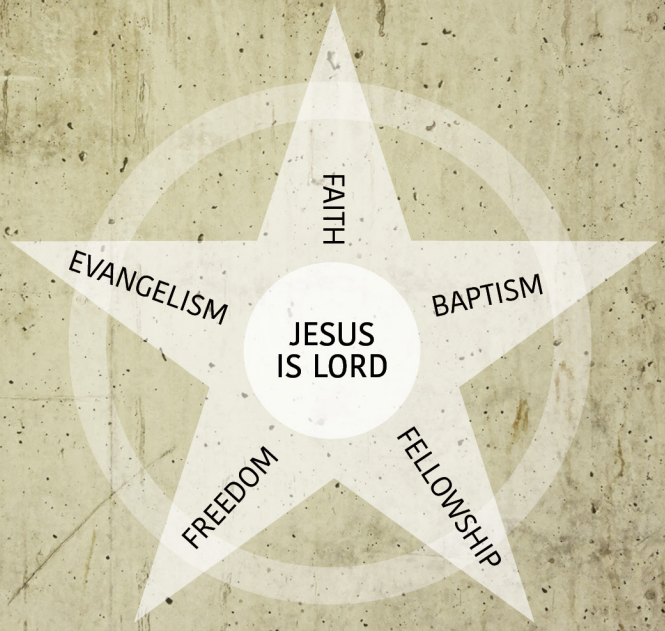
Journal of Baptist Theology
in context



Issue 6 (2022)

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Editorial

Andy Goodliff

I wonder if can you remember 25 years ago? Some readers might not have been born, I was doing A-Levels. The four articles are each pieces that reflect back around 25 years ago. Ruth Gouldbourne reflects back on her 1997 Whitley Lecture, *Reinventing the Wheel: Women and Ministry in Baptist Life*, and then explores where we are now. Paul Goodliff reflects back on the publication of his book *Care in a Confused Climate: Pastoral Care and Postmodern Culture* in 1998 — a book that has remained on many ministerial reading lists — and then offers how the book might need be rewritten today. Rob Ellis looks back on over 25 years involved in ministerial formation — he began teaching Christian doctrine at Bristol Baptist College in the 1990s, before being appointed Tutor in Pastoral Studies at Regent's Park College, Oxford in 2001 (becoming Principal in 2007). Ellis' article reflects on different changes that have taken place in how ministers are trained and formed for ministry. Finally Stephen Holmes' article is a look at theology at King's College London in the 1990s — Holmes was a PhD student then a Lecturer between 1997-2005 — and its impact on Baptist theology, especially at Spurgeon's College.

Each article has an element of history about it, but each article also wants to offer some thoughts on their subject for the present. They should be read alongside articles by Nigel Wright and Lisa Kerry from the previous edition. All of these issues — women in ministry, pastoral care, ministerial formation, and the practice of theology — remain important ongoing conversations that many of us who are readers of this Journal are invested in.

Reinventing the Wheel 25 years on: A Partial Reflection[1]

Ruth Gouldbourne

It is a delight to be asked to reflect on my Whitley lecture, *Reinventing the Wheel*,[2] which it was my privilege to give 25 years ago, and thank you. It is, I confess, more than somewhat disconcerting to realise that it is 25 years since I went around the country (In this days the Whitley was well-travelled in person; 13 venues in 12 months, which was wonderful and exhausting!) offering stories and reflections about women and ministry in English Baptist life. But it is always good to pause and review and to have time and space for reflection.

By the end of the series of lectures — in fact, halfway through it — I had taken to saying that I was now want to write chapter 2. But I never have and I haven't done it now, either. Rather, this is a reflection on 25 years on and as such is partial, both in the sense of incomplete, and in the sense of being my view, and nobody else's.

It is incomplete because I have not kept entirely abreast of the writing around women, around ministry, around being Baptist in the context of England over these years; I know some of it, but not all, and so there will be gaps in my reflection.

And this will not be an impartial reflection, for it is mine, and will show my partiality for positions I took and still hold, and for issues and approaches that matter to me.

A quick look around our life together today will show that things have changed considerably in 25 years. I had to adapt the lecture during the

[1] A version of this paper was first presented at Theology Live 2022, Friday 28 January 2022 held at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London.
[2] Ruth M.B. Gouldbourne, *Reinventing the Wheel: Women and Ministry in English Baptist Life. The Whitley Lecture 1997-1998* (Oxford: Whitley, 1997).

year of giving it, since my initial script said that there were no women superintendents, and Rev Dr Pat Took was appointed as Superintendent of the Metropolitan Area, London, during that year. Now, there are at least thirteen women working as parts of regional teams, and in some cases leading the teams, and there have been a significant number who have come and gone in the last 25 years. Two of our colleges now have women as co- principals, and there are women on the staff of all the colleges. Our Board of Trustees has been chaired by a woman, and Council has twice had women as chairs. Significantly, our General Secretary is a woman. The visibility of women, and their place in roles that are recognised as beyond the local church has increased significantly. We have had several women as President of the Union, not least Kate Coleman, the first woman of colour to fill that role.[3]

The number of women in ministry has also increased significantly. It has always been tough to get the figures of women who are ministers, but at the moment, it appears to be about a fifth of our ministers.[4]

The recent start of Project Violet is just the most recent of a whole series of places and contexts in which women's ministry, the experience of it, the strains and delights of it and the questions around it are being considered and investigated.

The existence of a group on Facebook of women ministers, which started out of a gathering in 2018, and now has 320 members, and rising — and clearly, this is not all the women who are in ministry. The range of women has broadened too; we cover the breadth of the theological spectrum, and ministry styles, and we serve in a wide variety of contexts, from small to large churches, as individual ministers, as parts of teams, as team leaders, as chaplains, as pioneers, as tutors. I do not think there is a category of ministry in which

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[3] For some of the more recent history see Andy Goodliff, 'Women and the Institution: The Struggle for Women to be Involved in the Baptist Union at the End of the Twentieth Century'. *Journal of Baptist Theology in Context* (1): 21-36.

[4] Figures from January 2021.

women are not serving. There are two women in pastoral charge in Scotland — notable, from my point of view, since when *Reinventing the Wheel* was written, my home Union did not really have a context to discuss the issue.

In 25 years, things have changed significantly.

Which of course is not to say that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. There are still no-go areas, geographically. There are still disproportionate numbers of women in smaller churches, in part-time, in slightly odd ministries, though now as when I first wrote, I want to remember that this may be choice, and is not automatically to be taken as a "problem". Research done by Gemma Dunning around issues of pay and conditions suggest that there is a gender pay gap,[5] and it is also the case that there can be a perception that women do not settle as easily as men (it will be interesting to see what difference the Union's new settlement procedures make to this both in truth and in perception).

In fact, one of the things that reflecting on *Reinventing the Wheel* has raised for me is the capacity of Baptists (and I suspect we are not alone in this) to recycle. Long before it became fashionable, we seem to have taken recycling very seriously.

And if you need proof of this, I suggest you visit the reading room of the website of Project Violet.[6] There you will find some fascinating articles and review and reflections connected to the history and the contemporary experience of being a woman in ministry.

You will read there an article from Violet Hedger, the first woman to train in one of our colleges for ministry, and for whom the project is

[5] Gemma Dunning, 'The Splendour of the Lord'. This was a piece of artwork created for Baptist Union Council, November 2018, which was the result of a survey into ministerial pay in the denomination.

[6] The Reading Room, Project Violet: https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/375394/Explore_Publications_related.aspx.

named. She writes, in 1941 of her experiences, good and bad. Here is one paragraph

> A vicar who was ready enough to come to my Anniversary tea, but would not come to the service, excused himself by saying that he was not sure Paul would have been there had he been invited! Or, as so often happens, in a Portsmouth church, after a service, and a long time answering those who were asking about the way of life, a youth demanded pugnaciously 'what right had I to preach.' 0 Paul, Paul, what prejudices are laid to thy charge! Often I hear murmurings that women cannot do things properly (even if they have never had the chance of trying). We are so made that we fear the strange, and this is especially true of religious practices when they are different from the usual custom. It is easy to overlook the fact · that there are greater differences between the ministries of the different types of men, than between my ministry and that of some of my brethren.[7]

There you will find Carol McCarthy, writing in 1986 of her frustration at the ways in which as a woman who is a minister, she is treated by colleagues, and by the wider community; she writes of eventually accepting that she was angry, and ceasing to try to push it away.

> And when I examine this anger, I find it strong and deep. I am tired of being patronised and I am tired of surprising people. I am tired of being treated as a peculiarity in churches, and in banks, shops or anywhere I cash a cheque. I am tired of the way conversations stop when I 'admit' to being a minister and I have grown out of the phase when I added 'but don't let it worry you, I'm quite normal!' And, in truth, I am angry and disappointed sometimes, when men cannot cope.[8]

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[7] Violet Hedger, 'Some Experiences of a Woman Minister', *Baptist Quarterly* 10.5 (January 1941), 246.
[8] Carol McCarthy, 'Ordained and Female', *Baptist Quarterly* 31.7 (July 1986), 336.

Carol, incidentally, I am proud to name as one of my wonderful mentors, not least because she gave one of the best responses I have ever heard to the challenges that we know so well. She quotes it in this article,

> 'I don't believe in women ministers', said a stranger once, facing me squarely and too close. 'I'm afraid you are confronted with the reality', I replied.[9]

You will also find a paper by Leigh Greenwood, who says

> In 2018, I completed and shared a piece of research for my MA, looking at how the history and principles of the Baptist Union of Great Britain have shaped the experience of women in ministry in its churches, and as part of that study, I invited women currently or formerly serving as Baptist ministers in Great Britain to reflect on their experiences. I wrote the questionnaire early in the project, and so it was not until I had already shared it that I realised I was asking an almost identical set of questions to that posed by Dianne Tidball three decades earlier. As I watched the responses come in, my heart sank to see that the answers were almost identical too, reporting the same instances of exclusion and discrimination.[10]

For all the changes and all the improvements in experience and in acceptance, we are still telling the same stories, as Greenwood says, of exclusion and discrimination.

Now, if the same thing has to go on being said, it is usually because it is not being heard.

Is this the case?

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[9] McCarthy, 'Ordained and Female', 336.

[10] Leigh Greenwood, 'Rebel Hearts and Radical Traditions', *Baptist Ministers' Journal* 350 (April 2021), 5-6. Greenwood is referencing Dianne Tidball, 'Walking a Tightrope: Women Training for Baptist Ministry', *Baptist Quarterly* 33.7 (July 1990), 388-95.

Are we actually not hearing the stories that our women in ministry are telling us, and by we, I mean both other women in ministry, and our wider community?

Of course there are differences; some very significant ones. And it is an important starting place to acknowledge that things have changed in 80 years — to acknowledge it, both because it is comforting, and much more importantly, because it is the reminder that things do change. Another of the women who were ministers of the generation of which Carol was a part, Marie Isaacs, was, in her time, the only woman to be studying at Regent's Park College, Oxford. And she could — and did — tell stories of having to crawl in and out of a lavatory window in order to study in the evenings, because she lived elsewhere, there being no provision for her to live in Regent's and the college was locked at 7pm. Since she was not resident, she did not have a key, but how else was she to reach the library. Her fellow students devised this way (though one has to wonder if they might not simply have opened the door to her, but of course, her presence in the building after the door was locked was forbidden, so perhaps that explains it) She also told the story of the time when, after preaching at College service, her fellow students surrounded her and marched her into the dining room for formal supper — which again, she should not have been present for — and the tutors judiciously looked the other way.[11]

Things have changed — women now have their own keys to college.

And it's a trivial example — or maybe it's not — but it is the indication that change has happened, and if it has happened, it can happen.

But I want to suggest it cannot happen while we are still reinventing the wheel, or rather, recycling the stories of pain.

And to stop doing that, we need to ask first of all, why we are doing it.

[11] For more on Carol McCarthy and Marie Isaacs, see Faith Bowers, 'Liberating Women for Ministry', *Baptist Quarterly* 45.8 (2014), 456-64.

Well, it might be that the time scale is too short. After all, somebody born the year that Violet Hedger wrote the piece I have cited could still be alive. And we are dealing with a community with over four hundred years of history going, for the most part, in the other direction. This I am sure is part of the reason, but it is not a justification. It may be that I am looking for changes to come too quickly, but that is not an excuse for changes to be delayed.

It may be that the sample is too small. After all, we are talking about one small group of women who exist and operate as we all do within the whole patriarchal system. Even with the increasing number of women in the various roles that we have seen emerge in the last hundred years, and particularly in the last 25 years, there's not enough of us to smash the patriarchy. Perhaps the best we can do is chip away at it a bit at a time. And while there are stories of exclusion and discrimination, and they must not be ignored, there are changes, there are advances, there moments of grace and times of blessing, and these stories too must be told.

Which stories are told and how seems to me at the moment to be at the heart of this. And this observation raises two questions for me; the way we tell history and who gets to tell it.

One of the reasons, I suggest, is that we are not yet inhabiting our own story. When I was writing *Reinventing the Wheel*, one of the obvious things that I believed I needed to do was to tell the story of women who had exercised some form of ministry through our history. Since one of the major themes of the lecture is that women and men come to and express ministry differently because of different socialisation and context – and part of that context is a tradition to belong to, or the lack of such, giving women a tradition to step into seemed to me an important exercise. It was the perception of the lack of such a tradition – that those who responded to a call to serve the churches in various ways did not have a sense of belonging, but had to reinvent the wheel each time, rather than receive and make their own an identity and practice.

The kind of history that I explored in *Reinventing the Wheel* was, for all it had the intention of developing a background for those of us currently in ministry, still that of isolated individuals. I had a very clear agenda in the accounts that I drew on for that lecture; I aimed to have a story for each generation, in order to demonstrate that when we reached the point of Violet Hedger (and indeed before her, Maria Living Taylor and Edith Gates) they were not some never-before-seen anomalies, but part of a developing tradition. But I don't think I succeeded, since tradition implies handing on — and that is precisely what was not happening. The title *Reinventing the Wheel* was actually truer than I realised at the time, since the way in which I chose to tell the accounts implied, even demonstrated, that each of these women effectively started from scratch and had little or no community or sense of continuity to draw on.

Now, I don't regret what I did in *Reinventing the Wheel*. Some of these stories were pretty hidden, and telling them in the way that I did was at least an attempt to uncover if not a continuous tradition, at least the possibility that what was happening in the twentieth century (and continues into the twenty-first) is not some modern aberration, but is the contemporary expression of an always-present dynamic. But doing it in such a way has meant that the focus has been on 'hero figures' — such as Violet Hedger. And I just wonder if the concentration on such figures does us all who are women in ministry a disservice as well as a being a blessing for us. For it can reinforce the message that we need to be heroes, and need to go it alone as they did.

Thomas Carlyle asserted that 'history is but the biography of great men.' In various ways and for various reasons, this assertion has been challenged as a way of approaching history and of exploring and telling it. Laying aside for a moment the exclusive nature of the language (not accidental but deliberate; Carlyle, and others who followed this model clearly believed that history and the making of history was a male activity) the idea and even more the practice on focussing on individuals and their stories as a way of telling, or better creating a history and a tradition is, I believe too narrow to be the only way we explore history and locate ourselves within it.

In *Reinventing the Wheel*, it was important to me to tell the — often forgotten — stories of individual women, as illustrations of, indeed affirmations of the presence of women in the continuing life of English Baptists; important because knowing that there had been women in various roles created space (I hoped and believed) to be a woman in various roles in the present. And I still believe it is a valid and important part of historical research, to uncover forgotten stories of individuals and weave them into the broader accounts.

However, I want to suggest that this is not the only, and more significantly, not a sufficient way of doing history. One of the dangers of Carlyle's Great Man theory of history is that it identifies one way of what it is to be a great man, and offers that as an aspirational model. One of the encouraging things I have noticed over the last 25 years is the variety of women coming into ministry – theologically, socially, in terms of what we do and how we do it. One of the things I argued in *Reinventing the Wheel* was that by challenging a particular model of ministry, i.e., that it is male, women simply by being there offered a gift of variety that was liberating for men as well. I am even more convinced of this, and long to see it reflected in the tradition that we uncover and then inhabit.

So I am very grateful for those who have made the history so much more accessible than it was 25 years ago. There has been significant work done and considerable resources uncovered. And I am delighted that we are moving to another phase in our historical work, with Project Violet and the multi-voiced, multi-disciplinary approach. By drawing in so many stories and voices, we will move away from the great individual model of our tradition, and produce a much thicker and more nuanced account of women's ministry. I would be very concerned if this was only done for women in the present, and if our deeper history remained — as it so often is at the moment — dominated by the great individual model. The movements of women, women's place in movements also need to be examined and explored; for example, the Deaconess Movement, the Baptist Women's League, the BMS Zenana missions, the Women's Auxiliary, Women's Bright

Hour, and so on.[12] There is a much deeper story here to tell of women's life and work in the churches and in society because they were in churches which might be another chip in the patriarchy. So, the article in the latest *Baptist Quarterly*, for example, about Sarah Bonwick, is also something of the story of the Baptist Women's League — an organisation that has been deeply significant in the lives and ministries of women among us.[13] Uncovering the stories of individual women was important for *Reinventing the Wheel* – but it is not sufficient. While I still believe that what I did in *Reinventing the Wheel* has value, I now regret that I was so easily seduced by the Great Man model of history, and even if I was offering Great Women, I was still held in structure of doing history that shores up a patriarchal model. I think — I hope — I would do it differently now.

