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News:

Responding to modern slavery

When slavery is happening on the doorsteps of our churches, we must respond.

How? By Dan Pratt

With the National Crime Agency (NCA) estimating there are well over 13,000 people being kept in modern slavery in the UK today, we must ask what is the church's response to modern slavery?

The NCA states that 'As you go about your normal daily life there is a growing and a good chance that you will come across a victim who has been exploited and that's why we are asking the public to recognise their concerns and report them.'

It is therefore imperative that the church responds to this injustice. In my ministry as a Baptist minister among those on the margins I have come into regular contact with those being exploited for labour or sexual services. Within the Eastern Baptist Association churches have already identified and helped victims of MS or those vulnerable to exploitation by reporting to the authorities and enabling people to be freed.

The UK's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland, notes 'Faith groups have influence, insight and rare avenues into the community. They are therefore a powerful tool in the fight against modern slavery'.

As Baptists, if we are seeking to follow Jesus in his mission, we follow him in 'setting the captives free'. When slavery is happening on the doorsteps of our churches and even sometimes within our churches, we must respond in order to protect and safeguard. How do we do this?

* Firstly we need to see our communities and streets with new eyes. Do we see those being kept in slavery around us? Do our churches know how to spot the signs of someone in slavery? Are individuals isolated? Is their story scripted? Are they being controlled?

* Secondly we should act. If we suspect someone is being kept as a slave do we know to phone the Modern Slavery National Helpline (08000 121700).

www.modernslaveryhelpline.org

* Thirdly, we need to partner together and consult. We are stronger when we work together to fight this injustice. How can we as Baptists Together, within our churches, associations and national networks work together in setting the captives free?

Within the EBA, we are developing a joined up response and exploring how partnerships can develop. We are working in partnership with organisations such as The Clewer Initiative, the Church of England's response to Modern Slavery. In 2018 the EBA along with The Clewer Initiative is facilitating three regional anti-slavery summits in Cambridge, Chelmsford and Norwich.

Having attended The Clewer Initiative's launch at Lambeth Palace, 17 October, it was encouraging to see their joined up and proactive approach. Miriam, a survivor of modern slavery stated at the launch 'I was trafficked by Christians. For 10 years I was a victim of modern slavery. They told me when to eat, when to sleep. I had no freedom'. Bishop Alistair Redfern called the church to 'take off our blinkers and go and find those in our society who are victims of modern slavery'.

As we join Jesus in setting the captives free, how can we as Baptists develop a robust and collective response towards the injustice of modern slavery?

Dan Pratt is Antislavery Co-ordinator for the Eastern Baptist Association

New Facebook Group for Baptist ministers

A new Facebook group to help Baptist ministers 'journey together and listen to others who have different perspectives' has launched

The group, Baptist Ministers Network UK, is for those who have been called to and are involved in Baptist ministry in the UK. It is intended to include people in various forms of ministry, locally, regionally and nationally.

'We hope that this can be a place where we can journey together by engaging in conversation and listening to others who have different perspectives,' reads the group description.

'A place of encouragement where we can build one another up and inspire one another. A place to ask questions and to discuss issues that we face as ministers.'

The group was formed with the blessing of the Baptist Ministers in the UK Facebook group, for which a member has to be a nationally accredited minister.

'It was recognised that it would be good to have a group that could have a broader membership, including regional and unaccredited ministers, and so this group was born,' the description continued.

This group is closed, which means that only current members can read what is posted.

If you are a Baptist minister, visit the group and request to join.

Hymn writer anniversary marks Baptist women focus

The stories of Baptist women have not always received a prominent place in the written accounts of British Baptist life.

