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**the baptist ministers'
journal**

January 2021 volume 349

Baptists and Brexit

*articles from Tony Peck, Joshua Searle,
Anthony Reddie and Peter Hatton*

plus....

Reviews

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useful contact details are listed inside the
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From the editor

This new year of 2021 will be memorable: we are living between the assault of the pandemic and the rollout of the vaccination programme. We will all have had experiences we could never have anticipated or imagined, and much has been written about Covid-19. However, in this issue of *bmj* we focus on another significant transition: Brexit. In the deep shadow of the worst period of coronavirus infections and deaths, we have slipped away from EU membership. British Baptists have historical and ongoing connections with Europe, so what does this mean for us? Does it raise any questions for our church members, our policies, and our ethics?

I am so grateful to our four writers for their heartfelt contributions, which may identify questions we had never considered, or present them in a way that makes us think again. They represent a spectrum of views and I hope you will find them challenging and interesting. Please note that author contact details are no longer included, so any responses or correspondence for *bmj* in this issue or ongoing will be *via* the editor.

I must also inform you of the tragic loss of a key member of the BMF team, Jem Sewell. Jem is the person who distributed the print copies of the *bmj* to those of you still taking them, and had been doing this job for us for some years with efficiency and cheerfulness. Jem died in service as pastor at Westbourne Park BC. Please pray for his wife, Hil, and their family and the church. BMF is grateful for all Jem did for us, and for the generosity of his church in sending out October's *bmj* after Jem's death.

This loss means that we are in urgent need of a new distributor. We are thankful to Sarah Halliwell, who has very kindly agreed to send out the next two issues, but by July we will need someone on an ongoing basis. PLEASE consider whether you could do this—or is there someone in your church? All costs are covered and there are four distributions per year. Contact myself (revsal96@aol.com) or Ron Day (ronald.e.day@outlook.com) for information.

It remains for me to wish you peace and courage for 2021: He who goes before us will always be faithful.

SN

European Baptists after Brexit

by Tony Peck

Author: Tony Peck is General Secretary of the European Baptist Federation. Here he is in conversation with the editor of bmj.

1. Tony, for any of our readers who haven't had much to do with the EBF, please tell us briefly what it is, what it does, and outline your role?

The European Baptist Federation (EBF) was founded in 1949 to bring together Baptists from Europe and the US concerned with reconstructing Baptist life after WW2, and also to support Baptists who now found themselves behind the Communist 'Iron Curtain'. Since then the EBF has expanded to include the Middle East, and today consists of nearly 60 member bodies and 13,000 churches, found in almost every country of Europe and the Middle East.

I have been the full time General Secretary of the EBF since 2004, and work with a small but very dedicated staff team based in several different countries. Our official office is in the Baptist House, Amsterdam, where is also situated the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTSC), the successor to the international seminary first established in Rüscliikon, Switzerland and which later moved to Prague, in the Czech Republic.

The EBF is one of six regional bodies affiliated to the Baptist World Alliance.

As a very diverse body of Baptist Unions and Conventions we come together first for fellowship, prayer and mutual support as exemplified by our Annual Council, which attracts around 150 leaders from over 40 of our member Unions. From that starting point we covenant to work together on evangelism and church planting (the EBF has a church planting programme); freedom and justice issues which encompass human rights and especially religious freedom and anti-trafficking; mutual support in theological education, especially centred on IBTSC in Amsterdam and also a Consortium of other Baptist colleges and seminaries throughout the EBF; and co-operation with our Unions and mission partners in humanitarian aid in such situations as the current crises in Lebanon. A recent additional focus for the EBF has been on issues of migration and the support of the millions of refugees from war and persecution in the EBF region.

2. *Can you tell us a little about where British Baptists fit in the spectrum of European Baptist life?*

Baptists Together (BUGB), BU Scotland and BU Wales and the Irish Baptist Networks are all members in their own right in the EBF and all of them continue to play a significant role in its life. BMS World Mission is a very active and supportive mission partner.

Baptists Together is one of our largest member bodies. For the first 25 years of its life the EBF was based in London, and successive BUGB General Secretaries have given significant leadership to the EBF up to and including Lynn Green.

British Baptists (partly because of their greater numbers) probably have a greater theological diversity among themselves than would be so with most EBF member Unions. I think this has enabled British Baptist churches and leaders to be able to relate well to different parts of the EBF. Besides the Association links established in the 1990s and since, there are many individual UK Baptist churches that work well with partner congregations in other parts of EBF. These links are hugely appreciated, and especially when they result in reciprocal visits between congregations. I would also mention the positive outcomes of partnerships for theological education, for instance the long-standing one between

Regent's Park College and the Baptist Faculty of the University of Bucharest in Romania.

3. *What has been the most significant aspect of the EBF's work since its formation after WW2, in your opinion?*

If I had to pick out one significant aspect among many, I would say that it is the EBF's fidelity to the early Baptist conviction of religious freedom for all, not just ourselves. During the first 40 years of the EBF's existence its leaders (such as David Russell, BUGB General Secretary 1967-82) were courageous in addressing governments about the suffering situation of fellow Baptists and other religious minorities in countries then under Communist rule, as well as providing practical help and resources where possible. This aspect of the EBF's work has not been forgotten by the current leadership of Baptists in those countries.

More recently the EBF has developed a dedicated team to address issues of what is now usually termed Freedom of Religion or Belief (FORB). We often work in partnership on FORB issues with the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and interchurch bodies such as the Conference of European Churches and the European Evangelical Alliance. In Russia, eastern Ukraine, the countries of Central Asia and in

parts of the Middle East, we continue to see violations of religious freedom, especially as they affect minority religious groups such as ourselves. And, indeed, as we are aware, the persecution of Christians has increased alarmingly in recent years, especially in the Middle East. The fact that the EBF and BWA are now represented at the United Nations human rights office in Geneva and on various national and international FORB forums, has proved much more effective in bringing to international attention what we are hearing from our Baptist communities 'on the ground' in the affected countries. The latest EBF initiative is to begin an online training course for those who wish to become more effective advocates for FORB in their own countries and among their churches.

In these ways we continue to defend religious freedom for all, inspired by that early Baptist vision of the sole Lordship of Christ, freedom of the individual conscience in religion, and the human right of all to enjoy freedom of worship and belief.

4. EBF has been there to support Baptist minorities in many countries. Will we have the same leverage after Brexit? What effects will Brexit have on the work of the EBF?

First of all, let me say that I regret very much the decision of the UK to leave the EU. I am not competent to judge the effects on the trade and economy of the UK, though all the signs at the moment are that they will be to the detriment of the UK for some time to come. And having participated in ecumenical discussions with EU leaders I am not blind to the defects of the EU. However, it was the cooperation for peace between nations that had fought against one another in the devastating World Wars of the 20th century that gave rise to the EU, and has greatly helped to guarantee that peaceful living together in the European family.

So what concerns me at the present time is the tendency towards racism, xenophobia and strident nationalism since the Brexit vote. The UK is not alone in this, and the same trends can be observed in countries such as Hungary and Poland that remain in the EU.

As a general observation, I believe that anything that closes borders and puts up barriers is to be deplored in our increasingly interdependent world. I always look upon my own Baptist tradition as truly internationalist, free from the shackles of state control and imprisonment within a single culture, and therefore more able to witness to a gospel that crosses borders of all kinds. Brexit

does not prevent this, of course, but it makes it just that much harder to express in practice in international relations, as exemplified by the UK withdrawal from the Erasmus student exchange scheme.

I confess that am often disappointed when I meet Baptists in the UK and elsewhere who appear to be much more narrowly nationalistic in their outlook, often basing their views on certain Old Testament motifs of nationhood rather than their fulfilment in the New Testament concept of a kingdom of God that knows no borders. Perhaps, post-Brexit, the whole subject of the place of modern nationhood in the economy of God should be a point of reflection and debate among British Baptists?

Having said all that, I do not think Brexit will not have an appreciable practical effect on the work of the EBF as a whole, except perhaps by making the travel of a British General Secretary open to more frustrating delays! The EBF is legally and financially based on the continent of Europe and half our member bodies are not in EU member countries.

And I am sure that many UK Baptist churches will want to preserve their internationalist outlook and connectedness with brothers and sisters in Christ in the EU and throughout the EBF region. It

meant a very great deal to me and to other EBF leaders that, on the day when the result of the Brexit Referendum vote was announced, I received a letter from General Secretary Lynn Green assuring the EBF of the continued commitment of Baptists Together to its life and work and the deep bonds of connection between us.