One of the reasons, however, why I did do it the way I did was to try and recover some lost stories, and indeed, lost voices — and it is to the matter of voices and the right to be heard that I want to turn now. The stories that I attempted to tell in *Reinventing the Wheel* had been either not told, or were only told in passing very often, rather than as it were, taking centre stage. And in asking why such stories get hidden, one is tempted to answer that it is because the voices represented in the stories are female.

It's not that these stories were not known – it is that they were not heard. Which brings us back to our recycling.

It's not that women are not telling these stories of exclusion, discrimination and pain – and it is not that they are only telling them to

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[12] For some accounts of these various movements and projects see Faith Bowers, 'For God and the People: Baptist Deaconness 1901-1905', *Baptist Quarterly* 43.8 (2010), 473-93; Karen Smith, 'Women in Cultural Captivity: British Women and the Zenana Mission', *Baptist Quarterly* 42.3 (2007), 245-48; Colin Cartwright, '"The Enfranchisement of Baptist Women"? A Brief History of The Baptist Women's League and the Womens' Suffrage Movement in England and Scotland', *Baptist Quarterly* 49.4 (2018), 146-64.

[13] Colin Cartwright, 'Sarah Bonwick (1849-1924), the Baptist Women's League and the Women's Suffrage Movement in England', *Baptist Quarterly* 53.2 (April 2022), 66-80.

each other, which was I think the case for a previous generation. It's not even that these stories are being denied. And yet they go on being repeated, because the discrimination and exclusion goes on happening.

There are surely three possible conclusions here. One, that this is part of the brokenness of society, and it is beyond the power of anybody or any institution or any community to change it. Two, that there could be changes, but that those who could help to enable those changes are not willing to do so. Three, that these stories are unimportant – and this, I believe, relates directly to whose voices carry weight. One of the responses to the #metoo movement has been "if this was going on, why did you not say something" – and the answer to that all too often is I did, and nobody listened. Of course, as we know, #churchtoo has been a part of this movement, for abuse of this sort has happened among us. In an article in 2015 called 'Defanging The Beast', Rachel Waltner Goossen explores Mennonite responses to John Howard Yoder's sexual abuse.[14] It's a terrific essay, and part of her exploration is into the way in which Yoder was rehabilitated, or his behaviour excused or the issues downplayed in the context of the wide and deep contribution that he made to theology in the twentieth century. She speaks of the way in which there has been widespread and to some extent effective attempts to 'influence the representation of his abuses in the press and electronic media.' She continues:

> Consequently, this narrative about Yoder and the women he targeted illuminates contested interpretations by claimants with stakes in Mennonite identity and theology. But as long as Yoder remains the key actor in this story, the perspectives of the women who challenged his sexual violence and identified its detrimental costs are side-lined.[15]

[14] Rachel Waltner Goosen, "'Defanging the Beast": Mennonite responses to John Howard Yoder's Sexual Abuse', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (January 2015), 7-80.

[15] Goosen, "'Defanging the Beast'", 76.

The women's stories are not being heard because the man — and the institution which values and depends on the man — is more important.

Could it be that something like this is happening to the stories we need to keep telling? Could it be that the voices of the women who are telling the stories of exclusion and discrimination are less important, less valued, less listened to than the voice, not of an individual man, but of the patriarchal system as expressed in our culture and in our churches. Just as my best intentioned attempts to uncover a tradition within which I and other women could place ourselves as we explored what it is to minister among Baptists actually reflected a patriarchal historiography, so the silencing pool into which the stones of the stories of pain, damage and oppression that women tell fall is the expression of a patriarchal system's way of maintaining a status quo in which the collective voice and ear is male.

One of the truths uncovered in the #metoo movement is that in any discussion of sexual assault there is a question of the nature of evidence and proof.

In the case of sexual violence, communities are inevitably confronted with the need to decide what to in the absence of evidence-based certainty, and how to listen to the stories that the women are telling. Historically, and in our legal system, we haven't been very good at it. And we have been even less good at changing behaviour, assumptions, even convictions on the basis of the accounts given. There is always a "but there's only your word for it", a "how can this be proved", a "it's too easy to damage somebody with an unsubstantiated claim" — and yes, it is, and I get that.

But at the base of it, the experience is that the stories that women tell of their experience are told over and over, and over many years and several generations. Which is an indication that they are not being heard. I suggest that the same thing is true — indeed, that it is a continuum — when it comes to our accounts of discrimination, exclusion and pain. The only evidence is the stories of the women —

and they are not easily taken seriously, they are often not given weight precisely because of the voice which is telling them.

And for the church, this is a very weird place to be.

After all, it is the stories of the women that are the very basis of believing the gospel:

> Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. (Luke 24.22-23)

And:

> Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."' Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her. (John 20.17-18)

And our faith is born.

It is born as the voices of women are taken seriously, even when what they are saying does not coincide with expectation. Or is it?

Now, clearly, this is a different kind of story from the stories of pain, discrimination and exclusion that I am referencing here. But there is a link "some women of our groups astounded us". And indeed, we can take this link further. In a clear and helpful analysis of "the missing women" in 1 Corinthians 15, Edward Pillar explores reasons why the list of witnesses to the resurrection that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 15 includes no women,[16] when the gospel stories clearly and consistently

[16] This was a paper presented at Theology Live 2022, Friday 28 January 2022 held at Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London. A recording of the paper can be found here:

present women as those who are the first witnesses – and not only witness, but the first commissioned to announce the resurrection, and the first charged to call together a believing community, as they are given the task of rallying the scattered disciples. I am not going to say much more about Pillar's analysis here, since that would be to repeat what is done elsewhere, but his conclusion is striking; that the omission of women from this list can be accounted for either by saying that Paul did not know – that the women's story had not yet been told, or that he found the testimony of the women too challenging to depend on in a context in which a patriarchal norm had to be protected. After all, as Pillar points out, 1 Cor 15 immediately follows 1 Cor 14, in which women prophets are silenced firmly.

To shape his paper, Pillar uses the analysis of Kate Manne, who argues in *Down Girl, the Logic of Misogyny*, that while sexism is the underlying ideology of the patriarchal order, providing it with a rationalised basis, misogyny is the 'law enforcement branch of the patriarchal order . . . policing and enforcing the governing norms and expectations of the patriarchal order.'[17] As Pillar reflects, it is not about hostility, but control. Misogyny rewards women who support, and punishes women who challenge, male dominance.

This is a useful distinction, and a helpful discussion about the nature of the biblical texts — and it also, I suggest, gives more insight into our recycling problem.

Just as Paul edited the list of those who had been the first witnesses of the risen Christ, for reasons that were not to do with what they saw, nor even with who they were as individuals, but because they were women whose story undermined the male power which had executed Jesus, so we find that women who regularly tell stories of exclusion, discrimination and pain are not heard, not because they as individuals are disbelieved, or because the person or structure who has caused this grief is directly countering the story, but because, in telling such stories

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x63D_YfK6yo&list=PLgfdZzKqTzzAkqRDl8bH3C8x1mDEmGQoq&index=3&t=46s

[17] Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (London: Penguin, 2019), 63.

these women, we, are challenging a patriarchal order — and one that does tell us that all is well, and nothing needs to change, because that is where its power lies.

And so we go on telling our story, and the stories go on sliding into the silence because of the misogyny of a broken world in which patriarchy dominates and does it so fully and all-embracingly that even as women, we find it easier not to listen to each other's stories.

Things have changed among us, for and as women in ministry and I am delighted to reflect on that and celebrate it. Taking this simply as a history, we have discovered more and I am thrilled to have the chance to do better, thicker, richer history — and to know that Project Violet is drawing contemporary voices and other disciplines. But we are still hearing — or rather not hearing — stories of pain and distress, discrimination and exclusion. Will we let them challenge, discomfort, astound us and transform us, or do the voices of women still, in the end, not carry weight?

Note on Contributor

Ruth Gouldbourne is minister of Grove Lane Baptist Church, Cheadle Grove. She has written many articles and chapters. The most recent being *The Story of Bristol Baptist College* (Pickwick, 2022).

Care becomes more Complex in a Confrontational Climate: A review of *Care in a Confused Climate*, twenty five years after publication.

Paul Goodliff

After serving as minister of the Bunyan Baptist Church in Stevenage Old Town for a few years I was due a sabbatical. Having been ordained at Streatham Baptist Church in 1988, it was three years later than its due date, but a move of pastorate in 1992 reset the sabbatical clock to 1997 and I used the time to write a book that I had thought had been informally commissioned by SPCK as part of its New Library of Pastoral Care. I was interested in post-modern culture, both in its artistic and architectural manifestations, and in the world of popular philosophy resulting from the so-called 'death of modernity', and the rise of a world where truth was fluid. By the time I had substantially completed it, with the first half describing what postmodernism looked like, and the second, longer, part what I took to be a Christian response in terms of the tasks of pastoral care, I discovered that SPCK were not in fact publishing any further volumes in that series. They might be interested, they said, if I removed the first part, as a stand-alone volume, but I felt the second half of the book made no sense without the discussion of postmodernism that comprised the first part, and I was not about to 'amputate half my baby'! This was my first book, after all. Thankfully, a pitch to Darton, Longman and Todd found a sympathetic publisher, and in 1998 *Care in a Confused Climate: Pastoral Care and Postmodern Culture*[1] was published in its entirety, and eventually found its way onto the reading lists for those training for ministry and taking a course in pastoral care, where, in a few cases, it remains to this day, 25 years after I wrote it, and in

[1] Paul W. Goodliff, *Care in a Confused Climate: Pastoral Care and Postmodern Culture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998).

2023, it will be the anniversary of 25 years since its publication, although it has long been out of print.

In the early 1990s I had taken the MTh in Twentieth Century Systematic Theology at King's College, London, with, among others, Colin Gunton as both a tutor, and supervisor of its dissertation on 'Eberhard Jüngel and the Speakability of God.' As *Care in a Confused Climate* came to completion, I sent Colin Gunton a copy of the manuscript with the request that he write a Foreword. He wrote back to say that his intention had been to decline my request, but that he had begun to read it on the train during the commute home to Brentwood from King's College, and had changed his mind, and so would provide the Foreword, which he duly did in November 1997. It concluded with 'It should provide a valuable resource for those who are engaged in that most difficult of tasks, pastoral work in a divided Church and desperate world.'[2] I like to think that the book has fulfilled the promise that Colin Gunton saw in it. Certainly, in various contexts strangers approach me and ask am I the Paul Goodliff who wrote *Care in a Confused Climate*, and (I think universally, so far) say they have found it helpful.

The book has been out of print for many years now, and I have occasionally been asked if I might write a revised or second edition — a request I have thus far declined, with other projects offering much greater personal satisfaction than re-heating that book. However, noting the anniversary of its publication, the editors of this journal suggested I might reflect upon its theme a quarter of a century after it first saw light, and with postmodernism no longer the novelty it once was. What might pastoral care look like in a post-postmodernist world?

In this article reflecting upon the ways in which any revised edition of *Care in a Confused Climate* needs to take into account some significant changes to the cultural context in which the church exercises pastoral care, I want to echo the tone of the 1998 edition: not overly referenced, understandable by the thinking lay person, rather than just the professional or academic pastoral theologian, and focussing in

[2] Colin Gunton, Foreword to *Care in a Confused Climate*, viii.

places upon more complex ideas (which in the original were placed in boxes and in smaller type.) Eschewing the latter convention only, this paper might approximate to a prolegomenon for a new, mid-21st century, construction of the role and tasks of pastoral care, related not just to the tradition, as in the original, but also to the context. This is pastoral care in context.

My analysis of the postmodern world led me to suggest four important characteristics to which pastoral care must respond: a fragmented world, relational instability, wounded souls and a suspicion of objective truth. To those challenges I proposed that pastoral care should have four priorities: building Christian community, creating relational health, healing the wounded soul and nurturing and sustaining faith. None of those tasks was novel, and they remain central to the task of pastoral care, but nonetheless, they remain an appropriate response to both postmodernism and whatever is identified as its successor cultural context. However, as a quartet, I now think that they are inadequate for a fuller response to the challenges faced by mid-21st century 'Western' society.

The inadequacy of the original postmodern thesis

My reflection on the validity of the cultural context of post-modernity is where I would now take the greatest exception to the thesis developed *in Care in a Confused Climate*. First, I was unaware of how the sociological and cultural framework by which both modernity and post-modernity was articulated owed too much to the dominance of the sovereign nation-state in the thought of the three giants of the sociological canon: Karl Marx, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim (and to their peculiar blind spots about the importance of colonialism)[3]. Sociology's birth coincided with the high point of European

[3] 'The essential props of liberalism — a sovereign state with clear territorial boundaries and an autonomous commercial economy — proved to be convenient fictions disguising the colonial reality. The conception of the Westphalian state, later defined by Weber as having a 'monopoly on the legitimate use of violence' within its borders, took as read that sovereign power was tidily contained within designated national territories', William Davies, 'Destination Unknown' in *London Review of Books* 44.11 (9 June 2022), 17.

imperialism, and the preceding three centuries during which the nation state developed, post Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, coincided with the rise in the violent and coercive exploitation of the rest of the world, be that the carving up of the contents of Africa, South and South East Asia and South America between the British, Spanish and French Empires, or the internal imperialism of the westward spread of white English-speaking colonial power in North America and the dominance of what is now China and beyond by the Han dynasty and ethnic group. Developments since 1998 suggest that the historical trajectory is not simply one from empire to nation state as its terminus, but one that returns to empire after a brief disruptive period surrounding two twentieth century world wars that coincided with the high point of modernity, and creates again global politics dominated by empire — a declining and fragmenting American one; a resurgent Russian one using extreme violence to restore its mid-20th century reach and the two emerging and dominant ones of India and China, neither of which owe long-term allegiance to the cultural hegemony of the modern or post-modern and liberal democratic European nation-state. The relative egalitarianism of the thirty years since the end of the second world war now seems like an aberration rather than a destination, with global wealth now increasingly distributed in ways that strengthen and enrich those who share in it, at the expense of those who do not.[4] The assumptions behind postmodernism that framed the pastoral responses of *Care in a Confused Climate* are almost all now debateable.

Alongside a continuing debate about truth that lay at the heart of much of the postmodernism of the 1990s, and its associated cultural fragmentation, any socio-cultural landscape mapped in a new edition of *Care in a Confused Climate* would need to embrace the impact of the climate emergency; the extraordinary growth in inequality following the 2008 financial crisis and its implications for wealth and poverty; the trend away from identification by political philosophy and class to one rooted in race, sexuality and gender (not least the splitting of the United States of America into two mutually-incomprehensible cultures

[4] Cf. Thomas Piketty, *A Brief History of Equality* (Harvard University Press, 2022).

that threaten to degenerate into a low-grade civil war, with all that would follow in terms of global instability;) the impact of social media upon human transactions and conversation; and the fall-out out from a global pandemic of Covid-19.

Those changes are helpfully framed, not just in the brief 25 years since 1998, but in a longer historical viewpoint, from, arguably, 1492 and the landing of Europeans on the shores of North America (if not 1619 and the arrival of enslaved Africans there), through the era of European empires that clashed, and were dissolved in the great twentieth century conflicts, to the multiple crises that followed the eruptions — political, economic and cultural — of 1968. This suggests that the current globalisation of empire is the new political reality, owing much greater similarity to the nineteenth than the twentieth centuries, even if Britain's location within that schema is radically different post 1945, and indeed post 2019 and the completion of the Brexit project beloved of the Right, nostalgic for a Britain more redolent of pre-Suez rather than post-Iraq. The prioritisation of individual liberty and identity over collective action and the suspicion of 'experts' in both the natural and social sciences continue to create a 'confused' climate in which the church exercises pastoral care. That prioritisation fatally weakens any global attempt to combat the climate crisis, (whose trajectory, despite Cop 26 commitments to the Paris accord, is not swift resolution, but an ever-deepening certainty of the destruction of global stability, and even human existence, through the lack of political will to fulfil the commitments to net-zero carbon emissions promised.) It also weakens the grounding of the global political/economic order in the security of the nation state (as the United States and its allies, notably the United Kingdom's, invasion of Iraq in 2003 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine almost a decade later demonstrates and China's threat to Taiwan anticipates). The confused culture about which I wrote in the late 1990s assumed the irrelevance of the threat of nuclear war, and that global conflict was unimaginable. Neither of those two assumptions now hold, and perhaps the longer-term context for the church's pastoral care is not only the confusion of a fragmenting culture, but the horrors of a new global conflict exacerbating the speed at which large parts of our planet currently inhabited become uninhabitable, and

the ability to feed (let alone sustain development) for nine billion people becomes almost impossible. The threats of global political instability, and possible war, and those of global warming are inextricably linked.

