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the baptist ministers'

journal

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From the editor

NB

I am sitting in Gladstone's Library, and have just spent a happy time looking at some of the books that belonged to the great man himself—distinctive by their bindings but otherwise shelved unrestricted among the newer books of today's extensive collection. In the margins and flypapers of some, W. E. Gladstone has added notes—most often a cryptic 'NB!'. Today I look at the passages he marked and wonder—what was noteworthy about that? Then I find a biography of one Rev Stephen Hawker, well studied by W.E.G., who has written in the front: 'a meagre, intemperate, manufactured biography of one who at least deserved a careful and searching criticism (WEG Nov 16, '79)'.

These annotations got me thinking about our own communication, and how Jesus is often represented today to a critical public—frequently there is offered by the media, or by well known commentators, a meagre, manufactured biography of One who deserves at least to be considered searchingly. To still far too many people, Jesus is an irrelevance, an 'NB' in history, who seems no longer to have a meaningful context.

So a challenge for 2013: that our lived testimonies in the community of faith will not leave people thinking, 'what was noteworthy about that?'. Use these pages to share your inspiration and reflection, and encourage others in witness to the real Jesus. SN

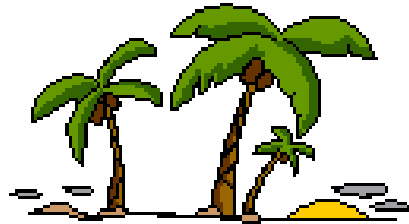


Last month's *bmj* tribute to Paul Fiddes was presented at Regent's by two of the contributors, Ed Kaneen and Beth Allison.

If you would like to contribute to *bmj*, or comment on an article you have read, please contact the editor on revsal96@aol.com.

Brian Haymes'

Desert island books



Almost as soon as I had said 'Yes' to the editor's request I knew I was in trouble. It's not the problem of choosing three books. That task I have found quite

entertaining. No, it's the thought of being alone for an unspecified but potentially long period of time. Like most ministers, I am an introvert, seriously introvert. I need space and time alone in order to function. Excessive noise and bustle exhaust me more speedily than many hours of hard work.

Yet the thought of being utterly alone, with no one to share conversation, food, even the quietness—that unnerves me. I hate the thought of such aloneness. Don't some people go mad in solitary confinement? Isn't it a form of torture? The paradox is that I need people around me to be alone. Please come and rescue me soon. Come and join me on the island, or take me home. It's not that I don't like my own company. I have come to realise how much I need others. *Relatio ergo sum.*

The choice of three books makes one think hard. I assume that this is a proper, well ordered, BBC-like island, which means that the Bible is provided. Just as well to ask, I think, since you don't always find that book even in pulpits these days.

My choice of books needs some explaining because they are, after all, only personal choices and not general recommendations. Consequently I fear this piece will become more autobiographical than review.

Jenny and I have relatives who are priests in the Church of England. Some years ago they asked if we would like to make up the number of a group going to Lisieux in Normandy for a few days, a visit that would focus on the life of St Thérèse. We had never been to Lisieux and knew nothing of St Thérèse, so we agreed to go. To prepare, I read *Story of a soul: the autobiography of St Thérèse of Lisieux* (3rd edn, translated from the original manuscripts by John Clark OCD, Washington: ICS Publications, 1996).

Thérèse lived for only 24 years, dying in 1897. Apart from a visit to Rome she lived her days in Normandy, mainly in Lisieux, before entering the Carmelite convent where she died. She launched no new theological initiatives, no mission programmes. But by the early 1920s the Carmel was receiving up to 1000 letters daily about her. She was canonised at Rome in 1925. In 1997 she was declared to be the 33rd Doctor of the Church. Apparently, it was this autobiography that initially set her influence running.

So I read *Story of a soul* quickly, only to be left wondering what all the fuss was about. However, staying at the Carmel and sharing the life of community prayer made me think again. I discovered that Dorothy Day, the social activist and one of my heroes, had written a book about Thérèse. She influenced Thomas Merton and no less a theologian than Hans Urs Von Balthasar had written an extended study of her life and thought. What had I missed?

I read *Story of a soul* again, slowly and with more care and I found that here was a treasure, set deep in its simplicity. Here was a sustained meditation, through a life, on the love of God. Thérèse described her 'little way' of devotion and service, a way that stressed direct love for others in thankfulness for being loved by God and as the expression of love for Jesus Christ. It all sounded so simple and, indeed, it is, but it touched me and goes on touching me profoundly.

Since that first visit we have been again to Lisieux for retreat. I have come to think again about the doctrine of the communion of saints, a doctrine largely ignored by contemporary Baptists. All this has given me a richer wider sense of the church, those united in Christ, sharing the life of God in Trinity. I do not pray to St Thérèse, as some of my friends do, but I pray with her and all the saints, all united in the great high priestly prayer of Jesus Christ. Her brief life will be one I shall be glad to recall and reflect upon while on the island.

As soon as I am abandoned on the beach I shall try to keep a calendar, not to count off the days, but to keep my life shaped by the story of the faith. So I shall be glad to mark Sundays and the festivals as best I can. There are three special anniversaries which focus my own identity. They are my baptism, my marriage and my ordination. I have always kept them, not the least recalling the vows I made and the promises of God in these sacraments. I shall want to keep that identity even though it only makes sense with others whom God has given. Vows are total. There is no moment of my life when I am not baptised, married, ordained. There is no clocking off, not even for what people call retirement.

One aspect of being a minister, an old fashioned one I discover, is the calling to teach and preach the faith. Perhaps I shall have to follow St Francis and learn to preach to the birds, to hear with them the word spoken. For years I have written out fully a sermon script. What is the closest appropriate literary form to a sermon? I think it is the short story and, in consequence, I have usually had a collection of short stories on the go. The best of the writers chose words so carefully. The characters are sharply but tantalisingly defined. They stick to the point with no wanderings to mislead, and there is often a surprising twist, an ending that is not a conclusion, only an invitation to carry on in imagination and thought—like Jesus' parables.

So my second choice is *The complete stories* by Flannery O'Connor (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux 1971). These stories are full of surprising perceptions into human life, often with wit and good humour. I shall need something to make me laugh. The characters experience both comedy and tragedy, as in life. There are 31 stories in the volume, many of them often hinting at O'Connor's deep faith in God and her trust in grace. God is simply 'there' in her view of the world, moving in the hiddenness but always 'there'. This is no 'in your face' God but the hidden God of Scripture, revealed in Jesus. I wonder if my reading of these stories will improve my writing of sermons—and will the birds be able to tell me so? Anyway, please God, this island will not be the last pastoral opportunity. You have launched the rescue boat, haven't you! Can you get them to hurry up, please?

Book three. I missed it when it was first published in 2001 and have only come to it recently but when I did I experienced that great thrill in reading which I have known with some other volumes of theology, mostly by Karl Barth. Thomas Torrance said of the volume, 'This is the most remarkable and moving book I have ever read'. It is *Between cross and resurrection: a theology of Holy Saturday* by Alan E. Lewis (Eerdmans).

What is the significance of the day before the third day? What is the theological meaning of the Incarnate One suffering internment, a corpse with festering wounds? What is God's union with this buried one? Why is this burial necessary? In effect, the book is not limited to puzzling questions about Saturday but about the full force of incarnation, sacrifice, suffering, resurrection and salvation. What does it mean to say we are baptised into this burial? The book is a work of genuine theology, drawing deeply on the scriptures and the tradition of faithful reflection in the church. It has stimulating footnotes and insightful pastoral responses. I wish I had come across it earlier.

This book has made me think, to learn more of the Christian language. At times it touches on worship, like all good theology. It already has made a difference to how I look at life and seek to live it. It is an illustration of faith seeking understanding by concentrating on a day we usually overlook, a day which is a key hinge between Friday and Sunday.

I am told that I am allowed a luxury item. I don't suppose a kit to build a dinghy will be allowed. A luxury is something you don't need but would bring pleasure and enhance living. So, can I have a big supply of plain paper and pencils?

But, please, as soon as you have finished this edition of *bmj*, come and be with me, and help me escape from this unnerving enervating aloneness. Is it not written, it is not good that the man should be alone?

Brian Haymes has served in Baptist colleges and Churches. He lives with Jenny in Manchester where they are members of Didsbury Baptist Church. Brian can be contacted on brian.haymes@ntlworld.com.

Chaplaincy at the Games

by John Boyers

Chaplaincy at the Olympics and Paralympics is not the product of well mobilised Christian ministries, nor of personal visionary initiatives, but part of the Olympic organisational structures. Embedded into the founding principles of the Olympic movement, set down by Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the educator and historian who more than any other laid foundations for the modern Olympics, was the provision of spiritual support for those competing.

