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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

On the home page of the One World Week website there is a quotation from the French Novelist and Political Writer Georges Bernanos:

"A thought which does not result in an action is nothing much, and an action which does not proceed from a thought is nothing at all."

The phrase resonated, and I wondered why, as I mulled it over. At one level it could be simply dismissed as a clever sound-byte, or even a crass truism. But it also bears a sense of worthwhile things requiring thoughtful foundation before the rush to provide quick remedies. In the best of Christian living thought and prayer are intertwined, and we often underestimate the discipline and effort involved in both. It seems sometimes these days that Christian 'Retreat' language is being used as an alternative to 'Engagement' language, rather than complementary to it, or the creation of an alternative society rather than the steady persistence of salt flavouring and seeds germinating. At a recent Baptist holiday event a participant was heard to remark "Isn't it good to get away to this and have a good time and not think about the world outside!" That's not necessarily a criticism of the event, but an invitation to consider why people really go to such gatherings.

To think in company, and in the blessed diversity of Baptist outlooks, requires hard listening and careful speaking. Which of us has never left a meeting feeling that we should have kept silence until we'd heard a little more, or that we won't bother to speak again if others can't hear us speaking 'outside the box' that they have put us in?

From understandings of pastoral ministry to issues in world development, like it or not, we are and will be engaged in one way or another. And the quality and understanding of our engagement with each will affect the other. Those who agree to contribute to this Journal do so

with no reward other than the sense of helping us to 'think in company'. The first article in this Issue is somewhat longer than usual, but is an important reflection by Paul Goodliff in his first few months as Head of Ministry Department in Baptist House. This is not a Noddy-guide. It requires and repays thoughtful input from the reader!

Amongst ministers who sometimes struggle with perceptions and expectations from the churches are those who have been called into various roles other than 'local church pastorate'. Yet not only do they embody Good News in places where church as organisation does not always reach, they also help to resource those of us who serve primarily in local Baptist churches. An interview with Jeff Williams of Christian Aid is offered as one such resource.

The selection of articles with a strong 'ministry' edge this time is continued with a stimulating response from Ted Hale to John Elliston's question, "What is distinctive about our celebratory acts that set them apart from the rest?" and completed with a review-article on some of the Pastoral writings and Biblical reflections of Eugene Peterson, produced by Michael Bochenki as part of his recent sabbatical studies. **bmj**

Doing or Being. An Old Chestnut Revisited

Paul Goodliff, **Head of Ministry Department, BUGB**

As I 'find my feet' in the Ministry Department, I am aware of a whole range of concerns about the processes of accreditation, training and support for ministers. However, let me take a step back and ask a more fundamental question. How are we to understand Baptist ministry? Is it about what we do, or about who we are? Baptists differ in their understanding of ministry, with a longstanding debate between those who see ministry in predominantly functional terms, and those who have a more ontological conception. This debate is highlighted particularly in the category of youth specialists, which the Baptist Union has accredited for some five years now. This debate is particularly acute for Baptists currently, as discussions begin to take place concerning the recognition of other categories of ministry, notably children's workers, family and community workers, music and worship leaders and parish nurses. If the ordained and recognised ministry amongst Baptists continues to maintain its historic connection to the Reformation tradition of Word and Sacrament, are Youth Specialists 'ministers' in a way that, say, Parish Nurses are not? Do they have sufficient in common with those called to Pastoral Leadership to defend their current status as ordained ministers?

To explore this question, it might help to describe the development of the recognition of youth specialists amongst Baptists in the light of (1) the wider understanding of ministry and (2) against the horizon of an ontological conception of youth ministry: represented by Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster's *The Godbearing Life*¹

1. The Development of the Recognition of Youth Specialists by Baptists.

The process of recognition of youth specialists has taken the past ten years, from the initial conversations in 1994 to the admission to the Register of Covenanted Persons Accredited for Ministry of those first Youth Specialists transferring from probationary status to fully accredited status in 2005.

The Baptist Union's Ministry Executive Committee of 3rd February 1994 received a report from Paul Mortimore² which stated,

'The gathered community of Baptists known as the Baptist Union of Great Britain wish to give positive encouragement from the denomination to Youth Specialists. Those who see the ministry they are fulfilling as their "primary vocational calling" to a ministry which enables others to minister within the context of the Baptist Church. This calling is the same in nature as that which we expect to find at work in the lives of our ordained ministers; to be set apart; to lead others on in faith and enable them to minister to one another and the world.'

At this early stage, it was anticipated that Youth Specialists would be but one category amongst a number, comprising, for instance, Evangelists and Community/Social Workers. However, there was a distinction made between these kinds of ministries and those 'on the accredited list', that is, those who traditionally had been recognised and ordained as Baptist Ministers. The recommendations in this

first draft paper included

- ♣ Applications to follow the same process and rules as applications to the Ministerial Recognition Committee
- ♣ Applicants are required to attend a Specialised Residential Selection Conference organised by the Youth Ministry Office in conjunction with the Ministry Department;
- ♣ The Specialised Ministerial Recognition Working Group would forward the names of successful applicants to the Ministerial Recognition Committee;
- ♣ The minimal vocational and theological qualifications required for admission to the List (Diploma in Higher Education in Youth and Community Work and a University Diploma in Theology, plus denominational courses);
- ♣ Recognised Specialist Ministries to be accorded benefits similar to those currently accorded to those on the accredited list of Baptist ministers.

To all intents and purposes, these specialised ministries were to be of a similar standard to the traditional ministry of 'pastor-teacher', but not ordained. It was not envisaged that someone who was a Youth Specialist could simply transfer to become a Pastor, without further training; a situation that remains today. Were these exotic creatures really ministers, or not? The answer was ambiguous: similar in quality of ministry, but without the status of ordained minister.

The following Executive Committee, of 6th October 1994, received a second paper on Youth Specialists³, detailed discussions having taken place between the Mission Department (where the 'youth desk' resides,) and the Ministry Department, and referred it back to the Mission Department for further detailed work.

This paper is essentially the same as ME/

2/94/2C, although it makes more explicit the distinction between Youth Specialists and ministers, 'We believe the significance of this ministry is such that the process leading to the recognition needs to compare with those which apply to men and women seeking accreditation as "ministers".'⁴ It also describes in greater detail the process by which prior learning could be accredited by a portfolio approach, as opposed to following a dedicated course of training at a recognised institution of higher education.

A year later the debate had moved on to the Baptist Union Council which in November 1994 approved all the recommendations of Iain Hoskins' paper that Ministry Executive referred back to Mission Executive in October of that year. All, that is, except one: Recommendation 7, that Recognised Specialist Ministries be accorded benefits similar to those currently accorded to those on the accredited list of Baptist ministers. The ambiguity remained in the discussions that preceded the adoption of the proposals. Frank Boyd welcomed the 'opportunity that this would give to direct enquirers towards full-time service, other than ministerial'⁵, by which I presume he meant 'pastoral'. Recommendation 7 offered to Youth Specialists the following benefits, amongst others, accorded to 'ministers on the accredited list'

- ♣ Entry into the Baptist Union Directory;
- ♣ Entry into the Baptist Union Pension Fund;
- ♣ Support from the Superintendency;
- ♣ Recommendation concerning standard stipend related to BU minimum and other terms of service;
- ♣ Participation in the settlement process.

This was removed from the final approval of the document because of reservations about the constitutional,

financial and superintendency implications of the recommendation. The details of this recommendation were referred back to the Mission Executive Committee to be reconsidered after wider consultation. This took place subsequently, and the recommendations adopted anyway.

So, with the recognition of Youth Specialists a possibility by the Baptist Union, the debate moved on to the wider horizon of a reconstruction of the List of Accredited Ministers, of which more in the following section. What is surprising is that it took until January 2001 for the Ministerial Recognition Committee to enrol any Youth Specialists, and those two pioneers, Danny Brierley and Stuart Earle, have yet to complete their probationary period. To date we have 7 Newly Accredited Youth Ministers and 12 Youth Specialist as Ministerial Students, or awaiting Residential Selection Conference.

2. Baptist Understanding of Ministry

The document about ministry that immediately precedes the introduction of the recognition of Youth Specialists dates from September 1994, *'Towards an Understanding of Forms of Ministry Among Baptists'*.⁶ It built upon two earlier reports, one from 1957, published a year later⁷, and another from 1961.⁸ The tone and content of the latter is summarised at the start of section B

Our doctrine of the ministry leads us to the affirmation that the minister is one called by God to be a minister of Christ, tested, approved and commissioned by the whole community, sharing the ministry of the church in a manner and in a locality to which he has been called by a fellowship of believers, and of which commendation has been given by the whole community The church receives the minister as one called by God, gifted by the Spirit, approved by the whole

community, appointed for leadership.⁹

The balance between local church and wider community is evident, as befits the autonomy of the local congregation in Baptist polity balanced by the fellowship of churches that comprises the Baptist Union and their voluntary cooperation in matters that include the national recognition of ministry. Further, this report recognises that there are no special functions of ministry that an ordained minister alone can fulfil, but that 'preaching and teaching the Gospel, leading the worship of the church and administering Baptism and the Lord's Supper, caring for individuals and for the fellowship'¹⁰ can be 'fulfilled by any member of the church who is mentally and morally fitted for that function, is spiritually gifted for it, and is called to fulfil it by the church.' However, 'normally, the minister, as the one appointed by the church for just these functions, will discharge them, and the church expects him to do so.' In other words, the minister, as one called to minister the Word and Sacraments, has a particular calling, but not a unique function.

