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# The Baptist Ministers' Journal

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

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

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

# Editorial

## Hogwash or Holiness?

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) has produced a 'Service of Thanksgiving, Intercession and Commitment to mark the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen'\*. When it was published in February, the Social Affairs Correspondent of the 'Daily Mail' quoted the views of an unnamed 'senior Anglican'. 'The Queen should not go within a million miles of this service,' warned the nameless cleric. 'It is a load of hogwash – rooted neither in the past nor the present. It mostly reflects a desire to be politically correct.'

As a member of the 'Preparatory Group' responsible for the service and the additional worship resources, I took more than a passing interest in that comment! The quotation however was merely an addendum to the main thrust of the piece, because what had really upset the 'Mail' was that the service dared to include an invocation acknowledging our shortcomings as a nation:

'We have not always followed the Royal Law and heeded God's Word, recalling times when selfish gain has come before service of others, and praying for the grace of penitence and the assurance of full and free forgiveness through the merit of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.'

Since churches of our Faith and Order rarely use set liturgies, it is highly unlikely that many Baptist congregations will be using this service on June 2nd. Nevertheless, I imagine it will be an unusual assembly where there will be no reference to the Jubilee and no prayers offered for the Queen. In that case, it is helpful to have available – if only for the use of the Leader of Worship – resource material that can help to raise the people's prayers from the trite to the transcendent.

In the accompanying booklet to the service, there is an important section on the concept of Jubilee (Lev 25: 8) with suggestions that the offertory that Sunday might be donated to a charity dedicated to

work with children, the bereaved, the farming community, and the casualties of war.

Looking back over the last half century in the life of the nations that make up the United Kingdom, it is good therefore to have an occasion to recall much to be thankful for. It is equally important to remember much that also needs to be forgiven.

'Gracious Father, all time is yours.  
We place these past years, our present  
and our future into your hands and into  
the realm of your healing and creative  
love.' **bmj**

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\* £2.50 from CTBI, Inter-Church House, 35-41 Lower Marsh, SE1 7SA

### *Suggested Bible Readings:*

Genesis 6: 9-22, 7.24 or Deuteronomy 11: 18-21, 26-28;

Romans 1: 1-6; Matthew 7: 21-29; Psalm 31: 1-5, 19-24

### *Alternative Bible Readings:*

Micah 6: 6-8; I Peter 2: 9-10; Matthew 5: 1-2; Psalm 150

Or:

I Samuel 16:1, 6-7; I Timothy 2: 1-8; Matthew 7: 21-27; Psalm 80

Or:

Deuteronomy 10: 12-16; 11:1; I Corinthians 3: 16- 4:1; John 13: 12-24

Or:

I Thessalonians 5: 12-24

# Monarchy or Republic ?

**Michael Ball, Minister of Llanishen, Cardiff, argues in favour of the transparency of a Head of State for whom he'd voted.**

Is it timely or is it unkind to discuss republicanism, in the Queen's Golden Jubilee year, when the Guides are already wearing their special badges, and Radio 4 began the year with a poll to determine our greatest Monarch (excluding Oliver Cromwell, for whom I might have been tempted to vote )? So far as we are presently allowed to know, Elizabeth the Second seems to have been conscientious and hard-working in doing her job as Head of State. I say "so far as we are allowed to know" because many official State papers remain secret for 30 years; others indefinitely. While the press have been almost brutally open about other members of the Royal Family, perhaps even guilty of persecution in some cases, there is still a policy of self-censorship so far as the ruling monarch is concerned, extending to some extent to the consort. This self-censorship also applies to television and radio. As examples from the two previous reigns, all the world but Britain knew of Edward VIII's relationship with Mrs Simpson; while the nature and seriousness of George VI's terminal illness was hidden from the British public.

## **Pressure**

However, the fact that so far as we know, the present Queen seems to have been a faithful monarch is no argument against the inherent unreasonableness of monarchy, and seeking to point out this unreasonableness is not meant to be personal criticism of her. Genetics and history alike reveal the impossibility without distasteful eugenics of breeding humans for outstanding leadership, or indeed for any other quality .In exceptional cases, ability runs in families;

we think of the Bachs in music; the Redgraves in acting. But dynasties do not work. Winston Churchill was a towering Prime Minister; his son Randolph was something of a disaster in many areas of life; his grandson Winston an undistinguished MP; we should be very grateful that Prime Minister is not a hereditary post! In business, the Beecham (pill) and Gibbs (toothpaste) families produced a fine orchestral conductor (Sir Thomas) and a minor composer (Armstrong), rather than entrepreneurs. Environment, as well as the unlikely continuance of suitable genetic inheritance, make the children of strong and successful people inherently less likely to be able to follow them. Children born with silver spoons in their mouths may well be disadvantaged in various ways. David struggled physically as a shepherd boy, the youngest in his ordinary and decent family. He made his way to power and influence by hard work, charisma, luck, God's will; Solomon by contrast was raised in immorality, luxury and family and court intrigue; Rehoboam even more so. And Rehoboam by his arrogance and stupidity squandered the religious and political inheritance of the Davidic dynasty and provoked national disaster.

I am not going to dwell on the damaging pressure on a family to provide a Head of State. Some, like George VI, find it an almost intolerable burden. The laws of succession mean that second, third, fourth in line to the throne live in a kind of limbo, in case they are needed, and then drift to the fringes in meaninglessness when others take their place as new generations are born. Princess Margaret is

a tragic example. Media attention and intrusion mean that part of their lives resemble living soap operas. Illogically, they tend to be castigated and blamed for failing to live up to our unrealistic expectations and hopes of them -that they should somehow embody "mystique" or be the ideal family role-model for us all.

### **Act of Succession**

Some would argue that monarchy has been part of British heritage and tradition, at least back to the days of Alfred the Great, so the system should not be disturbed. The long existence of monarchy is incontrovertible, but time after time, the hereditary succession has thrown up quite intolerable monarchs or candidates for monarchy, and the British people or establishment have replaced them by foreign invasion, by revolution, by rebellion or by invitation. It has been seriously suggested in recent years that a generation should be skipped, that in due course, William should succeed to the throne, rather than Charles. Such an act would subvert the whole idea of a hereditary monarchy, but the very fact that it is suggested points to the unsatisfactory nature of the hereditary principle. Further, if the people or the establishment can choose the Head of State, why should they (we) be limited only to the Windsors?

One very significant difference between Christianity and Judaism is the total eclipse of the hereditary principle in leadership. Priestly and Levitical family leadership roles were entirely replaced by prophetic/charismatic leadership, even though Jesus' mother Mary and his brothers James and Jude did exercise some responsibility in the primitive Church. The only hereditary office in the Christian Church of which I am aware is "Supreme Governor of the Church of England". This title was carefully chosen in Elizabeth I's reign to avoid any New Testament word concerning authority

or leadership in the Church, so that Biblical Christians could not make direct scriptural objections to the office, and to a woman holding it! In those days, when Christianity was overtly involved in political power, it replaced the Pope as a Protestant Monarch in this area of state. It is interesting that political power was so strong that it overruled any idea that women could not exercise leadership in the Church, something Anglicans only began to question seriously in other aspects of leadership in the 20th Century! The pale shadow of this remains in the Act of Succession, which guarantees in perpetuity an Anglican Protestant Establishment for Britain, and pressurises heirs to the throne so far as their individual faith convictions are concerned. They must either be Anglicans or give up their right to succeed. Surely we Baptists have believed from the days of Helwys that the law has no right to impose a particular religion on anyone, not even the Royal family? - and that the Church and State should be carefully distanced from each other?

### **Status**

Although the political power of the monarchy is limited, the system still gives quite absurd influence to people who really do not merit it. Quite apart from the sad spectacle of the Countess of Wessex shamelessly trying to trade on her royal connections to make money, we have the Prince of Wales interfering in public issues such as architecture, "alternative" medicine, green issues like genetically modified crops (against) and fox and deer hunting (enthusiastically for), and because of his "position", having influence way beyond his competence, with potentially adverse effects on us all.

