



UPDATE

Issue 60



"Perhaps we should have waited till he got over the hiccups?"

In this issue:

"Baptism of Fire? P 2

Baptism and "The Sssh Free" Church p 3

A Common Mind? P 8

Patristic evidence-continued p 12

Liturgical Revision by the back door? p 13

Thanksgiving in all things? P 16

A Summary of Anglicanism and Baptism
Ecclesioogy! P 19

"Baptism in the Early Church" p 23

“Integrity?”

I could not resist including the cover cartoon in this issue! At first sight the humour comes from the vicar solving his hiccups by the “hold your breath under water” treatment. But the real story was about a vicar who was using fire-eating to demonstrate the nature of the Holy Spirit at baptisms.

"It's very visual and very immediate" he says "but in spite of its looking fairly dangerous, it's not.. Fire-eating is really an attempt to speak about the Holy Spirit as the fire of love dwelling within us, and that we become living temples for God's Holy Spirit. This consuming, this ingestion of fire, suggests that brilliantly. It entertains but also informs:"

He has so many candidates for baptism that the church restricts it to twice a month. *"It's a place where people do relate to the parish church,"* he said.

I am not aware of any BI members who use this technique! Nor indeed whether they would be happy with this application. But one of the exciting things about being at the hub of BI is hearing how whatever our practice, we all seek to administer baptism with integrity. Rarely do “numbers” come up as a measure of “success”.

When we sought (for obvious reasons!) to rename our organisation from MORIB, we immediately empathised with that very word **“Integrity”**. In this issue that same word comes up in different guises.

My review and extract from Stephen Kuhrt's new Grove Booklet has the word at its heart ((look for it !) as he has struggled with his local situation - very different from most of our members.

Canon Goundry speaks (perhaps provocatively) from years of experience saying how the way he exercised integrity many years back would have been different now.

The wonderful testimony of Isabelle and her husband is a huge encouragement to those who rest on the integrity of Scripture—and her belief in Thanksgiving Services should encourage us.

My many years in General Synod make me concerned about the apparent lack of integrity in bringing forward the combined marriage and baptism services without debate.

Well—let us know what you think - and ENJOY!

Roger Godin (Acting Editor)

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON INFANT BAPTISM?

“Church Growth Through the Full Welcome of Children”

“The Sssh Free Church”

by Stephen Kuhrt¹ (Grove Book ISSN 1367-0840 £3.50²)

Veterans of Baptismal Integrity might be forgiven for thinking there can be few new approaches to Infant Baptism (IB) theology and practice. But this booklet offers what to me is a challenging new perspective on the issue of baptismal integrity regarding congregational practice

Stephen writes humbly of the origins of their highly successful 9.30 am “Sssh free church” - and credits his predecessor Canon Downey with its origins and early development. He makes it very clear that his church in affluent middle class Surrey has huge advantages of good plant but what he seeks to do is encourage the translation of the principles into other contexts and the final chapter. “Transferable principles from “Sssh Free Church” whilst perhaps partly contentious for some, needs humble consideration by all - quite apart from the issues around baptismal integrity.

Having lived in a neighbouring parish for many years (and even had the privilege of preaching there) I think one source of success that is not highlighted is the relationships that already existed in the Parish. Stephen’s predecessor once shocked a Deanery Synod by saying “*Our numbers come because we visit every home in the parish every year*”. Big affluent middle class parish maybe - but each home visited by clergy (with or without laity) seems a good start in any family work to me!

Anyway - to the Book! - From CHAPTER 1

The overall message of the book is based on four convictions:

- a. That many more people want to come to church than actually do so (certainly in more ‘middle class’ areas and probably in plenty of others as well).
- b. That this is particularly true of those people who have recently become parents and have experienced the important number of ‘life changes’ that frequently accompany the arrival of children.
- c. That when such families do approach local churches they are frequently put off by ‘cultural factors’, particularly unrealistic demands and expectations by the church (and sometimes themselves) regarding their children’s behaviour and therefore quickly give up coming.
- d. That if local churches can eliminate the factors which make it difficult for young families to attend (principally any element of “ssshing” or “tutting” towards young children) a vast amount of exciting growth is very possible

Chapter 2 - The Life Changes that Often Accompany Parenthood” sets out the pastoral foundation stone. A number of changes occur then within the lives of parents when children arrive, many of which make them very open to belonging to their local church. In particular he writes that “*hearts seemingly hardened by the tough world of work and ambition can be remarkably softened by the arrival of a child*” resulting “*in parents ... seeking , however vaguely something meaningful that will speak into the*

CHAPTER 3 in full

Recognising the Church’s responsibilities in regard to Infant Baptism

Within the evangelical Anglican tradition, ‘outsiders’ approaching the church in order to ‘get their child christened’ are often met with a degree of ambivalence. Both clergy and regular church members sometimes feel the tension between the desire to be appropriately welcoming and inclusive and the desire to preserve baptism from being devalued. My own theological background has been to understand baptism as God’s covenant sign and encourage infant baptism where parents intend to bring up their child in the family of the church, living out their baptism through a life of faith in Jesus Christ.