The 1994 document was occasioned particularly by the Recommendations for the Recognition of Youth Specialists before Baptist Union Council in 1994. It began by identifying two approaches to the question of spiritual leadership: that of an office of ministerial leadership¹¹, which from earliest Baptist times has been recognised in ordination, and a functional approach which identifies a fluid approach to forms of leadership arising from the gifts Christ gives to the church through his Spirit. This latter approach lay behind the development of elderships in more recent times in some churches, especially those influenced by charismatic renewal.

The authors of this document recommended adopting the best of both models, with the office of *episkopos*, with

its function of pastoral oversight, being differentiated by ordination from that of *diakonia*, representing 'other ministries.'¹² They recognise that the boundaries between *episkopos* and *diakonia* are open ones, while there is a sense in which all disciples are called to service and to 'watch over one another'.

The report identifies as 'ministers' those who are commissioned for oversight and the Word, or as 'A Minister of Word and Sacrament' as they describe it. It also recognises that there are others called to Other Ministries appropriate for recognition by the wider church.¹³ Included in this category are Evangelists, Pastoral Assistants, Lay Pastors, and crucially, Youth Specialists. While these exercise some *episkope*, they do not have the overall leadership in a Team setting, but work as members of Teams, and therefore this report recommends that 'as a practical matter of clarity, to reserve the word 'ordination' for the ministries which focus *diakonia* and *episkope* in the Church, that is for the setting aside of the 'minister', the deacons of a local church, and ... the diaconal ministries of the wider church.'¹⁴ However, they also recommend that the title 'Reverend' should be used only by those who are ordained as ministers, and who exercise an overall pastoral oversight in a community, following Baptist practice from the 17th century. This would exclude Youth Specialists on these terms.

This approach, with its distinguishing between the traditional Minister or Pastor and others, continues to have many benefits. It identifies as Ministers those who exercise a ministry of Word and Sacrament, coupled with pastoral care. However, it fails to recognise how Youth Specialists and Evangelists also exercise such a ministry. I would draw the boundaries in another place, to include in the List of those who are 'ministers' all involved in the ministry of word and

sacraments, but describe those who serve in other ways (the family and community workers, parish nurses and so forth,) as 'Recognised Church Workers'. Youth Specialists, when serving in the church context, regularly preaching and teaching, probably baptising and presiding on occasions at the Lord's Table, would be ministers.

This pattern was in part adopted in the document '*Towards a New List. Proposals for the Restructuring of the List of Accredited Ministers of the Baptist Union of Great Britain*'.¹⁵ This was presented to the Ministry Executive in October 1998, following the presentation of an earlier draft in January 1998. Its authors were Christopher Ellis, representing the Baptist Union Faith and Unity Executive, and Malcolm Goodspeed, the Head of the Department of Ministry. It sought to address the problem of the developing views amongst Baptists that saw the role of pastor as one ministry among others. Noting that the report '*Forms of Ministry among Baptists*', (discussed above,) recognised a variety of understandings of ministry amongst Baptists, any restructuring of the accredited list would need to allow for such diversity. The proposal that a distinction be made between *episkope* and *diakonia* was endorsed in '*Towards a New List*', with *episkope* being reserved for those exercising pastoral oversight and other ministries being described as diaconal, such being recognised nationally beyond the more local and familiar 'Deacon', or appointed lay leader. These ministries were to be included in one *Register of Accredited Ministries*, of which pastoral oversight was but one, albeit distinctive, category.

The role of pastor was understood as primarily concerned with the 'oversight, care and leadership of the Christian community manifested as local church or churches. It functions through word and

sacrament but its primary role is the comprehensive oversight of a church or Christian community.¹⁶ This ministry of oversight is exercised with others, both locally through deacons and Church Meeting, and beyond, through denominational leaders and superintendents, but where others exercise more 'specialist ministries *within* or *on behalf* of the church community, without having overall pastoral responsibility for that community'¹⁷ it was deemed appropriate to include their names within a distinct category of specialist ministries within the register of nationally recognised ministries.

The nature of the accredited list was discussed. It was noted that it could not be seen as a comprehensive list of ordained ministers, for within Baptist polity there would be those ordained ministers who were not on the list, nor was it an effective attempt at quality control. Rather, it was a list of those ministers (not only pastors,) who had entered into a covenant relationship with the Baptist Union, based upon call, competence and conduct. Call was seen not as a life-long call necessarily, but could change; competence was developed through training and formation, while conduct was to be affirmed or challenged through discipline.

The shape of the register was governed by three broad categories: ministries of oversight (pastoral oversight of local churches or the wider church,) specialist ministries (youth specialists, evangelists, chaplains and those seconded to other ministries,) and those who were retired. It also opened the door for a list of those whose ministries were accredited locally by Associations, but not nationally. This national register of locally recognised ministries has yet to be established, although the rest of the draft report forms the essential character of the current Register of Accredited Ministries.

The report represented a compromise between those who saw ministry in sacramental, or ontological, terms, and those who understood it in more functional ways. That diversity remains today, and results in the question at the heart of this paper. Is Baptist ministry about what we do or who we are?

The influence of the renewal and restorationist movements upon Baptist life throughout the last quarter of the 20th century led to a strong growth in a functional view of ministry. The pragmatic inclusion of women and men who the local church called to its service, with little reference to the wider denomination, and whose role was described in strongly functional terms, as well as the more theologically driven position, influenced by the historic roots of restorationism in the Brethren, that every elder, (the form of description for a local leader most common in those churches influenced by renewal,) had equivalent status, whether stipendiary or part-time/voluntary¹⁸, fuelled the functionalist view. Amongst many ministers today, particularly younger ones, this view would predominate. What distinguishes the ministry of the pastor from others would be a combination of its full-time and stipendiary character, its emphasis upon leadership and the requirements for training. At its most extreme, for instance, the ministry of the pastor would be no different in essence to that of a 'painter and decorator'.

However, there has been recently a renewal of the more sacramentalist view of ministry and ordination, expressed, for instance, by John Colwell and Stephen Holmes.¹⁹ These two contributions appear in the context of a recent and wider discussion of the sacraments, including baptism, the Lord's Supper and preaching.

Stephen Holmes roots his contention that ordination is an ontological

phenomenon, rather than a functional one, (in other words, a 'new way of being' rather than a 'new way of doing',) in the doctrine of the Trinity. The ministry is first and foremost the ministry of the church, rather than the ministry of individuals. This used to be expressed in the 'priesthood of all believers', whereas now, it is more commonly spoken of as 'every-member ministry'. This has implications deeper than mere semantic convention. The 'all' represents the corporate sense of the ministry of the church, (it is not expressed as the priesthood of every member,) whereas the 'every' speaks more of the way individuals play their part, separate and distinctive. The influence of charismatic renewal upon the understanding of ministry is again clear. In the drive to affirm and include every believer, the individualism of 'every-member ministry' replaces the older belief that ministry was the ministry of the church, 'ministry is corporate, not distributed'²⁰ If ministry is so conceived, then it is a reflection upon the character of God, whose persons do not act separately, but corporately, thus avoiding the ancient heresy of modalism: *opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. This conviction is seen, for instance, in the mind of Church Meeting, which is not simply a collection of individual ministries, but 'an irreducibly corporate ministry.'²¹

Holmes goes on to describe the ministry of the church in terms of the threefold ministry of Christ, prophet, priest and king. This is the work of the whole church, but within it the church has an ordained leadership who have 'received a *charism* and whom the church appoints for service by ordination through the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands.'²² This is not the same as an ordered ministry, in the sense of Bishop, Priest and Deacon, but the New Testament has ample evidence of ordained leadership, (Saul and Barnabas, Acts 13:1-3; Timothy, 2

Timothy 1:6, and so forth.)

'Ordination re-orders the relationships within the body of Christ that the one ordained stands in relationships of authority to other members of the body.'²³ This is a way of being within the church, not just a function of leadership, the aim of which is to lead the church in its prophetic, priestly and kingly ministry. The doctrine of *perichoresis* in the Trinity affirms the undivided nature of the acts of God, but alongside this must be placed the doctrine of appropriation. This identifies certain acts of God to a primacy of role within the Trinity. So, God the Father is identified with creation, the Son with redemption and the Spirit with sanctification. In the same way, Holmes argues that certain functions within the church are appropriately performed by particular people. Preaching, liturgical presidency and so forth might here be located as functions primarily within the ordained ministry.

It is here that Holmes wishes to 'recover an ancient wisdom,'²⁴ with different orders of ministry, such as the diaconate, catechists, exorcists and so on. The Baptist recognition of Youth Specialists and Evangelists could be interpreted in such a way.

Finally, in exercising legitimate authority over the church, the ordained ministry sometimes may oppose the community, in the name of Christ, as it challenges mal-practice, sin and worldliness. In this sense the authority of the minister is not wholly derived from the delegated authority of the church, but comes directly from God. It is this sense that he wants to argue for a *character indelebilis* in the ordained ministry. This is never ministry as rulership, always ministry as servanthood, but serving the body means at times challenging the body. A purely functional approach would see

ministry as lasting only so long as the functions were performed by the individual, with ordination and 'ministry' ceasing upon, for instance, retirement from the role as pastor.

