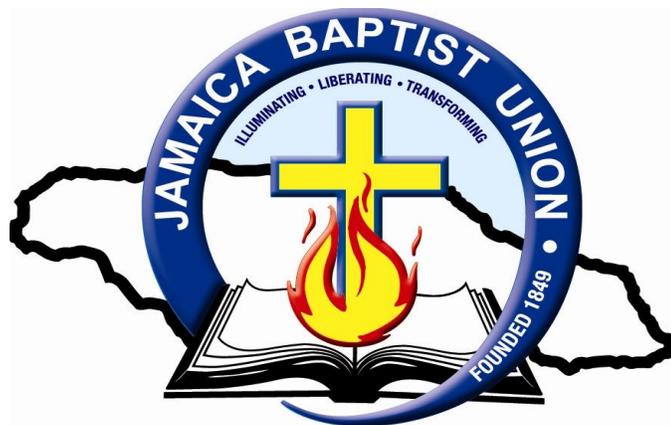


JAMAICA BAPTIST UNION



PAPERS PRODUCED BY THE FAITH AND ORDER COMMISSION

FEBRUARY 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Preface	i
Affirmation of Faith	1
The Ministry of Deacons	3
The Ministry of Superintendents	21
Children and Church Membership in JBU	37
The Moral Implications of accepting funding from certain Donor Agencies	44
The Death Penalty/Capital Punishment	50

PREFACE

Baptists were born out of theological concerns, inclusive of the desire to restore the New Testament model of church. The focus on voluntary confession of faith, believer's baptism and congregational church governance are deeply etched within our spiritual DNA. Notwithstanding, from the very outset, Baptists quest for truth have espoused different approaches, employing the terminologies "General" and "Particular" to definitive effect. Our approaches to understanding the sovereignty of God, the atoning work of Christ, the nature of grace and the eternal hope of believers are still questions in which Baptists worldwide, reveal some diversity of thought.

Baptists however, recognize the final authority in the church as residing in Christ. This in no way reduces our regard for the Bible which bears witness to God in Christ. We also maintain a keen interest in practical theology which, among other things, finds expression in a sincere regard for religious freedom or liberty of conscience. These features of our identity were very operative as the Faith and Order Commission of the Jamaica Baptist Union worked toward making these papers available for ongoing reflection within our member churches.

At best, this publication is a collection of essays, deemed important to the life of the Union and wider Church. They reflect diverse and thought-provoking contributions on ecclesial and ethical issues of some relevance to contemporary Christian mission. They are not papal edicts and the Commission makes absolutely no claim about their perfection.

The first and shortest paper is probably the most significant. As an Affirmation of Faith, this document encapsulates in creedal form, the essentials of our missional self-understanding. To such an extent, the other papers in this compendium are effectively, functions of such affirmation.

The ministry of Deacons and the ministry of Superintendents are at opposite ends on a continuum of familiarity within our faculty of church administration. While the former is a well established function within the Baptist church, the latter while relatively new has been gaining acceptance. The deliberations on both areas of ministry are characterized by an appreciable degree of fluidity of thought, which should evoke a commensurate measure of discussion and debate.

In answering to the question of how we Baptist, treat with admitting children into church membership, this particular paper first examines some biblical-theological issues worth considering, before proffering practical insights on the way forward. The position advocated is rooted in the ethics of Christian humility and missional community.

These are days in which, almost all communions are experiencing difficulties in funding the mission. How ought we to treat with donor agencies that are themselves, known to be, partially or completely subsidized by means which might not accord with a Christian ethic? And where are we on the matter of the death penalty, even as our nation struggles with the problems attendant to a high murder rate? What might be the issues worth contemplating?

Our reading of, reflecting upon and response to these papers are pertinent at this time when as Baptists, we are trying to make the link between faith and practice and between the search for truth and a spirituality founded on the encounter of God in all human experience. Our ultimate desire must be to inform faith and nurture action toward transforming the world, especially the world of the poor, the excluded and the marginalized.

Norva O. Rodney (Rev.)
Chair, JBU Faith and Order Commission
February 2012

Jamaica Baptist Union Affirmation of Faith

We unite in affirming that:

- God, who is personal, sovereign, triune and eternal, is Creator and source of all life.
- Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified, risen and exalted Lord, is the unique Son of God whose person and work reveal the fullness of God's nature, will and purpose.
- the Holy Spirit is the living presence of God at work in the world and in human experience making known, enabling, sustaining and bringing to fulfillment all that God has promised and willed through Jesus Christ, now and in the days to come.
- humankind and the whole creation owe their continuing existence and above all, their hope of salvation, to the gracious God. With sin leading to death, God makes liberation available to all through God's forgiving, redeeming and reconciling grace revealed and effected in and through the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,.
- the Church, the divinely created and Spirit-empowered community of believers in Christ, is called to worship of God through fellowship, proclamation, service and witness. By their calling, each and every member of the Church is to participate fully in the ministry and mission that God in Christ has committed to the church.
- believers' baptism and the Lord's Supper are integral to the life of the Church, according to the Scriptures. Through baptism into Christ, believers identify with the saving work of Christ, bear witness to our entry into newness of life and are incorporated into the body of Christ. Through baptism, they are also initiated toward a life of discipleship in the Church and in the world. At

the Lord's Table, disciples of Christ celebrate, with thanksgiving, the saving work of God in Christ, the communion we share with Christ and with one another, and the joyful anticipation of eternal fellowship with our living, reigning Lord.

- the Bible is the unique God-designated means by which God's truth, given in Jesus Christ, is interpreted within the community of faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and is understood to be authoritative for faith and life.
- God expects human beings to exercise responsible freedom of choice in good conscience. While showing them the way to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, God does not compel belief. Instead, all are given the freedom to believe.
- God in Christ Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, has endowed the Church with the freedom of assembly and expression so that it may cultivate reverent worship and responsible discipleship.
- God is sovereign Lord of the whole universe. All human life and the whole creation are subject to God's control and authority. The love, obedience, allegiance and loyalty that human beings offer to God supersede any loyalty we may express to any part of the natural order, including human beings and the systems and structures they create.
- In God's own time, God will bring to pass the promised consummation of history and total transformation of creation. All humankind should live toward such a future with a lively hope even as they pursue a faithful, creative and dynamic life in the purpose of God here and now. God holds the key to the destiny of all, as all will give account of their stewardship in God's eternity.

All blessing, glory and honour be to God now and forever!

The Ministry of Deacons

The office of **Deacon** is one that exists in several Church communions. However, despite its near universal currency there is no unanimity concerning who a deacon is and what a deacon does. These two factors admit a bewildering variety of understandings and practices. This is so not only in terms of differences existing between communions but also within individual ones of them.

As is always the case whenever new and emerging ministry-challenges confront the Church in general and individual communions in particular, effective ministry response becomes a matter of great importance. This in turn calls for renewed reflection on orders and patterns of ministry existing in the Church and individual communions. Based on the nature of challenges now being faced, the office and function of deacons have become a matter that calls for renewed reflection. Of course the matter is made no easier by the fact that up to now, diversity in both understanding and practice of the office and role respectively has been the order of the day.

It is here conceded that profitable reflection will benefit from looking at **New Testament evidence, developments in the early church** tradition and practice, later **development prior to what may be regarded as the modern period** and then the **contemporary period**. It is understandable that by the scope of the presentation the examination undertaken will be little more than cursory. However it is hoped that from the insights gained, the questions related to the deacons may be seen in a more helpful perspective, current understanding and practices may be properly assessed, and further attempts to give effective expression to the office and role may be helpfully guided.

New Testament Witness

Ministry within the Church is fundamentally of an inclusive nature. Every member of the church ought to share in its collective ministry. God in Christ by means of the gift of the spirit endows every member

of the church with a ministry gift for the common good of the Church itself – **Rom. 12:3-8**; **1Cor. 12:4ff.** **Eph. 4:7-13**; **1Pet. 4:10ff.** Ministry responsibility on the part of every member is therefore a New Testament provision and requirement.

At the same time however, the New Testament also witnesses to special ministry roles to be carried out by certain functionaries within local congregations. Elders or Overseers [Bishops] and deacons are a prominent and significant case in point. **Phil. 1:1**; **1Tim. 3:8-12**; Elders are found far more frequently and independently of any accompanying reference to deacons, **Acts 11:30**; **15:2, 5, 22**; **16:4**; **20:7**; **1Tim. 5:17**. Yet in the instances where deacons appear, they do so in association with elders. What this may suggest will emerge in the discussion to follow.

What then can be gleaned from the New Testament about the deacon and the deacon's role?

- ❖ The word that is rendered *Deacon* {**diakonos**} in the special sense of the office is the same word that is used in a more general sense for servant or minister – **Phil. 1:1**; **1Tim. 3:8, 12**; **Rom. 16**; cf **Rom. 13:4**; **1Cor 3:5**; **2Cor. 3:6**; **11:23**; **Eph. 3:7**; **Col. 1:7**. Whatever the office of deacon meant it was in the end a specially designated function role or expression of the more general category of ministry shared by all within the church. The status of deacons, with reference to superiority in relation to other members of the church does not arise in any way whatever.
- ❖ There are three clear and unambiguous references to the office of deacon in the New Testament – **Phil. 1:1**; **1Tim. 3:8, 11**. In all of the references deacons appear in association with Elders or Overseers [Bishops]. This suggests that deacons worked in ministry partnership with elders serving as significant help or assistant. Interestingly, nothing whatever is stated about the origin of the office or the duties involved. It can only be taken that such matters were well known and that there were no

problems ostensibly related to them so there was no necessity to make reference to them.

What we are given in the **Timothy** references are qualities and characteristics of persons eligible for the office. They were to be worthy or respect, sincere, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not slanderers, not pursuing gain. They were to hold the mystery of the faith with a good conscience, to be good managers of their household and married to one wife. It is the view of some interpreters that based upon the qualities and characteristics referred to there could be inferred something of the functions to be carried out by a deacon.

The dignity and seemingly high reputation that were necessary pointed to the fact that they might have had to be engaged in a deputation work on behalf of the Church. This would have warranted their being highly respected both within the Church and outside. The requirement that they be persons who managed their household well and who comported themselves with much self-discipline meant they might have had administrative function in the affairs of the Church. Exemplary conduct in the areas referred to would be a great asset in this regard. The statement that they were not to be greedy for gain pointed to a specific role in relation to finances and or material possessions which demanded honesty. The most that can be said is that the roles named do not appear to be unreasonable inferences but there is no certainty about them. Subsequent developments in relation to the office and its practice include functions that have been here inferred.

