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# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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

# EDITORIAL

## Personal meaning and public hope

'The task of the Christian Church' we are reminded, 'is to forge a link between the Year 2000, the name of Jesus Christ, and the possibility of personal meaning and public hope.' The material in this issue is a contribution to the 'personal meaning and public hope' side of that challenge.

Though it is of the essence of what we're about as Christians and as ministers, that is not an easy task. A significant part of that difficulty, in these islands at least, is that our context is changing at such a pace. In the view of one newspaper editor, 'The country is in the throes of social and economic change; it is more democratic, less deferential, harder and faster-moving than ever. The relationships between men and women are being recast. This needs to be reflected in our national image and collective culture' (Will Hutton). All of which, of course, has consequences for our churches, and ministers.

I recently received a letter from a very conscientious and able minister friend which said, 'Sometimes (quite often in fact) it feels as though we are ploughing a very lone furrow here and I wonder for how much longer we will be a viable unit. Occasionally, like yesterday, everything (including numbers attending) comes together and things begin to look more positive.' I suspect that those sentiments could be echoed in a whole host of places, where ministry is front line work nine times out of ten.

Another analyst, Professor Ray Pahl, traces the current trend to the end of the traditional labour market and the development of new flexible working patterns. 'A modern, educated, flexible workforce, exercising independence, choice and initiative, does not drop those values in its private and social life,' he argues, observing that in this world of choice, families and family members are becoming less important - and friends more so.

I believe there are a number of clues in the articles that follow that give cause for hope, while facing up to the reality of where our people are in their everyday lives. Because while the practice of the Faith will be influenced by the context, and to some extent shaped by it, there is also a vital element to it which challenges that culture where it misses the mark.

How we forge a link between where we are now and 'the name of Jesus Christ' will vary according to our theology and experience. That it needs to be done I have no doubt. For the name is not some kind of Hindu mantra but one that sums up the being of Immanuel, God with us.

# CREATING SOMETHING WHERE THERE WAS NOTHING

**IAN HARGREAVES** Professor of Journalism at the University of Wales, Cardiff  
sees an opportunity in the present climate for the meek to inherit the earth.

In his history of Christian Socialism Chris Bryant notes in passing a comment by Nigel Lawson, the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, that following the collapse of eastern bloc socialism and the new global consensus in favour of market capitalism, "all that is left to socialism is the moral high ground." In so saying Bryant shrewdly notes, Lawson thereby conceded a great deal.

The extent to which Tony Blair sees himself as part of the tradition of Christian Socialism with its unashamed ambition to hold the moral high ground, could not be clearer. It has already landed him with the living of St Albion in *Private Eye*, as satirists from Rory Bremner to Harry Enfield converge upon the view that Blair is most vulnerable to comic abuse when mimicked as a parson. His Cabinet contains half a dozen active members of the Christian Socialist movement and at the second and third ranks in the parliamentary party, the ranks are no thinner.

This does not, of course, mean that the government is inspired by the gospel of Christ in its every thought and action any more than it means that devout Christians are unable devoutly to disagree with Blair's politics. But it does make the point that the present prime minister invites judgment from a Christian perspective.

This article, however, does not have the intention of reviewing the moral performance of the government - even if that were a desirable goal, it is probably too early in the life of the administration to pursue it. What I wish to do is to try to understand an important aspect of Blair's politics and to suggest that for anyone working in a church, or indeed any faith community, an opportunity is opening up.

The theme I have in mind is that of New Labour's attraction towards a revived idea of civil society, which lies at the core of its view of the evolution of politics in the 20th century and offers some important pointers to what it might achieve in the 21st.

There was a time when socialists were not much concerned about the institutions of civil society. In the Soviet Union of Stalin and Brezhnev, it was assumed that the state itself would be a more efficient and more just provider of services and social institutions than either the private sector or what Americans call the Third Sector - that vast terrain of organisations which do not exist in order to maximise profit, but which do not belong to the state.

## **Voluntary and Mutual**

After 1945, the successful implementation of the Beveridge plan for the welfare state and the creation of a National Health Service led many British socialists to a similar

conclusion. Not only would state industry drive the private sector from the commanding heights of the productive economy, but so too would the state's provision of housing, hospitals, social insurance, theatres and art galleries displace those provided on the basis of 'charity' by the churches, the voluntary sector, Friendly Societies and co-operatives. Charity became a dirty word - signifying an absence of self-respect on the part of the recipient.

In the 40 years after 1945, however, we can now see all too clearly the extent to which socialism over-reached itself. Its managerial and productivity failures in British nationalised industries reached crisis point in the 1970s and eventually, the mainstream of the British political left, the Labour Party, retreated from its commitment to placing the public sector at the commanding heights of our lives - an outcome represented symbolically by the re-writing of Clause Four of the Labour Party's aims and objectives in 1995.

Subsequently, Blair made it clear that he intended to reach back into the formative years of the British labour movement, to rediscover the inspirational forces of the Liberal Party and the non-Marxist Labour Party tradition which rather than emphasising the domination of the proletariat through the institutions of the state, made the case for a more diverse ecology of voluntary and mutual organisations - an ecology still enormously rich in Britain, incorporating institutions as diverse as Oxfam, the BBC, the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the churches, sports clubs, residents' associations and Guide Dogs for the Blind.

### **Nurturing and Nourishing**

Alan Michael, another active Christian Socialist, who as Deputy Home Secretary (until his recent elevation to Welsh Secretary) was responsible for developing policy towards the Third Sector, reached back to the roots of British liberalism to make his case, citing the father of liberalism John Stuart Mill. Michael is particularly fond of a couple of passages from Mill, which can be run together as follows:

'A people among whom there is no habit of spontaneous action for a collective interest - who look habitually to their government to command or prompt them in all matters of joint concern - who expect to have everything done for them - have their faculties only half developed. .... It is of supreme importance that all classes of the community should have much to do for themselves; that as great a demand should be made upon their intelligence and virtue as it is in any respect equal to; that the government should encourage them to manage as many as possible of their joint concerns by voluntary co-operation.'

The least noticed phrase in this paragraph is "that the government should encourage them", a point which distinguishes Blair's approach to the Third Sector and to civil society from that of the Conservative right in the period of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. It is true that writers like David Green at the right-wing Institute of Economic Affairs have written passionately about civil society, but from a standpoint which suggests that all we require to correct past errors is for the state to withdraw from the social sector, as it did from the market sector when nationalised companies and public utilities were privatised.

The new Blairite left (a good example is Anthony Giddens in his recent book, *The Third Way, the Renewal of Social Democracy* argues on the contrary that only if government

actively engages with the task of nurturing and nourishing the institutions of civil society - providing the right legal and financial frameworks in which they can flourish and encouraging the Public Sector to act in true partnership with the Third Sector - will we get the best results, both in terms of the devolution of political power, the acceptance of responsibility widely among citizens and in tackling some of our most intransigent social problems, such as those we see all around us on our most impoverished urban estates.

## **Families and Institutions**

It is important to note that the re-emergence of interest in civil society is by no means an isolated British phenomenon. An excellent new book by John Keane, *Civil Society: Old Images New Visions*, untangles the history and places current developments in their appropriate context, noting especially the great importance of the civil society debate in former communist countries as they sought to re-furbish their public life after the repressions of the Soviet era. The American political commentator, E.J. Dionne has summarised well the reasons why the new left in the Americas, Europe and Australasia has converged upon the same conclusion:

*"the civil society debate is not a flash in the pan or a trendy effort to inject the appearance of life into a national debate that is failing to engage the country. The civil society idea is popular because it responds to problems inherent in other ideas. Its rise reflects three developments with deep roots."*

*"The first is a move among thinkers on both left and right to reflect on the failures of their respective sides and face evidence that may be inconvenient to their own arguments. The second is a widespread sense that changes in the economy and in the organisation of work, family and the neighbourhood have outpaced the capacity of older forms of civil and associational life to help individuals and communities cope with the change. The third is the impact of anti-government mood that has been part of American life since the 1970s. The interest in civil society reflects both a reaction against government and a desire to reconstruct energetic government on stronger ground."*

Anyone who doubts the extent to which these ideas have penetrated the thinking of the Prime Minister himself will have them dispelled by reading his recently published Fabian pamphlet: *The Third Way: new politics for a new century*. The first sentence of the pamphlet, under the heading "values" declares: "my politics are rooted in a belief that we can only realise ourselves as individuals in a thriving civil society, comprising strong families and civic institutions buttressed by intelligent government."

He goes on to argue that, "the grievous 20<sup>th</sup> century error of the fundamentalist left was the belief that the state could replace civil society, and thereby advance freedom. The New Right veers to the other extreme, advocating wholesale dismantling of core state activity in the cause of freedom. The truth is that freedom for the many requires strong government. A key challenge of progressive politics is to use the state as an enabling force, protecting effective communities and voluntary organisations and encouraging their growth to tackle new needs, in partnership as appropriate."

To all political rhetoric, the well-adjusted sceptic will reply with the question that

surfaced during the American presidential elections of 1992, namely, "where's the beef?"

## **Accountability and Transparency**

One thin slice of beef, a New Labour Carpaccio\* at the very least, is the recently published compact between the government and the voluntary sector, which has been negotiated in the last 18 months in an elaborate exercise of consultation and which contains valuable mutual promises about predictability of funding and a commitment by government that it recognises the independence of voluntary organisations even when they are in receipt of public funds, "to comment on government policy and to challenge that policy." For its part, the voluntary sector promises to follow best practice in terms of accountability and financial transparency - not something at which voluntary organisations, including those associated with the churches, have always excelled.

But it is plain to everyone that the compact is only a beginning and that if we are indeed to grow the Third Sector from its currently estimated level of 4 per cent of economic output (providing somewhere between 450,000 and 950,000 jobs) there is a lot more work to do.

So the debate is now open about what that political agenda should comprise. In programmes like its so-called New Deal for the unemployed (not to mention other New Deals, such as New Deal for communities) the government, especially through the work of its Social Exclusion Unit, is actively looking for energetic partners at the local and national level. If the Third Sector lacks the will or the energy to participate in these initiatives, if it fails to bring good ideas and good people to the task it will lose its greatest opportunity for half a century.

Government needs to be pushed from the Carpaccio\* of the Voluntary Sector Compact to the thick, roast beef of more ambitious political action. There is an urgent need to restore sense to the laws which govern charities, the voluntary sector and the co-operative sector - to enable them to redefine purpose and to be managerially more effective. Too many charities are bogged down in ancient and outdated purpose, some of them with not inconsiderable ancient sums of money sitting in their coffers.

