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SPIRITUALITY AND STRUCTURES

Who are these baptistic Christians?

Spirituality and Structures is, I suppose intended to engage with the intersection of the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit of God, the Ruach¹, with what seems to be the compulsion of the disciples of Jesus to organise structures of life for, so we claim, the better ordering of the communities of belief for worship, mission and service. Yet we know that this tension has consequences, certainly if structures begin to corral and confine the dynamics of the Holy Spirit. And whilst I was part of the planning group which chose the topics and titles, in preparing this presentation I realise I want to turn the title upside down, or at least, back to front, to start with Structures and then engage with a view of a Spirituality which can de-construct the structures and enable the Ruach of God to open up new dimensions of Christian discipleship in our gathering, intentional, missional, convictional communities² in Europe and the Middle East.

BWA Message 2005

In 2005 the longer discussion document of the Baptist World Alliance, from which the Centenary message was drawn, said this about the church –

1. No Christian tradition is the complete expression of the true church. We believe the true church is that company of all people and tribes and tongues that will stand before God at the last and be invited into God's everlasting Kingdom. It is an eschatological community that God continues to gather to himself. The church as known today is a genuine expression of that universal gathering of all those who through all ages will have been gathered by the Spirit through Christ to the Father in order that God may be all in all to them. While eagerly anticipating that great eschatological moment, we acknowledge that the church in every age is called to proclaim that Kingdom in word and deed, demonstrating a new humanity created in Christ Jesus and rich koinonia as a sign of God's presence among all believers throughout the world (Acts 1.6-14)³

These are fine words about the ecclesial reality we Baptists claim and with a dynamic thrust looking forward to the future God intends for us, but we also know these fine words penned by an international group of Baptist scholars might properly reflect what they understand to

¹ Ruach is the Hebrew word for Spirit. It is a feminine gendered word which is increasingly used by Baptist scholars when talking about the Holy Spirit. See Molly T Marshall "Transformational Reading: Minding the spirit" in *Baptistic Theologies Volume 3, Number 2, Autumn 2011* pp 2-4

² On this model of baptistic ecclesiology see Keith G Jones "Towards a Model of Mission for Gathering, Intentional, Convictional *Koinonia*" in *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Volume four, number 2, January 2004 pp3-13.

³ BWA Centenary Message, discussion document for Baptist Unions and seminaries. Presented to the BWA Centenary Congress, Birmingham, UK. The full text can be found with explanation in Keith G Jones "The Baptist world Alliance and Baptist Identity: A reflection on the journey to the Centenary Congress Message, 2005" in *The Journal of European Baptist Studies*, Volume eight, Number 2, January 2008 pp 5-17.

be the essence of Baptist ecclesiology. Placed alongside this is the inherent missionary thrust about which Glen Marshall spoke earlier –

2. We believe in the Great Commission. Every believer is empowered by God and called to be a missionary. This is a life that includes learning as a disciple of Christ and sharing His witness. The need to share the Gospel is at the heart of our understanding of the church. The good news of Jesus Christ should be made known in word and deed to every person in every part of the world. Missions is an integral part of our history as Baptists. It must be a vital part of our future for the task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth is unfinished. We believe that planting new local churches is fundamental to our missionary principle (Matthew 28.16-20).
3. Therefore, we encourage all Baptists everywhere to engage in local mission, in church planting and in prophetically relating God's grace to their particular situations. We join others through our unions, conventions, councils of churches, mission agencies and the BWA to work with each other in cross-cultural mission that the world might believe (John 3.17).⁴

Yet we recognise in many instances our structures have become moribund and atrophied because we have engaged in some false premises. The first of these is to declare there is a “pure and universal” Baptist ecclesiology which has been universalised somewhere between Thomas Helwys in 1609⁵ and Johann Gerhard Oncken in 1848⁶. As my colleague, Parush R Parushev, constantly argues, in front of the word “Baptist” we must always place an adjective “Anglican Baptist, Lutheran Baptist, Orthodox Baptist”⁷ as inevitably, it seems, Baptist ecclesial structures tend to be formed by the reaction to, or growing out of the dominant national, state or folk church where specific Baptist groups are established.

Ecclesiology in focus

It has been regularly declared that ‘the distinctive feature about Baptists is their doctrine of the Church’.⁸ In recent times various Baptist theologians have sought to identify and mark out a combination of theological assertions which might be said to characterise the people called Baptists.⁹ One assertion, which is not always emphasised outside of Europe,¹⁰ but strongly affirmed within Europe, is that Baptists are not ecclesologically independent, but interdependent. That is to say, though Baptist ecclesiology is founded on the theological assertion that each local gathering,¹¹ convictional and intentional community of believers has full authority to interpret the mind of Christ, nevertheless there is an understanding that like-

⁴ BWA Centenary Message 2005, discussion document for reflection on Baptist Unions and seminaries.