3. The Case of Youth Ministry.

We now turn to the case of youth specialists, or youth ministry, to see how this emphasis might work out in practice. The American youth ministry academic Kenda Creasy Dean and her co-author, youth work practitioner Ron Foster, refute a 'service profession' approach to youth ministry, and acknowledge that they mean this for all ministry. 'Ministry is the grateful response of God's people, whose activity in the world and with one another suggests a new way of being alive. Ministry is not something we "do" to someone else. It is a holy way of living toward God and toward one another.'²⁵ Of course, the boundary between 'being' and 'doing' is not rigid, for what I am will be expressed in what I do, and what I do will express, in part, who or what I am, and this permeable boundary is evident in the way that Kenda Creasy Dean, while wanting to distinguish between 'doing youth work' and 'being a pastor to youth,' readily points to the kind of training most desired by religious youth workers, training in ways to nurture spiritual growth, as evidence of the way in which youth workers, with much by way of resourcing to help them 'do youth work', actually want to be youth pastors, for which calling few resources exist.²⁶ It may be that the kind of work that a youth worker does, (running the youth club, organising the annual trip to Soul Survivor, taking school assemblies,) is subtly different to that of the youth minister/pastor (spiritual nurture, pastoral care, teaching the disciplines of prayer, for instance,) but on these terms, the functional approach remains common to both.

Where Dean and Foster make a stronger case for a different approach, one based upon being rather than doing, is in their central metaphor of 'Godbearing'. Taken from the Eastern Orthodox tradition of describing Mary as *Theotokos*, 'Godbearer,' they envisage youth ministry as a way of being that enables God to enter the world again and again, (not incarnationally in the way that Mary gave birth to Jesus of Nazareth, but incarnational, nonetheless.) The emphasis is not upon what ministers do with or for adolescents, but upon 'feeding our own famished faith' so that 'we cannot help but pastor a "flock" as well, regardless of the age of the sheep.'²⁷

The context is a reaction to the programme-based approach that dominated Christian youth work throughout the Twentieth century²⁸. In its place Dean and Foster place 'relational ministry', much as Pete Ward does in *Youthwork and the Mission of God*. "'Relational ministry"— contact ministry, showing up, hanging out, earning the right to be heard, or whatever you may call it — is nothing more than good, old-fashioned pastoral visiting in Nikes.'²⁹ Now, most youth work literature affirms the importance of building relationships with young people, but for Dean and Foster this is not because developmental needs in young people require it, but because of who God is, the God of Trinitarian relationship. For this reason they prefer the term 'incarnational' to 'relational' to speak of ministry, although they prefer the term 'witness' to incarnate, since the popular call to adults to 'model' Jesus Christ to young people is 'well beyond our sinful capabilities even on our best days.'³⁰ However, we can put flesh and bones on God's love for young people.

This move from doing to being, ('Being a pastor, I have come to discover, is infinitely harder than *doing* ministry. And

yet who I am with youth, and not what I do for them, is what they will remember twenty years from now.³¹) is predicated upon the conviction that it is the connection of the minister to Christ and to others that comprises the backbone of authentic youth ministry that enables young people to grow in faith. Just as God takes the young virgin of thirteen or fourteen, Mary, to bear the incarnate son, and asks of her, a teenager, a most demanding task, so youth ministers are called to carry Christ to young people rather than run a youth programme.

‘God did not choose a teenager to bear salvation to the world by accident. Who else would agree to such a plan? While the coming of Jesus Christ in a virgin’s womb is the unrepeatable mystery of God, God invites all of us to become Godbearers – persons who by the power of the Holy Spirit smuggle Jesus into the world through our own lives, who by virtue of our yes to God find ourselves forever and irrevocably changed. God’s yes always comes first:’³²

However, bearing Christ requires practices that are distinctive. It is not simply a call to being, but a call to certain practices that are conducive to such a way of being. Here Dean and Foster owe much to the movement originating with Eugene Peterson that has sought to recover traditional and orthodox pastoral practices from the plethora of management techniques in postmodern pastoral ministry. Attending to God in Scripture and prayer, attending to others in listening and spiritual direction are the themes of the works of pastoral practice by Peterson.³³ These practices of communion include spiritual hand-holding (the ministry of presence,) finger pointing (the ministry of direction,) compassion, catechesis, witness, worship and dehabituating, or the making of sacred space.³⁴

4. Conclusions

We began by asking the question “Is Baptist ministry about what we do or who we are?” We described the way in which the category of youth specialist became recognised in the Baptist Union, influencing more recent debate about the character of ministry, and the diversity of understanding of ministry within the Baptist tradition. Of the two predominant views, functionalism and sacramental, the former is most commonly held, but the latter is staging a substantial recovery, and would be the view which I hold. If ministry is conceived in ontological terms as a way of being rather than a set of practices, then this calls for a response from ministers about their own understanding of who they are or what they do. For instance, youth ministry as a set of practices or a particular programme is widespread in both Britain and the United States, but the influence of pastoral theologians like Eugene Peterson and youth ministers like Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster have pointed to a different model, one which starts with the person of the youth pastor or minister, and their calling to be in relationship to Christ and his people. These ‘Godbearers’ emphasise both who ministers are and a set of practices which are relational and ‘traditional’, in the sense of the practices for the cure of souls which have been paramount from the earliest days of the church.³⁵

Which leads us to respond to the question. If we conceive of ministers as programme managers then perhaps their status as ministers should be in question. However, if they are practicing the kind of Godbearing ministry that Dean and Foster envisage for youth ministers in particular, then they are clearly engaged in the kind of ministry that Baptists have recognised as ‘pastoral ministry’ for four hundred years, and which have been accredited for over a century. Youth Specialists engage in that

ministry with a particular age group, but it is not in essence any different from that ministry which pastors offer to the whole congregation. They are Baptist ministers. The unanswered question, of course, is whether those pastors whom the church has traditionally called to be its ministers are themselves Godbearers, or whether they have been replaced by a generation or two of managers, administrators, programme enablers and committee sitters. It may well be that the youth specialists whose ministry some are reluctant to ordain actually engage more regularly in the pastoral practices of catechesis, witness and visiting, direction and worship leading than their ministerial colleagues in pastoral charge.

The other unanswered question is how to ensure that we all do not become seduced by the lure of programme management in order to avoid the demands of relational and incarnational ministry. In those terms, ministry, whether it be with adolescents, adults, or the elderly, looks remarkably similar, and the demands it makes upon 'Godbearers' equally sacrificial. **[bmi]**

¹ Dean, C K and Foster, R, *The Godbearing Life* Nashville, Upper Room Books, 1998.

² Draft Recommendations for the Recognition of Youth Specialists, Paper ME/2/94/2C.

³ Hoskins, I, Recommendations for the Recognition of Youth Specialists, 20th September 1994, Paper ME/10/94/9

⁴ idem, p.1

⁵ Minutes of Meeting of Baptist Union Council, November 1994, p.4

⁶ Doctrine and Worship Committee Baptist Union of Great Britain, Towards an Understanding of Forms of Ministry Among Baptists September 1994

⁷ *The Meaning and Practice of Ordination Among Baptists*, Carey Kingsgate Press, 1958

⁸ Champion, LC, Barrett, JO and West, WMS, *The Doctrine of Ministry*, Baptist Union Publications, 1961.

⁹ Idem p. 40

¹⁰ Idem. P.44

¹¹ episkopos and presbuteros, taken as equivalents, and differentiated from diakonos, the ministry of service. Others would adopt a threefold pattern of ministry, identifying the Twentieth century Superintendency (and its Seventeenth Century predecessor, the Messenger,) with the office of episkopos, or Bishop, the pastor as the local congregational leader, (presbyter,)and the deacon as the recognised lay leader.

¹² Towards an Understanding, p.7

¹³ idem pp14-16 The authors also recommend one List of persons accredited for Ministry, but clearly differentiate between Ministers (also called Pastors) and Other Ministries (Youth Specialists, Evangelists, Pastoral Assistants, Preachers, Church Musicians, Social Workers etc)

¹⁴ idem p.19

¹⁵ Draft 5 Towards a New List. Proposals for the Restructuring of the List of Accredited Ministers of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Document ME/10/98/5

¹⁶ idem p.1

¹⁷ idem p.2

¹⁸ repeating using different categories the older distinction between the pastor or minister and the deacons. The new categories were sometimes 'Presiding Elder' and 'Elder', although in some cases the 'Presiding Elder' was not stipendiary, and the 'full-time' or stipendiary person was one amongst a wider group of other elders.

¹⁹ Colwell, J E The Sacramental Nature of Ordination. An Attempt to Re-engage a Catholic Understanding and Practice, and Holmes, S R Towards a Baptist Theology of Ordained Ministry, in (edited) Cross, A R and Thompson, P E *Baptist Sacramentalism*, Carlisle, Paternoster, 2003.

²⁰ Idem. p.256.

