

RENEWING A VISION FOR MISSION AMONG BRITISH BAPTISTS: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

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When I chose this title for the G. R. Beasley-Murray lecture, I was not aware that George Beasley-Murray's theme for his presidential address for the Baptist Union in 1968 was 'Renewed for Mission'.¹ It was an address which Patrick Baker, then in his final year of ministerial training at Spurgeon's College, considered in retrospect to have been a turning point in the life of the Baptist denomination in Britain.² In so far as the Baptist denomination is the only one of the historic Free Churches in Britain to be more or less holding its own against the corrosive impact on membership rolls of the surging tides of de-Christianisation, the vision held out by George Beasley-Murray in 1968, and indeed throughout his ministry, must be reckoned to be one of the sources of that spiritual vitality. In terms of new and creative initiatives for presenting the gospel to Britain's multi-ethnic and thoroughly materialistic society, Baptists have renewed, and are continuing, to renew their vision for mission, and for that we should be thankful to God. Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency as Baptists contemplate the missionary challenges of contemporary Britain. We are nowhere near the trajectory achieved by Baptist membership in the wake of the Evangelical Revival, which saw Particular Baptists more than double their proportion of the rising population of England between 1800 and 1851.³

Moreover, by 'renewing a vision for mission' I mean, not simply expanding and deepening our commitment to evangelism within Britain, but, more fundamentally, bringing into the very centre of our church life a passionate absorption with the theme of God's missionary purposes for the

world. It is no accident that the era in which Baptist membership grew most rapidly in Britain was also the era in which Baptists led the way in new initiatives in world mission through the formation of the BMS. The traditional bifurcation between world *mission* and domestic *evangelism* is theologically indefensible, and is not to be found at the roots of the British Baptist missionary tradition. William Carey's famous *Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792) was at root a protest against the supposition that the boundaries of European Christendom had any theological validity in determining Baptist thinking about the nature of the church's calling in the world. Hence, until as late as 1815-16, the BMS sponsored itinerant preaching tours in various parts of England.⁴ Of course, there was little more than a shadow of a Baptist Union in those days, but the point I am making is about the need for an integrated missionary vision, not primarily about institutional relationships. How prominent in the worship, preaching, and prayer life of our Baptist churches is a lively sense of what God is doing, and calling us to do with him, in the *world*? How aware are our church members of the fact that about two-thirds of the world's Christians now live in what used to be (and still, sadly, sometimes are) called the 'mission fields' of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania?

In this lecture I shall be drawing on historical resources from time to time, but we should not idealise our denominational history. In the year 1850-1, which was close to the peak of Baptist numerical growth in real terms, fewer than 44% of Particular Baptist churches in England supported the BMS, and many that did so did not do so consistently from year to year.⁵ Baptist missionary enthusiasm over the last two centuries has been sporadic and far from a model of theological purity. There can be, and should be, no going back to the days when British commitment to overseas missions was tinged with imperial overtones of the supposedly distinctive role of the British empire in the purposes of God for the world. I should be very surprised to hear that BMS

missionaries overseas celebrated last Friday's major event in the life of the British monarchy by processing through the streets proudly wearing rosettes of red, white, and blue, behind a trio of elephants, as they did in Udayagiri in Orissa on the coronation of George VI in 1937.⁶ But the loss of Britain's empire has, undoubtedly, made it more difficult for the Society, and all other mission agencies, to present the claims of world mission upon the attention of church members. The late South African missiologist, David Bosch, urged that the appropriate mindset for Christian mission was 'mission in bold humility'.⁷ European-led mission in the imperial context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had plenty of boldness, but precious little humility. Since the postcolonial crisis of the 1960s, mission in most of the churches of the northern hemisphere has had plenty of humility, but very little boldness. How might we recapture some of that boldness without losing our postcolonial humility in the process? I should like to suggest three answers.