Possibly influenced by the ideas of an earlier compatriot, Jean Jacques Rousseau, to 'educate the whole person', de Coubertin 'hoped the new games would bring back the ideals of physical, mental and spiritual excellence displayed in the ancient games, as well as building courage, endurance and a sense of fair play in all who participated'. Spiritual provision was to be a constituent of the modern games, because the needs of the whole person were to be met. Hence in recent major games the organising committees (called LOCOG in 2012) have organised 'religious services centres' or 'multi-faith centres' to provide the spiritual support for athletes. Following the lead of the International Olympic

Committee, some other major sports event (MSE) organisers have also become open to a chaplaincy presence.

But what form does MSE religious provision take, and—perhaps more pertinently—who decides that form? Before going there, I will make observations on the rise of sports ministry in the US and how that has influenced early UK developments.



John Boyers at MUFC

In the US by the early 1970s, many ‘sports ministries’ had emerged, some of which sought involvement in major sports event chaplaincy. Through the work of Athletes In Action, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Pro Athletes Outreach and other Christian organisations, chaplaincy had developed in the US principally as Christian outreach locally and internationally. When the vision of sports ministry was brought to the UK and Europe in the mid-1970s, the focus was clearly on overt evangelism to sportspersons. This is evidenced by an early ‘Christians in Sport’ video which explained ‘we want to tell top sports people about Jesus, and see them converted’.

Such an overtly evangelistic perspective might be a very valid focus for a parachurch ministry, might sit congruently with UK local church outreach, and might even be acceptable in US professional sport, but was perhaps not the best way of offering Christian chaplaincy to the world of UK sport, of which I became part in 1977.

My early years in English football constituted a very steep learning curve—including an understanding of how ‘football’ (well, at least ‘my’ club!) saw and valued chaplaincy. Clearly, they appreciated pastoral care, friendship and support in times of personal need or crisis. They seemed less keen on ‘evangelism’—here meaning the chaplain telling people about God when they weren’t asking to be told about God! However, I found ‘pastoring a secular congregation’—the essence of sports club chaplaincy work in my view—did build relationships and, significantly, trust, which in time led to numerous questions and conversations about ‘God-stuff’.

I found people wanted to ask, rather than be told; and they wanted to ask in their way and in their time. At least, this was my experience at Watford FC, where I was learning by trial and error how football club chaplaincy might work in practice. It grew there as a relational and pastoral ministry, but within this caring, supportive work emerged

situations and occasions when people opened up with spiritual questions. ‘Why did you become a vicar?’ (!) ‘Have you always been religious?’ ‘Do you actually believe this Easter stuff?’ And there were many other conversations revolving around ‘Why does God allow suffering?’, ‘Doesn’t science make faith irrelevant?’, ‘Why do you read the Bible when it is so unreliable?’, ‘Don’t all religions lead to God, so can’t we all believe what we like?’, ‘Isn’t church boring and just for old people?’, and ‘Have you ever had to deal with evil spirits or ghosts?’...to name but some!!

I’d like to offer some generalisations about how ‘chaplaincy’ might be viewed.

Some cultures, organisations or individuals see sports chaplaincy as a medium for, or a thinly veiled cover for, overt proactive evangelism. The method might be to distribute Christian scriptures or evangelistic DVDs, but the prime focus is proclamation: the chaplain is an evangelist in disguise!

Some would see sports chaplaincy as ‘mission’ in a wider sense, where service to and ministry in the organisation take on mutually defined forms within agreed parameters. This second scenario understands sports chaplaincy primarily as a pastoral and spiritual caring ministry: the chaplain is a pastor, but one who sees God’s hand in pastoral interaction with employees, and in the conversations and questions about faith and spirituality to which these lead. The chaplain is pastoral but ever responsive to requests to explain faith issues.

Third, MSE organising committees see chaplaincy as a means of meeting the religious needs of competitors, by organising religious services, prayer times *etc.* They generally are fearful of ‘evangelism’ and not all see the significance of ‘pastoring’, but the box of ‘religious provision’ must be ticked. In this context, they support chaplaincy work.

Thus with sport becoming more open to serious religious involvement, and with organisations and individuals wanting to be involved in these provisions, the actual nature of this religious involvement, how competitors’ spiritual needs are best to be met, has become a matter of debate. There is still a strong US emphasis on ‘evangelism’, and a strong alternative view supporting less direct Christian ministry. In the UK, the evidence at club level—where now over 225 chaplains are involved in delivering quality, sensitive, pastorally focused chaplaincy in many sports—is that the ‘pastorally proactive, spiritually reactive’ model is very acceptable in UK sport. Indeed, it is valued and endorsed.

I maintain that if the chaplain is well suited for ministry in that environment, is involved for ‘genuine’ reasons, is sensitive and confidential in service delivery, is able consistently to model Christian care and lifestyle over time, is following the agreed code of practice and is acceptable to the club in question, then that ministry will be strongly affirmed by the club and in time will lead both to opportunities for service and to conversations about God and faith. As Dave Chawner, former chaplain at London Wasps RUFC once remarked, ‘the presence of the chaplain puts God on the agenda’.

So what does that acceptable and successful pastoral perspective teach our UK churches about mission? For me, two things stand out.

First is the role of relationships in mission. We should value a 'longer view' of mission today, with people and communities. In sports chaplaincy, the clients need time to know about, recognise, understand the role of, realise the relevance of and be able to trust, the chaplain. In local church mission strategies, we must not underestimate the importance of contact activity/events, where people can get to know us, and a little further down the line, of content activity/events, where in unthreatening ways we can add some faith content into conversations or presentations. These build foundations for convey activities/events which explain what faith in Christ is about and lead under God hopefully to personal response to Christ and to discipleship. We live in a society largely ignorant of the message of the Gospel, which needs time to open up to the possibility of faith. I remember the comment of a Christian car sales manager (they do exist!) in my former church, that 'pressure to sell causes resistance to buy'. To be aggressive in mission is to be insensitive, and counterproductive.

Sharing Christ

As we consider how to share the message of Christ, let's remember there are many who think Christmas is about a John Lewis snowman and Easter about chocolate eggs! Let's understand the value of building relationships with individuals, families, and communities. Let's appreciate the importance of kindness, of love in action and of service to others. Let's understand that most folk don't need the challenge to get off the fence and respond to the message, because they haven't climbed the fence and they don't know the message!!

In sport and in church ministry, I have found the Engel scale very helpful. To sense where people are on the spiritual journey, and to help them through the next step at their pace/God's pace, is important. Flowers open in response to warmth and sunshine, but if through impatience the gardener forces the bud open, flowers can be killed.

My second lesson from club chaplaincy, is that ministry needs to move out from church buildings, from behind church walls and windows, to engage relevantly with the wider world. It should involve church members and ministers—and perhaps especially ministers? In those early days at Watford FC, St James' Road Baptist Church gave me freedom to work one and a half days per week as chaplain to that football club. That was 25% of my working time! That was one of their commitments to local mission. When I became senior minister, the church recognised the rightness of still giving me that amount of time for chaplaincy. Perhaps ministers, as examples to their members

and fully to use their experience and training, should be ministering far more to people beyond church? Can ministers be freed one day a week for ministry 'in the world', perhaps to the worlds of sport, education, business, banking, recreation, social need, politics, the arts, debt, the media, or whatever? We are to be salt and light in a tasteless and dark world.

Developing trust

MSE chaplaincy is unlike club chaplaincy. In the latter, over time you build trust with clients, even if that takes a year or more. At an MSE, the actual interface between chaplains and clients might be two or three times a week over 2 or 3 weeks, hardly time to build a trusting relationship. However MSE chaplaincy can operate out of 'transmitted trust'. A competitor might have had a helpful previous experience of MSE chaplaincy. Though not knowing chaplains at the current event personally, past experience is sufficient to 'transfer trust' to the current MSE chaplaincy team. Alternatively, an athlete may trust another Christian, who themselves can affirm the MSE chaplaincy to 'their' athlete contact. Thus trust is transferred, because of the trusted one's endorsement.

There is significance here for local churches. We must never underestimate the role of our members, those who live committed Christian lives at work, at the school gate, in playgroup, in the office or in their street. These people, known and trusted by neighbours and friends, contacts and workmates, are already appreciated. Their contacts like them and trust them. So they have influence when commending their church, making an invitation to a special carols event, a men's breakfast, or a community meal. They will be like the ones passing on trust from their trusted relationship to trust in the Olympic chaplaincy team, except this transfer of trust is from person to church activity.