There are perhaps more important theological issues to do with monarchy. The existence of a monarch at the head of the British State validates the whole

ludicrous edifice of Baronets, Lords, Earls etc; people who have (or think they have) a status in society by virtue of their ancestry, (whether robber barons or nouveau riche Victorian bankers who patronised a political party). Convention says they are entitled to be addressed as "My Lord" or "Your Grace" or "Ma'am" by the rest of us, and gives them automatic precedence in public events. The implication is that the rest of us are less worthy, less important. True, we are no longer categorised as "yeomen" or "villeins" or even "serfs", but allowed the honorary appellation of "gentlemen" but some of the deferential and snobbish attitudes remain. My objections are not just about meritocracy, but from the Gospel insight that in Jesus Christ, all such distinctions have been abolished. Male and female, slave and free, Jew and Gentile, Greek and Barbarian, 'aristocratic or royal' and 'common', all are one in Christ. If our vision is for a society and relationships between people which reflect Gospel truth and the Kingdom of God, how can we defend a theory and system which deny the basic unity of people? As a small boy, my father, who inherited a radical nonconformity, would often tell me "Always remember, my boy, you are as good a man as the King of England. But no better...!" While it exists, the monarchy has a tremendous power to subvert. Not only Labour Party politicians, but even our radical nonconformist leaders cherish their invitations to Garden Parties at Buckingham Palace or dinner at Windsor Castle. (For anyone who knows me well, and perhaps detects some hypocrisy, I confess that before my views had developed to their present state, in 1982 I was happy to represent the Baptist Union at the Scout Association National St George's Day Service at Windsor, in the presence of the Queen - the closest I have ever been to the Royal Family.)

## God's reign

There is not time and space to consider in detail a theology of Kingship in the Bible. But briefly, Gideon and Samuel warned God's people about its dangers. God himself claims that the system usurps his role, when he finally gives in to the people's demands and tells Samuel to anoint a king "for they have not rejected you, but rather they have rejected me from ruling over them" (1 Sam 8.7). The prophets were very wary of Kingship, as Walter Eichrodt, points out in his Commentary on Ezekiel (p 477) "When (Ezekiel) employs the word 'nasi' for the king of salvation bestowed by Yahweh upon the new people of Israel whom he has called into life, he does it to avoid using the title 'melek', which is similarly avoided by all his three predecessors Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah. The Canaanite origin of the title and its associations with despotism and absolute rule evidently created too strong a prejudice in the minds of these prophets against it to allow them to use a word so full of associations with an accursed past to denote the chosen of Yahweh, in whom all things, and with them the office of the ruler, were to become new."

The Jewish hope in the Davidic monarchy was for one who would be king by truly representing and embodying God's reign. This hope or vision is found in Psalm 72 for instance. It is only too clear that even David, the best of the bunch, fell very far short of it. His dealings with Uriah represent anything but the nature of God. And so develops the Messianic hope, the once and future King from the line of David which the New Testament claims has been fulfilled once and for all in Jesus. He is identified as Son of David; the Magi came to look for the one born King of the Jews; he was crucified as King of the Jews; ascending to heaven, he took Kingship with him, leaving a Kingdom headed by a

Father, not an Emperor. "The idea of the incarnation of the divine in the form of a man, joined to the idea that this man is in the royal line of David, pulls the carpet from under the human institution of monarchy, and it returns God to the place of sole monarch... Given that monarchy involves humans' appropriation of some of the deity's dominion over them, the depiction of Jesus as king in the New Testament narrative involves an ironic divine re-appropriation of kingship." R.E Friedman ("The Disappearance of God" pp 129-130)

### Humility

More devotionally, as Father Andrew (H.E. Hardy) wrote:- "Only he could be trusted to be the absolute King of men, because only he possesses in himself a humility equal to the absolute royalty which is his. We can trust him with infinite kingship because he is infinitely humble, and the secret of his humility is the same as the secret of his royalty. It is the infinite perfection of his love." ("The Pattern Prayer" p44) My acknowledgement of Jesus as King, in worship in devotion, and in aspiration in lifestyle, creates severe problems for me in relating to an earthly monarch. The anointing of the Queen as part of her Coronation Ceremony makes me increasingly uneasy, with its overtones of the sacral theology belonging to the Davidic ideal and echoes of the "Divine Right of Kings". And if I live long enough, I certainly don't want Prince Charles to become the Defender of my faith, even though he once said he aspires to be "defender of faiths", whatever that might mean.

Finally, I would like to address a few words to those despairing souls who are fearful of change lest we end up with someone worse for our Head of State; people so pessimistic that they think as a community of four nations, we would be

unable to choose a satisfactory Head of State for ourselves. Surely if a small nation like the Irish could choose someone of the gravitas and distinction of Mary Robinson, the UK could do as well? Politicians are held in low public esteem, partly deserved, partly as a result of fashionable cynicism. They are seen to be "on the make." But the Royal family hardly seem to have done badly over the years in amassing personal wealth. Some people say "Better the Queen than a politician." But monarchy is always in danger of giving us both - an unelected politician as our "impartial" Head of State. King George VI and Queen Elizabeth triumphantly and approvingly welcomed Neville Chamberlain to Buckingham Palace balcony on his return from his Munich policy of appeasing Hitler by betraying Czechoslovakia, before Parliament had had a chance to hear from him and consider its response. Has political bias or interference by the monarchy changed? We don't know - but the probability is that it has not. Cabinet papers for 1971 released only on January 1st 2002 revealed that the Duke of Edinburgh was forced to apologise to Prime Minister Edward Heath for a speech warning of the dangers he perceived for British agriculture in Common Market membership, made just as negotiators were entering the last round of entry talks in Luxembourg. I would prefer the transparency of a Head of State for whom I had voted, and who could be dismissed for corruption or incompetence, to the wishful hope, whose reality will not begin to be revealed for 30 years, that the nature and nurture of one person automatically selected from one privileged British immigrant family, which has shown itself severely dysfunctional in recent years, will necessarily provide me with a satisfactory Head of State for my nation. **bmj**

# Sex offenders and the church

**Andrew Taylor, Church Secretary at Market Street Baptist/United Reformed Church, Nantwich, draws on his experience as Chief Probation Officer for Cheshire to offer some suggestions on what churches and ministers can do in relation to sex offenders.**

The Sex Offenders Act 1997 introduced the registration of convicted sex offenders, and made it an offence for those required to register with their local police not to do so within fourteen days of the order becoming operative. The period for which registration must be maintained can vary, generally in line with the length of sentence imposed, but may be for life. Once an offender is registered, his or her situation is regularly monitored by the Police and Probation services, together with other agencies that may be involved with a particular individual. These may include health service agencies, social services, housing departments and other community agencies such as churches if they have significant involvement with that offender and/or their family. Such review panels will agree the form and level of continued oversight or supervision that may be needed to protect the public from the risk then believed to be posed (subject to the legal powers to exercise such supervision). The requirement to register was further extended in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

The work of the Sex Offender panels marked a significant change in the working relationships between the Police and Probation services, and emphasised the complementarity of their work. They also provided the opportunity and gave a framework for closer co-operation and collaboration in respect of other serious offenders, and many areas established Multi-agency Risk Panels in order to bring the same levels of inter-agency sharing to other situations. Formal agreements were signed and protocols established to

regulate the necessary flow of information and to operate the mechanics of calling meetings and setting shared action plans.

This was endorsed in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 which gave a statutory responsibility to the Police and Probation services to operate Multi Agency Public Protection panels, and the formal guidelines for these were issued in March 2001. This therefore marks the culmination, at least to date, of the shifting role and duties of the Probation service, and moves the service away from its previous social work/social service past into a new identity as a public protection/law enforcement agency. It is nevertheless one that continues to recognise that the lasting protection that is offered to the public by effecting fundamental changes in offenders' attitudes, beliefs and behaviours requires sustained personal commitment to offenders as individual human beings. And, although not all probation staff would state it in such terms, offenders are still individuals precious to God for whom He sent His son into the world.