The pastoral experience, however, of seeing so many parents seeking baptism for their child made me start to question whether the ‘failure’ of so many baptised children to be brought up within the church is primarily their parents’ fault. At our Baptism Preparation Evenings I would explain the commitment that the baptism promises entail and the alternative of a thanksgiving if these were seen as too demanding. However again and again it was clear that the parents wanted the sign of baptism. Rather than dismissing this as simply down to tradition or superstition, influenced by the observations in Chapter Two, I became persuaded that, in most cases, these parents had been touched by God’s grace and were seeking to respond. Mindful of the model of Jesus meeting people where they were, I became convinced that it was my duty to affirm their spiritual search and respond to their request for baptism with enthusiasm.

My theology of baptism remained unchanged since I was still convinced that the biblical understanding of the sacrament was that it ‘effects what it symbolises in the context of faith’. Where my *understanding* of the pastoral response to this had shifted, however, was in my growing sense that a really decisive factor (possibly *the* decisive factor) in baptised infants failing to grow up within the church was that church’s failure to cater properly for them. Discussion of ‘baptism policy’ commonly revolves around whether the parents (and godparents) can make their baptism promises with integrity but an equally pressing question appeared to be whether the local church could really proclaim with integrity “*we are members together* of the Body of Christ”. To be able to make such a proclamation, the local church, I came to realise, must be doing everything that it can to express with its

pastoral practice as well as its words that these newly baptised infants are full members of the church. This in turn led us to a far more consciously 'theological' development of the "Sssh free" approach to church outlined in the following chapter.

Before turning to that, however, it would perhaps be helpful to outline the approach that we now take towards baptism at Christ Church.

Now that we have developed our "Sssh free" approach to church, we generally find that the first point of contact with families seeking a 'christening' is once they have started coming along to our services. Where this is still made through other means (such as a phone call to the Parish Office), we suggest that these families start coming along to the 9.30 service. Almost without exception, they appear happy to do this.

The next step is that the parents (and child, if the parents wish) are invited to a Baptism Preparation Evening which take place once a month on a midweek evening. This usually lasts between 45 minutes and an hour. At this meeting I try to be as enthusiastic as possible and explain that our aim as a church in regard to baptism is to combine an inclusive welcome with clarity about the importance and indeed sacred nature of baptism. The CPAS video² 'First Steps' is shown and afterwards I underline the points it makes about the seriousness of the promises, the importance of parents being on the same Christian journey as their child and the great opportunity that baptism provides for the whole family to be renewed in this. In addition, I also outline how seriously the church takes the proclamation 'we are members together of the Body of Christ' and our aim to express this in every possible way. The "Sssh free" ethos of the 9.30 service is explained as well as the priority on providing high quality groups for children and our general desire as a church to support the parents in every area of their child's development (for example through our Parenting Classes). In short, I make clear our hope and intention that the whole family will continue to be active members of the church. In the light of the factors outlined in Chapter Two, the parents usually respond with considerable enthusiasm and are happy to be linked up with members of the congregation who arrange to visit them to discuss the baptism promises in greater depth. I encourage those visiting to talk personally about what the promises mean to them and the difference that coming to church has made to their family.

At the baptism service itself, the twin emphases of an enthusiastic welcome and the importance of response are again strongly made. We limit the baptisms at our 9.30 service to a maximum of two families at a time to 'keep it special' and reserve seating at the front so that all the child's family and friends feel especially welcome. A central part of the baptism itself is that it is recorded on video with the most important aspect of this being a message that I record for the child to watch as they grow up. In this message I try to use child friendly language in explaining our hope that the DVD will serve as a reminder to them of (1) how God declared through their baptism that they are special to him and (2) the need to respond to this promise by seeking to follow Jesus.

I then link both of these to the gift of a children's Bible which we present to the child asking that the parents (and any older sibling present) will help them to grow up reading and understanding it. I also allow as much other filming and photography of the baptism as the parents want, explaining that I wish to do everything possible to keep it in memory and facilitate their child's response to it.

After the baptism, if invited, I always try to attend the 'party' since this communicates a strong sense of partnership and co-celebration, this time on the 'territory' of the family. Around a week after that I also visit the family taking with me two copies of the baptism DVD – one for the parents and one for the child. The cover on the DVD is made as attractive as possible and personalised to include the child's name and the date of their baptism. This visit, coming so soon after the baptism, is usually a key factor in ensuring that the positive experience of church created by the baptism event is maintained and leads to regular membership. It will be clear that all of this practice surrounding the baptism has been carefully thought through. None of it, however, is more important than what follows next, which is the effort to produce an ongoing experience of church for the child and family that fully expresses their full membership of the Body of Christ. To produce a quality experience for a family at a single baptism service is not difficult and achieved in plenty of churches. Producing a similar experience week after week to ensure that this leads to regular attendance and membership is much more demanding but ultimately much more important.