1. Rediscovering the Missionary Purpose of God

Missiologists nowadays talk a great deal about the mission of God, or *missio Dei* (it sounds more impressive in Latin). They wish to remind us that mission originates with God, belongs to God, and is broader in scope than the mere multiplication of church members. This emphasis would not have been news to William Carey. The Introduction to the *Enquiry* grounds the call to action in mission, not in the command of Christ, but in the universal salvific purpose and loving character of God.⁸ Section I of the *Enquiry* goes on to argue that the commission given by Christ to the apostles remains binding on all Christians to the end of the age, but Carey's appeal is not to the commission alone, but to an implicitly Trinitarian understanding of the *missio Dei*. Behind the command of Christ lay the purpose of God, and that purpose was confirmed by evidence from many quarters of the globe (and here Carey drew on Jonathan Edwards)

that ‘the universal down-pouring of the Spirit’, proclaimed in the book of Joel as a sign of the last days, had already begun.⁹ The protests of hyper-Calvinists that no initiative to bring the gospel to those beyond the frontiers of Christendom could be contemplated until God signalled a resumption of the apostolic age by the renewal of the miraculous gifts were thus silenced. Carey’s appeal was for obedient action to the command of Christ, but also for earnest prayer that the purposes of God for the world would be fulfilled:

The most glorious works of grace that have ever took place, have been in answer to prayer; and it is in this way, we have the greatest reason to suppose, that the glorious outpouring of the Spirit, which we expect at last, will be bestowed.¹⁰

The origins of the BMS lie in the institution within the Northamptonshire Baptist Association in 1784 of monthly prayer meetings for the world-wide spread of the gospel. The united prayer movement was itself a response to Jonathan Edwards’s pamphlet, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer*, published in 1747.¹¹ In the *Enquiry* Carey follows Edwards in using Zechariah chapters 12 and 13 to teach that ‘a universal conjunction in fervent prayer’ would be the prelude to ‘copious influences of the Spirit’ being shed upon the churches, and hence to the fulfilment of God’s saving purposes by the establishment of his kingdom among all nations. Carey is insistent that the deployment of all human means in mission without the accompanying blessing of the Spirit will be ineffectual.¹²

We may have questions about the postmillennial eschatology that underlay these arguments. But the point to notice is Carey’s belief in the sovereign and gracious redemptive purpose of God for humanity, perfectly revealed in Jesus, and effected in history by the Spirit of God bestowed on the people of God down the ages. That belief was the basis of Carey’s confident, but not self-confident, missionary action, and it can be so of ours as well.

Behind Carey's pamphlet lies the evangelical Calvinism of Andrew Fuller, with its finely-struck balance between divine sovereignty and the responsibility of Christians freely to offer, and of non-Christians freely to respond to the offer, of the gospel.¹³ Nearer the surface of the *Enquiry* lies also, of course, the gospel texts, not simply of Matthew 28, but also of the long ending of Mark 16, both of which Carey cites as the source of 'the Commission of Christ'.¹⁴ We should note in passing that neither the phrase 'The Great Commission', nor any exclusive linkage between the Commission and Matthew's version, may be found in Carey: both the stock phrase, 'The Great Commission', and its exclusive attachment to Matthew 28: 18-20, are later developments in Protestant tradition.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it is Matthew's version that is to the forefront of Carey's mind, and it seems to me that his exegesis of the words of Christ is exactly right: 'All authority is given to *me* - therefore *you* go.' If we forget the first part of that statement, mission becomes just another process of human persuasion or propaganda, an attempt to capture or colonise the minds of men and women so that they should all think just like us. That is not authentic Christian mission. But equally, if we forget the second part of Christ's statement, we end up with a view of the *missio Dei* which leaves the church comfortably marginal to the salvific activity of God. That is a view which is now most assiduously promulgated, not so much in our day by hyper-Calvinists, but by advocates of a radically secular view of mission that places little emphasis on the necessity for the actual proclamation by Christians of the good news of the reign of Jesus.

What might this reminder of the theology that undergirded the genesis of our missionary tradition as British Baptists have to say to our contemporary church scene? Allow me to suggest three interrelated reflections.