New challenges

The way in which these new realities are cashed out in the human lives that the church's pastoral care touches adds a new challenge to the confusions and community fragmentation identified 25 years ago: widespread anxiety and deficits in personal resilience. This has been most closely observed post-pandemic in children and young people,[5] whose education was disrupted in the context of an increasingly competitive market for university places and work, and whose social development was transformed by lockdowns and the prohibiting for long periods of face-to-face human interaction.[6] Infants lost the opportunity for early socialisation in pre-schools and toddler groups[7]

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[5] World Health Organization: https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health
accessed 20.7.2022. 'Emotional disorders are common among adolescents. Anxiety disorders (which may involve panic or excessive worry) are the most prevalent in this age group and are more common among older than among younger adolescents. It is estimated that 3.6% of 10-14 year-olds and 4.6% of 15-19 year-olds experience an anxiety disorder. Depression is estimated to occur among 1.1% of adolescents aged 10-14 years, and 2.8% of 15-19-year-olds. Depression and anxiety share some of the same symptoms, including rapid and unexpected changes in mood.'

[6] University of Nottingham report, *Child and adolescent mental health in a post-lockdown world. A ticking time bomb?*
https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/vision/vision-child-adolescent-mental-health-post-lockdown accessed 20.7.2022. 'Data collected since the start of the pandemic demonstrates incontrovertibly that the overwhelming harm to young people has been to their mental health. **Half** of young people aged 16-25 report deteriorating mental health, with **1 in 4** feeling 'unable to cope' and the number likely to have clinically significant mental health problems has increased from 1 in 9 in 2017 to 1 in 6 in 2020 after the first English lockdown – that's 5 children in a class of 30 now likely to need clinical support.'

[7] Scottish NHS report, *Babies in Lockdown*.
https://www.pmhn.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Babies-in-Lockdown-Main-Report-FINAL-VERSION-1.pdf accessed 20.7.2022. 'There

(or even with grandparents and other family members), and this was replicated in both primary education and non-statutory contexts such as church children's work, and in teenage years for secondary schooling and both organised and impromptu social settings. The impact of this over two years or so is yet to be fully grasped, but already children and young people record higher levels of anxiety and depression associated with interrupted development.

Quite apart from this interruption, the ubiquity of social media, and a widespread shaming culture amongst teenagers and young adults, adds to the levels of anxiety and depression among this age group. Peer group pressures have always been present amongst adolescents, but the ways in which pressure is applied unmediated by actual personal encounters — and applied in much wider groups of young people — has created a culture of anxiety and self-hatred quite apart from the impacts of the pandemic.

Associated with this is a new form of puritanism, centred not around the old sins of sexual incontinence or profligacy, but new ills such as transphobia and racism. Just as in the seventeenth century there was a censorship around certain issues or manners of expression, now that censorship is a described as 'cancel culture', with those transgressing finding their academic careers destroyed, publications removed from reading lists and publishers withdrawing support for new books from them. Former feminist rebels are perceived to be transgressive transphobes when they question the validity of some aspects of the struggle for trans sexual rights (such as the demand for women-only public lavatories, changing rooms or hospital wards.) This new intolerance of ideologies that are deemed 'evil' (and some, like racism, most certainly are) is accompanied by a poverty of resilience to ideas

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is a complex interplay between parental anxiety and distress and infant experiences and behaviour. Whilst the data does not tell us what has caused the changes, the findings are very concerning and do not augur well for child development,' 25.

that might be offensive, giving rise to trigger warnings for literature that contains descriptions of violence or of ideologies that we now find offensive. Even the Christian scriptures are subject to these, with religious studies students warned that the gospels contain disturbing accounts of executions (crucifixion). At the heart of these developments lies the debate about acceptable limits to freedom of expression and freedom of speech — hard-won freedoms that stand as a bulwark against totalitarianism, and are under threat even in a society like Britain's, with its much-vaunted 'tolerance' of difference, both on university campuses and in legislation (a forthcoming and wide-ranging police bill poses limits to public demonstrations).

In this culture teenagers find themselves assaulted verbally on social media if they do not fit in, have ready access to websites that glamorise suicide, with girls troubled by relationships with boys who have been exposed to the fantasies of pornography from early teens, and who have come to believe that sexual relationships must be conducted in those violent and demeaning ways.

The most profound cost-of-living crisis in decades generates similar anxiety disorders amongst adults of working age who fear that their financial circumstances are unsustainable, and also many older people on fixed pensions (although with a government commitment to raising the state pension and many other schemes index-linked, perhaps this age group will be the least affected by this crisis.)

If in the 1950s and 1960s an expectation of global nuclear war was present (children in schools did exercises for a nuclear attack, even if most likely wholly ineffectual, and adults were mostly aware of the possibility of a nuclear war, especially surrounding the Cuba Missile Crisis of 1962), by 1998 when I wrote *Care in a Confused Climate*, that dread had receded among the general population (even if continued by those campaigning for nuclear disarmament.) The collapse of the Soviet empire, and before China had risen to its current ascendency, the anticipation that civilisation would be obliterated by a nuclear war was no longer a source of existential angst. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, and the veiled threats to NATO by Putin that he could use nuclear weapons if Russia's existence was at stake, has

added the possibility — if still most unlikely — of this threat to the consciousness of many people.

In July 2022 Sir Stephen Lovegrove, the United Kingdom's national security advisor, argued that the world's superpowers, armed with nuclear weapons, understood each other better during the Cold War than now, and a break down in communication meant that the risk of an accidental escalation to full nuclear conflict was at its highest since the 1980s. 'The Cold War's two monolithic blocks of the USSR and NATO, though not without alarming bumps, were able to reach a shared understanding of doctrine that is today absent. Doctrine is opaque in Moscow and Beijing, let alone Pyongyang or Tehran.'[8] New weapons systems, notably hypersonic missiles, significantly shorten the time available to respond with restraint to accidents (of which there have been over 30 reported since 1945) rather than an aggressive response of missile launches, and brings an accidental start much closer, together with an uncertainty whether the older doctrines of mutually-assured destruction still deliver the peace that has, by and large, prevailed for the past 75 years. 'The reality ... is that current structures alone will not deliver what we need a modern arms control system to achieve.'[9]

The most recent analysis of the global impacts of full nuclear war suggest that by far the greater death toll comes from the crop failures and subsequent starvation of those who survive the immediate impact. Any nation deliberately initiating a nuclear strike almost certainly consigns its own population to oblivion, and 5 billion deaths would result in the ensuing nuclear winter.[10] This significantly raises the impacts, but perhaps reduces the likelihood of such a catastrophic event.

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[8] Sir Stephen Lovegrove in a speech to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, reported in *The Times*, 28 July 2022, 1-2.
[9] *idem.*
[10] Analysis by Prof Alan Robock, Rutgers University, New Jersey, reported in *The Times*, 16 August 2022, 19.

Of far greater awareness is the unfolding climate disaster,[11] already present in increasing drought in the tropics, as elsewhere; melting of ice caps and glaciers; increased potency in storms; and most recently, a devastating heat wave across Europe in the summer of 2022 with its associated damage by wildfires. The rather anodyne 'climate change' is more properly called a climate emergency or crisis, and its impacts are already widely felt and almost universally attributed to human activity over the past two hundred years (to the extent that a new geological era has been recognised, replacing the Holocene with the Anthropocene.) The inability of nation states to implement the changes to human activity, and the worsening crisis to a looming 'point of no return', brings its own levels of guilt and anxiety.[12]

All in all, then, a new, third challenge must be added to the two I identified 25 years ago (those being a fluidity in ethics and truth, and a fragmentation in community). Human society is both afflicted by higher levels of anxiety and mental ill health, and has a welcomed increased readiness to be open about it, than in the 1990s, together with, perhaps, a reduction in the resilience of individuals to withstand the pressures that generate mental illness. It is commonplace to speak of a 'snowflake' culture, with its trigger warnings and wellbeing centres, but it represents very real increases in the levels of mental ill health among all generations (except, perhaps, the oldest) and especially amongst adolescents and young adults. Later we will explore a fifth task of pastoral care (or perhaps a refocusing of the existing one designated in *Care in a Confused Climate* as 'healing the wounded soul') that responds to this pervasive anxiety in society.

However, there is another challenge that must be added (and therefore a sixth task in response) and that is the way in which identity politics,

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[11] References to this are too numerous to be especially helpful, but note the IPCC *AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2022*, and its predecessors. https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/ and the Summary for Policymakers, https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM.pdf

[12] See, for instance, Michael S. Northcott, *A Political Theology of Climate Change* (London: SPCK, 2014); and *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007).

especially racial justice and issues in human sexuality, have come to replace older ways in which people framed their identity around class and political affiliation. That older framing was already present at the start of the twentieth century, and was dominant after the First World War, dividing people into socialist, communist, conservative and liberal. By the last quarter of the twentieth century, this was already breaking down (and *Care in a Confused Climate* was written in the aftermath of Tony Blair's 1997 ascendency with New Labour that blurred some of those categories) and then throughout the long period of Conservative Government from Prime Ministers Cameron, through May and Johnson, older political divisions have been replaced, most significantly by Brexit, but also by issues and legislation around identity (most notably the availability of Civil Partnerships and Equal Marriage, and more recently, legislation and debates around transexuality), environmental issues and the legacy of the slave trade in monuments, plaques and statues.

Especially amongst teenagers and young adults, the issues of collective or state control of industry versus privatisation, the extent of union rights or a defence strategy that embraced or rejected the nuclear deterrent, that preoccupied my generation in the 1970s and 80s have been almost wholly replaced by ones of justice for racial minorities and the combatting of racism (Black Lives Matter being only the most obvious of these), the protection of the environment (for instance, the advocacy of direct action, a policy also advocated by an older generation more likely to support Extinction Rebellion) and the rights of trans people (the rights of the gay and lesbian community perceived to be almost wholly enshrined in law and recognised in society.) Those issues were peripheral to mainstream political identity half a century ago, but for the younger generation have become central.[13]

The church has often been slow to respond to those challenges, or even recognise their significance, even if, often, it is now

[13] cf. Liz Marsh, 'Climate Crisis: "Grief, Anger and Hope as I look to the Future"', and Anika Matthews, 'The Relevance of Mental Health for the Faith of Young People' in *Young, Woke and Christian: Words from a Missing Generation* edited by Victoria Turner (London: SCM, 2022).

disproportionately obsessed by them. The more conservative element finds itself in profound disagreement with wider society about the issues of human sexuality that secular society has largely resolved the issue in favour of a liberal and affirming polity. Meanwhile, the more liberal mainstream has adopted wider society's acceptance (not always because of a reflexive endorsement of a prevailing cultural milieu, but in part through a deep theological review of an historic ideology, akin to its similar endorsement of the ministry and leadership of women resulting from an engagement with feminism.) The arguments within the churches are bitter and acrimonious.

This sixth task of pastoral care is, then, a response to the questions of individual identity that both connects with those parts of the wider public that have now resolved the matter in favour of accepting the validity of faithful, monogamous same sex relationships, and, equally important, finding ways to disagree within the churches in ways that do not fracture irrevocably the unity of the church. This is both a question of ecumenical practices, and of disagreeing well.

Preliminary Summary

So, to summarise thus far, the range of challenges that pastoral care is called to respond to 25 years after *Care in a Confused Climate* was written has grown from the original postmodern ethical fluidity and confusion over truth claims, and the accompanying fragmentation of society — to which the responsive tasks were building community, creating relational health, healing the wounded soul and nurturing and sustaining faith — to embrace two new challenges: widespread anxiety accompanied by other aspects of mental health in a more uncertain world and the replacement of a largely class-based identity with one that is absorbed with issues of personal identity, especially of race and sexuality. The response to those two new challenges is our concern for the remainder of this paper.

New Tasks: 1. Nurturing Wellbeing

The church in which I am a member in Bicester has called a Baptist minister, Helen, to be a community minister for the new housing

development on a former Army base, Graven Hill, to the west of the town. Here most of the development is not provided by a major house builder, as is the case for other developments around Bicester in recent years — Bure Park (completed in 2008), Kingsmere (continuing in 2022), Elmbrook (a continuing eco-village) and newer developments that infill some of the gaps — but by self-builders. It has been the subject of Kevin McCloud's 'Grand Designs' television series, where, in passing Helen's manse was heard to describe it as 'the vicar's house.' Finding ways to build a sense of community out of these entrepreneurs has been hard work, and Helen has developed a toddler group, a community garden and a community choir, but perhaps most significantly, a wellbeing cafe ministry adopting a model developed by Baptist minister, Ruth Rice, as Renew Wellbeing.[14] Here is a place where it is 'OK not to be OK.' It is a response to high levels of anxiety on the estate, not just for all the reasons that any self-builder might encounter, especially during a pandemic — shortages of just about everything and runaway budgets —but for reasons of socially vulnerable people placed in social housing without an appropriate infrastructure nearby — schools, shops, public transport and so forth. These will come later, but meanwhile social isolation is a major bane of the estate. Cafe 103 is a response to this challenge.

Finding ways to support the anxious and depressed lies close to the original task of 'healing the wounded soul', but assumes a whole new level of significance. Other tasks help — having supportive relationships and a sense of community — but there is something quite particular about the challenge of high levels of anxiety, grounded not just in the particularities of a new environment, but in the existential threats of a climate emergency that sees English summer temperatures top 40C (as I write this) with an attendant risk of wildfires and the potential loss of property (especially if you have invested much of your life in building your 'grand design'), nuclear conflict and a cost-of-living crisis that comprises inflation-busting

[14] See Ruth Rice, *Slow Down, Show up and Pray* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2021).

increases in energy and fuel prices, knocking on to general inflation exacerbated by a European conflict that threatens global food security.

Listening skills, quiet accompaniment, befriending, meditative craft activities and coffee, tea and cake are simple but effective responses. The more challenging, but equally necessary, response is for the church and its pastors to think theologically about this crisis, or at least engage with the work of John Swinton[15], and Chris Cook[16] regarding mental health, and, for instance, Norman Wirzba[17] or Ruth Valerio[18] regarding the climate emergency.

New Tasks 2: Enabling Good Disagreement.

In 1998 when, during my first sabbatical, I wrote *Care in a Confused Climate*, I was still minister of the Bunyan Baptist Church in Stevenage and part-time chaplain at the Lister Hospital in town. Within a year I had been appointed the Baptist Union's General Superintendent for its Central Area (we were commonly called 'the Area Supers' by churches and ministers), leaving the local pastorate for some fifteen years until I took up pastoral charge once again in 2015 in Abingdon. Determined see what 'the new boy' was made of, the Baptist Union's General Secretary, David Coffey, and its Assistant General Secretary, Myra Blyth, invited me to chair a new working group to explore how the Union might respond to the growing concern over an appropriate response to questions of same sex relationships.[19] Building on an

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[15] John Swinton, *Finding Jesus in the Storm. The Spiritual Lives of Christians with Mental Health Challenges* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020); John Swinton and David Willows (eds.) *The Spiritual Dimension of Pastoral Care: Practical Theology in a Multi-disciplinary Context* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000).
[16] Christopher C. H. Cook and Isabelle Hamley (eds.), *The Bible and Mental Health. Towards a Biblical Theology of Mental Health* (London: SCM, 2020).
[17] Norman Wirzba, *This Sacred Life. Humanity's Place in a Wounded World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).
[18] Ruth Valerio, *Saying Yes to Life*. The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent Book 2020 (London: SPCK, 2019).
[19] For an account of history of Baptists and sexuality see Andy Goodliff, 'Baptists and Same-Sex Relationships: A Brief History', *Baptist Ministers' Journal* 353 (January 2022): 9-19.

earlier, but broader, work, *Making Moral Choices*,[20] we developed a training tool designed to equip Baptists to make informed decisions about human sexuality — a tool I still use from time to time when invited to assist a church in exploring those questions. It did not define a Baptist response to the question of the theological legitimacy and ethical validity of same sex relationships, but remained true to Baptist ecclesiological principles that these are matters primarily for discernment for the local church. It becomes an issue for wider relationships when churches differ, of course, and find co-existence within an ecclesial body such as an Association or Union of churches increasingly difficult. However, in order to discern effectively, a congregation needed to be informed adequately, and this lay at the core of the material we produced, and the process it employed in its utilisation, not least in enabling different voices to be heard as they interpreted the scriptures. It requires a generosity of spirit and an ability to listen well that has more recently been notable for its absence in national Baptist conversations, despite the very best efforts of its national leadership.

More recently, as General Secretary of Churches Together in England (CTE), I led that ecumenical instrument through a period of profound disagreement over a question of human sexuality that arose to the day exactly of my induction into the role. Over four years we wrestled with not only the substantive issue — could a Quaker woman nominated to the CTE Presidency exercise that office while marrying her same-sex partner — but also how to disagree well, for disagree we surely did. Again, careful listening, generous responses and a willingness to prioritise the unity of the body over sectarian differences, led to a maintenance of the unity of the ecumenical instrument, and in four years of debate and prayerful enquiry we did not lose a single one of the 50 or so churches in membership with CTE, but continued to see a steady trickle of new member churches, most of which would have a doctrinal position unfavourable to an affirming polity.

[20] *Making Moral Choices* (Didcot: Baptist Union, 2000).