CHAPTER 4 and CHAPTER 5 These chapters set out in detail the stages of development of the "Sssh free service" and its evaluation as part of a concerted effort to take notice of the primary insight underlying the whole book. It is what the church and its members do or provide *after* a baptism which is crucial.

CHAPTER 6 sets out six principles which could be transferable to other churches. Stephen is arguing for more integrity when it comes to Infant Baptism rather than less. He points to a third way between open or indiscriminate baptism (which abandons the concept of integrity) and a policy so concerned for integrity that it comes over as ungracious and sitting lightly to the spiritual impulses that have led the family in the direction of the church. His growing conviction, reinforced during the six years spent at Christ Church, is that there is always something spiritual 'going on' when parents approach the church for baptism. His determination, reinforced by the 9.30 'Sssh Free' service is to 'meet people where they are but not leave them there'. and with 95% of those who are baptised joining permanently (he and his colleagues baptise around 30 children a year) the policy and practice clearly needs thinking about.

“God-moment” that they have experienced”. This leads into Chapter 3 which we reproduce below.

Notice the serious approach to preparation³, that the alternative of Thanksgiving is offered and practised, and other practical steps which may or may not be new to readers including the idea of the church making a personalised DVD for all baptised children for them to watch as they grow older and to encourage them to follow Jesus throughout their lives. But the key to Stephen’s approach is “*whether the local church could really proclaim with integrity ‘we are members together of the body of Christ’*” This leads into the following chapters which need to be carefully read in order to make full sense and give justice to the key point. These chapters tell the story of the church’s attempt to devise a service that is radically inclusive of children on the basis of their full membership of the church through baptism. There are some surprising blessings that can come upon the whole church when such an attempt is made to express the theological truth of baptism in practice.

Some of the ideas mentioned in the book will not be new to many of our members - for example “front-pew treatment”,



and some may feel patronised that “to produce a quality experience for a family at a single baptism service is not difficult” Equally making a DVD for each service is not something a single-handed vicar can manage easily. But few of our members in pastoral positions will not learn something from this book.

¹Yes Stephen IS the son of our Council of Reference Member Gordon Kuhrt—but not under undue influence!

² Price goes up in January - so buy now!

³ *First Steps* referred to in the booklet is now available as a DVD from CPAS and will be reviewed in Update 61

Grateful thanks to CPAS and Stephen for permission to reproduce the above lengthy excerpt, and to Church Times for the above cartoon.

A Common Mind?

In this article, long-standing member Canon Walter Goundry raises the issue of the relationship between Baptism and Holy Communion and provokes scrutiny of the usefulness of Confirmation as currently practiced in the Church of England

BAPTISM

I suspect that we shall never come to a common mind about infant baptism in the scriptures, nor indeed a common theology, for that latter depends on other things, our attitude to Fall and Creation. However the debate is important, for without it we shall not understand each other or decide what is acceptable for a Church that claims universality. The BI Update is the best instrument I know, having been a member almost from the beginning. I would suggest that all members should take extra copies and, if not available, reproduce them themselves and give them to all clergy and, where possible, leave them in public places.

The question I ask is how necessary is common agreement and interpretation from the New Testament and church history? Indeed, is it possible? A liturgical scholar with regard to the Eucharist writes that it is impossible to say what exactly happened in the beginning or that anything was universal. The question then is: when things settled down, what shaped theology and practice and this then opens up the situation for us. What effect did culture then have on theology and practice? What effect did later events have? I remember Canon Couratin saying that the oil of baptism is the oil of bathing for those who could have a bath in the first century.

**“..how necessary
is common
agreement and
interpretation from
the New Testament
and church history?”**

Can we then just lift baptism from the NT and the early church and use it as a blueprint now? Our culture and knowledge is not theirs. Of course, there will be some guidelines in the past but one fact is always true for them and for now and that is the task of evangelism. In our world, with change in theology, with a rediscovery of some old truths, what is a good way to bring people to Christ? I am often astonished that St Paul could write that he became all things to all men in order to save some. He didn't, of course.

Many years ago when parish priest of a very lively and busy church, after much discussion and meetings with the bishop, and the local URC and the Baptists, the PCC decided not to baptise babies of non-attending families. In fact we had always taken great care over baptisms – classes etc, parish Eucharist, fixed Sunday. Parents had to get confirmed and come to church. The result was poor. The congregation was bored, irritated by the response.

There was, as many will appreciate, much flak – letters to the bishop, articles/letters in the local press. The bishop, who much preferred a very open policy, nevertheless supported us. My successor who came from working in a country of strange beliefs moderated this policy. In what ways and why I do not know. He is now a bishop in the same mission field. I wonder what he does with those who believe in black magic? His successor has moderated the system further so that baptisms are more frequent. Will the congregation vote with their feet on these frequent occasions?

“No infant baptism, - thanksgiving for everyone.”

It is easy to say that I wish I knew then what I know now. Practice would have been different. Retirement is a marvellous time for reading and learning. There would have been some modification with regard to baptism/thanksgiving and communion.