Marking the tercentenary of the birth of Anne Steele (1717-1778), a prolific Baptist hymn writer, the October issue of *The Baptist Quarterly* seeks to redress this imbalance by publishing all of the articles in this issue by women, and about women. By Karen Smith and Simon Woodman

Ruth Bottoms examines Anne Steele's hymnody, in dialogue with contemporary Baptist worship. She notes that 'we are, and we become, what we sing', and although Steele's hymns may have been lost to common usage, their influence on Baptist worship endures, not just in the more cerebral tradition of hymnic worship, but also in the more over(t)ly emotive engagement of the charismatic tradition.

As Bottoms compares Steele's hymns and the songs used at the 2009 Baptist Assembly, she suggests that the combination of honesty and emotion in Steele's writing challenges contemporary Baptist worship. Indeed, how can worship be both intellectually rigorous, emotionally engaging, and authentically celebratory; while also allowing space for the exploration of emotions such as doubt, sorrow, or suffering?

Sue Barker paints an engaging picture of Susannah Spurgeon, the wife of the Charles Haddon Spurgeon who emerges from her husband's shadow as an enterprising and faithful partner in ministry. Readers may be surprised to discover that it was Susannah Spurgeon who was largely responsible for her husband's wide-spread fame as she formed a 'Book Fund', which during her life time distributed thousands of books to support pastors around the world. She also founded the 'Pastors Aid Society' and the 'Westwood Clothing Society', to counter the 'evil' of ministerial poverty.

Karen Smith traces the role played by two pioneering women educators Martha Smith Trinder (1736-1790) and Henrietta Neale (1752-1802). Their insistence on learning as 'play' may also inspire teachers today.

These articles along with several book reviews in this issue of The Quarterly serve as a reminder that the history of Baptist life must include the stories of the contributions of women and offer a timely reminder that as we recall the past, Baptists may reflect on current issues and be challenged and inspired for tomorrow.

The Baptist Quarterly is a publication of the Baptist Historical Society. If you would like to browse some past issues see <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ybaq20>.

Details of membership in the Baptist Historical Society may be found at <http://baptisthistory.org.uk>. This is the first in a series of articles from the Baptist Historical Society for The Baptist Times

Simon Woodman and Karen Smith are the editors of The Baptist Quarterly.

Ministry Today UK to close

A cross-denominational organisation run by ministers for ministers is to call time after almost a quarter of a century

Ministry Today UK (MTUK) began in 1994 following concern about the number of ministers leaving ministry. It has served ministers through an annual conference and well-regarded journal published three times a year. It also offered consultations to groups of ministers and local churches.

Its closure from April 2018 is related to the stepping down of founder, Baptist minister the Revd Dr Paul Beasley-Murray. Paul had served as its chairman and the journal's general and review editor but decided to step down from the leadership after retiring from full-time stipendiary ministry.

He explained:

Although I still am involved in preaching and teaching, the fact is that I am no longer running a church – and so no longer experiencing the stresses and strains of ministry today. I believe that a strength of MTUK is that it has been an organisation run by working ministers for working ministers, and so I gave notice to the Board that another chairman was necessary.

Unfortunately, the search to find a new chairman was unsuccessful. Although a partnership was explored with one or two theological colleges, it was felt that such a partnership would 'change the character of Ministry Today UK as a body run by working ministers for working ministers.'

The board made its decision to close in the summer.

‘Inevitably I feel somewhat sad about this outcome,’ Paul wrote in the editorial of the latest issue of the journal. ‘It is not easy to give up on an organisation which one founded.’

However, in reality, ‘there is much to celebrate,’ he continued.

‘MTUK has occupied a very special place in the life of many ministers – there has been no other British cross-denominational organisation focussed on the practice of ministry. Over the years I certainly have been blessed by the insights of others from traditions not my own,’ Paul continued.

There have been 72 issues of the journal, featuring 520 articles on a wide-ranging array of topics.

What’s more, the MTUK board has decided to leave a permanent legacy by republishing all these articles in eight hard-backed volumes. Sets will be deposited in all six British copyright libraries. There are also available to buy.

The board is particularly keen that working ministers will be able to afford to buy the legacy volumes. Until the end of November they are available for just £48 (plus £10 p&p).