²¹ Idem. p.256

²² Idem p. 257, quoting Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Geneva, WCC,

²³ idem. p.259

²⁴ idem. p.260

²⁵ Dean and Foster *op cit*, p.9

²⁶ idem. p.16

²⁷ idem. p.18

²⁸ In the United States, this 'youth group' approach was popularised by Christian Endeavour, aiming to protect young people from the seductions of popular and increasingly secular culture. However, integration with

church was minimal and the development of faith hard to accomplish. 'Nothing that happened in the life of the congregation as a whole looked even vaguely familiar to youth ghettoized in youth groups and vica versa.' Idem. p.30 See also Brierley, D. *Joined Up. An Introduction to Youth Work and Ministry*, Spring Harvest Publishing Division, 2003, pp14-58 and Ward, P. *Growing up Evangelical: youthwork and the making of a subculture*, London, SPCK, 1996, for a brief over-views of the history of youth work

²⁹ idem. p.26

³⁰ idem. p.27

³¹ idem p.41

³² idem p. 48

³³ Peterson, E, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1987

Under the Predictable Plant: An Exploration of Vocational Holiness, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1992

³⁴ Dean and Foster, op cit chapters 8-13.

³⁵ Goodliff, P. *Care in a Confused Climate. Pastoral Care and Postmodern Culture*, London DLT, 1998, chapter 1

JUST LIFE

We are looking forward to launching a new partnership programme between BUGB and Christian Aid in November called 'Just Life'. The overall aim of the programme is to enable our churches to respond to the biblical call to pray and act for the establishment of God's kingdom of justice and righteousness, helping us work with Christian Aid to ensure that many more in our world are able to enjoy a just life. In particular, it will seek to enable churches:

- To participate in Christian Aid's work of campaigning for justice.
- To increase understanding of development issues, including the structures that perpetuate poverty, inequality and injustice.
- To explore the links between faith and justice through worship and prayer.
- To respond to specific justice issues by linking with and giving to the work of Christian Aid partners

Our hope is that, as 'Just Life' develops, it will enable us to begin to identify for the first time a network of Baptist individuals and churches who are engaged with these kind of justice issues, and to be able to work together to further this vital agenda.

If you and your church would be interested in finding out more about 'Just Life', please contact the 'Faith and Unity Department' at Baptist House. We would be delighted to hear from you.

And by the end of November we will be able to send you full details on how to become involved with 'Just Life'.

Graham Sparkes
Faith and Unity Department
Baptist House
01235 517728
gsparkes@baptist.org.uk

Experiencing Christian Aid

Jeff Williams is a Congregational Minister (Union of Welsh Independents) who for the last eighteen years has been a staff member with Christian Aid, latterly as its National Secretary in Wales. The Editor interviews him for this Journal.

Jeff, what bearing does your background and experience in pastoral ministry have on your present work?

In a strange way, what I feel more and more is that the study of the Word and preaching is where I see the two parts of my work coming together. In one way Christian Aid may feel like a retreat from pastoral ministry, but the study of the Word of God remains. Whilst in pastoral ministry one is preaching and teaching within a local community, I am now doing that within a slightly different framework. In many respects there is a very clear distinction now between the work I was formerly doing in a local church – for example there is now no pastoral ministry in the sense of visiting the sick and dying as a matter of course. Here there is a very clear cut-off. But in 'preaching the Good News by all means' there is a very clear continuum. In a much sharper sense, though, I have become conscious not only of preaching the Good News *to* the poor, but also of hearing the Good News *from* the poor.

Some might think the step between "preaching to" and hearing from" a little difficult –

It's not a difficult step for me, because it reflects why it is so important for us all to recognise the depth of Christian Aid's mandate to tell the stories of poor communities. These stories very often include amazing faith, and as they are told, we are hearing the Good News without realising it.

For example, amongst the landless in Brazil in their struggle for land and a space to settle – the quest for an ordinary, mundane life. Where there are no obvious grounds for hope, people *choose* to see beyond the difficulties and have a vision of the 'new earth', the place where they have a home.

How does that relate to those other gospel words of Jesus, that "my kingdom is not of this world"? Might not too close a connection between the struggle for land and the promise of God's kingdom draw present possession and eternal hope too closely together?

Yes, that can be true. In Nicaragua especially during the 1970's-80's, Base Communities (Christian Liberation Theology) were vital in prompting and demanding change, but when the victory came, it was hard to sustain those Base Communities because of a tendency to equate the victory with the Kingdom of God.

Michael Taylor, a person who has influenced many of us in very many ways, would often say that we can speak too glibly about hope and the poor, but we can too easily dismiss such talk as well, for it is a very painful thing. I don't have his exact words, but the gist of them always remains with me: hope doesn't wait for transformation - transformation is the child of hope.

There are so many examples of Good News – people of simple faith who believe and act on those beliefs. I'll never forget sitting down in the later 1980's with two

young men who were Delegates of the Word (leaders of Base Communities). A third had been assassinated. At least one, I'm sure, was a Baptist. They worked on sugar plantations. Very aware of the opposition they were facing, I asked them how they were able to continue in the face of threat and death. "Because this is true", came the reply. "This" was the Bible.

Their faith emboldened them to do what they were doing as if the future was sure. They really *believed*, when they said "Your kingdom come". It's easy for us to say, but not perhaps to live.

We have a lot to learn from the lack of separation between spiritual and material that is often evident amongst the poorest of the poor – people who make the relationship very clear between this weak being here and 'life in its fullness'. This life here is already part of 'the things of beyond' with no dividing line in-between.

I have a feeling that many of the blocks which we put up to full engagement and fuller learning come from artificial theological boundaries – not only separating 'earth' and 'heaven' too sharply, but also judging who to work with on the basis of faith labels.

Again and again I am struck by the non-exclusivity of the poor. Christian partners who are happy to work with people of secular outlook and those of other faiths. In the sharp contexts, where the struggle for life is at its sharpest there's no "you're not an Evangelical, I can't work with you", or "you're not enough of a Liberation Theologian to work here authentically", but a common vision that holds people together.

There is a warmth and a passion in addressing need that gives strength and vibrancy to communicating across boundaries that seem important

elsewhere. It has to do with grappling with difficulties and striving to overcome.

There is a lovely story about a community in Latin America. In the 'second step', when the landless have their land, the Base Community continues to study the Bible and put it into action. A question put to one worker "What are you responsible for?" draws the answer "compost and catechism". This seems to me to be a parable of the earth: what we need to sustain life and also grow people – what we may become.

What Biblical resources do you draw on for such insights?

Biblical resources? What about Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, Leonard Cohen?! But Biblically, yes – well the prophets and Jesus aren't a bad place to start!

I've never had 'favourite' bits in the Bible, but I've recently been reading the first letter of John – especially chapters 3 and 4, about love. And I've been struck by the times that the questions 'What is love?', 'How do we know what love is?' are answered by being recalled to what God has done in Jesus, and this very clear connection between love in words and love in action – the *seamless connection*. For many of us, the sadness of church life is that we concentrate only on either/or.

Is your word of hope from the poorest communities actually a word of despair for the comfortable communities?

No, I don't think so. There's a huge *challenge* to the materially comfortable. But there are all sorts of people around who chose hope above despair. There's a huge challenge to re-assess what we're doing, and more than a suggestion that our whole area of the world is making more of a mess of things than we like to think. The institutions to which we've given free rein

to keep ourselves comfortable and others poor. Take trade, for example: those who govern the world of trade don't seem to care about the consequences for the poorest.

Christian Aid is at the forefront of campaigning for Trade Justice. Does there come a time when we should realise that such things are too complex for ordinary people to engage with?

Christian Aid has always campaigned and involved itself with the politics of situations. In recent years this has involved thousands of people supporting action for justice in International Trade and to wipe out World Debt. We are criticised for meddling in matters that we don't fully understand – but I'm convinced that even the experts don't fully understand. All we need to know is that there is a basic injustice at work. Often the complexities are used as a mechanism to fob off those who seek change. It must be possible to have a world trade system which will bring life. I don't believe those who tell us "You're not experts, you can't understand. It can't be better!" I don't believe them. I think they're lying.

For it's those who have seen an injustice and are willing to act on that simple faith – it's they who can change things. It's as much an act of faith for people here to campaign, as it is for those who pick up their hoes to till the ground they don't yet own.

You have mentioned some stories of different places. What stays in your mind from some of your recent travels with Christian Aid?

One of the exciting things about my job is the travel. Sierra Leone was a huge surprise for me. I didn't expect good news there. But only two years after the end of a brutalising civil war, what I found was

simply amazing – people planting, people harvesting, as if there was a future. But the most encouraging thing was the way that people were trying to reconcile within the communities: learning how to forgive and how to live with old enemies, sharing with them the task of building a common future.

In Sierra Leone, the Muslim-Christian relations are very good, even to the extent that groups would start meetings with prayer and each would join in the prayers of the others. Family relationships would cross the religious divide, since the greater sense of identity was of Sierra Leonians – brothers and sisters. I asked a young woman who had seen her home destroyed and her family scattered, "How do you forgive?" She replied, "They are my brothers and sisters, I have to forgive". Others cannot do this, but speak of having to accept the past for the sake of a better future.