No infant baptism, thanksgiving for everyone. A thanksgiving for birth is something that all people experience. Such a common practice would therefore both remind us of and strengthen our sense of community. It would get rid of the idea of a judgmental church in this issue – first and second class parents. It would also be a restoration of natural theology, of the goodness of God in nature and its wonder. This is already taking place. K Barth's influence is waning. Christian scientists, stimulated by Darwin, yet not accepting that God is dead, have shown us how fantastic we are. Dr J le Fanu in "Why Us?" opened my eyes. G K Chesterton said that to be ordinary was extraordinary. Some theologians are questioning the gap between the natural and supernatural.

This acceptance of thanksgiving is the first step of evangelism. We have to be born to be reborn – creation before re-creation. The Church, like Jesus,

He took a risk that in that meeting there might be a “disclosure moment”. There certainly won’t be without meeting Jesus. We stand in his place. We can’t expect people to become Christian or behave like Christians before they have met Christ. Gospel has to come before Law. Jesus is the Gospel as well as the proclaimer of it. Timothy Ratcliffe, “Why go to church?”, points out the dangers of identifying ourselves by our differences. Unnecessary differences can be removed without harm to the Church.

When people came to Jesus, met Jesus, what did they see? Perhaps just a man or special man, a legion of suggestions. Some saw more. This should be our attitude. Baptism can then become the response of faith, the nailing of one’s colours to the mast, a commissioning for service, a finding of one’s gift for the Body, a public acceptance of responsibility. However we administer it, total immersion, chrismation, bishop or parish priest. This would solve the problem of those baptised as infants wishing to be re-baptised. It could well be that this practice will mean that sin is out for the time being. Again Gospel before Law.

OPEN ALTARS

At the moment the commonly accepted view is that we should be baptised and confirmed or otherwise in good standing to receive communion. I would abolish such a rule and admit all present at the Eucharist to receive and it seems to me possible to justify such a step from the New Testament. There are of course other possible views. Not all evidence is one way but in the present Church crisis, which best will serve God?

An examination of all the occasions in the gospels when Jesus shared food with others, when he blessed and broke food, the references to the Kingdom and wedding celebrations, the feeding of the 5,000 the issue of who to invite. St Paul after the shipwreck suggests to me a more open Church.

“We need more of the joy, celebration and wonder of celebration in the Eucharist.

Such a policy, as with baptism/thanksgiving, is a restoration of the natural order. The creatures, elements of bread and wine the symbols of the goodness of God in the natural order, a celebration of creation, the marvels of nature which allow us to produce them, a thanksgiving for it and a reinstatement of it. We need more of the joy, celebration and wonder of celebration in the Eucharist. We need more of the psalm “for I am fearfully and wonderfully made”. Such a view should save us from the exploitation of others and the earth.

Secondly it would be a reminder that we are 'all in this together', a reminder of our common humanity, of our common need to eat and drink. Of course, to some it will be just bread and wine, ordinary stuff – a response that Jesus met as a person. For all of us it is a reminder that the Eucharist is a community meal and that the Church and world is a community.

We still debate the question about evangelism and the Eucharist. I don't and can't see how it isn't. The Eucharist is the only divinely ordained service. If it doesn't fulfil all the needs and responsibilities of the Church for itself and for the world, either Jesus has let us down or we have failed to use it aright. The Eucharist is the Gospel in miniature. If it isn't fairly obviously so, then we have missed the point.

I find it odd that we who hold the highest doctrine of the Eucharist, seeing there Christ himself, wish to treat bread and wine, body and blood differently to Jesus' treatment of himself. It is not that the divine presence is not there, or wasn't in Jesus, but that he had no difficulty in meeting anybody and everybody. It was the religious that he had most problems with. Our God is a relational God first and foremost. A holy trinity which comes to meet us in Jesus with the opportunity to see more and move on. Our God in Jesus is a God who reveals and exposes himself, is a God of invitation.

I am amazed when I hear clergy say that Jesus in the sacrament is nearer to us than if we walked beside him. This is a totally false division but it dictates how we behave. It is the one Jesus, the one Christ, who in our eyes may start as one person, but in his time become another to us. So then in the Eucharist we need to take the risk in meeting, as Jesus did and pray for a moving on, a moving on to baptism.

It also seems churlish to have people at the Eucharist and not allow them to share bread with us. To some it will be bread and wine and remain so, some Christians believe that in any case, but in the context of the service and community that is not without significance. To others in the course of time, it will be Christ himself.

As Anglicans we stress Word and Sacrament. If people can receive the Word, why not equally the Sacrament? In all that we do or say, we are giving a picture of what God is like. Too often it seems to be Father nasty, Jesus nice. Not an encouraging image for evangelism!

More Patristic Evidence

David Perry unpacks further evidence which indicates that the baptism of healthy infants could not have been the norm until the end of the fourth century. This time it is from Rome in the 380s, that crunch decade in which the Catholic Church was decisively established by the Roman Emperor Theodosius.