⁵ On Helwy's see Stephen Wright *The Early English Baptists 1603-1649* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2006)

⁶ On J G Oncken see Ian M Randall “Every Apostolic Church a Mission Society: European Baptist Origins and Identity” in Anthony R Cross(ed) *Ecumenism and History: Studies in Honour of John H Y Briggs* (Carlisle:Paternoster Press, 2002)

⁷ Parush R Parushev – find a citation !

⁸ W.T. Whitley, *A History of British Baptists*, rev. ed. (London: Kingsgate, 1932), p. 4.

⁹ By Baptists it is assumed those within the gathering, or believers' church tradition who are identified with the Baptist World Alliance, or recorded in the book edited by A.W. Wardin, *Baptists Around the World* (Nashville Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1995).

¹⁰ See, for instance, D.K. McCall with A. R. Tonks, *Duke McCall : An Oral History* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Baptist History and Heritage Society/Nashville: Fields, 2001).

¹¹ See my *A Believing Church: learning from some contemporary Anabaptist and Baptist perspectives* (Didcot: Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1998), p 64 and *passim*.

minded communities of believers are to be related to and engaged with for a whole variety of ecclesial purposes. Such a relationship is not simply pragmatic, but is of the theology appropriate to the believers' church tradition.¹² Some have accused those of us who advocate such an ecclesiology of adopting an incipiently sectarian stance, but, as Alan Sell comments "while this is an ever present danger, if the concepts of discipleship and mission are to the fore in the community of faith, sectarian ghettoization will not be a necessary result."¹³ This point was emphasised in the 2005 BWA Centenary Congress message in the paragraph on the Church and the Kingdom, which reads

[We] 8. Declare that through the Holy Spirit we experience interdependence with those who share this dynamic discipleship of the church as the people of God.¹⁴

The whole of this statement expresses the thinking that has had a shaping influence on European Baptists.

Interdependency is in our genes

Interdependent relationships, entered into by local covenanted communities of believers, are not bound to a specific micro-geographical area, but can be recognised in regional, national, continental and international arenas, as the BWA Centenary Congress Message makes clear. The basic model is of the local covenanted gathering church being driven by the Holy Spirit to participate in such trans-local relationships freely and for theological and missiological reasons, as an outcome of their worship of the Triune God. For local gathering communities, which then directly understand the Holy Spirit to be encouraging them to join and participate in regional and national Baptist ecclesial groupings, there is also a covenant of trust,¹⁵ that empowers and permits the national officers and councils of these groupings to join continental and intercontinental ecclesial-like groupings as if the local church itself made the move towards such wide-scale interdependency. The ecclesial form thus described places the weight of ecclesiology on the local, as opposed to the international, continental, national or regional bodies (in contradistinction to many other Christian World Communions), but I have argued elsewhere¹⁶ that it gives real substance to the ecclesial nature of the 'more-than-local', trans-local, trans-national and trans-continental elements and, though it is principally an ecclesiology from below, it is not vacuous in the other spheres of the more-than-local.

This is a key theological point, because it places Baptist communities, Unions and the EBF itself within a historic Baptist pattern of always seeking to build ecclesial trans-local life outwards from the prime notion of the local church as the base ecclesiological unit, with all other structures being derived in a pyramidal way from the core ecclesial reality. The different ways of conceiving Baptist ecclesial life can be considered diagrammatically.

¹² Believers' church is used here as defined by D.F. Durnbaugh in *The Believers' Church: the History and Character of Radical Protestantism* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1968).

¹³ Alan P F Sell *Confessing and Commending the Faith*. (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2002) p 45.

¹⁴ BWA 'Message from the Centenary Congress', Birmingham, England, July 2005 at <http://www.bwanet.org/congress>, para. 8, Accessed 20 January 2007.

¹⁵ See R. Kidd (ed.), *On the Way of Trust* (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 1997), pp. 22-4 on 'covenant, union and alliance'.

¹⁶ In a paper presented to the BWA Symposium on Baptist Identity and National Culture, Elstal, Germany, May 2001.

The Baptist Pyramid (diagram 1)

In contrast to this model of ecclesial relationships, Jonathan Edwards argues for a series of concentric circles and this is the view of some other leading European Baptists.¹⁷

The Baptist Concentric Circles (diagram 2)

My view is that in contemporary Baptist life the gathering baptistic churches best relate and resource each other in something more akin to a web than either a pyramid or concentric circles, and the theologising behind such an approach is spelt out by N.G. Wright.¹⁸

The baptistic web (diagram 3)

In whatever way we try to express diagrammatically the ecclesial nature of baptistic communities, what is very clear is that, for Europeans, there is an ecclesial life and reality beyond the local and that normally this is by gathering communities associating together and then by those bodies associating with one another.