## **Pro-social modelling**

Like the Probation service, the churches also face the challenge of responding to a changing society with evolving values and attitudes, and seek to understand and apply their own essential truths and values within this uncertain and volatile environment.

If the Probation service has found its firm ground within a view that effective, even restrictive, supervision of offenders needs to be based on the principles that



no opportunity to modify an individual's behaviour constructively should be ignored, and that the consistent observation and experience of the behaviours and attitudes required (pro-social modelling is the technical term applied) is crucial to success, the churches can define their equivalent position.

If the Probation service can reconcile itself to a view that a duty of care extends to victims and potential victims as well as to those whom for a century it was bound statutorily to "advise, assist and befriend", the churches can also appreciate that love, including what has been called "tough love" has to be expressed to all in ways that are appropriate to the situation.

Inevitably this involves balancing a range of responsibilities that feel, and can be in reality, in tension with each other. Churches would not deny that in principle their God given responsibility of love and care embraces: potential victims of crime; offenders; offenders' families; those previously victimised by known offenders within the fellowship; those previously victimised by an offender unknown to the fellowship, who suffer continuing hurt because of what happened to them. Giving practical expression to that is more difficult. Absolute prioritisation of these different responsibilities may be neither possible or appropriate. However, some consideration of the approaches to be adopted to these different groups, recognising that the individual realities and circumstances of each have to be addressed, is likely to be very helpful, and may usefully be done before events finally require it.

### **Massively under reported**

Is this a pressing matter? Offenders, as a whole, proliferate within the community. A longitudinal study by the Home Office has indicated that by the age of 40, 30% of

males (virtually 1 in 3) will have been convicted of an indictable offence. If churches in any way are representative of the community at large this will have some reflection within congregations. However, only a small proportion of those are persistent and serious offenders, and despite the column inches they can command in some media outlets, sex offenders are again a small proportion of the offending population. Such statements have to be understood against the other known fact that sex offending, especially against children and in domestic settings is massively under-reported. Never the less a recent survey amongst Methodist ministers indicated that 13.3% i.e. one in eight knew of sex offenders within their current appointment (with interesting regional variations of 25% - 4.2%). More alarming is the evidence emerging from the Faithfull Foundation, an agency that specialises in work with sex offenders, that a surprisingly high proportion of such offenders identify themselves as having church connections. This is being further researched with probation services at present.

In part this is not surprising. Certain patterns of behaviour are known to be typical of sex offending, and particularly offending against children. Distorted cognitive practices are common, such as seeking moral justifications, misconstruing the consequences of the behaviour, or attributing blame to the victim. Denial of continuing responsibility often accompanies this, and a religious experience can be used to absolve responsibility or deny any on-going risk – "Jesus has healed me!" Equally common is the cultivation of opportunities to offend and the grooming of potential victims, especially child victims. Churches, with their various associated youthwork outlets provide easy potential situations in which sex offenders can progress their meticulous and patient plans. And churches seek to

keep their doors and activities open to all. No-one is vetted before they come to church; indeed, sinners may be particularly welcome.

The challenge, therefore, is to balance all the competing demands and expectations in a way that is fair and consistent with the values and beliefs of the church. This is a challenge that has been faced by all the denominations and whilst, it is my impression, all have sought to comply with the requirements of the Children Act, which helps to provide a valuable framework for those issues that relate to the protection of children, a number of groups have taken further their ideas about constructive engagement with sex offenders. This has included exploring the meaning and practical implications of forgiveness, which does not require forgetting, nor absolving an offender from past or future responsibilities for their behaviour.

### **Pastoral Responsibilities**

Equally, it recognises the difficulty a victim may have in feeling, let alone expressing, forgiveness, especially if the offender and victim know each other within the church context. It requires some careful re-evaluation of the implications of conversion – what that does, what it does not do, and how those things can be tested. It invites a review of the meaning of church discipline, i.e. the authority of a church to require an individual to accept a framework of actions and behaviours as part of the process of belonging.

I suspect that no church would find it difficult to accept and assert the primacy of the priority that should be given to the protection of children. It is enshrined in legislation and is enjoined upon us by Scripture. Holding firmly to that helps address all other issues. Some denominations, such as the Methodist

Church, have formally resolved that people with convictions or police cautions for sex offences shall not be allowed to hold office in the Church. Such a position can appear to carry the implication of doubting an individual's capacity to change in a meaningful way, or to view a professed conversion with scepticism.

It is a difficult message to communicate that all are welcome within the church community, but that the past of some cannot be forgotten or totally left behind. However a distinction can be drawn between membership and its commitment, and the exercise of office. Sexual offending is a complex area of behaviour, but its association with the abuse of power has been thoroughly noted. Bestowing power on such individuals has to be questioned. As a perhaps over simple analogy, placing a bottle of spirits within the grasp of a reformed alcoholic may not automatically lead to their relapse, but it might so why would one do it? Additionally, churches properly invite and attract the vulnerable. Particular care should therefore be given in selecting those to whom extra powers and responsibilities are given.

This is not to argue that offenders and particularly sex offenders should have no place within the church community. It can be understood why there is a human emotional temptation to call for that, but there is no theological basis to such a position. Churches have a pastoral responsibility to all, including offenders and there are many working within the criminal justice system either professionally or particularly voluntarily who see that as part of a Christian calling and ministry. Offenders, though, do not tell a uniform tale of acceptance within churches and sadly the same can be said of the experience for their families. Equally efforts taken to accept and assimilate sex

offenders cannot be allowed to be interpreted as giving a greater priority to offenders than to their victims, to whom a ministry of care is also owed. It is not impossible to do both, but the inherent tensions need to be recognised, acknowledged and continually worked with. The role of ministers in addressing this is crucial.

So what should churches and ministers do?

### **Vetting procedures**

Reference was made above to the shift there has been within the Probation Service in terms of its responsibilities for public protection and risk management, and churches may need to make similar adjustments to their thinking and approaches. A protective church is not an uncaring church, and the responses it makes to those within their care need not, and indeed should not, be unthinking, unfocused and unplanned. The Methodist Church survey quoted earlier indicated that there are many ministers within that denomination who have had to determine a position in respect of sex offenders for themselves, and even more who would be well advised to do so before an individual forces them to do so.

The Children Act requires churches to establish procedures for vetting and affirming those who work with young people. Equivalent procedures for accepting and relating to sex offenders can also be commended. Such procedures, openly published, can be reassuring to all elements within a church and can both limit and authorise what can be done. It can demonstrate that neither offender nor victim are being overlooked and the protections that both require are being addressed. The protection required by sex offenders does need to be considered and their vulnerability to accusation and to

their own potential for re-offending borne in mind.

Such a procedure is likely to have to include:

- whether the church has been given notice of the possibility of a sex offender making contact. If it follows release from prison there may be some element of referral from the prison chaplain and early plans can be made, ideally with other agencies, e.g. police, probation and social services covering the full range of resettlement issues.
- If no notice has been given, what steps should be taken to link up with other agencies and the public protection panels?
- Whether to establish a small pastoral group within the church particularly to support the offender. In some instances when the past offences have been against children such a group has taken responsibility for accompanying the offender throughout worship and other church activities, and may extend its brief to supporting the individual across a wider range of rehabilitative activities.
- The terms of any risk assessment that the church should undertake. Agencies involved with public protection panels may be pleased to advise on this matter.
- The possibility of establishing a specific contract with the offender, clarifying the terms on which the person will be involved in the life of the church. The Churches Child Protection Advisory Service can provide a suitable draft contract for consideration.
- The means and regularity of reviewing how things are going, such a process properly involving the offender and their family.

- Criteria for deciding the manner and degree to which information about the offender should be disseminated.

## Home Office

The question can be asked as to whether this is acceptable to a sex offender, or is it an elaborate ruse to scare them off and so keep all the issues at bay. Broadly, evidence suggests that a sex offender, concerned about their resettlement, conscious of their potential for re-offending and seeking a continuing place in a caring and worshipping community will accept this if it is done openly and in a manner that accords them essential dignity and respect. It is a joint venture, mutually agreed, mutually reviewed and ultimately mutually beneficial.