Siricius was a Roman, the son of Tiburtius. He entered the service of the Church as a youth and served as a deacon from the time of Pope Liberius. He was unanimously elected to succeed Pope Damasus in December of 384.

St. Siricius is noted for being the author of the first extant papal decretal. A decretal contains an authoritative decision on questions of discipline. The occasion of this one was a letter from Himerius, bishop of Tarragona in Spain, who wrote to Pope Damasus asking for his decision in several matters of discipline. Siricius answered on February 10, and ordered that his reply should be communicated to the neighbouring bishops.

Among other things, the Pope said “Whoever has vowed himself to the services of the church from his infancy must be baptised before the years of puberty and join the ministry of lectors.”

Why does Siricius demand that those whose parents aspire for them to pass through the ranks of Christian ministry should be baptised before puberty and be given the status of lectors as pre-pubescent boys?

The answer is straightforward. Siricius was a strong advocate of celibacy for the ordained. If infants dedicated to Christian ministry were baptised and made lectors before puberty, it would make it much easier to enforce clerical celibacy. The boys would grow up already aware that their lives were to be lived in celibacy.

This decretal gives us insight into Roman baptismal practice in the 380s, when Christianity was really taking over from paganism. “Being vowed to the service of the church from infancy” shows how some Christian parents were responding to their newborn sons. The other common practice was to enrol their infants as catechumens (e.g. St Augustine). But it is clear from Siricius’s words that up to that point in time children in Rome were not being baptised prior to puberty unless in danger of death. They were not baptised as infants but rather baptised as instructed and believing young people of an age able to speak and decide for themselves.

Liturgical revision by the back door?

At the heart of BI policy and practice is “....*In a spirit of loyalty to the traditions of the Church of England to seek to clarify the provisions relating to the administration of Baptism in the Canon Law...*”

Canon B21 enjoins that “It is desirable that every minister ...shall normally administer the sacrament of Holy Baptism on Sundays at public worship when the most number of people come together”

July 2009 saw the publication of the combined service of marriage and baptism. It was propounded mainly on the grounds that it was pastorally needed. Comment was surprisingly muted - even though as we see below it seems it was issued just *after* a session of General Synod. There has been no Synodical discussion of what amounts to a change in Canon Law. which seems to give license to baptism away from the main service

Rev Peter Wenham raised this in his letter to the Church of England Newspaper

Sir, Regarding the new church advice giving official support for private baptism: being welcoming to all is vital but that does not mean that we should be confusing to many.

The new liturgy for marriage and infant baptism seriously undermines the good practice of baptism taking place in the main service of Sunday worship as directed by Canon B21 and the Book of Common Prayer.

A church marriage is a covenant made between two individuals in the presence of God and witnessed by family and friends. It is, at its heart, a family occasion and is in effect a private ceremony.

Baptism is a covenant between the recipient (or parents on their behalf) and God in the presence of the worshipping community It is, at its heart, a church occasion and is properly a whole church ceremony.

To put baptism into a private domain seriously undermines what we teach about baptism as the joining of the pilgrim church.

It is going to be difficult to explain to parents why we do not perform private baptisms on a Saturday afternoon when the Church produces a two-in-one liturgy to enable us to do just that.

Peter Wenham

Nottingham

Following committee consideration, BI responded

Peter Wenham makes a good point both from Canon Law and pastoral practice – that baptisms away from a main Sunday Service undermine the concept of a pilgrim church.

Firstly. **Canon Law**

These new services allow “normalisation” of baptism outside the main Sunday Service contrary to Canon B21, and thus undermine the Canons by Liturgical “reform”. However rather than change the canons, we have effective legislation by the back door – should not General Synod have been given an opportunity to discuss this? The odd paragraphs of guidance raise points which are then ignored - for instance, they acknowledge the canonical expectation that baptism should normally be on Sundays, but give no weight to this in the face of "pastoral reasons". The guidance says the minister should "encourage" a "limited but substantial" presence of people from the Sunday congregation - don't "limited" and "substantial" contradict each other, and suppose the "encouragement" results in few coming?

Secondly **Pastoral Practice.**

Clearly we should welcome any who wish to move from “partnership” to marriage. But to combine that (which may or may not represent a spiritual forward step) with baptism of infants or children, hopelessly confuses several issues. Marriage is one thing: it's 'a gift of God in creation' and as such is something the church solemnises as part of celebrating Gods common grace. Baptism is a gift of God in the order of redemption. Unfortunately the CofE has inherited a situation it partly created, unwittingly, where baptism is used in popular culture as a creation-rite (ie to celebrate the birth of a child etc) on a par with marriage, in that sense. So the real rub is not the marriage but the confusion about baptism and that is only a problem in situations where both are contemplated together where the couple concerned are not really in a position psychologically or spiritually to attempt to make good on the very explicit promises required of them in the baptism service. It's a different matter if the couple concerned have come to a point where they are starting to respond actively to the gospel: in that case it is very appropriate for wedding and baptism to be held together. However, if that is not the situation it really would be better for churches to have a policy of using a very first rate non-baptismal 'christening' (a suitably well-done Thanksgiving is actually more appropriate to those needs)

On a minor point - these resources are really nothing more than an indication of how to create an extra-long service by including all the compulsory elements of each of them in the right order. They say the marriage should come first unless the couple are unbaptized in which case the baptism should come first - but no reasoning is offered about why this should be.