If MSE chaplains don't function on personal trust, or the transferred trust of another friendship or a previous MSE chaplaincy experience, they operate out of the known role and functioning of chaplaincy. People come to a faith centre because they have some understanding of what it offers, want to find out more, and to use it. The attraction may be a planned religious service, a Bible study, a safe place for personal prayer, the presence of someone with whom they can talk confidentially, or a venue to replace 'their home church' when away in the pressure cooker of competition. Most athletes know that chaplaincy at an MSE provides for the religious needs of those who live or work in the Athletes' Village. They understand that the faith centre is one of many provisions which may include entertainment facilities, bank, general store,

ticket booth, gift shop, florist, restaurants and many others. All these are present to cater for various personal needs in the Athletes' Village. In the 'Faith Centre' spiritual needs are met. Not everyone needs everything. So it is for chaplaincy. For different people, chaplaincy may be either irrelevant or invaluable.



Chaplaincy meeting at the Games

At the 2012 Stratford Athletes' Village, many never came near the chaplaincy, while many others greatly appreciated its facilities. For some, we provided friendly support during their time in London. Other people came to pray, to join in services, to attend Bible study, to talk, or just to be in an atmosphere of faith. We knew of some responses, but only God knows the real consequences of many chaplaincy contacts. Some came to the chaplaincy for help and found hope. Some came for peace and found The Peacemaker. Some prayed to win and found The Winner. Some came for a sign and found a signpost, and went away wondering if they should follow. Many others used the chaplaincy and what it offered, but only God knows the significance and the outcomes of this for them. All we knew was that they came to use what the Faith Centre offered.

Church could be similar. In local church ministry, we found people from the immediate community began to recognise us as 'their' local church. They came to us when they felt we could help—a toddlers' morning or playgroup; a funeral service; a christening (I did explain what we offered and why!) 'to be done'; a wedding, or whatever else. Some were never seen again till another need was felt, but some did take our material, some started to attend guest events and services—and we saw God at work in their lives! Some came to faith in Christ, others came nearer to Christian commitment than before, others gained understanding of what faith in Christ meant. I learned that people used what we offered, but in using us, some began to find God at work in their lives. Are there lessons from the summer of 2012 for the mission and ministry of our churches?

John Boyers has been chaplain at Watford FC, at Manchester United, and at many international sport events. He now works part time with Sports Chaplaincy UK and part time at Altrincham Baptist Church. Contact John on jkbcoreuk@aol.com.

Mourning and moving pastorate

by Jeannie Kendall

Let me start this article with a confession. What follows is essentially subjective, but I hope it is not simply catharsis! It is unashamedly personal. Last year I moved pastorate after 38 years of worshipping and 28 years of working for the same inner city church. Despite a background in therapy (as director of a counselling service for some years) some of my reactions have surprised me. From informal conversations with other ministers following transition, I have begun to suspect that my feelings, while arguably exacerbated by the length of time spent at my previous church, are by no means unique. In our knowledge-hungry society one can find information on almost anything, but I suspect there is a dearth of articles linking ministers changing pastorate with grief and mourning. I wonder whether my personal reflections might bring this (perhaps undervalued) aspect of transition into a more public forum.

There are several descriptions of the grieving process, most notably from Colin Murray-Parkes and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross.¹ While helpful, they can imply a smooth transition through stages to the positive outcome of acceptance or moving on. Anyone who has suffered a bereavement will know it is not that simple, because all the feelings interweave and grieving seems to take us through repeated cycles, and takes much longer than usually recognised. It may be more helpful to look at this life-change through the lens of William Worden's 'tasks of mourning'.²

Before doing so, it is important to acknowledge that leaving a pastorate may be prompted by a variety of things. I was aware that at my age (56 when going on the list) it was a case of move now or stay to retirement, and I felt I still had something to give in a new situation. I felt very positive about the move (and still do), with a strong sense of calling to the new church. For some, leaving pastorate may be because of retirement, which may or may not be welcome, or stresses in the current situation or, sadly, because of financial strictures in the church. Different reasons for moving on will affect the path of grieving, not least because grieving is known to be more complex where relationships have been difficult. Grieving will also be impacted by the length of pastorate and a number of individual variations such as our patterns of ministry and of attachment, themselves affected by our personal histories, another often neglected factor. In spite of this complexity, what follows will open the subject to debate.

Worden describes the first task of mourning as *accepting the reality of the loss*. In loss by

death, this may be aided through viewings, the funeral *etc*, but still takes some time. I thought, at the time I left my previous pastorate, I had accepted this reality. My final service was intensely moving and I had the opportunity to say some final words to the church (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVGNp2hoRAM>). I requested a book to be compiled of anything that church members wanted to say, so that I could read it later when the loss felt less acute. In fact for various reasons I have only just received it, and have not yet read it; but undoubtedly that will help me to face (again) the loss.

I was to realise later that I had not fully understood the depth of the loss. The busy nature of a move, getting to know people and new church structures masked it to a considerable degree. Two things in particular, a few months into the new situation, brought it home. First of all, three church members I had known from the previous church for over 30 years died. I felt keenly that I could not, as it were, see their pastoral journeys through to the very end.

Second, Christmas came. It is well attested in mourning that the ‘firsts’ are difficult. In a new pastorate of course there is an adjustment to the individual church and their expectations of various times in the church year (and the delicate matter of which, if any, to change!). Since I am in co-ministry³ that matter has been eased since my colleague was already here, and indeed has been both very supportive and sensitive in helping me through the transition and able to give important perspectives of history where needed. So the services were not the issue: indeed they appeared to go well. The two moments the loss hit were after the two main Christmas services, as I stood at the door watching others greet each other with deep affection. I was reminded that their deep rooted relationships are with each other: I have come alongside them for a time, hopefully a long time, but as yet I am not part of their story, or they mine, in the same deep way that was the case in my previous church.

It will always be different—I was baptised and married in my previous church, both my children were dedicated there, I baptised my daughter and conducted her wedding there, and it was there her daughter was dedicated. That kind of history cannot of course be replicated and will not be that way for everyone. Equally, ministers all operate differently and my style has been of quite deep pastoral engagement. At my previous church there had been a number of tragedies which meant I had the privilege of travelling with people through some particularly dark times. For others, loss may take different forms—such as not seeing through a major project, or mentoring a staff member through to their next stage of professional development. It is important, I believe, to face the reality of loss and the pain that a move will bring, in addition to the sense of excitement at a new chapter.

This brings us to Worden's second stage: *to experience the pain of grief*. In my experience ministers—at least, some—can be very adept at sitting with the pain of others in their loss, but may find it more difficult to accept their own. We can be much better at caring for others in pain than ourselves, implying we are less than human emotionally, which is surely not healthy, biblical, or true? I have felt, to be blunt, embarrassed by my grief. I have not wanted (nor I suspect would it be appropriate) to share it with those in my new church, since they might understand it as unhappiness with them, which is not at all the case—I love being in ministry here. Loving a new church or ministry does not minimise the pain of loss any more than remarriage (a frequent metaphor for the minister—church relationship) means that the loss of a previous partner is less. I have needed (and still do) one or two who understand the peculiar nature of ministry and who can affirm that my feelings are not unreasonable. I hope that will allow me to continue with this second task as it evolves through other 'firsts' or situations which bring it to the surface.

According to Worden the third stage is to *adjust to a situation where the deceased person is missing*. This stage of course may be multifaceted: we miss positive aspects such as a person's support or humour, but at times have also to adjust to the absence of less positive ones such as conflict or watching a person struggle with ill-health. So with leaving a church there will be aspects of missing both the positive and coming to terms with the less-so. I was greatly helped in my leaving service by a carefully written leaving liturgy, acknowledging the good that was being left and also times of failure (by both the church and me) and releasing me from responsibility for the church from that moment. Taking part in that, though very emotional both for me and the friend who led it, was I believe important. However there are aspects of adjustment that will inevitably continue. People are what I miss most, of course, but there were also structures which were familiar, patterns and ways of doing things, knowing lines of communication. In this, too, the 'firsts' will again be important in the adjustment: once I have navigated a year in the new church I may well find that this third task is at least on the way to being accomplished.