5. What is the thing you are most excited about in EBF's immediate future?

In 2019 the EBF completed its very first younger leaders' programme called Transform. I think this is the initiative that gives me greatest satisfaction from my years as General Secretary. To see God's gifts so richly expressed in the lives and ministries of 11 younger leaders, female and male, was a real joy and inspiration. Several of them have almost immediately gone on to take key leadership positions in their own Unions or in the EBF. When we are able to, the EBF has committed to a second Transform programme.

The main added extra that EBF offered to these younger leaders was the experience of crossing borders of all kinds: between themselves; between very different cultures and ways of being Baptist from which they came; with the different countries in which they met; and in their reflections on their own discipleship and how that journey shows them new

horizons by their encounter with one another.

I believe that my period of service as EBF General Secretary has been a time of transition in many ways, and not least from older to younger leadership in many of our Unions, especially in eastern Europe and the Middle East. What excites me is that many of these younger leaders are not only open to God's will for them in service to the church, but more open in their concern for the world and being willing to be engaged with it, in politics, environmental concern, a deep passion for justice, and new ways of being church for the world—all seen as part of sharing in the one great mission of God.

6. How can we best pray for our Baptist brothers and sisters in Europe and where can bmj readers go to find out more about the EBF?

Please pray:

1. That during this time of pandemic, our Unions and churches, especially those in economically poorer nations, will be encouraged and supported to be able to reach out to their communities with the love of Christ in word and deed.

2. For the work among refugees who are especially suffering from the effects of the Covid-19 crisis, particularly in Lebanon, Greece, and Turkey

3. For the process, delayed by the pandemic, to find my successor as EBF General Secretary, and for a smooth transition later in the year.

4. For a continuing development and deepening of the 'ties that bind' British Baptists and other Baptists in the EBF region, as we enter the post-Brexit reality.

5. That during this time when we cannot meet in person and much has gone online, the member Unions and churches of the EBF can still experience the prayerful support of one another and that we indeed 'belong together because we belong to Christ'.

The EBF website has further information, resources and planned events that may be of interest, and also regular stories and prayer requests from its member Unions: see www.ebf.org.

There is an EBF Facebook page, and also a 'Friends of EBF' Facebook Group that you can join and that has a large subscription.

For young people there is a very active EBF Youth and Children's Work Group: <https://ebfyc.org/>

And for ministers—when it is possible again—IBTSC Amsterdam welcomes and can accommodate individuals for short periods of study leave, with access to the John Smyth Library with its superb collection of (mainly English language) print and online volumes: see www.ibts.eu.

British Baptists and Brexit

by Joshua T. Searle

Author: Joshua Searle is Director of Postgraduate Studies, Spurgeon's College, Trustee of the Anabaptist Mennonite Network, and Chair of Trustees of Dnipro Hope Mission.

Following a year-long transition period, Britain has now voluntarily withdrawn itself not only from its largest trading partner, but also from an institution that has become a bulwark of democratic freedom and an example of civility and the rule of law throughout the world. Having 'taken back control' and 'got Brexit done', it seems that we can now look forward to the bright future promised by the Vote Leave campaign back in 2016. This golden age, according to some Christian Leave advocates, will involve not only reclaiming national sovereignty, reducing immigration, and trading freely with 'the rest of the world', but will also mean the recovery of Britain's lost status as a 'Christian nation', unshackled from the restraints of a supposedly secular EU.

In this article, I write as a British Baptist with deep and wide connections to the wider European Baptist family, and from the conviction that the withdrawal from the EU is a cause not for nationalistic celebration and triumph, but for nationwide soul-

searching, which should include a strong note of lament and repentance. The aim is not to rehearse the arguments for and against Brexit or to criticise those who voted Leave or Remain. I know many sincere Christians who voted for Brexit. They are not racists or bigots and my intention is not to condemn anyone who voted in good faith to leave the EU. My aim, rather, is to show that, in the post-Brexit world we have now entered, in which the idols of 'political sovereignty', 'border security' and 'national interests' are cherished and fetishized (including by some Christians), Baptist faith and practice can become characterised by its emphasis on global solidarity, generous hospitality and Christlike self-denial. These gospel values would serve as 'antibodies' to the 'pathogens' of sovereignty, security and nationalism that have infected British politics since the Brexit vote. I also want to propose a positive, outward-looking vision and to encourage British Baptists to reach out (now more than ever) to the wider European Baptist

community.

The European origins of the British Baptist movement

It is important first to state an obvious fact: although Britain has left the EU, British Baptists have not left the European Baptist Federation (EBF). We still stand in spiritual solidarity with our fellow Baptists throughout Europe. Moreover, as British Baptists, Europe is part of our identity. Our historical origins are bound up with the European Reformation, especially the radical wing. It is sometimes mistakenly assumed that the British Baptist movement emerged spontaneously out of English Puritanism, but in reality, the English Baptists owed a great deal to the European anabaptist movement.¹ Our European spiritual forebears in the 16th century regarded their Christian faith neither as a badge of cultural identity nor as an accident of birth or geography, but as a free and committed response to the gospel.² Taking seriously Christ's Great Commission, these early Anabaptists travelled around the whole of Europe, Bible and tracts in hand, to teach, to preach, to suffer, to live and, in many cases, to die for the sake of the gospel.

The emphasis of our European Anabaptist forebears on radical discipleship and allegiance to the Sermon on the Mount left an indelible mark on the spirituality

and theology of the British Baptist movement. The early history of the British Baptists and European Mennonites is more intertwined than has often been recognised. John Smyth, widely recognised as the 'first Baptist', had close connections with the Dutch Mennonites.³ Several of the earliest English Baptist churches maintained contact with European Mennonites for several decades into the 17th century. Although Thomas Helwys (who in 1613 founded the first English Baptist church in Spitalfields, east London) broke with Smyth in 1610, he nevertheless retained the fundamental conviction of the European Anabaptists that the separation of the church from the state was the precondition of religious freedom. Moreover, in the early years of their history, British Baptists often found a safe haven in Europe, away from the 'official' Church of England, which discriminated against Baptists and nonconformists in general.

Will Brexit restore Britain to its status as a 'Christian nation'?

We (British Baptists) inherited our suspicion of political power and the concept of the 'state church' from our European forebears, who understood that when the church and state were brought into the totality of a single authority, the church ceased to be the church.⁴ Our history teaches us to reject as false and idolatrous any nostalgia

for England as a 'Christian country' under the authority of a 'national church'. For Baptists, the notions of a 'Christian nation', and a 'national church' are not sacred archetypes, but oxymorons and illusions. We regard the alliance of church and state and any attempt to impose Christian morality through aggressive legislation as morally bankrupt and devoid of any biblical basis. Our history has taught us only too well that the political dominance of the Christian religion over national life leads not to spiritual revival, but merely creates a thin veneer of civic religion among a people whose adherence to Christianity signifies little more than a nominal attachment to the history and culture of the nation.

Moreover, Baptists have also learned the bitter lesson from history that the state has tolerated Christianity only when it has been adapted to the pattern of the world and advanced the social and political ends of the state. When we imbibe the gospel message, we experience the revelation of a new order of reality: namely, God's Kingdom, which is in opposition to the world order and spells the end of the false harmony of Christian piety and political power. There is great truth in the simple statement of Berdyaev that, 'All states and economies are, in essence, unchristian and opposed to the Kingdom of God'.⁵ In Christ, God reveals himself to us not in power,

authority and sovereignty, but in freedom, love and sacrifice. This is why the idea of 'political sovereignty' is totally opposed to the spirit of the gospel.⁶ In fact, I regard the lure of political sovereignty as one of the temptations that Christ rejected in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). I would even speculate that among the kingdoms that Satan presented to Christ were all those nations and empires of the world which would later call themselves 'Christian'.⁷

The recent history of church collusion with right-wing populism and 'Christian nationalism' reminds us that, unfortunately, those involved have learned very little from either scripture or history. They still labour under the illusion that Christians (the followers of Jesus' Way) can legislate their way to righteousness by lobbying the government to pass laws that prohibit abortion and promote 'family values'. They believe that it is fulfilment of Christian duty when they petition our national legislators to pass laws that will discriminate against homosexuals, Muslims and other 'non-Christian' religious minorities. This alluring prospect of imposing the Kingdom of God on a supposedly godless society has seduced Christians from the reign of Constantine up to the tenure of Donald Trump. They imagine that if they can elect enough Christians to public office, they will be able to restore Britain's status as a 'Christian nation'.