Examples exist of churches taking a notable lead in work with serious sex offenders in the community. "Circles of Support and Accountability" is an approach developed by the Mennonite Community in Ontario, Canada, and run by that church and the state Correctional Services. Its purposes are to reduce the risk of re-offending by individuals convicted of sexual offences and to ease their transition into the community, and speak to the fears of victims. It operates by a small Circle of (about 6) people from a faith community befriending and closely supporting and supervising a serious high-risk sex offender on release from prison.

Neither the control exercised nor the care bestowed can be minimised, but the results have been very encouraging. Those involved view the work as resonating with a number of important biblical themes including God's mercy, God's steadfast love; and the consistent concern of God for the alien, the prisoner and the dispossessed. As their manual states: "At the heart of these understandings lies an even more fundamental reality, the God-

human relationship shaped in covenant community".

Within this country those ideas are in the process of being explored under a shared initiative being taken by the Home Office, the Society of Friends and the Wolvercote Clinic of the Faithfull Foundation. The Home Office is now sponsoring initial experiments to see how the model might transfer into this country and criminal justice system. Although not exclusively so, faith communities are seen as having particular roles to play in this.

However, it is not appropriate to commend this to all churches, though it may produce a repository of advice and experience from which all churches can benefit. For the present churches need to be vigilant to the possible presence of sex offenders within their numbers, mindful of the issues and balances of cares and responsibilities that would need to be addressed in such circumstances and have done some preliminary thinking as to the procedures that should be adopted. **bmj**

## Resources

Local Multi-Agency Public Protection Panels: contact the local Police or Probation Services.

Churches Child Protection Advisory Service, PO Box 133, Swanley, Kent BR8 7UQ

The Church and Sex Offenders: Report to Methodist Conference 2000. From; Methodist Publishing House, 20 Ivatt Way, Peterborough PE3 7PG

The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, Wolvercote Clinic, Horton Hospital, Long Grove Road, Epsom Surrey KT19 8PZ



# Leicester Areopagus

**Michael Ipgrave, Secretary of the Churches' Commission for Inter Faith Relations, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, invites us to see multiculturalism as an opportunity rather than a threat.**

If you were to take a train to Leicester – one of Britain's most religiously diverse cities – two sights would greet you as you emerged from the station. Straight in front you would see the tower of a disused Anglican church, now converted into flats. Behind you to the left, your eye would be caught by the huge dome of the Central Mosque, filled daily with hundreds of worshippers. In other parts of the city, Christian redundancy and new religious use come together in the same building – most poignantly, the former Carey Hall, a Baptist church named after the great missionary to India, is now the sumptuous Shree Sanatan Mandir (Hindu temple).

Such powerful markers in our urban landscape can easily be unsettling for Christians and others, who feel that familiar reference points have been changed. Likewise, people who grew up in close-knit urban neighbourhoods may feel a sense of bereavement when their streets, shops and schools change in character as people of other faiths move in, and those feelings of loss can be projected onto other communities as fear or suspicion. These reactions may also be compounded by stereotyped views of 'the other' fed by ever present media images, by half-remembered prejudices from the past, and by anxieties about a future 'clash of civilisations' along religious lines.

So there are many pressures inviting us to view people of other faiths in our country as 'a threat'. Recent reports have pointed out the extent to which people in different communities can actually live separate lives, with next to no meaningful

interaction or even meeting. A sense of being threatened by the other is equally cause and effect of such segregation – an attitudinal problem found in both 'majorities' and 'minorities'.

## Cross the line

Yet it is surely a sign of the transforming and renewing power of faith, its resistance to being 'conformed to this world' that in fact so many individuals and groups see the situation very differently – not as a threat, but as an opportunity. In Leicester, for example, the Central Mosque recently hosted a lecture by the Templeton 'Prize Winner Arthur Peacocke as part of a City Centre Churches ecumenical Lent course, attended by both Christians and Muslims. At Shree Sanatan Mandir, people of all faiths are regularly invited to community celebrations, and the temple enjoys a particularly close relationship with the Anglican church of St Alban's across the road (which is pastored by an Indian priest). Examples of interaction and bridge-building like this could be multiplied across the city and the country.

What is it that impels people to 'cross the line' in this way, to step across the invisible but very real boundaries that separate our communities from one another? In particular, why should followers of Jesus see the presence of people of other faiths as an opportunity rather than a threat? It seems to me, from having met Christian individuals and churches across Britain who are involved in inter faith work, that they are usually motivated by one or more of four fundamental impulses – though none of

these are mutually exclusive, and most will find each important in some degree.

Most importantly, all four of these motivations are deeply rooted in the Christian Gospel, and each poses challenges to us as Christians seeking to live by that Gospel. To illustrate this, I want to describe each in turn, not only in relation to current British realities, but also by looking back to one of the seminal inter faith encounters of apostolic times: Paul's dialogue with the religious philosophers of Hellenistic Athens on the hill of Areopagus, as that is presented by Luke in Acts 17.

### **Respectful relationships**

An initial motivation leading Christians into inter faith dialogue is 'ethical', as follows. If we truly love our neighbours and count them as our friends, then we will take seriously that which is most precious to them. In the case of Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Jews and other religious people, that means in particular taking seriously their faith. The New Testament shows God's love in Jesus reaching out across the barriers created by religion. We prove ourselves to be Jesus' disciples today by forging trusting and respectful relationships with people of all faiths.

Now, 'taking a belief seriously' is not the same as agreeing with it. Here is a challenge for Christians: how to honour people of faith, and take seriously the beliefs they hold, while still keeping some critical distance from those beliefs. Acts 17.16-17 describes how Paul was 'deeply distressed' when he saw the Athenians' idolatrous worship. At the very least that means that he felt strongly about the beliefs and practices the Athenians held dear: he cared enough about these people to argue with them 'every day'. It might seem a peculiar way of showing his love, this constant arguing, but then the New Testament shows that Paul ended up

disagreeing with almost everybody any way, so perhaps it was his way of showing that he cared.

But still there was a serious problem for him here: with attitudes deeply ingrained in him through his Jewish upbringing, idolatry was repugnant to Paul – he could not agree with it, he was 'deeply distressed'. Like other Jews of the time, he would have associated idolatry with sexual immorality and perhaps too with economic exploitation. For Paul, Athenian religion was profoundly 'other'. He loved the people, but he was alienated from their faith. That was the challenge he faced, and it is a challenge that Christians today also can sometimes face in inter faith encounter.

### **Soul freedom**

So how to respond? Part of our response certainly will be in realising that there are things we can learn from beliefs different to our own. But there will still remain big differences, and here we have to learn the ethics of accepting the Other in their otherness, while discriminating this from that which we cannot accept because it is contrary to the Gospel. This is not an easy thing to do, and it is not something that Christians have been very good at – think of the painful experience of Jewish people at the heart of Western Christendom for nearly two centuries – but it is a challenge which is central to the Lord's command that we should love as he has loved us.

In Christian-Jewish dialogue, we have had to learn that the other is and remains the other even if we find that distressing. Perhaps we need to learn that lesson more widely in inter faith relations, to be ready to give space to the otherness of others more generously. Idolatry is not for Christians, but is it right always to condemn those who use images in their worship? It may be that the grand old

Baptist traditions of respect for 'soul freedom' can be of help to all Christians here.

Another reason that British Christians give for involvement in inter faith dialogue is a social motivation: the responsibility we have to help build inclusive and welcoming communities. Religious differences can so easily become causes of division and suspicion. We have seen terrible examples of Christianity itself being used to divide one community from another – in the British Isles, we are still struggling with the consequences of this in Northern Ireland. We must not repeat this mistake in our multi faith world, where the health of our life together will depend on building good relations between people of different faiths who know and trust one another. We need religious interaction in our increasingly interconnected world – to adapt current Government language, 'community cohesion' is a Gospel imperative. This is more than just overcoming divisions; we can work positively together as people of different faiths for the values of the Kingdom – for peace, justice, and the integrity of God's creation. And as we work together on these great issues for our world's survival – often by taking quite small-scale, local practical steps together – we can find that there are values which we hold in common.