I travelled to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories not long ago. What is happening in the Holy Land is heartbreaking; it seems that everything and everyone is touched by violence and fear. Where are the signs of hope? Where is the Good News in the land of Jesus? For me, it is those people who confront the realities but refuse to be drawn to violence. The men and women of the Parents' Circle, Israelis and Palestinians, who know at first hand what the bombings and the oppression can do and say No to revenge and try to work together to heal the hurt. The workers of the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee and the farmers who rebuild the old wells when the water supply to villages on the West Bank is cut off. The medical workers of the Middle East Council of Churches and the Union of Palestinian Medical Committees who heal and care for the sick and the wounded in Gaza and the West Bank, The individuals

and groups, both Israeli and Palestinian, who are brave enough to tell the truth about what is happening in the Holy Land. Of all the issues that Christian Aid is involved in at present perhaps this is the most contentious. Many people criticise our reports and advocacy work on the issue of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but at what point do we tell our friends that we can not speak up for them?

We have Israeli partners who don't actually understand the difficulties in the minds of some Christians in this country who distance themselves from Christian Aid's engagement in the Middle East. Christian Aid believes *unequivocally* that *Israel* has a right to peaceful existence and to develop. But the same rights should be offered to Palestinians.

Our views are shared by many in Israel, whose work is very often involved in building bridges and making conversation possible across divides. We work to exactly the same mandate in Israel-Palestine as we would anywhere: to expose the scandal of poverty and work with others to eradicate it. And there is a huge increase in poverty amongst Palestinian people in the last 2-3 years.

Where Christian Aid gets in to difficulty is that it doesn't find it easy to keep its

mouth shut, and in becoming a voice for others it is bound to get into trouble.

Finally, give us an impression of the churches you deal with here.

It's very encouraging to work with Christian communities here, and throughout Britain. The voluntary workers in churches sustain us as members of staff as much as do our overseas partners.

I personally don't find it easy to be a fundraiser, but obviously without the money little will happen. Where I sit here in Wales, I know where the money comes from, and that very often it's the communities who know struggle themselves whose giving per head is the greatest. Some of the poorest communities are amongst the best givers.

I also find it encouraging when local churches who have great demands on them (*I know!*) realise how much what they give actually benefits them – the profit from what they give, in terms of their own spiritual growth as they become more willing to learn and to be involved in the issues. And when Christian Aid, along with Tear Fund and Cafod, can get thousands of people to lobby their MP's, others begin to realise that these people form the churches and are formed by them. **bmj**

May the God who breathes life into the broken,
who exposes our divisions and our pride,
whose tenderness is the strength of the poor,
bless us and charge us with power
to live as community in this world,
in the name of Christ. Amen

From *Harvest for the World* A worship anthology on sharing in the work of creation.

Compiled by Geoffrey Duncan for Christian Aid. Canterbury Press 2002

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Beaufort House, Brunswick Road, Gloucester, GL1 1JZ

Tel: 0845 0702223

WHERE THERE IS LIGHT.....

Whilst on holiday during our wet summer season this year I was gazing out of my Hotel window and happened to notice that the outside light over the entrance was flickering. The flicker was intermittent as if someone was playing with the light switch. I didn't take much more notice and I carried on with my gazing wondering when it would be dry enough to venture out.

The rain did ease and at last I could at least go out for some fresh air. On leaving the hotel I could hear a fizzing sound as if a wasp or bee had been trapped. I looked up and found that it was coming from the flickering light that I had noticed earlier. There had been no one playing with a switch - it was coming from the light bulb which had become partly immersed in green water in its suspended bowl. Not only was it dangerous to touch it could have been the source of a fire as green tentacles of ivy had trailed itself over all the fittings. The Hotel electrician was highly embarrassed but quickly solved the problem.

This same story can often be repeated with the churches we insure. Many a church will tell us that "Yes - we have had the wiring tested - It's all OK". However there is an oft forgotten item which escapes the notice of the Church members and indeed the electrician - the outside light over the porch or entrance gate.

Many times our Surveyors have come across an outside light fitting which was originally meant to be waterproof with all weather cabling, but the glass bowl is full of water (and dead insects), or is missing altogether and open to the elements. On some occasions it will be swinging free having come away from its mounting.

The dangers are obvious when pointed out and It is understandable that these fittings are forgotten or neglected - so long as the light shines at night it is never thought of!

Of course the dangers do not only arise from lighting circuits and it is important to be able to identify an electrical system which is not quite right. There are numerous tell tale symptoms which can alert you to a problem with your electrical system:

- Lights that dim or flicker
- Sizzling or buzzing sounds emanating from the electrical system
- Damaged, cut, broken or cracked wire insulation
- Frequent blown fuses, or circuit breakers that trip frequently

Our surveyors and indeed the Baptist Union of Great Britain recommend that churches have their electrical installations inspected and tested every five years supplemented with regular visual checks at least annually . Even if you have had a full wiring check it is most important that these symptoms are not overlooked and " just in case " it would be sensible to double check that outside lights and other odd lighting points are included in a regular inspection.

Baptist Insurance issue Guidance notes on various Health and Safety matters including electrical wiring. If you would like more information please do call us.

Yours Sincerely

Alf Green ACII
ASSISTANT GENERAL MANAGER

“Stock Answers or Stock-Taking”?

Ted Hale, Northampton, reflects on what we bring to weddings and funerals, in response to John Elliston’s article, ‘One Wedding and a hundred Funerals’, July 2004.

John Elliston asked (BM) July 2004 p.22) “What is distinctive about our celebratory acts that set them apart from the rest?” and requests, “No stock answers, please.” In one sense I think that “stock” answers are what exactly is required. By that I mean we have a stock or store of experience out of which we produce the essential elements for performing rites of passage which are distinctively Christian. On that basis I offer a few thoughts. This is not an academic response, but it may hopefully provoke further thought from others, because this is an important issue.

The active Spirit

The first distinctive thing is that we recognise that when people ask a minister to conduct a ceremony it is a privilege to respond. It is the prompting of **the Spirit of God at work** in their lives. In and through them we can hear what God has to say to us about their particular needs and aspirations; but these are also indicators of wider human sensitivities. My over-complicated faith is often challenged by the simple belief in God which others bring into my study. I do not relate to them as a celebrant, nor as a marriage guidance counsellor, nor as a social worker, nor anything other than a minister of the Gospel – the good news that God faithfully loves us and wants us to channel that love into how we relate to one another and how we think about our life and our destiny. Of course, there are Christian celebrants at Registry Offices and the Spirit of God may be in the motives which take two people there to give themselves to each other. The pity is that this will hardly ever be recognised. In preparing people to celebrate rites of passage in a chapel, the place of God as source of faithful love is a

normal and declared prerequisite for continuing.

Faith as a matter of belief-in

Closely related to this is the distinctive element of **Faith – a belief in God**. This ideally imbues the entire proceedings, from a first meeting, through to the ceremony and into the ongoing relationship if possible. This is perhaps best symbolised by the inclusion of prayer. Especially significant for me at a marriage service are prayers which precede the making of the vows. The prayers make it quite clear that the vows are made to God as well as to each other. We may, indeed probably will fail ourselves and our spouse (or children in respect of dedication vows), given the high standards of the vows. But God will not fail us, and if our love for each other is rooted in God’s love there is the possibility of repentance, forgiveness and even a greater life when it is enriched by redemption. Rites of passage mark changed and changing relationships. Offering these to God in prayer constitutes a formal recognition of some of the important changes, but does so in an atmosphere of worship in which all our relationships are placed within the wide parameters of the judgement and mercy of God. There will also be prayers for those most intimately involved in the ceremony which invite them to make a personal commitment to live in such a way that God is honoured. Christ-like belief is not primarily intellectual assent; it is lived commitment.

Faith as a matter of sharing-in

The word *Faith* is also relevant in another sense. Our ministry has validity because we are members of the body of Christ. For

many years, as a matter of principle, I would not insist that people came to church prior to being married or having children dedicated. I believed it was wrong to place any obstacle in the way of people wanting to come to God. To invite them to think about their own sincerity was sufficient. Over the last two to three years I have changed my practice! I do not insist, but I strongly urge people to share in the church's worship before they come to be married as part of the church's life. I believe the services are the better for it, because, as with Baptism, it is not primarily my faith or theirs which undergirds the occasion, but the faith of God's people expressed in their shared life of worship, witness and service. It is good to see church members coming to the services for couples whom they have met when they have come to experience first hand what "this" church is like, and what "this place" feels like when God is being praised. Furthermore, "this place" is used for many rites of passage, as well as the faithful meeting together of people who love God. The chapel is often a library of people's sacred memories. So, whilst God can truly be worshipped in any place, there are some places in which the Spirit of God may be more readily appreciated. No registry office or hotel can offer what a chapel can – *if* the chapel is a place where the whole of life is regularly offered to God.

The effective Word

Another distinctive factor that we offer is **The Word**. Again, there is an obvious meaning to this in as much as most rites of passage celebrated by a minister of the Gospel will include a reading from the scripture. If a passage such as 1 Corinthians 13:1,4-8a,11-13 is used, it may well stand on its own: but I have always believed that if a minister of the Gospel has nothing to say at a wedding, dedication or funeral, then they really have nothing to say at all. If we have listened to what God is saying

in and through the participants, or in the life of the deceased, there will be a relevant scripture passage, and there will be a Gospel to declare, because God loves these people and wants them to share in the Kingdom prepared for all who love God. However, the Word is not just in the scripture and its exposition, it is in the welcome given in God's name; it is in the explanation as to why the ceremony is taking place in a chapel; it is in the sanctifying of the state's requirements for a legal marriage; it is in the carefully chosen and prepared vows and prayers, it is in the hymns, it is in every verbal offering. We believe that words are a powerful way of bringing something of God into our lives. The importance of that belief cannot be overemphasised, and it sets us apart from the rest.