(1) A trinitarian understanding of God nurtured by consistently trinitarian worship is the only secure basis for churches to undertake mission to the world. This may sound like a truism, but I notice that a major policy document

produced by BMS World Mission in January 2007, 'Towards 2010: Where BMS is Heading', made only one explicit reference to the mission of God in an eight-page document, and no mention at all of either the Father or the Holy Spirit, whereas 'Jesus' or 'Christ' appeared eight times.¹⁶ An emphasis on mission as obedience to the command of Christ without an accompanying emphasis on mission as the gracious sovereign intention of a loving God will induce a frenetic and guilt-laden approach to evangelism that can only lead to frustration. Without an adequate trinitarian framework, we will be unable to grasp ourselves and present evangelistically to others a doctrine of the atonement that avoids grotesque caricature.¹⁷ Without a continual recognition of the gracious power of the Spirit, as we have already observed, evangelistic mission becomes propaganda, mere human persuasion. If all authority belongs to Jesus, the mission of the church is not to convert people – only the Spirit who mediates that authority in the world can do that. It is only through the presence of the Spirit that the authority given by the Father to the Son is made available to us. Without the presence of the Spirit it simply makes no sense for us to go when the authority belongs to Jesus, and not to us. But with the indwelling presence of the one through whose power the Father raised the Son from the dead, and through whose power men and women can be raised to new life in Christ, obedience to the 'Great Commission' becomes possible.

(2) The mission of God is an overflowing of the incessant dance of self-giving in relationship (what Moltmann and other theologians call *perichoresis*), which characterizes the inner life of the triune God, into the community of the people of God, and from them into the world. Worship that is consistently focussed on God who is Three in One will build churches that are able to combine cultural diversity with unity and have a vision of a plural world made one in Christ. Conversely, worship which is preoccupied with 'Jesus and Me' will surely encourage atomistic and self-absorbed rather than mission-minded

Christians. Those of us who lead worship, and those of us who preach, need to be asking ourselves continually whether our choice of songs and the content of our sermons are equally honouring to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and are regularly encouraging our people to focus on the missionary purposes of our triune God for the world.

(3) A third reflection relates to the centrality of organized corporate prayer for the world in the movement that transformed Baptist life in much of England in the 1780s and 1790s. Without the monthly prayer meetings that began in 1784, there would have been no BMS, and no London Missionary Society either, for the movement spread to Congregationalists.¹⁸ Without prayer, insists Carey, there will be no outpouring of the Spirit, and no building of the kingdom. This is no new message for a gathering of Baptists, but I wonder whether the place of prayer, and especially of intercessory prayer for the world, has become marginal to the life and worship of too many of our churches. Congregations which regularly and imaginatively engage in bringing the world to God in prayer will also be congregations which are committed to bringing the gospel of Christ to the world. Conversely, congregations whose prayer life is introspective will not be missionary congregations. If we do not Sunday by Sunday implore God for the outpouring of his Spirit on the world church in its witness to the world, can we be surprised if our members seem uninterested in the life of churches overseas, or even in the next association? If we do not regularly bring before God in our Sunday services the needs of a world riven by conflict, hunger, poverty, environmental catastrophe, and epidemic disease, can we be surprised if our church members appear to see little connection between these subjects that dominate their television screens and what they imagine Christian mission to be all about? As N. T. Wright in particular has reminded us, God's redemptive and restorative purpose extends ultimately to the renewal of the entire created order, leading to the new heaven *and* the new earth of which the

Book of Revelation speaks.¹⁹ The scope of our prayers should be no narrower if we are to be true to the mission of God.

2. Restoring the Centrality of Missionary Discipleship

A second ingredient in my recipe for the renewal of our vision for mission is the priority of restoring the centrality of missionary discipleship. This is a priority which is already reflected in the strategy document adopted by the Baptist Union Trustees in 2008, which lists ‘making disciples’ as the first component of ‘the heart of the strategy’, and makes the encouragement of missionary disciples in ‘radical, life-long missionary discipleship’ its primary strategic objective. Nevertheless, I find it interesting that the document lists ‘mission’ as a separate component of the heart of the strategy from making disciples.²⁰