## **Devolution**

These are themes hinted at by Paul in Acts 17.26, where he presents a vision of a whole cosmos, a world designed from the very beginning to be diverse in its peoples and their cultures. In Britain, we are waking up to the reality of diversity – not only because of the enriching of our life through immigration, but in other ways too: internally, as devolution reminds us forcibly that Scottish, Welsh and Irish people are British in very different ways from English people (something which they

had never forgotten, but some of us English had!); and externally too, as we come to see that being British is one way of sharing in the wider experience of being European. We are becoming accustomed to cultural diversity in a new way. The great question, as yet unanswered, is this: can we also see the diversity of faiths around us as in some sense a positive blessing God has given to his people to use in working for a better world?

Again, an imperative which brings many British Christians into inter faith relations is evangelistic: to share faith with others. But how are we to commend the Gospel in a multi-faith situation? If we wish to witness among people of faith to the truth which we have known in Jesus, we certainly cannot expect to do this unilaterally. For, whether they belong to one of the so-called 'missionary religions' or not, everybody of faith has some truth to tell. So everybody finds that others too want to speak to them of their own faith. We have to be ready to listen as well as to speak – a genuine encounter is always a mutual one. Taking mission, taking truth-telling, seriously leads people into relationship. Some of the most creative inter faith work in Britain today involves Christians from an evangelical background, whose wish to share the Gospel has been transformed they listen to the depth and integrity of others' faith stories.

## **Unknown God**

Paul's evangelistic motive is very clear in his dialogue on the Areopagus: 'This I proclaim to you', he asserted. [Ac 17.23] Proclamation is an irreducible part of Christian mission, and to stand any chance of being effective it presupposes relationships of the kind Paul tries to establish with the Athenians. He praises them as being 'extremely religious' (I think we should hear this as a word of commendation, not as a sneer, but



probably that depends on our own background as we read the text). He has done at least enough research to be aware of the Athenian cult of the 'unknown God'. All the same, we have to notice too how his proclamation seems only very partially successful. Some of what he says the Athenians misunderstand ('he is speaking about foreign divinities' – they assume that Jesus is a male and Anastasis, 'resurrection', a female deity [17.18]). Other parts they find ridiculous [17.32]. The impression is that only a few of his hearers become Christian believers. [17.34]

But should we really regard this outcome as unsuccessful? Paul may not indeed have succeeded very well in conveying the message he intended to convey, but how can we know how much of some kind of message was heard by his audience? Communication always involves the possibility of a multitude of meanings be discerned, and in some ways that which is received by the auditor is as important as that which is intended by the speaker. Just notice how right at the end of this passage [17.32] Acts speaks of a third group among the Athenians: neither those who go away mocking nor those who become disciples, but some people who say 'We will hear you again about this'. Part of the fruit of an evangelistic effort may in fact be to find ourselves invited to a continuing dialogue, with open-ended outcome. The challenge here is to know if we are ready to accept this dialogical responsibility, rather than just moving on to another group of people somewhere else (as Paul did!). We face the same challenge as those early Christians. It is simply this: as we seek to commend the truth to which we have come in Jesus, are we prepared to allow ourselves to be drawn into a searching dialogue with the deepest insights of the cultures within which our own mission is set, whether those are 'other faith' or 'secular'?

## Profound questions

The fourth and last way which leads to Christian involvement in inter faith dialogue is perhaps the hardest to describe, but perhaps also it is the most important. I will call it a spiritual motivation. It arises from that fundamental attitude of humility and reverence which we experience before our God, as we recognise that he must also be the God of all peoples. Paul in Ac 17.28 quotes from a pagan Greek poet (Aratus): 'We too are his offspring'. He does this to show some awareness of the universal presence and activity of God – drawing on the collective experience and wisdom of the Greeks to recognise their insights into God's reality. Many Christians today are coming to discern the presence and activity of God among people of different faiths through open and trustful meeting and sharing with them. Inter faith encounter can renew, enrich, transform our Christian discipleship; it can help us be better Christians.

This raises a profound question for Christians. To put it provocatively: can we allow ourselves to be evangelised by people of other faiths? That is, can we be converted by their witness to become more faithful Christians? On one hand, there is a fullness of revelation we have received – and received for the good of all. On the other, there is a truth we can only discover, a goodness we can only experience, through being in a relationship of openness and trust with our neighbour. I think when I say that of a dear Hindu friend of mine, Ramesh, who died a year ago. Ramesh felt as close to me spiritually as any Christian. I would sit in his little terraced house in Leicester being force-fed with vast quantities of samosas while he talked to me about spiritual things. Ramesh taught me much about God, much about what it means to be a Christian, and I saw and loved in him a goodness which I

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**To the readers of the Baptist Minister's Journal**

## **A Shocking Cup of Tea**

On their visits to Churches around the country my surveyors regularly come across hazardous situations which had they not seen would be hard to believe.

Many church members would acknowledge that Kitchens, whether fully fitted or just a sink with a tap and a water-boiler (the ubiquitous "Burco" ), or kettle, can be quite hazardous places. However the following horrific story related by one of my surveyors sadly demonstrates that the dangers are not universally understood.

A small, somewhat impoverished Church, which had a small "kitchenette", akin to the sink/kettle type described above had some visitors. They had attended morning worship, and stayed for a cup of tea and time of fellowship afterwards.

As many kindly people do, one of the visitors offered to help make the tea. There was an electrical socket very close (too close as it turned out) to the sink. The electric kettle was old to say the least (the traditional church-hall variety - chrome plated steel, big, with a large black handle), and had a long mains cable - allowing it to be filled from the tap over the sink whilst still connected to the (live) socket.

Unfortunately there was a fault with the kettle heating element. When the kettle was filled, the result was catastrophic, causing extremely serious injury to the visitor.

I feel sure that many church members will be familiar with this type of tea making arrangement but think nothing of it. Also I wonder how many churches retain that faithful old workhorse of a Burco boiler propped up with an old book as one of the feet has fallen off!!

Clearly there is a significant lesson to be learned here. Most accidents are preventable and it is of paramount importance for anyone with the responsibility for safety within your church to seek out and minimise situations as described above.

As a strong recommendation I suggest that you ensure all the old kettles "donated" to your own Church are thrown out and that you invest in new plastic jug-kettles - the sort that plug-in to a stand, with a short curly lead to the socket, which is repositioned well away from the sink. That broken Burco will also have to go!!

Timely attention now can save much heartache later.

Yours Sincerely

Alf Green ACII  
(Assistant General Manager)

believe came as a 'ray of that truth enlightening all people' of which the Second Vatican Council spoke in *Nostra Aetate*.

I believe that Ramesh was given me as a gift of God, a sign of the Spirit to renew my discipleship. Knowing him has convinced me that we can hold together the two sides of the challenge we face: faithfulness to Christ and openness to our neighbour. Not just that we can hold them together, indeed, but rather that they belong together in any case *in God's purpose*. This is no intellectual puzzle to be

solved, but a way to live our lives, in the opportunity that we have been given to find new paths of discipleship as Christians alongside our neighbours of different faiths. **bmj**

Note: This article is partly based on a sermon preached by Dr Ipgrave at the United Theological College, Bangalore in January 2002. The Churches' Commission for Inter Faith Relations, of which the Revd Baroness Kathleen Richardson is the Moderator, has recently published a Christian Response to Religious Discrimination (copies available from CTBI Publications, 31 Great Smith Street, SW1P 3BN (+44 (0)20 7898 1305) [orders@ctbi.org.uk](mailto:orders@ctbi.org.uk)).

'Much of our difficulty in relating to religious pluralism also has to do with an ecclesio-centric theology. We should not forget that at least in some stage in history "No salvation outside Christ" became "No salvation outside the church"!