- ❖ In **Romans 16:1** Paul uses the same word which is used in the special sense for *Deacon* as well as in the more general sense for *Servant* or *Minister* [**Diakonos**] in relation to Phoebe and her role in the congregation at Cenchreae. If the use of the term in relation to Phoebe is in the formal and technical sense as *Deacon* in the local congregation, then the reference here would make it a matter of four instead of three direct

references to the office in the New Testament – **cf 1Phil. 1¹; 1Tim. 3:8, 12.**

This would also represent incontrovertible evidence that women were eligible for the office and actually functioned in it. Of course there are those who believe that the instructions given to the women, who in some translations, are assumed to be Deacons' wives in **1Tim. 3:11** were actually female Deacons. The word used there was not the regular Greek word for 'wife' but for 'woman'. The instructions given are similar in significant ways to those given to the Deacons. Yet there are others who would deny that they were deacons. They argue that there would have been no need to single out women for instructions were they being instructed as deacons. It also seems as if the instructions to deacons resumed in verse 12 after a break at verse eleven to deal with the women. As said however, if Phoebe was being referred to as a deacon in the formal sense of the word then it would put the whole question beyond doubt that already women were eligible for the office and actually performed it.

There would also probably be a hint at the function of a deacon or an aspect of it based on what is said further about Phoebe. She is described as having been in a helping role in the congregation, to say the least – **Rom. 16:2**. This is one of the things which for one reason or another has been associated with the role of the deacon in most instances in subsequent development.

As it stands however, it remains a hotly debated subject whether Phoebe is to be regarded as a deacon in the formal and official sense or whether the term used in relation to her must be understood in the more general sense of servant. The state of indecision concerning the matter is amply represented in various versions of the Bible in their rendering of the term. A survey in this regard would prove very instructive. To date the matter remains unresolved. While there are those who see no

reason why it should not be taken for granted that Phoebe was a deacon in the specialized sense, there are others who think that there is no real reason why she should be considered in such terms.

It remains a wide open question and so nothing decisive about who a deacon was then and what was the deacon's role can be based on Phoebe's designation. Whatever is claimed has to be claimed in a tentative manner.

- ❖ A passage that has had a very influential role to play in the consideration of the New Testament witness is one in which the term *deacon* itself does not appear at all. The passage is **Acts 6:1-7**. It has been traditionally held that the event reported on in this passage constitutes the institution of the Diaconate. It was the case of the setting apart or commissioning of seven *men of good report* to minister to the needs of Hebrew-Greek speaking widows who had complained of being neglected in the daily distribution of food. The Apostles who addressed the complaint did not think it prudent to divert from their task of dealing with the word of God and engagement in prayer to become involved in meeting the need of the women. As a result the seven men spoken of as being '*in good standing, full of the spirit and wisdom*' were delegated to minister to the need that was the subject of the complaint.

What is the basis of the tradition that this represented the institution of the diaconate? It has already been pointed out that the word *deacon* [**diakonos**] does not appear at all in the passage. The connection however lies in the fact that though the noun representing the title is not used, the related verb meaning to serve [**diakonein**] is used to indicate what the men would do, that is to serve or wait on tables – **6:2**. Another noun 'service' [**diakonia**] of the same connection is also used but it is used both for service in relation to the daily distribution as well as the work to which the Apostles were committed, **6:1**; **6:4**. This latter word therefore does not make as strong and direct a

point as is claimed for the verbal connection. How strong this connection really has become a matter of serious debate.

Those who consider the appointment of the seven to be the founding event naturally trace many later practices back to it. Since it was men who were chosen, there are those who see the diaconate as a male preserve. The number seven has been considered significant, and so for example in Roman Catholic circles for a long time the number of deacons was restricted to seven only. As the seven were appointed in relation to the daily distribution of food for the neglected ones, the work of the deacon has been seen to have a very strong welfare association within the Church. The appointment seemed to have been a congregational one and so many feel that such appointments ought always to be made by the congregation. There was a specific act of setting apart with laying on of hands. This act is taken by many to represent one of ordination. Such then are some of the things with variations here and there that are thought to have originated with the event of the appointment of the seven and which marked the institution of the diaconate.

There is no doubt that this tradition has had long lasting influence on the continuing place of deacons within the life of the Christian Church over the centuries. Yet there are those who have come to question the appropriateness of the direct link that has been between the appointment of the seven in Acts and the office of deacon. Too much it is believed has been built on too little evidence.

It has already been pointed out that nowhere in the story or anywhere else have the men been called *deacons*. The verb that is considered to supply the link is used in a general sense many places elsewhere and with no hint of any special technical usage as is being claimed in this instance – **Luke 10:40; 12:37; 17:8; 22:26-27; Jn. 12:2, 26**. It is not without significance that so soon after the appointment for the specific task that *Stephen*

and *Philip* are found engaged in what has been described as 'a highly individualistic preaching ministry'. This was unrelated to what would have been their substantive office of waiting on tables as deacons.

The men actually seemed to have been appointed to a special task in a given moment and in a given circumstance. They were appointed in their own right and were identified by name not unlike the twelve. There is no indication that when they no longer operated in the office that they were replaced by successors. Stephen was killed and others were scattered because of persecution but there were no named successors as far as the evidence stands. The appointment was a special event, calming the discontent that was registered and forestalling what could have been a seriously disruptive factor in the life of the fledgling church.

The laying on of hands no doubt represented some form of authorization but it is going too far, it is believed, to regard it as ordination to an office of a permanent nature and as precedence to be followed. These men were said to have been already filled with the Spirit so it does not seem as if it meant that any special or additional spiritual gift was being endowed by the act of laying on of hands.

In further denying that the event had anything to do with the institution of the diaconate, a very interesting view has been advanced that serving tables really had nothing to do with being engaged in welfare activity. This view is associated with **John Collins** and has caught the attention of many. His view is that in the fellowship that was shared in the homes there was breaking of bread and teaching of the word daily, **2:42, 46-47; 5:42**. It was in such a setting that the particular set of women felt neglected. It sprang from the fact they were Greek speaking and the teaching that was being done at the time of the breaking of bread was done in Aramaic. They were therefore not benefiting from the teaching as they ought on such

occasions. The Apostles did not feel that they could be diverted from their task of dealing with the larger groups on such occasions and at public worship. Therefore the seven were appointed to do the teaching that the women and others like them needed. All the men were Greek speaking. They were therefore not serving at tables but rather served tables where the special teaching needs existed. It is significant that the comment that immediately follows the account of the appointment is about the spreading of the Word of God and increase in the number of disciples. The further preaching activity of *Stephen* and *Philip* is also thought to be in line with this view. Whether this view is correct or not no one is sure.

What is clear is that the manner in which for a long time it has been taken for granted that the appointment of the seven constituted the institution of the office and function and diaconate cannot be as confidently maintained. The way positions and views have sometimes been stated with much dogmatism and inflexibility based on the belief that the appointment of seven supplies adequate grounds for them, demands some second thought. It must be recognized that indeed the evidence is certainly not available to associate the origin of the diaconate with any confidence with the event in the Acts of the Apostles, strong and influential as the tradition has been to do so.

An interesting way in which some think this event may still serve a useful purpose is that while it may not be seen as the originating act it may still serve as a kind of prototype. This related to how a particular form of ministry may emerge in response to specific need, especially membership care. It also points in the direction of the way the certain qualities are highlighted as requirements for the exercise of the particular ministry. A prototype while it stands as model, is always subject to variations, adaptations and adjustments as warranted by circumstances and contextual particularities. It would be no different in this case. At best the event of the appointment of

the seven may be seen in such a prototypical relation to the development of the diaconate.

The New Testament confirms that the office and function of deacons existed in local congregations in its times. Deacons worked in close association with Elders or Overseers [Bishops] probably in an assisting role in special areas of care and administration. Certain qualities of Christian commitment, character and life-style were considered important for eligibility for the office. Certain details in relation to the office are not given in any of the contexts in which it is referred to unambiguously. Its origin, the method of appointment to it and its duration are some of such details and many of these continue to be matters of debate.

The Golden Years

The years following the New Testament period down to about the fifth or sixth century (CE) have been called the *golden years of the deacon*. The evidence for the existence of the office is impressive. Its prominence and influence in the life of the Church were significant. The role deacons played varied but seemed to have embraced a range of liturgical and administrative functions. What accounted for this is not all clear but some factors seem to suggest themselves.

The Church was spreading with congregations growing in number. It was at the same time assuming institutional features as it settled down and so institutional needs in terms of administration and management had to be dealt with. Ministry needs would also have increased and certainly become more varied in the process. These then might have been some of the factors which in one way or another would account for the diaconate to have to come into its own in such a prominent way at the time.

A sample of the evidence is in order.

a) In a manual of moral instruction and church order, a handbook of church discipline, called **Didache [c.AD 60]** deacons are placed alongside prophets and teachers and are described as persons worthy of the Lord, meek, not lovers of money, truthful, approved and honourable.

In the 1st Epistle of Clement to the **Corinthians [c.AD96]** – a letter emerging in the church of Rome – deacons are described as converts to the faith, persons willing to be examined, approved by the Holy Spirit, believers who have a responsibility to other believers [**1 Cement 42:4-5**]

b) In the Epistle of Ignatius to the **Ephesians [AD98-116]** a deacon identified as Burrhus, is described as a fellow servant with the bishop who is a recipient of God's blessings and whose service to the Church brings honour to both the Church and the bishop. The deacon appears to be a sort of assistant to the bishop.

In the Epistle to the **Magnesians 6:1** deacons are described as persons entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ; and in the Epistle to the **Trallians [2:2-3]** deacons are said to be servants of the mysteries of Christ, persons of integrity and persons to whom the Church owes loyalty. They are messengers sent to distant churches [3].

The Epistle to the **Smyrnaeans** mentions the need to hold deacons in high esteem [8:1] describing them as persons devoted to the cause of God and cared for by the church [10:1] they are called fellow-servants of the Lord with other church leaders [12:2].

Writing to the **Philadelphians**, Ignatius, a bishop of the church claimed that deacons are persons who experience a oneness with the Church and are eager for the unity of

the church. They are appointed according to the mind or will of Christ and are established, that is ordained, by the Holy Spirit [1:1]. That same correspondence describes deacons as fellow servants of the Lord Jesus with the Church leaders. They are workers who tirelessly seek the spiritual well-being of the church [4:1]

- c) **The Shepherd** of *Hermas* [AD 148] explains that deacons are persons who are willing to affirm partnership with others in the work of the ministry. They co-operate with others in the work of leadership and appreciate the values which make for peaceful co-existence, including willingness to listen to others [5:1]
- d) In the writings of Justin Martyr, deacons are described as persons serving tables [1st Apology 65-67] and Hippolytus claimed that deacons must serve the bishop. They are allowed to administer the Eucharistic cup, if not enough presbyters are present [**Apostolic Traditions 23, 26, 30, 33.**]

In the **Didascalia Apostolorum** of the Syrian Church, deacons are described as bishops' assistants.