An urgent task of the churches in their pastoral care strategies is, therefore, to find ways of disagreeing well in a cultural context of fierce and acrimonious conflicts over questions of identity, fuelled by the anonymity of social media, which encourages the previously unacceptability of rudeness and threat, and lacks necessary grace. It is a matter of serious missional witness that the church disagrees in better ways than it has hitherto, or that characterise the wider culture. Developing a theology and good practice of disagreement has become a focus for a number of churches, including the Church of England. Christopher Landau explored this in the context of New Testament ethics in *A Theology of Disagreement*[21] (essentially his Oxford DPhil thesis), while Justin Welby has drawn on his professional experience of reconciliation in *The Power of Reconciliation*,[22] written for the 2022 Lambeth Conference, riven by disagreement over the Provinces of the Anglican Communion's differing policies for same sex marriage. Welby claims that 'identity is not made by defining ourselves against others in hatred and by seeking domination: the habits of reconciliation and peacebuilding liberate our identities, preserve our autonomy, increase our safety and show us the common good.'[23]

All of that presupposes that there would need to be a thoroughly revised section on same-sex relationships within chapter 9 of *Care in a Confused Climate* (pp. 167–171), and derived from the now extensive literature on this area of theology, ethics and pastoral practice (generating a publishing small cottage industry in the process).[24]

Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis of the challenges arising from moral choices, and the accompanying need to find ways to maintain unity while acknowledging unresolved (perhaps

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[21] Christopher Landau, *A Theology of Disagreement. New Testament Ethics for Ecclesial Conflicts* (London: SCM Press, 2021).
[22] Justin Welby, *The Power of Reconciliation* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2022).
[23] Welby, *The Power of Reconciliation*, 10.
[24] The literature is too extensive to do any more than suggest Robert Song, *Covenant and Calling* (London: SCM, 2014); Adrian Thatcher, *Redeeming Gender* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016); and the materials associated with the Church of England's *Living in Love and Faithfulness* process.

irreconcilable) disagreements has been work undertaken by the World Council of Churches. Moral Discernment in the Churches (April 2013) was followed by the publication in 2021 of Faith and Order Paper No. 235, *Churches and Moral Discernment III. Facilitating Dialogue to Build Koinonia*,[25] as well as its preceding two volumes.[26] This 'describes patterns in the complex negotiations between continuity and change as churches respond to moral challenges' in an attempt to understand the significance of the 'conscience of the church' in moral discernment processes.

New Tasks 3. Enabling a More Robust and Honest Engagement with Suffering.

A third refocussing that I think is essential is a consistent move away from pastoral ministry, or pastoral care, as a kind of mere 'hand holding' that avoids the truths about the human condition. Gentle and empathic accompaniment of those who face life's challenges is not a bad place to start, but it is an inadequate place to say the final word. The pandemic, if nothing else, should have reminded Western people who think they are immortal (or at least, have a right to a long life of *four* score and ten years) that life is fragile and unpredictable, and prone to throwing us 'curved balls.' Yes, pastoral care must be empathic, and sensitive — pastoral care by insensitive pastors tends to trample on wounds, rather than tend them — but it should also tell the truth about the challenges people face. The rise in anxiety levels is in part because of a false perception that life must be easy, anaesthetized against all discomfort and devoid of offence. Sometimes the most effective pastoral care is to offend the recipient into the perspective that accords more closely with the gospel truth that in this world we shall have tribulation. An initial reading of the conversation between Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon in *The Christian Century* in June

[25] WCC. Faith and Order Paper No. 235, *Churches and Moral Discernment III. Facilitating Dialogue to Build Koinonia*, April 2021.
[26] WCC. Faith and Order Papers No. 228, *Churches and Moral Discernment I. Learning from Traditions*, January 2021; and No. 229, *Churches and Moral Discernment II. Learning from History,* January 2021.

2021[27] might sound like the theological equivalent to Statler and Waldorf on the Muppet Show, but a closer reading exposes their concern for pastoral care that is ready to challenge the postmodern emphasis on rights, and especially that for an easy life, because of the gospel's honesty about the costs of discipleship. They insist that,

> The only good to come from this pandemic is to rescue some pastors by giving their congregations loss and pain worthy of the ministrations of the church, rather than the bourgeois concerns that have come to preoccupy the White mainline church in recent years.

They continue,

> **Hauerwas:** Woundedness is part of the price we pay for being human. Because human affliction has no end, in a world that doesn't have time for the wounded, the pastor who leads with, 'Where does it hurt?' risks being overwhelmed by people and their pain.
>
> **Willimon:** Maybe we preachers ought to be up-front that woundedness is the predictable price we pay for being sent on outrageous assignments by Jesus.
>
> **Hauerwas:** Contemporary pastoral care's troubles began when seminary faculties divided the pastoral and the prophetic tasks of the church. Both truth telling and caregiving are necessary for the church to be the church. To produce people who care for the dying in a culture like ours becomes a prophetic act. Christians who tell the truth require care because violence is the way the world responds to the truth of Christ.

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[27] Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, 'The Dangers of Providing Pastoral Care', *Christian Century* July 27, 2021. https://www.christiancentury.org/article/interview/dangers-providing-pastoral-care.

> If in a hundred years Christians are identified as people who do not kill their children or the elderly, we will have done well in our pastoral care.

This might reflect an overly-therapeutised American culture of pastoral care (of which I was critical in *Care in a Confused Climate*) but it does have some resonance for the practice here in Britain, too. Living with challenge, hardship and a lack of rights is, after all, what we signed up for when we were baptised.

In addition to those major changes, any revision of *Care in a Confused Climate* would want to engage more fully with some of those pastoral theologians who have enriched the discipline since the late 1980s, such as Neil Pembroke,[28] Stephen Pattison[29] and the series of books associate with the Bible Society and Cardiff University.[30]

In 1998 I should have noted the observation by Helmut Thielicke, 'The gospel must be preached afresh and told in new ways to each generation, since each generation has its own unique questions. The gospel must constantly be forwarded to a new address, because the recipient is repeatedly changing his place of address.'[31] A summary of this article might be 'pastoral care has to be re-imagined afresh for every generation, since each generation has its own crises and needs. It

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[28] Neil Pembroke, *The Art of Listening*, (London: T & T Clark, 2002); *Pastoral Care in Worship. Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); *Divine Therapeia. Theocentric Therapeutic Preaching* (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2013); and *Foundations of Pastoral Counselling* (London: SCM, 2017).

[29] For instance, Stephen Pattison, *The Challenge of Practical Theology* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2007) and *Saving Face. Enfacement, Shame, Theology* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2013), which owes a great deal to my own *With Unveiled Face* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005).

[30] Paul Ballard and Stephen Holmes (eds.), *The Bible in Pastoral Practice* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005); Gordon Oliver, *Holy Bible, Human Bible: Questions Pastoral Practice Must Ask* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006).

[31] Helmut Thielicke, *How Modern Should Theology Be?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1969).

must be exercised at a new address, because the recipients are repeatedly changing their world.' At its core, pastoral care has not changed in two thousand years, but in its particularities, the mid-twenty-first century is a world away from the late twentieth in which context *Care in a Confused Climate* was written. New challenges call for new foci, new tasks and new priorities. If the heart of pastoral care for much of the history of the church was learning how to die well, replaced in modernity and post-modernity by learning how to live well, then it might just be that we are entering an era when the focus is not just how to live well, but also how to avoid dying badly. The anxieties about global war, climate change, and just the cost-of-living call for new skills and understanding in pastoral care, while handling the disputes that rage out of control so easily requires many to be the non-anxious presence in the room, and enable conversation rather than cancelation. Discovering those skills can only strengthen our witness to the Christ who said 'do not worry about your life' (Matt. 6:25) and inspired the Apostle Paul to write, 'lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called . . . making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' (Eph. 4:1, 3.)

Note on Contributor

Paul Goodliff was most recently General Secretary of Churches Together in England (2018-2022). In addition to *Care in a Confused Climate*, he is the author of *With Unveiled Face* (2005), *Ministry, Sacrament and Representation* (2010) and *Shaped for Service* (2017).

Enacting Theology: Reflections on Pedagogy, Pastoral Virtue, and Mission

Rob Ellis

Introduction and Biographical Note

Appropriately enough for one who has come to specialise in research on theology, religion and sport,[1] I look back on my ministerial life as a game of two halves. For twenty years from 1981 my primary focus was the local church, and I served as pastor first in the ecumenical context of suburban Milton Keynes, and then in Bristol in a more urban environment and a predominantly travelling-in congregation. Here I also began teaching Christian doctrine at Bristol Baptist College, and I was actively involved in the Association. In 2001 I was appointed Fellow in Pastoral Theology to direct the ministerial training programme at Regent's Park College. Each of the Baptist Colleges is unique and Regent's particularity arises from its wider identity, functioning as a small Oxford college with undergraduate and graduate students from across the humanities and social sciences, and no faith test applied for those not preparing for ministry. It makes for a stimulating place in which to study theology and prepare for ministry. In 2007 I was appointed Principal and alongside involvement in ministerial formation took on oversight of the college as a whole, retiring in autumn 2021. Alongside these roles I served the wider Baptist family in various ways. It is from this life of ministry that I have been invited to share these following reflections. I do so with some misgivings, but in the hope that they might be helpful for some and begin a conversation with others.

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[1] See for example, Robert Ellis, *The Games People Play: Theology, Religion, and Sport* (Eugene OR: Wipe & Stock, 2014).

Patterns of ministerial formation in a changing world: learning to 'do theology'

1. 1981 - 2021: All change?

I was a student at Regent's too, and in my final year I was a student representative on the panel which appointed the College's first full-time tutor in pastoral theology, Bruce Keble.[2] Bruce soon initiated the congregation-based programme which became known as Regent's In-Pastorate Training — or, perhaps unfortunately, RIPT for short. Northern Baptist College had led the way in this model of training under Michael Taylor.[3] To those whose experience of College had been the more traditional full-time residential pattern, I detected that there was always something a bit suspect about this pattern. As Nigel Wright notes regarding the time of his entry into Spurgeon's as a student:

> The assumption at the time tended towards the belief, as it did in other spheres such as teaching, that academic achievement was the primary preparation needed for ministry. More practical or denominational subjects took place outside the degree or diploma curriculum and were accompanied by regular availability for preaching, by assistantships in local churches, summer pastorates or, in later parts of the course, student pastorates.[4]

I suppose we might summarise this approach as saying: 'learn your theology, and pick the rest up as you go: if some occasional opportunities can be provided, all the better.'

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2 See Anthony Clarke and Paul Fiddes, *Dissenting Spirit: A history of Regent's Park College 1752-2017* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2017), 169-73.
3 See Anthony Clarke, 'How Did We End Up Here? Theological Education as Ministerial Formation in the British Baptist Colleges', *Baptist Quarterly* 46.2 (2015), 69-97. Cf. Anthony Clarke, *Forming Ministers or Training Leaders? An Exploration of Practice in Theological Colleges* (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2021), 61-62.
4 Nigel G. Wright, 'Theology and Ministerial Formation in the Bristol and Baptist Traditions,' *Journal of Baptist Theology in Context* 5:1, 29.

When I returned to College in 2001, I very quickly came to see that both patterns of College course had much to be said for them and could be shaped to the circumstances and needs of individuals. Students on the RIPT course not only learnt their theology but often proved to be able theologians. In the twenty years following my leaving College in 1981 and my return as a tutor in 2001 the congregation-based course had gone from not existing at all to having over half of the ministerial students in College. Wind on another twenty years to my retirement and the congregation-based students accounted for almost the whole cohort. Similar things were happening in the other Colleges. This change was not due to any policy actively pursued. The original move towards congregation-based training was a happy co-incidence of the pedagogical and practical. As candidates for ministry got older and were often married with families — and their spouses often had careers of their own — moving everyone to Oxford, or wherever, became both less practical and desirable. But the rationale for the switch was often given in pedagogical terms. The old complaint — and it had been frequently made — that College courses were too theoretical met new trends in adult and professional education. These trends had been influenced by understandings of education which understood that the adult student did not arrive as an empty vessel to be filled with knowledge, but as a person bringing much knowledge and life (and church) experience to course. Drawing on Paulo Freire and David Kolb,[5] there was a stress on reflecting on experience and bringing experience into dialogue with new knowledge.

These trends shaped the way in which ministerial education developed in the last decades of the twentieth century, but further changes accelerated things in the last twenty years or so. In particular, new policies on higher education fees have had a dramatic effect. Fees were first introduced at a relatively modest level, but once the principal of students paying towards their course was established the level of fees rose sharply in stages to the current levels. Given that our Baptist family has no tradition of central support for ministerial education, preferring to allow the colleges themselves, 'sending' churches and candidates to bear these costs, these big rises have proved devastating. None of our Colleges has the endowments that would be required to

[5] Both of whom pay their own part in the development of Liberationist theologies and education strategies.

meet these costs themselves and local churches and candidates rarely have the resources to fund tuition fees of £9,000 per annum per student. Mature students presenting for ministry have frequently already taken a university course and are therefore ineligible for student loan funding. All of these developments place an enormous strain on all parties in the process. Some of the financial pressures caused by fees and living costs are mitigated on the congregational pattern because courses can be pursued registered part-time and placement churches often pay a stipend to the minister-in-training, but the question of how we finance the preparation of ministers is an urgent one for us today. There is a further gender issue, because women generally find it harder to access any type of preparation for ministry for a range of reasons, and financial pressures have not made any of this easier.[6]

Congregation-based training is clearly the most appropriate way forward for most of those who present as candidates for ministry today. Learning both in College and 'on the job' should be a fruitful experience and means that the head-learning and hands-on reality go side by side. The challenge in College is to make sure that they really are simultaneous, the one always informing the other. As in other spheres of 'profesisonal education' these days, a key idea is that of developing 'reflective practioners' — people who think about what they are doing and where they are doing it, and constantly relate theory and practice in helpful ways. Local churches play a key role in this, and at its best the partnership between College and church is enlivening for all parties and helps shape fine ministers. It has been exciting to be involved in this.

As Wright notes,[7] this shift to congregation-based training is both old and new. It echoes some of the earliest practices in the way English Baptists prepared candidates for ministry and also much current practice in professional education. But the financial pressures have tended to drive everyone into this pattern. Even those for whom it may not be the best mode — and there are some for whom the same academic courses work best when followed in a more residential and

[6] On some of this we await the outcomes of Project Violet, which is being hosted by the Centre of Baptist Studies in Regent's.
[7] Wright, 'Theology and Ministerial Formation', 30-31.

academic setting. The financial pressures have remained: for colleges, churches, candidates. There is a growing body of anecdotal evidence shared among regional minsters and Colleges that in days of lower denominational 'brand loyalty' we are losing a significant number of promising candidates for ministry to the Anglicans in particular because they will have their fees paid and a maintenance allowance too. The Anglicans have also finally moved towards a more congregational style of ministerial education meaning that the pedagogical advantages of that pattern are retained for those for whom they are both attractive and appropriate.

In the wake of the Baptist Union's Ignite Report (2015), ministerial education once again became a hot topic in some quarters. From time to time rumours about how 'they' wanted to 'close down a College' would circulate in denominational circles, and some have argued that spreading our students across five Colleges is a poor use of resources. Quite apart from the legal nightmare that would be involved in pooling the separate and autonomous charities together, this also flies in the face of the greater regionalisation that we have come to see in our Colleges. Whereas a couple of generations ago, each of the Colleges had their own distinct *academic* identities this is now less clearcut. The Colleges serve geographical areas at least as much as attracting women and men of a particular stamp. The Ignite Report also led some to ask whether our ministers 'needed' formal academic qualifications. Could this be the way out of the financial problems - slash the fees being paid to the Universities to whom our Colleges relate? But this is a short-sighted suggestion. It would save *some* money but the cost of delivering high-quality ministerial education would still be significant and have to be borne by someone. If candidates are as now contributing to their own costs, is it not appropriate to award a qualification which is recognised and of use beyond our Baptist family? Candidates often enter ministry later than once they did, and some go to other callings before they retire: pastoral ministry is no longer a lifetime calling. In that, as in other ways, we reflect our wider world. The degree or diploma earned while preparing for ministry has a currency beyond our churches, and so gives 'value' to candidates. A university award also gives greater confidence in the rigour of the process - no other serious profession would think it appropriate to cut corners in shaping its practitioners, and supervision of its qualifications by an external body offers an important guarantee of quality.

The real challenge emerging from Ignite and other signs of the times is how the Baptist family will *together* give genuine financial support to those preparing for ministry in our churches. For too long it has been done on a wing and prayer. If we value ministry, somehow we have to find a way of expressing that value through the way we allocate resources.

2. Learning to 'do theology' rather than learning 'about' theology

Another consequence of the Colleges' taking seriously what candidates bring on to the course in terms of knowledge and experience has been a desire to shape the course to broaden and develop individuals. This now sometimes feels like an apparently endless personalisation of courses, with increased admin and support — it was a sign, largely unnoticed, of the care which Colleges take of individuals. It is in this context that College staff can be heard sighing when another helpful suggestion is made as to what 'ought to be in the course.' The curriculum is already full to bursting with a mix of academic and practical theological foci. If we had unlimited time all sorts of other things could be added — except students generally want to get on and get through, and those holding purse strings want things done as cheaply and quickly as possible, and so it goes. Initiatives in Continuing Ministerial development might help - but it will be important for proper engagement to be secured to that this to does not become an exercise in ticking boxes.