Nevertheless, though these post-Oncken dynamics have been expressed principally as relational, only the naïve would assert European Baptists have steered a clear and dynamic path away from the structural which has juridical aspects to it. Let us momentarily examine several areas of ecclesial life where a structural model has been developed, sometimes over against the ecclesial model which asserts that the gathering community of believers, covenanted together, discerns the mind of Christ, through the Holy Spirit by prayer, reading the Scriptures and listening to each other.

Leadership and Ordination

No where do we see so clearly structural outworkings from within our ecclesiology than when we explore leadership issues. We believe God is gathering into local communities women and men so that the believing church might engage in it's worship, life and mission. We believe that all within each local community are gifted and that the gifts vary. This is inherent to our base desire for spiritual discernment. Some leaders are gifted to what generally we talk about as "Servant Leadership", though this category is often disputed because for many leadership can be authoritarian and in many of our Baptist Unions has become controlled through

¹⁷ The Revd Jonathan Edwards is the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and expressed this point of view at a Workshop on the future structure of the BWA on 30 September 2006 at Valpre, Lyon, France. Personal recollection of the author.

¹⁸ N.G. Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist View* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005).

systems of licensing, ordination and supervision (regionally and nationally) by organisms of lesser ecclesial importance than the local church.¹⁹

In this contested area of discourse within the church concerns are expressed about leadership at local, region, nationally and continental-wide. A US-based organisation, Columbia Partnership, brings together some of the leading thinkers in baptistic leadership in the USA today²⁰. Recently one of the “partners”, Suzanne Goebel, placed an article on line called “**The Crisis of Leadership**” where she explores contemporary challenges to leadership using as a conversant partner an earlier work of James MacGregor Burns and his book on Leadership (1978) looking specifically at issues of –

- Power
- Authority
- Transactional and transformational leadership
- Moral leadership
- And the relationship between them all.

In this lecture I can only touch on the issue of all these turning points of leadership for baptistic churches, but I am inevitably drawn to a focus on transformational and transactional leadership which is *strategic*, because the quest for strategic leadership is, in my view, of paramount importance for baptistic communities in a post-communist, post-foundationalist, post-modern Europe – which is the place we appear to be.²¹

Let us be clear what Leadership is. It comes from an old North European word meaning a path, road, way or course of a ship – it is a journey word. So it is a word about stepping out on the way. As such, it should be a deeply spiritual word. Leadership has functionality : defining the task, planning, briefing, controlling, supporting, evaluating. We need to get right quality (who and what you are) and function (what you do). The apparent Biblical model of this is rooted in the professional/skilled/proficient (good) shepherd. *Kalos*. Leadership a key concept for an ecclesial community because leadership has the potentiality to address issues of change and to do so with the resources of faith – spiritual resources. However, in many Baptist communities in Europe we see a management concept of leadership. Here Structures and Spirituality can so easily clash.

Now, certain models of strong, centralised power leadership which we discern in many parts of our European Baptist family have been called into serious question in this post-communist era so often, as Suzanne Goebel asserts, “ power is distinguished, particularly brute power and its cousin tyranny, as that which is only concerned with the needs, goals and motives of the power wielder.”²² With Goebel, I am concerned that a focus on power alone has degraded, if not, indeed demonised the search for Christian spiritual leadership both within the local church and from the community of faith to the general population and there can be no true

¹⁹ In Europe Unions with highly defined procedures for selection, training and control of those who seek ordination include Armenia, Czech Republic, Great Britain, Germany, Georgia, Poland, Russia, Sweden,

²⁰ www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org accessed 29/09/2011.

²¹ On the “post” Europe see the writings of my colleague, P R Parushev, especially the work he has done on baptistic theology following the insights of James W McClendon Junior. See especially *Doing Theology in a Baptist Way*” paper delivered at a symposium celebrating 1609-2009 at the Vrije University, Amsterdam. (Amsterdam: Vrije University, 2009) and *Christianity in Europe: The Way we are now* P R Parushev, (Oxford: Church Mission Society, 2009)

²² Suzanne Goebel *The Crisis of Leadership: Implications for Congregational Leadership*. www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org accessed 29/09/2011.

transformation of the ecclesial community, as envisaged in the BWA 2005 statement in the face of such miss-formed power.

Power-wielders are found in leadership and in Structures of our Baptist unions and in baptistic churches – and they are full of purpose and intent ! This is abusiveness and stops the possibility of true Strategic spiritual leadership – the radical reformation did not reject a Pope in Rome only to succumb to a pope at home !²³ Sadly, as Goebel notes and I can affirm, there are many pastors who wield and abuse power without any apparent concern for the “followers” as she describes them, ecclesial community as we might contend, for the growth of the laos (whole people of God) and their needs. We might go so far as to assert that leadership based on power defames and denies the model of leadership discovered in Jesus.

Such Structural Power leadership seems at deep variance with the ecclesiology and spirituality of baptistic communities and our working out of what it means to be a gathering, intentional, convictional, missional, baptistic community of faith.²⁴

Leadership in baptistic communities inevitably involves forms of power, but is not itself power assumed by, or controlled by the Strategic Leader, but is rather offered power from the spiritual life of the ecclesial community which incorporates the needs and goals of the community and so the leader has a focus not on “self” but on “others.”