These Constantinian assumptions were evident in some Christian contributions to the debate ahead of the Brexit Referendum in June 2016. I was aware of British Christians claiming that 'Until we can wrest control of Britain back from the EU we cannot hope as Christians to truly reshape it'.⁸ Some Christians even imagined that once they had political power, and as soon as they had abandoned a supposedly secular and godless institution like the EU, they would be able to direct the nation towards the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. The paradox of this belief is that it constitutes both laudable aspiration and demonic deception. Back in 2016, the anti-EU demon masqueraded as an angel of light, holding out the tantalising prospect of restoring the nation's 'Christian heritage', all the while stoking fear, resentment, division and hatred.

In a sceptical age in which so many idols have been shattered, the idolatry of the 'Christian country' is one of the most persistent temptations for Christians. Never did Christ promise to establish righteousness on the earth. Instead, he summoned his followers to faith, courage and repentance. He called people to take up their cross and follow him, and to live as a despised minority in a dark and hostile world (John 15:19). Jesus never promised that our lives would be improved by

success in elections and referenda or that our discipleship would be somehow enhanced by obtaining political power. Instead, Christ summoned his followers to a life of suffering, persecution and costly witness (*martyrion*). For Christians, there is a path to the Kingdom of God, but it goes through Golgotha, not Westminster, Washington or Brussels.

'The whole world is under the control of the Evil One'

For my own part, I believe that Brexit was an act of incalculable folly that has left our nation diminished and has generated a pointless, manmade crisis that has compounded the disaster and chaos caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. But we should not be surprised when people make self-destructive choices, either as individuals or as entire nations. Scripture teaches that 'that the whole world is under the control of the evil one' (1 John 5:19). The world is in the grip of dynamic forces, many of which are demonic in origin (Ephesians 6:12; cf 1 John 4:3), which deceive people and lead people into destruction.

Many of those who are under the grip of these forces don't even know about their existence. Many are even leading the charge to destruction under the banner of 'Christianity' and some think that they are thereby doing God a favour (John 16:2). 'Wide is the

road that leads to destruction', said Jesus, 'and there are many who go through it' (Matthew 7:13). The biblical writers and Christian tradition have recognised lying and deceitful talk as one of the characteristic manifestations of demonic activity (John 8:44). Dark powers and principalities flourish in an atmosphere of lies, leading to disastrous consequences.

The falsehoods and propaganda around the Brexit debate should have made it clear to us as Christians that the issue of truth-telling is not simply a matter of personal morality, but has profound political implications. Lies have destructive consequences not only for individuals, but for whole societies: 'careless talk costs lives'. The Brexit campaign was nourished upon lies and would not have won had it not been for the brazen falsehoods—an extra £350 million for the NHS every week, reductions in council tax and VAT, the prevention of 'up to 77 million Turks'⁹ from entering the UK, the freedom to trade with the EU and 'the rest of the world' without having to adhere to any external regulations etc. To Christians the lie was told that once 'we' were free from the EU, 'we' would be able to reclaim Britain's status as a 'Christian nation'.

The Brexit vote was made possible by the atmosphere of falsehood and illusion within which the Leave

option was aggressively advocated and promoted. It is sobering to reflect that Christians were just as likely to fall victim to the massive disinformation campaign as everyone else. During the campaign, we heard little about the spiritual foundations of the EU or the Christian vision of the 'healing of the nations' (Rev 22:2) that had inspired its founders, such as people of deep Christian faith like Robert Schumann, Jean Monnet, Alcide De Gasperi and Konrad Adenauer.¹⁰

Instead of informed debate, we mostly heard (on both the Remain and Leave sides) dead clichés from political spin-doctors, ill-informed celebrities, and unenlightened church leaders. The discussion on an issue of such complexity and depth as the cultural legacy and spiritual destiny of Europe, was reduced to hollow soundbites and banal party slogans. Bereft of soul and sundered from its spiritual foundations, the debate around Britain's EU membership became prey to cynicism, commercial interests and mental manipulation. This manipulation was enhanced through the targeted use of 'big data' analytics, as Russian 'bots' bombarded conservative Christian Facebook groups with anti-EU propaganda and evangelical clickbait, which linked readers to articles on fringe fundamentalist websites that purported to offer a 'biblical case for Brexit'.

Addressing the problem of 'sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity'

The Brexit debate reminded me of a fundamental conviction that I hold as a Baptist Christian nonconformist: namely, that the *Zeitgeist* (or spirit of the age) is diametrically opposed to the Holy Spirit and to the gospel. Moreover, scripture indicates that God sends people a 'powerful delusion' (2 Thess 2:11) so that seemingly pious people will believe falsehoods, including lies that are disguised as 'Christian values'. It was a feature of the Brexit debate among Christians in the lead-up to the Referendum that by leaving the 'godless' and 'secular' EU, Britain would be able to 'reclaim' its 'Christian heritage' and reassert Christian morality into public life.

Hearing these sentiments at the time (if I may be excused for quoting myself), I made the following note in my diary on 7 June 2016: 'Evil in the world today appears newly adorned in the vestments of "traditional values" and "Christian morality". Evil is not simple and easily recognisable, but is convoluted and complex and often presents itself as "good", sometimes even as "Christian"! I made this note right after attending a Baptist church in suburban London where I spoke about the Christian origins of the EU. After the main talk, I witnessed the dispiriting spectacle of Baptists

parroting slogans from UKIP and the extreme 'Christian' fascist group, Britain First, in response to my presentation. Reflecting on this experience in my diary that same day, I recalled the famous words of the great Baptist preacher, Martin Luther King Jr: 'Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity'.

As nonconformists, we should take to heart Jesus' sombre warning: 'See to it that no one deceives you...' (Mark 13:5). Although all people are susceptible to being deceived, Christians seem to be especially vulnerable to conspiracy theories. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, a few of my Baptist students and friends sent me links to articles and video clips, which claimed that Covid-19 was caused by 5G electromagnetic radiation, that hydroxychloroquine was a 'miracle cure' for this novel respiratory pathogen, and that the virus was deliberately manufactured by George Soros and Bill Gates to enable them to implant microchips into people's bodies under the cover of a global vaccination programme. Receiving these messages brought back memories of summer 2016 in the lead up to the EU Referendum. Back then, some Christian friends, including a few Baptists, sent me video clips and links to articles on fringe Christian prophecy websites which 'proved' that the EU was the whore of Babylon and that the best

way for Christians to foil the nefarious schemes of Antichrist was to vote Leave in the Referendum. Again, I thought of MLK: 'Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity'.

Evangelical Euroscepticism and Baptist nonconformity

Anti-European sentiment has been a prominent feature of British evangelical political theology in recent decades. Such sentiment has sometimes been fuelled by far-fetched and highly dubious so-called 'prophetic' speculation concerning the alleged link between the EU and certain symbols and images depicted in Revelation. Some evangelicals, including many Baptists, fear that membership of the EU constitutes a grave compromise that leads to a diminishing of the distinctive witness of Christians within a secular European 'super-state'. In more extreme forms, this scepticism even claims that the EU is a manifestation of the kingdom of Antichrist, which is paving the way towards a syncretistic one-world religion and the coming of the great tribulation, supposedly depicted in Revelation 6–19.

When I lived in Northern Ireland, I had fascinating conversations with Baptists, who believed that the EU was being used by the Roman Catholic Church to extend its allegedly diabolical influence over

world affairs. The EU was thus denounced as a tool in the hand of the Antichrist. I read an article by a Baptist minister which claimed that the European Common Market had been established exactly according to a supposed apocalyptic blueprint contained in the Old Testament. When I met the author in person, I remember him pointing to chapter and verse from Zechariah 5 and 6 to prove his point. As part of my doctoral research, I read or listened to literally hundreds of bizarre sermons and talks on 'biblical end-times prophecy', which asserted dogmatically that the EU constituted a revival of the Roman Empire, which was represented by the 10-headed beast (or the 'whore of Babylon', or 'the Antichrist' or 'the dragon') in the book of Revelation.¹¹

Much of this evangelical Euroscepticism, although often expressed in good faith, is attributable to misinterpretation of the apocalyptic texts and a lack of understanding concerning the origins and aims of the EU. The EU is currently experiencing a sustained assault by a coalition of dark forces, incarnated in xenophobic, nationalistic and populist strongmen leaders, from Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, to Victor Orban and Nigel Farage. The cynical appeal to 'Christian values' by such radical populists reveals a sinister, and even satanic, dimension to the assault on

European solidarity. I am deeply disturbed by the unholy alliance between Christian piety and far-right ideology that is emerging in the post-Christian West.¹² Under the present conditions of cultural confusion and resentment, Christianity is being wielded by far-right populists as a cudgel to beat their political enemies in the current 'culture wars'. Paradoxically, the Christian religion is being used as a weapon against Christianity itself. The dark powers and principalities have seized upon the confusion of the past few years and now recognise an opportunity to destroy the EU institutions of civility, democracy and solidarity, which have preserved peace and freedom in Europe for more than 70 years.