So to Worden's fourth task—*to withdraw emotional energy and re-invest it in a new relationship*, which perhaps is where the complexity of grieving in the context of moving churches becomes clear. Most ministers take a short break between churches, but it is usually taken up with moving house (sometimes part of the loss—we left behind my favourite house of all those we have lived in). This break is normally short. I would suggest that the minister has to invest in new relationships (both with the church corporately and with individuals) before the task of grieving can possibly be

finished. It is important to engage in the new church with energy—though not at a pace that will induce burn-out. This investment can mask the reality of the loss and so perhaps mean it takes longer to work through. The task will be different in retirement where there may be more space to work it through, but where the transition is made complex if the minister did not want to retire, or his or her sense of identity was too deeply caught up in the role. I suspect though that in retirement there is at least more understanding of aspects of loss and mourning than in a change of pastorate.

In fact a fifth task has recently been added to Worden's original four: *to redefine a new sense of identity and incorporate the loss into a new sense of self*. I recognise signs of that already: bringing one or two aspects of my previous ministry (such as morning prayers) into the new church, while seeing other parts I need to release as no longer important or possible in a changed role. I have made a conscious effort to say 'we' of my new church from the very beginning, having sometimes heard ministers new to post say 'you'. I realise already I am different as a minister in this new setting. There is a gradual recognition of all that previous experience has allowed me to bring into the changed situation. I recognise that there will be new and valuable aspects of myself which will now find space to grow. I can already see things God is teaching me through co-ministry as a way of working and specifically through my co-minister. I bring all I was before, including my sense of loss, into what I contribute here: my prayer is that God will use it somehow in that extraordinary way he does. There is much to hope for the future which is enriched, not diminished, by all that has been left behind.

All this is to come: at the moment however the very real enjoyment in my new situation sits alongside a sense of loss which at some moments feels more manageable than others: such is the joy and pain of ministry. Taking up the cross daily will look different for us all—this is just one form, but one that I suspect may need more recognition: and so I submit this reflection with a genuine interest in the experience and thoughts of others on this aspect of the privilege and tenderness of our calling.

Jeannie Kendall is now co-minister at Carshalton Beeches Baptist Free Church and she can be contacted on Jeannie@beechesbaptist.org.

Notes to text

1. C. Murray Parkes, *Bereavement* (4th edn), Penguin, 2010; E. Kubler-Ross, *On death and dying*, Routledge, 2008.
2. J. William Worden, *Grief counselling and grief therapy*, Routledge, 2009.
3. We are both full-time ministers, with no speciality and no hierarchy—unusual, but by no means unique: it would probably warrant another article!

A journey through a dark place

by an anonymous contributor

The parable of the frog dying because it didn't realise the water was getting hot very slowly is an excellent analogy of my situation a couple of years ago.

I had not long moved to a new church. It was situated in an exciting location. I had a lovely family. Generally things were pretty good. So the question was 'Why did I feel so unhappy?'

I found that I was getting increasingly irritable with people, but especially those closest to me. I was having trouble sleeping. When I woke up my first thought was 'Oh no, not another day'. I also started to have very dark thoughts about—well, not exactly killing myself, but almost wanting an accident to happen. I was thinking: 'If this is the abundant life promised by God, then you can keep it'.

Just before Christmas 2011 I had two small knocks in a car. In one, someone went into the back of me; in the other, I reversed the courtesy car into my neighbour's vehicle. My insurance did not cover me for the neighbour's car.

It was while driving in atrocious weather on a motorway just after finding out about the insurance that I had my first panic attack. My chest constricted; I could not breathe; I was crying. I was not in a good place.

All this time I told no-one, but just went about my daily work, pastoring others, preparing for the 'joy' of Christmas.

Eventually I confided in a colleague who advised me to either see my doctor or try the online program called mood gym. The depression-scoring system of this program had me off the scale.

It was a conversation with the practice nurse which persuaded me to see my doctor, who was fantastic. I knew my thinking was not right, so CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) would not be suitable—so I started on one of new antidepressants, one I have been on since. I just take a small dose but my quality of life has improved beyond all recognition.

The strange thing about all this was that I had done my Master's on helping people with depression within a church congregation and have subsequently done some

teaching on mental health to medical students. My research had shown that being part of a caring community can have a positive impact on depression, such as reducing medication.

A famous piece of research done on the importance of social support and mental health was done by Brown & Prudo in 1981.¹ They were researching depression among women living in the Outer Hebrides. They noted that the vitality of the religion on the islands of North Uist and Lewis remains very evident. It has a permeating influence on all significant phases of life. By interviewing over 200 women on the island, they noted that depression was the most common mental health issue in both rural and urban populations. On the island, it was found that the prevalence of depression was only 6% among regular churchgoers compared with 20% among the non-churchgoers. Many of the women interviewed were from traditional crafting backgrounds, sometimes living singly because many men worked away in the oil business or at sea.

Among the non-churchgoing women, those in the least traditional types of dwelling had a much greater risk of depression; but the churchgoing women had a lower risk of developing depression irrespective of the type of dwelling. John Swinton notes that the less 'integrated' a woman was, the higher the chances were of becoming depressed.²

Swinton noted that the religious community appears to have functioned in at least four ways:

1. by protecting women from the effects of social isolation;
2. by providing and strengthening family and social networks;
3. by providing individuals with a sense of belonging and self-esteem;
4. by offering spiritual support in times of adversity.

This phenomenon is not limited to Christian religious groups, but any faith group. Swinton notes a study by Shams & Jackson into the role of religion in predicting wellbeing and moderating the psychological impact of unemployment. Looking at the relationship between the employment status of British Asian men and their psychological wellbeing, they concluded that men who are religiously active and involved with a religious community are protected from the potentially detrimental psychological effects of unemployment.

I think one of the major problems is finding a safe place where we can admit we have a problem. This step is fairly easy to do with physical illness but not so easy with mental health issues. Brian Adams,³ who wrote an autobiographical book on living with bipolar disorder describes the situation very well.

Visit a ward in a general hospital and you will see that most of the beds are festooned with flowers and 'get well' cards. In a psychiatric ward the norm is just a few cards or none at all. The choir lady in the recent story gave away one of the reasons, one that had never occurred to me: the psychiatric in-patient is not properly ill...from the ward I phoned up a choir member and told her that I could not attend the rehearsals. I was in hospital, I told her with this 'ongoing thing'; deliberately suggesting that it was my spine that had put me in hospital.

But I had miscalculated. 'What ward are you in?' the lady wanted to know. The choir members would all want to send me cards. 'No, no, that's all right,' I said. 'But we like to send cards' she insisted. 'What ward are you in? C'mon Brian.'

'Ward 40', I lied. This was the ward where I had had a second operation on my back half a year ago. Feeling displeased with myself and surprised at the lack of confidence I had shown, I spoke to the ward manager and asked if he would assist me in my deceit by phoning ward 40 and ask them to forward to his ward any mail addressed to me.

Up smiled the deputy ward manager, who had been listening: 'And what if a couple of choir ladies show up at ward 40 with a bunch of flowers and ask for Brian Adams?'

Mmnnn...

I phoned the choir lady right away and apologised for misleading her. I told her I was in a psychiatric hospital with manic depression. Sorry for thinking she would be embarrassed by it, I did not mind her telling anybody she wanted I was in hospital with this illness and that cards should be sent to this ward in the psychiatric hospital.

She could not have been nicer about it and I realised what a dope I had been in trying to conceal the truth and how much worse I had made things. Despite my willingness for anybody to know of my situation, she said she would be careful whom she told and that she was very glad that I had told her about my manic depression because when she had put the phone down after speaking to me earlier that day she was terribly concerned that there was something 'really seriously' wrong with me.

Mmnnn...

Two cards from choir members came in the following day which I appreciated and which doubled my total in one swoop.

Over the past year I have become less embarrassed about saying I have depression. But I have also been shocked to find how many of my ministerial colleagues have also experienced it. I have also found that many struggle to tell people in their congregations—myself included. It is extremely sad that the communities of Christ

that many of us are in do not feel particularly safe places to confide.

I thought I would share this journey with my colleagues that there is a way through if you are in a dark place. Contrary to the popular belief that the light at the end of the tunnel is just a 'bxxxxd' with a torch bringing you more work, I have actually found that the Christ light does shine in that dark place through ministries such the ministers' counselling service, as well has a couple of really good friends who have stood by me right through this time.

Notes to text

1. G. W. Brown & R. Prudo, *Psychiatric disorder in a rural and an urban population. Part 1. Aetiology of depression*, in *Psychological Medicine*, 1981, **11**, 581-589.
 2. J. Swinton, *Spirituality and mental health care: rediscovering a 'forgotten' dimension*. Jessica Kingsley, London, 2001.
 3. B. Adams, *The pits and the pendulum. A life with bipolar disease*. Jessica Kingsley, London, 2003.
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Whatever happened to associating?