- Wesley Ariarajah, onetime director of the WCC's *Dialogue Sub-unit*.

# BT 2001

BAPTIST TIMES

## The year 2001 is many things. It is:

- the 150th anniversary of the Great Exhibition.
- the first year of the new millennium (not 2000!).
- the 100th anniversary of the birth of Walt Disney.
- the year Arthur C. Clarke chose for his popular space odyssey.
- the 100th anniversary of Queen Victoria's death.
- the probable year of a General Election.
- the 100th anniversary of the patenting of the Gillette safety razor.
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# What's so amazing about Yancey?

**Determined to have a sabbatical that revolved around "being" rather than "doing" Martin Poole, Minister of Godalming Baptist Church, decided to give himself to an easily paced meander through a dozen or so books by the best selling Christian author Philip Yancey**

Yancey is an easy communicator who is a skilful wordsmith. Few would not have at least heard of his powerful title "What's so amazing about Grace" and few who read the 280 pages would fail to come away without a renewed wonder at the God for whom "there is nothing we can do to make him to love us more and nothing we can do to make him to love us less".

He has a very contemporary style. For example in "Reaching for an invisible God" he encourages the habit of pausing every hour in the day to be aware of the presence of God. He then makes the telling observation that "Many people check their E mail more often". He also illustrates an adult response to God's grace by taking his readers through the storyline of the film "the Saving of Private Ryan". The dying captain who led a squad of GI's on a daring mission on Ryan's behalf, surveying a scene of total desolation concludes the film by the challenge to the private "earn this". In "The Jesus I never knew" he re-titles the sermon on the mount as - "lucky are the unlucky" and notes how Jesus teaching undermines today's philosophy of "the one who dies with the most toys wins". He re writes key parables in "What's so amazing about grace" so that the Hidden treasure becomes the discarded winning lottery ticket found by a tramp, The Unforgiving servant is about a huge business start-up loan written off. The Marriage feast is a party given by a jilted bride to drop outs rather than forfeit the prepaid costs of the reception. The prodigal son becomes the prodigal daughter and the best robe and

fattened calf become a greyhound bus terminus, bedecked with a computer generated "Welcome home banner" and celebrating family members, in silly party hats, ready to embrace the errant returning offspring.

## **'Where is God when it hurts?'**

Undoubtedly a compelling aspect of his books is the seemingly endless supply of true life dramas that ensure all that is written is earthed in the real world. The starting point for "What's so amazing....." were the words from the lips of a tortured drug addicted prostitute who sold her daughter for sex - "Why should I go there (church) They'd only make me feel worse". Similarly the book "Disappointment with God" is bound round seeking to counsel a once keen bible college student whose doubts and disappointments cause him to lose his faith. "Where is God when it hurts" emanates from the onset of Hodgkin's disease which crashes into the life of a newly married couple who wrestle with the "why" question and some of the cruel answers suggested by Christian visitors.

Yancey further enhances his work with a multitude of powerful references to the likes of Tolstoy, Dostoveski, Gandhi, Henri Nouwen, John Donne, Martin Luther King etc. - His most recent book - "Soul Survivor" - gives a keen insight into some of those whose writing and example he admires and from whom he quotes extensively.

Yancey's own life has not been free of hardship and struggle. Just after his first

birthday his father died of polio which resulted in poverty for the family who lived in council housing or caravan parks and on one occasion a trailer pitched on church property - conservative Southern Baptist fundamentalist soil. He studied at a bible college with a strict code of rules and regulations that were unconvincingly and tortuously culled from scripture. When he met his wife he describes himself as "painfully shy, socially inept and emotionally damaged".

He had been born and raised in Atlanta Georgia and inherited the racism of that region without really questioning it. With money earned from his paper round he bought a souvenir pick axe handle resembling those used by policemen to beat civil rights demonstrators. "Black people gave us someone to look down on, someone to mock and feel superior to.....sociologically we may have qualified as 'poor white trash' but at least we were white !" "The Ku Klux Klan had an almost mystical hold on our imaginations... we were taught that it was the last line of defence to preserve the Christian purity of the South".

### **'I learned grace through being graced'**

Needless to say when Martin Luther King burst on the scene Yancey accepted the teachings of his church which dismissed King as a card carrying communist and philanderer. Subsequently Yancey recognised that here was a classic case of the mote and the beam with the church seeing only the splinter of Martin Luther King's moral lapses but failing to see their own colossal plank of racism. The conversion from racism is complete and now Martin Luther King's powerful words - "We love men, not because we like them, not because their ways appeal to us nor even because they possess some kind of divine spark. We love every man because

God loves him" - are etched in the heart of Yancey.

Whilst Martin Luther King's life is an inspiration for Yancey it was lived out at a distance. Paul Brand however who, in Yancey's words "influenced my Christian life more than any other person", was a close friend of over ten years. He was pivotal in reviving and strengthening Yancey's own fledgling faith. Brand exemplified what Yancey reminds us is the most quoted saying of Jesus in the gospels - "Whoever finds his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it". Turning down more prestigious and lucrative posts Brand gave himself to helping the needs of leprosy sufferers in India. He pioneered research into what is the world's oldest and most feared disease and insisted on being paid Indian wages instead of the usual higher amounts paid to foreign doctors. One of Brand's patients who suffered hideously at the hands of the disease and the stigma attached to it concludes by saying "I am happy I had leprosy for I would never have known the Brands and the God who lives in them". Yancey similarly summarises Brand's influence upon him "I learnt grace through being graced"

Yancey also learnt about pain and indeed co-authored with Paul Brand the book "Pain the gift nobody wants". It revolves around the ground breaking discovery that Leprosy sufferers are harmed not so much by the disease itself but by the fact that they lose the ability to sense pain. As a result they could be observed reaching into a fire to retrieve a hot potato that had been dropped, walking barefoot across broken glass, or be unaware of an exposed nail in a gardening implement that was being used and drawing blood as it gouged into the flesh. Yancey describes how Brand sought to produce a pain system that the leprosy

sufferer might wear that alerted him to danger by a warning light or even a mild electric shock. The experiment proved impossible for many reasons amongst which was the ability of the patient to ignore a painless warning light or switch off an electrical impulse which could not distinguish between say the pressure applied when safely grasping a railing or harmfully grasping a thorn bush. The research did however elicit a fresh appraisal of pain concluding that it is an indispensable and indeed magnificently precise aspect of our biological make up.

### **'I usually end up writing about pain'**

Yancey admits that "no matter where I start, I usually end up writing about pain" In doing so he draws deeply on Paul Brand's research as he attempts to handle the issue of human suffering. If physical pain is a positive needful aspect of physical life could the same apply to emotional pain. Fear can be positive by preventing reckless behaviour - by way of example Yancey refers to his own leisure pursuits of mountain climbing and downhill skiing, being kept in bounds by realistic fear. The pain of loneliness seeks to nudge us towards friendship and love. Guilt can be described as a pain message to the conscience and maybe even the painful sense of lack of personal fulfilment can lead to an earnest quest for God.

It is not surprising that such a focus causes Yancey to be constantly drawn to the book of Job. Indeed in the remarkable volume "The bible Jesus read" which is an incentive to study the Old Testament the first book to which Yancey points the reader is Job. Job's experiences are the basis for the last ten chapters of "Disappointment with God" from which the point is made that there are two distinct expressions of faith. There is what Yancey terms as "Footprints" faith which is poetically described in the meditation of

the same name and seen in its purist form in Ps 23 "The Lord is my shepherd.." But says Yancey there is the "hang on at all costs faith" which better describes Job who battles in the darkness having seen not the slightest imprint of the cosmic dialogue between God and the Satan. Such faith finds its pure expression in the preceding Psalm (Ps 22) quoted by Jesus "My God why hast thou forsaken me?"

