haddon Robinson: (IVP, 1991, 192pp, £5.95)

“When people come to church, they don’t come to be bored”. The challenge of preaching to the modern, secular mind is addressed in this honest and relevant book. It is the product of extensive interviews with the three authors carried out by the editorial team of the American journal *Leadership*. As a result, the style is conversational and anecdotal, with considerable insight into the minds and hearts of the three authors.

The book is divided into four parts. The first deals with the cultural context into which the message must be communicated. The second part examines the homiletical task; what constitutes a balanced preaching programme?; how much thought do we give to illustrations?; how can biblical truth be effectively blended with life applications?

I found the third and fourth sections the most helpful and challenging. How do we tackle the most sensitive and controversial subjects? “Controversy makes preaching a more difficult proposition. But a congregation needs the spicier issues if for no other reason than God fills his Word with just such fare”. Sex and money receive a chapter each, while, interestingly, preaching for commitment is included among the ‘tough’ issues. The final section covers personal preparation and evaluation.

While many of the examples used inevitably reflect the American culture, I found enough wisdom and practical advice to make this more than “just another book on preaching”. Not least, its value comes from the clear conviction of all three authors that ‘God continues to use the “foolishness of preaching” to turn people toward himself. Through sermons, eternal life is offered to individuals who otherwise are surrounded by a throw-away culture.’

**Graham J. Watts**

**In Whose Image? God and Gender** by Jann Aldredge Clanton (SCM, 1991, 144pp, £6.95)

“Dear God, are boys better than girls? I know you are one, but try to be fair” – a little girl’s letter. Sweet – but revealing how many people think about God and how important this subject is.

Jann Aldredge Clanton is concerned with the way we talk about God, and how that talking affects our relationship with God, and our understanding of ourselves. She starts by examining Scripture and Church history to explain how we have got where we are in our understanding of images of God, and then, using the doctrine of the Trinity as a model, she examines how it might be possible to conceive of a God containing and transcending gender. By using a questionnaire, she has explored the relationship of God-language with the self-esteem and spirituality of women and men and concludes by looking to the future and the ways she hopes the Church will be strengthened by widening our understanding of God.

Clanton is a Southern Baptist pastor. She takes Scripture seriously, is concerned pastorally, wants to explore what it means to be in the image of God. Those of us involved in Baptist ministry here will also find these issues high on our agendas. In this book we find the beginnings of a way of thinking about them that takes seriously both our biblical understanding and the questions being raised by and for many women and men about God and humanity.

There are some things I did not like, mainly phrasing – to talk of “imagining” an “androgynous” God, seemed awkward in an already threatening body of ideas, but this perhaps is a result of cross-Atlantic culture clash.

I believe this is an important book. I know it is a challenging book. I hope it is a book that British Baptists will take seriously.

## **Ruth Gouldbourne**

**The Nonconformists** by James Munson: (SPCK, 1991, 368pp, £17.50)

A readable book opening thus, “The decline of English Nonconformity as a major part of English culture in the twentieth century may well be seen as being as profound a change in English history as the suppression of the monasteries under Henry VIII....Nonconformity’s decline has been gradual...come from within, not imposed from without”. Munson surveys the strengths and weaknesses of Nonconformity by looking at its impact on Victorian life, its social nature, its contribution to Victorian culture. He pictures the nonconformist minister, and shows the search for dignity among nonconformists, and their moves towards unity. Munson looks at nonconformists in the rest of the Anglo-Saxon world. He investigates their ‘peculiar’ conscience, and finally looks at passive resistance and nonconformist power before 1914.

Munson presents in a good overall survey much material that we have known of in scraps, and for that he must be thanked. Munson’s thesis is that the almost complete identification with the Liberal Party, while it gave nonconformity great strength and power, also sowed the seeds of its own decline. When the Liberal Party fell, so did Nonconformity lose its influence. We need to learn the lesson that while the Church and Christians must play their part in the political arena, it must not become too identified with one party, of whatever colour.

The picture drawn of Nonconformity shows the industry and commercial entrepreneurialism of Victorian dissenters. It was virtually impossible to keep a household supplied without buying goods manufactured by nonconformist owned companies. There were great social experiments by people like Salt and Cadbury, but at the same time there was exploitation that we would now condemn.

This book is thought provoking and carries warnings from the past for our social action and evangelism as we go forward into this last decade of the 20th century.

## **Thornton Elwyn.**

## **Jesus and Judaism** by E.P. Sanders (SCM, 1985, 444pp, £8.50)

Professor Sanders has already made a name for himself as the author of two very important books on the Apostle Paul, books which have set the tone for much of the rest of the scholarly world. Here in this book he turns his hand to the complicated question of Jesus' relationship to Judaism and shows himself to be an eminent Gospel scholar as well as a Pauline one. Once again, the result is an impressive book which is stimulating, thought provoking, challenging and provocative, all at the same time. It is not an easy book to read for the subject matter itself remains **the** Gordian knot of New Testament studies. Yet Sanders' writing is clear, his thought lucid and the style easy to follow. The book itself is virtually a textbook on the history of NT research into Jesus' relationship to Judaism; at the same time it stands as being a fresh, new attempt at a way forward in understanding the milieu out of which Christianity was to grow.