The conservative evangelical tradition that has so fundamentally and fruitfully shaped British Baptist life, especially in the four decades since George Beasley-Murray’s presidential address of 1968, seems strangely reluctant to appropriate Matthew’s emphasis that Christian mission is essentially to do with making disciples. Evangelicalism, ever since its eighteenth-century origins, has instead placed the call to conversion at the centre of its understanding of mission.²¹ The call to turn to God in repentance and faith was certainly at the heart of the message that Jesus proclaimed, and should equally be so in ours. But the gospels know nothing of mere converts: the call of Jesus was to take up one’s cross and follow him (Matthew 16:24). In our exegesis of Matthew 28 we sometimes seem to miss the obvious: we are sent to make not converts, but disciples, of all nations. The commission is not discharged once commitments to follow Christ have been made. The sixteenth-century Anabaptist tradition, with its emphasis on the call to costly discipleship, has something to teach us here. Hans Kasdorf has aptly said that while the mainline Reformers rediscovered the great Pauline term *Glaube* (faith), it was the Radical Reformers

who ‘rediscovered the evangelists’ word *Nachfolge* (discipleship). People cannot, they maintained, call Jesus Lord unless they are his disciples indeed, prepared to follow him in every way.’²²

Something of the same emphasis can be found in the early years of the English Particular Baptist tradition. Benjamin Coxe, Hanserd Knollys, and William Kiffin went so far in 1645 in their *A Declaration Concerning the Publike Dispute ... Concerning Infants-Baptisme* to put discipleship logically prior to baptism, thus virtually collapsing the identity of the missionized into that of the disciple. They did so on the basis of a literal reading of the Greek text:

The onely written Commission to Baptize (which is in Matth. 28:19.) directeth us to baptize Disciples only, *Go ye and Disciple all Nations, baptizing them*; that is, the disciples: for this is the onely construction and interpretation that the Greek word can there beare; and Infants cannot be made Disciples, because they cannot learne.²³

The missionary responsibility of the church is to make not converts, but disciples whose communal life together will be a visible embodiment of ‘all that I have commanded you’ – in other words, the mind of Christ and the values of his kingdom. Hence the church as a missionary community is called to be what Lesslie Newbigin loved to refer to as ‘the hermeneutic of the gospel’, an icon or exemplification of what the gospel of the kingdom is all about.²⁴ ‘Making converts’ implies replication, domination, and the colonization of the mind – and the world imagines that this is what we are aiming to achieve in Christian mission. ‘Making disciples’, on the other hand, can only mean calling others to follow the One whom we have found to be supremely worth following: the disciple is one who *chooses* to follow. We who are ourselves continual learners in the school of Christ invite and appeal to others to join us in travelling along the road of discipleship. This was an emphasis dear to the heart of George Beasley-Murray. His sermon on Matthew 10:24 preached on 10 October 1970 on the occasion of the ordination to Baptist ministry of his son, Paul, noted that

‘The disciple is sent out to be a teacher. But he always remains a disciple – a learner.’²⁵ That is an indispensable emphasis in mission, where too often the missionary teacher has forgotten that he or she remains a disciple, and has become a dominator as a result. Christian nurture is not to be seen as a separate business from evangelism, as too often it is in the Protestant evangelical tradition. The evangel we are called to proclaim is itself a call to follow Christ, and to *go on following* Him.

German mission theorists in the early twentieth century, who were the first to grapple seriously with the problems of Christianity and culture, developed the idea, which can claim some basis in the New Testament, that the call to discipleship has a corporate as well as an individual reference. Influenced by German Romantic notions of the national *Geist* or spirit, they noticed that Matthew’s record strictly does not say ‘go and make disciples *from* all nations’, but ‘go and make disciples *of* all nations’ (*panta ta ethnē*). The idea that the gospel might be addressed, not to individuals alone, but to nations as collective entities, was taken up by the pro-Nazi ‘German Christian’ movement in the 1930s to suggest that there was a peculiarly German way of being Christian, a distinctively Germanic pattern of Christian faith, rooted in the *Blut* and *Boden* (blood and soil) of German national life.²⁶ Karl Barth, that stalwart opponent of the German Christian heresy and of all nationalistic distortions of the Christian faith, regarded such teaching as ‘painful fantasies’, and so in a celebrated exegetical study of Matthew 28 expressed his contempt for the idea that the nations as such are called into their own unique patterns of discipleship, a view he dismissed as ‘worthless’.²⁷