At the same time, government and the voluntary sector must address the most serious and persistent difficulty for the Third Sector: its shortage of new risk capital. A number of ideas have emerged about how this could be tackled ranging from the redirection of funds from the lottery, to the creation of a national network of social capital banks, to the radical innovation of "voluntary taxation" - the ability of citizens to indicate on their income tax forms a share of their contribution which could be handed not to the Treasury but to named Third Sector organisations. This system is already in use in a number of countries in Europe.

## **Energetically and Entrepreneurially**

Where does this leave the churches? I would say, in possession of a wonderful opportunity. The arguments for social engagement contained in landmark reports like *Faith in the City* and their many equivalents in the free churches have at last met with a

positive response. It is now time for the churches to ask themselves; where's the beef?

I am not pessimistic. My own family has recently moved part of its domestic base to West Wales, where in a United Reformed Church chapel on the coast of Pembrokeshire we have discovered again what we have found in a huge diversity of places from New York to central London. That the Church is alive and well in thousands of communities, contributing energy, inspiration and example to local people, often in places where nothing much else exists of that sort. Members of this particular church organise art exhibitions, public performances of music, social events and networks of care, with the sort of resources which would scarcely fund a secretarial post in government.

Meanwhile my wife, Adele Blakebrough, a Baptist Minister, has been working away since last April to create the Community Action Network, which uses the Internet to link social and community entrepreneurs who are tackling problems of social exclusion across the United Kingdom. The roots of this initiative lie very much in her experience of helping to build the Kaleidoscope Project at the John Bunyan Baptist Church in Kingston upon Thames - now widely regarded as a model community-based project serving the most difficult abusers of heroin and other opiates. Her partners at Community Action Network include the Rev Andrew Mawson, who has built a remarkable centre, involving healthcare, education and the arts, at his URC base at Bromley-by-Bow. But Adele's and Andrew's partners also include business, which has funded the start-up of the network, and government, which has also promised financial and other support.

This is how the Third Sector will grow, energetically and entrepreneurially building partnerships, creating something where there was nothing. In political terms, this can be called the enrichment of civil society. In Christian language it offers the means by which the meek shall inherit the earth.

\*for the benefit of those unaccustomed to the menu of New Labour's Islington eateries, Carpaccio is very thinly sliced beef, dried in the Tuscan air.

*Ian Hargreaves is also chairman of Demos, the think tank, and of the board of the New Statesman, which he used to edit. In various past lives, he has edited The Independent, been deputy editor of the Financial Times and Director of News and Current Affairs at the BBC.*

### **Reading references:**

*Tomorrow 's Politics*, edited by Ian Hargreaves and Ian Christie (Demos, 1998, £7.95) includes an essay by Ian Hargreaves on the Third Sector called: beyond Morris Dancing.

*The Third Way: new politics for a new century*, by Tony Blair is published by the Fabian Society, price £3.50.

Chris Bryant's *Possible Dreams, a personal history of the British Christian Socialists* is published by Hodder and Stoughton (1996)

John Keane's *Civil Society: old images, new visions* is published by Polity (1998)

Anthony Giddens: *The Third Way: the renewal of social democracy* is published by Polity (1998)

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# Gathered at the Table: Reflections on the Lord's Supper

**ROBERT ELLIS, Minister of Tyndale Baptist Church, Bristol, reflects on the meaning and practice of the Lord's Supper.**

In this article I want to stimulate thought on the subject of the Lord's Supper by considering it from a number of different perspectives. What do each of them suggest to us about our belief and practise in celebrating the Lord's Supper? These reflections begin with the conviction that our central act in worship should tell us something not only about God, and about ourselves, but also about church.

"A doctrine of the Lord's Supper that has no place for the real presence of Christ, however understood, has substituted a meritorious act, a pious spiritual exercise, for the sacramental grace in which the Father gives his Son again to his people in the fellowship of the Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

The problem with the debate about the 'real presence' is that it has been conducted so much in terms of the relation of the Risen Christ to the bread and wine. Arguments about transubstantiation, consubstantiation and the like were largely these sorts of arguments. But Baptists have a distinctive angle to offer which either supplements or supplants this debate. Not with a subjectivism which concentrates entirely on the *individual's* faith in receiving - we have sometimes made the sacrament of baptism individualistic enough without selling communion short in the same way. And similarly, not by insisting on an austere memorialism either.<sup>2</sup>

Some Catholic theologians now speak of 'transignification'. What before the meal 'signified' only bread or wine now acquire a new significance in their use in the meal, by revelation of God, coming to signify the body and blood of Jesus in their inner meaning and power. Many Baptists would feel able to agree to such language. However, the problem comes after the meal: would they let us give the left overs to the children, or the birds? What significance do the bread and wine have then? Would they all have to be consumed, or 'reserved'? The run-in after the ecumenical communion with the local parish church reminds us that even Baptists with a 'high' view of communion or the real presence of Christ at the Eucharist would not normally associate this presence so closely with the bread and wine as some others do. 'Transignification' has a stronger emphasis on the faith of the receiver (the 'subjectivity' of the Eucharist) alongside the greater 'objectivity' of the more traditional Catholic position. But for Baptists, if I dare generalise, the Lord is present in the believers as much as in the bread and wine; certainly, in the totality of the event rather than in a part of it. It is with this in mind that perhaps we might revisit the historical debate.

## **Solidarity**

Zwingli is often associated with a memorialist position. But when speaking about the presence of Christ, Zwingli moved the focus away from the bread and wine and the words of institution, and towards the believing community. "Wherever two or three..."<sup>3</sup> may not be primarily a Eucharistic text, but it has a significance for our practice at the

Table. For Zwingli it was the dynamic created by the whole meal, which indicated Christ's presence. It is here, I believe, that we have a clue to a more positive position which many of us would want to affirm. It is that Christ is indeed present - not simply in the bread and wine - though they are essential in some way as 'vehicles of recognition' - nor in the faith of the individual - but in the believing community. Not in one or another, but in the whole; not in the bread and wine rather than in the receivers, or vice-versa, but in both: bread, wine, believers - where two or three break bread, "I am with you". Christ's presence is not indicated by my faith but by our celebration.<sup>4</sup> Jurgen Moltmann may have something similar in mind when he points out that "This is my body" must be heard along with "broken for you." The presence of Christ is not an abstract presence, but a presence for us; not in the bread alone, but in the bread for us.<sup>5</sup>

One of the themes of the Supper developed by the American Baptist James McClendon is 'solidarity', and it is a particularly fruitful one. Like the term 'communion' it covers horizontal and vertical relationships. We have solidarity with one another<sup>6</sup> and with Christ. But if the Supper is not simply something we act out, if it is not just a human response - but also something God does - then it is also a sign of his solidarity with us. Preachers have made the point about sacramentum - the oath of allegiance to the emperor - and how the sacraments are our oaths of allegiance. What we miss is that they are also God's oath of allegiance to us, an expression of his (new) covenant love.<sup>7</sup>

One of the other themes of the Eucharist which is most obvious is to do with the ordinariness of what is used. In this the Eucharist recalls and shows forth and celebrates the incarnation itself. Flesh of our flesh shown forth in, well, bread of our bread. The God of incarnation is the God who is down-to-earth enough to share our human lot, and become one of us.<sup>7</sup>

### **Extra-ordinary**

The moment of transfiguration in the ministry of Jesus might seem a long way from the Lord's Supper. It is, however, a moment when the 'ordinary man' Jesus is seen in his true identity and significance. This leads us two ways in talking about the meaning of the Eucharist. First, somewhat over against what we have just said, it suggests that God did not simply take and use the ordinary, but transformed and transfigured it. The bread and wine might be said to be transfigured at the table, when we see them for what they 'really' are: not simply the staples of physical diet, but also the means by which our spirits may be nourished from the very life of God. Insofar as this is true, we can extrapolate, to a point, from the bread and wine to other moments in our experience when God uses the ordinary things of our world to be vessels of his grace. They are not simply left ordinary, but transfigured into something quite extraordinary. An old clay pot from one perspective, a holder of heavenly treasure from another.<sup>8</sup> As Barclay's communion thanksgiving runs:

"Father we know that you are always trying to speak to us in the common things and in the common experiences of life, and that in the midst of time you are always giving us glimpses of eternity."<sup>9</sup>

But there is also another direction of this Eucharistic transfiguration. For we recognise that after being fed by his Risen Lord alongside a Galilean lake, Peter is recommissioned

for service and a new task is laid upon him. The food may not be bread and wine here, but the mood is unmistakably Eucharistic.<sup>10</sup> Those who gather at the sacramental meal are themselves transfigured, changed, and seen in a new light.<sup>11</sup> For Jesus looks at Peter and sees not a hopeless failure, unreliable and feckless. He sees Peter the missionary, to whom the work of the kingdom is given.<sup>12</sup>

One of the most obvious changes to someone comparing Cranmer's 1562 Book of Common Prayer with the 1980 ASB is the move from repentance to celebration, and from cross to resurrection. For too long our Eucharists have been funeral wakes, instead of new life parties. The focus needs to change.

It would of course be inappropriate and impossible to lighten every moment: the breaking of the bread itself is solemn enough reminder that the way to resurrection lay through the cross. The meal is a reminder of squabbling, betrayal and death - but it is also - this Lord's Supper - the moment when we recognise and celebrate that Jesus is the one crucified and risen.

### **Irony**

McClendon places great store on the role of the Supper in building up and maintaining community. It was the fact that practise at Corinth was doing the opposite that prompted Paul's stinging rebukes.<sup>13</sup> To eat and drink in this way, was, said Paul, not to discern the body - but rather (and this is a measure of the seriousness of the situation) to eat and drink judgement on themselves.<sup>14</sup>

The Supper has, therefore, become a symbol of unity in the church - and in practice, a sign of disunity. It is a cause of some concern that in this meal, the climax of our worship, we find ourselves in difficulty with our ecumenical colleagues. Those who find themselves wanting to 'celebrate' with Roman Catholic friends find themselves in special difficulty, because the Catholic view is that it would be a pretence to celebrate the Feast of Unity when that unity is still not a reality. Most of the other denominations see the Eucharist as a means to attain that unity rather than only the goal of it. However, the irony will not be lost on most unbelievers, that at precisely this point - the Feast of Unity - we find it so difficult to worship together; and even if theological matters can be dealt with, the widely differing forms of practice and administration cause real complications. But we need not look to the undeniable ecumenical dimension for our problems. Have we really taken seriously the words of Jesus about settling disputes before going to the altar?<sup>15</sup> We pass the peace in one form or another, but what is the status of this performance: pious prayer, statement of fact, wishful thinking, ironic subversion?! How does one deal with this aspect of the Eucharist in a community like our local churches? Can one face it down and turn it to creative advantage? Or must it remain as an embarrassment?