What has emerged is that the office clearly became a highly formalized and permanent feature of the Churches' life. The Church developed a threefold pattern of ministry with Bishops, Elders and Deacons. Deacons were third in the hierarchal structure and held their office for life. Their function would have varied from place to place but they did perform important liturgical functions and administrative duties especially related to management of property and care of members. They were excluded from celebration of the Eucharist which was reserved for the Bishop or the Priest, so also were the granting of absolution and the pronouncement of blessings. They were however allowed to read the Gospels and Epistles at the Eucharist. They received the offerings and recorded the names of the

donors. They were allowed to assist the Bishop and after a while the Priest in the distribution of the elements to the people and participated in prayers. All this along with the work of distributing alms and ministering to the welfare of the members made their role one of great importance. There even emerged the office of Archdeacon, the chief deacon of a specific place who served as the bishop's chief administrative officer.

The Decline

The Golden period did not last. Clearly tension might have developed at least in relation to the Priest. What is sure however is that at the onset of the middle ages there was a definite decline in the influence and curtailment of liturgical function of deacons. In the West in Episcopal Churches the diaconate became no more than an interim stage in preparation for the priesthood. Of course in the Eastern Church the order of deacons remained a permanent one and it seemed to have been restricted to men who had reached a designated canonical age.

Again what is evident is that while the diaconate had a place within the Church it was subject to much variation and diversity in terms of its role and function. In principle it retained its status in relation to the Bishop and the Priest. It was a ministry in its own right but at the same time it was in assistance of the others. There was no merging or blurring of the lines however much the functions of the deacon widened in some instances and places. Deacons were Deacons as such. The role seemed to have been influenced by and responsive to Ministry and Church needs within a band of activities including liturgical ones, but they seemed to have remained excluded from certain functions which were the preserve of the bishop and the priest.

Resurgence of Interest and Contemporary Realities

Whatever it is, whether there is something constant in the nature of what the diaconate represents with all the diversity it displays

otherwise or in the very nature of what the church represents and the needs it is called upon to serve, the diaconate as a form of ministry has shown much resilience. There has been a resurgence of interest in it and there have been attempts to state or restate its place and function within the economy of the Church's life and ministry, especially in the face of new ministry challenges.

Both the Church of England and Roman Catholic communions have sought to redefine its place and give it a more significant place than that which had befallen it. Whereas the Church of England abolished some other lower orders of ministry it had recognized, it retained the diaconate as the lowest order of ecclesiastical ministry. In this case there was a two-fold understanding of it. It consisted of those who were deacons only as interim stage on the way to their becoming priests and also of a permanent office for those who were not going to become priests but who were received as 'vocational' or *distinctive deacons*. A little after the mid-nineteen eighties women were admitted to the order of deacons in England following the precedence that had been set in some other provinces.

As with so many other things, Vatican II became a moment when a new move was made in relation to the diaconate in the Roman Catholic Church. At the Council there was vision of the possibility of restoration of a permanent diaconate in the Church and a procedure was established for that purpose. This saw the procedure being put into practice in some places soon after. The order became open to older married men. Younger men who joined it were expected to remain celibate. The duties of the deacon set out by the Council's constitution on the Church (***Lumen Gentium***) included to baptize when properly authorized, administer communion (as distinct from celebrating it) assist at and bless weddings, instruct and exhort and administer last rites to the dying. Incidentally these are duties that are of the same nature as those allowed to the Anglican diaconate.

In the reformed tradition deacons administered alms and cared for the sick and infirm. In Presbyterianism within this tradition there is also the practice of having a deacons' court. This court is concerned with the distribution of the Church's goods and management of its temporal affairs.

Among the **Disciples of Christ** a group which emerged out of the Presbyterianism in the nineteenth century, deacons are understood to be '*public servants of the church in all things pertaining to its internal and external relations*'.

In many **United Churches**, which include former Presbyterian and Congregational Churches, elders share in the work of the Pastor, but deacons carry out welfare functions.

Within **Methodism**, there is no consensus on the role of deacons. In British Methodism, the office of deacon does not exist. Meanwhile, the Methodist Church in America recognizes a deacon as an ordained person on the way to becoming a fully qualified and recognized minister. The deacon is a person on probation and is able to perform some of the duties of eldership.

What of Baptists?

The early Baptists appear to have regarded deacons as ministers. John Smyth, who organized the first Baptist Church in Amsterdam, identified two sorts of ministers in the Church.

Christ has set in His outward Church two sorts of ministers, viz. some who are called pastors, teachers or elders, who administer the word and sacraments, and others who are called deacons – men and women – whose ministry is to serve tables and wash the saints feet.

Thomas Helwys, colleague of John Smyth, who organized the first Baptist Church on British soil in 1612, envisaged a Church congregation having several Elders as well as deacons. Both Elders and deacons alike should be appointed by the Church of which they are members, with fasting, prayer and the laying on of

hands. Yet though from this it was envisaged that a Church would have multiple elders, eventually in many Baptist Churches eldership came to be identified with a one-person ministry along with deacons who continued to serve the ministry of the church. In some of these Churches a three-fold pattern pastor, elders and deacons remains. The current situation with Baptists in different parts of the world and even sometimes within the same country reflects the same varied and diverse understanding of the place and function of deacons in the Church.

- In recent times, among British Baptists, the deacons' responsibilities have been described as follows-
 - **Example:** to be a good example to the rest of the Church members.
 - **Decision-making:** participating in the decision-making functions in the church, offering needed leadership;
 - **Unity** : serving the maintenance of unity within the church – theological unity, unity in purpose, unity between age groups, unity within and between church organizations and unity between the minister and church members.
 - **Good Administration:** contributing to the facilitation of good administration.
 - **Christian Growth:** promoting Christian growth among members, by fostering members' support of the opportunities for growth which the church offers.
 - **Outreach:** stimulating the church to be involved in evangelism and service.

Among Baptists in the United States of America, the deacons' role is variously understood. Let us take one example in the ***Southern Baptist Convention.***

The office of deacon is described as one not of authority, but of service rendered by one who agrees to be an example in spirit, love, devotion and loyalty. The original purpose of a deacon is said to have been significant to preserve the spiritual fellowship of the church. Today, according to this understanding, deacons are to take care of families in the

church. They maintain regular contact with Church members so that encouragement, support and nurture are provided. They visit in the homes of church members to maintain a contact from the church. In times of crisis, each deacon seeks to provide Christian concern and ministry.

Within the ***Jamaica Baptist Union (JBU)*** the second edition of **Guide to Church Membership** which came out in 1973, explained that the varied ministries of the Church exist under Christ. Regarding bishop and elder as interchangeable words in Scripture, the Guide states that elders correspond to officers in JBU churches and that bishops correspond to pastors of local congregations. The elder, **The Guide** says, *'is one who sees to the job to be done and gives some spiritual oversight'*. According to **The Guide** in the New Testament, deacons are helpers in the churches. *"The function of the Deacon today", says **The Guide** is more like that of an Elder. He must be a man greatly respected for his faith, behaviour and leadership. He has a ministry to the fellow members and is responsible for oversight, particularly in his area, but also in the fellowship as a whole. He is elected by the members, then ordained"* (p20). This is the closest we get to a clear official statement on the role of the deacons in the JBU churches.

Notwithstanding the male gender bias of the language used, both male and female serve as deacons in the church. In what is said deacons are seen to have a responsibility that relates to spiritual welfare of the members in particular but also not without interest otherwise in the general life of the church. The responsibilities are not spelt out in any detail probably wisely so since they would most likely vary amongst circuits of churches and congregations. However, things like participating in the celebration of the Lord's Supper especially praying and distributing elements, taking communion to the sick and infirm, preaching, administering welfare fund or provision, where this is in operation, generally constituting a body which assist the

pastor in ministry matters including disciplinary ones would probably be amongst the responsibilities of deacons.

Such things as the manner in which deacons are selected or appointed, the duration of their tenure and the way they are acknowledged, recognized or set-apart by the congregation are not matters on which there have been any guidelines. There seems to be an ever increasing need for such guidelines noting what seem to be disagreements of a divisive nature concerning such matters which are becoming more and more evident in our midst. Such guidelines among other things will protect against arbitrary decision-making and actions on the part of individuals or groups, preserve the integrity and function of the office and reflect the corporate will of the church under the guidance of the Spirit.

Conclusion

In the end, amongst the variations and diversities that characterize the whole matter of the diaconate and its function there are still certain constants that merit some careful notice. These cannot but make a salutary impact on whatever is thought, said and done as far as the diaconate is concerned.

What are the constants?

- (a) The persistent presence and function of the office. Changes occurred in its influence and prominence at one time or another and in different settings and circumstances. However the need for such an office in one form or another was always felt. The very title itself remained throughout, probably because it speaks of the fundamental servant character of the office which is so absolutely essential at all times in the life of the church.
- (b) The association of the office with the office of the pastor or priest in an assisting or helping role even though it is at the same time an office in its own right. It is not an office that functions independently or in a total substitutionary fashion in relation to the office of the pastor or priest or its equivalent.

- (c) Certain functions such as those concerned with membership welfare and involvement in the worship-life of the church seem to have been constant features of the role of deacons.
- (d) There seemed to have been certain qualities that remained consistent requirements for the holding of the office. These are influenced greatly by the list found in the New Testament - **1Tim. 3:8ff; cf Acts 6:3 (7)**
- (e) There seem to be a consistent adaptability of the office that makes it an office that is particularly responsive to ministry needs at the level of congregational needs and members welfare as they emerge from time to time. This no doubt accounts for the measure of diversity that is so much itself one of the constraints associated with the office.

Translocal Ministry or the Ministry of Superintendents

All Christians are called to use their gifts in God's service, and all may therefore be said to have or to exercise a ministry. However, for the purposes of this paper, 'ministry' will be used, in accordance with popular usage, to refer specifically to the ministry of pastoral oversight or leadership, otherwise known as the 'ordained ministry'. Some people refer to this by the Greek term '*episcopos*', meaning oversight, whether this is exercised in a local church or circuit or more widely. Pastors or Superintendent Ministers exercise such ministry in their respective spheres of service in a way that is not true of all Christians.