‘What a bargain for this wide-ranging collection of articles on almost aspect of the practice of ministry!’ wrote Paul.

‘Even with the closure of Ministry Today UK, the journal will continue to bless ministers for a good number of years to come.’

MTUK was originally called the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry, after the great 16th century pastor of Kidderminster.

One of his quotes featured on the back of the early issues of the journal.

“All churches either rise or fall as the ministry doth rise or fall – not in riches or worldly grandeur, but in knowledge, zeal and ability for their work”.

Or in other words, said Paul “The key to the health and growth of the churches is its leaders”.

‘I dare to think that the many ministers who have read our journal and attended our conferences have been the healthier for it.’

Money management course in school

Baptist church team delivers a Christians Against Poverty Money Course to pupils in a local secondary school

Youth pastor Owen James and a small team from Tabernacle Baptist Church in Penarth, delivered a Christians Against Poverty (CAP) Money Course to Year 12 pupils at St Cyres School.

The invitation came about after one of the Baptist church members, a cook at the school, had discussions with members of staff about the CAP Money Course. The church has been running it for several years helping people to budget and run their finances well. More recently it has started a CAP Job Club to help people with skills to acquiring jobs.

Owen, who had come into post in January, had an interest in helping young people plan their finances. 'I was with a course tutor at a university when she got a call from a first year student who three weeks in to term had spent all her money because no one had explained to her how to budget or handle money. One of the things students going for the first time to uni need is help with planning their finances.'

He discovered that CAP had created a youth supplement to its general course, and subsequently received training in how to deliver it.

Owen was then invited for a meeting with Phil Davies, Head of the Welsh Baccalaureate programme at St Cyres. The programme has an emphasis on teaching life skills such as management of time and resources. The CAP Money Course covers areas such as understanding best buys – getting value for money; understanding loans, and hire purchase, and was deemed suitable.

Owen presented the course to more than 80 Year 12 pupils alongside colleague Sara Redwood. They were joined by two others from the church for the breakout sessions, meaning each had around 20 pupils to work on budgeting.

Owen was pleased with the response. He said:

'The afternoon went well. We had a very warm reception from the staff and pupils. The young people engaged well with the topic in both the main 'breakout' sessions. Conversations were had with pupils about their finances and also regarding future finance challenges they would face.

'Discussions were heard among them regarding how they finance their current 'life style' and how this could change and whether 'Bank of mum and Dad is the best way to live. Certainly in the group I had there were young people appreciating that not everyone has the same financial advantages or disadvantages as themselves and a more tolerant attitude was expressed.

'The staff expressed positive views regarding our presentation and were appreciative of us going in and presenting the course.'

As a result of the session, Owen and the team were invited to present the CAP Money Course in another secondary school.

Reflection

How did the Reformation change the Church?

Five ways the Reformation changed not just the Church, but the world. By Mark Woods

Martin Luther³¹ October 1517 – the day the Reformation began. According to some, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg's Castle Church in defiance of the Pope, and the rest is history.

Well, perhaps. Actually it's not entirely clear that he did it himself rather than sending a servant. It was a perfectly normal way of communicating – a bit like blogging. Even worse, many scholars now believe it may never have happened at all. And it took a little while before the implications of the 95 short statements – about how the Pope couldn't forgive sins through granting indulgences – really sank in.

Furthermore, Luther wasn't the first or the only Reformer. Still, 31 October is as good a date as any to mark the beginning of a movement that changed not just the Church but the world. This is how it happened.

1. It gave us the Bible.

The Reformers believed in going back to the scriptures. While the Catholic Church set store by tradition, the Reformers believed in going back to the source. So, their scholars and pastors read the Bible intensively, and as printing and literacy spread they encouraged their people to do so too.

They preached from the Bible and wanted everyone to understand it, so they translated it; the Catholic Church believed the Bible was dangerous in untrained hands.