There is something egalitarian about the Lord's Supper. The rich must wait for those who are late, and all get the same.<sup>16</sup> The Supper is established in the context of the Passover<sup>17</sup>: that great deliverance of Israel from slavery into a new (and sometimes frightening) freedom. This Passover God is the one who sees the plight of the slaves and commands Pharaoh to "let my people go."<sup>18</sup>

## Radical

Amongst the worship material which has been found useful by many in the last few years is much from Iona.

“Lord God, as we come to share the richness of your table,  
We cannot take bread and forget those who are hungry.  
We cannot take wine and forget those who are thirsty.”

Is the Eucharist bound integrally to the Passover God, the God of justice? What does this mean about our week-by-week celebrations?

Anthropologists suggest that in most cultures, eating and meal events have the capacity to send messages of various sorts. Food signals rank and rivalry, solidarity and community, identity or exclusion, intimacy or distance. The Gospel writers record Jesus table-fellowship, and these episodes are at the heart of Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom. When Jesus is at table, or discussing hospitality or telling stories of banquets, he is acting and speaking representatively, embodying key aspects of the Kingdom of God that he is inaugurating.

The radical nature of the table-fellowship of Jesus can be contrasted to the practice of some of his contemporaries, who could exhibit a highly legalistic (and exclusive) view of purity, hierarchy and status. Jesus’ eating habits really threatened the social-religious world of his opponents. For Jesus to share a table with outcasts, thereby suggesting their acceptance by God, was a political and religious statement. As Moltmann has pointed out, the meaning of the meal we share around the Lord’s Table is not derived from the Last Supper alone but is also nuanced by every other meal in the gospels.

Michael Walker’s *Baptists at the Table* gives a detailed and sometimes agonised description of the debate (dispute would be better) which raged amongst Baptists in the 19th century on the question of ‘open’ or ‘closed’ communion. Churches split on the matter, and Baptists effectively excommunicated one another over it. Michael Walker takes a ‘hard’ view: making concessions to those baptised as infants, he sees the path to the sacrament of communion only through the sacrament of communion.<sup>19</sup> In this he has gone against some common assumptions amongst Baptists, and I recognise them as assumptions I have been working with. Where do they lead?

## Offence

Robert Hall, champion of the Open Communion view, was guided by two principles which may be ancestors of our contemporary practice (forgive me if I unwittingly make you, too, an open communionist when you are not!). Hall was “angered and baffled” by the offence against the unity of the church caused by the closed communionists’ position, dividing those who were baptised as believers from all others.<sup>20</sup> Today we too are concerned that the unity of the church is fostered by the Lord’s Supper; or at least, that it not be a painful reminder to everyone of the disunity of the church! But Hall was also motivated by a reluctance to pronounce on the quality of another’s faith. If someone was accepted to be a Christian, irrespective of baptism, they should not be refused communion. The argument can be summarised as ‘if they’re good enough for Jesus they must be good enough for the table in our church.’<sup>21</sup> True, Hall was speaking

of those baptised by other means, but it seems but a short step for those who are suspicious of any claim that the sacraments are necessary for salvation<sup>22</sup> to extend the argument further. The strict logic of baptism and communion may suggest otherwise: but since when did theology concern itself with strict logic alone, divorced from the pastoral heart of that theological perspective?

For Baptists there is a stress on the 'inner' rather than the 'outer' aspect of a rite. Someone can be a Christian without being baptised. If they can be a Christian without baptism, should we insist on baptism before communion? I find myself an 'open communionist' by inclination and belief.

The commonly used form of 'invitation' reflects this 'open communion' line. "All who love the Lord Jesus Christ" are invited to the table. But for us, the openness of this line, is causing newer problems associated with the rediscovery in the last few decades of the centrality of communion.

### **Fringe**

We have stopped celebrating communion as a tag-on extra, after the benediction, and it has become part of the main celebration of worship. And this means that a much more diverse group of people are present at the Lord's Supper. Is it just that we are reluctant to be too nosy or directive in serving those who have been neither baptised or are church members, or do we recognise that "loving the Lord Jesus Christ" might mean different things to different people at different points in their lives? Can you be sure that every adult who receives communion in your church is baptised? - and how important is it to you? to Jesus?

Because we want the whole family to be together, and for children to see what makes worship special, increasingly children are present from time to time at communion. This brings another group of people to the table who hear the words of invitation and believe they qualify. Some churches try to find other ways of including them (I hear noble tales of serving milk and honey to the children at the Table), but we are not far from the pain of ecumenics: to show our unity by giving one set of people one thing, and another set something else can be difficult. At what age is it appropriate to serve communion to young people - who have not been baptised - bearing in mind we probably serve adults who have not been baptised and who may be no more spiritually mature or aware? When a ten-year-old says, "I love Jesus" how do we quantify the authenticity of that love? Is it our business to try to do this anyway? Can we see Jesus, at the table with all sorts of people in the gospels, insisting on a similar measurement process?

Instead, therefore, of being a holy mystery for those on the 'inside', the Eucharist might be used as a tool to reach those on the outside, or the fringe at least. "Tax gatherers and sinners", baptised believers, children who 'love Jesus'. Here the Lord's Supper does indeed "proclaim the gospel" by becoming an *evangelistic* event in which all are invited to meet the Risen Lord, present and host at the table. Perhaps not so much the feast of the baptised as the common table of the kingdom, at which people at very different stages on their own journey to mature Christian faith might be welcome and at home. This is, I suggest, except perhaps in relation to children, near to what we practise. Should it not also be what we advocate more openly, joyfully and consistently?

**Footnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Michael Walker, *Baptists at the Table*, Baptist Historical Society, 1992, p 204.
- <sup>2</sup> Perhaps the *Baptist Hymn Book* preserved the memorialism 'best' in "By Christ redeemed, in Christ restored", by George Rawson, BHB, No 311.
- <sup>3</sup> Matthew 18: 20.
- <sup>4</sup> James W McClendon, *Systematic Theology II: Doctrine*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994, p 400.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, SCM, London, 1977, p 255.
- <sup>6</sup> In his *Systematic Theology I: Ethics*, Abingdon Press, Nashville 1986, McClendon speaks of the important role of the Eucharist in building up and maintaining Christian community (pp 214-218).
- <sup>7</sup> See "See amid the winter's snow" by Edward Caswall (1814-78), BPW 173 and "The Servant King", by Graham Kendrick (b 1950), BPW 529.
- <sup>8</sup> 2 Cor 4: 7
- <sup>9</sup> William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper*.
- <sup>10</sup> See, for instance, John Marsh's commentary on John 21: *The Gospel of St John*, Pelican 1968, pp 653ff.
- <sup>11</sup> Not just the bread and wine transfigured by the presence of Christ, but the community of believers also.
- <sup>12</sup> See, e.g. , "Sent forth by God's blessing", by Omar Westendorf (b 1916), BPW No 448.
- <sup>13</sup> 1 Cor 11: 17ff.
- <sup>14</sup> 1 Cor 11: 29.
- <sup>15</sup> Matthew 5: 23ff.
- <sup>16</sup> 1 Cor 11: 18.
- <sup>17</sup> E.g. John 12:1.
- <sup>18</sup> Exodus 5: 1ff
- <sup>19</sup> Michael Walker, *ibid* p 202.
- <sup>20</sup> Michael Walker, *ibid*, p 45.
- <sup>21</sup> Michael Walker, *ibid*, p 52 ff.
- <sup>22</sup> And therefore representative of a kind of medieval sacramentalism against which the reformation reacted.

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# JESUS' VISION OF THE NEW SOCIETY

**Michael V. Jackson, Minister of Blenheim Baptist Church, Leeds, and former editor of this Journal, adds a New Testament perspective to the current discussion in support for the family.**

By no stretch of the imagination can 'the family' be regarded as a major theme in the New Testament. Yet, inasmuch as it served as the principal model by which the essential nature of the Church came to be understood, its importance is very great. A significant number of terms, intrinsic to the first century household - father, son, brother, servant - came to be reinterpreted in terms of the household of the Church and given theological content. Scholars such as Banks would claim that *oikos* (household) is the most expressive of all Paul's concepts for expressing the essential nature of the Christian community, yet, at the same time, the most neglected. We can say, then, that 'family life' is important in the New Testament primarily because it informs the idea of 'Church'. It is important also because, as the smallest unit in society, it was and remains the place where Christianity, in the first instance, is to be experienced and lived out.

In the Graeco-Roman world of the day, the unquestioned assumption was that the family was directly related to the state, indeed was modelled upon it (Aristotle). Therefore, as the state consisted of the rulers and the governed, so did the nuclear family. Being a microcosm of the state, the first century household was jealously guarded against anything which would disrupt it or offend against accepted norms. The alternative was a threat to public order and eventually the collapse of the state. Such was the projected reflex action of one upon the other.

In practical terms this meant that the authority of the state governed relationships within the family and underwrote its structure. It was severely patriarchal, the father possessing powers that, today, would astonish us. For example, even after a daughter was married, she remained under the authority of her father; a woman often had marriage arranged for her to suit the political advantage of the families in question; a widow rarely inherited more than a fraction of her husband's estate; and a slave was, in law, no more than the chattels of his or her master. In short, women, children and slaves had responsibilities; the male patron, or head of the house, had rights. Their sacred duty was to loyally support and uphold him in his position and give him honour, the most prized commodity in the ancient world.

If this rigid stereotype appears unattractive, it did at least represent a measure of security in a very precarious world. Indeed, a slave was more secure than a 'freedman'. Under the patronage of the household, he or she could enjoy material security and a place within a recognized social framework. Moreover, at this period; the 'household' was increasing in importance, claiming loyalty even over the state itself, because of the significance it gave to the individual.

## **Cracks**

What were the cohesive forces which maintained family life? One was what has been called an 'institutionalized friendship' between patrons and their dependants, which

expressed itself in needs being met and duties performed. The other cohesive force was a common religion, traditionally the Graeco-Roman pantheon of gods. It went unquestioned that the members of the household would reflect the religion of the patron. If he was converted in one direction or another, they would be expected to follow suit, though the New Testament indicates that this did not always happen: Onesimus and Philemon. Yet in the solidarity of the first century household, cracks were beginning to appear. To this extent, it relates to family life today. One of the strains was the growing economic independence of at least some women. A woman with wealth, through inheritance or wise investment, was in a position of influence and power. Lydia, in Acts, a trader in luxury purple dye, was probably a 'freedman', and certainly well-off. She is an example of a class which was upwardly mobile in the first century. Yet, at the same time, society expected of such women a traditional and subordinate role. Result? Social tensions.