Baptistic communities cannot value Strategic Leadership unless there are recognised goals being addressed. In setting goals also requires common agreed and accepted priorities – not only of the Strategic Leader, but of the ecclesial community and without this chaos will ensue. Strategic Leadership will need to be equipped and focused on both transactional and transformational change. Goebel defines these as follows :-

- **Transactional:** the exchange of valued things, with valued “things” being as concrete as property or as abstract as feeling warm and fuzzy.
- **Transformational:** occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.²⁵

Churches and leadership

Do our churches have a culture which values such transformational leadership ? What models of leadership “fit” within our culture ? What models are actually permitted ?²⁶ We affirm the ministry of all (the whole people of God, the *laos*) and the leadership of some. Strategic Leaders in our baptistic vision are called out by the church community, the point emphasised by Goebel, and I believe the New Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit gives her gifts irrespective of gender (Acts 2. 17-18). In some parts of our baptistic family cultural reasons

²³ This is not my original saying – it came out of the charismatic/new church movement in the UK in the 1980’s in the light of the assumption of massive personal power by certain gifted, but flawed, charismatic church leaders.

²⁴ This definition of baptistic churches is one developed by P R Parushev and Keith G Jones, based on earlier insights of James W McClendon Jnr.

²⁵ Suzanne Goebel *The Crisis of Leadership: Implications for Congregational Leadership*. The Columbia Partnership, 27.09.2011. Accessed 28.09.2011 www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org

²⁶ Derek J Tidball sets out what he perceives as Biblical models in *Builders and Fools: Leadership the Bible Way* (Leicester:IVP, 1999)

currently appear to dictate this deep Biblical truth should be suppressed, but we know from the very earliest churches (Romans 16. 1-2) women were in leadership (Romans 16.3) and teaching and there were women serving as Apostles (Romans 16.7) and Prophets (Acts 21.9, Acts 2. 17-18). Generally baptistic communities believe that strategic leadership is always shared, not least in the Biblical covenanted relationship between our Triune God and the community of disciples, but spiritually within the community (Acts: 13.1, 15.23, Phil. 1.1). So structures call for teams which may have a leader or “presiding elder” (Acts 15).

My assertion is that the New Testament does not lay out one model, or leadership structure as universally – oecumenically – the case. However, at least the following terms are common – Apostle, bishop, presbyter, deacon, elder. We find it difficult to agree with certain Episcopal churches (Roman and Anglican especially) that there was only ever one order – bishop, presbyter, deacon – a constant unwavering three tier model, all tiers being ordained and set aside to this particular ministry with progression from a lower order (deacon) to the highest order (bishop). Amongst baptistic communities all these New Testament words are used, but not all in the same place. Many European Baptists use presbyter (pastor) and Deacon or Elder. Some have a regional or national leader (Episcopos/President/Superintendent). Matters of setting aside (ordination) differ markedly.

Issue of authority immediately surface as a crucial factor in leadership. In hierarchical/episcopal churches the laos buy-into the idea that Leadership is declared and has an authority by virtue of office. This authority is declared to be a legitimate power. Some may question it, as it is currently challenged in parts of the Catholic community on such questions as the cover-up of sexual abuse by leaders (priests and bishops) or recent Papal announcements refuting any legitimacy for the leadership of women within the community of faith, except in certain proscribed roles such as nuns and ministries of diakonia.

For baptistic communities spiritual authority is generally conveyed by some setting apart of an individual, perhaps through ordination by the wider community or commissioning by the local ecclesia. Generally, authority in Strategic Leadership is only accorded to a person or group if qualities of spirituality, integrity, authenticity, initiative and moral resolve are determined.²⁷

Gill and Burke²⁸ argue there are eight key features of spiritual leadership to be discerned in the New Testament book most clear on the theme, the Acts of the Apostles

- **Worship:** Strategic leadership comes out of a context of worship. (c.f. early chapters of Acts). From this it is clear the Spirituality of the community produces the structures which permit leadership to blossom.
- **Vision:** arises out of prayer and worship. (Acts 7 and Stephen; Acts 8 and Philip, Acts 9 and Saul/Paul, Acts 10 and Peter). Here again spirituality is placed to the forefront in shaping the community of faith and we must be careful of structures which confine, rather than release, the spiritual visionary dynamic.
- **Sense of priorities:** each of the above is given either clarified or revised priorities (Acts 10.34). Strategic leaders do not do everything, they are deliberately selective and they do not react to “one event after another”. That is an organisation structural response which has pervaded too often in too many situations.