How can Baptists respond to Brexit?

As Baptists, our response to Brexit should be shaped by our tradition of radical nonconformity for the sake of the gospel. As nonconformists, we should assert a healthy scepticism against dominant trends in the social and political spheres, even when these trends appear to be positive, beneficial and popular—or even 'Christian'. In this time of resurgent nationalism and post-truth politics, nonconformity is raised to the level of a spiritual and moral imperative.

For Baptist nonconformists the challenges of Brexit should be

taken as a call for creativity. What is needed from us is a readiness and ability to be nonconformists for the sake of the gospel of Christ. Our openness towards those who are different, our generous hospitality and our resolute solidarity with our European brothers and sisters in Christ will be a more compelling gospel witness than superficial 'arguments' for and against Brexit, however pious or 'biblical' these arguments may appear to be. To be a people of integrity, to be self-critical and broadminded, to respect other approaches, to show compassion to the victims of disinformation, to empathise with those who hold other views and at the same time to have the courage to follow our own Christ-centred, Bible-based principles—all of this is a more compelling witness to the truth of the gospel than divisive political or religious conflicts over national identity.

Moreover, in these divisive times of closing borders and narrowing worldviews, I would encourage all British Baptists (whether pro- or anti-Brexit) to make a special effort to establish contact with members of our wider Baptist family dispersed throughout Europe. There are so many great treasures in our European Baptist community. My own appreciation of Baptist life and faith has been immeasurably enriched by my deep friendships with Baptist brothers and sisters in France,

Germany, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Poland, Moldova, Lithuania, Ukraine and Armenia—to name just a few. Post-Brexit, my spiritual connection with European Baptist life has assumed an even greater significance for me as a British-European Baptist.

On a practical note, I would also encourage British Baptists to find out more about the good work of the EBF—for example, the ways it is helping the European Baptist family to respond compassionately and concertedly to multiple crises such as human trafficking, the ongoing refugee emergency, and the global pandemic.¹³ Find out about what is happening in Amsterdam at the IBTS Centre, which is doing remarkable work to build bridges between Baptist communities throughout Europe.¹⁴ Or find out more about the work of UK-based charities (such as Dnipro Hope Mission,¹⁵ for which I am a trustee) that are working to build the Kingdom of God in different parts of Europe by deepening bilateral relationships between UK and European Baptist churches. But once you've browsed the websites and found out some new information, don't stop there, but look for ways to get involved!

In response to Brexit, I hope that Baptists can remain true to their European, nonconformist roots. In my book, *Theology After Christendom*, I called upon nonconformist theologians to

envision a theology that would empower and equip Christian witness in a post-Christian world.¹⁶ I argued that this required theology to assume a posture that was antagonistic to the prevailing culture, but which stood in critical solidarity with the world and its suffering inhabitants. I hope that in these times of revived tribalism and closing borders, the European Baptist community can express the spirit of welcome and hospitality for the sake of Christ and his Kingdom. My prayer is that British Baptists will become agents of reconciliation, creating a hospitable climate within which the gospel virtues of compassion, truth, and justice can flourish, and where friendships can be established across national boundaries around a common allegiance to Christ and his gospel. Above all, I hope that we can learn from the example of our European Baptist and Anabaptist forebears, who taught us to follow the Way of Jesus by acknowledging the primacy of our allegiance to God over all other loyalties, including to the state or nation. As disciples of Christ, we recognise our God-given vocation to live as a small minority in the midst of a world whose attitude towards the gospel fluctuates between benign indifference and overt hostility. In such a post-Christian world, whether in or out of the EU, we will need to learn that we are most faithful not only to our Baptist heritage, but also to the gospel

itself, when we act with generosity, hospitality and humility. In these challenging times, may we be known as a people of grace, and let us be ready not to judge and criticise, but also to listen, learn, serve, and suffer for the sake of the Kingdom of God. Above all, as we confront the prospect of a dark and uncertain future, let us remember these immortal words of hope and assurance: 'the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'

Notes

1. The circumstances surrounding the emergence of distinctively Baptist churches in England in the 17th century have been a subject of detailed debate and I will not examine it in detail here. B. R. White pushed the view that English Separatism was the seedbed for the Baptists (both General and Particular): see *The English Separatist Tradition: from the Marian Martyrs to the Pilgrim Fathers*, Oxford: OUP, 1971, pp161-64. White contended against the claim of A. C. Underwood that the Continental Anabaptists were the "forerunners" of the English Baptists: see *A History of the English Baptists*, London: Kingsgate, 1947, pp15-27. Other notable Baptist historians and theologians, such as Ernest Payne and Glen Stassen, have presented compelling evidence concerning the Continental Anabaptist origins of the British Baptists. See Stassen, 'Anabaptist Influence in the Origin of the Particular Baptists', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* **36**, 1962, pp322-48; and Payne, 'The Anabaptist Impact on Western Christendom', in G. F. Hershberger (ed), *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1972, pp305-16. I'm grateful to Keith G. Jones, for reminding me of the contested historiography around the origins and development of the English Baptist movement.

2. Harold S. Bender, 'The Anabaptist

Vision', in Hershberger (ed), *The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision*, pp29-54.

3. Jason K. Lee, *The Theology of John Smyth Puritan, Separatist, Baptist, Mennonite*, Macon, GA: Mercer, 2003, xi.

4. William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977, p194.

5. Berdyaev, *Smysl Tvorchestva [The Meaning of Creativity]*, Moscow: Astrel, 2011, p294.

6. Berdyaev, *Tsarstvo Dukha i Tsarstvo Kesarya [The Kingdom of the Spirit and the Kingdom of Caesar]*, Minsk: Izdatelstvo Belorusskogo Ekzarkhata, 2011, pp252-53.

7. Berdyaev, *Tvorchestbo i Obyektivatsiya [Creativity and Objectification]*, Moscow: T8RUGRAM, 2018, p242.

8. Joe Boot, 'Voting and the Role of the State' <<https://www.ezrainstitute.ca/resource-library/blog-entries/voting-and-the-role-of-the-state>> [April 22, 2016].

9. Boris Johnson, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/boris-johnson-brexit-turkey-eu-referendum-vote-leave-campaign-michael-gove-a8734296.html>

10. See Jeff Fountain's history of the endeavours of the EU founders to establish European solidarity on biblical principles to oppose the pagan ideas of nationalism, imperialism and fascism, which had caused the devastation of 1914-18 and 1939-45. *Deeply Rooted: The Forgotten Vision of Robert Schuman*, Amsterdam: Seismos, 2017.

11. My revised doctoral thesis was published as a monograph under the title, *The Scarlet Woman and the Red Hand: Apocalyptic Belief in the Northern Ireland Troubles*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014.

12. Joshua T. Searle, 'Prophecy, Protest and Public Theology: The Relevance of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Prophetic Mandate in Today's Post-truth World', *Journal of European Baptist Studies* **20:2**, 2020, pp102-12.

13. www.ebf.org

14. www.ibts.eu

15. www.dniprohopenmission.org

16. Joshua T. Searle, *Theology After Christendom: Forming Prophets for a Post-Christian World*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018, xvi.

Brexit and the challenge to the church in Britain

by Anthony Reddie

Author: Professor Anthony G. Reddie is Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture at Regent's Park College, University of Oxford, Professor Extraordinary at the University of South Africa, and author of Theologising Brexit: A Liberationist and Postcolonial Critique.

I have always been somewhat ambivalent about the EU. My decision to vote Remain in the 2016 Referendum was formed after taking stock of the various proponents on either side of the argument. It seemed to me that the Leave side was overpopulated with right-wing proponents who represented people with whom I would always profoundly disagree on a whole range of subjects.

Whatever the merits on either side of the debate, I remain convinced that the underlying sociocultural and religious thrust of the Leave campaign was the conflation of notions of White entitlement and, as a corollary, the demonisation of Black and other visible minorities in the UK. This form of White nationalism has similar movements in other European countries such as France, the Netherlands and in Hungary, to name but three.

Historical roots

The roots of Brexit lie in English nationalism. The rise of the 'fortress islander' mentality that sees 'us' as different from 'them' really began during the reign of Elizabeth I. English nationalism was based on notions of being different from, and better than, others. Underpinning the aforementioned is a subterranean theology of election that identifies Whiteness and Englishness as the defining symbols for the construct of righteousness and as a signifier of religious acceptability.