Editor's Miscellanea

Baptismal battering:

Can you stand it? If you are feeling strong try this web address!

<http://heidelblog.wordpress.com/2009/11/27/baptism-debate-audio/>

It's a debate between a Credo Baptist and Paedo Baptist with Q & A. Your Editor couldn't take it!

Mentioned Previously



Search for almost any information on the web and Wikipedia will be top of the "results" - and justifiably so in most cases.

The BI web site has maintained its first page position on Google for a long time (despite the irritations of one or two of the present usurpers like the CofE and two totally irrelevant video clips!).

But I do feel Wikipedia needs supplementing and updating and would invite all members to take a shot. It's free, but time consuming. Please let me know of your progress!

Change of Address

Long-serving Committee Member Steve Corbett has recently been "induced" to a new living as vicar at St Gabriel's, Blackburn. Address is

6 Charnwood Close, Blackburn, Lancs, BB2 7BT; Tel 01254 581412. -
spc757@googlemail.com

Thanksgiving in all things? A Challenge and a Testimony surrounding an unusual Thanksgiving Service.

This is rather unusual in a BI Update! It all started when Isabella was seeking bright and cheerful certificates to commemorate the Thanksgiving Services for her children (only available from BI!). As we talked, a fascinating and challenging story emerged - and although perhaps members may wonder what it's doing in here at all - I felt there was a personal message that needed to be heard as well as how a Thanksgiving Service can be made to mean so much.. So bear with us folks!

Isabelle and Clyde share the story of Zachary's birth - which stood out as a family 'monument' for seeking and following God's will

Zac was due to be born on 13th July 2008, but he did not make an appearance until 1st August 2008 – 19 days past his 'due' date. As we waited and waited for him to be born, we felt very strongly that God wanted us to trust Him for His perfect timing – this was very much going against the 'norms' of medical practice which leaves little option but a medical induction in hospital if a baby is more than 14 days' overdue. We decided to allow Zac to come when he was ready. During that long wait, we continually weighed up the risks and benefits of not intervening and, as each day passed, although we were sometimes in a state of emotional turmoil, we felt at peace with what God was telling us. But the decision to allow Zac to be born naturally at home in God's timing rather than via a pre-scheduled medical induction in hospital was not a decision we made lightly.

When Zac eventually arrived, he was perfect in every way and, contrary to what we had been warned might happen to him if we waited, he had all of the characteristics of a baby that was born exactly on his due date – so God knew what He was doing!

Without having gone through this experience, we might have thought that the date of Zac's birth was a random event – that it would make no difference whether he was born on one date or another, but this experience has taught us the significance of his and our other children's Birth Days.

Those close to us knew that Zac's Thanksgiving Service was as important to us as would be his Wedding and the detailed preparation that went into the Service and the celebration afterwards (for his first birthday) reflected that. But it was the Bible passages and the sermon that summarized the true significance of the day for us – God had guided us along a path that, in the natural, was terrifying to follow and, in doing so, He had given us a

miracle. Zac's Thanksgiving Service was our way of formally presenting him to the world and to the Church, it was our way of proclaiming the story of his birth, it was our declaration of thanks for God for a baby who was so hard fought for, one who might so easily never have been given to us at all.

Although having children has been relatively easy for us, we have never taken for granted God's grace in choosing to bestow these most precious of gifts upon us. That is why, for Clyde and me, our children's Thanksgiving Services will, for us, be one of the most significant events of their lives. These sentiments were reflected in the inspiring and reflective sermon that Liz gave at Zac's Thanksgiving Service - so prayerfully prepared, its content speaks for itself and a key extract is set out below:

[From the sermon by Rev Liz Horwell]

"There is something very special about all Services of Thanksgiving for the birth of a new child - reminding us as they do of God's great and wonderful blessings to us in our lives here on earth; reminding us of God's creative Spirit: the way that he makes each and every one of us in his own image; the way that he cares for each and every one of us every single day of our lives. But I think that there is something extra special about our Thanksgiving service today for young Zachary Alexander- perhaps lots of particularly special things about this service of Thanksgiving.

For it seems to me that Isabelle and Clyde have a depth of trust in our God that not many people have; not even many Christians; and, dare I say, not even many priests. For most people trust to their own judgment, or that of "experts" - human experts.; whereas Isabelle and Clyde have shown, in their patient waiting for Zac's arrival a year ago today, an understanding that God's timing is not human timing, God's ways are not human ways, but God's ways are best.

Isabelle's and Clyde's trust is reflected so beautifully in the readings they have chosen for today. First that wonderful reading from Ecclesiastes: "for everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven" Then, the story from Genesis of the birth of Sarah's baby, Isaac. Abraham was 100 and Sarah well beyond normal child-bearing years.