Yancey encourages us to exchange the unanswerable "why" question by looking at things from God's perspective and ask instead "to what end?" This he points out was the thrust of Jesus words to his disciples who start probing for the reasons behind the man born blind (John 9). Yancey believes that this is also the thrust of what is in the longest speech by God recorded in the whole bible (Job 38-42). As God answers Job one might expect that at last the issues of suffering would be addressed. Instead Job is given a natural history lesson but with the underlying message "if I can produce such a marvellous world as this...can you not trust me in those areas you cannot comprehend?" The challenge is to stop looking backward to an event of suffering by seeking to locate its source but rather look forward to what can flow out of it.

### **'lamebrains, misfits and odd ducks'**

For me I find Yancey's strong affirmation of heaven a particularly vital part of the whole "suffering" study. "In any discussion on disappointment heaven is the last word". "If our Christian hope, tempered by sophistication does not allow us to offer this truth to the dying convulsing world then we are indeed of all men most miserable." He further quotes from St Therese of Avila "From heaven the most miserable earthly life will look like one bad night in an inconvenient hotel"

But heaven is not only discovered as the gleaming precious mineral in the darkest

mine of disappointment but also the brightest of all lights in the sunniest days of life as Yancey reminds us of C.S.Lewis' great reflection - "All the beauty and joy we meet on earth represent the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news of a country we have never yet visited".

But as Yancey is frequently reminding us we live on Easter Saturday and a very real part of a Christian's life is the group of "lamebrains, misfits and odd ducks" that make up the church. He is not sparing of criticism about the church, but neither is he despairing of the institution that has done him much harm. He writes from within the church as one "who has absorbed some of the worst the church has to offer yet still landed in the loving arms of God".

He further writes "I rejected the church for a time because I found so little grace there. I returned because I found grace nowhere else" The challenge Yancey lays before the church is the call to live out the faith.

So what sort of church would suit Yancey. He is quick to point out the flaws of his own fundamentalist upbringing which was prepared to give only superficial answers to key questions and spoke with too much confidence. Its confident pronouncements on healing for instance brought confusion and guilt to many There was an apparent desire to brow beat people into a one size suits all package of beliefs before full acceptance. In reaction he quotes John Donne's observation "Churches are best for prayer that have least light" Here the call is to leave room for mystery and on going discovery and in Yancey's own words "not pretend to spell out what God himself has not spelled"

### **'the cameras of history'**

But it is the ability of Church to channel the full dimension of the love of God that

Yancey finds ultimately important. He often turns questions round so that "Where is God when it hurts? becomes Where is the church where it hurts?" or "Why doesn't God do this ? becomes Why doesn't the church do this ?" The best picture on which Yancey repeatedly draws is the AA meeting. He typically caricatures a gathering where the first words spoken by a newcomer will be "Hi I am Tom and I am an alcoholic and a drug addict", to which the response from the group is a warm "Hi Tom". Yancey fears that such acceptance, honesty, openness and support is not easily found in our churches. He quotes a homosexual saying "it is easier for me to find sex on the streets than a hug in church".

Undoubtedly the most startling remark to be found in Yancey's writings are the words from the book "The Jesus I never Knew". "Imagine the reaction today if an Arab ran through the streets of New York shouting the World Trade Centre will blow up". The words are startling of course because of the events of September 11th 2001 - the day which the media has declared changed the world. Yancey's book was published in 1995 but the purpose of his comment was to underline the powerful reaction and sense of alarm if not hysteria Jesus provoked by declaring that he could destroy the temple and rebuild it three days. The rebuilding was not an issue but to talk of destroying this unique inspiring and only recently completed symbol of worship was as scandalous as suggesting the imploding of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre.

Of course Jesus words refer to his own body and the Christian is left reflecting on the day that truly did change the world forever. The crucifixion which Yancey points out occupies one third of the gospels, means that the image of a dying

Jesus is embedded in the minds of believers as much as the tumbling towers in the psyche of all New Yorkers. As he emphasises in "Disappointment with God" - " At the moment when God seemed downright helpless, the cameras of history were rolling recording it all"

So what is so amazing about Philip Yancey ? Is it that he is today's C.S.Lewis with an American accent ? He certainly has the ability to state respected wisdom with a new urgency and challenge, so that the old adage of hate the sin but love the sinner is rendered stabbingly more powerful by bringing to light C.S.Lewis' telling admission that this is the way everyone of us lives.

Or is it that he persistently majors on three broad themes namely Tackling the issues of doubt, Teasing out

understandings - but not answers - about suffering and Telling out the uniqueness of Jesus ? Each are presented as a facet of the same diamond of faith and whilst particular books emphasise one aspect over and above the other two, in most books the ideas often coalesce and find expression in their application to the church.

Or is it supremely his self description "not a pastor but a pilgrim, septic with doubt ?". Despite this his writings are in fact pastorally powerful. His questioning, inspiring style reveals a faith that takes up the challenges of today's society and remains unbowed through regular infusions of the Amazing Grace of God. May the amazingly prolific Philip Yancey continue to write for the benefit of fellow pilgrims for many years to come. **dmj**

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## Down with Leaders

from Ron Armstrong, Clevedon

Dear Journal, I especially appreciated Ted Hale's brave and timely piece, Down with Leaders (October 2001). He is saying something the present generation of Christian ministers needs to hear. Many of today's ministers are labouring under intolerable burdens, compounded of self-imposed overwork, living up to their ideal model of what a Christian minister ought to be.

My observations from the sidelines of retirement lead me to conclude that many of our present-day pastors have become more and more obsessed with their leadership images and achievements, and find it difficult to cope with relationships – with the deacons, close colleagues, and even in Church Business Meetings.

Could I plead with today's generation of ministers therefore to ponder John the Baptist's definition of his task. He rejected all the pretentious names the mob wanted to pin on him, and simply said, 'He must increase. I must decrease'. It must be one or the other. It can't be both simultaneously.

Let me conclude with a quote from Emil Brunner: 'Not the hostility of the unbelieving world but clerical, parsonic ecclesiasticism has ever been the greatest enemy of the Christian message of brotherhood rooted in Christ'. **Emj**

**HOLIDAY COTTAGE:** Modernised slate miner's house in Brynrefail, near Llanberis at the foot of Mt Snowdon. An ideal base for mountain walks and climbs but also with the sandy beaches of the Llyn Peninsula and Anglesey only a short car ride away. Many North Wales attractions nearby, especially 'little trains'. Sleeps 5/6 in three bedrooms. Well equipped for a family. Plenty of books and games for the rainy season. Available all year round/ Approx £100 per week. Contact Geoff and Marilyn Birch on 01249 461975, or e-mail: [gandmbirch@waniwuri.freereserve.co.uk](mailto:gandmbirch@waniwuri.freereserve.co.uk)

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## Out of the mouths

Children at a Catholic elementary school have given some unorthodox answers to Bible questions. Among them were:

- ❑ *St Paul preached holy acrimony, which is another name for marriage.*
- ❑ *Samson slayed the Philistines with the axe of the apostles.*
- ❑ *The first commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.*
- ❑ *The seventh commandment is you shall not admit adultery.*
- ❑ *The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.*
- ❑ *Solomon, one of David's sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.*
- ❑ *The epistles were wives of the apostles.*
- ❑ *Christians have only one spouse. This is called monotony.'*

- from 'The Tablet' 16 Feb 2002

# Book Reviews

Reviews for April 2002

***By what authority?*** Anthony Harvey. SCM Press, London. 2001. pgs viii + 176 £14.95

It has been - arguably - nearly two decades since a Church publication has contributed significantly to national public debate on a major social issue or problem. *Faith in the City* helped both to expose and re-define understandings of poverty in late C20th Britain. Indeed, it can be argued that it played a significant role in the emergence of the key concept of Social Exclusion in New Labour policies. Anthony Harvey, argues that the reason for this report's relative success was that, for all its attempts to theologise, it actually appealed to a basic moral and ethical consensus in society at large. It connected and therefore gave rise to both opposition and consciousness-raising at one and the same time.

What, though, is the place for official Church statements in the C21st? Many of us hoped that the Churches Together movements would lead to intelligent, perceptive and public Christian comment on society and world. The reality has been often different, with pronouncements diluted by an almost obsessive emphasis on thorough consultation - or, worse, by disagreements over who will actually do the pronouncing itself!