However, the German missiologists’ interpretation was not entirely killed off by Barth. A similar position was taken up by Donald McGavran, founder of the church growth school. As a Disciples of Christ missionary in India from 1923 to 1954, McGavran observed the remarkable people movements of his day, which saw people of the same caste unit or village moving towards Christian

faith through corporate decisions, led by the natural leaders of the community.²⁸ McGavran drew the conclusion that India would never be won for Christ by piecemeal individual conversions, but only by a mission strategy that enabled people groups (his interpretation of the *ethnē*)²⁹ to move towards Christ without having to cross the barriers of caste or culture. That was the origin of what we know as church growth theory. It was not borrowed from the German missiology of nations, although McGavran later became familiar with one of its leading exponents, Christian Keysser, and endorsed his approach.³⁰ McGavran's methodology was the seed-bed of all those subsequent seeker-friendly strategies in church life, with which we are now so familiar, that endeavour to make it easier for people to follow Christ by customizing the presentation of the gospel, or the experience of Christian worship, to their existing cultural frame of reference. The famous, or (depending on your point of view) infamous, 'homogenous unit principle' affirms that people prefer to become Christians without having to cross a cultural barrier, and thus leads to the logical conclusion of Christian congregations that are culturally or ethnically homogenous.

There is a lot to be said for McGavran's view, but his theory made a fatal and exegetically dubious distinction between discipling, understood as the initial process of evangelisation, and the supposedly separate second stage of 'perfecting' ('teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you').³¹ Church growth theory deduces a whole series of apparently logical steps from the apparently attractive initial premise that the most important thing in mission is to maximise the rate of conversions. But Jesus does not command us to maximise conversions, but to enable people of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds to become true and lasting disciples. Integral to that process of discipleship is learning to walk the road alongside other disciples of different ethnic or cultural allegiance. That difficult lesson is not some advanced-level

Christian education module to be bolted on to profession of faith at some later stage, but is rather an integral part of becoming part of the disciple community.

What does this mean for our approaches to mission, whether at home or overseas? It certainly does not mean that we should throw out our handbooks on inculturation, or contextualisation. If our mission is to be profoundly incarnational, following the pattern set by Jesus himself, then we must take with utmost seriousness the patterns of life and thought of those to whom we are sent. An incarnational emphasis in mission is conventionally associated with Catholic theology, but it is also one that has recently been advocated by the Australian Baptist missiologist, Ross Langmead.³² However, it does mean that, for every new mission strategy proposed as the answer to our current ineffectiveness, the question we should be asking from the beginning is not ‘Will this strategy maximise our rate of initial professions of faith?’, but rather ‘Will this strategy lead under the blessing of God’s Spirit to lasting growth in not merely the size, but also the spiritual depth and cultural breadth of the community of Christian disciples? Will this strategy enable our church to reflect more fully the biblical vision of the body of Christ which knows no division between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, rich and poor, male and female?’³³ What we have come to label ‘culture’ is always an approximation to reality, an attempt to freeze within one photographic frame an elusive entity which is always fluid and always a composite of the differing perspectives of old and young, male and female, native and newcomer. This is all the more the case in our globalized and electronically inter-connected world. The history of the twentieth century, in which both German Nazis and Afrikaner Christians erected abhorrent ideologies of racial supremacy on the basis of philosophies that absolutised cultural differentiation, should warn us against any approach to mission that on the basis of an unmediated appeal to culture elevates converts above disciples.