Secondly, there was the influence of religions other than Graeco-Roman. Foremost among these was the worship of Isis a cult originally from Egypt. Socially significant is that the cult of Isis was a woman's movement, appealing right across the harsh social strata and enshrining the belief that the power of men had been given, through the cult, to women: an ancient prefiguring of Germane Greer! Such a philosophy was social dynamite and threatened to re-structure the patriarchal household. For this reason it was vigorously opposed, equally when it came from the teaching of Jesus, and for the same reason: the stability and good order of society. The picture emerging, therefore, is of a society which, though, on the surface, stable and rooted in the stereotype of the patriarchal family, was being challenged from beneath by strong counter currents.

In Palestinian Jewish society, too, the urban-rural divide was as real as it is for us today. But some things were held in common. First and foremost the patriarchal nature of the family, legislated for by the Mosaic Law and carried over into first century Christianity. Extended families were common, with two or three generations in one home. Marriage was obligatory for men, even rabbis, and monogamy was the norm. Unlike urban Hellenistic society, women had no right of divorce, and abortion and the abandoning of children was quite alien. Large families were regarded as a sign of God's gracious favour ('happy is the man who has a quiverful'), and children, though well cared for, were not regarded as significant until the Bar Mitzvah ceremony at the age of 12, for a boy. The extended Jewish household rarely, if ever, included slaves.

### **Unorthodox**

The Gospel record presents us with a Jesus who was so radical in his views that they are hardly likely to have been created by the community which followed him; they are part of the bedrock of Gospel tradition. To begin with, he gave heightened significance to the categories of women and children. This in the light of the fact that a rabbi would give thanks that God had not made him a woman, and that, although a child was 'different', because morally innocent in terms of the Law, he or she was not considered a full member of the Covenant community. They were merely incipient adults, lacking any real identity, as they were in our day before 'teenagers' were invented, in the post-war years, as a distinct socio-economic grouping.

As a direct result of Jesus' counter-cultural attitude in this area, we have the 'receiving'



of the children in Mark 10 and parallels. In the context of the day, and in comparison with other great founders of religion, Jesus' stance is without parallel. He invests the lowest member of the community with the highest theological significance, and gives the greatest incentive to loving and caring for them by identifying himself with them absolutely. We cannot but compare this teaching with the situation of today's child, his vulnerability and abuse. It also begs serious questions about applying, uncritically, the theology of the adult to the child in terms of children's evangelism and baptism.

Turning to Jesus' attitude to women, again we encounter a highly unorthodox perspective. Evidence includes his willingness to help and heal women, his undifferentiated Kingdom preaching, his socializing with women and his readiness to accept material support from them in his Kingdom mission. Jeremias says of the latter that it was 'an unprecedented happening in the history of the time', due to social and religious taboos. All this undoubtedly contributed to the mounting opposition, and it scandalized those who safeguarded the fence around the Law. The effect was two-fold. Firstly, it opened out new social possibilities in a rigidly patriarchal society. and, secondly, it stressed the dignity and significance of women in the sight of God which, as Schnackenburg observes, was 'bound in the long run to exert a deeper influence and be more conducive to raising the dignity of women than any particular social reform'. We who are so familiar with them can hardly begin to imagine the impact of Jesus' words and actions on a typical and orthodox Jewish home of the day.

Notwithstanding all this, Jesus was no mere social reformer, rather the messianic proclaimer of the eschatological Kingdom of God. It is this which helps us to understand the second strand of his 'family' teaching, which may appear, on the face of it, contradictory to the first.

### **Tensions**

It coheres around Mark 3 and 13 and parallels. In the first, Jesus distinguishes between his natural family who are 'outside' and his faith family who are inside with him, that is those who are in solidarity with him because they, like him, wish to do the will of God. In the second text, 'the little apocalypse', Jesus will be the cause of family break-up in the final conflict. This should be read in the light of the traditional Jewish teaching in which family breakdown was one of the 'woes' preceding the Day of the Lord (Mic 7:6 and widely regarded as messianic). This painful teaching clearly reflects the eschatological ethos of his Kingdom preaching, the desperate life or death choices which must be made because the Kingdom is so near, and the willingness to surrender what is inherently good, family life, for something even better.

The concept, in the Epistles, of 'household', is invariably understood as the house church meeting in the homes of such as Gaius, Phoebe or Stephanas. Already in the letters of Paul, only 20 years after the Crucifixion, the home has become the model and highly creative base of Christianity. It represents a 'deep re-socialization'. Not that Christianity was the innovator. The Hellenised Jew, Philo (d. AD50), wrote of the Jews at Passover, 'every dwelling is invested with outward semblance and dignity as a temple'. And many pagan cults, clubs and trade associations used the household as a base.

The use of the home by Christians meant that the patron or householder was of

special significance; this was equally true if the patron was a woman, as, for example, Chloe, Nympha and Prisca. The many references suggest that women were far more influential in the Pauline mission than was hitherto realized. Simply by being householders, and thereby patrons, they exercised leadership by default, and, being well-off were able to endow the church meeting in their home. Perhaps the Church was able to capitalize upon the growing independence of wealthy, upper-class women. To this should be added the powerful influence of Jesus in his attitude to women, plus the eschatological ethos in the Church. This resulted in the suspension of the deep social divisions, reflected in Paul's 'neither male nor female'(Gal 3:28). The liberated behaviour of the women of Corinth, perhaps under the influence of Isis or Dionysus, and its censure by Paul, illustrates the tensions which were to come (1Cor 11).

## **Demanding**

It is for this reason that we find numerous examples in the New Testament of the *haustafeln*, German for 'house rules', as in Eph 5 and 6; Col 3; 1 Pet 3. Scholars are of the opinion that their theological purpose was to impose a more patriarchal order on the Christian household, in order to ensure that it did not offend against conventional standards, thus jeopardizing Christian witness. Did it, in fact, represent something of a retrenchment in the post-Pauline era? The 'disruption of households' was certainly a charge brought against the early Church. Meeks points out that, in the second and third centuries, complaints were still being made about the degree of enthusiasm and intimacy within the house churches, reflected in Paul's filial expressions: 'I have begotten you' (to the Corinthians); "My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you"(to the Galatians). Also, Paul frequently uses the more filial 'brother', as opposed to 'friend'. In Hellenistic society, such highly charged expressions were something of which a wise person ought to rid himself, moderation being the prized virtue.

So while the Church was out to change society, it could not at the same time offend against society. This would alienate and destroy all the bridges of access. The Christian Church has always lived with this tension.

The *haustafeln* themselves are not Christian inventions, but reflect the best conventional morality of the Jewish and Hellenistic worlds. It is sometimes said that the distinctively Christian aspect in all this is that the duties are reciprocal: the wife is to be submissive, the husband to love his wife and so on. But, as Houlden points out, such reciprocity is also found in Philo and the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca (d. AD65). Houlden argues that the really distinctive thing is that the fundamental relationship of the Christian to Christ embraces all other relationships, which, in turn, provide the context in which Christ is to be experienced. The family provides the immediate setting for Christian values and attitudes to be expressed, and, we might add, the most demanding setting.

Again, the question arises as to how far the first century *haustafeln* can be applied today, arising as it did in a particular historical and social context where 'harmony' was the overriding goal. The first century was a time of increasing social ferment and the Christian household was not to add to it.

## Vulnerable

One of the examples of *haustafeln* (Ephesians 6), exhorts fathers to bring up children 'in the discipline and instruction of the Lord'. This reflects the fact that education, especially for poor families, was the responsibility of the head of the house (rabbis prohibited women from teaching even small children). The patriarch would have to ensure that his children and other dependants were adequately prepared for life. This helps to illustrate one of the main differences between the New Testament family and today: it was much more self-contained, autonomous and responsible, first and foremost, to itself. No external authority - medical, educational, legal - had jurisdiction, as is, increasingly, the case today. It raises the question of the responsibility of the home for Christian education of the young, whether or not, and to whatever degree, that education is offered by the local church.

Although not part of the *Haustafeln* as such, 'the care of widows' figures significantly in the New Testament, dealt with most fully in 1 Tim 5. Clearly because, as a social category, there were so many and the Church had experienced pastoral problems with them. With the category of 'orphans', widows represented the most vulnerable section of first century society and were liable to exploitation. The Church, while recognizing its responsibility for them, exercises a cool realism; where relatives exist they should have primary responsibility, and where widows are young and likely to re-marry, the Church should not take responsibility for employing them or maintaining them. Today, in a more or less welfare state, the Christian Church is not the last resort.

As to the relationship of parents and children in the New Testament this, as Schnackenburg and others observe; is in terms of authority, discipline and obedience, and as such reflects both Jewish and Hellenistic family life. Yet the very fact that household terms were re-interpreted to describe the very deepest relationships between Christians in the Church does suggest that the status of children was not simply defined by their readiness to be obedient. For Schnackenburg 'The Christian's heightened reverence and love for the heavenly Father of Jesus, also ennobled his idea of paternity in general'. This is one of many areas of New Testament study where one has to read between the lines and deduce from what is written what it might imply. On the whole, the relatively small amount of New Testament teaching devoted to 'family life' could lead us to suppose that, in this area, there were relatively few problems, in marked contrast to today.

In summary, it is possible to argue, with Stambaugh and Balch that the ethic of Jesus was far more radical than we find in the New Testament generally. For example, twice in Mark (ch 3 and 10), Jesus promises his followers new brothers, sisters and mothers, but not fathers. In Matthew (ch 23), he commands 'call no man your father on earth'. This, plus his high valuation of the child and the significance he gives to women, is a revolutionary ethic in Graeco-Roman society. So, did the cultural leap from Capernaum to Corinth, from rural to urban life, cause it to be moderated in the direction of a more traditional and therefore acceptable paternalism? In other words, was Jesus' vision of the new society just too great to comprehend? If so, it is no less the case today.

# THE REAL HUMAN MARY

**JANE KINGSNORTH, Associate Minister at Tyndale Baptist Church, Bristol offers a Baptist, Feminist Theology of the Mother of Jesus.**

Praying with a friend caught up in a horrific situation, I had been unexpectedly plummeted into an experience involving Mary, Jesus' mother.