Ted Hale responds...

Of particular interest in July's *bmj* is Andy Goodliff's article on associating. There is much in Andy's article with which I wholeheartedly concur—eg 'association life is marginal to most congregations'; and some to which I can only respond, *we told you so—and you wouldn't listen*—eg the concept of the CBA was always a non-starter!

There are also things which should cause concern. The most serious is the call to rewrite the Declaration of Principle in such a way as to lose the essential nature of a Baptist church: a locally gathered community of believers whose primary corporate task is to discern and fulfil God's will in their locality. In this sense a church meeting prayerfully and humbly to seek God's will and to set in hand appropriate actions is the ultimate authority. It is the faithful discharge of this duty by all the members of each and every church which gives us our common identity and makes sense of any Baptist associating.

A regional minister, much less the officers of the association or the Union, cannot know what God is calling any particular church to do unless they are directly involved in that

church's life. They can, and probably should, be there to offer some of the support and advice which churches need—but the function of Baptist structures and extramural personnel should be to enable local churches in their specific mission, not to make demands that local churches give priority to external structures.

When we are a 'people of the book' Baptists will obviously not be self-centred or inward-looking. Rather we will have a concern for our neighbours (*eg via* Home Mission), our enemies (*eg via* Amnesty International), and the world (*eg via* BMS)—but it starts from where we are, not from where someone else, however well intentioned, has decided they would like us to be—and assumes they have the *ultimate authority* to tell us.

Andy Goodliff replies...

I want to respond to Ted's comments about the Declaration of Principle as follows.

- Surely we'd say that the ultimate authority is Jesus Christ, not the church meeting.
- I guess where we part is that I want to argue that our relationship with the Associations and with the Union is not just pragmatic and functional, but is covenantal and ontological. The local church of which I am a part only makes sense as being-in-relationship with other Baptist churches, Associations and Unions—this is fundamental to our identity, not an optional extra.
- I think the Declaration should reflect this belief.
- This argument supports top-down authority, but is also a recognition that, for Baptists, authority and power is dynamic: but within each local church itself as well as beyond. So, sometimes I exercise leadership, sometimes the deacons, sometimes the church meeting—none of us has sole authority (I am in agreement with Ted that ministers are not 'leaders' although they do exercise leadership). In the same way, I would argue that Association and Union can each exercise leadership, as can the local church. We are in a relationship of listening to, discerning with, seeking the mind of Christ together.
- I don't think any of this argument is to lose what it is to be Baptist, in fact, I would argue, it would recover that which is more Baptist.
- I would argue that a Baptist church which wants to cling to its independence above all else is far from the way the Christ, as would be a Union that sought to make every decision from the centre.

• Paul Fiddes is very good on this, in my opinion, in his book *Tracks and traces*. I have made some similar comments in an article in the April 2012 edition of the *Baptist Quarterly* on the language of 'Baptist family'.

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Reflections

Reflections

Two meals by Fran Bellingham

What constitutes communion in the setting of the emerging church? By this term I mean churches in which a 'fresh expression'—new forms of worship and practice—are adopted. Does the distribution of bread and wine in an ecclesial setting constitute the act of communion, or is it simply the sharing of a meal? What makes the simple meal of bread and wine 'communion'? Is it the inclusion of a liturgical act performed by a recognised priest, or the sharing of food with the recognition of Christ's death and resurrection? Two experiences in the same small chapel have helped me to reflect on what constitutes communion.

Argoed Baptist Church has recently celebrated its bicentenary, yet it is an emerging church. The membership is emerging from years of decline and seeking new ways to engage in mission within a rural village where all amenities have been removed.

In the church's archives a recipe for an early type of yeasted *bara brith* dating from 1846 was discovered, originally made for a chapel tea.¹ This rediscovered bread has been recreated and enthusiastically received by the congregation, amazed that they can lay claim to their own recipe.

On Palm Sunday we engaged in a reflective, all age communion service, recounting the whole crucifixion narrative. Within this service, held in the hall rather than the sanctuary, the participants were gathered around a central low table on which was placed the bread and wine. The Argoed Loaf, as this *bara brith* has come to be known, was used. The whole loaf was broken and distributed by the children rather than the diaconate (as normal), enabling them to participate fully. As the bread was shared the congregation was invited to think about the ingredients.

Bread is the 'stuff of life', yet the addition of fruit, sugar, spice and fat creates a cake. Bread is often eaten alone, yet cakes are for sharing, associated with festivals and celebrations. Bread takes time to make, often three days at a minimum allowing for milling grain, growth of natural yeasts to aid fermentation, and kneading the dough. We are reminded that the falling grain is a vivid symbol of resurrection (John 12:23-25). The grain offering in the Old Testament is without yeast or sweetening agents, so the bread speaks of offering (Leviticus 2:11). Spices were included in the ancient offerings as incense, formed part of the gifts of the Magi, and the burial spices brought by the women to the tomb, as well as the lavish offering of perfume over Jesus' feet.

Symbols

The Argoed Loaf contained water, the symbol of life, as well as butter.² The vine fruits brought to mind Jesus as the true vine and also the cup of suffering. We focused on how grapes are crushed to make wine, or dried as raisins, both symbols of death, but also of joy. The action of yeast, unseen, working within the dough and bringing the loaf to life is symbolic of God's power at work, the miracle of bread making to the extent that in mediaeval society yeast was known as 'Godisgood'.³ Yeast is used both positively and negatively within scripture. It is used as an analogy of the kingdom of heaven, in that yeast permeates every part of the dough, and therefore every part of society (Matthew 13:33, Galatians 5:9). Yeast is also used negatively, indicating the insidious nature of the Pharisees' teachings (Matthew 16:6, 11-12).

Typical of the Lord's Supper, each participant only took a small morsel of the large loaf during communion, but after the service members gathered around the remaining loaf, eagerly cutting and wrapping the bread in serviettes to share with family members, neighbours and friends. On reflection, this practice spoke eloquently of the sharing of Christ with the whole community, the hospitality of the Lord's Supper extending beyond the walls of the church and into the community—a visual demonstration of the action of yeast, the kingdom of heaven infiltrating every part of society. It also echoes the traditional practice of distributing wedding cake to absent guests as a sign of favour.

The distribution of the Argoed Loaf demonstrates the favour in which the recipient is held in by the givers, and it echoes the hope of Christ's return and the wedding feast of the Lamb. It also speaks of covenant: we send cake to witness to the covenant of a marriage, in turn is a metaphor used by OT prophets for God's covenanted relationship with the people of Israel. Accepting the food, partaking of the feast indicates participation. Carter states that it is:

*A gracious gift from God, a symbol of God's justice and provision of adequate resources for all, of God's goodness and transforming presence.*⁴

The sharing of the bread with the community was a surprise to me, being completely spontaneous. Some Christian traditions keep the communion bread set aside to be taken into the community, others emphasise that the bread must be completely consumed at the meal. This distribution fitted neither pattern. The communion loaf, broken, shared and gathered by the participants to share further with friends and family, spoke of a longing for the mission of the church to break the bounds of what was considered 'normal church'. There was a sense in which this was the 'priesthood of all believers' in action. One can only guess the conversations that these gifts of bread engendered.

The use of a loaf indigenous to the culture of the believers provided a sense of communal identity. This community is able to trace its roots through many generations. The people remember the church in its heyday, a time of demographic growth in the village with the arrival of the coal industry coinciding with a religious fervour. The recreation of the loaf also looks forward to a new generation, using the past to inform and provide continuity with the future.

While celebrating communion away from the sanctuary and the table raised a few eyebrows, moving the altar to the centre of the church is sometimes seen in modern

ecclesiastical architecture, notably the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool.

The central place given to the altar or communion table has strong symbolic significance. The community is gathered for a meal. It is an offer of hospitality. This is in marked contrast to the focus placed on a pulpit located on a stage. It is a move from the celebrity to the celebrant, from someone speaking who is speaking to you to one who is eating with you and who welcomes you to the feast on behalf of Christ.⁵

Interestingly, those who had excluded themselves from communion felt able to share the loaf after the formalities of the service had ended, which raises questions of hospitality. The fencing of the table, combined with an emphasis on self-examination before communion, has led many to believe that they are 'not good enough' to share the feast. By contrast, in the gospels Jesus feasts with sinners and outcasts, not asking them to change prior to the meal. After eating with Christ they often do change. Paul's injunction for examination is to ask whether the Corinthian church practices are hospitable to the whole body, rather than a check for unconfessed sins.

A second eucharistic meal?