We come to the third and final ingredient in my recipe for the renewal of missionary vision:

3. Re-envisioning the Shape of Missionary Fellowship

In the *Enquiry*, Carey advocated that ‘in the present divided state of Christendom’, a national voluntary society of Baptists dedicated to the global spread of the gospel, though not necessarily the ideal way of doing mission, was the most feasible step of missionary obedience at that time.³⁴ This recognition was duplicated in the founding minute of the BMS, which stated that ‘in the present divided state of Christendom it seems that each denomination by exerting itself separately [*sic*] is most likely to accomplish the great ends of a mission’.³⁵ Baptists, unlike Christians of Catholic persuasion, do not believe that there is only one revealed and authoritative way of being church and doing mission. Rather, in conformity with the diversity within the New Testament record, they believe that structures should be continually reshaped by the dialogue between the enduring values of the kingdom and the plurality of contexts within which the church is called to embody the gospel of the kingdom. Baptists in every age and every national setting therefore face the challenge of seeking God’s guidance about what the most appropriate structures are for fulfilling our part of God’s mandate for mission here and now. There are several dimensions to this challenge.

The first of these is an international dimension. Baptists, no less than other Christians, now live in an age of multi-directional missionary traffic between the continents. Mission no longer flows solely, or even primarily, from North to South or from West to East. This is, however, not quite as new as we sometimes imagine. At the great World Missionary Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910, one of the delegates of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society was a Telegu Baptist from South India, John Rangiah. Rangiah was in fact a missionary sent by the Telegu Baptist Home Missionary Society to work among the Telegu indentured labourers in the sugar plantations of Natal.

An early example of what we now call ‘south-to-south’ mission, he is remembered today as the primary architect of the Indian Baptist community in Natal.³⁶ But what was occasional and of exotic interest a century ago is now of regular and central importance in the ongoing story of world mission. Brazilian Baptist missionaries serve in Lusophone Africa and in Portugal. Kingsley Appiagyei from Ghana has served as the president of our Baptist Union from 2009-10 and has founded two of the largest Baptist congregations in the United Kingdom. Other gifted Baptists from the global south such as Joe Kapolyo at Edmonton are enriching our denominational life. Multi-directional missionary traffic is here to stay. It makes for much more interesting journeys, but also occasional collisions! British Baptists are gradually learning what it means to be humble receivers in mission, as well as continuing to be givers. Learning to receive in humility does not come easily when we have been long accustomed to be donors. Experience within the United Reformed Church of receiving missionaries sent from the majority world to work in Britain under the auspices of the Council for World Mission (heir to the old London Missionary Society) suggests that church members naturally expect such missionaries to talk about the life of their churches overseas, but find it much more difficult to invite them to comment on what they may have noticed about our own church life.³⁷ Of course, non-western missionaries working in Britain will make cultural mistakes, and may even attempt to impose their cultural readings of the faith on us. But British Christians did precisely the same in the reverse direction in the past.

Like other denominations in Britain, Baptists have some way still to travel in this respect. Although Fred George (a Sri Lankan), Kate Coleman and Kingsley Appiagyei (both Ghanaians) have served as presidents of the Union in 1997-8, 2006-7, and 2009-10 respectively, we have not yet seen any Christian from the global south appointed to a senior staff position in either the Union or in BMS World Mission. Although a contrast might be drawn with the Church of England, which not simply has an archbishop of York born in Uganda, but as

long ago as 1989 had a Pakistani, Michael Nazir-Ali, as general secretary of the Church Mission Society,³⁸ Baptists now compare very favourably with other British denominations in terms of the ethnic range reflected in their ordained ministry, including at regional team leadership level. In BMS World Mission in 2011 the election of Nabil Costa, a Lebanese Baptist leader, as a trustee and the appointment of an Indian evangelist, Benjamin Francis, as associate regional team leader for India, are strategic and welcome steps.³⁹

The second dimension to the challenge is an ecumenical or ecclesial one. British Baptists developed their denominational tradition in the context of European, and specifically Anglican, Christendom, marked by a union of church and state which even the Anglican Church has, happily, found to be not permanently exportable. Christendom has now largely dissolved, and the Baptist tradition is now found in a great variety of cultural contexts, and its ecclesial character has transmuted, sometimes quite radically, as a result. We have Baptist bishops in countries such as Georgia. Once again, however, this is not quite so novel as might at first sight appear. It would be plausible to claim that there were Baptist bishops in India as long ago as the early nineteenth century. They were not called bishops; they were called BMS missionaries, yet they exercised most of the functions of episcopacy. The 'Form of Agreement', a statement adopted by the Serampore missionaries in 1805, stated that Indians ordained to the ministry of the word and sacraments must be allowed to fulfil that ministry

as much as possible without the interference of the missionary of the district who will constantly superintend their affairs, give them advice in cases of order and discipline, and correct any errors into which they fall; and, who joying and beholding their order, and the stedfastness of their faith in Christ, may direct his efforts continually to the planting of new churches in other places, and to the spread of the gospel in his district, to the utmost of his power.⁴⁰