In this helpful book, Harvey offers some ways forward. He analyses the sources that Christians have traditionally used to undergird their public statements: the Bible, Natural Law and, more recently, the concept of Liberation. He believes that 'Christianity' can still play a significant part in the formulation of public morality and policy' and appeals for Churches to find a

third way between those who still assume that Christianity has a monopoly on speaking truth and those who would allow Churches to speak *only* to the faithful. We must learn instead to appeal to 'a range of moral principles and issues on which the major religious traditions agree.' We are to 'encourage those deeper springs of moral conviction which are fostered by stable family and community life and which are essential to the promotion of the common good'.

This is a helpful book - especially for any who have tried to speak into local community or national life in the Name of Christ.

**Michael I Bochenski,**  
Dagnall St, St Albans

***The New Dictionary of Pastoral Studies,*** Wesley Carr (ed.), London: SPCK, 2002, 414pp., £30, ISBN 0-281-05000-7

In the resurgence of Pastoral (or Practical) Theology the New Dictionary provides a timely resource. The 1987 version has been updated, enlarged and rewritten and is a worthy symbol of this developing area of scholarship. It has drawn together a wide variety of contributors, both academics and practitioners to produce a dictionary which amply fulfils its stated task: to provide a resource for students beginning pastoral studies and a reference book for pastors. It is broad, sensible, clear and scholarly.

Its breadth is represented in both theological and practical ways. The definitions describe and include rather than prescribe, they also weave a good balance of pastoral theory and practice, together with articles on social and

behavioural psychology. The approach is sensible. Each entry begins with a brief bolded definition, invaluable for quick reference, and then develops the subject with underlined cross references to other articles. Significant works are referenced to the bibliography at the back. Unfortunately not every reference has a clear item in the bibliography, which is a minor source of irritation. The writing is consistently clear and the detail well judged. The scholarship can be illustrated by the eight articles from "pastor" to "pastoral theology", which are not only a masterly description of the discipline, but include notable names in the field, typical of the quality of the contributions.

It is not true that this dictionary is "unrivalled", since the larger *New Dictionary of Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (1995, IVP) covers similar ground for the same users. Many BMJ readers will have the earlier dictionary, but the one under review is more practical in content with more detail on technical matters relating to the behavioural sciences and, in a time when many pastors need to sustain contact with other care professionals, access to such a book is essential. The entries on significant theological themes are very brief for their subject matter and could better be found elsewhere. They also suffer by comparison with the articles on practical subjects, although where the theological matter has been linked specifically to pastoral theology and practice the entry is more satisfying and useful.

This dictionary is a substantial piece of work in its field which will serve students and pastors for a long time; a valuable investment.

**Chris Voke**, Spurgeon's College

**Arius; Heresy and Tradition, (2nd ed.)**  
Rowan Williams SCM press; ISBN 0 334 020850 7, 2001, £16.95, 245pp, + appendices, notes, index.

The commentators during a recent tennis tournament suggested that for the British number three to improve, he would have to play consistently with those who were the level above him. Thus his game and skills would be developed.

Reading this discussion of Arius' context and theology is to be in this position. This is not an easy book, but it is teaching from the pen of a skilled thinker and communicator and his teaching helps us to stretch the game of our thinking. The experience of reading it is rather like attending a lecture. The bulk of the book is made up of Williams' discussion of Arius' thinking, context and philosophy, and in the first appendix he engages with the points raised by the critics of the first edition of the book in 1987. The feel is rather like the discussion of questions following a learned paper—the points may be obscure to those not in the debate, but their importance is illuminating.

The main book itself is in three parts; after a survey of what people have said about Arius (in itself an interesting reflection on the necessity of an "Other" to help us define ourselves) there is an attempt to reconstruct the very complex history of the struggles between Arius and those who thought like him, and on the other side, those who regarded his thinking with suspicion. In the second part, Williams discusses the theological context of the struggle, and its importance. The final section puts the whole controversy in the context of the prevailing philosophies of the time, and presents a possible explanation of why Arius came to the conclusions he did. This is completed by a "postscript" which considers the theological implications of the whole thing.

Quite apart from the fascinating discussion of the whole Arian controversy, and the new insights offered by Williams into chronology and interpretation, I believe the value of the book is summed up in the "postscript"; "There is a sense in which Nicaea and its aftermath represent a recognition by the Church at large that theology is not only legitimate, but necessary." (p 236). By showing us the theology, and its philosophical background and implications, even if it does strain our minds, Williams has himself shown us the vital necessity of thinking about the faith we strive to live and proclaim. This is a hard but worthwhile read.

**Ruth Gouldbourne,**  
Bristol Baptist College.

*Prayers for Life's Particular Moments* and *In this Hour - Liturgies for Pausing* both by Dorothy McRae-McMahon Both books published by SPCK at £9.99.

This was my first introduction to Dorothy McRae-McMahon as I have not come across her work before and it is a useful first look. Both books are a series of Liturgies covering various aspects of the Christian calendar as well as other events of life missed out by many similar books. For example, *In this Hour* has a section entitled "Let us Grieve" which contains prayers entitled for a battered woman and another called "Mutual confession" at the closure of Ministry.

Each book starts with a good introduction that gives a sense of Dorothy's reason and inspiration for writing. The individual Liturgies start with notes that can help you to set out a welcoming space for those coming to join you in worship and suggestions for items that could be useful aids or symbols enriching the worship for others such as welcome signs, water or candles. There is thoughtful guidance as to how to shape your prayers, involve others and yet the liturgies can either be

taken as a whole or shaped to suit your own purposes.

Dorothy write with a fresh clear style that is both sensitive and compassionate and clearly springs out of her wide experience of engaging with people in vulnerable situations. What was helpful for me about these books was that over the years I have collected many books of Liturgies often because of just one or two special occasion liturgies within them and yet here in these two books many of those subjects were drawn together. If you have other books by Dorothy I'm sure you'll want these. If like me you've not come across her writing before but would like a place to start, yet you have lots of liturgical books already, might I suggest *In this Hour - Liturgies for Pausing* for its ability to fill a small space of time with meaning and its ability to be adapted for use in a pastoral situation. However, if you know of someone who is just starting out in leading Worship in Church, Quiet Days or Retreats then both books would be an excellent resource that I'm sure would be returned to again and again.

**Sarah Kinch,** Associate Minister,  
Manvers St, Bath.

*The Oxford Bible Commentary.* (CD Version.)  
Oxford University Press. 2001. £45.

I have used this computer-based commentary for the last four months as I have prepared sermons and bible studies. Needless to say a single volume bible commentary (this work is also available in book form) cannot hope to cover material in the depth that is expected from more specialised volumes. That said, there is often merit in being shown the plan of the wood before getting lost in the trees! It is also helpful to have easy access to commentaries on those biblical books that we visit infrequently. I have certainly found the work helpful on a number of occasions.


The quality of the contributions is generally high, aimed at the general reader rather than the pastor. On several occasions I found that verses that were causing me some difficulty did not get mentioned whilst those I found straightforward received considered attention. Yet I also found specialised vocabulary, for example in 1 Peter there is a discussion of the 'prooemium' without the term being defined.

The Oxford Commentary uses the Logos system. This will allow many users to add it onto their existing library, where it will be a valuable addition. I do not have this software, which effectively meant I could not use any of the extensive hyperlinks that are built into the commentary since no version of the bible is included. I consider this a serious omission since it is precisely at this point that a computer commentary is superior to the printed version.

The Logos system is able to run on a variety of platforms, including very modestly specified machines. However, it does look somewhat dated and the options for customising are limited. On my machine windows frequently disappeared off the side of the screen making navigation difficult. Scrolling the mouse wheel moved the text down the screen irrespective of which way the wheel was turned!

I have used the computer version *Expositors Commentary* for some years now and this will continue to be my preferred option, though it is more expensive, because it is more detailed and contains the NIV text.

**John Houseago.** Broadmead, Bristol.



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