And finally those verses where God reminds Job that it is not Job who knows or decides the timing of birth for the animals but God who knows and determines these things.

And so our service today reflects the trust that Isabelle and Clyde have in God; trust that they know they can rely on because it says so in the Scriptures; trust that doesn't require us ever to live in our own

strength and wisdom, but allows us to relax into God's strength and wisdom and is exactly what God asks of each and everyone one of us as we develop our relationship with Him in our life journeys"

Liz's sermon provides a flavour of the individuality, intimacy and meaning that Zachary's Thanksgiving Service conveyed, not only to him and to us, his parents, but also to many members of the congregation, a number of whom were from other faiths, religions and lifestyles. Many people told us how touched they were by the Service because it spoke so clearly of God's involvement, intervention and direction in our lives – and it showed them that He could and would do the same in their lives too.

Footnote: This article is much shortened from the original. But Isabelle is very happy for me to send the full article to anyone who might be helped by it. Since that time of rejoicing, Isabelle and Clyde have been faced with another faith-challenging crisis *"...for the pregnancy I am currently blessed with is complicated and we have been warned that we are at risk of either losing our baby or giving birth to a baby who will have special needs"*. (Ed)

Why are we so timid about Thanksgivings?

We can perhaps be accused of "banging on" about the Thanksgiving Service being such an excellent starting point for baptismal preparation and practice, but when such an effective pastoral tool is available both for committed Christians wanting to "reserve" the rite for their children when believers, and for those wanting "something" for their new-born - we must be forgiven!

As Rev John Hartley says: *"In 23 years of ordained ministry in 4 parishes I've baptised fewer than 23 infants. Yet I've had almost no complaints ... I even generate "christening requests" from over the parish boundaries. How? Simply by making positive use of the Thanksgiving Service. It's much friendlier, has a real feeling of welcome, can be offered without conditions, can be tailored to individuals, generates no feeling of being pushed to make promises ... and families appreciate it, which is why they and their friends come back and request more. So I've done hundreds of them.*

The great secret of its success? Well, it's what Jesus did when they brought children to him! Isn't it?"

Why not take a look at our web site <http://www.baptism.org.uk/promtg.htm> and the associated "Q & A"

A summary of Anglicanism and Baptismal Ecclesiology.... [from BCP, current liturgies, the Canons and The 39 Articles.....!!]

Clifford Owen now resident in Belgium and - a former Chairman of BI has been reading....

Before our recent Cologne conference for the Diocese in Europe clergy, our bishops spurred us to keep up our theological reading by listing thirty or so books which would 'do us a bit of good'. This spur had an additional carrot of a good discount from Church House Bookshop if we ordered at the conference! So I decided to go in for *Reformation, Europe's House divided 1490-1700* by Diarmaid MacCulloch (London, Penguin, 2004) and Paul Avis' *The Identity of Anglicanism, Essentials of Anglican Ecclesiology* (London, T&T Clark, 2008) What follows is not a review of either book, (especially as I have not yet finished either!), but a sketch of why Paul Avis could be of interest to BI.

MacCulloch is a name which is destined to become quite well known through the new BBC TV series *The History of Christianity*. It is a book over which I will take time to wade through all of its 700 pages, since the need to understand the Reformation is quite important in a country like Belgium. Belgium is still largely Roman Catholic in sub-culture, but is buffered between France and Holland, where the latter is still undergirded by a strong Protestant theology. Furthermore our Anglican congregation in Brugge shares a church building with the 'Verenigde Protestante Kerk Belgie' (The United Protestant Church of Belgium) Also, when one works in the European mainland one is a very much more self-conscious of being Anglican, and consequently much more in need of an understanding of one's own ecclesiological identity. Continentals (a very broad term!) want to know what it is that is unique to Anglicanism. Are we Catholic or Protestant? How can we be both? I have recently heard two interesting comments: a VPKB minister (see above) thought that there seemed to be more of the Holy Spirit in the Anglican Church! A visiting speaker from the Catholic University of Leuven also said that if the Anglican church in Holland were to conduct its worship in Dutch, a number of congregations would immediately go into three figures! It seems to be saying that we as a church have something positive and special to offer, which we are not too conscious of and take for granted in our English homeland.

So I turn to Paul Avis' *Identity of Anglicanism*. Paul Avis, for those of you who don't know him. is rooted in Exeter Diocese as a former parochial minister. He was also a lecturer in church history at Exeter University, scholar, author, theologian, Anglican apologist, but above all an ecumenist. *Identity* is written very much from his present seat as General Secretary of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity. His approach therefore is very much in an ecumenical context, and concerned to strengthen that which is unique, if anything, to the Church of England over against the Roman Catholics on one side and the historically declared Reformed churches on the other. Avis sees the Church of England as a church which has never overstated itself, always modest, but ready to declare its catholicity and reformed recipe when challenged. What he is keen to say is that no one church on earth is really able to say that it *is* the final form of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church, without remainder. He seeks to dispel the sense that if only we could add a couple of last things which would make us 'right' then the Roman Catholic Church would be happy to declare Anglican orders ok and all would be well. However, enough of that for the moment!