This theological underpinning of English nationalism represents a conflation of three ideas: of empire, of the Church of England and of conservative politics. Is it any wonder, then, that the trigger for the Referendum vote in 2016 emerged from discontent rooted in English nationalism within the Eurosceptical wing of the

Conservative Party—historically, one third of the religious and political repository of the establishment of English nationalism (the other two being Whiteness, and the Church of England).

Impact of Brexit

The Brexit vote demonstrated the barely concealed exceptionalism and sense of entitlement of predominantly White English people. The clear xenophobia underpinning the Leave campaign reminded many of us that 'true Britishness' equals Whiteness and that those who are deemed the 'other', be it 'migrants' living in the UK or 'foreigners' from Europe, are distinctly less deserving in the eyes of many White British people.

It can be argued that the romantic push for the nostalgia of the past (when Britain had the biggest Empire the world has ever seen), is predicated on the intrinsic notion of Britain being superior to other nations, often seen in terms of groups such as Britain First, or others on the political right who want to 'make Britain great again'. To quote the Black British social commentator Gary Younge, 'Not everyone, or even most of the people who voted leave, were driven by racism. But the leave campaign imbued racists with a confidence they have not enjoyed for many decades and poured arsenic into the water supply of

our national conversation'.¹

It is my contention that the vote for Brexit was very much based on the presumption of White normality and the belief that the needs of poor, disenfranchised White people would be better served if the numbers of poor minority ethnic people and others from outside of the UK were reduced. The fact that so many poor White people believed such blandishments can be explained, in part, by my suggestion that Whiteness is a repository of privileged notions of belonging and its concomitant identity is one embedded in paradigms buttressed by superiority and entitlement.

The toxicity of the hostile climate on immigration helped to create the contemporary era, in which White entitlement has reasserted itself—blaming migrants and minorities for the social ills that supposedly plague the nation. In the context of the Referendum vote, I have noted the diffidence with which the church has responded to the phenomenon of Brexit, the success of which helped to fuel the state-sanctioned cruelty of deporting members of the 'Windrush generation' in 2018.

In using this term, I am speaking of the arrival of 492 Caribbean people at Tilbury dock on the former troop ship, the SS Empire Windrush, on 22 June 1948. After

the arrival of this first group of Caribbean migrants, there followed approximately another two million people from the various Caribbean islands, between 1948 and 1965. These people were invited to the UK by the British authorities to help rebuild the nation after the devastation caused by WW2 and the fight to defeat Nazi Germany.

The Black Caribbean people who were deported were British citizens. They were victims of a toxic environment for which many White people voted. I have yet to find any church leader who has identified unambiguously with the cause of marginalised Black and minority ethnic people, who are the expendable residue of the Brexit phenomenon.

I have personally attended meetings and watched and listened to predominantly White leaders pander to the toxic rhetoric that targeted Black people and minority ethnic migrants, to placate the wounded psyche of White privilege and entitlement. Ironically, their diffidence showed more care for dissatisfied and disillusioned poorer White people—who largely do not attend their churches—than for the Black migrants who do attend, in disproportionately large numbers; often in the inner cities after they had been vacated by ‘White flight’ in the 1980s and early 90s.

The challenge to be one in Christ

It can be argued that, along with the NHS and London Transport, British churches have been the greatest beneficiaries of Caribbean migration in particular and immigration in general. And yet half of all British Christians, presumably belonging to these churches, were still happy to vote for Brexit, which included a marked negativity towards migrants and immigration. These were the very people who had revitalised their own churches!

It is clear that all Christian traditions and denominations have been the beneficiaries of immigration in Britain, particularly through the legacy of the Windrush generation. Whether in terms of revitalising predominantly inner-city churches in Britain, within White majority ‘historic’ churches like the Church of England and others—Catholic, Methodist, URC and Baptist—or with the rise of African and Caribbean Pentecostal churches, British Christianity would be in a parlous state without Black migrants. This is certainly true for the URC, which has probably been the greatest beneficiary of Caribbean migration among the member churches of the Council for World Mission in the UK.

Black Christianity in Britain can be said to have emerged *via* the mass migratory movement of Black people from Africa and the

Caribbean in the years following the end of WW2. The Brexit vote was a nationalistic, White-centred event that cynically used migrants as the scapegoat for the problems of the nation. The undercurrent of Brexit was a rejection of multiculturalism and the legacy of Windrush that has brought new Christian faith communities and radical collective living, born of Caribbean values and our African heritage, into this nation.

I would like to interpret the legacy and the importance of Windrush in the light of the story of Pentecost. I continue to believe that the narrative of the first Pentecost has much to teach us as we struggle with the continued challenge of embracing and affirming difference in our post-Brexit life in 21st century Britain.

Pentecost has a special resonance for our increasingly plural and complex nation, because any careful reading of this text affirms notions of cultural difference. If physical and linguistic differences are themselves part of the problem for many people who voted for Brexit, then what are we to make of a text in which these differences are visibly celebrated? Part of the legacy of Windrush is the very form of physical and linguistic differences that one sees in the Pentecost event—which is a contradiction of the values of Brexit. Whatever the merits of leaving the EU, it is my prayer that

this nation will finally come to terms with the fact that ethnic and cultural difference has been a great boost to Christianity in Britain and the church would be all the poorer without it.

A key response of British churches to Brexit needs to take two directions. First, to affirm difference and recognise it as a theological gift, as seen in the Pentecost events. Second, British churches must be committed to anti-racist action. This is necessary if Christianity is to preserve its cherished belief as being one holy, catholic and apostolic body. In the age of Trump, Brexit and White nationalistic populism, White Christianity must remain committed to the liberative qualities of Christ as its true Lord and Saviour and reject the heresy of White superiority. The quest for equity, liberation and justice is one that requires the committed determined action of all peoples, irrespective of faith commitment (plus those who profess to hold no such notions).

This move also requires truth-telling and a retreat from all forms of obscured talk that blind us to the structural and systematic forms of racism which continue to oppress Black and other minority ethnic people in Britain and across wider Europe. Whether we wish to acknowledge it or not, privilege, and notions of who is important, has a colour. Similarly, systemic

power, notions of belonging, and what is deemed acceptable also has a colour.

The task of unmasking the privileged construct of Whiteness is not for Black and minority ethnic Christians only. The task of effecting the systemic and structural changes that more fully reflect the Kingdom of God within Europe is a task for us all. The failure to name and unmask these forms of unearned privilege has been, for me, the most telling indictment of White Christianity in Britain, which in turn, has besmirched the very concept of the universality of the body of Christ.

This universality of the church is imperilled in the age of Trump, for whom a majority of White evangelicals in the US voted. This is equally so within the British context, when the content of the Leave campaign was predicated on rampant xenophobia and racism, and for which many White Christians voted. The challenges of John 13:21-35 are real, and have bedevilled White Christianity in Britain for centuries. This new commandment from Jesus sits at the heart of the Christian message and has implications for those inside and outside the community of faith.

The followers of Christ are asked to love another for 'by this, everyone will know that you are my

disciples' (v35). The way in which the followers love one another will be a sign of their commitment and belonging within the common life of faith in Christ Jesus.

The task of challenging the toxicity of White privilege is necessary if the universal and inclusive understanding of the Christian faith is to be maintained in Europe. The church must be at the forefront in the fight for and support of those on the margins who are being scapegoated by the majority White communities across Europe.

Christianity must be committed to a ruthless and fiercely argued critique of all forms of privilege that suggests that some people matter more than others. The churches in the UK and Europe must challenge the rise of White nationalism and the narrowness about the identity of who truly belongs, in what has traditionally been defined as a White Christian continent. Christianity and churches must show a different way!

Note

1. Gary Younge, 'After this vote the UK is diminished, our politics poisoned' in *The Guardian*, 24 June 2016. [<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/24/eu-vote-uk-diminished-politics-poisoned-racism>]

A valediction, forbidding mourning.

Why the UK's departure from the EU might not be a cause for lament

by Peter Hatton

Author: Peter Hatton is recently retired from tutoring theology and biblical studies at Bristol Baptist College and Trinity Collehe.

Dan Snow (@thehistoryguy) wrote on 1 January 2021:

75 years ago, after history's bloodiest war, with its unimaginable brutality, a generation of survivors tried to prevent future war by building institutions to curb assertions of national sovereignty. The UK forged that. Now we help to dismantle it. Brexit is a tragedy.