Something always has to give, and when congregation-based students inevitably have less time in College to participate in lectures and classes and (for those so inclined at any rate!) to read and reflect, it is impossible to 'cover' as much ground in terms of the 'traditional' theological disciplines as used to be the case when students undertook full-time residential courses. For instance, biblical languages, always fragile for those of us who aren't natural linguists, are now typically marginalised. This might save congregations from some pseudo-scholarly sermonic diversions, but it is important also to recognise the cost of such marginalisation in terms of a general lowering of biblical theological literacy. Students might also spend less time on patristics and be more selective in all kinds of ways compared to their collegiate forbears. For critics who consider theological education to have been

delivered in some elitist space divorced from church-world reality, such changes might be considered overdue but it is important to recognise what is happening and what its consequences may be.

But even as we recognise this we have to balance it with two other critical observations. First, that the congregation-based pattern may *tend* to produce students with a narrower and/or shallower theological grounding, but it certainly still does produce some very good theologians. Knowing *about* theology is not necessarily the same as being able to *do* it well. Knowing about it may and does help, but there is more to it than that. Some students without the 'advantage' of residential theological education produce work of very high quality and go on to be fine local practical theologians[8] (which is what ministers are, looked at from one perspective at least) and sometimes excellent postgraduate work. What we need in ministry are not, ultimately, people who *know about* theology, but people who can *do* it. 'Doing theology' is a relatively new expression.[9] It does not refer so much either to what Paul was doing when he wrote to the Romans, or what Karl Barth was doing dictating his *Church Dogmatics* to his even more long-suffering amanuensis. Doing theology is what a local minister does when she works with her deacons and church members on the appropriate mission response to their locality; it is what she does when she preaches to them; it is what they all do together under her leadership when they exercise pastoral care; and so on.

Theology is not something that belongs in libraries but is something *enacted*. This is inevitable. One doesn't decide whether or not to enact a theology: one does it come what may. The question is whether that theology is both well-formed and enacted well. Every time a minister does a pastoral visit (or doesn't), every time they preach a sermon, every time they do a turn at the food bank, every time they enter a school for assembly or governors' meetings, every time they have coffee with a person seeking faith or meaning — or something, every

[8] For more on practical theology as local see Rob Ellis, 'Ministry and Wine' in *Ministry in Conversation: Essays in Honour of Paul Goodliff* edited by Andy Goodliff and John Colwell (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 98-120.
[9] See 'Help us to search for the truth: Baptists and Doing Theology' in *Gathering Disciples: Essays in Honor of Christopher J. Ellis* edited by Myra Blyth and Andy Goodliff (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 1-24.

time they drop in on the youth club, every time . . . well, you get the picture. It's all theology: enacted theology. Charles Gerkin articulates it well:

> Pastors enact their theological presuppositions to the extent that their manner of relating as well as their verbal responses to their congregants remains true to their theology of church and ministry. Pastoral theology is thus an enacted theology, an expression of what the pastor believes about the human condition, the Christian gospel, and the purpose of the church and its ministry as those beliefs are translated into caring pastoral response.
>
> Viewed from the perspective of theology, the pastor's care of a congregation involves the pastor in leading the people in the construction and enactment of a "local theology".[10]

This leads neatly on to the second observation. Students on a congregation-based course tend to approach theological education differently. There can be a crude instrumentalism about this which is damaging: 'what good will this do me when the chips are down in a church meeting, or when I need to preach on mission?' Approaching the raw material of the theological tradition in an overly functional way can lead to an overly superficial engagement with it, and to a skimping on the hard graft required to form a theology well. But coming to this tradition from the warp and weft of church leadership does mean that theological writing is tested not just against canons of logic and biblical consistency, but also against reality. At its best this process results in a kind of two-way illumination, where Barth makes more sense because we come to him from a church meeting or a mission initiative or pastoral encounter or some sermon preparation. Those experiences might put Barth on his mettle, might lead us to be critical. But that mission initiative might also take on a new dimension when we have interacted with Scripture, scholars, and other practitioners, and marshalled our reflections in a disciplined way. The theological tradition gets freshly and critically probed when we come to it from

[10] Charles V. Gerkin, *An Introduction to Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 121. I first read this book in my final months in pastorate. It enabled me to make greater sense of what I been doing for the previous twenty years.

the warp and weft, but that warp and weft also gets new light shed upon it which could lead not just to new understandings but also to new practices. While we have *lost* something in the shift from full-time residential to congregation-based we have also gained something, and that something is very valuable.

Changing vocabularies

1. From training to formation: 'the greatest and hardest preparation is within'

So far I have used the vocabulary of ministerial training and formation rather fluidly, and often fallen back on 'theological education,' of the vaguer 'preparation for ministry,' hoping they might sound more neutral. It would be useful to ponder some changes in vocabulary now, and their significance. One of the biggest changes in my forty plus years as first a 'consumer' and then a 'deliverer' of preparation for ministry is in the key vocabulary used to describe the process. The change is significant. Back in the 1970s we spoke about *ministerial training*; now the language of *ministerial formation* predominates. At Regent's we continued to speak of 'training and formation' believing that both elements remain significant.

After the Enlightenment concerns of ministry came to be regarded as a separate task of theology coming after biblical studies, church history, dogmatics and ethics. 'Practical theology' (as it was sometimes called) applied for the life of the church the findings of other theological disciplines. To this understanding, practical theology wasn't very *theological* but almost entirely *practical*. This may account for the nervousness which some still feel about the term. Practical theology was oratorical technique, voice production, counselling skills, writing a good Christmas publicity card, winsomely presenting the faith, and even organising a filing system. This severing of practical theology from theology has been very damaging.

American theologian Edward Farley convincingly accounts for the way in which theology became a predominantly book-bound subject, less a reflection on the lived life of faith and more a study of abstracted ideas. He describes how theology as a discipline became distanced from ministry, detecting three separate 'narrowing' movements — in

the middle ages through fresh conceptual rigour; then the post-Enlightenment specialisation of theological disciplines to which I have just referred; and then finally the separation of the practice of ministry into its own department.[11] Farley observes that, just as Old Testament study suffered by being remote from practice, so too 'too practical theology' suffered from being insufficiently rooted in more general theological study. As a result, it has tended to mirror the concerns of wider society in the way it has configured the ministerial task, rather than reflecting and developing gospel concerns. This mirroring has taken three typical forms according to Farley — and we don't have to look far in contemporary ministry to see them all quite clearly: the shaping of ministry by models that are bureaucratic, moralistic, or therapeutic. So ministry either becomes (i) managerial; or, (ii) moral life guidance in terms of 'shoulds' and 'oughts'; or (iii) it serves individual fulfilment.

All three may have their place in ministry but when they become the prevailing shaper of it something has been displaced — and that something, says Farley, is gospel. Practical theology cannot afford to be remote from study of the Christian tradition in scripture, history and doctrine; and in turn, that study becomes unhelpfully and unhealthily abstracted when it is not connected to ministry. His work shows the dangers of separating theology and practice; and therefore making the practice of ministry *untheological* (insofar as anything *can* be untheological!), but merely technical and pragmatic — a matter of the proverbial 'hints and tips.'

The language of training suggests that the process of preparation for ministry is largely about picking up certain skills. It is rather ironic then, given that a couple of generations ago when students prepared for ministry on predominantly academic residential courses, that the term 'training' was used. In the old days, sermon class involved a brutal kind of training, and it could sometimes be delivered through score-settling. There was also voice production. In College the 'training' element was narrowly focused! Student pastorates allowed exposure to a greater range of pastoral experience, but even this was very limited with little scope for the development of the kind of leadership and

[11] Edward Farley, *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional thoughts on the Church's Ministry* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 3-5.

pastoral skills necessary in being the minister of a local church. And there was none of the rigorous *theological* reflection on such practice which is now commonplace. So even when we called it 'training,' there was actually very little real training involved.[12]

When a student is involved as sole or co-pastor in a local church the scope for training 'on the job' is much greater. 'We learn from our mistakes' is a common axiom, and it is far better to make mistakes in a constructive and supportive environment where one's very title ('minister in *training*' — that word again — HMRC nudged us towards this nomenclature) draws everyone's attention to the fact we are not the finished article. Ministers never are the finished article, of course; a characteristic they share with everyone else. But here the title helps us to remember that.

The recent Baptist Union emphasis on competencies for ministry echoes this old interest in training and suggests to me that we were not entirely wrong to continue to use the language. Ministers need to be competent, they need to be able to do certain things to a certain standard. Of course, the list of things we might draw up in which they need to be competent might change from time to time — in the '70s we had 'good practice,' but we didn't have Safeguarding as we now know it; we expected good communication skills but didn't require facility with a PowerPoint presentation. The Baptist Union's list of competencies articulates the current consensus pretty well and I am not going to rehearse them again here.[13]

But ministries rarely fail, or at any rate don't always fail, because ministers are incompetent. Ministers can be incompetent, of course,

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[12] For a personal reflection on the terminology of training in relation to ministry, contrasting it with her experience of training as a nurse, see Lisa Kerry, 'A Profession of Faith: Professionalism in Baptist Ministry,' in *Journal of Baptist Theology in Context,* 5.1, 47-63. She remarks (53) that 'I looked back on my NHS experience of "see one, do one, teach one" as halcyon days compared with the way I was being formed as a Baptist minister,' and (59) 'My own [ministerial] training was an inconsistent experience of some exemplary and some non-existent and even damaging supervision.'

[13] See 'The Marks of Ministry,' online at https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=244139&view=browser, especially 8-9.

but incompetence is rarely a cause of catastrophe. Ministries usually fail because ministers make poor decisions, find it difficult to make good relationships, and because they become morally disoriented. I should quickly add that not all failures in ministry are the fault of ministers. Other church members can behave poorly, exhibit destructive pathologies, and so on. But here we are concerned with ministers. As well as being capable in what they do, ministers should be 'the right kind of people.'

Your alarm bells may now be ringing — mine would be. It has sometimes been alleged that one College or another seeks to produce a certain kind of minister. Some will be as familiar with the stereotypes. I am not talking about that kind of shaping here. By speaking of the 'right kind of person' I am not suggesting that ministers should be vetted with regards to specific theological positions or their ability to preach alliterative sermons or such like. Rather I am suggesting that ministers need to be the kind of people who can listen as well as they can communicate; who can sympathetically and sensitively learn the story of a congregation before becoming part of it and seeking to direct it; who understand that, as Eugene Peterson reminds us, the first task of a pastor is to direct the congregation to God. Not to the pastor, not to themselves; not even, first, to the world; but to God.

Peterson scathingly observes that ministry is the easiest profession to 'fake,'

> By adopting a reverential demeanour, cultivating a stained-glass voice, slipping occasional words like "eschatology" into conversation and *heilsgeschichte* into our discourse - not often enough actually to confuse people but enough to keep them aware that our habitual train of thought is a cut above the pew level – we are trusted, without any questions asked, as stewards of the mysteries.[14]

He jokes about setting up a lucrative training school with four basic courses for would-be pastors. The first module is Creative Plagiarism in which he would direct trainees to 'a wide range of excellent and

[14] Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 6.

inspirational talks, show you how to alter them just enough to obscure their origins, and get your reputation for wit and wisdom.' The second module focuses on voice control for prayer and counselling and trains students in a holy intonation to project an 'unmistakable aura of sanctity.' The third module is efficient office management because 'there is nothing parishioners admire more in their pastors than the ability to run a tight shop administratively,' returning calls and answering correspondence promptly and having just the right amount of desk clutter. The final module teaches the ability to protect an image of being busy and sought-after. An annual refresher course would keep people up to the mark. He remarks that he had joked about this for years before realising that such institutions actually existed and were advertising for students.[15]

We might find this caricature disturbing or just dismiss it as misleading. But it alerts us to several issues. First to Peterson's main point about the danger (perhaps a beguiling danger) of ministers hiding behind a pretence of some kind. Being in ministry is inhabiting a role. We have to do things which sometimes do not come naturally to us but which come with the role we are undertaking. But it must never be an 'act,' something that isn't real. The dividing line between the 'role' and the 'act' is sometimes wafer thin, and it requires a good deal of self-awareness to navigate it properly. But Peterson also serves indirectly to underline the point about competence not being enough. We can appear to be a good communicator, and to be efficient and perhaps even 'spiritual' (though that is a word which requires an essay all to itself), and we are not rumbled because we might apparently be providing what is needed — or at any rate, *wanted*.

In terms of preparation for ministry the way that this has come to be spoken of is by using the shorthand of 'formation.' Speaking of training, of the acquisition of skills and technique, is broadly speaking to focus on the extrinsic; language of formation focuses on the intrinsic. Formation addresses on the person 'inside.' This was well understood by the Puritan poet and pastor George Herbert, who wrote the first English language pastoral theology in the early seventeenth century. Speaking of those in the universities preparing for pastoral

[15] Peterson, *Working*, 7-8.

charge he spoke of the importance of the knowledge of Scripture and other theological disciplines. Their

> aim and labour must be not only to get knowledge, but to subdue and mortifie all lusts and affections; and not to think, that when they have read the fathers, or Schoolmen, a Minister is made, and the thing done. *The greatest and hardest preparation is within* . . .[16]

Herbert stresses over and over again that the pastor must experience for himself that which he communicates to others, and that such communication springs from this personal experience within. They should preach on 'moving and ravishing' texts[17] so that the knowledge nourished in the hearts and minds of their hearers '*drive it to practice*'[18] — because the point of experiencing God's grace is to live within it and from it. Theology is enacted, not abstract, and it springs from within, from a God-ravished heart.

While knowing scripture must be the 'chief and top'[19] of a pastor's priorities (given priority in the curriculum, we might say), Herbert's attitude to it is reminiscent of the more meditative or contemplative *lectio divina* readings of monastic communities, and the end of scripture reading is prayer and living. Knowledge as to be transformative: it should 'inflame', and then drive to practice, 'turning it to reformation of life.'[20]

Herbert's pastor has integrity, he 'is himself where ever he is,'[21] and this concern and others is echoed by a second seventeenth century Puritan divine, Richard Baxter. Baxter is (or has been) well known in Baptist circles for saying that 'All churches either rise or fall as the ministry doth rise or fall.' Some of his other observations are less

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[16] George Herbert, *A Priest to the Temple or The Country Parson* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2003), 5. Italics mine. Herbert died in 1633 and this work was published posthumously about twenty years later.
[17] Herbert, *Parson*, 15.
[18] Herbert, *Parson*, 44. Italics mine.
[19] Herbert, *Parson*, 8.
[20] Herbert, *Parson*, 44.
[21] Herbert, *Parson*, 39.

frequently repeated. Baxter believed that before any congregation can be reformed, first the pastor must be reformed. The 'reformed' in Baxter's title is a neat play on words, not only indicating a location in a particular reformation tradition, but also highlighting the need for every pastor to undergo continual re-conversion. His language is vivid and arresting:

> Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine... lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours. It much hindereth our work, when other men are all the week long contradicting to poor people in private, that which we have been speaking to them from the Word of God in public . . . ; but it will much more hinder your work, if you contradict yourselves, and if your actions give your tongue the lie, and if you build up an hour or two with your mouths, and all the week after pull down with your hands! . . . One proud, surly, lordly word, one needless contention, one covetous action, may cut the throat of many a sermon, and blast the fruit of all that you have been doing.[22]

Both of these writers stand in the long line of pastoral theologians stretching back to the church fathers who emphasise the importance of the *person* of the pastor, who speak of the ways in which character and technical skill must be congruent with one another. The tradition speaks of the vital importance of an inner experience of grace, constantly examined and nurtured and expressed imperfectly but graciously (how else can grace be expressed?). Baxter's opening chapter is tellingly entitled 'The Oversight of Ourselves.' While personal responsibility is certainly required along with self-discipline and self-awareness, we might question whether we are fully able to oversee ourselves. Rather, in an echo of an historic Baptist phrase, we walk with one another in mutual oversight and care. It is when we become accountable to one another that we become properly able to 'oversee ourselves.' The process of preparation for ministry involves and nurtures this sense of being-ourselves-among-others.

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[22] Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (London: SCM, 1956 [1651]), 1.1.3.

It is these kind of concerns that language of formation addresses, and there have been moves more recently to align this theological strand with the philosophical tradition of virtue ethics which is commonly traced back to Aristotle, and which the Catholic tradition has long engaged. Alasdair McIntyre is considered to be the leading philosopher-advocate,[23] and his work and its impact has been picked up by theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas and our own John Colwell.[24] For Hauerwas, the Christian life is a journey of growth in love, faith and hope, and the individual Christian embarks upon this journey not alone but in and with a community of individuals similarly embarked - and indeed with the community itself seeking such growth. These three main theological virtues are worked out in less grand sounding ones: such as kindness, patience, joy, simplicity, generosity, and humility. As part of Christ's body we come to be more Christ-like, and the emphasis is upon Christian character rather than moral or spiritual rules.[25] For Hauerwas this reflects his view on theology and ethics more generally: 'So much modern theology continues to presuppose the deistic assumption that the first step in theology is to convince modern people that God exists. Christian theology should be preoccupied with the more biblical question, what *kind* of God exists?'[26] In a similar way, we should be asking what kind of person is a Christian, and what kind of community is a church? The answer is always shaped by God's revelation in Christ.