When Baptists think about ministry and ministers, it is generally with respect to the service of the Pastor in his / her congregation or circuit or the ministry of Deacons in the local church. The ministry of Superintendents, for which I have been asked to provide a theological rationale, is a *translocal* ministry, that is to say a ministry that is exercised over a wider area than the local church or circuit for the benefit of several, perhaps many, churches and their pastors and deacons. Examples of translocal ministry include the ministry of the Apostle Paul in relation to the churches he founded, the ministries of the Anglican bishop, the Methodist District Chairman, the United Church Moderator, the Apostle as recognized by some of the newer churches, and the Messenger as recognized by some Baptists in England in the seventeenth century.

The reason for using this unfamiliar word is that all titles of office come to us freighted with connotations and associations from past history and experience. The premature use of a title can foreclose the discussion. If the new office-holder is referred to, even humorously, as a 'Baptist bishop', for example, many Baptists will be alienated simply by the use of this word.

Alternatively, the selection of a particular word may tend to circumscribe the ministry to which it relates. 'Superintendent' is a case in point. Depending on our previous experience of the word in

the world or the church, 'superintendent' might tend to suggest authority rather than pastoral care, or administration rather than dynamic leadership. Before settling on a title, we would be wise to agree on what the office-holders are to be and do, and for this reason I shall use the term 'translocal' as we explore the legitimacy and possible function of such ministry among our Baptist churches.

The Superintendency first introduced into the JBU in 1972 was not strictly speaking a translocal ministry. It was a pastoral relationship established between a senior minister and a probationer and focused entirely on the care and development of the latter. However, since 1994 the ministry of the superintendent, though still focused largely on the needs of the probationer, was widened to include those of the church being served by the probationer and of any other pastor who might seek the superintendent's help. It was further envisaged that the superintendent should be a 'link person' between the churches and the Union, facilitating ministerial settlements and assisting in the resolution of conflicts. The aim was to appoint a set number of such superintendents, who among themselves, would cover the baptist constituency in the island. In this way Superintendency became a translocal ministry. Nearly two decades later, it appears that churches and ministers have been slow to accept this ministry and to realize its potential, and it is suggested that this may be due to uncertainty as to whether it is in accordance with Scripture on the one hand and Baptist principles on the other. There may also be some doubt as to whether such a ministry would be of benefit to the ministers and the mission of the churches. Accordingly, we shall seek a warrant for translocal ministry by looking first at the precedents the New Testament (NT) provides, and then at the principles to be found especially in the letter to the Ephesians, before seeking to draw some practical conclusions. An appendix traces the experience of the Baptist Union of Great Britain with regard to translocal ministry over the years.¹

¹ This paragraph is based on the information provided by the paper 'Superintendency (Part 1)' written in 2000 by Revd. Neville Callam.

New Testament Precedent

Baptists have always and rightly looked to the Scriptures, and the New Testament in particular, to provide authoritative guidance for faith and life, and have believed and claimed that their theology and practice of ministry is based firmly on the witness of the biblical texts. This claim is more difficult to sustain than is often supposed. For one thing, every other denomination looks to the NT and with equal success finds there a warrant for their own theology and practice, which suggests that the evidence must be capable of different interpretations. Today it is widely acknowledged that the NT does not provide a 'blueprint' for the organization of the church, but this is not to say that the evidence of early Christian practice which it does provide is without interest or relevance. In what follows I shall attempt a brief reconstruction of the emergence of local ministry in the NT churches, before going on to ask "what, if anything, it has to tell us about translocal ministry."

The first Christian churches met in the homes of relatively well to do converts and it is likely that it was the householders who provided leadership and pastoral care to the church that met in their houses. Paul refers rather vaguely to such people in some of his earliest letters without using any title of office.² Later he refers to the leadership of the Philippian church as 'the overseers and assistants' (Phil. 1:1). 'Overseer' was a common Greek word used in many contexts for 'someone in charge', and the word translated 'deacon' in our Bibles simply meant 'someone who assists'. Neither word carried any particular religious significance. It was these two words, 'overseer' and 'assistant', that came to denote local church ministry in the second half of the first century, as we can see from 1 Timothy 3:1-13,³ as well as from other early Christian writings.⁴ As the churches grew and the households multiplied, the overseers were then referred to as 'the elders', a collective title of honour connoting seniority. Later still, one of these elders became the overseer of the

² 1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Cor. 16: 15-16.

³ Whether or not this letter was written by Paul himself, it clearly provides for the situation when his absence is taken for granted.

⁴ 1 Clement 42:4, Didache 15:1.

whole local church, with elders and deacons under him. What had been a twofold order of ministry in the NT, overseers and assistants, became a threefold order of overseer, elders and deacons, but these offices were all ministries of the local church and remained so well after the NT period.⁵

If this is how the ministry of the local church developed in the early days, some comments are in order. First, our evidence for what happened in the early church is very fragmentary. We are best informed about the Pauline churches, although even here, Paul's occasional references can only be interpreted by a certain amount of guesswork. We simply do not know if similar patterns developed in other parts of the church. Second, while this two-fold, later three-fold, pattern can be seen emerging in the pages of the NT, it is never commanded or presented as a model for imitation, neither by Paul nor by the Acts of the Apostles. Third, it appears that patterns of ministry emerged as need arose, and that when they did, they were culturally appropriate, using common Greek vocabulary and shaped by the pattern of the Graeco-Roman household. However, fourth, the extensive vocabulary of honour and dignity used in both the Jewish synagogue and the Greek clubs and associations is conspicuous by its absence. This 'servant' ethos arguably goes back to Jesus himself (Matt. 23:8-12). Those who claim to follow the NT must respect its silence as well as its commands and conclude that, just as *their* ministry developed in culturally appropriate ways, as need arose, and in imitation of Christ, so too may *ours*, and that where no clear guidance is given, we may trust the Holy Spirit to lead us into all the truth (John 14:26, 16:13).

What then can we say from the NT about *translocal* ministry? Once again our evidence is restricted to the churches of the Pauline mission and comes from Paul's own letters and from stories about him in Acts. From this we can see that Paul himself clearly exercised a translocal ministry in relation to the churches he founded. He wrote them letters of pastoral advice and instruction. He gave them

⁵ For a fuller account of this process see R. A. Campbell, 'Leaders and Fathers', *Baptist Quarterly* 36 (1996), pp. 315-330.

general and specific directions (Acts 20:17-35, 1 Cor. 4:17, 5:4-5, 7:17, 2 Cor. 2:8 f.). He was ready to exercise discipline (1 Cor. 4:21, 2 Cor. 13: 2, 10). Later, the Pastoral Epistles clearly envisage that Timothy and Titus will exercise a ministry of superintendence towards the churches in their care. Titus is to appoint elders (or overseers) in every city (Tit. 1:5). Timothy is to be concerned with the appointment of overseers and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1-13) and with the remuneration and disciplining of elders (5:17-20). Of course it could be argued that Timothy and Titus are simply local ministers of their respective churches, with responsibility for elders and deacons under them, but Tit. 1:5 and 1 Tim. 3:1ff. make this implausible, and in any case they are represented as receiving instructions from outside the local situation, from Paul in fact, so that some translocal ministry is clearly in view.

It might be argued that Paul was an apostle and that he therefore had an authority possessed by no one today. This begs a number of questions about apostleship, but fortunately we do not need to go into them, since when Paul exercises authority over a local church he never does so *as an apostle*. We do not find him basing his instructions on his office. He never says, 'I am an apostle, so you must do as I say.' Instead he speaks to the church as a father (1 Cor. 4:15), and the authority he claims is personal not institutional. When Paul makes emphatic claims to be an apostle, he is defending his understanding of the gospel, claiming to be on equal ground with the Twelve, but not claiming to hold an office with defined privileges and responsibilities. As for the other apostles, we have no information about how they worked, what they did, or how they understood their office. Paul is the only apostle about whom we have any detailed information. When he exercised authority in the churches, it was not as an apostle that he did so; when he claimed to be an apostle it was not in the service of exercising such authority.⁶ Having said that, whether as apostle or as father, it is plain that Paul exercised a translocal ministry towards the churches he founded. He travelled from place to place, visiting the churches and building them up, and when he could not visit them he wrote

⁶ For this point see E. Best, 'Paul's Apostolic Authority', *JSNT* 27 (1986), pp.3-25).

them letters of advice and encouragement, or sent delegates to act on his behalf.

New Testament Principle

So far we have been engaged in sifting the evidence provided by the NT to see if we can learn what the first Christians did. We have seen that this evidence is fragmentary so that any reconstruction, such as the one I have attempted will be provisional, subject to modification, and unlikely to command universal assent. Neither Jesus nor his apostles appear to have bequeathed any particular church order or structure for subsequent generations to follow. This suggests that we should not look to the NT so much for *precedents* as for theological and ethical *principles* that may guide us as we seek to order the church according to the mind of Christ. Ultimately, the justification for any particular ministry must lie not in whether we can find a precedent for it in the practice of the NT churches but in whether it enables the Church to fulfill its calling to be the body of Christ through whom is revealed to us the character and purpose of God himself. The most sustained theological reflection on the Church and its ministry provided by the NT is to be found in the letter to the Ephesians, to which we now turn.

At the close of his great prayer that the readers may know the hope to which God has called them and the power of God on which it rests (Eph. 1:15-23), Paul⁷ declares:

And [God] has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph. 1:22-23 NRSV).

The interpretation of these verses is disputed, but I think we are on safe ground if we say that the one who fills all is God. In fact taking 'fills' in the sense of 'fulfills' and noting that *pleroumenou* is in the present continuous tense, we may understand God to be in the

⁷ I take the view that Ephesians was written by a disciple of Paul in the generation after his death, but he speaks in Paul's name and presents what Paul would say.

process of fulfilling or completing everything in every way, working towards that day when 'God will be all in all' (1 Cor, 15:28).

Secondly and more controversially I want to suggest that the words 'the fullness' refer not to the church, as if the church were the fullness of Christ or of God, but to Christ himself as the fullness, the full revelation of God. 'He is the image of the invisible God.' (Col. 1:20) God will one day fill or fulfill everything in every way, but at present it is Christ who reveals the Father's purpose and character, and he does so fully.⁸

Meanwhile, thirdly, it falls to the church to manifest Christ and his purposes to the world, which is why the church is said to be the body of Christ. As Christ lives in the church by his Spirit, the church is called and enabled to make him present and visible to the world, so that we have here a set of three truths, each one nestling inside the other like a set of Russian dolls, as follows:

- God is in the process of fulfilling everything in every way.
- Christ is the fullness, the full revelation of God.
- The Church is the body, the outward manifestation of Christ.