The study is divided into 11 chapters with excellent Introduction and Conclusion sections. Sanders concerns himself with two basic questions: Why did Jesus die? and How did Christianity begin? He then systematically works through the evidence, sifting and analyzing; weighing up possibilities and suggestions as he works toward a sensible and credible solution to these two foundational questions.

One critical point of interpretation made by Sanders is that Jesus is best seen as a faithful member of first-century Judaism, yet one who might properly be described as a "prophet of eschatological restoration". Thus Jesus' relationship to the Judaism of his own day is one of the key areas of discussion. This is an exciting way forward for NT research for Christians have long been content to simply contrast Jesus with a characterization of Pharisaic Judaism without really coming to grips with how comfortably Jesus fitted within the bounds of normative Judaism. How many times have you and I sat through sermons which made it all too nice and easy, setting Jesus' message of grace over against the "legalism" of the Jews? We conveniently forget that many major NT figures seemed content to remain within Judaism and still felt themselves firmly Christian. Is it all as simple as it is sometimes made out to be? Sanders insists that we do a severe injustice to the NT texts we take as the foundation of our faith by allowing such simplistic, reductionistic contrasts between Christianity and Judaism to be drawn. Sanders is keen to assess properly Jesus' reliance and adherence to Judaism while at the same time attempting to understand how Christianity arises from the Jewish roots, and although eventually breaking with her "mother-faith", yet remaining true to so much of the heart of Judaism.

Interpreting the NT evidence on this complicated subject is by no means an easy task to undertake, and Sanders' work is not without its flaws, but his aims are laudable and his intentions worthy of special examination. If you want a book to challenge you, to cause you to be forced to turn to the New Testament in pursuit of the answer to the deeper questions of *Who was Jesus?* and *What did Jesus come to do?* then I recommend this book to you.

## **Larry Kreitzer**

## **Coping with Suicide** by Donald Scott (Sheldon Press, 1989, 96pp, £3.50)

"Suicide is commoner than we like to admit" (p1). Pastors who listen and care "below the surface" of people's lives have already discovered that and, of

course, many folk have pondered the possibility, if fleetingly, of making an end of things. "The figures for those who die on the roads are, though higher, not very different, yet suicide attracts far less publicity particularly from the preventive point of view" (p2).

Various 'myths' are exploded e.g. the idea that those who threaten suicide do not actually do it and the idea that surrounding conflict heightens the risk. In Northern Ireland, "We might have expected that the IRA terrorist campaign would lead to an increase in depressive illness, but quite the reverse has been found"(p13).

The various strands that can lead to suicide (from chemically based 'clinical depression' through to a sudden change of circumstances) are sensitively examined. The book is a mine of information for the Counsellor, and a source of comfort and practical (in the life-affirming sense!) assistance to the afflicted.

The chapter on 'Mercy Killing' raised many questions for someone as 'pro-life' as this reviewer, and I would query whether the subject should even have been approached in this book.

That apart, a very good book indeed and a 'must' for ministers.

### **Sam Sayer**

**Highlights in the Life of C.H. Spurgeon** by Eric W. Hayden (Pilgrim Publications, 1990, 128pp, £3,30)

The author of this fascinating but rather tantalizing book is deservedly the master-mind on the life of C.H. Spurgeon. He has devoted a lifetime to an arduous and comprehensive study of the great Victorian preacher. However, the title of this well illustrated book poses a question on which I am inclined to pass, but "I've started, so I'll finish".

These 'highlights' are in fact a year by year biography, recording in great detail Spurgeon's many activities. If the author's earlier book that we are encouraged to read is aptly titled *Searchlight On Spurgeon*, this book is more a microscope, with a wealth of statistics including the size of his congregations at the Tabernacle and the number of new members received, his open-air audiences, the money donated to support his philanthropic interests and above all, his publications, especially his sermons, to which reference is given in volumes beyond one's reach!

However, Mr Hayden's labour of love is not in vain. Spurgeon's genius is vividly presented. We hear the silver bell of his remarkable voice, admire his catholicity, his love of children and of the countryside, his generosity and kindness. We sympathise with his ever-recurring illness which involved frequent visits to the South of France. Pastor and Puritan, preacher and philanthropist – all these portraits emerge to the patient and persevering reader who is stimulated but scarcely satisfied.

One thing is abundantly clear: of Mr Spurgeon it may truly be said: "He being dead, yet speaketh". to which one may add the words of Wordsworth, in praise of Milton: "Spurgeon, thou shouldst be living at this hour, England hath need of thee".

### **Harry Young**