Snow's twittersphere lament, atheist though he is, eloquently expressed that feeling of sadness, almost of despair, that several of my Christian friends also shared on social media on the same day. Common to many of these posts was an understanding that the EU has self-evidently been a force for peace. Snow's judgement that 'assertions of national sovereignty' led to 'history's bloodiest war' would, I suspect, have found wide agreement. After all, must not such assertions necessarily be at odds with a gospel that calls the peoples to abandon pretensions of superiority based on ethnicity and

unite in Christ (Galatians 3.28)?

Of course, arguments based on social, economic or even religious utility have a place in this discussion and other contributors to this issue of the *bmj* may cover them fully. However, I wish to explore here what I see as strong, significant claims involving what we might call political theology, grounded in historical judgements. I will suggest that those judgements are not as self-evident as they might seem, and that even 'those who mourn in Zion' for the UK's departure can discover a little 'oil of gladness'.

However, we might first enquire if a 'political theology' is not a contradiction in terms. After all, if Christ's Kingdom is not 'of this world' (John 18.36), should we not leave it to get on with its business, withdrawing into that community where we can find friendship and live justly, hoping that our witness to the ways of the Prince of Peace will have an effect outside it? This

has been, as I understand it, the way followed by many in the historic Anabaptist traditions. Today, however, many who value Anabaptist insights consider it absolutely necessary to engage with politics. With them we may agree that, even in this interim before the return of Christ in glory to manifest fully his Kingdom of peace and justice, God cares deeply about the world and, by extension, for how it is governed.

If this be granted, we may ask with Oliver O'Donovan, what is it that the nations seek? That is, what desires for our life together in communities and nations are implanted within us by God? Professor O'Donovan responds with an answer that might, at first sight, surprise us, coming as it does from an ethicist rooted in the Reformed tradition. He suggests that our most profound yearning in political life is not, first and foremost, for peace and security (valuable as these things are) but for true authority characterised by righteous judgements.¹ This claim—provocative as it may seem to those of us who assume the deep corruption of human nature, perhaps especially in the public arena—seems to me both defensible and necessary, if we are to reason together about our lives in the wider community. From it should follow a certain generosity, in particular that we should not presume that, while our motives

for arguing for a particular political position are based on virtue and goodness, those of our opponents are self-seeking and corrupt. Let us rather assume that those we disagree with are motivated by a desire for the good even if they have misunderstood, in a particular situation, what that involves. It is with this in mind that we may question the notion that 'assertions of national sovereignty' need, always and everywhere, to be 'curbed'.

What, firstly, does 'national sovereignty' involve? Among international jurists, sovereignty is not defined in terms of the external markers of nationhood—borders, language, culture, traditions and specific institutions. A nation can possess all these things, but, crucially, without the freedom to make its own law it cannot be described as sovereign. It was, accordingly, this freedom to make law that, under successive treaties, especially Maastricht (1992) and Lisbon (2007), the countries of the EU agreed to pool, and it is this freedom that the UK has reclaimed by seceding from that union. Once the matter has been stated in this way (one which, I gather, is not controversial in the international legal community), it is, perhaps, clear that, in and of itself, such a freedom—which would also include the freedom to copy the law of others—need not, *pace*

Snow, inevitably lead to conflict nor necessarily require 'curbing'.

Indeed, as Christians, should we not take note of the fact that the biblical narratives concern themselves with the story of two connected communities, Israel and the church, who claim the sovereign freedom to make their own law? The significance of this is not reduced by those New Testament texts (eg Romans 13; 1 Peter 2:13ff) that urge us to comply with the laws of the Empire when those make for the public good, as, when they do not, and so conflict with the 'law of liberty' (James 1:25) received by the church from her Lord, then his law takes precedence.

Be that as it may, where is the evidence that the wars of the past century were fought because countries wished to assert the freedom to make their own laws? Always recognising the risk of over-simplifying complex historical causality, is it not more plausible that grubbier, more elemental passions—principally, fear of potential adversaries, desire for territorial expansion or the retrieval of provinces lost in previous conflicts, often coupled with a lust for revenge—were the actual drivers provoking the conflagration of 1914-18? Similar passions, now infused with the totalitarianism of Hitler's *völkisch* racial theory or Stalin's brand of Marxism—ideologies, that, as

Hannah Arendt has noted,² were expressly internationalist rather than linked to notions of nationhood, let alone 'national sovereignty'—led to the even more devastating reprise of 1939-45.

If, as Christians, we wish to be generous to those we disagree with on Brexit, should we not assume that the issue turned on whether true authority could be recognised more clearly in the EU's system of pooled sovereignty or in the retention of sovereignty within nation states and, in particular, within the UK? Of course, how such true authority might be recognised is a matter for fierce debate. Particularly when issues of immigration or sharing of resources are concerned, agreement may seem far off. Yet should we not, nevertheless, assume that, those who hold opinions we consider to be ill-informed and ill-considered may, even so, be motivated by a desire for righteousness in government rather than by prejudice or narrow self-interest?

Were, in fact, such desires discernible among those who voted Leave? Well, it is clear that the very sharp minds behind the Leave campaigns brought together a coalition of voters that included such diverse groups as fishermen and environmentalists who saw the EU as responsible for the unsustainable hoovering up of fish in the North Sea and the

lunacy of 'bycatch' dumping; animal cruelty activists distressed at what they held to be the EU's failure to restrain the live transport of animals; those who saw the combination of subsidies for European agriculture and tariff barriers on food as responsible for the exclusion of African farmers from a natural market; and those who believed that the EU was a 'capitalist club' that allowed employers to drive down wages by importing cheap labour. Included in that same coalition were, no doubt, others motivated by trivial matters or by narrow nationalism and self-interest, just as, we may suppose, there were some who voted Remain because they did not want their holiday home in Tuscany to become less accessible. It is also true that advocates of the Remain position did seek to address some of the above issues, but often in a dismissive way that suggested they were inconsequential; certainly, as far as I recall, no substantive arguments were ever offered to show how the UK's continued pooling of sovereignty within the EU might remedy these, and other, equally weighty concerns.

In the same questioning spirit, might we re-visit the assumption that the existence of the 'institutions of the EU' has preserved peace in Europe since 1945? First, we might reflect that, as far as western Europe is

concerned, the main conflict driver from 1869 to 1945 was the belligerent rivalry between France and Germany. This rivalry has not gone away completely, but that it could have led to renewed conflict after 1945 is, soberly considered, highly unlikely. This is not simply because the main territorial dispute between France and Germany, the possession of Alsace and Lorraine has now been settled, we may think irrevocably, as the number of German (well, *Elsässisch*) speakers in those areas has inexorably diminished. Much more important to my mind—and I speak as one who spent four years in Germany as a child, worked in the country as a young man and then in banks in London where the working language was German—is that the Federal Republic of Germany has learnt hard lessons from history about the folly of militarism and has explicitly rejected any belief that its destiny is to impose its will on Europe. Shorn of those eastern territories that had most fostered a culture of militarism (the disappearance of Prussia from the map of Europe is astonishing!), Germany, even after re-unification, is a different country from the Reich created by Bismarck, and not just geographically. France too, for all its, justifiable, pride in its rich cultural legacy and historical preeminence, was also humbled by its experiences between 1940 and 45.

Accordingly, the Treaties of Paris (1951) and Rome (1956) in which these former enemies and the Benelux countries joined with Italy to commit themselves to share resources and abolish trade barriers, may best be seen as expressions of pre-existing, profound desires for peaceful cooperation rather than mechanisms necessary to restrain nationalism. Given these sentiments, these expressions of a deep war-weariness, can we realistically envisage circumstances in which the countries of western Europe would have gone to war again after 1945, whether or not the EU had come into being?

However, we must not forget that Europe has not been at peace in the past 60 years. There have, of course, been two conflicts involving large scale military operations: the protracted war (1991-2001) in the former Yugoslavia republics and the ongoing Ukrainian crisis that began in 2013. Arguably, in both conflicts, the EU has not restrained ethnic and nationalist rivalries but encouraged them.

Significantly, any coherent response on the EU's part to the breakup of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was bedevilled by the historical connections of its individual nations to the Balkans. Accordingly, when the crisis began in 1990, France and the UK sought

EU support for the continuation of the existing Federation while Germany backed Slovene and Croatian desires for independence. However, in 1992 the EU followed the lead of Germany and took the momentous step of recognising Slovenia and Croatia as independent states. The years of war that followed—in which perhaps 130,000 people lost their lives—cannot, of course, be laid entirely at the door of the EU. Ethnic and religious rivalries within the former Yugoslavia were, doubtless, at the root of the violence. Nevertheless, EU recognition of the breakaway republics was, at the very least, premature, undermining voices that supported compromise and encouraging separatists.