A second meal within the same community took place a week later when a small group of members spent the day cleaning, decorating and preparing the chapel for the Easter celebrations, which included a baptism. Topics of conversation moved around hopes and dreams for the church community, the anticipation of new life evidenced through the baptism, the opportunity to open the doors of the chapel building to the wider community in evangelism and mission. Finally the little group became hungry and so one member went out for fish and chips. The members gathered for that meal laughed at the implications of the order: 'five fish and two chips'.

The story of Jesus feeding the five thousand was recounted from memory, without recourse to a Bible and while there was not 'prayer' in a liturgical sense, there was still a sense of prayer and praise, acknowledging God's abundant provision. Was this meal of fellow believers, remembering Christ's actions and God's goodness, any less a real communion than a liturgical celebration of the Lord's Supper? This question raises the question of whether it is the bread and wine that make 'communion', or the words of institution and liturgical prayers, or is it that Jesus is present when his followers meet and eat, remembering his life and seeking to live his way in the power of the Holy

Spirit? I would argue that this meal of fish and chips was indeed a holy communion, Christ present where two or three were gathered.

Throughout the gospels we witness many meals where Jesus is both host and guest. The fish and chips at Argoed were reminiscent of the post-resurrection breakfast hosted by Jesus of grilled fish (John 21: 11-14). As with the bread, the fish must be broken to be shared and eaten. The single fish, being part of a shoal, echoes the many pieces from the one loaf. More importantly, it is Jesus' presence which elevates this from being a simple barbecue on a beach. With our fish and chips, it was the presence of Christ, 'where two or three are gathered in my name', that made this simple meal into a eucharistic experience. In our gathering, our informal prayer, and our laughter, we were remembering the whole of Christ's ministry encapsulated in the story of the feeding of the five thousand.

In *The prodigal project*,⁶ the authors discuss 'reframing' as being essential in 'curating' worship experiences. Reframing means placing something into a new context, bread and wine becoming not simply elements of a meal, but endowed with symbolic meaning. The authors explore other communion meals in which traditional elements were replaced by hamburger buns and coke at a festival, the elements being appropriate to the setting. Jesus reframed the common elements of a meal within his society. In the 21st century the common elements of a meal may well be beer and chips!

Theological symbolism may be lost when bread and wine are replaced by other foods, but how far removed from the symbolism of abundant wholeness are our offerings of cubed, processed bread and de-alcoholised wine or Ribena? Willimon compares so much of what is offered in communion, to a Weight-Watchers' meal, rather than the joyous feast of the bridegroom.⁷ While moving the Lord's Supper out of the sanctuary or using alternative elements might be regarded as sacrilegious, the experiences at Argoed have provided opportunity for reflection. Perhaps we have superimposed so much meaning on communion that we have forgotten that primarily it is the celebration of community, with each other and with God, with whatever elements we have to hand, and in whatever context we find ourselves in. Nigel Wright says:

*...the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is not be located in the bread and wine as such but in the way in which the Holy Spirit is present among the people of God in the act of sharing bread and wine together as themselves the body of Christ.*⁸

While Clark argues that:

*Eternal life is the fruit of communion (John 6:58) with Christ; the Eucharist is the means of that communion.*⁹

However, if we are partakers of the body of Christ, sharing in his life and death, this is so much more than simply eating bread and drinking wine. John perhaps speaks more of our sharing in the actions of Jesus, in community, symbolised by the bread and wine, the body and blood. Ultimately we are called to take the new life, borne out of communion with Christ into our wider communities, be that through an indigenous *bara brith* or from the deepening participation in community over a meal of fish and chips.

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Notes to text

1. The original recipe is as follows: 'Towards 1000: flower – 7 bushels, currants – 60lb, sugar – 36lb, best mixt spies – 1lb, essence of lemon – ½ ounce, candied lemon – ½ lb, eggs – 112, barm – 2/-, 1lb butter to every 7lb. 2 bushels of this quantity maybe made Seed Bread 1lb caraway seed. Everything may be made use of But the currants. Half the above quantity to be used.

Working this recipe down it becomes: 650g strong plain flour, 125g currants, 50g sugar, ½ an egg, 125g butter, 30g candied peel, drop of essence of lemon (optional), 1/4tsp mixed spice. This was made up as for ordinary bread using one sachet of easy blend yeast and 300ml of milk and water mixed.

Bara brith is a Welsh speciality and literally means 'speckled bread' and is akin to the Irish barm brack, the English tea loaf or the Cornish saffron bread. Most modern recipes are for a heavily fruited, cake based loaf, but older recipes are lightly fruited and based on a buttery yeast dough.

2. While water and oil are both symbolic of the Holy Spirit, within the context of a 19th century recipe, olive oil was relatively unknown, so for culinary purposes butter would have taken its place.

3. Elizabeth David, *English bread and yeast cookery*. London: Penguin, 1979, p 92.

4. Warren Carter, *Matthew and the margins: a socio-political religious reading*. Sheffield: Academic, 2000, p 434.
 5. Eddie Gibbs & Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging churches: creating Christian community in postmodern cultures*. London: SPCK, 2006, p 229.
 6. Riddel, Pierson & Kirkpatrick, *The prodigal project: journey into the emerging church*. London: SPCK, 2001, p 73.
 7. William Willimon, *Communion as culinary art in Christian Century*, September 21, 1977, p 829 on <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1186>.
 8. Nigel Wright, *Free church/free state: the positive Baptist vision*. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005.
 9. Nevill Clark, *An approach to the theology of the sacraments*. London: SCM, 1958, p 53.
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Reflections: responses

Bob Allaway responds to Rob Trickey's *Bad or broken?*, *bmj* 316

Rob Trickey (*Bad or Broken?*) makes some good points, but there is something he overlooks in Luke 15. All Jesus' first hearers would have been aware that in welcoming his lost son home without any penalty, the father was writing off a third of his pension. Likewise in Matthew 18, the king who cancels his servant's debt is bearing the loss himself. What both parables show is that, as Bonhoeffer taught, grace is free, but it is not cheap, it cost God. That is the truth that penal substitution (often very ineptly) seeks to uphold.

Something that is perhaps too abstruse for *bmj*: a problem with the Western/Catholic liturgy is that it takes *kyrie eleison to mean* 'Lord have mercy', and we associate mercy with needing forgiveness. In fact it was the stock cry of beggars: 'Have compassion, sir!' as is clear in the Eastern liturgies, whence it came.

Rob Trickey replies:

Thanks Bob. I note your point about the parable of the prodigal—in fact, I would argue that the cost was far greater than purely financial, in terms of the loss of honour. The parable would have been shocking to Jesus' hearers from the moment the father permits his son to leave

(rather than whipping him into submission!).

So yes, I agree that grace/forgiveness is costly and that penal substitution reflects that truth. My concerns are (a) that it has become the dominant metaphor, and (b) that it is seen too much as a mechanism. Taken together, these result in too much weight being placed on this one way of looking at the cross. And (in my view) this results in a distorted view of God and of ourselves in relation to him.

It's vital that we hold on to the necessity of the cross, as the way freely chosen by Jesus. But if this necessity is explained solely (or even primarily) in terms of providing a mechanism whereby God can forgive us (and it often is explained in that way), then the cross loses much of its power (and I would suggest, becomes rather absurd). Seeing the cross more in terms of the ultimate revelation of God's character and nature (as per Tom Wright's interpretation of Philippians 2), and of victory over evil through the power of self-giving love, seems to me to be very powerful and humbling. And it's good news!

An interesting point re the *kyrie*. In the same way, salvation tends to be seen in terms of forgiveness rather than healing/wholeness. But that's another article ...

Colin Sedgwick also responds to Rob Trickey:

I'm sure I am not alone in being moved by Rob Trickey's reflection on the human dilemma, *Bad or broken?*, in the last *bmj*, and want to thank him for such an honest testimony. I find myself in sympathy with a lot of what he says, but in the end very unsure about the direction in which he seems to be heading. If we follow his train of thought right through, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that there is simply no need for any kind of atonement theology at all, penal substitution or whatever—the story of the prodigal son says it all. But what then are we in fact to do with Paul and those other parts of the New Testament (including the gospels) which do emphasise this strand of Christian thinking? Do we end up dispensing with the cross altogether—at least as anything more than a heroic martyrdom? As Rob points out, the gospel writers provide plenty of 'backstory' for Jesus and who he was—but the passion narrative is hardly squeezed into a few verses at the end! It seems to matter very much to them as well as to Paul.