I was holding Jesus' head and praying for my son. At the same time, Mary was crying out to me, 'I couldn't do this – I couldn't hold my son during his trial.' At that moment I experienced the devastating pain of her love which she had not been able to express during his long night. I heard her cry, 'The curtain of my heart is torn in two.'

What was this about? What had actually happened? As a Free Church Christian, I immediately rejected the notion that Mary, as a person, had spoken directly to me. But, looking into my Methodist and Baptist background, I found nothing that could help. There appeared to be no doctrine or practices, scriptural, theological or spiritual that could illuminate this experience. Setting aside secular explanations of extra-ordinary psychological processes at work, I decided to use the experience as a starting point for an exploration into the reasons for the void and how it might be filled in. Beginning with scripture, I then explored the background to the absence of Mariological writing and thinking in Free Church Christianity. Finally I investigated accessible Mariological material and examined its application for a Baptist.

In contrast to Matthew, Luke presents Mary as chief protagonist in the birth narrative, displaying an understanding of her central role in the story and an empathy with her situation. Some commentators emphasize her unique position as 'first among the faithful', the first disciple.

God's plan for the redemption of the human race depends on the faith and full co-operation of one woman – body, mind and spirit. Perhaps God could have used her body without her consent. But He waits for her to choose to bear His son of her own free will. (The so-called *fiat* of Lk 1:38). In typical Lukan fashion, Mary's experience is juxtaposed with that of Zechariah. He had questioned the angel and remained unbelieving (Lk 1:20); Mary questions and believes.

## Sword

In contrast to Luke 1, with a positive and celebratory flavour (Lk 1:32-35), chapter 2 gives a hint of trouble. Its warning tone suggests rejection. Mary is addressed directly, and is part of Simeon's prophecy: 'and a sword will pierce your own soul too' (v35). Some consider this refers to the pain she experienced at the cross, despite the fact that Luke does not specify Mary among the women (Lk 23:27). A second possibility is that the 'too' links her with Jesus, his prophesied pain being hers also. Thirdly, Coleridge<sup>2</sup> cites Ezek 14:17 and sees the sword as the metaphor for judgement instead of pain. Perhaps the closing adverb links her with the 'many in Israel' of v34, suggesting that Jesus will be the sword, the means by which Israel, the nation, chooses whether to accept God's redemption or not, and also for Mary, the individual. Whether one or another or

all three interpretations are taken up, it is clear that Simeon's oracle is specific about Mary, about pain and judgement, and about her involvement in God's purpose.

Mary's presence before the crucifixion with those who accompanied Jesus, and after, in Jerusalem at Pentecost, is also relevant. Mary, the one who agreed of her own free will to give birth to God's son, continued to accept His purpose in her life. Her *fiat* involved her in his ministry, in pain and suffering. It took her to the cross, where she watched her son being tortured to death. But the cross was also for her, like everyone else, the point at which she had to make a judgement in her heart. Like the 'many', and like us, she received the sword that pierced her soul, causing her to decide whether or not to accept God's redemptive plan for her, for humankind. The pre-crucifixion mother became the post-crucifixion Christian.(Acts 1:14)

This sits more comfortably with a Free Church approach. Mary, like other men and women in the Bible, is human and therefore one of us. Her experiences provide valuable insights for us. Her *fiat* and subsequent life of faith in spite of suffering are model examples for us to follow.

Yet we do not readily think or talk of Mary. In fact, it is probably true to say that we consider her less than almost all other Bible characters - Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, etc., various prophets, disciples, even nameless characters who receive healing. Perhaps this is partly due to the residual effect of patriarchal attitudes in the church. Perhaps it is also because of the way that Mary has been treated by the church throughout history.

## **Sexuality**

Today's silence about Mary among Baptists does not reflect her treatment throughout history – a vast body of writing contributes to Marian devotion. Mariology has defined her as *theotokos*, which can be interpreted in two ways: 'Bearer of God', a factual, physical state, and 'mother of God', focusing on an ongoing relationship between human and divine. The original use of *theotokos* as 'God-bearer' was translated in the Vulgate as *Mater Dei*; the meaning 'mother of God' was then placed onto it from the Latin. Gradually, its use as evidence in the Christological debate declined and it assumed an independent meaning which focused on Mary in her own right. This has been fuelled over time by such notions as the Immaculate Conception and Assumption, her perpetual state of virginity and her status as compassionate mediator between humanity and a judgmental God, and co-redeemer with Jesus Christ.

The above statements, which underpin devotion to her, have no foundation in scripture. Prompted by statements of the Church, the cult and myth of Mary has developed over time by a blending of pagan goddess worship which began before Christianity, and the veneration of Mary by celibate men, within a patriarchal western world order and in response to sociological and cultural conditions. Mary was absorbed into an androcentric Christianity and, like women, recreated as a symbol to fit a masculine ethos.

Perhaps the most destructive image associated with Mary has been the dominant one of Virgin Mother. Paradoxically, it venerates motherhood as women's prime purpose

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To the readers of the Baptist Minister's Journal

By the time you read this letter I shall have retired as General Manager of your insurance company on 31 December 1998.

The five year period during which I have held this office has been a time of considerable change in every area of the company. I feel privileged to have been associated with all of these as I believe significant improvements have been achieved both in respect of policy covers and the clarity of documentation. Furthermore I have introduced an Instalment payment facility to allow the insurance costs for churches to be spread over a 10 month period. Currently this is provided free of charge to our customers. At the same time, a new computer system has been installed to enable us to cope with the various changes introduced.

I would not have been able to accomplish these changes without the support of my management team and staff who have approached their changing roles with commitment and enthusiasm. This has often been in the face of frustrating circumstances particularly in respect of the new computer system plus the relocation to new offices.

The link with the Ecclesiastical Insurance Office which I commented on in my last letter, has helped provide a sound financial base as we look to the next millennium. I feel that I leave the company in a strong position as we look to the future. I will not be severing all my links with the company and will retain an active involvement in my capacity as a Director.

Finally, I would like to thank you for the time you have taken in reading my letters in each publication and for passing on information to your church treasurers and secretaries where this has been appropriate.

Yours in His service

T E Mattholie.

whilst denigrating its means. The ideals of motherhood and virginity are totally incompatible. It promotes motherhood but not sexuality for women. It defines women in the context of men only.

It is important to acknowledge this hegemony which is still manifest today in certain exclusivist tendencies. Baptists, for whom the concept of the priesthood of all believers is a central focus of their faith, cannot identify with this inequality. It is therefore congruous with Baptist theology that a new theology of Mary is constructed. This should include a conscious attempt to identify and remove all androcentrically constructed imagery.

## Soul

The vast amount of Mariological material was perplexing. Trying to relate what I read of her to what I had experienced of her during that prayer, I faced two possibilities. Was this the Mary of historical and cultural construction, or the Mary of the New Testament? Was she a symbol, a myth, the product of humanity's needs and drives? Or was she a living, breathing, rough young peasant woman?<sup>3</sup> Was she a passive recipient, a channel, or a woman with an active faith in God? The Bible was my beginning.

In Luke's gospel, Mary is the chief protagonist in the birth narrative. Luke encourages us to empathise with Mary so that we experience much of what happens through her eyes. (Lk 1:34, 46-55; 2:19, 33-35). Mary chooses to obey God of her own free will – she is not coerced, she is not the passive, unknowing recipient of a miracle action. Instead, she responds freely with body, mind and soul. There is nothing special about Mary that makes her worthy of this role. Her lowly state is highlighted. She does not possess extraordinary powers enabling her to overcome difficulties more easily. What she does display is a strong faith. Surely Mary was the original radical believer, taking a path no one before her had taken, choosing freely to respond to the invitation which changed her life.

Grenz argues that it is the resurrection that confirms Christ's divinity, not the virgin birth.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, less attention is given to factors associated with Mary at Jesus' birth and more on what happened to her at the end. The seemingly insignificant little word 'too' is crucial. Although a sword piercing the soul is ambiguous, the addition of the 'too' tells us that it will be like what will happen to the 'many' in vs34-35, and that the experiences of the 'many' will be something like a sword piercing the soul. Like us, she will undergo the same process of making a choice between acceptance or rejection of Christ, and will be eligible for salvation. Like us  
, (Jn 14:15-17) God filled her with His Spirit. Like her (Lk 1:48) we are blessed because of what God has done (v49).

Mary's *fiat* (Lk 1:38) is a helpful tool for Baptists. Like believer's baptism, it is the answer of faith, the individual's response to an invitation to a unique call, the commitment to a life of obedience to Christ. Like Mary, we do not know what lies ahead. But we have the advantage of seeing where her *fiat* took her. We, also, must journey to the cross. But we know from scripture that, with faith, God goes with us to that point and beyond.

## Spirit

No Baptist could ever call Mary 'mother of God'. To do so is to place Mary in a hierarchy and perhaps even within the Trinity. Its roots are non-scriptural, its development a human construction.

But, in its original usage, *theotokos* meant 'God-bearer'. Mary was God-bearer in a physical sense; we bear God in a spiritual sense, as set out by Jesus to his disciples. (John ch. 14-17). 'Mother of God' elevates Mary to a special status, but 'bearer of God' conveys a sense of responsibility. His purpose in the world today is dependent on our willingness to bear Him within us, as it was then on Mary's response. Mary's physical bearing of Jesus Christ and her subsequent journey is a helpful reminder to us of what that entails – of our responsibility, the faith it requires, and the uniqueness of His call.

There is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that we should focus on Mary's physical state. It could be said that Mary's perpetual virginity is significant as confirmation of Jesus' divinity. But, for Baptists, it is the resurrection which confirms his divinity, not birth. Perpetual virginity, together with the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, is rather a contributory factor to the divinizing of Mary, setting her apart from humanity, eclipsing the work of the Holy Spirit, and even Jesus.

An emphasis on virginity also highlights the male domination of the Christian faith. Virginity is a female physical state from a male perspective. It places women in a passive role, sexual intercourse (either received or not) becoming the means of defining them. Halkes would rather focus on her as believer, linking her with Abraham, individuals who responded in faith, her *fiat* being a condition of the new covenant.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout history, people have shown a desire to address Mary directly, seeing her as a mediator between them and God. This removes her from amongst the redeemed and puts her with the redeemer. But it is not Mary who is the compassionate, forgiving miracle worker, it is Christ. Historical portrayals of a distant and judgmental God are the product of the patriarchal structure of western society, at odds with a Baptist view of Christianity, and we do not engage with ideas that contribute to a picture of a human of raised status. Our concept of the priesthood of all believers means that each person has the same access to God.