“..no one church on earth is really able to say that it *is* the final form of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic church,

It is his chapter on Anglicanism and Baptismal Ecclesiology which could well bear deeper study by BI sympathisers. Avis sets out 14 theses in which he attempts to summarise the Anglican doctrine of baptism as can be drawn from the Prayer Book of 1662, current liturgies of the Anglican Communion, the Canons and 39 articles. Space prohibits a full discussion here, but there are some important assertions:

Baptism is an 'effectual sign'. It has an 'instrumental' relation to the action of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration or rebirth through which the Spirit is received. (Avis' words)

Baptism is the foundational sacrament of Christian initiation, which also includes catechesis, liturgical profession of faith and the confirmation of the Holy Spirit, participation in the Eucharist. Baptism is the sacrament of membership of the body of Christ though not into any particular denomination. Avis has a particular emphasis on recovering the 'old' stance of seeing confirmation as a necessary pre-requisite to receiving holy communion.

Baptism requires a human response of faith and committed discipleship.

There is much more, but taken as a whole BI's agenda would seem to sit squarely and firmly within Avis' summary of Anglican baptismal polity. Or to put it another way BI certainly appears to be playing 'within the legitimate boundaries of the Anglican pitch'.

My mind went back over some of the earlier work in the area of baptismal reform in the Church of England: Hensley Henson, Roland Allen, and if I can dust off that essay I wrote in *Reforming Infant Baptism* (Hodder 1980), Alec Vidler. If a heavyweight such as Vidler was so outspoken on the need to reform baptism at the pastoral disciplinary level then there must have been many fingers in C of E ears over the decades of those who really feared facing up to this one.

There is also of course Gordon Kuhr's excellent *Believing in Baptism* (Mowbray 1987), with his chapter on the case for discrimination in baptism. Anglican authority is often summarised as *scripture, tradition and reason*. My conviction is that baptismal reform has been a tradition within the Church of England of the Holy Spirit's making, right back to Gorham, (who was also Exeter Diocese!) and probably if I were to do my homework properly, to the Anglican Reformers*. Then bringing us up to date; last but not least is Roger Godin's notable effort to get baptismal discipline onto the General Synod agenda back in the 1990s. His successful efforts were quietly and relentlessly debated into a snowdrift of non-commitment. (I've not forgotten, Roger!) But what is worth noting about Roger's original motion is that it was rooted in the BEM document's section on 'indiscriminate infant baptism' (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Lima statement 1982) This document is hailed by Paul Avis as groundbreaking piece of work.

One conclusion I draw from Avis's *Identity* is that individual churches have an amazing capacity to silence the uncomfortable even though a logically obvious course of action beckons. He has the ecumenical context principally in mind and the need for Anglicans to have an ecclesiology which exhibits *integrity*. As far as BI is concerned I detect in Paul Avis the possibility of a friend!

(*I feel a need to look at Geoffrey Bromiley *Baptism and the Anglican Reformers* (London, Lutterworth Press 1953) on this; and of course Richard Hooker.)

“A happy outcome” - from the web queries

Ed: I was wondering how things developed following our correspondence. Did you find a solution?

Web questioner: YES !!! is the happy answer to your question. I got in touch with a lovely lady - they were very happy to welcome us and baptise xxx. We felt welcomed & comfortable.

[It's great when we can bring reconciliation - following bad pastoral practice!]

Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries - by Everett Ferguson; Eerdmans (978-0-8028-2748-7)

Review by David Perry

Everett Ferguson has been studying Christian initiation in the early centuries of the Church for very many years. This large tome (953pp) is a vast labour of love and a culmination of all his efforts. The contents run from “Antecedents of Christian Baptism” via the New Testament and the patristic period through to the late fourth century.

For evidence and discussion of Christian faith and practice it is unrivalled in its comprehensiveness. In parallel with his own treatment of original sources, the author sets summaries of the scholarly debate. He can be relied on to give an accurate picture of the story so far. This does not mean that what he says is the last word on any given issue, but it means the reader has been given a large and reliable platform on which to build further insights. Enormously helpful are the six indices which occupy the last 100 pages of the book, heroic in their comprehensiveness.

Within its chosen compass this book is outstanding. However, at least one aspect of the genesis and development of Christian baptism is not covered. There is no attempt to set out the interplay between the Church and its political and social setting. For example, the Theodosian Code is mentioned only in a footnote clarifying a point about the Marcionites. There is no attempt to present and analyse the secular and political pressures that affected the practice of baptism through time. The addition of a companion volume “Politics and Baptism in the First Five Centuries” would make the coverage truly complete.

That being said, this book provides a wonderful starting point for anyone seeking to learn about baptism as it developed in the first five centuries. It should entirely displace the work of Jeremias and Aland in this field and be the basic textbook/source book for theological students.

Cover price £41 but can be had via Amazon (including delivery) for under £30.