Engaging symbolism

Rites of passage are usually full of symbolism. I have suggested sometimes that in a chapel, unlike in any other setting, **our symbols "drip with divinity"**. This description probably derives from a favourite picture of mine from Psalms 133:2, "It's like the precious anointing oil running down from Aaron's head and beard down to the collar of his robes". Saturation leading to overflowing! The symbol of the ring is a good example. What does it mean when a couple give and receive a ring at the registry office? Does anyone tell them what it might mean? A minister can tell them about the phallic symbolism and how our physical relationship is a wonderful thing when the nature of God shapes our sexual activities, patient, gently loving, self-giving, wanting the best for others. We can tell them how the ring was once an important and sometimes highly prized symbol of ownership. In the 21st century it can be a treasured and helpful social sign of belonging, and the story of the lost son in Luke 15 might be shared. The ring may

also be seen as a token of all the precious things we want to share with one another. And, of course, the ring has no beginning and no end, is found on Celtic Crosses, and is a widely used symbol for God. Readers could obviously add much, much more to this, but when all the words of the service have been forgotten, the ring will be a helpful reminder of almost everything that was celebrated, and above all a reminder that God is with us always. Other actions can be important Christian symbols too: the groom greeting the bride with a holy kiss, kneeling for prayer, turning to face each other and holding hands while the vows are made, sharing the same order of service, asking who brings the man to this occasion as well as the woman, turning in toward each other rather than away from each other as the exit music plays. The whole is a ceremony in which every part has a meaning, of which, through good preparation, both the minister and the participants, and as much as possible the congregation, are aware.

The potent blessing

I think all the above makes what we do quite different from what is on offer from a secular celebrant. However, if I had to choose one thing above everything else that makes us distinctive, it would have to be **The Blessing**. Any celebrant could offer a blessing, but the fact is they don't! And if they did, it would be without the faith context of place and people which a chapel affords. When I give a blessing at rites of passage it is almost always from Numbers 6:22-26:

(The LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron and his sons, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,) *The LORD bless you and keep you: The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

And verse 27 is always in mind "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

I am sure the editor would not appreciate a sermon at this point on Numbers 6:27, and BMJ readers will no doubt have preached on the verse anyway (!), but I regularly explain to people preparing for rites of passage that when this blessing from the Bible is given, I may lay my hands on the head of the person, but I do not have special hands, nor do I have special access to God, but I am part of the great stream of people who have tried to offer their lives to God, and encouraged others who wish to do the same. So, when I offer a blessing it is a symbol that the person being blessed is also included in that great and wonderful company. To be blessed means to be acceptable to God, to be part of God's people, to carry God's name. I try to make people aware that as a formal blessing is given they may not actually feel anything, and there is nothing unusual or wrong about that; equally they may feel a sense of awe which can be disturbing, or they may feel a deep warmth and happiness. All kinds of feelings are possible, but they are all secondary to the meaning of the blessing which at heart is "You are God's person".

One footnote!

I have been to church weddings and registry office weddings. Sadly, I might prefer the registry office to one or two church weddings I have experienced. But when chapel weddings are full of the love of God, they include a joy in the Lord which no registry office or other location, and no civic celebrant, can emulate.

Yes, it is a stock answer, but it must be given. What is distinctive about us is that we believe in the love of GOD, and that belief permeates every moment of our conduct of rites of passage – and I thoroughly enjoy them. **bmj**

The pastoral theology of Eugene H Peterson – a taster for readers

Michael Bochenski, St Albans

Eugene H Peterson (EP) was, for some 30 years, the pastor of Christ our King Presbyterian Church, Bel Air, Maryland before becoming Professor of Pastoral Theology at Regent College, Vancouver. His pastoralia trilogy: *Working the Angles*, *Five Smooth Stones* and *Under the Unpredictable Plant* have become, in two decades, three of the most widely read works of contemporary pastoral theology around. These are, however, only part of his prolific output. Much of a recent sabbatical¹ was devoted to reading many of his published works. What follows - an extract from a much fuller document recording my reading over several delightful sabbatical weeks - are some of the key things that struck me during my reading of these books of contemporary pastoral theology.

Run with the horses – the quest for life at its best. (Illinois: IVF 1983)

These reflections on the life of Jeremiah contain exegesis and application at their very finest. Reading them made me want to go straight back to the book of Jeremiah and read it through again. Soon a sabbatical goal which had begun as a chore – re-reading the whole of the Bible – became a real pleasure. Consider this reflection on the experiences of exile: 'All of us are given moments, days, months, years of exile. What will we do with them? Wish we were some place else? Complain? Escape into fantasies? Drug ourselves into oblivion? Or rebuild and plant and marry and seek the shalom of the place we inhabit and the people we are with.'² Peterson's reflections on the need of each generation of Christians to re-invent the wheel were also enormously helpful, not least as I find myself well past the end of one generation and some way into a second since my conversion back in the late 1960s. He quotes Charles Williams helpfully here: "There is no other institution that suffers from time as much as religion. At the moment when it is remotely possible that a whole generation might have learned something both of theory and practice, the learners and their learning are removed by death, and the

Church is confronted with the necessity of beginning all over again. The whole labour of regenerating mankind has to begin again every thirty years or so"³

Five smooth stones for pastoral work (Eerdmans 1980/1992)

The key to this fine book lies in its final few paragraphs. There Eugene Peterson takes us back to a young man seeking out five smooth stones in a brook at a time when war was raging all around him. They turned out to be exactly what was needed for the battle: 'No one could have guessed that the man picking stones out of the brook was doing the most significant work of the day.'⁴ "Where do we go for inspiration in ministry these days?", we are asked through these pages. Freud, Maslow, Galbraith, Parsons and the literature of humanism and technology or back to biblically informed understandings of the Christian faith? 'The Megilloth are five instances of what it means to attend to those details of pastoral work in the modest, limited, transitory and ordinary places where pastors are called to work between Sundays.'⁵ Song of Songs reminds us about the intimacy of prayer through its story of sexuality and human love. 'All the intimacies possible to man and woman in love are an index to the ecstasies and difficulties in our loving response to the

God who loves us.⁶ Ruth reminds us of the importance of story-telling in ministry and life's journeys. Lamentations takes us to the heart of the pain-sharing that is such a vital component of pastoral ministry. Ecclesiastes reminds us of the need to declare the NOs of life before we can hear God's eternal YES. 'The fact is that everything that is done and spoken in the name of God is not good. Everything that happens does not turn out all right if only we put a happy face on it.'⁷ Finally Esther points us to the importance of participating in and contributing to community building whether or not we are aware of God's presence with us. The Church's survival is God's responsibility, not ours.

Working the Angles – the shape of pastoral integrity (Eerdmans 1987)

This is a plea for local church pastors the world over to get back to the basics of our craft. Too often we have degenerated into those kinds of shopkeepers who know: '...how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money.'⁸ This, Peterson pleads, is not what we are about. What we are about is working the angles: operating, that is, within a biblically interconnected framework of core tasks without which our ministries will be fatally flawed. 'Three pastoral acts are so basic, so critical that they determine the shape of everything else. The acts are praying, reading Scripture, and giving spiritual direction.'⁹ If our patterns of ministry do not operate with and within these three corners of a divinely-designed triangle then our ministry '...is no longer given its shape by God. Working the angles is what gives shape and integrity to the daily work of pastors and priests.'¹⁰ As he puts it with characteristic bluntness: 'Working the angles is what we do when no one else is watching. It is repetitive and often boring.

It is blue collar and not dog collar work.'¹¹

Reversed Thunder – the Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination

(Harper San Francisco 1988)

The title of this book comes from a George Herbert poem on prayer: 'reversed thunder' is what prayer helps to make happen. Peterson follows here the revered scholar Austin Farrer's lead in seeing in John of Patmos' work a host of 7s: 7 messages (1-3); 7 unsealings (4-8:6); 7 trumpets (8:7 –11:19); 7 beast visions (12-14); 7 bowls (15-18) and 7 last things (19-22). The appeal in this book is a profound one: that we learn to respond to Revelation with our senses and imaginations rather than with the usual cerebral tools of rational analysis alone. Television or cinema watchers may well have superior insights into this text than do biblical scholars. Hear him on the letters to the 7 churches for example: 'For persons and churches who have been bombarded with tedious, footnoted, complaining analyses of the church for these many years, the seven succinct letters of St John are a relief. Numb from the overkill exposes of the secular preachers, we respond to John's mercifully brief missives with gratitude.'¹² Or on heaven: 'Many people want to go to heaven the way they want to go to Florida – they think the weather will be an improvement and the people decent.'¹³

The Contemplative Pastor – returning to the art of spiritual direction

(Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 1989)

A thinner book somehow – both in pages and content. It amounts to a number of reflections on the pastoral life with some specific references to spiritual direction, though not in any consistent way. Between Sundays - as well as on Sundays - pastors are called to mediate grace. 'Pastoral

ministry increases in effectiveness as it discerns and discriminates among the forms of sin, and then loves, prays, witnesses, converses, and preaches the details of grace appropriate to each human face that takes shape in the pew.¹⁴ Peterson also reminds us here of those people we immediately think of in our working ministries: 'The instances of courage and grace that occur every week in any congregation are staggering. Pastoral discernment that sees grace operating in a person keeps that person in touch with the Living God.'¹⁵ There is also a significant testimony in these pages to the value of sabbaticals. Writing of his own before and after here, Peterson writes: (before) '...a tiredness of spirit, an inner boredom. I sensed a spiritual core to my fatigue and was looking for a spiritual remedy.'¹⁶ (After) 'I felt deep reservoirs within me, capacious and free flowing. I felt great margins of leisure around everything I did – conversations, meetings, letter writing, telephone calls. I felt I would never again be in a hurry. The sabbatical had done its work.'¹⁷ Whether such experiences take days or months to wear off – if they do – those of us who have benefited from sabbaticals will identify with these words.