EU diplomacy played, arguably, an even more problematic role in the continuing crisis in Ukraine. Offering EU Associate status to the country in 2013 was deeply divisive, pitting the Ukrainian speakers in its west against the Russian speakers of the Donbass and Crimea and encouraging the insurrectionist violence on the Euromaidan in Kyiv. Again, the EU cannot be held responsible for the aggressive Russian response to what was seen in Moscow as the overthrow of a friendly, elected government by dark reactionary forces, although such a response was grimly predictable to those who had any knowledge of the politics of the region. However, we

cannot speak in this context of the EU's institutions 'curbing assertions of national sovereignty'. In a perilous situation when a minority feared (not without some reason) that its language and culture would be legally marginalised, the EU poured oil on the flames of the conflict rather than seeking to extinguish them.

I have no wish to labour this point. I am happy to grant, that, in my own homeland of Ireland, EU diplomacy played an important (though not crucial) role in bringing the parties to the table for the Good Friday agreement. Nevertheless, the assumption that the EU has always been a force for peace and security in our continent, is not self-evident when viewed from Belgrade or Sebastopol. Berlin may have rejected the notion of an inevitable *Drang nach Osten* only for this arrogant belief in an inevitable expansion eastwards to have been taken up in Brussels! We can only hope that the UK's departure may prompt some reflection, and indeed some humility, in certain quarters.

I end with a confession and a plea. First, I put a (metaphorical!) peg on my nose in June 2016 and voted Remain, mainly because I feared (and still fear) the consequences of Brexit on the continued Union of the UK. However, I have come to fear something else even more in the past four years: namely that as

a nation we have slipped into a place of division where we are content to remain in those 'echo chambers' where we hear only those arguments we agree with. How encouraging it would have been had the mainstream Christian churches provided exceptional places of generosity and willingness to listen in this period. Regrettably this has not generally been the case, for, often enough, it appears we have made an implicit equation of sound Christian belief with support for EU membership.

I do not share the pain (indeed the shame) many Christians feel in this new era; nor am I elated, for too many of my loved ones and friends in the continuing EU and the UK are saddened and perplexed by these developments. Yet, if we were able to reach out beyond whatever place we find ourselves in today, might it not present us with a new and joyful missional opportunity? Might we not now be given one more chance to engage in humbler ways with that 'demographic' in the UK that we have, for so long, found it most difficult to reach; that is, with the oldstock, male, working class, those who, in disproportionate numbers, believed in the righteousness of leaving the EU?

Notes

1. Oliver O'Donovan, *The desire of the nations: rediscovering the roots of political theology*. CUP, 1996, pp 6-29.
2. H. Arendt, *Origins of totalitarianism*. London: Penguin, 1951, pp509-513.

Reviews

edited by Michael Peat

Including the stranger: foreigners in the former prophets

by David Firth

IVP: Apollos, 2019

Reviewer: Pieter J. Lalleman

The prolific David Firth of Trinity College, Bristol, discusses the roles of foreigners in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. To this end his work has four major chapters, each on one of the books mentioned, plus shorter introductory and concluding chapters. As the author of commentaries on Joshua (IVP's *The Bible speaks today series*) and Samuel (Apollos), Firth is eminently qualified to write on these parts of Scripture.

Not long ago in this journal I recommended the book by Helen Paynter on violence in the Old Testament. My first impression of Firth's study was that it covers the same ground as Paynter's, but that impression was only partly correct. It is in the discussion of Joshua that the issue of violence plays a large role. Firth shows how in Joshua foreigners come to be included in Israel through faith, Rahab and Caleb being the prime examples.

Later on, violence is no longer an issue. It is remarkable, however, how many non-Israelites continued to live in the Promised Land, which may serve as evidence that very little—if any—ethnic cleansing had taken place when the Israelites moved in.

In Judges the main problem is that the Israelites behave as foreigners, thus losing their status as people of God, whereas several foreigners are among the book's liberators. Firth shows how, in Samuel, foreigners in the land are primarily used for evaluating the behaviour and faith of the Israelites. In Kings the focus is on foreigners outside the Promised Land. As Firth says, 'Foreigners are not a problem, but a foreign faith is' (p170).

Throughout the book Firth often does more than merely discuss the roles of the foreigners, and not everything he includes is directly relevant for the subject. In his enthusiasm he fills eight pages on Judges 1—but this is still good, insightful material. Everywhere he shows up key words and literary structures in the narratives. He listens carefully to the stories in which foreigners occur and brings out the intentions of the authors. Because the Old Testament contains so many stories with little or no authorial comment, these authorial intentions are often hard to discover; here an expert guide makes them clear. We learn (again) that the biblical authors report

many things of which they disapprove without making this disapproval explicit.

As a reader you do not have to agree with everything Firth brings up—for example, the suggestion that Elijah may have been a foreigner (p147)—to enjoy the rich contents of this book. I was amazed how important the role of foreigners is in the story of Israel, and how positively many of them are depicted.

A slight complication in reading about 'Joshua' and 'Samuel' is that in Firth's study these names can refer both to the characters who bear these names and to the books which bear their names; the reader needs to decide this case by case.

So—like Helen Paynter's book—this one is timely, yet quite different. It will be a great help to all of us as we preach the Old Testament stories; indeed, it will encourage and help us to preach these stories (again). Apart from one page, the book is accessible without knowledge of Hebrew.

Send my roots rain: refreshing the spiritual life of priests

by Christopher Chapman

Canterbury Press, 2019

Reviewer: Ronnie Hall

This book is based on the author's experience of being a Roman

Catholic priest and later, after moving to the Church of England, becoming a spirituality adviser. He is now teaching spirituality to Anglican ordinands and priests in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. It's fair to say that a Baptist minister is not the target audience for the book! This is clear from the very beginning as the author naturally has a very different understanding of ordination and priesthood than that of a Baptist. Having worked with Catholic and Anglican colleagues for many years I have learned to filter and adapt when faced with episcopal ecclesiology but I found this book a real struggle!

Chapter 3, *Perspectives on priesthood*, was hard-going. I found it nearly impossible to balance the theology of priesthood with my own experiences as a Baptist minister. For example, I can't build a theology of spirituality on the premise that I take the place of Christ as I sacrifice him at the altar in the eucharist.

Chapter 4, *Priest as disciple* was just as tricky. While the short section on prayer had helpful everyday tips the longer section on pilgrimage was tough to relate to. Having read it through a second time I did begin to agree that the idea of a long pilgrimage might be a good idea on a sabbatical, but it is not the Baptist way of doing things as a rule! I think that's more or less the point. The priest is something that you are, as well as what you do. But Baptist ministry is what we do as disciples:

we think differently.

The author hopes that Christians from other traditions can take something from the book and you can—but you have to go to Chapter 7 to do so. There are some helpful practical tips on the importance of friendships, the need for accountability and joining a dispersed community.

Overall I cannot recommend this book to you. I have a fairly broad theology but this book isn't really written for Baptist ministers and neither should the author make any apology for not doing so. But if you are interested in deepening spirituality then please check out *The city is my monastery* by Richard Carter.

The city is my monastery

by Richard Carter

Canterbury Press, 2019

Reviewer: Ronnie Hall

I approached this book with a degree of scepticism. A town or city is not a place to build a monastery. Besides which, a Rule of Life often involves silence and getting in touch with creation which is, I believe, hard to do in a noisy, busy urban ministry. I've only ever been a church minister in a town or city centre and now I work in a very busy inner city prison. I never thought of these as a monastery or even really considered the possibility of them

being so. However I do have an open mind and was prepared to give Richard Carter a fair hearing.

As I read this through the first time I started writing some of the phrases and put them on my office wall. 'The city is God's just as much as the hills and the valleys', 'discover the riches of the place you are in', 'Sabbath gives you time to be aware of what's happening around you', 'the Kingdom is brought about by simple acts of change'.

These sound like little inspirational quotes but in the context of this Rule of Life they are so obvious I can't believe I never made the connection between them before. It was mesmerising reading this book because I didn't actually 'learn' anything as such. Instead everything I already knew about urban ministry came alive and in an absolute moment of clarity I realised that my frustrations about working in the city are because I've always assumed that God can't be heard properly in a city, it's just too noisy. I'm still working on this and I will be for a long time because any Rule of Life takes discipline and practice. There are things written here that, if I can ever achieve them, I'll have cracked urban ministry.

This is not a quick read. It is part autobiography, part poetry and part narrative. It is not a textbook telling you how to do a Rule of Life.