²⁷ Goebel asserts in north America there is a major challenge to the notion of authority in Leadership in this post modern generation. There is a need, she argues, for protection against absolute power,

²⁸ Robin Gill and Derek Burke *Strategic Church Leadership* (London: SPCK, 1996)

- **The identification of opportunities:** In Acts 8 the Ethiopian Eunuch presents Philip with an opportunity (differentiation between opportunities and threats is important). Philip sends the Ethiopian eunuch on his way rejoicing. In contrast, Simon the sorcerer, is unmasked as being a threat (Acts 8.13, yet issues as identified in 8. 18-19).
- **Leadership** is carefully selected for defined tasks: Mathias (Acts 1), selection of Deacons (Acts 6). Selection and role differentiation are associated with leadership.
- **Conflict:** Acts doesn't imply the leader is to be so embracing that everyone loves her or him. This does not mean that leaders set out to engender conflict. However, internal and external conflict are referred to (Acts 2, 4, 5, 8). Standing for truth is crucial, unfortunately many church leaders just want to be loved. Within the church (Acts 5, 11, 15)
- **Outcomes and accountability:** Acts is interested in outcomes and accountability (Acts 1, 2, 4, 59). Both quantitative and qualitative concern about the health of the church is important.

Gill and Burke go on to suggest that Strategic Leaders within the structural realities demonstrate :

- Setting priorities – focused on worship
- Determining objectives – opportunities and threats
- Strategic planning
- Ownership and accountability

Now, if our churches, associations, unions and even the EBF itself in Europe operate with a juridical, set organisational model such Strategic Leadership, driven by the Ruach of God will become virtually impossible. Here will be the clash between Structure and Spirituality focused on the Holy Spirit.

So I come to the crux of the challenge between Structure and Spirituality. Early Baptists spent much time discerning the gifts of individuals and then, in community, setting them apart for service. Some were seen as having leadership gifts and set apart in that way. Today, Structure often rules with the cult of individualism encouraging someone to believe for themselves they have leadership potential, go for a seminary education and then fulfil the national organisational requirements of paperwork to be permitted to be ordained. In an extreme way this can be a clash of two understandings and we who work in seminaries have to work at drawing together the Structural and the Spiritual in a creative partnership.

The Spiritual and the Structural and Legal

Another classic point of tension between the Spiritual and the Structural might be focused on the strategic use of assets. Baptists, to use the McClendon understanding of “this is that, then is now”²⁹ see ourselves as New Testament communities of faith, which, according to the great Orthodox scholar, Alexander Schmemmann, was a *domus ecclesiae*³⁰, a church meeting in

²⁹ For an explanation of this phrase see James Wm McClendon Jnr *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986). The other volumes are *Doctrine* and *Witness*.

³⁰ Alexander Schmemmann *The eucharist* (New York: St Vladimir's Press, 2003), pp 19ff.

houses and enjoying table fellowship.³¹ Today, baptistic communities appear structurally bound into a Christendom model post 4th century with buildings for worship, activities, administration throughout Europe which require repair, maintenance, legal ownership rights, use beyond the one to three hours on the Lord's Day and which often sap the energy of the ecclesial communities who inhabit them. Since the first Baptists in Amsterdam simply rented space, appropriately enough, in a bakehouse³² owned by a Mennonite³³. This might be called an assets-light ecclesiology, but sadly it has been mostly downhill since then with Baptists joining other "Christendom" Christians in purchasing land, putting up buildings to accommodate maximum crowds for Church Anniversaries, Harvest Festival, Evangelists rallies and the like. The moment we do this Structures can dangerously impede Spirituality.³⁴ Inevitably assets – financial or structural, require management which require Trustees, an Association, a Verein or an equivalent to manage them. Now, intrinsically, such legal bodies³⁵ are not, of themselves, bad, but they are inevitably confining and restrictive. They are constructs within the world of the state and such, almost inevitably, a part of the Christendom order³⁶. Christian mission, following the Ruach of God, is much more dynamic and interpretive, engaging with an ever-changing world and, I believe, that is why Spirituality must have precedence in baptistic communities, over Structure.

For ten years I was General Secretary of the Yorkshire Baptist Association³⁷. The history of Baptists in Yorkshire is generally and persuasively a dynamic growth and expansion from the 1660's through to, certainly, the 1980's.³⁸ Over three hundred years, populations move, situations change and in my ministry I found I faced two phenomena – the establishment of new churches in growing communities on the lower lands around Leeds, York and Sheffield and the abandonment of chapel and Sunday School buildings on the Pennine hills where there had been thriving communities in the 1700's, but now there was no population³⁹, worship had ceased, the structure, the land, the building remained. A legacy of once active and vibrant Christian communities, but populations, life, the Ruach of God moves on and soon only the shell of faith – artefacts, remain. This is the Structural reality of Christianity. In south west Russia some years ago the then President of Russian Baptists, Piotr Konovalchik, asked me what I thought of the amazing mock-gothic chapel buildings Russian Baptists had erected in the city of Bryansk. Of course, I congratulated him on the drive and energy of Russian Baptists to erect three (or possibly four) amazing edifices for Baptist believers in this once-

³¹ I argue for eating as a principal activity of the true community of faith in Keith G Jones "Gathering Worship: Some tentative proposals for reshaping worship in our European Baptist Churches today." Forthcoming *Journal of European Baptist studies*, Volume thirteen, number 1, September 2012

³² Bethlehem means the "house of bread"

³³ Keith Sprunger and Mary Sprunger "The Church in the Bakehouse: John Smyth's English Anabaptist Congregation at Amsterdam, 1609-1660" *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85, April 2011.