Paul Goodliff's *Shaped for Service*[27] views preparation for ministry through the less of virtue ethics, and the Baptist Union's 'Marks of Ministry' Document explicitly locates its approach within this tradition[28] speaking of the 'characteristics, capabilities and motivations we wish to observe and affirm' in those who are ministers.

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[23] Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame, 1961)
[24] See John E. Colwell, *Living the Christian Story: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).
[25] Hauerwas' position is summed up in an accessible way in Stanley Hauerwas, *The Character of Virtue: Letters to a Godson* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018).
[26] Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Alien*s (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 24.
[27] Paul Goodliff, *Shaped for Service: Ministerial Formation and Virtue Ethics* (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2017).
[28] 'Marks of Ministry,' 2.

Two caveats must be made at this point. The first is to observe that, if assessing technical competence — the skill in preaching, the technique of pastoral care, the effectiveness of evangelism — is difficult, then assessing someone's *character* is even more so. Increasingly we find ourselves in an environment where things have to be measured, and the criteria for measuring spelled out. When I was a student many years ago, one 'felt' what counted as 2:1 or first class work, but now marking schemes enumerate exactly what is required. But measuring character is extremely difficult and defies easy measuring — and my experience of tools which purport to do this with objectivity is mixed.

Second, there is a balance to be struck even here between formation and training, character and competence. Many of the practices we adopt and make routine may be internalised and can be formative — in positive or negative ways. As the Marks of Ministry paper reminds us 'Measuring ministry in this way [i.e. by character] does not of course diminish the need for ministers to develop certain competencies as being is not disconnected from doing.'[29] But it is more than that: adopting good practice in pastoral relationships, internalising the need for proper boundaries, respect for others, skills in listening, etc, shape who we are as people. There may not be an absolute distinction between character and competence.

There is a particular virtue required of ministers, and it is sometimes overlooked. The reason why I didn't hone my PowerPoint skills as a ministerial student was - of course - that PowerPoint had not been invented. I bought my first computer in 1986, an Amstrad PCW. A few years later a PC followed. At some point in the 1990s a colleague at Trinity College in Bristol talked me through the process of getting an email address so that I could access College communications - and they could contact me and send me documents. A dial-up modem sat on my desk, often uncooperatively. We take our digital world so much for granted that it is salutary to remember how recent it all is. The first iPhone was launched in 2007, now smartphones are ubiquitous. Much more recently in the coronavirus pandemic we have become accustomed to zoom and other online ways of meeting when we cannot be physically together. This scrappy timeline is instructive

[29] 'Marks of Ministry', 2.

because it acts as an indicator of the rapid pace of cultural and technological change we are experiencing and cautions us against thinking that anyone can ever leave College with all the skills they are going to need for a lifetime in ministry. While it may be true to say that human nature remains the same as it did when I left College for my first pastorate in 1981, the world has changed dramatically in many ways. Some of those changes have affected the ways we tend to think and process information, the ways in which we interact, and the kind of expectations we have of one another and our world. They may not change human nature, but they change our cultural locatedness and general assumptions profoundly.

The idea that someone can prepare for ministry and have every necessary skill perfected on their College course is therefore ludicrous. Colleges will focus on basics and try to provide the learning environment which will help the student go on learning long after they have graduated. It will seek to cultivate an open and curious disposition, a willingness to work at problems, and a sense of where to go to find answers or commentary - and how to interrogate those sources in a critical way, rather than just swallowing them at face value. There is some training that is required and delivered; but Colleges also need to form students to be 'perpetual students' — not in the sense of always wanting to take another course, nor in the sense of never wanting to take on responsibility, but in the expectation that they do not know everything and they will have to keep working on the areas they do not know well. There is good reason to welcome recent BUGB initiatives in Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) which should nurture the virtue of openness and enquiry. Embodying this, of course, will make us aware that the more we know the more we realise that we do not know. *C'est la vie.*

2. From ministry to mission: God's mission 'creates a church as it goes on its way'

When I 'trained' for ministry all those years ago, the term 'ministry' was the one we used for what we were doing and preparing to do. 'Mission' tended to refer to evangelistic aspects of that ministry or what Home Mission and BMS engaged in. That's an oversimplification, but accurate enough for the contrast needed here. Now we are quite properly using language of mission and ministry to

talk about the being of the church and the work of the pastor. This is not simply a matter of semantics.

David Bosch's work on the theology of mission, published in 1991, both summed up the then current trends and gave the cause more impetus.[30] He quoted Kahler's axiom that 'mission is the mother of theology',[31] and his work gave missiology a theological credibility it had sometimes lacked in certain quarters. He analysed the differing understandings of mission operative certain parts of Scripture and in different periods of history to powerful effect. In placing mission at the heart of theology and of the life of the church he reminds us of the essentially outward-looking life of the Christian community. A key concept to which he draws our attention is that of the *missio dei* - the 'mission of God.' Tracing this expression back to Karl Barth, he notes its fundamentally Trinitarian basis - we are sent in mission as both the Son and the Spirit are sent too. Indeed, the Latin *missio*, from which we get our word mission, means send or sending. 'As the Father sent me, so I send you,' Jesus tells his disciples (Jn 20:21). An important part of this understanding is the recognition that God is a missionary God, so mission belongs to God and is not our project and or activity. Rather, we are caught up in the mission of God as we seek to live as Christ's people in the power of the Spirit. As Jürgen Moltmann puts it: 'It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfil in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church, *creating a church as it goes on its way*.'[32] When this quotation is used its final clause is often omitted, but it is vital. It is as the church is included in God's mission that it *becomes* the church. There is no church without such inclusion in the *missio dei*.

This sea-change in thinking about mission as with the origin and the sustaining force and focus of theology and church has quite properly affected the way we speak about ministry. Whatever happened in the

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[30] See Andy Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination: A Study of Baptist Institutional life in the 1990s* (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2021), especially chapters 3 & 4, for an account of this discussion amongst Baptists.
[31] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1991), 16.
[32] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 1977), 64. Italics mine.

past, pastors must now be prepared for *ministry and mission*. This is a theological requirement even before it is a practical necessity. There is an irony here: some complain that the church needs to move out of 'maintenance mode' and into 'missionary mode.' But often the motivation seems to be little more than maintenance after all - the needs of institutional decline driving the agenda and 'our' mission. Sometime the complaint is that we are in our 'pastoral mode' rather than missionary mode. Insofar as there is a temptation to settle for being the chaplain to a congregation and manage its seemly decline, there is something in this. But fundamentally the pastoral and missional are two sides of the same coin. All our pastoral work is finally missional. All our mission work must be pastoral. We embody and share the care of Christ. This care is so generous and unconditional that it cannot be contained within our Christian community but must spill over into the world.

Concluding remarks

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,[33] but the ways in which we respond faithfully to his call on our lives changes according to the circumstances in which we live. It is a moot question whether or not it would be preferable for every candidate for ministry to prepare via a residential programme in one of our Colleges. For the great majority of candidates now it is neither desirable nor possible. While there are certainly disadvantages and constraints that come with congregation-based training and formation, there are also real advantages too. One of these is the greater opportunity for students to learn to do theology, bringing the lived experience of ministry and mission into dialogue with Scripture and theological insights of various kinds, giving a coherence to their enacted theologies. Among the constraints will be the more limited time to engage with the theological sources and perhaps to graft at what Herbert called the 'hardest part,' the preparation of the person. The importance of the minister's Newly Accredited Ministry period and CMD beyond is difficult to underestimate. Our communities *become* church as they are caught up in God's mission and we need effective, able, and curious[34] ministers who

[33] Hebrews 13:8.
[34] Wright, 'Theology and Ministerial Formation', 44.

are pastor/missioner theologians to help us renew the life of our churches and denomination for and in God's mission. This presents a challenge to all of us in Baptists Together: candidates, churches, associations, Colleges and Union.

Note on Contributor:

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25 Years On: The Theological Turn at King's College London and the Renewal of Evangelical Baptist Theology in the UK

Stephen R. Holmes

Without wishing to dismiss in any way the important contributions of the other Baptist colleges, in the second half of the twentieth century, the self-consciously evangelical tradition amongst English Baptists in particular[1] was shaped by Spurgeon's College, and by the steady flow of accredited Baptist ministers who came through what was then London Bible College, and is now the London School of Theology. There is no doubt that there was a change, not uncontested, in this tradition, over the half-century.[2] I suppose that in various ways I am both a product of, and a late contributor to, that change, and offer reflections here on one significant contributor to it, the Research Institute in Systematic Theology ('RIST') at King's College, London, which began in 1988, and lasted in recognisable form until 2005, when, after Colin Gunton's death, Murray Rae and I both left King's, and there was a wholesale change of faculty in systematic theology. Here,

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[1] This reflection remains true, I think, but in more complex ways, for Wales and Scotland. Wales through the influence of BUGB churches, although the BUW has perhaps been more traditionally evangelical in recent decades, and Scotland through both the exchange of leaders (for example, Andrew Rollinson, coming from Spurgeon's to a denominational role and two significant pastorates in Scotland, or Lisa Holmes, now on the BUS national team, and trained first at LBC (as was) and then at Spurgeon's), and through the influence of English/Welsh writers and speakers on natively Scots Baptists.

[2] Anecdotally, I recall David Harper, then Area Superintendent of the Eastern Area of BUGB and chair of Spurgeon's College Council, comment (it would have been about 1997) on how pleased he was to see the change in the culture of Spurgeon's from his own days as a student when, as he memorably put it, the college was devoted to defending 'the credibility of Genesis and the edibility of Jonah'.

in the spirit of 25th anniversaries, I want to offer some reminiscences, and then to try to analyse what was driving the 'theological turn' at KCL in the 1990s, and how that affected British Baptist theology.[3]

Andy Goodliff has identified two theological traditions in late twentieth century British Baptist life. One took its inspiration from Leonard Champion's 1979 Baptist Historical Society lecture—'Evangelical Calvinism and the Structures of Baptist Church Life';[4] the other he identifies to some extent with Mainstream, and so with the renewal of evangelicalism in the UK associated with Clive Calver's leadership of the Evangelical Alliance and the rise of Spring Harvest.[5] There is not a simple relationship of Goodliff's second stream with the renewal of Baptist evangelical theology that RIST contributed to, but at least some of the same leaders are involved, and it is striking how Spurgeon's College, in particular, became almost solely staffed in theological areas by KCL graduates.

Goodliff identifies Nigel Wright as the key theologian in this stream;[6] Wright did his doctoral work at King's under the supervision of Colin Gunton, gaining his doctorate in 1994;[7] John Colwell similarly studied under Colin Gunton, being awarded his doctorate in 1985.[8] Graham Watts studied under Alan Torrance for his doctorate, awarded in 1998,[9] and was involved in Spurgeon's life in various ways even before he took a faculty role on Colwell's retirement. Peter Stevenson's KCL doctorate, also supervised by Alan Torrance and then Murray Rae, on

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[3] I am following up here a comment I made in my *Baptist Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2012), 58.
[4] Leonard Champion, 'Evangelical Calvinism and the Structures of Baptist Church Life', *Baptist Quarterly* 28 (1980), 196-208.
[5] Andy Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination: A Study of Baptist Institutional Life in the 1990s* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 24-44, 71-78.
[6] Goodliff, *Renewing a Modern Denomination*, 37-41.
[7] Published as *Disavowing Constantine: Mission, Church and the Social Order in the Theologies of John Howard Yoder and Jürgen Moltmann* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000).
[8] Published as *Actuality and Provisionality: Eternity and Election in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1989; Wipf & Stock, 2011).
[9] Published as *Revelation and the Spirit: A Comparative Study of the Relationship between the Doctrine of the Revelation and Pnuematology of the Theology of Eberhard Jüngel and Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

John McLeod Campbell was awarded 2001.[10] Wright, Colwell, and Stevenson were all teaching at Spurgeon's, and so those who came through that college, like the present writer, were inducted into the KCL school;[11] the same was true of students at London Bible College (now London School of Theology): Graham McFarlane, for example, also studied under Gunton, being awarded his PhD in 1990. I myself taught at Spurgeon's whilst working on my PhD, 1996-1999,[12] and remained involved at various levels, including being effectively 'first reserve' for any needed cover teaching in doctrine, until relocating to Scotland in 2005. I studied under Wright and Colwell, and later taught alongside them, and also Stevenson and Watts; to the extent that there was a 'KCL RIST' way of conceiving theology, it was so dominant as to be unchallenged in Spurgeon's between, say, 1990 and 2007.[13] This may well not have been a good thing in some respects, but it was a reality. I turn, then, to exploring the culture and commitments of the KCL Research Institute in Systematic Theology.

Theology at King's in the 1990s

Tuesday was postgraduate day at King's College London, at least for the theologians. Taking advantage of location and transport links, people would come from various distances and gather mid-morning in Seminar Room 2E for the RIST (Research Institute in Systematic Theology) seminar. Lunch together would follow for most, generally in what was effectively a student cafeteria, and then in the afternoon one of the PGT modules would happen, again, generally, in Room 2E—it

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[10] Published as *God in Our Nature: The Incarnational Theology of John McLeod Campbell* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

[11] We might also note another Spurgeon's link in Paul Goodliff, who trained at Spurgeon's, and would do an MTh with Gunton, 1990-1992. Gunton would write the Foreword to Goodliff's book *Care in a Confused Climate* (London: DLT, 1998). For a number of years Goodliff was a Research Associate Fellow at the College.

[12] Published as *God of Grace, God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).

[13] One other link that demonstrates the relationship between Gunton and Spurgeon's was that following Gunton's death in 2003, in 2007 Spurgeon's held a day conference on the theology of Gunton, with Colwell, myself, and also Robert Jenson and Douglas Knight speaking. See Lincoln Harvery (ed.), *The Theology of Colin Gunton* (London: T & T Clark, 2010).

would be Revelation and Reason, always, in the first semester; something else in the second. PGR students would take advantage of being in central London to visit libraries—King's own library, the University of London collection, perhaps for some the Dr Williams Library or the Evangelical Library—and of course the British Library, which surely still has a claim to be the best library in the world.

Seminar Room 2E was long, but narrow, with a low ceiling. A bunch of standard-issue MDF tables pushed together into a narrow conference space—two seats at each end, maybe eight or ten down each side—the seats were equally-standard issue plastic chairs, and more chairs lined the walls. It was in one of several town-houses on Surrey St that the College had purchased over the years and knocked together into what was rather grandly called 'The Chesham Building'. Access was a nightmare—Surrey St slopes up from the Embankment to the Strand, so none of the previously-separate buildings had matching floor levels, or corridors that met each other, and so odd little flights of three or four steps and sudden corners were a feature of every route. This was where we lived, back then (Theology and Religious Studies has done better since at King's).

King's had nicer spaces—the centre of the original building was symbolically the Great Hall on the ground floor, and above it the chapel—the former the sort of grand space you would expect from a Victorian monument to the establishment, the latter if anything even grander, in an 1840s Anglican style that hovered somewhere between supreme self-confidence and the sort of aggressive self-assertion that is used to mask despair. RIST ran a series of conferences that happened in those better spaces, and would end round a large table in the basement of an Italian restaurant, almost next door, with a waiter who had a trick of pretending to break your credit card, and Colin Gunton refusing to let anyone else see the prices on the wine list, but insisting on buying several bottles of Barolo for us all to share. Several times a year there would be a day-conference, generally on a Friday, that would happen in some middle space—a large and nicely-furnished room that however was in the second sub-basement, perhaps. The week-by-week life of the Institute, however, happened in Room 2E.

I first experienced that life as a new doctoral student in September 1996, it would be Colin Gunton in the right-hand chair at the head of

the table, that week's speaker to his left. Alan Torrance would be to the left of the speaker, the first of the side seats, and Douglas Farrow facing him. Brian Horne would be further down the table, as would at least some of Graham Stanton, Francis Watson, Douglas Campbell, or Eddie Adams from New Testament; Paul Helm and Martin Stone, philosophers of religion, were both regular attenders also. Michael Banner, once he had arrived at King's, was there. John Zizioulas had some sort of a deal bringing him to KCL for six weeks each year, and he would be there when around, of course. London being London, and Colin being Colin, others might be passing through, invited to stay with the Guntons, and present at the seminar. Then there would be the students—twenty or thirty of us, I guess.

I remained around that table on Tuesdays until moving to St Andrews in 2005. The staff changed—Alan Torrance left in 1999, and Murray Rae took his job; I took Doug Farrow's when he moved home to Canada. Michael Banner took the ethics chair. Colin died in 2003, and for a year Murray and I shared the task of chairing the sessions, before Oliver Davies arrived to take the chair and we both moved on.

Contra Wiles: A Context for Gunton's Thought

I start with this colour because, at the time, I think the self-narration of most of us involved in the RIST would have been as a consciously counter-cultural community. The community bit is easy to understand—but achieving it in a commuter university like King's took significant work, which Colin Gunton in particular gave himself to in all sorts of ways—the 'counter-cultural' bit is harder, but is again down to Gunton, who for most of his life felt he was an outsider—he would reflect on being in two deeply Anglican establishments, Oxford and then King's, as a convinced Dissenter. I cannot speak for the other Baptists noted above, but I discovered a significant set of shared concerns with Colin, growing from our shared congregationalist beliefs. Oxford mattered to Colin and the fact that he was excluded from taking any of the established chairs there (which until very recently—some years after his death—were reserved for Anglican clerics) was, I think, a lasting hurt, although not one he spoke about. In

1992, he was the first non-Anglican to give the Bampton lectures,[14] an invitation which required a change in the rules; I know a little of the, frankly ridiculous, arguments made to oppose this, and I suspect he knew a lot more. (Paul Fiddes was the second nonconformist Bampton lecturer, in 2005.)