This book is a Rule of Life. It is a book to keep close by and work on day after day. My only quibble is that the original artwork looks incredible but would be so much better in colour. I almost wish it was published as a journal with space for margin notes.

The writer is Anglo-Catholic and that is definitely evident in his theology. However for anyone in an urban ministry I find it hard to believe you wouldn't benefit from reading this and having an urban Rule of Life.

Candles in the dark: faith, hope and love in a time of pandemic

by Rowan Williams

SPCK, 2020

Reviewer: Michael Peat

This book is the fruit of Rowan Williams' weekly contribution to the daily bulletin prepared by St Clement's church in Cambridge, in the wake of pandemic restrictions implemented in March last year. There are 27 short chapters, including an epilogue with thoughts on what the past year's intense reminder of our shared fragility might have to teach us for the future.

These reflections span the period from late March to mid-September 2020, with various of the controversies which then made headline news receiving the wise

and faithful scrutiny for which the author is well known. The toppling of slave trader Edward Colston's statue in Bristol, the ubiquity (and, often, iniquity) of 'algorithm thinking' in our society, the methods of Extinction Rebellion, and the perils and possibilities of singing *Rule, Britannia!* and *Jerusalem* at public events; these are some of the events which occasion astute spiritual observations. Other chapters respond to the strange routines that have become everyday norms under enduring pandemic restrictions: one suggestion that will live long in my memory is that 'wearing masks...just might make us pay more attention to the whole of how someone else is behaving or communicating,' so that 'perhaps we are more "barefaced" sometimes when we wear masks' (p45).

Williams highlights the original Catholic Anglican context of these reflections in his preface, and its presence can be felt when some chapters take their cue from the saint whose feast day it was when the reflection was written. But for this Baptist reviewer, this feature was but a reminder of the riches we can discover when we step out of our faith-related comfort zones. At a time when social bubbles are a necessary imposition to reduce infection, there was something especially appealing about being free to cross the porous boundary of an ecclesial 'bubble', so as to

learn from closer contact with a different church tradition!

Short though it is, this book offers plenty of profound and timely insights for those wanting to reflect theologically on the 'interesting times' in which we find ourselves.

Stop calling me beautiful: finding soul-deep strength in a skin-deep world

by Phylicia Masonheimer

Harvest House, 2020

Reviewer: Pieter J. Lalleman

'You are beautiful to God as you are'. Young American theologian and mother of two, Phylicia Masonheimer, is fed up with these words. Please stop telling me that I am a special person in God's eyes. Stop telling me that I can accept and embrace myself. This message is much too similar to what the world also tells us.

Self-acceptance is only part of the gospel, Masonheimer argues. Yet in most churches it's all you hear. You are welcome here, God loves you, now please read your Bible every morning. A message so superficial that many women are turning their back on the church.

Masonheimer argues that the biblical gospel is also about repentance, overcoming addiction, recovery from damage and a truly changed life, and these topics get

chapters in her book. Her intentions come out in these words: 'This book is meant to point you from a surface-level faith in Jesus to a deeper, stronger, more grounded Christian walk' (p198). Thus the book comes across as a response to the following words from Ian Stackhouse's 2012 *Primitive Piety*: 'The intimacy that is longed for in a charismatic setting is often that which produces a positive outcome or feeling. This is increasingly true in a postmodern culture and, with the rise of social media, frequently only a positive image is displayed. Whilst this is true of society at large, it can also be true within the church: members of the congregation feel that they have to present a 'happy face' with the pretence that everything is alright' (p31).

Throughout her book Masonheimer addresses women, but many men will like it as well, because the issues are universal. The book is American, but not overly so. I would have appreciated a deeper analysis of the culture which produces this superficial version of the gospel. After every chapter follows a page 'What you can do today', always with three concrete points. Masonheimer's use of scripture is accurate, if never very deep, with Dinah (Genesis 34) making appearances alongside the Samaritan woman.

Whom the cap fits, let them wear it.

The X, Y, Z of discipleship: understanding and reaching Generations Y & Z

by Nick & Marjorie Allen

Malcolm Down, 2020

Reviewer: Andy Scholes

I will openly acknowledge at the beginning of this review that I am not someone who has done a load of reading around the various 'Generations' and their differing traits. That said, I do know that I'm a Generation X-er, just...and that therefore likely impacts how I view the world—and the church—and this book!

With that as a context I was quite looking forward to picking up a bit more about how the 'Generations' differ in expression and view of the world, but more than that—how to go about discipling them.

Reading through the book two things came across straight away—first, the authors' hands-on experience in this area (discipling young adults) over a number of years. Second, their enthusiasm.

The book itself is divided into four sections. The first section, as you might imagine, sets the scene and encourages the reader not to hastily grumble about a particular generation because they see things differently but instead seek to understand and to see differences in terms of opportunities.

Section two provides some general analysis of some of the significant issues for those young adults who fall into the Generation Y and Z bracket. They write about issues of identity, the desire for authentic community and the challenges—and opportunities—of the technological developments that previous generations didn't necessarily have to navigate. I personally can remember a time before mobile phones and the internet for example; but those in their 20s probably can't! While this last area is certainly unique, other issues highlighted are perhaps not too surprising—and could in fact, apply to those of any generation!

Section three was for me probably the strongest section in that it gives three chapters over to explore wider cultural trends and how they may impact on those in Generations Y and Z—and in my opinion it does it well. The authors choose truth in a post-truth world, discernment in decision making in the face of a 'fear of missing out' (or FOMO) and the area of intolerance/tolerance.

Section four then gives suggestions and thoughts for a response and way forward, drawing on a couple of pieces of recent research (one from the Church of England and one from the Evangelical Alliance) around questions of what young adults look for in a church. What came out was the need for a church to

be friendly and welcoming, and to provide opportunities to get involved and have their voice heard.

In this section there is also a bit of a discussion about whether to go 'hip and trendy' (lighting, sofas and good coffee etc) in terms of the shape of a Sunday morning in a bid to attract young adults or whether to stick to 'who you are' as a church for the sake of authenticity—some studies suggest that young adults are drawn by the sense of mystery and the experiential, and appreciate authenticity. My sense is that the authors don't come down on one side or the other—and maybe that's the point, I guess it's context-specific.

All in all, while it isn't particularly my style in terms of writing and some of the phrases used, I did appreciate the authors' attempts to be even-handed when talking about the particular generation in question—neither unnecessarily critical, nor leaving out the critique if that is needed.

There was a real emphasis on building genuine relationships, sharing food, opening homes, and generally 'doing life' together—and this being the foundation and context in which discipleship can happen.

Book reviews and CMD

You will be aware that the Ministries Team of Baptists Together is encouraging all serving ministers on the accredited list to commit to undertaking some form of continuing ministerial development (CMD). Regular information is now being sent out by Tim Fergusson about the opportunities and possibilities available to you.

There is considerable flexibility about what might constitute CMD for any individual minister. What will stretch you in ministry and give you new vision and energy for your service to God?

You might like to consider writing a book review for *bmj*. This would mean committing to reading a book of interest to you and reflecting on it as a practising Baptist minister, then sharing your views through these pages. You could share your thoughts with a peer or with other colleagues too.

If you would be interested in reviewing for *bmj*, please contact the *Reviews* editor, Mike Peat, at mike.peat@bristol.ac.uk, and let him know what sort of things you are interested in reviewing.

The editor

***bmj* Essay Prize 2021**

The *bmj* invites entries for our Essay Prize from those serving in, or in formation for, the leadership and ministry of Baptist churches. We would like an essay of 2500 words on a topic and title of the entrant's choice that fits into *one* of the following categories:

Baptist History and Principles

Biblical Studies

Theology or Practical Theology

We are looking for clear writing and argument, and preferably a creative engagement with our Baptist life. The prize will be **£250.00** and the winning essay (and any highly commended contributions) will be published in *bmj*.

We particularly encourage entries from those in the early years of their (Baptist) ministries, which includes MiTs and those who are not in accredited or recognised leadership roles.

Closing date: 30 March 2021

Entries should be submitted **electronically, double spaced and fully referenced, using endnotes not footnotes**, to the editor at revsal96@aol.com, including details of your name, address, church, role, and stage of ministry.

Judges will be drawn from the Editorial Board of *bmj* and subject-appropriate academic Baptist colleagues. We reserve the right not to award a prize if the entries are unsuitable, of an inadequate standard for *bmj*, or do not meet the criteria.

Please share this competition with colleagues to whom it might be of interest.

Contact the editor if you have any queries.