The two verses might then be better translated:

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church (which is his body), Christ, who is the fullness of him who is in the process of fulfilling everything in every way.

God's character and purpose are fully revealed in Christ, and Christ's character and purpose are to be made visible and effective by the Church.

If this is to happen the ordinary Christians of whom the church is composed will need to be united in love for one another so that the body of Christ may be built up, 'until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,

⁸ For this understanding of the verse, according to which 'the fullness' refers to Christ and not to the church, see G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison* (Oxford, 1976), p. 49.

attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.' (Eph. 4:13)
For this purpose the ascended Christ has given gifts to his church:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Eph. 4:11-12 NIV)

Christ has given gifts to enable his church to reflect his nature and purpose and these gifts turn out to be *people*, ministers in fact, in particular the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists and the pastors and teachers. From what Ephesians says in 2:20 we may conclude that the apostles and prophets belong to the past (from the writer's point of view), since they form the foundation of the church. They gave the church its fundamental gospel on which everyone else builds. The evangelists and pastor/teachers⁹ are then those who carry on the work today, the evangelists corresponding to the apostles, breaking new ground and planting new churches, and the pastor/teachers corresponding to the prophets as those who bring God's word to the church and feed the flock of God. God's gifts therefore include both local and translocal ministries.

It is important to note that Ephesians does not give us a list of church office-holders. It does not include such offices as we know to have been emerging in the church at that time, overseers, deacons, and elders. The ministers are named in terms of the gift they bring to the church, not the office they hold. This is significant. God, we may believe, will always give these gifts to his church, but the gifts may be exercised by a variety of office-holders. Gifts are given by God; offices are created by the church as it perceives the needs of the times in which it lives, using terminology appropriate to its culture. Applying this to our situation, we may say that the church has the freedom and duty to create whatever offices it perceives it needs, having regard to the situation in which it finds itself. It is not obliged to adopt the structures that served the earliest churches, nor to

⁹ It is widely agreed that the pastors and teachers represent one ministry because of the absence of the definite article in front of 'teachers'.

adopt the titles that they used, but always it will seek out those whom God has gifted and given to the church, the evangelists and pastor/teachers who will build up the body of Christ, extending its boundaries and promoting its growth in knowledge and love. This means the church will need its local ministries of teaching and pastoral care in congregation and circuit, but it will also need translocal ministries to do for us what Paul did in his day, pushing out the boundaries and promoting unity among the several congregations and the wider church.

If translocal ministry by whatever name can be seen to be in accordance with NT precedent and principle, as I have tried to show, it may still be asked whether it is in accordance with the Baptist understanding of the church. Specifically, does it pose a threat to what Neville Callam calls 'the cherished notion of *the autonomy of the local church*'? That matter has been the subject of a separate paper by Cawley Bolt,¹⁰ and there is no need to discuss it again here, except insofar as it relates to translocal ministry, but some comments are in order.

First, it would be widely agreed that 'autonomy' is an unfortunate word, suggesting wrongly that a church is free to do anything it likes and obscuring both the headship of Jesus Christ over it on the one hand and the obligations of congregations to care for one another on the other. 'Autonomy' easily leads to speaking about 'rights', whereas, as people saved by grace we should be speaking of privileges and duties. The introduction of 'rights' language into the debate is usually as disastrous to relationships in the family of faith as it is in those of the natural family. We would do better to talk about the 'competence' of the local church, as Bolt makes clear. Those who seek to stand on the precedents provided by the NT would do well to note that Paul clearly considered that the freedom of the local church was circumscribed by the practice and mind of the 'churches of God' (1 Cor.7:17, 1 Cor 11:16, 1 Cor. 14:33b).

¹⁰ 'The Autonomy of the Local Church', Rev. Cawley Bolt

However, second, the competence of the local church does imply a certain freedom (a better word than independence), and that freedom may need to be asserted in the face of threats to it from whatever source.

Historically, we have asserted the freedom and competence of the local church against the claims of the State or the Established Church to control or direct its affairs. This is a battle Baptists have largely won on behalf of the whole church, but if it became necessary we would fight it again. Nigel Wright advances the claim that 'by default or design the church at large has begun to adopt values for which Baptist Christians have historically stood', and that, 'church bodies that were once the very deniers of the liberty [Baptists] sought now present themselves as though this was a human right for which they have always struggled', though he concedes that the argument has not been won in all places.¹¹

Again, as is made clear by the JBU's 1966 Guide to Church Membership,¹² we assert the freedom and competence of the congregation over against any attempt by the minister to rule the church. The Guide says, 'The Minister is the servant of the Church whose gifts as shepherd have been recognized by the Church....When there is disagreement, the will of the community is generally followed.' (pp.22-23) Our ministers are usually called by the congregation, not appointed from outside, and it is the membership who elects the deacons and other officers of the church. They are not chosen by the minister. The minister's authority is to a large extent based on trust, and that trust has to be earned. What is true of local ministers should be true of translocal ministers as well. They too are not rulers of the church, and their acceptance is likely to depend on this being made clear. They may urge the churches forward and warn them of dangers, but they may not as Baptists seek to override the decisions of the church meetings under their care. Their ministry needs to be recognized by the churches and ministers they serve, and in this respect it is interesting to note that

¹¹ Nigel G. Wright, *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Paternoster, 2002) pp. 56-7

¹² Bolt, 'Autonomy', p.4

the Baptist Union of Great Britain has recently instituted the election of Regional Ministers by the churches of the regions they serve, where formerly Superintendents were appointed centrally (after consultation) as employees of the Union (see appendix). We may think that this is not just an attempt to bond the new ministers more closely with the churches in their charge and reduce the fear that they will be seen as bureaucrats or bishops, but that it also better expresses a distinctively Baptist understanding of power and authority as something given from below rather than from above.

Finally, we assert the freedom and competence of the local church, if necessary, against the Union itself. True, the local church by joining a Union commits itself to observing the rules and objects of the Union, and to that extent, voluntarily limits its own freedom. However, it is to a Union of independent churches that each church gives its allegiance and as such it has a competence and freedom that the Union must respect. Of course, the relationship of the churches is not meant to be confrontational, – quite the reverse! However, if the appointment of Superintendents were to be seen as an attempt to exert control over the churches, rather than to build them up in love and equip them for mission, that appointment would rightly be resisted.

There is no reason, however, why such conflicts should arise. Our goal should be not so much independence as of interdependence, which does not cancel the responsibility of each church to follow the leading of the Spirit, but which allows that this leading may come through suitably qualified persons who speak into the life of the church from outside. There is an analogy here with the position of the individual believer. The believer, as an individual, must make his or her own decisions, but is well advised to listen to the advice of other members of the body of Christ, not least the Pastor. In a similar way, the individual congregation needs to pay attention to the needs of others and the insights of godly leaders as they exercise their right of self-determination.

Two practical points in conclusion. First, it will be important to be clear about the job description of translocal ministers. Experience shows that administration tends to crowd out inspiration, and this in turn tends to lead to the appointment of people who are 'safe' rather than inspiring. Administration needs to be done, of course, and done well, but it should not be confused with the task of prophetic leadership and wise counsel. Our analysis of Ephesians 4:11-12 suggests that translocal ministers could well exercise an evangelistic ministry and to lead the churches in mission. If they are to really know the churches and pastors among whom they minister, areas or regions should not be too large.

Second, there is the question of what such translocal ministers are to be called. Clearly, from one point of view this is a very secondary matter and yet titles are important for the hidden messages they convey and the temptations to pride that they carry with them. Jesus specifically warned his disciples against titles of power and prestige (Matt. 23:8-12). We shall not call them 'bishops' because we do not understand authority in the Church in the same way as those who use that title. We shall not call them 'apostles' (even if their task is in some way apostolic) because the title is controversial and likely to prove a distraction. Some denominations and Baptist Unions have used the word 'Superintendent', but we may think this title better conveys superiority rather than servanthood. 'Regional minister' has the merit of being strictly descriptive: they are ministers for a region as others are ministers in local churches, and no overtones of power or dignity are implied.

Appendix: The witness of Baptist experience

It may be helpful at this point to glance at the experience of Baptists in England with regard to translocal ministry. This is not to suggest that such experience possesses any authority for Baptists in other countries, but all of us can learn from the twists and turns of other people's journeys and take from their story lessons relevant to our own context. We shall look briefly at three significant developments:

- i. the emergence of the translocal ministry of 'messengers' in the earliest days of the Baptist movement,

- ii. the appointment of Area Superintendents at the beginning of the twentieth century, and
- iii. the radical overhaul of this ministry at the start of the twenty-first century resulting in the replacing of Area Superintendents by teams of regional ministers.

We do not know as much as we would like about the 'messengers' who appear from time to time in the records of Baptist life in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They appear primarily to have exercised an evangelistic ministry, but also to have served as representatives of the churches to wider gatherings and to have had a pastoral role *vis-a-vis* the churches who recognized their ministry. They were appointed by the local churches among whom they ministered. Their significance for us is that, they show that at the very start of the Baptist movement the need for such ministry was widely felt.¹³ The early Baptists never supposed that the local church had no need of others. On the contrary they formed associations of churches and were willing to recognize a translocal ministry to exercise a measure of oversight within them. In 1652 the Abingdon Association declared that a church should be in association because:

- There is the same fundamental purpose as there is in church membership: to keep each member pure in life and doctrine.
- Christian love should go further than the limit of one's own congregation.
- God's work needs combine strength to be effectively carried through.
- Each church, like each believer, needs the help of others to quicken, help, advise and keep from misunderstanding.
- Associating together shows the world that members are true churches by demonstrating effective fellowship.

The idea of the autonomy of the local church needs to be understood in context as a justified reaction to the tyranny of Church and State. It was never intended to deny the legitimacy of churches relating together in wider groupings or associations. Such

¹³ This was more true of the General Baptists than the Particular Baptists

associations would need ministry in the same way as the local church. As they saw it, translocal ministry was legitimated by translocal associating, and translocal associations were required for the health of the churches and the spread of the gospel.¹⁴ However, during the eighteenth century the Baptist churches in England experienced decline, becoming more concerned for maintenance than mission, and the office of Messenger gradually died out.