Rob is very honest in telling us that his new thoughts have come at a time of personal difficulty—a mystery illness on the one hand and a hard time in ministry on the other. I can't help wondering if this could be significant. While of course it is absolutely right—it is inevitable—to let our personal experiences inform and stimulate our thinking, is there perhaps a danger of allowing them to play too formative a role? When I was a brand new minister an experienced colleague, my then senior friend, told me (with, I think, a hint of

bitterness) that one of the most important lessons he had learned over many years was never to make an important life-decision when feeling tired, unwell, depressed or angry. I am sure that was wise. And perhaps that principle may apply too to allowing personal experience to shape our thinking overmuch.

I personally have never felt comfortable with what might be called a grovelling attitude towards sin. I am struck by the fact that even in the Lord's prayer the mention of sin could almost be taken as an afterthought: Give us today our daily bread—oh, and forgive us our debts...As a young Christian I was influenced by a group of Calvinists who, while in certain respects a very great help to me, also caused me some concern. They loved to quote the Isaiah text (KJV at that time) to the effect that 'all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags'. Even as a teenager I felt there was something not quite right here. But on reflection I think my discomfort wasn't because Isaiah's diagnosis was wrong, but because it seemed a distortion to treat it as if telling the whole story. So in this I am very much with Rob. And yet, and yet...! If anything I have found myself travelling in the opposite direction to Rob—the older I get the more I find myself feeling my own 'badness', and my need of mercy and forgiveness. (The very word 'bad' here, I can't help feeling, is too stark, too unnuanced, to be really helpful.)

To some extent I feel that Rob is wanting it both ways. He insists that the emphasis he wants—on God's love rather than on human sin—is only his starting point. He stresses several times that his point is 'not to gloss over the reality of sin and the need for forgiveness'. But at the same time he insists that 'our basic problem is not that we are bad but that we are broken'. I find myself wondering: Well, which is it? Are we 'bad' or aren't we? Rob seems to both affirm and deny that belief in much the same breath.

Perhaps the nub of the difficulty is precisely what we mean by 'sin'. Rob speaks of sin 'in the normal understanding of the word', but he doesn't tell us what he understands that 'normal understanding' actually to be. I have never understood (and, rather more to the point, neither have the church's teachers down through history!) that 'original sin' means that each of us is utterly evil through and through; as Rob says, we can indeed often see 'a basic goodness in people'. No. What it means, surely, is that we are a spoiled race, that something has gone seriously wrong in the way we as human beings are. Without going into grovel-mode I can only say that that 'bias towards the wrong', which is the essence of sin is very strong in me!

Is it unduly cynical to reflect on events such as the running aground of that container ship in the West Country a year or two ago? It spilled onto the beach its cargo of all sorts of goodies, whereupon (so it was reported) large numbers of local people—probably known as pillars of the community—drove out to get their share of the pickings. It had to be pointed out to them that this was in fact a little matter of, er, theft. Or to point out that according to confidential surveys most people cheerfully admit to being willing to lie to land a job or to get themselves out of some kind of difficulty? Such incidents do somewhat tarnish the idea of 'a basic

goodness in people’.

Of course Rob is right to point out that the Bible story starts with the creation (though one might ask, ‘Where else could it!’), and that what God made was ‘very good’. And yes, surely it is right in our presentation of the gospel, depending to some extent on the situation of the person we are addressing, to put God’s love first. But whether we like it or not, the very first thing we read of human beings doing is succumbing to the tempter and disobeying God. No, the Bible doesn’t start with sin. But it gets there pretty sharpish! All of which suggests to me that the simplest answer to Rob’s question ‘Bad or broken?’ (if we must continue to use that word ‘bad’) is ‘Broken because bad’.

Where I am particularly grateful to Rob is that emphasis upon the love of God. Yes—at risk of repetition—our great task and privilege is surely to make known to people that God truly loves them, whoever they are and whatever they may have done, and that, like the father in the story, he longs to see his prodigal children come home. Even John 3:16, that supposed summary of the gospel, starts with God’s love and doesn’t so much as mention sin, though it is assumed and explicitly mentioned a little further on. I think it was Spurgeon (a man, I suspect, with a strong emphasis on sin) who urged his trainee ministers: ‘Preach much upon the love of God. More flies are caught by honey than by vinegar’.

I have to say, though, that here is another area where my experience has been different from Rob’s: my impression is that most forms of Christianity in our time, including the strongly evangelical, do in fact major heavily on God’s love, perhaps indeed to the detriment of the idea of his wrath. I have sometimes wondered, as I look back on my 40 years of ministry, if this is a strand of teaching I personally have been guilty of soft-peddalling—which could lead on, of course, to the vexed question of penal substitution. But perhaps that is for another day...!

But I feel my last word must be: Thank you, Rob. And thanks be to God that he loves even such as us—bad, bruised, broken, battered, bewildered... whatever!

Rob replies to Colin:

A general point to begin with: I deliberately couched my article in terms of testimony because I wasn’t necessarily wanting to initiate a debate or state a position. I was (and am) conscious that there a number of loose ends, and there are implications for our understanding of the cross, salvation, hope *etc.* So there is an element of ‘this is how I feel’.

In terms of my own journey, I do see the danger in allowing our experience to shape our thinking too much—but then again, if our experience bears no relation to our thinking, then we might question whether our thinking is correct! I referred to my illness because I

felt it provided a useful metaphor for considering the real issue as opposed to the symptoms. Although my thinking has crystallised in the past couple of years, I've been thinking about a lot of this stuff since I was at college in the early 90s, when I first discovered W. H. Vanstone and attempted a dissertation on the cross in the gospels.

I'm conscious that I've raised questions about the place of atonement theology, in the light of the rest of the New Testament. There are also questions about the nature of the Bible itself and how we interpret it. So when we consider Paul's teaching on the cross (for example), we need to ask what he was doing and why. It seems to me that (in common with the rest of the NT) Paul was reflecting on the person of Jesus and asking 'who was this man?' At the same time, he was wrestling with questions about the nature of God and of his dealings with Israel (the covenant), and trying to ensure that the church was both united and equipped to spread the gospel (the good news that Jesus is Lord). If Jesus was the Messiah, then the cross must have been part of the plan (in some sense). So I think there is a certain amount of reading back into the cross, in the light of all those considerations.

Similarly, when we read the gospels, we need to ask why so much attention is given to the so-called 'passion narrative'. It might be because the cross is the most important part of the Jesus story. Or it might be that the cross needs to be put firmly in the context of the rest of the story, perhaps even stripped of some of its theological accretions. We tend to see the cross in substitutionary terms (Jesus died our death), and yet in his teaching on the cross, Jesus tells his disciples that they must be willing to take up their cross and follow. This suggests that we should see the cross more in terms of Jesus being faithful to his calling than in terms of atonement. Of course, there are plenty of passages (mainly outside of the gospels) which do approach it with an atonement perspective; but part of my point is that we have made passages like Mark 8 subservient to Romans 3, rather than the other way round.

I don't feel I'm having my cake and eating it by wanting to take sin seriously. The phrase 'bad or broken?' seemed like a good headline, and I accept that the word 'bad' doesn't serve well for any serious discussion of the issues! But to stick with it for a moment longer, my position is that we are bad because we are broken—badness is the symptom of the real problem, which is our brokenness. To be more precise, I would understand 'sin' (biblically) as referring to a deep and profound disorder—which doesn't seem a million miles away from talking about brokenness as the fundamental problem. The question is: does this put us at a distance from God? Are we born as prodigals, estranged from the father? I would argue against this view.

However, sin/brokenness causes us 'to sin'—to behave in ways which are destructive. It is this behaviour that (if not dealt with) creates a rift in our relationship with the father, and it is this behaviour which needs to be forgiven. If we start to confuse the need to be

forgiven for things we have said/done/thought, with a supposed need to be forgiven for who we are, then we enter into very dangerous and damaging territory. And that's the problem with using 'sin' language to talk about what's wrong with us (as opposed to thinking of ourselves as broken). I would reiterate that I believe our greatest need is not forgiveness, but the knowledge that we are loved, because only this can heal our brokenness (or rather, allow us to become more whole).

The other point concerns God's wrath. It seems to me that setting God's wrath against his love is a false dichotomy. I think it is Vanstone who notes that the opposite of love is not anger but indifference. The problem is that we misunderstand the nature of love, not that we overemphasise it. At the simplest level, if God loves me beyond my imagining, he also loves you in the same way, and so if I do something to hurt you I will experience God's anger—not in spite of his love but because of it. The same logic applies to those living in extreme poverty, and indeed to the creation itself. 'God so love[s] the cosmos' that he is angry at our abuse of it. The parenting metaphor helps here, I think—at its best parental anger is directed at destructive or damaging behaviour (rather than from a sense of personal affront), and punishment is about discipline/training, not retribution.