³⁴ Keith G Jones "The authority of the Trust Deed" *Baptist Quarterly* Volume XXXIII No 3 July 1989 pp 103-118

³⁵ Titles vary across Europe and the relationship of such assets to local churches varies. In some countries all assets are held by the Union as a Verein or association. In other countries local churches can be legally registered as "holding bodies". The system hardly matters. The structures impose duties and disciplines unknown to the New Testament church.

³⁶ Nigel Wright, *Disavowing Constantine, Mission, church and the social orders in the theologies of John Howard Yoder and Jurgen Moltmann* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000).

³⁷ www.yba.org.uk. Accessed 01 June 2012

³⁸ Ian M Sellers (editor) *Our Heritage: The Baptists of Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire 1647-1987* (Leeds: YBA, 1987).

³⁹ A classic example of this is the church of John Fawcett at Wainsgate, Hebden Bridge, now in the care of the Churches Historic Trust. John Fawcett is the author of the hymn "Blest Be the Tie that Binds", widely regarded as the "Baptist anthem".

closed city. It has nearly 500,000 population. It is a centre for steel and railway carriage manufacture⁴⁰. Interestingly, since the collapse of communism, population is declining, heavy metal manufacturing closing down and it is already mirroring the decline of the Welsh coalfields in the early 1900's and the Yorkshire woollen industry in the 1960's. As populations move, will the Baptist "tabernacles" be possible to maintain ?

This second example points to how assets lead to the necessity of Structures, which, with time, may have the ability to hinder the people of God respond positively to the Ruach of God, move on, adapt and develop in their mission and discipleship.

The responsibilities of seminaries

As this is a gathering of those engaged in the work of developing Strategic leaders for the service of the churches that the mission of God might be supported and enhanced my task is surely to draw out conclusions, if only tentative, on the interaction between Structures and Spirituality.

In so doing I want to start and end with Spirituality. I believe if seminaries exist, they certainly exist to inculcate a pattern of spirituality on the life of the students in community. At this point I certainly take my inspiration from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his confessing church seminary at Finkenwald in Germany in the dark days of the Second World War.⁴¹ I believe such an understanding of the first place of spirituality in community⁴² is the only way we can have an effective integration of the twin poles of structure and spirituality. Paul Fiddes, in an excellent introductory article to a key collection of Baptist essays on this theme declares "Spirituality has been moulded by an ecclesiology where the local congregation stands under the direct rule of Christ"⁴³ and where we have a prime duty to set our communities of learning firstly and foremostly as spiritual communities seeking the mind of Christ. Now, this is in sharp contrast to the normal demands of academia and against what appears to be the spirit of the age. I am nothing, if not a dissenter !

In 2003 I tried to articulate my notion of how a seminary, such as those we represent, might develop to inculcate a flexible spirituality in our students and act as a counterpoint to my own understanding that many seminaries, owned by their Unions, are intended to be places to "teach" denominational structure and promote conformity of what it means to be a "British", "German", "Ukrainian" Baptist.

What sort of community should foster deep Spirituality and challenge a natural push toward Structure ?

Seminaries are, in a sense, irregular places within the Christian Church. If gathering intentional koinonia of believers⁴⁴ are the true ecclesia, then anything which is not simply

⁴⁰ www.wikipedia : Bryansk. Accessed 01.06.2012.

⁴¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer *Life Together*, translated by John W Doberstein (London: SCM Press, 1954).

⁴² Multiple compilers *Take our Moments and Our Days: An Anabaptist Prayer Book* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2007)

⁴³ Paul Fiddes (ed) *Under the Rule of Christ: Dimensions of Baptist Spirituality* (Oxford: Regent's Study Guides, 2008)

⁴⁴ For some opening up of this idea of the church see my forthcoming article in *JEBS Volume 4 Number 2*. January 2004.

formed of God in Christ drawing together believers in an intentional community to worship him and engage in His mission, the *Missio Dei*,⁴⁵ must, in some sense, be irregular.

Perhaps, in a way, the old “dissenting academies” were a more appropriate model over against the modern seminary, when a handful of students were attached to a revered and scholarly pastor, often living in his home (as with John Fawcett and the beginnings of the Northern Baptist Education Society in the 1700’s⁴⁶) and belonging to the church of which their mentor was pastor?