Under the Unpredictable Plant (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 1992 pbk 1994)

This is a book about rediscovering pastoral vocation based around the story of Jonah. Interestingly it is to 'secular' authors such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky and James Joyce, as well as to the Catholic tradition of stability, psalmody and asceticism that Peterson turns principally in this book. 'Every time a Pastor abandons one congregation for another out of boredom, anger or restlessness,' he writes, 'the pastoral vocation of us all is vitiated.'¹⁸ We need to learn again, he suggests, from the monastic discipline of Benedict: stability. Stay where you are: 'But the norm for pastoral work is

stability. 20, 30 and 40 year long pastorates should be typical among us (as they once were) and not exceptional. Far too many pastors change pastorates out of adolescent boredom, not as a consequence of mature wisdom. When this happens neither pastors nor congregations have access to the conditions that are hospitable to maturity in the faith.'¹⁹ One resource we must turn to more and more in rediscovering pastoral vocation is that of the Psalms. The Psalms are, Peterson suggests, the best guide of all to praying – whether through the disciplines of a lectionary or daily office or via a personal reading and praying plan which incorporates them. A rediscovery of eschatology will also help us. Just as Jonah learned to declare God's judgment on the Ninevites: 'It is essential that we become eschatological pastors'²⁰ For '...eternal souls are at stake here, precious lives at risk.'²¹ This book represents another highly creative application of Scripture to the pastoral life from an expert in *praxis*.

Leap over a wall – earthly spirituality for every day Christians (Harper San Francisco 1997)

These are reflections on the life of King David. Having recently preached through the David narratives with a colleague in ministry, this book was a particular delight. With characteristic insight, skilful prose and scriptural sensitivity, Peterson brings fresh and helpful applications for contemporary living and church life to familiar stories. Just two quotes must serve as examples:

- **On criticism:** 'We're criticized, teased, avoided, attacked, shot at, abandoned, stoned, cursed, hunted down, snubbed, stabbed in the back, treated like a doormat, and damned with faint praise. Not all of these things, not all of the time, but enough of them and often enough to realize that not everyone

shares God's excellent attitude towards us.²²

- **On all churches:** 'They fit the basic profile of Ziklag. I was pastor to one of those congregations for thirty years and thought I could beat the odds and organize something more along the lines of Eden, or better yet New Jerusalem. But sinners kept breaking and entering and insisting on baptism, defeating all my utopian fantasies.'²³

Subversive Spirituality (Erdmans & Regent College 1997)

An anthology. A collection of essays and musings stretching back over some three decades brought together in a single volume. It concludes with a number of, also previously published, interviews with Eugene Peterson, which help to illuminate both his work and his personality. *Subversive Spirituality* is divided into five sections: Spirituality, Biblical Studies, Poetry, Pastoral Readings and Conversations. Consider this, for example: 'I wanted to see the Jesus story in each person in my congregation in just as much local detail and raw experience as James Joyce did with *Ulysses* in Leopold Bloom and his Dublin friends and neighbours.'²⁴ As *Ulysses* is probably the most difficult and frustrating book I have ever read I am not sure of the wisdom of this analogy, though I understand it! As often in Peterson's writings, what comes across clearly is an affirmation of the local church pastor: 'Being a pastor is an incredibly good, wonderful work. It is one of the few places in our society where you can live a creative life...The true pastorate is a work of art – the art of life and spirit.'²⁵ The accounts of his work on what was to become *The Message* are also illuminating. This has been the work of over a decade and, in another sense, a lifetime. For Peterson it was a gradual calling from God upon his life. He had long preached from and used the Hebrew and Greek to help

the texts come alive to his North American congregation. Following a translation of Galatians, and then the New Testament, the call to complete the whole of the Old Testament came to him over the 1990s. The full version has only recently been completed.²⁶ And what a tremendous achievement it is. That of an American Martin Luther or William Carey.

The Unnecessary Pastor – rediscovering the call. Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson (Erdmans 2000)²⁷

These reflections on the Pastoral Epistles are written in tandem by two pastoral theologians who clearly have both a strong mutual respect and a similar outlook. The creative use of Scripture and its helpful application are what linger long after the final pages are finished. Both affirm the traditional roles of pastoral ministry in a society and a culture, which increasingly undervalues them. 'Pastors have an extremely difficult job to do, and it's no surprise that so many are discouraged and ready to quit...Our culture doesn't lock us up; it simply and nicely castrates us, neuters us, and replaces our vital parts with a nice and smiling face. And then we are imprisoned in a mesh of 'necessities' that keep us from being pastors.'²⁸ Marva Dawn also affirms those of us in local church ministry with much needed encouragement: 'You are there! And you're sticking it out, in spite of many false expectations and a culture quite inimical to genuine pastoring! Let me remind you that you are a gift to the church you serve!' ²⁹ Now there's a thought...

Conclusion

The pastoral theology of Eugene H Peterson is both rich and enormously stimulating for pastors. What emerges from a reading of some of his many writings is a portrait of a very able theologian and reflective writer. A working pastor full of

self-knowledge and insights into God, Scripture and life. This butcher's son, a descendant of Norwegian settlers in the United States has also travelled a long way. As you read him you come to admire his bluntness about the bandwagons and gimmicks of some US Church life – and indeed our own. He is a master of the trenchant phrase or the humorous putdown. Not for Peterson the easy pathways of plans and programmes, church growth techniques and strategies. Just 'working the angles' faithfully before an always faithful God. His modesty also strikes you again and again as you read him. The endless round of speaking tours and conferences has little appeal to him. Over the years he has turned down most such invitations. Rather, his has been a quite deliberate rooting in a local church and, in later life, in a single seminary. His enthusiasm, throughout, has been for creative local church preaching and pastoring. And how refreshing it is to hear a popular pastoral theologian commending the reading of novels and poetry, serious theology and country walking. Never read him? Start now. **bmj**

¹ Winter 2004. I am grateful to Dagnall Street Baptist Church, St Albans and to the Baptist Union's Ministry Department for this opportunity for sabbatical study leave.

² *Run with the horses – the quest for life at its best.* (Illinois: IVF 1983) 156

³ *ibid* 125

⁴ *Five smooth stones for pastoral work* (Eerdmans 1980/1992) 241

⁵ *ibid* 21

⁶ *ibid* 40

⁷ *ibid* 163

⁸ *Working the Angles – the shape of pastoral integrity* (Eerdmans 1987) 1

⁹ *ibid* 2

¹⁰ *ibid* 4

¹¹ *ibid* 12

¹² *Reversed Thunder – the Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (Harper San Francisco 1988) 54

¹³ *ibid* 174

¹⁴ *The Contemplative Pastor – returning to the art of spiritual direction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 1989) 121

¹⁵ *ibid* 124

¹⁶ *ibid* 144

¹⁷ *ibid* 150

¹⁸ *Under the Unpredictable Plant* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans 1992 pbk 1994) 18

¹⁹ *ibid* 29

²⁰ *ibid* 147

²¹ *ibid* 153

²² *Leap over a wall – earthly spirituality for every day Christians* (Harper San Francisco 1997)