You can contact Rob Trickey by email at rob@hayhill.org; Bob Allaway at robert.allaway@o2.co.uk; and Colin Sedgwick at colsedg@hotmail.com.

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Reviews

Edited by John Houseago

The practice of prophetic imagination

Walter Brueggemann

Fortress Press, 158pp

ISBN 978-0-8006-9897-3

Reviewer: Martin Gillard

Were the Old Testament prophets foretellers of the future, or social reformers? Walter Brueggemann thinks neither, and instead seeks to chart a course between these two traditional, 'conservative' and 'liberal', descriptions.

Brueggemann defines prophetic preaching as 'an effort to imagine the world as through YHWH, ...a real character and a defining agent in the world'. It should be noted that this book is in fact a companion volume to his previous major work *The prophetic imagination* (published 1978, 2nd edn in 2001), in which he outlines this thesis in greater detail; here he seeks to apply the practice of prophetic imagination to the task of modern day preaching.

This task means contradicting the dominant worldview around us, which he describes as 'therapeutic, technological, military consumerism', in the same way as the OT prophets contradicted the false thinking of

the ancient kings of Israel and Judah. The prophets challenged the assumptions of unconditional spiritual favour in beliefs such as an unconditional divine endorsement on the Davidic royal line, Jerusalem as the perpetual and unchallengeable home of YHWH, and the special status of the Jewish people as the chosen people of God.

The book includes chapters on *Loss as divine judgment*, in which he makes clear that wrong choices have negative spiritual consequences; *The lingering place of relinquishment*, which discusses the important place of grieving, including God's grieving over us; and *The burst of newness amid waiting*, reminding us of God's ability to create new possibilities out of our suffering and loss, linking the OT prophecies with the Christian proclamation of the Resurrection.

One of the great strengths of this book is the author's attempt to provide a practical application of his thesis for the benefit of the modern day preacher. In turn, one of its great weaknesses for many British readers is the US context, as Brueggemann focuses primarily on 'American exceptionalism'.

While seeking to speak from biblical authority he struggles to explain why it is authoritative, and at times it would be easy to read his arguments as deism rather than theism.

If you already like Brueggemann I am sure you will enjoy this volume. If you are new to Brueggemann you would be better starting with his earlier work, *The prophetic imagination*. If you believe prophecy is supernatural foretelling and forthtelling, or if

you believe prophecy is social activism, then you would be better reading something else.

Martin Luther's basic theological writings, 3rd edn

Timothy F. Lull & William R. Russell (eds)

Fortress Press, 2012

ISBN 978-0-8006-9883-6

Reviewer: Ronnie Hall

I am sure that at some point we've all quoted Martin Luther in sermons, and we might even have read something about him during our time at college. Luther is a major figure in the history of the church and will always fascinate Christians, particularly those entrusted with teaching and reading on doctrine and church history.

I am not enough of a church historian to have read a lot of Luther; I usually accessed the writings of men like him through other writers and scholars. This is a shame because Martin Luther is someone who deserves to be read in his own words and not just through the interpretation of someone else. The problem for someone like me is where to begin? This is where a book like this comes in.

In its 3rd edition, this book is a compendium of Luther's major works, organised by theme. I found the introductions to the pieces enormously helpful in placing the writing in Luther's own theological development and time. The editors also provide footnotes explaining obscure phrases, where the original text is unreadable and even where Luther gets it

wrong. There is a classic example where Luther quotes Augustine and in the footnote it basically says, actually Augustine didn't say that...

Despite the title this book is not basic at all, not in the normal sense of that word. It is basic in that it is not comprehensive—I imagine that would take several volumes! At over 500 pages it is quite enough to be getting on with.

I confess to some trepidation when I started to read this. It is a weighty tome and covers some very big theological topics. I found it hard-going at times. For all the difficulty I came away with a deeper understanding of Luther, what he said and more importantly why he said it in the first place. So I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to get started in reading Luther and not reading about Luther. I found this book a valuable summer reading project.

Analytical lexicon of New Testament Greek (revised and updated)

Maurice A. Robinson & Mark A. House (eds)

Peabody- Hendrickson, 2012

978-1-59856-701-4

Reviewer: Robert S Dutch

Books that help us to read and use the Greek New Testament are to be welcomed. Robinson & House's *Analytical lexicon* (AL) is one such tool, constructed in three main parts: (1) introductory material (preface, features, using the AL, and abbreviations); (2) the AL with the Greek—English dictionary;

and (3) appendices.

The preface explains the relationship of this new edition to previous lexicons while the 'features' section introduces the layout and entries. The next section, *Using the analytical lexicon*, explains its four main purposes: (1) *Identifying and analyzing Greek words*; (2) *Strengthening grammatical understanding*; (3) *Elucidating word meanings*; and (4) *Unlocking morphological significance* (which is a useful glossary of Greek grammatical terms). This 'features' section explains that the first step in using the AL is to locate the Greek word alphabetically, so users need to know the Greek alphabet. Then the 'listing' is illustrated with the parsing explained. However, although this explanation is confusing in one illustration for the listings, using the AL itself is straightforward.

The main section, *Analytical lexicon with compact Greek—English dictionary*, has two entries: dictionary and analytical. The dictionary entries come from Mark House's (ed) *Compact Greek—English lexicon of the New Testament* (Hendrickson, 2008) and are keyed to Strong's *Exhaustive concordance*. Words with more than one meaning are clearly distinguished, while analytical entries expand the value of the dictionary entries. Words are parsed using the straightforward abbreviation system, so readers can understand their relationships in Greek sentences. The parsing terms are also explained in the useful *Glossary of Greek terms* (Appendix II). Parsed words are helpfully keyed with a table reference to the word form in the *Greek word tables* (Appendix III). Appendix IV gives the *Principal parts of common Greek words*, while the

earlier Appendix I explains *Rearrangements to Strong's numbering system*.

The introductory section is useful for scene setting. I liked the font size and text layout since this did not appear overcrowded, while the volume itself is a manageable size. When using the *Greek word tables*, readers should be aware that the declension of Greek forms may follow a slightly different order to some textbooks—eg Jeremy Duff's *The elements of New Testament Greek*. This is not a major problem but it requires awareness. The AL is very valuable in helping readers retain/develop NT Greek skills. I enjoyed using it while preparing material for teaching Greek. Moreover, our librarian purchased a copy for the College (Bristol Baptist).

Studying Paul's letters: contemporary perspectives and methods

Joseph A Marchal (ed)

Fortress Press, 2012

ISBN: 978-0-8006-9818-8

Reviewer: Fred Rich

This volume aims to provide an introduction to widely differing areas of research into Paul's letters. Marchal admits that there are many other areas that could be explored, but to avoid making this book unwieldy it has been limited to 11 well chosen approaches. These are historical, rhetorical, spatial, economic, visual, feminist, Jewish, African-American, Asian-American, postcolonial and queer perspectives. If this list doesn't seem off-putting then you should find this volume a worthwhile resource.

The introduction states that this book is intended for the non-specialist, but this may be a little misleading; I would not recommend studying it with church members! Rather, the ideal non-specialist audience for the book is undergraduate university students beginning a course in religious studies, biblical studies or theology. As such it is fit for purpose and is a largely engaging and interesting title. However, for the average church member it would be highly confusing, complex and downright off-putting.

I believe that there is much of value here for ministers. In discussing many contemporary ethical and moral issues, verses from Paul's letters are often quoted in a QED way for the particular perspective of the individual. This book may help you to think about the way that you and members of your congregations approach Paul's letters (and other portions of the scriptures for that matter).

The chapter on economic perspectives is one that encourages us to read Paul's letters in a way that recognises socio-economic realities in the communities to which he was writing, and the countercultural message that Paul encouraged. In our own times, such ways of thinking may be very helpful, especially when church members may be struggling to make ends meet themselves.

Ongoing debates in response to changes in the law with regards to civil partnerships, and the decisions of some of our ecumenical partners, mean that issues of sexuality are also highly relevant today. The chapter entitled *Queer perspectives* may be rather

challenging, but may nonetheless broaden our understanding of others whose views are not often expressed within Baptist circles. It is not a chapter about what the Bible does or does not say, and as such may be a refreshing third way to inform our conversations in the future.

The question is how relevant such a book might be for ministry? It is not a devotional, and neither is it a gold mine for sermon quotations. Instead it offers an opportunity to broaden our horizons when reading and interpreting Paul's letters personally, which may in turn help us in communicating the same to our congregations.

Could YOU review?

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