However, that is not the case today and with advances in knowledge and the growth of the many disciplines within theology, the formation of “enablers”⁴⁷ to serve the churches requires assistance of several disciplines and educators from different backgrounds to offer any chance of the learners understanding sufficient of the whole story of the people of God not to lead those they are called to *enable* from orthodoxy and orthopraxis into deep error, or heresy.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer set out, in my view, a simple, but profound model in the desire to create the Confessing Church Academy at Finkenwald⁴⁸. Of course, he was a Lutheran creating a community of young men⁴⁹ for a church engaged in deep struggle for the soul of Christianity against the German National Church and the Führer principle, but nevertheless some of his insights can usefully be applied to us.

The basic realities

The Baptist Unions of Europe and the Middle East, together with other Christian traditions and organisations, send us people from the ages of 19 upwards to IBTS to be formed by us at three different levels (Certificate, Master, Doctoral) for a period of nine months, to what can seem like an infinity of years. We also often have travelling missionaries, volunteers and others who live for one or more years within our community.

Some of us as enablers within the community commit ourselves for periods of five or more years to this enterprise. Others choose to live within our community for varying lengths of time. These realities mean there is a core of people who grow together, perhaps over a two or more year period and who, whether deliberately or unwittingly, provide the basic shape of community into which others must fit. Those who pass through the community for shorter spaces of time inevitably influence the community, but may not be able to move some of the basic building blocks set in place and which the core people will not allow to be moved.⁵⁰

Of course there are those who live with, and yet in a measure apart from, the community for longer periods but are not part of the core who do try from time to time to exert an influence

⁴⁵ The mission of the church ought to be a reflection and participation in the mission of God and in a real sense the whole church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world

⁴⁶ John Fawcett was sent students who lived in his home at Hebden Bridge. In some senses it was a replication of the idea of the apprentice going to work with the pupil-master. Of course it has limitations in the lack of cross-fertilisation where several “pupil-masters” are involved.

⁴⁷ I use this term rather than pastor, which has authority overtones. I am seeking to move us away from hierarchical models of formation to forming women and men who see themselves in servant leadership enabling churches to fulfil their worship and mission.

⁴⁸ He sets this out in *Life Together* Dietrich Bonhoeffer. SCM Press. London. 1954.

⁴⁹ It was only men – what problems he might have faced with a mixed community!

⁵⁰ Such basic building blocks at IBTS are the physical structure, certain policies on lifestyle, the basic pattern of morning prayer and Wednesday Eucharist.

and know what levers to pull and pulleys to spin to apply pressure to the norms of the community⁵¹. Yet, by and large a core group of 12- 18 people at IBTS really are those who are the committed heart and who have it within themselves to shape the community at a deep level.

What is our basic shape?

Worship forms the heart of this shape at IBTS built around morning worship at 09.00 and the Wednesday Eucharist. Some who join the community seek to rebel against this “liturgical” spiritual style⁵², but it might reasonably be argued that most intentional communities in Church history have had the rhythm of worship, work, shared meals and recreation as the norm. Bonhoeffer argued strongly for the day beginning with worship and in that sense at IBTS we have compromised by having the day begin with breakfast, but nevertheless, morning worship still marks the first point at which the community is formed for the day as we all sit in chapel together.

For most other communities the day would end with worship, too⁵³, but at IBTS we have not been able to develop this, though the CAT students do develop patterns of evening prayer and Bible study and in some years at 22.00 and the whole student community has Vespers once a week. We seek to introduce different historic patterns of community worship and each year we expose our students to the rhythm of the Northumbria Community⁵⁴

Another key moment for the forming of community in a spiritual way is around the meal table. The monastic tradition took this very seriously and the whole Gospel account places meals at the very heart of meeting with Jesus, from the wedding feast at Cana, through the revolutionary assembly on the hillside, to the meal in the upper room and then at Emmaus and, of course, the breakfast at the lakeside. Where else can we expect to meet Jesus aside from when we are eating? At IBTS this has been a real dilemma. Mass catering in a self-service dining hall at lunchtime is a very poor substitute, especially when we are then reduced to sitting at small rectangular tables (reminiscent of the dollies tea cup beloved for the communion wine in some aberrations of the Eucharist)? Some years the single Masters students have operated a “Kitchen of Love” and have perhaps struck a modest blow for another sense of community.

We have, in a sense, no community forum to talk with each other and develop a sense of community. We recognise the constraints of the academic life, the mix of activities – seminary, hotel, and conference centre – and so we feel we are disabled from taking “community” further. We see too the differences of the people who come – young single people full of energy, families – some living off campus, volunteers – some of whom are very old and limited. Now, the diversity of people in one way helps us reflect the reality of life beyond IBTS, but also places challenges, certainly against the model of a monastery or the

⁵¹ Examples might be the negative work of Peter Kalkman in 2001 and the positive desire to get our community to be a haven for those rescued from trafficking of Lauran Bethel.