Evangelicals' love of scripture comes straight from the Reformation, because the Reformers taught that scripture alone was authoritative. Hence the famous words of William Tyndale, strangled and burned at the stake for translating the Bible into English: "I defy the Pope and all his laws. If God spare my life, ere many yeares I will cause a boy that drives the plough to know more of the scripture than he does."

2. It gave us spiritual freedom.

Luther's key insight was that salvation was by faith alone. He wasn't the first or the only one to realise that, but because he was a brilliant writer, speaker and publicist, his books and pamphlets spread very quickly. It's not up to the Pope or his ministers to forgive sins, he said – we trust God and we are saved.

In the Church of the day, forgiveness was obtained through doing penance – acts of charity, prayers, or self-punishment that were supposed to reinforce an inward repentance and were inseparable from it.

Luther used to torment himself – and irritate his confessor – because he thought he hadn't done enough penance to be saved. But then he realised that salvation wasn't about what we do, but about what Christ has done.

This was radical because it cut out the middle man. Anyone, without the intervention of a priest, could repent and be saved. It was also threatening to the authorities: the sale of indulgences – effectively tickets to heaven – was an industry bringing in huge revenues to the Church. Luther was hitting the Pope in his pocket.

3. It gave us religious freedom.

Which is not quite the same thing. Before the Reformation, the Church was in charge of spirituality. The Catholic Church, which controlled religion in the West, defined right and wrong theology. It exercised political power through Catholic rulers who all acknowledged – grudgingly, in quite a few cases – that the Pope had some kind of authority over them. After the Reformation, that changed, though it took a while – many Protestant countries were just as intolerant as Catholic ones. Real freedom of religion was a long way off and in the beginning only the strange Anabaptists taught it – but the Catholic Church's monopoly was broken.

That led to a flowering of theology not just among Protestants, but among Catholics too. They had to think about why they believed what they believed, and to be able to defend it – so the quality of debate jumped all round. It was the beginning of a free market in religion, and everyone had to try to improve their product.

4. It gave us democracy.

The Reformation began as a protest against authority. Luther was deeply opposed to violent rebellion and wrote a truly horrible pamphlet urging rulers to put down a peasants' revolt with fire and sword. But others were perfectly prepared to resist unjust authority. They read in the Bible about God's judgment on wicked kings and were willing to take up arms against them.

It didn't always end well – Zwingli died at Kappel in a battle against Catholic forces, and several others came to sticky ends. Many Continental Protestant countries had absolute and authoritarian monarchies even so, but in England it was the children of the Reformation who chopped King Charles's head off and gave Britain a true parliament.

Recognising the importance of the individual's conscience was a step on the way to recognising the importance of the individual's rights. As the Leveller Thomas Rainsborough said at the famous Putney Debates in 1647: 'I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live, as the greatest he; and therefore truly, Sir, I think it's clear, that every man that is to live under a government ought first by his own consent to put himself under that government; and I do think that the poorest man in England is not bound in a strict sense to that government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under.'

5. It gave us fresh temptations.

The Reformation was a wonderful gift from God in which precious truths that had been hidden for generations were discovered and shared with the world. But it also meant the destruction of the old systems of authority. Everyone could read the Bible and interpret it for themselves, so Protestantism was – and is – vulnerable to new heresies growing up.

And human nature is inherently sinful, so the Reformers themselves, and the movements they inspired, were flawed too. Luther wrote anti-semitic tracts; Zwingli had the great Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier racked to get him to change his mind about baptism; Calvin demanded the death of Michael Servetus for denying the Trinity (though, to be fair, he wanted him beheaded rather than burned, his actual fate).

We should rejoice in the Reformation and praise God for the reformers – but we should acknowledge where they went wrong, too.

Mark Woods is a Baptist minister and managing editor of Christian Today. This article first appeared in *Idea*, the magazine of the Evangelical Alliance, and is republished with permission