## Sacrifice

It is inevitable that much historical Roman Catholic treatment of Mary will be rejected as we construct a Baptist Mariology. Yet there is a very rich heritage of thought in the Roman Catholic Church, notably the writings of Chiara Lubich, of the Focolare Movement<sup>6</sup>. Lubich rightly points us to the love which is at the heart of both Mary's and our relationship with Christ. Elizabeth Gaskell said 'a mother's love is from God and holds fast forever'.<sup>7</sup> I shall rephrase this slightly to read 'mothering love is from God and holds fast forever'. A love which could be called 'mothering love' originates in God – and can be found in anyone who holds another in special relationship - parents of both sexes, lovers. I have heard a spiritual director speak of it in relation to one receiving direction. It is a prominent feature of Revelations, where Julian of Norwich identifies motherhood as love and locates it in God.



This love caused God to make the greatest sacrifice, and at its heart is that sacrificial element says Lubich. Christ lives within us, (Jn 17:21), calls us to be his disciples (Matt 28:19) and urges us to seek him in those we meet (Matt 25:34ff). In this way, we are like Mary. As her heart contained a sacrificing love for him, so we have his sacrificing love in our hearts for those around us in whom we seek him.

This idea has helped to explain my out-of-time prayer experience. The sense of being Mary and experiencing her pain was grounded in that sacrificing love. In ministering to my friend, I was ministering to Jesus, standing alongside Mary.

How might a model be constructed which avoids past pitfalls and remains true to Baptist theology? It needs to be rooted firmly in scripture. It should be tentative and not fixed, allowing for others' contributions, but above all, allowing for God's future revelation.

It should reflect the Baptist belief in the equal value of all people to God. The real, human Mary has been hidden for too long behind cult and culture. A fresh approach to Mary, one which upholds her scriptural identity and humanness, will encourage a valuing of the reality of Christian women today.

If we look upon Mary as we do others in the story of God's people, followers of faith like ourselves, she does not command special treatment in her own right, but gives us a deeper knowledge of God, of His actions in our lives and His relationship with us. We discover a model of faith, obedience, endurance and transformation through the cross. God calls each of us to a unique task. Like her, we are called by Him to make an active response of free will. Like her, by the Holy Spirit, we bear Jesus Christ, and his love, to the world. Like her, our *fiat* involves us in a choice at the cross, a soul-piercing, and the possibility of resurrection.

#### Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> *Woman, First Among the Faithful*. Moloney 1985.

<sup>2</sup> *The Birth of the Lukan Narrative*. Coleridge 1993, 176

<sup>3</sup> John Bell often makes reference to this Mary in his preaching and lectures.

<sup>4</sup> *Theology for the Coming of God*. Grenz 1994, 422

<sup>5</sup> *Mary Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. Schillebeeckx & Halkes 1993, 54

<sup>6</sup> *Meditations*. Lubich 1989

<sup>7</sup> *North and South*. Gaskell,

# FINDING THE SIGNS TO FOLLOW.

**MICHAEL J. CLEAVES, Minister of College Street Baptist Church Northampton, ponders over the future for a Church with a great past.**

On October 27th, 1997 the fellowship at College Street Baptist Church, Northampton, celebrated a milestone in its long, chequered and notable history - its 300th Anniversary, The celebrations coincided with a pastoral vacancy. A month before I had accepted the church's call to be its 25th Minister - a line of 'succession' which includes such prominent Baptist names as John Collett Ryland, John Ryland Jr., John Turland Brown (a past President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain), Edward Murray Page and Jamie Wallace. The church also boasts a famous son, in the person of Dr. H. Wheeler Robinson, a Former Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford, and a renowned Old Testament scholar of the first half of the twentieth century. With such a weight of history, I was to some extent relieved that a previous commitment prevented my being present on the week-end of the Tercentenary celebrations. However, in my address to the congregation at my Induction, I did reflect on the fact that in the year 2001 College Street would be entering the fifth century in which it will have borne witness to Jesus Christ and represented the Baptist expression of being the Church in Northampton. I therefore want to share some thoughts on what it means for such a congregation, along with a number of others in our tradition, to continue to minister and witness in a typical middle-England town and in the context of a rapidly changing wider society.

Incidentally, as an aside at my Induction, I also remarked on the fact that it was strange that such an historic church building, now Grade Two listed and once called the Baptist Cathedral of the East Midlands, did not have a single road sign to direct the visitor, the curious or even the worshipper. A continuing correspondence with the local Council has followed, pointing out the plethora of direction signs to places of Anglican worship. However, though we might justly complain at the lack of due acknowledgement of our town's Nonconformist heritage, the deeper reflection is that if a town-centre church has what people want, they will beat a path to its door, irrespective of signs, one-way systems or eagle-eyed traffic wardens.

So, what will it mean to be a fifth century Baptist in Middle England in the twenty-first century?

## **Tough**

Less than a year's experience of town-centre ministry is hardly any time to gain lasting insight into what it means. What I can say is that it is tough. It is significant for us that in all our publicity we have to inform people that our premises are 'off the Drapery (a main shopping street) and behind Debenham's (department store)'. College Street is an ancient thoroughfare in Northampton but, in today's terms, a back street. Once a residential area from which it drew its congregation, populated with wealthy businessmen, it is now hemmed in by a car-park, office buildings, stores and shops on a cramped site - and the surrounding area is largely devoid of residents. Add to this that until recently the street was part of the town's red-light district, and it will be clear that, sociologically speaking, the church has fallen on hard times.

Nonetheless, the congregation, though a rapidly ageing membership, has striven during the eighties and nineties to cater for its town centre neighbours. Following a massive and expensive redevelopment the church has provided a coffee shop, Christian bookshop and, until recently, a Nursery. The Ministers have developed a chaplaincy in Debenhams and a now regular publication 'The Street' goes out to the area with topical articles, information and so on. The area is, however, subject to the kind of town centre blight caused by out-of-town shopping developments which are a feature of end of the century Britain. Town-centre shops are struggling or closing and fewer people are now regular visitors. A major employer, Barclaycard, closed its headquarters nearby to relocate to the town's ring road, thus contributing to the closure of the Nursery. It is also true to say that the church, though it has a large building, has a low profile in the town. A recent random sample of people in the area, were asked 'Where is the Baptist church?' and this revealed that 90% did not know. This seems to say that the church is not fulfilling its role in the town centre as it should, but it begs the question whether it has ever done so. History at least would suggest that for many years it did.

## **Mother Church**

Like any other organisation, a church seeking to know where it is going needs to know where it has come from. The story of the Baptist cause in Northampton is a long and fascinating one.

There are now eight Baptist churches within a four mile radius of Northampton town centre, but College Street was the grand-mother of them all. Indeed for some it still is, as on a recent preaching visit to one of them, a church which, significantly relocated out to the ring road in the eighties, I was asked to take their greeting back 'to our mother church' - a very un-Baptist concept!

The College Street story began with a group of Dissenters to the 1662 Act of Uniformity, who, around 1670, formed a 'cell' meeting in the home of one Robert Massey. The founding of the first Nonconformist church in Northampton in 1695 prompted in turn the setting up of the Baptist congregation in 1697 to become known as College Lane church in later years. The membership grew to about 260 by 1726, but soon after the church went into rapid decline and closed for a time. Having been re-established a few years later, the church progressed steadily and saw rapid growth and prominence under the ministries of the John Rylands, father and son. Ryland Snr. arrived as Minister to thirty members in 1760. By 1778 it had reached 202, with many members coming from local villages. Ryland Jr., a gifted scholar and preacher by the age of 14, was co-pastor with his father from 1781. It was he who recorded the following: 'On October 5th, 1783, I baptised in the Nene, a poor journeyman, shoe maker, little thinking that before nine years elapsed he would prove the first instrument of forming a society for sending missionaries from England to the heathen world.'<sup>1</sup> That poor shoemaker was William Carey.

The Rylands' era ended in 1794, and the church was pastorless for six years - the longest vacancy in its history. The nineteenth century nonetheless saw a period of great expansion for the church and its schools and missions. At one time over one thousand Sunday scholars were recorded at College Street. The second half of that century saw the ministry of John Turland Brown, who was pastor for 51 years, the membership

peeking in 1885 at 766. A new church building, the present one, was opened in 1863 to seat about a thousand. A notable member from 1867 into the twentieth century was Marianne Farningham Hearn who ran the Young Women's Bible Class and had an international reputation as lecturer, traveller and editor of the 'Sunday School Times'.

## **Dominoes**

The present century has seen twelve ministries, none lasting more than twelve years. It has been demanding for the church, through two world wars, the high point, and the decline of the local shoemaking industry, and the rapid growth and spread of the town in the last thirty years. From a membership of over 300 in the late 1940's, it has now declined to around 100 at the end of this century, with a preponderance of elderly members. A church once able to enjoy considerable affluence due to its business connections saw a steady decline in income and an increase in the costs of maintaining such a large building. In 1982 a decision was taken to disband the congregation 'to serve God in other ways and places' - a potential replay of events in 1726. The decision was reversed within a year and the congregation committed itself to remaining as a town centre church, with an ambitious redevelopment programme costing a third of a million pounds. In 1998, ten per cent of that amount still remains to be paid. However, the redevelopment focussed the church on its town centre ministry, and in 1990 the church gave permission for the priests of the nearby Roman Catholic cathedral to celebrate Mass on two days a week - believed to be the only Baptist church in Britain, which is not in a local Ecumenical covenant, to be extending such hospitality.

Such a brief overview does at least demonstrate something of the key role of College Street and similar churches throughout the country in the history of English Nonconformity - a dissenting tradition which goes back at least to the mid-seventeenth century and arguably to the Lollards of the late fourteenth century<sup>2</sup>. However no-one can live on bread eaten yesterday and no church (except perhaps the Anglicans) can live on the wealth of the past. What does the future hold for the College Streets of today?

On a number of occasions recently I have spoken to the Deacons and the Church Meeting about our situation as a set of dominoes. As we consider the way ahead, so many things are prone to change that once the first happens it will be like 'Record Breakers' on T.V. This can happen, of course, in a positive and a negative way. One of the first disappointments was the moving away of a young family with four children, thus wiping out the younger Sunday Club. This has, however, spurred us to cherish even more the few young people we have and to form a small but hopeful Young People's group. A further major domino is the key question of whether the congregation should remain on its present site, disband, or remove. Such a crucial issue has yet to be raised during my ministry, formally, but I have established already that, whether the final answer is stay or go, I have been called to the church with an 'agenda for change'!