In 1915 in response to the mounting administrative demands of a growing denomination the Baptist Union in England divided the country into nine areas and appointed Area Superintendents for each of them. Their responsibilities were as follows:

- to facilitate ministerial settlement
- to administer the Sustentation Fund in their Area, raising money and approving grants
- to be available to help and advise churches in times of special difficulty or conflict
- to exercise a spiritual ministry in the churches of the Area, promoting closer co-operation.¹⁵

It was also increasingly accepted that they were to be pastors to the pastors, although that does not seem to have been stressed at the start. In time the ministry of Area Superintendents became widely accepted and respected within the denomination, although it remained a matter of dispute how far they should be seen as bishops on a par with those of other denominations. By the 1980s their job description had been modified as follows:

- to give pastoral care to ministers and their families;
- to give pastoral oversight to the churches, encouraging and advising them in their mission;
- to provide leadership in the Area in taking initiatives for the furtherance of the Christian witness and education;

¹⁴ John Weaver, 'Translocal Leadership: A Theological Reflection', *Translocal Ministry*, p.48. For a fuller account of the messengers see Ruth Goldbourne, 'Messengers: do they have a message for us?', *Translocal Ministry*, pp. 24-32, and 'Transforming Superintendency' (the report of the BUGB General Superintendency Review Group) pp. 17-18.

¹⁵ See 'Transforming Superintendency', pp.18-19.

- to facilitate ministerial settlements;
- to act as representatives of the Union at the appropriate level in ecumenical discussion and action;
- generally to promote the objects of the Union.¹⁶

However, despite the best efforts of the Superintendents themselves over the years, there was growing dissatisfaction with the ministry so defined. In the first place it was widely acknowledged that the job was just too large. Areas were too large, the number of churches and ministers to be cared for too great, with the result that Superintendents were forced to give priority to administration over strategic thinking and to crisis management over pastoral oversight. Secondly, there was a widespread belief that in 'post-Christian' Britain in the late twentieth century there was an urgent need to change the emphasis in the churches from maintenance to mission, and that Superintendents should be concerned with this rather than with pastoral care and administration, important as these might be. Thirdly, the Area Superintendents had always been appointed as employees of the Baptist Union. This meant that their loyalty was likely to be with the institution rather than the churches, who in turn could regard them as distant establishment figures. In all these respects the Superintendents could be contrasted with the early Messengers, who were primarily concerned with evangelism and church-planting. The latter had responsibility for a smaller number of churches, by whom they had in fact been appointed in the first place.¹⁷

Many of these points were addressed by the report of the General Superintendency Review Group, 'Transforming Superintendency' (1996), which recommended that Superintendents be freed as far as possible from administrative tasks so as to concentrate on the care of the ministers, while 'the greater responsibility for the life of the churches lies with the Associations, of which the Superintendent is a part.'¹⁸ In the event, however, the Union through its General

¹⁶ From the Baptist Union Home Mission Scheme, as amended by the General Assembly, 1989, quoted in 'Transforming Superintendency', p.21.

¹⁷ N. Wright, 'The Case for Translocal Ministry', *Translocal Ministry*, p.12

¹⁸ 'Transforming Superintendency', p.24, 27

Assembly adopted the more radical proposals contained in a further report, 'Relating and Resourcing' (1998), which recommended the formation of regional associations, which would in turn directly appoint and employ their own regional ministers. At the present time, since the start of 2002, there are twelve such regional associations in England, each with a team of regional ministers responsible for promoting mission in their area. Those who were formerly Area Superintendents are now Regional Ministers and Team Leaders, employed and paid locally. Together with the General Secretaries and denominational heads of department the regional ministers form a national leadership team. The Regional Minister/ Team Leader can no longer be seen as a representative of the Union to the churches; rather, he or she is a representative of the churches to the Union. The new arrangement is intended to provide translocal leadership that is a) mission-orientated, b) manageable, and c) locally accountable. It is believed that this marks a return to principles expressed by the early Baptist Messengers and also to those found in the NT itself.

CHILDREN AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE JAMAICA BAPTIST UNION

Introduction

The confusion surrounding the age at which baptism should take place is a complex global challenge that the Christian Church has inherited. Should baptism be for new born babies or should it be reserved for children and youth at a particular stage in their development? Should this rite be for persons in their “riper years” who are able to testify personally of saving grace?

This is just one of the complex issues associated with the debate on baptism. In this age of ecumenism, there is the need to guard against positions of arrogance and intolerance and find a way to be respectful of the varying positions that are posited with equal vigour and commitment. For sure, the response to this troubling subject cannot be one of abandonment of the practice of baptism nor can it be one of a uniform approach. Given the current climate of pluralism and diversity, the appropriate response has to be one of celebration of the diversity of baptismal practices with a view of discovering new meanings that will aid the enrichment of one’s tradition. This approach will take us beyond the question about who is right and who is wrong and help us to see the Baptist baptismal tradition as one among many, each with its own integrity.

This is the backdrop against which the issue of the minimum age for church membership within the context of the Jamaica Baptist Union will be explored. In addressing this subject, special attention will be given to the theological understanding of baptism in Baptist churches. An attempt will also be made to establish an understanding of children with special reference to the scriptures as well as to recommend factors to be considered in determining the readiness of a child for baptism.

Theological Understanding of Baptism in Baptist Churches

Traditionally, Baptists preferred the word “ordinance” rather than “sacrament” to speak of baptism. The term “ordinance” is preferred

in some Baptist circles because it implies that baptism was commanded or ordained by Jesus and given to the disciples, as well as, by extension, the church. The rite of baptism is therefore regarded as an act of obedience to the command of Christ, both on the part of the baptized and the church. In recent times, however, Baptists have become increasingly comfortable with referring to baptism as a sacrament with a particular understanding of the term in mind. Christopher Ellis posits the following meaning of 'sacrament':

“The term ‘sacrament’ suggests the power of symbols to link us to the depths of reality, and points us to the use by God of material means to mediate His saving action”.

Baptism, understood as sacrament as defined by Ellis, is a **proclamation** of the Gospel of Christ. It proclaims and enacts the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the forgiveness of sins, the believer's union with Christ and incorporation into His Body. As a sacrament, baptism is a celebration of a **partnership** in which God partners with the church and the person being baptized through the work of the Holy Spirit. The theological value of the partnership is underscored by the profound mystery of collaboration within the Trinity. As a sacrament of **presence**, the symbolic act of baptism celebrates the unity of creation and the redemption in God's saving action. The relationship between baptism and incarnation is seen in the way nature is incorporated into the whole scheme of God's plan. God's presence in the sacrament of baptism can be affirmed only insofar as it points to his sacramental presence in the world that Christ died to save.

Baptism is also a sacrament of **prophecy** because it enables the church to be a sign of the kingdom, pointing beyond the here and now, to that which is yet to come. It gives visibility to the contradiction of the cross in discipleship, since union with Christ, through baptism, promises a cross as well as a crown. As a sacrament of **promise**, baptism is not to be seen as a delivery mechanism of assurance and certainty, but as a sign and seal of God's covenant promises. It offers not so much certainty of salvation but union with Christ whose promises can be trusted.

When the word 'sacrament' is properly understood as defined above, there should be no difficulty in speaking of baptism as a sacrament of proclamation, partnership, presence, prophecy and promise.

Christian baptism assumes the experience of conversion, pardon and cleansing on the part of an individual. It signals the participation in Christ's death and resurrection, incorporation in the Body of Christ, the sign of the Kingdom and the gift of the Spirit. It is through Christian baptism that the baptized enters into union with Christ. In the New Testament, the granting of the Spirit is normally within the context of the event of Baptism (Acts 2:38; 19f; Titus 3:5). The union with Christ that is symbolized by baptism is in fact the gift of the Spirit. **Baptism is therefore an initiatory event in which all that forms the foundation of the Christian life is symbolically realized in union with Christ, the gift of the Spirit, regeneration, and membership in the community of faith.** Most Baptists agree that immersion is the mode that best captures the full meaning of baptism and that believer's baptism is the most clearly attested practice of baptism in the New Testament. Therefore, the personal faith of the recipient and continuous participation in the life of the church are essential for the full fruit of baptism. Does this view of baptism only qualify adults and disqualify children? Examining the teachings of Jesus about children will certainly assist in answering this question.

An Understanding of Children in the Teachings of Jesus

In the gospel of St. Matthew, children are presented as a model of humility. In responding to the question as to who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus placed a child in the midst of the disciples and instructed them to emulate the child's character. (St. Matt. 18:1-4 para.) By such action, Jesus challenged Jewish assumption that the child was not merely raw material for education but the symbol of true discipleship and moreover a true representative of himself.

Identification with the child, as well as solidarity with the humble, are marks of greatness in kingdom ministry. This is so because such

identification and solidarity in Jesus' times exposed one to ridicule, suffering and persecution. The action of Herod in ordering the slaughter of innocent children in his ruthless pursuit of the Christ child, supports the claim that to be a child was, in those days, to be at the mercy of the powerful. The attempts by the ruling elite to keep children quiet in the temple (Mt 21:15f), showed how children were despised by the worldly wise. While children may not have the sophistication of the learned and prudent, they do have insights that must be cherished and not repressed or despised. It is of interest to note that it was not the powerful or the wise, nor even the disciples who recognized Jesus in Jerusalem, but the children, the blind and the lame in the temple. They were the 'little' ones who believed in him (Mt. 18:5ff) and were referred to as the oppressed whom Jesus summoned to himself in Matthew 11:27ff. They were able to identify the one who was in solidarity with them.

Children are therefore among the category of the marginal and humble who are privileged to receive insights into the divine wisdom; something hidden from the wise and sophisticated. It is clear that the child does not only represent the humble in the teachings of Jesus but also the chosen people of God. Identification with the category of the excluded, particularly with the child, is an imperative for discipleship. This undoubtedly raises serious questions about the nature of the provision that is made for children in the liturgy and common life of the church, as well as the extent to which adults recognize children as persons of importance within the Christian fellowship.

Indicators of Readiness for the Baptism of Children

Given the emphasis of Baptists on the importance of personal faith in the baptismal reality the question of intellectual capability arises. At what age would a child be intellectually capable to make such confession? The purpose of this paper is not to suggest a minimum age, as this would be most difficult given the variations in cognitive development, among other factors. At best, one can only suggest some factors to be considered in determining the readiness of a child for baptism. The assumption of this paper is that a child is

capable of personal faith, although such faith may not be as developed as that of an adult. However, this should not pose too much of a problem when baptism is considered as an event within the process of initiation. This implies that nurturing in the faith for both the child as well as the adults is of paramount importance and is to be considered as an ongoing exercise. In determining the readiness of a child for baptism, each case would have to be examined separately because of the various factors to be considered. These include the home environment, the faith of the parents/ guardians, the understanding level of the child and the openness of the church community to nurture the faith of the child.