If that is not a statement of episcopal functions, I do not know what is. It is not surprising that some of the families of churches planted by BMS missionaries

have rather more of the episcopal or presbyterian style of polity about them than the congregational independency which we in Britain sometimes identify as a defining mark of Baptist identity. The globalization of the Baptist tradition, as of other Christian traditions, has placed high on the agenda the question of exactly which elements in Baptist identity are of universal, non-negotiable, significance and what of merely local or temporal, significance.

Lastly, there is a specifically relational challenge which faces us as British Baptists. The challenge is to be willing to re-conceive the mutual relations, and perhaps even the structures, of our national Baptist missionary fellowships (Baptist Union of Great Britain, Baptist Union of Scotland, Baptist Union of Wales, and BMS World Mission) in the same spirit of godly and prayerful pragmatism which Carey demonstrated in the *Enquiry*. We have come a long way since the Baptist Union was a tenant of the BMS, occupying a few rooms in the Society's headquarters in Furnival Street in London, as it was until the opening of Baptist Church House in Southampton Row in 1903.⁴¹ There is a protracted and not particularly edifying history of relationships between the Union and the Missionary Society, but if there is one lesson to be gleaned from that history, it is that much depends on the personal relationship between the heads of the two bodies. In Jonathan Edwards and David Kerrigan we are currently blessed with a pair of denominational leaders who are not only gifted, but also united by a common vision for mission. They deserve our prayers and encouragement as they work together at developing the relationship in directions appropriate to the state of church and society in Britain today. None of us knows what the shape of British Baptist structures for mission will be in one hundred years' time, though, if granted a vantage point from glory, I would be surprised, and depressed, if they turned out to be precisely the same as we have now. The architecture and geography of denominational identity are changing profoundly, both within Britain, and globally. The challenge for British Baptists will be to renew their vision for mission in this fluid context in

ways that hold fast to those values that are integral to the gospel, while sitting lightly to everything else.

¹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Renewed for Mission* (London: Baptist Union, 1968), cited in Paul Beasley-Murray, *Fearless for Truth: A Personal Portrait of the Life of George Beasley-Murray* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), pp. 117-18.

² Paul Beasley-Murray, *Fearless for Truth*, pp. 68-9.

³ A. D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (London: Longman, 1976), p. 37. Particular Baptist membership was 0.45% of population in 1800, and 1.12% in 1851. General Baptist New Connexion membership was 0.17% of population in 1851, and obviously considerably less in 1800.

⁴ Brian Stanley, *The History of the Baptist Missionary Society 1792-1992* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), pp. 18-19.

⁵ Brian Stanley, 'Home support for overseas missions in early Victorian England, c. 1838-c. 1873' (University of Cambridge PhD thesis, 1979), pp. 194-5.

⁶ Stanley, *History of the BMS*, p. 301. The royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton took place two days before this lecture was delivered.

⁷ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 489; see Willem Saayman and Klippien Kritzing (eds.), *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch's Work Considered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996).

⁸ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1792), ed. E. A. Payne (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1961), pp. 3-6.

⁹ Carey, *Enquiry*, p. 12.

¹⁰ Carey, *Enquiry*, pp. 78-9.

¹¹ Stanley, *History of the BMS*, pp. 4-5.

¹² Carey, *Enquiry*, pp. 77-8.

¹³ See Michael A. G. Haykin, 'Andrew Fuller on mission: text and passion', in Ian M. Randall and Anthony M. Cross (eds.), *Baptists and Mission: Papers from the Fourth International Conference on Baptist Studies* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), pp. 25-41.

¹⁴ Carey, *Enquiry*, pp. 7-9.