## **Daunting**

To change the metaphor, therefore, my perception is that we are locked into a log-jam, while the river of time is fast flowing away. Whether the decisions made in the 1980's were right or wrong, the church continues to carry both an historic burden of being the only main-stream evangelical presence in the immediate town centre (such burden also being an exciting opportunity), and a financial liability for the building for some years to

come. There remains £30,000 to be paid for the redevelopment and almost £50,000 in rent for the bookshop under a lease until 2006. Such an over-facing commitment for an elderly congregation tends to create a timidity about the future, a lack of vision about what the church might become, and an understandable fear of spending money on what many see to be badly needed improvements.

The sanctuary of the church is a prime example of log-jam. Originally built in 1862/3, College Street retains many of its boxed and doored pews, despite having removed about 50% of them in the 1980's. The pulpit end of the sanctuary is therefore largely unchanged from that time, but with the addition of high-backed choir pews installed in the 1920's. The restricted visibility this creates and the cramped -front area, therefore militates against a high degree of interactive worship common today, and tends to demand a very traditional form of worship, compounded by a magnificent but overwhelming pulpit. The retention of such a layout seems to me to say that during redevelopment the church said 'thus far and no further'. The result is to my mind a user-unfriendly sanctuary which speaks of the traditions of the nineteenth century and not the challenger of the twenty-first.

As I and the Deacons consider my 'agenda for change' I am keenly aware that College Street has undergone many changes and the prospect of continuing change is daunting. The handling of change is a delicate matter in any church where, surrounded by movement, the gut reaction is 'but nothing changes here'. At the heart of our situation lies the attitude to the nature, the context, and the place of worship. College Street has so far remained largely untouched by the new patterns and modes of worship of the last 20 years, and any attempt to 'catch up' will be inevitably painful for many.

## **Heritage**

Like many congregations, however, College Street has to be in the business, to borrow a now well-worn phrase, of 'thinking the unthinkable'. Even only twelve years after a royal re-opening, the possibility of closure must be considered. Apart from the major resource of the commitment and energies of its members, the church building log-jams a realisable resource estimated at between £500,000 and £1 million. God, the Baptist Union and English Heritage willing, such capital could be freed from its present log-jam and put to use in the Kingdom of God elsewhere in Northampton. This fact is a challenge to responsible stewardship of God's resources. Whether a future decision is stay or go, it is already clear that three options face the church: stay, don't change, and die; stay, change, and live; change, go, and be reborn. What, then, might God have in store for our situation?

Before moving to Northampton I had lunch and a long conversation with a leading Baptist in Northampton to whom I put the question 'What do you think the prospects are for College Street?' The typically candid reply was: 'The future is not good'. The reply was predicated on the likelihood of resistance to change, a losing-battle commitment to maintaining town-centre ministry and an unwillingness to grasp modern opportunities like out-of-town development.

Like its inhabitants, Northampton goes back a long way, and is rightly proud of its social, religious and industrial heritage. What seems to be ignored is that we are now living in a post-industrial, post-Christian and post-modern world, where traditional towns

are being challenged to their foundations. Typical of this was an article in the local paper in October 1998 headlined 'Plans for new station derailed', the story of a proposed high-speed rail link to continental Europe. With eleven local councils and other bodies opposed to the plan, a planning appeal will be made early in 1999. Despite local opposition, I believe this scheme will go ahead and is integral to the huge expansion plans for this quintessentially Middle England town<sup>3</sup>.

## Shock

This issue encapsulates the challenge to churches like College Street. Part of our genius as Baptists, from the time of the Civil War in England, has been that we have followed development and population spread down the centuries. We have in that sense not been an 'against the flow' movement but, for good or ill, we have followed the signs of the times and planted our witness where the people have been. College Street itself was an example of that in the past, with a large residential area around it. Unless the local council takes steps to develop with mixed housing the many brown-field sites adjacent to the town centre such a situation will not arise in the foreseeable future.

There is, of course, a good counter-argument for uprooting, as exemplified by the Baptist Union of G.B.'s commitment to inner-city, town centre and other situations in the Home Mission 'Against the Stream' fund. The dilemma for congregations like College Street is how to faithfully answer the questions 'what is God calling us to?' and 'how do we best use our resources for the Kingdom of God?'

I am very aware that I have come to Northampton with a very different experience of being the church. Eleven years ministry in Milton Keynes conditioned me to a culture of change, development, experimentation and challenge. To characterise the transition as moving from the 'shock of the new' to the 'shock of the old' is to disparage neither, but simply to say it as it is. For instance, I could spend the rest of my current five-year contract getting the church to move out, relocate to a new development area in the country fields being swallowed up to the south of Northampton, and negotiate doing it within an ecumenical covenant as well. I am equally aware that the 'white flight' of the churches from town centres to population-growth areas smacks of a 'success theology' mentality, counter to the spirit of the Gospel. Being a fifth century Baptist in a town centre in post-industrial Middle England is not easy. If we at College Street are to stay in our present location, I take inspiration from the chequered history of the church over the centuries: the old way to put it might be 'the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word'; a more up-to-date mode might be to sing 'the only way is up'!

## Footnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> See Powell, David: *Moments in Time - a brief history of College Baptist Church 1697 - 1997*, page 9, publ. by the church. I am grateful to the author for the historical background.
- <sup>2</sup> See Turner, DC: *The Origins of St Albans Baptists in Baptist Quarterly* October 1998, page 403, line 11, quoting from *Historia Anglicana*, ed H.T. Riley, 1863, ii p.52
- <sup>3</sup> See *Northampton Chronicle and Echo*, page 9, October 20th, 1998

# J-Mail

## NO LIFE WITHOUT DEATH

*From Roy A. Freestone General Superintendent Central Area.*

Dear Journal, At the service of thanksgiving for the life and ministry of the late Rev. Alan Staple reference was made to his links with Green Pastures and the fact that he and Eileen were in residence awaiting the arrival of the newly appointed Director when he was taken ill at the end of the service on the Tuesday evening. The address which Alan gave at that service (the final address he was to give, although clearly he did not know that when he prepared and delivered it) was read at the Thanksgiving Service. With the families' permission I reproduce it here:-

When I entered the full-time Baptist ministry, my parents gave a music edition of our hymnbook. In the front of the book my father had written:

'Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy' (Psalm 126:5).

For a while I wondered why my father had chosen this inscription for me. Life had been wonderful up to that point and I had thoroughly enjoyed my work and Christian service. There seemed to me no reason why anything should change. 'Sowing in tears' was most unlikely to happen to me. It was going to be my privilege to help those who were passing through sorrow, not to face it myself.

Needless to say, I soon began to understand what the words meant. Not only was I quickly challenged to put aside my own ideas and feelings (to do which was always a little 'death' for me), but I saw that I could never help others through the dark times they experienced unless I knew for myself what it was like to walk in

the darkness. I had to walk with them, sorrow with them, weep with them, hold the silence with them, feel the distress and hurt with them.

Of course, we all have 'deaths' to die before we come to the death of our bodies. And we cannot help others unless we have passed through those 'deaths' with acceptance and with faith in the God of all comfort. What brings us through these times is not intellectual understanding, but the grace of God and the faith that depends on God and is open to receive his grace.

A Christian mystic wrote: 'We must fold the wings of the intellect and open the door of the heart.'

It is the solemn promise of Jesus, the one who reveals God to us, that he will be with us always, even to the end of the age. Nothing will break that promise; nothing can separate us from that love. This being so, the darkest valley can be a forming ground of character that will overcome in every test that lies ahead, and what is more will see us through to resurrection which is also promised.

We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope; and hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts.' (Romans 5:3-5) This is not to say *what we must never say* – that suffering is the will of God. It is not. Yet, even in times of deepest suffering, there is hope. And, remember, that Christian hope does not disappoint us because it's not mere optimism that things will get better. It rests on the promise that whatever happens, whatever 'death' we have to pass through, Christ will be there; and when death comes at the end of earthly life he will still be there for those who trust and depend upon him.

Using another figure of speech, Jesus speaks of the seed put into the ground. Beneath the dark earth where it is cold, lonely, dark and damp the seed dies. But, with the dying, comes germination, new life, growth into the fullness of harvest time. There is always resurrection after Calvary.

Archbishop Oscar Romero, gunned down as he preached at Mass during Lent 1980, left a legacy of hope for his people which has strengthened them through the years of slaughter and hardship which have followed. He told them:

'We are living in a black night, but Christian faith discerns that beyond the night the dawn already glows. The hope that does not fail is carried in the heart. Christ goes with us. To each one of us Christ is saying: "If you want your life and mission to be like mine, do as I. Be converted into a seed that lets itself be buried..Do not be afraid; those who shun suffering will remain alone. No one is more alone than the selfish. But if you give your life out of love for others, as I give mine for you all, you will reap a great harvest." Do not fear death or threats; the Lord goes with you.'

It is not when we feel clever or powerful or self-sufficient that the Lord seems most near, but when we know that we are weak and even wounded. That is surely because when we throw the weight of our dependence upon him we receive the strength of the Lord who was willing to be vulnerable because of his great love, and still, as it were, has the wounds open in his hands and side. He encountered absolute despair upon the cross and he comes to the place of our despair in the power of his victory and resurrection.

With Christ, there is life abundant, but there is no life without death.

## **A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS** *From John N. Jonsson, Professor of World Religions, Baylor University Waco, Texas.*

Dear Journal, I remember the late Eric Worstead, Principal, Spurgeon's College from 1955-1957 as my Old Testament Professor, confidant and friend.

When I arrived from South Africa as a young student in 1948, he made me feel at home by inviting me for high tea in his home with Joy and their young family. Although a serious academic scholar in his field there was a personableness and composure about his informed attitudes and his attractive appearance which made inter-personal communication possible. His sincerity, vitality and enthusiasm for life appealed to me. In the lecture hall, on the sports field, in his home, and among his students, he came through on a personal level. He made me feel important, and important enough to give me advice and guidance when the going was tough. His strength of character, his creative energy, and his integrity of mind and action, helped me and many others to walk tall in society.

During the final year at Spurgeon's College, when my fiancée, Gladys Crankshaw, arrived in London to work in a nearby hospital as a registered nurse, Eric Worstead took a personal interest in her welfare and wellbeing. For me he had the quality of a man for all seasons. Within my own academic "theologia viatorum" I found him to be a thinker who dared to be a Christian, and as a Christian dared to be a thinker. He was a friend possessed by the strength of his own spirituality and heritage, which spurred me on to more noble exploits for God within the personal inequities and societal prejudices in the country South Africa, to which Gladys and I returned to minister. We were blessed to have come under the persuasion of an incarnated faith in Eric and Joy Worstead



which contributed to the zest of our own corporate faith and lifestyle.