²³ *ibid* see footnote 6 page 234-5

²⁴ *Subversive Spirituality* (Eerdmans & Regent College 1997) 176

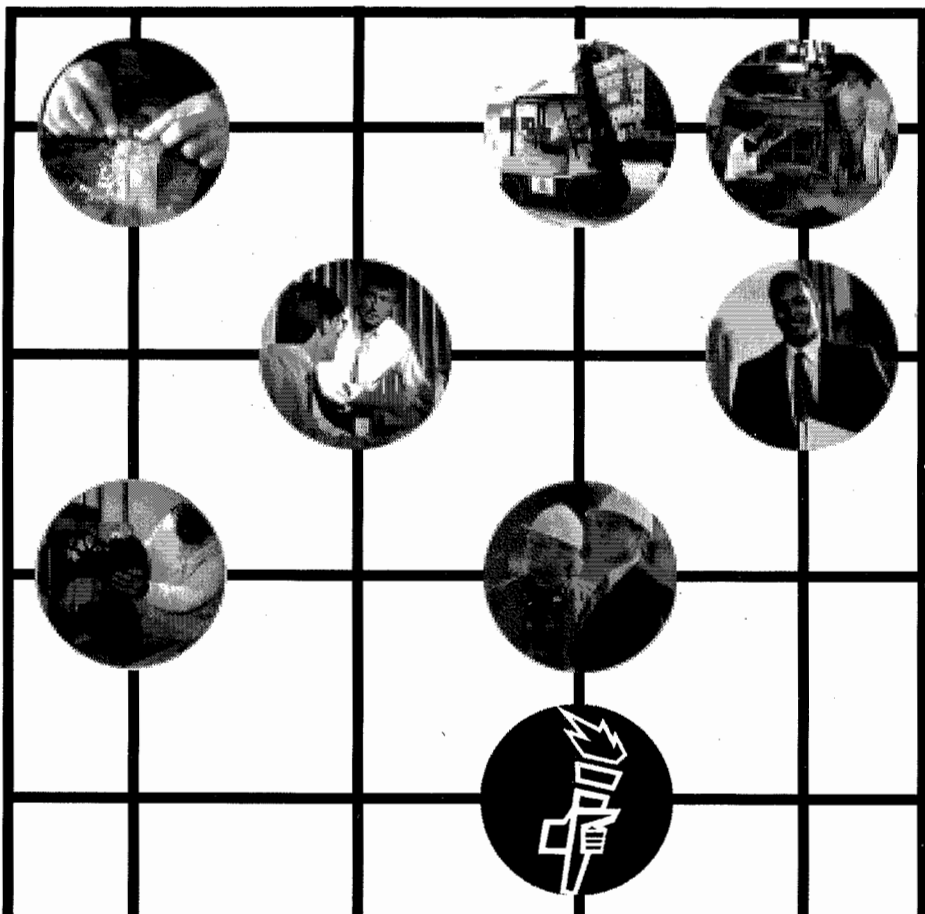
²⁵ *ibid* 244

²⁶ See *The Message – Remix* translated by Eugene E Peterson (Colorado: Nav Press 2003)

²⁷ *The Unnecessary Pastor – rediscovering the call* Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson (Eerdmans 2000) 183

²⁸ *ibid* 183

²⁹ *ibid* 242



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Book Reviews- October 2004

Edited by John Houseago

Healed, Restored, Forgiven. Liturgies, Prayers and Readings for the Ministry of Healing. Ed. **John Gunstone.** Canterbury Press. £12.99.

Arguably, the latter part of the book containing scriptural and more recent readings, should be read first. They shape the theology from which this book is born and enable the prayers to be better understood, adapted and offered.

The volume is for clergy and laity in pastoral ministry, in the light of the Church of England "Time to Heal" report and the publication of Common Worship. These prayers add to the Church's resource for handling the experience of God and healing amongst people.

Rather than providing primarily for the more "formal" setting of a service led by a member of the clergy [although there is a good service order for the Eucharist], this book is encouraging new approaches. There is a section for private usage, but the main thrust is to build up the ministry of teams who will provide times for healing within the overall pastoral ministry of the Church.

There is clear guidance that leaders be both recognised by the local church and linked with the wider diocesan training. There must be supervision and a readiness to know when someone else's gifts are needed.

This is not a book that does all the work, so that a person simply looks up the words. That would miss one of the objects, which is to encourage a readiness to take outlines and accept permission to adapt them in fresh ways for the particular occasion.

Importantly, this is not a book that provides prayers *instead* of committed pastoral ministry by the church. Prayers must always be part of that pastoral ministry whether offered in private, in groups, or in public.

This is a useful companion. But if some phrases feel a little staid or predictable, ask what freshness your ministry can bring - and adapt.

Bob Mills. Bristol City Centre Chaplain.

A Preacher's Companion. Essays from the College of Preachers. Edited by **Geoffrey Hunter, Gethin Thomas and Stephen Wright.** Published by the Bible Reading Fellowship. pp 173 £9.99 ISBN 1-84101-254-8 Paperback.

This is an easy read. Forty short essays, some only a page long, none more than seven. Written by thirty-five authors as a tribute to Donald Coggan, Founder of the College of Preachers. Drawn from many denominations, it represents a broad spectrum of views, but is held together by a shared commitment to preaching.

There are five sections — Models of Preaching, Contents, Methods, Contexts and Listeners — with 7-10 essays in each section. They touch on virtually every aspect of preaching from traditional "Preaching from the Old Testament" to unconventional challenges (such as "From Julie Andrews to John Wayne"). Many will find it most helpful in facing changing patterns of communication and shorter attention-spans. Essays on "Preaching among all ages" and "Interactive Culture" may be challenging but can start to point a way forward.

It's an easy read because every writer has to get to the heart of his or her subject right away. There are lots of pithy sound bites — "A preacher may be humble and modest but never timid" (Colin Morris) or David Schlafer's "Sequence and suspense are essential elements in any sermon shape" or Douglas Cleverly Ford's two tasks of preaching, "to make Jesus a real figure and to make goodness interesting."

How much we benefit from such brevity will depend on how we read it. It can be read "Readers' Digest" style, skipping quickly from one piece to another, enjoying each but retaining little, our preaching unchanged. But if we read it easily, we should also reflect hard; taking time on one essay before moving on.

It's a "Companion" to take on our travels as our preaching develops, or begins to look a bit tired. And if a taste leaves us wanting to explore in greater depth, there is a list of books for further reading.

David Butcher, Bagworth, Leics.

God and the Gangs; an urban toolkit for those who won't be sold out, bought out or scared out. **Robert Beckford**, Darton Longman and Todd, London 2004 £10.95.

Described by The Guardian as a television natural, Robert Beckford may be Britain's first cool theologian. Raised in the black urban churches of the West Midlands, he now lectures in black theology in Birmingham and his books have titles like *Jesus is Dread*. He is significant because he is one of the first theologians to write out of and into the experience of Britain's African-Caribbean community. We should be listening.

This book is written in response to the shocking murders of two young black women in Birmingham in 2003. The killings raised the issue of gangs and gun crime in the Afro-Caribbean community.

The victims' links to black churches mean that a theologically robust Christian response is demanded. Beckford's contribution is written in an accessible style and insists that the urban churches take politics, history and context seriously as they address the issues. He gives examples of positive practical initiatives and he ends his brief chapters with study questions that help the book live up to its sub-title's promise of an 'urban toolkit'.

It is particularly helpful that Beckford addresses the complex issue of whiteness in the urban context. This is something we have ignored too long and he has done us a service in raising it. In the circumstances it seems churlish to acknowledge that his reflections are superficial and that, while he raises the issue of class, he seems unwilling to address it. There is an interesting section on examining ideology in Scripture and in society and it would have been interesting to read Beckford's thoughts on who he thinks gains from the promotion of the ideology of racism which keeps the poor of Britain's inner cities in fear of one another.

Overall, a helpful contribution to a subject of vital importance.

Steve Finamore, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol

The Word before the Powers -An Ethic of preaching. **Charles L Campbell**. Westminster John Knox Press ISBN 0-664-22233-1. 2002

Written after 9/11, this is deliberately not specifically about it. Campbell encourages readers to use his reflections to wrestle with how we interpret and respond to such events.

He argues that powers [and principalities] were created good, yet we experience them as fallen. They tend towards violence. They are many, potent

and rebellious. They dominate, dehumanise, and disempower. They are oppressive, lead to idolatry and ultimately death. They are best countered with the Word of God not by further violence. We experience powers in institutions - social, political, corporate etc. To preach against powers is a battle not with flesh and blood, rather on a broader, spiritual plane.

Jesus - Word of God - resisted the powers in his temptations, in preaching, in table fellowship, in healings and exorcisms. The cross is a direct consequence of his resistance. The words 'Forgive them' shows the deepest level of his resistance to their domination. The resurrection shows victory over them.

Preaching the word is part of the battle against powers. Campbell argues that there is an ethic of non-violence inherent in preaching against powers and principalities. Preachers must speak for the oppressed - being the revolutionary before becoming the pacifist - otherwise we side with the status quo. Social issue sermons

don't go far enough since they are based on the concept of beating the powers - and they don't! Rather preaching against powers should set people free to live and see and be different.

Naming powers and unveiling their reality is part of the seeing. Preachers must be like the child who tells the emperor he is wearing no clothes.

He offers models of preaching which are not another form of domination - speaking with authority without being authoritarian, preaching as friends among friends.

He urges preachers to find time and a place where we too can worship.

This is an exciting, challenging [not too heavy] read with plenty in it to make me want to try to practice what he preaches [or vice versa].

Alan J Mason. Newton Abbot

"CONTACT, CONCERN AND COMPASSION" - THE BAPTIST MINISTERS' FELLOWSHIP

In the light of responses received to the BMJ article (April 2004) the committee are agreed that:-

1. the BMF shall provide a means of associating for all those involved in Baptist ministry.

A change of name to reflect this is desirable. At the moment the committee are considering *The Association of Baptist Ministers* or *The Association of Baptists in Ministry*. BMF members' comments would be helpful. Please send before December 1st to Geoff Colmer (Chair) 105, Tamar Road, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire LE13 0HA (email geoff@colmer77.fsnet.co.uk <<mailto:geoff@colmer77.fsnet.co.uk>>)