Spiritual Influence

Spiritual influence is critical for determining the readiness of an individual for baptism. The home is a primary agent that influences values. This is the first place where children are exposed to value formation. There is generally speaking, a greater propensity for children who are supported by an environment of Christian principles and values to be nurtured into the Christian faith. This expression does not preclude a child from a non-Christian environment from being so influenced. However, knowledge of the home setting will enable those of the church community to determine the most effective preparatory programme needed to ensure the readiness of the prospect. Therefore, every effort should be made by those of the church community to acquaint themselves with the circumstances of the home environment within which the child lives. Such an environment should take into consideration the faith of the caregiver.

Christian caregivers are often more likely to fulfill a complementary role in the process of preparation and the ongoing nurturing of the child. The child could benefit from the Christian virtues exemplified by parent/guardians. However, important as this is in determining the readiness of a child, it should not be used as a basis to exclude children of non-Christian parents / guardians from baptism. Children of non-confessing Christian parents / guardians should also be considered for baptism upon request. It may require the provision of

more support on the part of the church for the child and the child's family, for example, the assigning of spiritual mentors / sponsors.

Cognitive Development

Cognitive development varies from child to child given the differences in a number of contributory factors, for example, hereditary, environment, opportunities, etc. While it is important to ensure that the child has a basic understanding of the fundamentals of the faith, one has to be careful about the extent to which such is required. This is against the awareness that there are persons - both adults and children - who have peculiar challenges that which undermine their intellectual capability. Should intellectual capability be insisted on, these persons would be automatically disqualified. The point is, although this is desirable, provision will have to be made for exceptional cases. In these circumstances, the faith of those surrounding the child along with the faith of the Christian community must be taken into serious consideration in arising at a decision.

The Community of Faith

The openness of Baptist churches to recognize the importance of the place of children in the life of the church varies from church to church. Some churches are more willing than others to create ministry opportunities for children. If the church is not at the place theologically to embrace children as authentic members of the Christian community, they could do more harm than good to those who have the desire to become members of the church. A deepening theological understanding of the place of children in the kingdom of God will assist the church in preparing and nurturing children in the Christian faith. Such a church will understand the importance of having in place the requisite support mechanism to ensure the spiritual growth and development of the child.

It must be admitted that the list of factors is not exhaustive as others might become contextually relevant. Reflection on the ones mentioned, however, should be useful in helping to determine the readiness of the child for baptism. These factors might not be all

applicable to every situation; therefore an analysis of each individual case should be done to determine those that are relevant.

Conclusion

The importance of the Baptist church considering this subject at this time cannot be overemphasized. The church community has an awesome responsibility to assist in the nurturing, growth and development of our children. One of the ways to fulfill this responsibility is to receive them into the membership of the church so that they can benefit from direct pastoral oversight, Christian guidance and congregational support. Based on our faith and practice, baptism is one of the avenues through which children can be initiated into the Christian family.

The need for personal faith as a prerequisite for baptism ought not to be limited to adults because children also have the intellectual capability for personal faith, notwithstanding the possibility of it not being as developed as that of an adult. Although Baptists regard confession of personal faith as important, it must be admitted that there are persons, including children, who might be incapable of making or giving expression to such, due to various health and wellness challenges. These persons ought not to be disqualified from baptism. Instead, the church should ensure that adequate provision is made to facilitate the growth and development of their faith.

While a minimum age is not recommended for children to be baptized into the churches of the Jamaica Baptist Union, at least three factors are suggested for consideration in making a determination relative to the readiness on the part of the child. In determining so, each case should be treated on its own merit.

The Moral Implications of accepting Funding from Certain Donor Agencies

The churches and church schools of the Jamaica Baptist Union from time to time seek funding for major mission projects or might even be approached with offers of partnership or sponsorship of any of their projects. It is often difficult to make a decision on whether or not to accept funding from certain agencies, as their affiliations are sometimes questionable. This paper, therefore, seeks to explore the risks involved in accepting funding from donor agencies, whose sources of revenue are inconsistent with a wholesome Christian ethic.

There are many 'donor agencies' in existence in Jamaica, which function to provide funding assistance or charitable contributions whether in whole or in part, in cash or kind to individuals, community based organizations or institutions. These donor agencies are themselves funded through various means, all of which are not usually made public, but which range in such broad categories as endowments, trusts, or other such terms to indicate how their funding is managed and administered.

The questions raised concern the sources of funding of these agencies. Where do these agencies get their monies from?

As an example, the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) names its funds as coming from the following sources:

25% Government of Jamaica, (GOJ)

50% World Bank,

25% IDB (Inter-American Development Bank).

The funds for the GOJ contribution come from various sources, including the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Commission.

The Jamaica Baptist Union has always been committed to partnerships with community as part of its understanding of stewardship and the management of resources. However,

challenges arise if funds being accessed are known to originate from such activities as: gaming / gambling, money laundering, human exploitation and/or abuse, for example child labour. Such partnerships would not be deemed morally appropriate for cooperation between the JBU churches or church school and present some risks worth considering.

Discerning the Gifts

Having explored some of the possible implications of accepting funding from certain donor agencies, it is important to note that there is a complex array of ways that money becomes available to receiving organizations including churches from funding agencies of concern. Peter J. Adams in his paper entitled "*Reducing the moral jeopardy associated with receiving funds from the proceeds of gambling*", outlines some of these ways:

Direct Industry Contributions – In this arrangement, private commercial organizations choose to provide direct funding to the church or church school for community development purposes. In the cases where these donors receive their profits through questionable means, this kind of arrangement is the least desirable because it involves a strong and direct relationship between the recipient organization and the donor. Adams states that, "within this relationship the contribution is unlikely to occur anonymously because the donor is seeking an association primarily to improve its public profile. The community recipient is consequently likely to perceive that a strong obligation to the donor involves discouraging activities that might threaten the source", (Adams, 10)

Community-Administered Contributions – Within this arrangement churches or church schools carry out their own gambling operations for the primary purpose of raising money to fund their own programmes. Often this is on a small scale and may involve less prominent forms of gambling such as raffles or bingos. The main drawback to this is how it normalizes and legitimizes the negative practice, in this case gambling, at the grassroots or community level.

Government-Administered Contributions – In this arrangement the government of Jamaica manages the provisions offered by these funding agencies and disperses profits to the community in the form of funding grants.

Government-Brokered Contributions – In response to perceptions that direct agency funding allows the donor too much leeway to influence outcomes, some governments have sought to establish their own independent organizations to receive and disperse contributions from privately run companies; for example gambling providers.

Government-Mandated Contributions – Here the government enacts legislation that requires some of these companies that often donate, for example, cigarette manufacturers, breweries, gambling/ gaming providers, to allocate a portion of their net income to fund projects with a community purpose.

Potential Pitfalls & Risks

Ethical Risks

The essential ethical consideration that follows from accepting monies from questionable sources is that the church or church school becomes locked into a challenging ethical dilemma. How can an organization that claims to be serving the common good of community maintain its credibility when part of its income comes from and depends upon the success of sources that are known to cause harm to that same community? It has been proven, for example, that exploits within the gambling industry result in a variety of social concerns. Gambling can divert parental energy away from family life, thereby reducing input into relationships in such areas as family recreation and care of children (Williams, 1996; Raeburn, 2001). It certainly does not compensate to argue that the end justifies the means. How can such organizations set up to liberate people from all kinds of bondage and social ills, benefit in a real sense, either directly or indirectly, from other people's misery? These are some of the ethical issues at stake.

In many instances the main functionaries within these funding organizations are aware of the negative impact their engagements tend to have on society. By partnering with the church or other organizations interested in community development, they are in effect seeking legitimacy for their actions. They are hoping that their “public good” will “blind” the eyes of society to their inherent evil. If not discerning, the Church and other faith based organizations can become like mere pawns on a chessboard, being manipulated for ignoble ends and ‘to win the crowd’s approval’.

In 2007, executive director of the Betting Gaming and Lotteries Commission, Derek Peart, explains that, “in addition to its work of regulating the gaming industry, the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Commission has been funding various social interventions to tackle the issue of problem gambling. One such is a grant to RISE Life Management Services (RISE), which has enabled this Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) to operate a gambling prevention and counselling programme, where activities include school interventions, training of Guidance Counsellors and providing counselling for problem gamblers” (JIS, p11 URL).

Reputational Risks

The reverse effect of funding organizations gaining positive publicity from partnering with churches and other community development organizations is that at the same time, those receiving organizations may be marring their own reputations. The perception of an association with any of these irreputable funding agencies could be interpreted as complicity with their standards of acquiring revenue.

Governance Risks

Whenever an organization receives funding from any institution, there is a risk of losing one’s rootedness, self-reliance and unique identity which are important for transformation. To maintain or meet requirements to receive funding, receiving organizations are often asked to surrender their own goals, vision and values, in order to align themselves to those of the funding agency. This tends to result in an unhealthy pathological dependency in the name of survival. In

addition, over time the receiving organization, if it is a church, may lose its prophetic edge as it regards the church's competence to critique the standards of the funding agency.

Relationship Risks

Church and church based organizations are expected to be relational entities in society. The church must maintain a keen interest in the building and strengthening of healthy relationships, be it on an individual or a corporate level. A further risk to consider is the possibility that receiving funds from sources which are funded by agencies of ill-repute may lead to the jeopardizing of existing relationships between the church and its supporters or an organization and its stakeholders.

How Can We Reduce the Risks?

There are at least two important principles to explore in order to reduce the moral risks that attend receiving funding from donor agencies.

The first is the need to pursue a course of developing ***ethical consciousness*** *within the church*. Our inability to identify and respond appropriately to the risks associated with accepting funds from questionable donor agencies indicates a level of ethical unawareness among our members. A carefully considered response to these issues is likely to occur if there is programme of awareness building relative to the attending issues.

Secondly, ***informed participation***. This principle explores the importance or the need to demand transparency regarding sources of funding and how this funding is obtained. Without information, organizations receiving funding are not in a position to intelligently weigh the issues for and against to make an informed decision.

Conclusion

The experience of many of our churches within the Jamaica Baptist Union is that funding the ministry within the community is always a challenge making it even easier to accept funding from any donor who is willing to give. However it is important that as we seek funding

and or respond to offers to fund projects, that we consider carefully the ethical implications of the response we make.