¹⁵ See David F. Wright, 'The Great Commission and the ministry of the Word: reflections historical and contemporary on relations and priorities', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 25:2 (Autumn 2007), pp. 149, 153-7.

¹⁶ 'Towards 2010: where BMS is heading' (Didcot: BMS World Mission, 2007).

¹⁷ I am, of course, alluding here to Steve Chalke's controversial statement in 2004 that the doctrine of penal substitution was liable to be regarded as 'cosmic child abuse'.

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- ¹⁸ E. A. Payne, *The Prayer Call of 1784* (London: Baptist Laymen's Missionary Movement, 1941), pp. 11-12; Richard Lovett, *History of the London Missionary Society*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Frowde, 1899), I, pp. 12-13.
- ¹⁹ See N. T. Wright, 'New heavens, new earth', in John E. Colwell (ed.), *Called to One Hope: Perspectives on the Life to Come* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), pp. 31-51; also Wright's *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007).
- ²⁰ 'Strategy' (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, n.d. [2008]).
- ²¹ See D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1989), pp. 5-10.
- ²² Hans Kasdorf, 'The Anabaptist approach to mission', in Wilbert R. Shenk (ed.), *Anabaptism and Mission* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, and Kitchener, Ontario, 1984), p. 53.
- ²³ B. Coxe, H. Knollys, and W. Kiffin, *A Declaration Concerning the Publike Dispute ... Concerning Infants-Baptisme* (London: 1645), p. 19, cited in Haykin, 'Andrew Fuller on mission: text and passion', p. 27.
- ²⁴ For Newbigin's fullest exposition of this theme see his *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 222-33.
- ²⁵ Cited in Paul Beasley-Murray, *Fearless for Truth*, p. 107.
- ²⁶ Richard V. Pierard, 'Volkish thought and Christian missions in early twentieth-century Germany' in James R. Thrower (ed.), *Essays in Religious Studies for Andrew Walls* (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen Department of Religious Studies, 1986), pp. 138-49; Werner Ustorf, *Sailing on the Next Tide: Missions, Missiology, and the Third Reich* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000).
- ²⁷ Karl Barth, 'An exegetical study of Matthew 28:16-20', re-published in Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig (eds.), *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), pp. 24-5.
- ²⁸ Alan R. Tippett (ed.), *God, Man, and Church Growth: A Festschrift in Honor of Donald Anderson McGavran* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 10, 21-5.
- ²⁹ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd edn. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 40.
- ³⁰ McGavran's foreword to the English translation of Keysser's classic study, *Eine Papuagemeinde*, published by his William Carey Library as *A People Reborn* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1980), p. ix, reveals that he was unaware of Keysser's work until about 1958; see Pierard, 'Volkish thought and Christian missions', p. 145.
- ³¹ Tippett, *God, Man, and Church Growth*, pp. 27-31.
- ³² Ross Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh: Towards an Incarnational Missiology* (Lanham, MD. and Oxford: University Press of America, 2004).
- ³³ See René Padilla's fine article, 'The unity of the church and the homogenous unit principle', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6:1 (January 1982), pp. 23-31; re-published in Gallagher and Hertig (eds.), *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity*, pp. 73-92.
- ³⁴ Carey, *Enquiry*, p. 84.
- ³⁵ BMS Committee Minutes, 2 Oct. 1792, pp. 1-2, Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford.
- ³⁶ Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 100.

³⁷ Sheila Maxey, 'Learning to receive missionaries', *Articles of Reformed Faith and Religion* 8 (Winter 1999-2000), p. 16.

³⁸ The Church Mission Society was known as the Church Missionary Society until 1995.

³⁹ <http://www.bmsworldmission.org/news-blogs/archive/bms-trustees-given-global-dimension> (accessed 2 May 2011).

⁴⁰ *Periodical Accounts Relative to the Baptist Missionary Society* 3 (1804-9), p. 206, cited in Brian Stanley, 'Planting self-governing churches: British Baptist ecclesiology in the missionary context', *Baptist Quarterly* 34 (1991-2), p. 381.

⁴¹ Stanley, *History of the BMS*, p. 386.