At King's this sense of outsidership became tied up with a self-consciously daring approach to renewing the discipline of systematic theology. Colin encouraged us to feel that doing theology the way we were doing it at King's was somehow subversive—as we shall see, it certainly was when RIST began, in 1988, but arguably we kept that self-narration going longer than was necessary. I think for Colin himself something important changed when John Webster took the Lady Margaret Chair in Oxford and immediately contacted him saying he wanted to be a part of what we were doing—as I noted before, Oxford mattered to him, and so this was the vindication of his programme that he was able to trust. That said, it is worth exploring the earlier good reasons for the sense of outsidership.

The 1990 Bampton lectures, immediately preceding Gunton's, were given by Alister McGrath, and were entitled 'The Genesis of Doctrine: a Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism'.[15] 'Doctrinal criticism' is not a concept that has lasted; the phrase was coined, I think, by G.F. Woods, and was made popular by Maurice Wiles, who held the Regius Chair in Oxford for over two decades and chaired the Church of England's Doctrinal Commission. (It is worth noting that both Woods and Wiles had held the chair in Christian doctrine at King's College London that Colin Gunton was later to occupy.[16]) Wiles's significance at the time might be gauged by how often he was attacked: Fergus Kerr published a paper entitled 'Surviving Wiles'; Stuart Hall—the patrologist, not the founder of cultural studies—

[14] Published as *The One, the Three, and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[15] Published as Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).
[16] Woods from 1965-67 and Wiles from 1967-70.

offered us the rather wonderfully titled 'Exploratory Wiles: Or, How to Beat About the Burning Bush'.[17]

The idea of doctrinal criticism was fairly simple: the sort of historical criticism that had for a century been applied to the study of the Scriptures ought to be applied also to the study of the history of doctrine—for Wiles, trained as a classical English patrologist, this meant we needed to look hard at the conciliar doctrines of Trinity and Christology, and recognise that they are historically-contingent products of murky and often disreputable politics. There are several things to say about this:

First, I don't suppose it comes as a surprise to many contemporary readers. We have benefitted over the past two decades from a true renaissance in patristics, perhaps particularly in the English-speaking world. Lewis Ayres; Michel Barnes; Morwenna Ludlow; Rowan Williams—the list could go on for some time. Because of their labours, we know this history, and know it well. I simply do not know the extent to which this generation were inspired by Wiles's programme, but it is noticeable that their carrying out of the historical work Wiles demanded has generally led them to affirm, rather than deny, the viability of traditional doctrines. Wiles's *JTS* review of Ayres's book on Nicaea suggests that he was, shall we say, less than happy with this.[18]

Second, it is worth looking carefully at Wiles's criticism in that review. He is appreciative of Ayres's historical work, and sees it as an important 'step in the right direction', despite some minor quibbles over terminology and the like; he is insistent, however, that it is only a step: 'plenty more detailed work on ecclesiastical links, personal ties, and political influences … will be needed.' He is more critical of Ayres's identification of a proper attentiveness to mystery as the core of pro-Nicene theologies post-360, which he presents as a strictly historical matter; I am not sure the history is on his side here, given

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[17] Fergus Kerr, 'Surviving Wiles: From Dogmatic Theology to Doctrinal Criticism' *New Blackfriars* 57 (1976), 388-92; Stuart G. Hall, 'Exploratory Wiles: Or, How to Beat About the Burning Bush', *King's Theological Review* II (1979), 38-42.

[18] Maurice Wiles, 'Review of Lewis Ayres's *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology*', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 56 (2005), 670-75.

Eunomius's insistence on the univocity of theological language, and the centrality of writings *contra Eunomiam* to the Cappadocian development and triumph, but when patrologists of the status of Wiles and Ayres disagree, I am certainly not competent to rule. He is most critical, however, of the final chapter of Ayres's book, where he turns to consider then-contemporary trinitarian theology, and to critique the claims made by social trinitarians that their novel doctrine was in any way a recovery of the Cappadocians.

Wiles agrees with Ayres's critical work here, but is troubled by his positive reconstruction. Ayres ends with a reflection, perhaps inspired by Fergus Kerr's response to Wiles (cited above), on the possibilities of doing good history under the authority of the magisterium. Faith demands that we believe in some sense in the providential preservation of the truth, and of the Church, and that we seek to see the guiding hand of the Spirit in the narratives of history—perhaps particularly in the fourth century, when the Christian doctrine of God was being determined. It is in principle impossible to discern these realities adequately before the eschaton, however, and so the Christian historian knows that she is unable to prove the truth which she confesses, but must strive to fail as adequately as she can. Ayres responds directly to Wiles's earlier work at the end of the book, suggesting that, fundamentally, their disagreement is over the nature and function of Scripture; in his review Wiles concurs with this, but comments that his 'own reading of Scripture in the light of modern biblical scholarship' leads him to continue to regard his own rejection of any claim of unified doctrinal teachings in the canon, or of any claim about the inevitability of the doctrinal development that led to Nicaea, as sound.

Third, then, we need to come back to what Wiles called 'modern biblical scholarship'. Wiles's own training was perhaps at the apogee (in England; it had come earlier in Germany) of a recognisably 'modern' self-confidence amongst biblical critics; phrases such as 'the assured results of recent scholarship' are used a lot less in Biblical studies now than they were in the 1930s—consider, for representative example, C.H. Dodd's calm assurance in his 1936 inaugural lecture from the Norris-Hulse chair in Cambridge: reviewing the work of the discipline to 1900, he comments '[t]he Synoptic Problem was, in principle, solved, the Pauline Corpus, within limits, fixed, and the

general succession of the New Testament literature determined on lines which all subsequent study assumes as a basis … The major problems had in a measure been solved.'[19] This was not even something Dodd was arguing for; it was a claim he assumed his audience would recognise and assent to. Further, Dodd similarly outlines a detailed methodological proposal for the discipline, composed of five successive stages, which he similarly assumes will be recognised by, and uncontroversial to, his audience.

When Wiles imagines a practice of doctrinal criticism, it seems clear that this is the model he wants to emulate. The task should be strictly historical, first of all laying a groundwork of facts—which works bearing Athanasius's name are authentic? Which are spurious?—and then a set of genealogies and relationships—when did he write *De Incarnatione*? Does it precede the Arian crisis, or is the lack of controversial material somehow artful, and if so why? The task of interpretation follows, but it is again a strictly historical task: we may seek to expound Athanasius's account of the Father-Son relationship, but any move from what Athanasius thought to what we should think is ruled out. It is when Ayres starts on this work in his final chapter that Wiles feels he has to part company decisively.[20]

Now, as I have indicated, Wiles's account of Biblical scholarship was already anachronistic in the latter stages of his own career, and I will consider the significance of that later, but this gives a fairly vivid picture of what was being taught as theology in Oxford when Colin Gunton was a student there. In Wiles's hands, doctrinal criticism was just devastating to historic orthodoxy—as early biblical criticism had been in the first half of the nineteenth century; John Macquarrie published an evaluation of Wiles's legacy, and even he suggested that,

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[19] C.H. Dodd, '*The Present Task in New Testament Studies: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered in the Divinity School on Tuesday 2 June 1936* (Cambridge: CUP, 1936), p. 10.

[20] Wiles made this same point again in reviewing Gunton's *Yesterday and Today*: '[h]e rightly insists that if we are to understand the New Testament documents we must recognise that their picture of Jesus is theological through and through … [b]ut this important truth is always in danger of slipping over into the much bigger claim, that as Christians we have to share that view.' Maurice Wiles, 'Review of Gunton, *Yesterday and Today*', *New Blackfriars* 65 (1984), 44-5.

in rejecting the possibility of any account of incarnation being intelligible or credible, Wiles had gone too far.[21]

Gunton's own doctoral thesis, published as *Becoming and Being*, shows both the influence of this context, and his view of an alternative possibility. The book is subtitled *The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*.[22] I assume Barth needs no introduction, but Hartshorne might: he was a leading figure in the process theology movement. Gunton assumes in his thesis, and in the subsequent book, that what the process theologians called 'classical theism'—their lumping together of doctrines of God from Augustine to, say, Edwards—is untenable, and that we therefore need a new way forward. The book, that is, simply assumes that doctrinal criticism has worked, at least on theology proper; an untenable pagan hellenistic idea of deity as stasis must be discarded. Hartshorne provides one route to completely revise the doctrine of God, a route which, because it was far more responsible to (then-)contemporary philosophy (Whitehead's process thought) than to orthodoxy, would have been found amenable by Wiles. Was there another way?

Well, Mansfield, the historically-Congregationalist college in Oxford where Gunton studied, hired a new dean in 1965, a youngish American Lutheran called Robert Jenson. He was working on constructive possibilities for theological renewal, again assuming the success of (something like) doctrinal criticism, but he found inspiration for a more positive new theology in Barth, and the developments of Barth offered by an emerging German generation including virtual unknowns (then!) like Moltmann and Pannenberg. *God after God* was his book doing this work.[23] He took Colin on as a doctoral student, and I suppose that he pointed Colin to the possibilities of Barth.

Jenson moved back to the USA in 1968, and Colin finished his DPhil under the supervision of Macquarrie, but it was Jenson's vision of a reconstructed theology that was more, not less, attentive to the gospel

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[21] John Macquarrie, 'Review Article: The Theological Legacy of Maurice Wiles' *Anglican Theological Review* 88 (2006), 597-616.
[22] It was published as *Becoming and Being* in 1978 by Oxford University Press.
[23] R.W. Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

narrative that inspired Colin, and his relationship with Jenson was the one that lasted. Colin took a lectureship in philosophy at King's two years into his doctoral work in 1969, which delayed, inevitably, the completion of the DPhil till 1973. He was eleven years in the philosophy department at King's before moving to Theology and Religious Studies.

His first book after the publication of his doctorate was *Yesterday and Today: A Study in Continuities in Christology*.[24] Read against the context of doctrinal criticism, two features stand out. The first is the continued acceptance that doctrinal criticism had been successful in certain ways: Gunton does not want to 'reverse' the development of thought, but to 'take it further'; indeed, '[o]nly by deepening the possibilities inherent in Christology for our understanding of God can theology by truly radical'—the echoes of Barth, and indeed of what Jenson found in Barth, are clear.[25] The second is a further stage of pushing back—the most famous quotation from the book, and indeed the preliminary statement of the book's central thesis, is about needing to say the same things in at least some of the same words as the Fathers.[26]

Gunton embarked on a programme of retrieval, looking for neglected figures in the tradition who offered alternatives that avoided the errors he still believed doctrinal criticism had identified. Owen and Irving offered possibilities for Christology; Andrew Walker introduced him to Coleridge, who offered a way of reading the Trinity as a useful and generative doctrine. The conclusions of the doctrinal critics were to be accepted; the inherited theological consensus was indeed untenable; but reconstruction would come from more authentic, if neglected, strands of the tradition.

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[24] Colin E. Gunton, *Yesterday and Today: A Study in Continuities in Christology* (London: DLT, 1983; SPCK 1997[2]); page references below are to the second edition.

[25] Gunton, *Yesterday and Today*, 8.

[26] 'The argument of this book is … that it is very difficult to maintain a real continuity with earlier ages unless we can *at least in some ways* affirm their words as our words…' Gunton, *Yesterday and Today*, 5; emphasis original. This thesis is explicitly framed as a response to doctrinal criticism, referenced on the previous page.

In the mid-1980s, the British Council of Churches set up a doctrinal commission looking at what they termed 'the forgotten Trinity'; Gunton was the URC representative, and there he met, I think for the first time, a Greek cleric and theologian who had recently taken a post in New College, Edinburgh, John Zizioulas. It is not difficult, given the analysis above, to see why Gunton was simply captivated by Zizioulas's account of a remarkably generative Cappadocian trinitarianism that had been lost—if Zizioulas was right, then what doctrinal criticism had successfully demolished was a Western, Augustinian, distortion of Christian doctrine; reconstruction and renewal could indeed come through reaching into a more authentic tradition of Cappadocian trinitarianism.

I have attempted to show how reading Gunton's theological programme as a response to doctrinal criticism, as exemplified by the work of Maurice Wiles; this might seem surprising given how infrequently Gunton refers to either the programme or to Wiles himself.[27] I note, first, that Gunton does not spend much time disagreeing with any of his contemporaries in his published work, and so this observation should not carry too much weight. Second, there is one paragraph-length treatment of Wiles in *The Barth Lectures*, a posthumous transcript of one of Gunton's lecture courses at King's. There, Wiles is dismissed and one who misunderstood the Fathers and, following Schleiermacher, recast Christology in particular in fundamentally untheological terms, with Jesus as nothing more than the ideal human being.[28] Third, I have noted above that *Yesterday and Today* is presented as a response to doctrinal criticism, even if it gives little space to discussing the movement. Fourth, and most significantly, I have suggested that several aspects of Gunton's research trajectory—from his choice of PhD subject, through his fascination with marginal figures, to his wholehearted embrace of Zizioulas's account of the Cappadocians—can all be explained, at least in part, as ways of

[27] Gunton refers to Wiles once in passing in the first edition of *Becoming and Being* (and twice more in the added 'Epilogue' in the second edition; there is one reference in *Yesterday and Today*; and perhaps three or four others across the rest of his works.

[28] Colin E. Gunton, *The Barth Lectures* edited by Paul H. Brazier (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 188-9. Recent scholarship on Schleiermacher would dispute this characterisation of his Christology, it should be noted.

responding to this theological movement, which was dominant in the Oxford of his youth. For Gunton, to do constructive Christian theology in dialogue with the tradition was an ongoing act of rebellion, almost—even if he never quite lost the sense that doctrinal criticism had succeeded, and so that some sort of reconstruction was necessary.

Gunton and Schwöbel: The Intellectual Basis of RIST

Christoph Schwöbel arrived at King's in 1986, and in 1988 he and Colin founded the RIST together, with Christoph offering the original idea and taking the lead to begin with. Schwöbel's doctoral work had been on Martin Rade; his second book, a collection of essays, but with a much stronger connecting theme than is usual in such collections, was *God: Action and Revelation*, published in 1992;[29] it showed a commitment to the doctrine of the trinity as the organising principle of theology, and Christoph's ongoing interest in relationality as a key theme. This was close enough, but also different enough, to what Gunton was getting from Zizioulas that their dialogue was rich and generative. The themes of the first RIST publications—personhood and then trinity—were unsurprising, and set a context, a basic theological methodology, that, along with Gunton and Schwöbel's shared debt to Barth, would be characteristic of RIST throughout its life.

The younger generation who came in—Alan Torrance; Michael Banner; Murray Rae; Douglas Farrow; me, to just name people on faculty—were not trained in doctrinal criticism, and so perhaps did not have any personal sense of rebellion, but, as I noted above, there was an ongoing sense of challenging norms. I was taught doctrine at Spurgeon's by two of Gunton's earlier doctoral students, Nigel Wright and John Colwell, and so it never occurred to me to doubt, let alone to defend, the thought that Coleridge—the subject of my Masters' dissertation—and Edwards—the subject of my PhD—might be interesting and useful dialogue partners. Even John Webster, half a generation younger than Gunton, and fighting some of the same battles, was committed more to retrieval than to reconstruction: he assumed that the basic theological problem was that an intellectually-

[29] Christoph Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992).

serious and still-credible tradition had been lost, not that the broad Christian (or Western) tradition had simply gone wrong.

Barth held these two approaches in careful tension, which may be why so many in this history found him so generative. On the one hand, he was not only committed to dialogue with the tradition, but frankly confessed in his introduction to Heppe's compendium that he did not know how to appropriate Scripture without first travelling back through the tradition to it.[30] On the other, he saw a fatal error that needed correction, essentially in a doctrine of God that did not pay enough attention to the person of Jesus Christ.

Webster's own journey to the project of theological retrieval of course came through engaging with post-liberalism and the Yale School. That was not a big part of the King's project—we waved at Lindbeck when we talked method, and name-checked Frei when appropriate, but Cambridge was the place where they were studied in the UK in the 1990s. There was, however, a significant shared move, the problematisation of the Enlightenment. There was no question at RIST throughout its life that the Enlightenment was a problem to be overcome, not a triumph to be celebrated (another of Colin's early books was entitled *Enlightenment and Alienation*[31]). This was perhaps bequeathed by Jenson, who wrote a book on Edwards before that was fashionable because 'Edwards knew what to make of the great eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and America and its church are the nation and the church the Enlightenment made.'[32] If criticism of the Enlightenment has become common, not least because of the present pervasiveness of feminist and postcolonial approaches across the humanities, we need to remember that it was once not so universal.