### **TIMES BEST SERMONS**

**From Harry Young, Bideford, North Devon**

Dear Journal, Two friends, separately, brought the 'Preacher of the Year' details to my notice this year, and since I was suddenly without preaching I decided to enter. I was in the first fifty, then in the semi-final of thirty. Visiting examiners came to see me here at Bideford at the beginning of July. I was not, however, in the final, but the sermon, entitled 'Listening to Jesus in a busy life', is included in the 1998 collection. There were over 250 entries, four of the finalists were in their 30s, one 40s, one 60s. I was the oldest ever to enter - I am 78 years!

### **THE BMF WEBSITE**

**From Bob Almond, Kirby Muxloe Free Church.**

Dear Journal, The BMF website is up and running at [HTTP://vistweb.com/BMF](http://vistweb.com/BMF) (note - no WWW!) and we would welcome further comments. Please note that the address in the Journal substituted a dash (-) for the required tilde (~), but with that small correction it still works - the alternative is just shorter and simpler. The site can also be found by following the link from the BU website under 'Baptist Organisations'.

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*Letters may be abbreviated*

## **Men of England & Wales! You are wanted ....to join the Baptist Men's Movement!**

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# HOLIDAYS 1999

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# Book Reviews

I am looking for volunteers to review books. If you are willing to be asked occasionally please contact me and let me know any areas of theology in which you are particularly interested. Your reward, apart from the fame of being published, is to keep the book that the publishers will have supplied.

John Houseago

## ***Groundwork of Christian Worship.* Susan J. White.**

**Epworth Press. 1997, 276 pp. £11-50**

Here is a lively and stimulating book on Christian worship. Susan White deals with her subject in a simple and straightforward style. She is clearly aiming at someone beginning to think seriously about worship and her concluding glossary of terms fits this approach. There is however an obvious depth of scholarship behind all she writes and the comprehensive nature of her treatment makes for a satisfying read.

All the subjects one would hope to find are covered, the biblical and historical foundations, the elements of common worship, sections on the rites of passage and the worship cycle. It is also a very practical book, including towards the end, some perplexing and some moving case studies which would be useful for a worship group or pastors' training session to consider. Her appendices provide a very rare practical resource for observing, analysing and preparing worship.

In terms of her standpoint this book is written very much from a western and European as well as a fairly traditional perspective. Therefore the charismatic and the Pentecostal, the South American and the African-Caribbean approaches to worship hardly get a mention. These are serious omissions in a book which seeks to deal broadly with worship as we experience it today and lay foundations for us.

A further criticism arises from the section on contemporary issues where there appears to be lack of decision over crucial matters. Susan White is happy to describe our dilemmas, but seems not so happy to commit herself over key issues such as inter-faith worship and inclusive language for God. I am still unclear where she stands, though she displays admirable pastoral sensitivity.

However these weaknesses do not detract substantially from a book which is full of thoughtful and practical, as well as scholarly, writing. Give it to anyone who is involved in leading or preparing worship, it will do them and the church much good.

**Chris Voke**

## ***No Ordinary Man: Resources for Reflective Worship on the Person of Jesus***

**Nick Fawcett. Kevin Mayhew Ltd. £19.99**

Need a way to bring to life the characters that are part of the Jesus story, and haven't time, or energy, to write your own? I recommend a dip into this imaginative and thoughtful book. Each meditation is clearly linked to a scripture and the book covers the

breadth of Jesus life, using individual 'shoes' to walk in to enable reflection on who Jesus is for us today.

A small prayer follows on the main emphasis of the reflection more directly developing the thoughts of the character so that there is a movement to an involvement with the story. This encourages one's own thoughts and reflection quite helpfully without being too directive.

I particularly appreciated the everyday language that meant the meditations can be read, and sound, like they might actually have been the person talking. There is plenty of scope for using the material in a creative way. There are plenty of suggestions about using music and slides.

There are several suggested outlines for particular services, and quiet days, moving through a theme to show how to use several meditations together with coherence. But, flexibility seems a key word! The material is useful for dipping in but for best use remember that this is the author's interpretation and therefore becomes one way of opening out the bible story.

The author has clearly used accessible resources, so it should be possible to get hold of the suggested accompaniments with minimum effort. When movement and creativity in worship is so vital for enabling congregations to engage with the bible and the reality of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, here is a colourful and often moving set of reflections that reminds us that we are trying to portray real events and people.

**Rachel Haig**

***God of Compassion*, Gerard Hughes. Hodder & Stoughton. £6.99.**

The book is small (120 pages): the impact enormous.

Exploring God's Covenant, the author of *GOD OF SURPRISES* now leads us through Old and New Testament passages which stir with fresh and provocative insights. He is never far from the need to cancel Third World debt as a powerful statement of God's justice and compassion - where are we?

His over-arching theme is 'The Covenant of God with all peoples and with all creation'. His purpose is to enable reader/participant to enter more readily and deliberately into the reality of God's compassion.

This book is not really about the author's opinions, rather more a journey with him and inescapably into him. Yet, and this illustrates a recurring theme; it is his own openness, humility, questions that naturally lead to exploration with God through Jesus.

The centrality of Incarnation and deep spirituality meet here. He moves irresistibly from the micro to the cosmic, all united in God who wants to meet us everywhere. So politics economics, the environment, justice and peace, celebration, suffering, forgiveness all emerge as essential Biblical themes because they are about being human in God's way. In what is so wonderfully and chaotically human we meet, not escape God,

challenging and liberating.

In encouraging us to face ourselves quietly with God, he makes this a book for living prayerfully, The theology is typically strong, brave and resonant, but only because vulnerability, imagination and contemplation are at the heart. God and ourselves in cooperation. Hughes style and lay-out, fifty sections, each concluding with a prayer and a searching exercise, makes it ideal for guiding individuals and groups through thinking into new action.

The closing 'New Covenant for the Poor' focuses our need to share, for the whole world. Are we prepared to see the world through God's eyes of compassion and so work in love and trust together?

This is a significant and timely writing. The new Millenium may be raising questions about what we do. But how openly we receive and reflect God's compassion will always be the most crucial challenge.

**Bob Mills**

***Furnace of the Heart: Rekindling our Longing for God,***

**Sister Margaret Magdalen. Darton, Longman and Todd. £7.95**

Sister Margaret Magdalen is well known among Baptists (ex BMS missionary, associate member of a Baptist church, speaker at Baptist Ministers' Conferences etc.) and we pride ourselves on the connection each time she writes another helpful and much acclaimed book- Happily her move to the South Africa branch of her Anglican Order has not stopped the flow.

In exploring the various facets of our longing for God she deals perceptively with the dangers of illusion and of our addictive desires. These can be simplified and verified so that they are more clearly focused on God.

Perhaps we hold off pursuing our desire for God out of fear of where he will lead us, but this book challenges us to enter into the pain and the joy of the longing and to dare to respond to God's call to plunge into the abyss of love and to share in the compassion of Christ.

By sharing the pain and suffering of Christ's compassion "we become the irrigation channels through which his tears water the earth's wounds in healing and mercy". Darkness is seen to be the means by which we can step through the limitations of human understanding into a realm where we are more sensitively attuned to the Spirit and can walk by faith rather than by sight. In these and other ways Margaret Magdalen invites us to journey from the depths of our hearts deeper into the heart of God.

She quotes from a wide variety of sources and writes in a flowing style which is easy to read, while stretching mind and heart.

**Sister Margaret Jarman**

***Drugs and Pastoral Care* Kenneth Leech. Darton Longman and Todd; £10.95**

This is not simply a book about drugs, although few books give such a comprehensive description of illicit drugs in common use. The author gives the social background which is essential for an understanding of why people take drugs. All too often, even among professionals, drug use is seen as a sign of personal pathology, whereas once the social context is understood it is clear that most drug use is well within the cultural conformities of young adults in today's society.

Part Three of the book deals with the theological and pastoral issues arising from the drug scene. I wish that before any preacher says another word on this subject, or before any group of Christians consider how they might get involved in a caring ministry among drug users, they pause until they have read and sufficiently thought through these four chapters. Indeed, such an understanding of Christian ministry, from the point of view of an Anglican priest, will challenge much so-called evangelism.

This is a book on two levels. On the one level it is a practical guide to the drug scene. As such it is a masterly summary of the known data on illicit drug use. On another level it is a book of rare spiritual insight. Having spent over thirty years working with marginalised people in Soho and the West End of London, Kenneth Leech is firmly rooted in the realities of life. At the same time, his religious discipline enables him to see beyond the surface of things. *Drugs and Pastoral Care* is written with the clarity and insight which has made Kenneth Leech an important writer on Christian spirituality. Christians engaged in mission cannot afford to neglect this book.

**Eric Blakebrough**

***Islam and the West* Colin Chapman. Paternoster Press, 198 pp, 1988. £12.99**

Colin Chapman worked in the Middle East with CMS and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, taught at Trinity College, Bristol, was Principal of Crowther Hall and is now Director of 'Faith to Faith' consultancy.

This important book, based on lectures given at All Nations, first surveys the often-painful history of the relationship between Muslims and Christians, displaying a great sensitivity and respect. (I had not realised that, 'at the time of the Reformation ... Catholics saw in Islam many of the features they hated most in Protestantism'!)

The 'War of Words' is surveyed: diatribe, apologetics and conversation. As an example of this last, he describes exchanges between Kenneth Cragg and a Muslim scholar in which each showed openness at a deep level, and comments, 'While some believe that there cannot be any genuine dialogue whenever one partner has any secret desire to change the mind of the other, many others would say that the most enriching kind of dialogue takes place between people who are so passionate about what they believe that they want to share it with others.'

The title of the book is highly significant. It is not just about relationships between Muslims and Christians; Western secularism also is involved. How can the sovereignty of God be embodied in the laws of a secular state? Chapman illuminates the way in which

this leads even moderate Muslims into agonising dilemmas over the issue of human rights. The problems for Muslims over schooling in Britain are examined in depth, and also the relationship of Church and State - many Muslims feel that without 'establishment' no religion would be treated seriously in national life,.

This book helps one to understand how threatened Muslims feel today, even in countries where they are the majority - the world media are all-pervasive, and their primary influence is secular. Chapman urges Muslims to recognise that some of what secularism has brought is good, but well understands their fears. This book should enlarge the understanding of all who read it.

**Edward R B Williams**

## WORD COUNT

I am consistently told by all kinds of people that they and others won't read articles if there are too many words on the page - it just causes them to shut off and turn over!

*Jan Kendall 'mh international'*

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