⁵² Andrei Kravtsev, now Rector of North Caucasus Bible School, would be one such, but on leaving realised what he now missed.

⁵³ At my home seminary morning prayers, after breakfast, marked the beginning of the working day and evening prayers at 21.00 marked the point at which the ordinands could consider ceasing to work on their theological papers for the evening, though, actually much real theologising took place in the inevitable sharing of coffee in a dormitory room after prayers, or for braver souls, the visit to the pub for “last orders please”.

⁵⁴ For more information about the Northumbria Community see <http://www.northumbriacommunity.org/> accessed 18 June 2012

vision of Bonhoeffer. Then, there is culture and language. There are some very different expectations culturally – English people wait to be invited before going visiting. Some Slavic groups never issue an invitation to cross their threshold, but expect people just to turn up. Some cultures, for instance, north Americans, appear to make everyone their instant friend (promptly to forget them when out of sight), people from some other cultures are slow to make friendships, but then they become deep and lasting.

Can more be done by seminaries to create a lasting community Spirituality which will modify the juridical Structures of our Unions ?

Until such time that the greater community (the EBF, Academia, etc) change profoundly it is unlikely we can convert ourselves into a gathering intentional community of disciples. When my academic dean, Parush Parushev, has talked in the past of IBTS as a “monastery” he is raising a model which also has flaws – potential detachment from the world, not taking seriously the community of women and men⁵⁵, struggling to relate community to the world of higher education and the fact that we come having made different “vows” to each other and to our churches. When talk about a gathering intentional community in an Anabaptist way, I recognise we cannot create a little Moravian Anabaptist village in, for instance, the heart of Prague with our own flour mill, bakery, pottery, weaving shed and farm.

Nevertheless, though we see the difficulties and the pitfalls can more be done to enhance a greater sense of spiritual community without abandoning our responsibility to equip enablers for the Structures of Baptist Unions in the EBF ?

Being more creative about what we have

Do we really help people understand what we have already and why some things are important? It is clear the model academic staff present is crucial- and here the informal modelling can often be more influential than the formal.

All of us have had students in our institutions who seem destined to live for the Structures- do the lectures, write the papers, conform to the desires of the Union for an educated ministry. So we come across students who think working through the night and stumbling bleary-eyed into lectures without breakfast is what we want from them. What an aberration of our intentions!

What cannot be changed

This is not a gathering intentional convictional koinonia. It is a seminary, hotel and conference centre. The EBF have appointed some people to run the institution who are more “permanent” and others pass through as students and community members. Those given the greater responsibility for the community are baptistic in tradition, but from different cultural values. Some live on and some off site. Some have immediate and pressing family responsibilities, others are slightly freer. There is no simple way our world can be turned upside down to develop a much closer community because we do not all arrive at this place from a common desire to be part of a gathering intentional convictional community and even

⁵⁵ Yes, I know the Abbess Hilda presided over a mixed community of women and men in the Celtic monastery at Whitby, but it seems beyond most mixed groups of women and men to keep the simple monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

if that were our aim the pattern of gathering and the specific clustering of convictions might vary across the group.

So, alongside the demands of some students and the deep longings of some more permanent members of our community a certain realism may be needed. If we cannot do everything some of us might want to do, can we do something? Can we emphasise the Spiritual community and relax our grip on preparing structurally conformist pastors who miss out on the Spirit blowing where she will.

A modest way forward

I have spent the greater part of my ministry in the juridical end of Baptist Structures. Ten years as a “General Secretary” of a British regional Baptist association, eight years as Deputy General Secretary of a Union, sixteen years on the EBF Executive Committee, ten years working on re-structuring the Baptist World Alliance.

But now I understand this. So much of Structural conformity can debilitate true openness to the Ruach of God. Seminaries can be guilty of forming students to be experts in denominational doctrine, juridical procedures and a conformist identity because we are owned, paid by and answerable to these very same structures and potentially fail to develop true disciples of Jesus Christ who listen in communities of faith more intentionally for the Spirit of God by being women and men of deep and abiding spirituality.

This will be my last CEBTS meeting. In twelve months my contract at IBTS concludes and I ask myself what I value most in seeking to serve God and the EBF family through fifteen tense, demanding and troublesome years. It is, in the end, the formative experience of community spirituality, daily worship, the weekly Eucharist⁵⁶, the shared meals, the common table. We have had brilliant students who have gone on to do outstanding doctorates. We have had able administrators now leading our EBF Unions and seminaries, we have had below average characters, who somehow serve the churches, but when I look at our blog site, our Facebook pages and all and read the email testimonies, it is the circle of prayer in the chapel which is most often commented on as formative and memorable, not the outstanding theological lectures, the erudite post graduate seminars, the intense comparison of different national approaches to the practice of ministry.

Keith G Jones
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⁵⁶ See my 1999 Whitley Lecture “A Shared Meal and a Common Table” (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 1999).