Post-liberalism, as the name makes clear, begins with the experienced failure of liberalism. The core of the liberal project, in theology at least,

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[30] Karl Barth, 'Introduction' in Heinrich Heppe (tr. G.T. Thomson), *Reformed Dogmatics: Set out and illustrated from the sources* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950).
[31] Colin E. Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation: An Essay towards a Trinitarian Theology* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1985).
[32] Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 3.

might be understood as confidence in the individual scholar's judgement: I throw off the shackles of tradition, and communal norms, to pursue my own intellectual project, and thus I find truth. This is classically Enlightened of course—we only need to think of the resonant descriptions: 'a prejudice against prejudice'; 'sapere aude!'—and so post-liberalism is similarly a rejection of 'the Enlightenment project' (to use a very King's phrase that is not without its own problems) as self-evidently good. The post-liberal response was to replace the judgement of the individual with the judgement of the community. The precise community that was to be trusted was, to be honest, generally ill-defined by the key post-liberal thinkers. Lindbeck's commitment to ecumenism suggested it was the whole Church of Jesus Christ, but—as far as I know, and I am certainly not an expert—he never really specified the limits of this; Mormons, in or out? Self-proclaimed Arians, like Wiles? And so on. Hauerwas implied, in his focus on the performance of liturgy, that the local congregation was the decisive community, but if liturgy is authorised beyond the local congregation, this also becomes difficult. Generally there is an appeal to 'the Christian tradition' which remains rather ill-defined.

I am very happy to be told that it is because I share his denominational affiliation, but, for me, the best account of a post-liberal theology is Curtis Freeman's *Contesting Catholicity*.[33] It is convincing because it is agonistic. Freeman explores the problem of finding security in the ecclesial tradition when, as a Baptist, his key ecclesial identity is a principled dissent against aspects of the tradition. Colin Gunton neither wrote nor, in my hearing at least, said anything indicating this same self-awareness, but I think there is something here that might be useful for understanding the development of his thought. If Zizioulas is right, then the Western tradition—Anglicanism included—has gone wrong, and we can make an appeal to a true, if marginalised, tradition: the Cappadocians, eclipsed by Augustine; the English Dissenters, exemplified by Owen and Irving; the odd eccentric genius like Coleridge; Barth as a church father come late in time, recalling us from the errors that had crept in to (something close to) the truth. If Zizioulas is right in his account of the history, then this appeal need

[33] Curtis Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

not be agonistic, as Freeman's is, but might rather be a celebratory, if countercultural, recovery of a marginalised alternative tradition.[34]

That said, the crucial post-liberal turn, to locating authority, which can no longer believably reside in the brilliance of the individual scholar, in the ecclesial community and its tradition of interpretation, is one we grasped forcefully at King's, in a very particular and concrete way. It occurs to me now that many of those truly committed to the project were deeply invested in the life of a particular congregation. Gunton was associate pastor of Brentwood URC for almost all of his teaching career; Murray Rae was in pastorate whilst teaching at King's; Marlene Schhwöbel, Christoph's first wife, was pastor of their local (URC) congregation whilst they were in England; in other cases I am relying on thicker description, drawn from memory, but it was there, not universally, but generally, in those who were really committed to the project. Colin's own congregationalism—and Christoph and Marlene's involvement in a URC congregation of their own—meant that the local gathering was emphasised, but that was by no means exclusive—John Zizioulas was bishop of a Christian community that no longer existed; Jenson was committed far more to a vision of Lutheranism than to a particular local expression of it; and so on.[35]

This ecclesial commitment felt counter-cultural even when I joined the staff at King's. The Ninian Smart style of religious studies, where the researcher stands outside the community being researched and observes them dispassionately, was assumed by perhaps half or more of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies—interestingly, including many of the Biblical Studies staff, but not including some of

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[34] Readers of my own work will know that I find Zizioulas's account of the history to be unconvincing (see particularly *The Holy Trinity: Understanding God's Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012); as a result, I share Freeman's sense that any authentically-Baptist programme of retrieval will be troubled and difficult.

[35] Anecdotally, I remember chatting to Jenson and his wife Blanche one Monday at a conference in London, after we had been at the same seminar in Scotland the previous Friday. Asking about their weekend, I was told (by Blanche, of course: Jens was famously taciturn) that they had worshipped at a Lutheran church in London that was their favourite local church in the world, because of its commitment to the continuation of various seventeenth-century Lutheran traditions.

those who taught other world religions, who saw that we Christian theologians were teaching as insiders to the tradition we taught and very much wanted to do the same. I recall being at King's the first time what is now called 'Impact'—then it was 'Knowledge Transfer'—came onto the institution's radar; about ten of us, who had been quietly sneaking off to offer our expertise to our various religious communities, were suddenly able to claim that same work as a valuable contribution to the department.

How unique, at the time, was the academic culture of the RIST? I am not qualified to answer that, as I only knew what we were doing at King's. We were, I reflect, disproportionately training the theology tutors of the various (non-Anglican) ministerial training colleges in the UK, and whilst some of that was no doubt down to geography, our ecclesial orientation must also have been relevant. Beyond the UK, I remember Bruce McCormack saying, I think in conversation after Colin's memorial service, that the number of doctoral students who came to Colin and then took posts in confessional US evangelical institutions was remarkable, and had changed that culture decisively—post-Trump, he may have revised that opinion, but the fact of the placements at least remains true.

Wiles—and several of our senior colleagues at King's in my day—would have deplored that ecclesial orientation, but it seems to me that, in UK academic theology at least, it has won the day. That was certainly not all down to what we did at King's—as I commented earlier, Cambridge was more visibly post-liberal—but my own ecclesiological commitments make me wonder if the KCL RIST focus on the local congregation was different from, and better than, a generalised commitment to some vague ecclesial identity called 'the church'. The King's way—the Gunton/Schwöbel way—was not to hover at 30 000 feet above the messy reality of congregational life, and to make pronouncements from there, but instead to be in the community on the ground, and to find ways, trusting in the promises of the gospel, to rejoice in it. (I might say on this that, whilst at King's, I was part of a small group of elders that led my own congregation through the process of dismissing our pastor for moral failure; we were not dewey-eyed and idealistic about local church life!)

Systematic Theology and 'Modern Biblical Studies': Some methodological reflections

I have explored the background of what was done at King's, and identified an appeal to tradition, and a commitment to the local church, as key features of what we were doing in RIST. There are two further aspects I want to raise, more briefly. The first is in the idea of specifically 'systematic' theology. This was a lasting concern—it is there in the title of the Institute, and in a short paper Schwöbel wrote around the time of its founding;[36] at a conference on the future of theology and religious studies not long after the founding of RIST, Gunton wondered about the lack of systematic theology in the English tradition in a very worthwhile paper, later published in *SJT*.[37] When Gunton and Webster founded a new journal, they called it the *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, with Schwöbel and Jenson, amongst others, on the editorial board, and in the first issue Gunton wrote about what, if anything, was meant in the change from naming modules and posts 'Systematic Theology' rather than 'Christian Doctrine'.[38]

'Systematic theology' was a term long-used in Germany, and to a lesser extent in the USA. I suppose that the focus on being systematic was something that Schwöbel, in particular, brought to the project, convincing Gunton and others that one of the missing pieces in reconstructing Christian theology was attention to the complex set of inter-relations between doctrines—and indeed between theological subdisciplines. In his 1987 essay, 'Doing Systematic Theology', Schwöbel first argues that systematic theology is 'the self-explication of Christian faith'—note the silent but demanded ecclesial location—and then lists five criteria for the practice of theology: christocentricity, leading to a Scripture-principle; the historical and communal character of faith, leading to a sustained engagement with tradition; the relevance

[36] Christoph Schwöbel, 'Doing Systematic Theology', *King's Theological Review* X (1987), 51-57.
[37] Colin E. Gunton, 'An English Systematic Theology', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993), 479-96.
[38] Colin E. Gunton, 'A Rose by Any Other Name? From "Christian Doctrine" to "Systematic Theology"' *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1 (1999), 4-23.

of faith in each particular context, leading to a need for locally-credible expression; internal coherence; and external coherence.[39] This emphasis on theology as a practice, or as Schwöbel puts it 'a craft which in some rare cases achieves the quality of an art',[40] was something sustained—when Colin Gunton, Murray Rae, and I put together a new introductory module, largely methodological in focus, and produced a textbook for it, we called it *The Practice of Theology*.[41]

On this account theology becomes self-reflexive—as we might put it in shorthand, if God did in fact create *ex nihilo*, then theology cannot be dependent on any other discipline or body of knowledge. We can see the effect of this in, for example, the development of John Webster's work after his return to the UK. Webster's justly-famous Oxford inaugural, entitled *Theological Theology,* looks with the benefit of a quarter-century of hindsight to be almost groping in the dark at times for new methodologies that would be responsible to this sort of account of the practice of theology;[42] at one point, for example, he is trying to invent 'the theological interpretation of Scripture',[43] but he lacks either the language or the tools to do more than indicate that we need a theologically-responsible practice of reading that we haven't consciously imagined yet—of course he imagined it more fully than perhaps anyone else some years later in his *Holy Scripture*.[44]

I promised to return to Wiles's invocation of 'modern biblical scholarship', and this is the point to do it, because there is an important sense in which Wiles was right, or rather in which he needs to be shown to have been wrong. In the end, most of what we do as systematic theologians is reading historical texts, and Biblical scholarship, New Testament scholarship in particular, gives us the most complete and exhaustive tradition of reading historical texts that

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[39] Schwöbel, 'Doing Systematic Theology', 54-56.

[40] Schwöbel, 'Doing Systematic Theology', 51.

[41] Colin Gunton, Stephen R. Holmes, and Murray Rae (eds), *The Practice of Theology: A Reader* (London: SCM, 2001).

[42] John Webster, *Theological Theology: An Inaugural Lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 27 October 1997* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

[43] Webster, *Theological Theology*, 11-14.

[44] John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003). John dedicated this work to Colin Gunton's memory after his death.

we have—the quantity of scholarship compared to the brevity of the text is simply unparalleled anywhere. If we believe that other texts can be read as the NT is read, then the achievements of NT scholarship should give us a model for what we might hope for in our study of other texts—this is the sense in which I think Wiles was right.

Where was Wiles wrong? Not, I think, in his insistence that, at some really fundamental level, the Scriptures are texts like other texts—they are, and that matters—rather his failure, theologically considered, was to reflect that all text exists only within the economy of God's creation, and, in the end, all text exists only to serve the gracious purposes of God. Scripture is, like every other text ever written, the product of human hearts and minds and hands—this is what we can call the humanity of the text—and to this extent Wiles was right—but Scripture is that within the divine economy, and within that economy, Scripture has a status and purpose accorded to no other text, and in failing to recognise this, Wiles was wrong.

This speaks directly to his criticisms of Ayres, who essentially claims that there is nothing in his historical investigations that leads him to doubt or contradict his Catholic faith. Wiles's response, however, is that in his view there should be—this was the point of his comment about 'modern biblical scholarship' that I quoted above. And it is not trivial; consider, for example, the question of the origin of two of the three standard ecumenical creeds. Legend has the Apostles' Creed being given by divine inspiration to the twelve apostles one line each; in fact we know enough about the evolution of the baptismal creed of the church of Rome that we can say with some certainty that the Apostles' Creed is the form that symbol reached somewhere in the fourth century; again, we have very good textual evidence that the Athanasian Creed owes nothing to Athanasius, instead being a combination of two fifth— or sixth-century Latin documents. Now, neither the ascription of the Apostles' Creed to the apostles, nor that of the Athanasian Creed to Athanasius, is a crucial dogma of the faith, but in principle such a dogma could be disproven by historical investigation—and Wiles essentially claimed, against Ayres, that this is what had happened with NT studies.

Consider again, however, Dodd's confident summary of what nineteenth-century NT studies had achieved: the synoptic problem

solved; Pauline authorship determined; dating agreed—no-one in contemporary NT studies would be so confident. The closest to an equivalent claim one might find today would be an admission of a sort of failure: it would not be hard to find a New Testament scholar who would admit that there was little point in new work on, say, the synoptic problem—every bit of available evidence has been examined, re-examined, and re-re-examined, and, absent new evidence (say, the discovery of a manuscript of the assumed source-text Q), there can be no significant advance on what is, presently, essentially an impasse. The problem is not, however, 'solved': different scholars reconstruct the evidence in different ways, and fail to convince each other.

This is interesting: it is not that there is shared agreement that the evidence is inconclusive—that is certainly a conclusion argued for by some, but others maintain Markan priority, argue for Matthean priority, or even—John Robinson's Bampton lectures—Johannine priority.[45] Such a situation can only be a result of methodologies that, at some level, differ. Behind Dodd's calm assurance of progress lies an assumption that NT scholars all share a presumption of the task and methods of the discipline. Bockmuehl, in something of a lament for the discipline, imagines taking Dodd into a contemporary academic library, and sitting him down with recent volumes of *NT Abstracts*: this would reveal the utter fragmentation of the discipline, which 'no longer enjoys any agreement either about the methods of study or even about the criteria by which one might agree about appropriate methods and criteria.'[46] Postmodernity has arrived with a vengeance!

We need, however, to push even further. The shared agenda of the Biblical scholarship Dodd imagined was based on a very modern conviction, exemplified right at the beginning of its story in Reimarus's *Fragments from Wolfenbüttel Library*: the Biblical texts report many examples of miracles; we know miracles don't happen; so the texts that report them must be falsifications. The task of Biblical scholarship is to give a credible account of how these falsifications came into existence, and of how they became accepted as in some way factual. I am told by colleagues in the field that even this position is starting to

[45] John A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (London: SCM, 1985).
[46] Markus Bockmuehl, '"To be or not to be?": The Possible Futures of New Testament Scholarship' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998), 271-306, 273.

crumble: to take the paradigmatic event of the resurrection of Jesus, I have been told more than once recently that most NT scholars accept that something remarkable must have happened, even if they are not quite prepared (professionally) to assert, with the creed, that 'on the third day, he rose from the dead'.

This gets us back, however, to Schwöbel's account of the systematic nature of theological study, to Gunton's account of the universal claims of theology, and to Webster's groping towards (what would later be called) the theological reading of Scripture. In a properly systematic theology, the possibility of miracles is a theological question, depending on an account of how the triune God has ordered creation. This is not, of course, to assert the possibility of miracles, but it is to locate the question properly, which scholars from Reimarus to Wiles failed to do. I have noted already that philosophers and NT scholars were a regular part of the conversation at the RIST; I think for people like (e.g.) Paul Helm and Francis Watson this re-ordering, this properly theological arrangement of heirarchies of knowledge, was attractive.

What was happening at King's back in the day? It was an attempt to address the seemingly-unavoidable theological problems of the 1960s by being more, not less, faithful to the gospel. In this it involved a complicated relationship with the Christian tradition that I have indicated that I think was misplaced. It was systematic, and because of that consciously interdisciplinary—but insistent on ordering the disciplines theologically. It was exciting—and if we often over-reached, which (in my judgement) we did, we overreached in the spirit of Luther's dictum that, knowing the gospel, we might sin boldly, and repent more boldly still.

Conclusion: The Influence of RIST on British Baptist Life

This programme influenced Baptist life, particularly in its self-consciously evangelical expressions, through Spurgeon's; through the London Bible College/London School of Theology; and through the influence of the individuals named above. It was certainly not the only influence, and I have not here attempted to evaluate its relative significance. Goodliff's story is of a wrestling between this 'missional

stream' and a more 'ecumenical stream', seeking a specifically theological renewal after the model provided by Champion's account of the influence of Andrew Fuller. I have traced the involvement of several of the leaders of Goodliff's 'missional stream' in the RIST. I have also noted some of the themes in the way Gunton, at least, taught them (should I say 'us'?) to do theology; some of these might appear to resonate—at least; I make no speculations about causality in any direction here—with aspects of that missional stream. These include, for example, a concern for the local congregation; an impatience with certain forms of liberalism that can appear as a lack of theological rigour. There is not space here to explore how this played out in Baptist life, but the reflections above might suggest that the 'missional stream' was not less theological, but just differently theological, to the other, for example. On any evaluation, however, the story of the RIST at KCL is a part of the recent story of British Baptist theology.[47]

Note on Contributor

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[47] This paper began as a seminar paper, introducing the 2022 Martinmas Semester Theology Seminar at the University of St Andrews, which is focused on 'the theological turn at King's' through readings of the various RIST publications. In revising it for publication, I have not attempted to hide the degree of personal reminiscence involved: not only was I at King's, but Gunton, Schwöbel, and Webster were each senior colleagues at various points in my career. I am grateful to colleagues and students for their engagement with the paper in the seminar, and to Andy Goodliff for helpful editorial comments in the process of revision.

Journal of Baptist Theology in Context

Aims

- To encourage the sharing of good theological, biblical and historical research by Baptists
- To support pastor–theologians in academic publishing

- To offer the wider Baptist family thoughtful work which will aid their life and mission

Submitting to Journal of Baptist Theology

We welcome submissions from Baptist pastor–theologians.

All submissions to be emailed to Andy Goodliff (andy@goodliff.com) as word documents with footnotes. Submissions to be no more than 7,000 words.

Cover Image

Designed by Micky Munroe. The image is based on a painting that was for many years displayed in Helwys Hall, Regent's Park College, Oxford and was designed by Henry Wheeler Robinson (College Principal, 1920-44), representing the five principles of Baptist life: faith, baptism, evangelism, fellowship and freedom. See H. Wheeler Robinson, 'The Five Points of a Baptist's Faith' *Baptist Quarterly* 11.2-2 (January-April 1942), 4–14.