Works Cited

Adams, P. J. "Reducing the Moral Jeopardy Associated with Receiving Funds from the Proceeds of Gambling." CAMH Issue 17: August 2006
<http://www.austgamingcouncil.org.au/images/pdf/eLibrary/3063.pdf>

Government of Jamaica. Jamaica Information Service. Betting Gaming and Lotteries Commission: Ensuring Proper Gaming Sector. September 30, 2007
http://www.jis.gov.jm/news/104-finance-public-service/13134-finance_planning-betting-gaming-and-lotteries-commission-ensuring-proper-gaming-sector

Raeburn, J. M. Towards healthy gambling: A health promotion approach to gambling in New Zealand. Auckland, New Zealand: The Problem Gambling Committee of New Zealand & The Gambling Studies Institute of New Zealand: 2001.

Williams, A. Gambling: A family Affair. London, UK: Sheldon Press: 1996.

THE DEATH PENALTY / CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Introduction

The authorized execution of a person who has been convicted by a legal public functionary of a crime deemed punishable by death has been understood to constitute Capital Punishment or the Death Penalty. There are seven main methods of execution in current use worldwide; these include hanging, electrocution, firing squad, poison gas, lethal injection, guillotine, and stoning.

The practice of capital punishment is a long and established institution. For most of history, it operated free of controversy since most governments used to punish a wide variety of crimes by death and conducted executions as a routine part of the administration of criminal law. However, in the mid-18th century, social commentators in Europe began to emphasize the worth of the individual and to criticize government practices which they considered unjust, including among the lot, capital punishment. The subsequent controversy and debate over whether governments should utilize the death penalty continue today. At the time of writing, there are approximately 250 men and women under sentence of death in the Caribbean. Here, execution is mainly by hanging. Ironically, this inhumane punishment is a legacy of colonial rule and is now rejected by the European countries, including Britain, from which it was inherited.

Critics of the death penalty contend that it is brutal and degrading, while supporters consider it a necessary form of retribution or revenge for terrible crimes. Those who advocate the death penalty assert that it is a uniquely effective punishment that deters crime. However, both advocates of and opponents to the death penalty dispute the proper interpretation of statistical analyses of its deterrent effect. Opponents of capital punishment see the death penalty as a human rights issue involving the proper limits of governmental power. In contrast, those who want governments to continue to execute tend to regard capital punishment as an issue of criminal justice policy. Because of these alternative viewpoints, there is a profound

difference of opinion, not only about what is the right word on capital punishment, but about what type of questions are being asked when the death penalty becomes a public issue.

Notwithstanding the above, it is hard not to appreciate that the death penalty is also an issue of religious significance. This is so because of the points of attachment regarding morality, sin, life and death. It touches existential questions and falls within the spheres of natural law ideology. This paper will first engage in a short but frank exposé of what the Bible has to say on the topic and thereafter seek answer to the theological and ethical questions asked of the practice. The paper will conclude with a recommended position for further contemplation.

A Biblical Overview

At least two popular world religions emanate from the Bible. Judaism emanates from the Old Testament and Christianity emanates from both the Old and the New Testament. However one views the Bible, it makes up an important cultural document that has influenced and still influences a significant part of the world.

A discussion on the death penalty is incomplete without some interaction with that which has been accepted widely as the revealed word of God. For us, it must be noted, that the Old Testament was the only Scripture for Jesus, the apostles and the first Christians. The subsequent Christian Church has never abandoned the Old Testament and whereas it is admissible that much of the Old Testament is no longer relevant for the Christian Church of our time, the Church has always taught that, scattered throughout the Old Testament, are divine principles with eternal relevant character. One of such is the common biblical expression:

“An eye for an eye and a tooth...”

Often, this dictum has been erroneously cited as a justification for personal vendetta or revenge. However, proper exegetical work will reveal that in the context that the words were originally cited, it was not a word given for individuals to effect revenge. The quote is found

in a legal context where a judge is at work (Ex. 21). The “eye for an eye...” principle can be seen as a legal application of the golden rule in St. Matt. 7:12, “do to others as we would have them do to you.” Both principles assume that human beings are equal and ought to treat each other in an equal and just manner. That is to say that, if we willfully and knowingly harm one another, we are at the same time admitting that, according to the spirit of the principle, others within the parameters of the state governed by law, can do the same to us.

“An eye for an eye” also means a protection for the guilty party, who should not have to worry about suffering more than the suffering he / she has caused. The principle therefore limits the extent of the retribution. It is about the exercising of a just recompense or sanction. It is also worthy of note that retribution is a principle that runs throughout the Bible. We see the principle applied in parables that Jesus spoke; it is referred to in Rom.13:4, Acts 25:11, in Rev. 6:10 and 19:2. Finally, the principle may be found applicable in the legal systems of almost every country. Arguably then, in the biblical principle of “an eye for an eye...” lies the foundation for the death penalty. The fundamental rule, crudely expressed, is that a life has to be paid for with a life. The Biblical expression “life for life” (Ex: 21:23) has often meant a death penalty, but not always, since conditional clauses exist. (see Numbers 35:22-25).

How is the Old Testament teaching to be Understood?

According to the literature of the Old Testament there are nearly twenty crimes that deserve the death penalty. These include murder (Gen:9:6; Numbers 35:16-21); speaking a curse over parents (Ex.21:17); breaking the Sabbath (Ex:21:14); blasphemy against God (Lev.24:14-16, 23); practicing magic, fortune telling and sorcery (Ex.22:18, Lev. 20:27); adultery and fornication (Deut. 22:22); practicing prostitution as the daughter of a Priest (Lev. 21:9); raping someone who is engaged (Deut:22:25); bestiality (Ex.22:19, idolatry (Ex. 22:20, Lev.20:1-5, & Deut 17:2-7); incest and homosexuality (Lev. 20:11-14) and even contempt of Court (Deut 17:8-13). The manner of execution varied from stoning to being burned to death. The most

important and conclusive fact from these assertion is that in the Old Testament, the death penalty is presented as a legitimate form of punishment.

That the word of God commands the death penalty is to be read as an expression of God's holiness and righteousness more than it is any indication of the vicious and mean intent of the Divine Being. The legitimizing of the death penalty for crimes against humanity shows that God values humankind and that God's hold in high esteem eternal moral principles to guide human relationships. These orders were meant to give safety and secure the dignity of our humanity. Without order and punishment we would be like lower creatures lacking a sense of responsibility and accountability before God and toward one another. We would then be living in a world that is without moral and ethics and would be without honour and esteem. From such a standpoint, the capital punishment exists then as a confirmation of the high value placed upon us who bear the **Imago Dei**. The examination of a few references may help in supporting these inferences.

Gen: 9:6 states that *"whoever sheds the blood of man (human beings), by man (human beings) shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God, has God made man (human beings)."*

We find here, a law that is the basis for all laws that were to come concerning the capital punishment. We can infer that this law was put in place for murderers and the reason is clearly expressed: *"for in **the image of God** has God made human beings"*. The fact is that, the one who murders destroys the image of God in another person and by extension has committed an indirect attack on God's being.

The historical context of this verse is helpful in aiding our comprehension. The saga begins in Genesis 6:11ff; *"I (God) am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them."* Gen.6:11-13. God therefore punished the world with a "global death" which has been referred to as a flood. Unjust violence was thereby punished with "just violence". Since the

command in Gen.9:6 was given after the water had abated, it can be inferred that the authority was somewhat delegated to human beings, so that human beings can effect judgment and meet the evil violence with the sword of righteousness. Gen. 9:6 therefore comprises the embryo to the emerging state that is given a divine authority to practice the role of the punisher.

These references can be seen as foundational to why the death penalty is seen by some as an edict. From them, we can conclude that in God's eyes, human beings have a value that surpasses everything else in creation. To the Christian faith, the death penalty is first and foremost a concern for the human value. The death penalty exists then as a sign and a proof of the inestimable worth of humankind and that value is bound up in God's expressed love for us.

Someone may ask however, are not violent criminals and murderers also "*in the image of God?*" In one sense, "yes" but at the same time, it may be argued that God's image in such persons has been distorted and that when the crime is committed she or he is reflecting more of the "*image of the evil one*". In fact this may be at the heart of the reason for Gen.9:6, since it can be deduced therefrom, that one who has taken another person's life, has seized being the bearer of the *Imago Dei*, thereby forfeiting his own right to life.

Numbers 35:31 states: "*do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death.*"

The message implied here is that no one should be able to buy himself free from the death penalty. Money should not be able to save the life of a murderer. The crucial principle here is that everyone is equal before the law. There ought to be no difference in the treatment meted out to persons based on the measure of their wealth or poverty.

Exodus 20:13 states: *"You shall not murder"*.

Some persons start here in arguing that the word of God forbids capital punishment. Beyond the obvious contradictions that would have to be accorded to biblical injunctions, the fact is that throughout history, this command has not been interpreted as aimed primarily at the courts or the judicial system, in the same way that it is not considered to be aimed at any nation's defensive force or army. The injunction, like the others, is aimed at human beings in their capacity as citizens of the society. The simple meaning therefore is that no human being acting as a civilian is allowed to willfully and knowingly take the life of another person. Where this is not observed the crime is punishable by death.

How then do we answer to the question of Christ message of love as it relates to the State governed by law? What is the message of the New Testament on the issue of the death penalty? Considering the many New Testament scriptures concerning love and forgiveness, do they say anything concerning the death penalty?

To the state governed by law, the answer is "No". However to the Christian Church, led by the Spirit of the Risen Lord the answer is a resounding "Yes." **Jesus' teaching concerning love, mercy and forgiveness, makes it impossible for the death penalty to be embraced within the framework of the Christian Church.** Capital punishment goes against Christ's message of love and forgiveness. By extension, his core message would also go against the practice of prison sentencing and fines. It goes against the whole state governed by law with its judges and jurors who sentence criminals. At the same time, we must recall that Christ's teachings concerning turning the other cheek, forgiving others who offend us etc., is not an issue concerning the state governing by law but for us as individuals in our everyday lives.

Scholars agree that no statement by Jesus concerning 'love and forgiveness' and 'not passing judgment' was meant for the punishing authorities or the judicial system. There is nothing implied in the gospels to indicate that Jesus had any primary concern for the state

governed by law as he taught love. If it had been so, that Christ's teaching included the judicial system, all states governed by law would have fallen under his judgment, including all Christian nations that ever existed. One cannot think of a country that has ensured that Christ's teachings on love and forgiveness are written into the law concerning the treatment of criminals. The possibility exists that such would have been the end of the state governed by law in the long run. It would have caused lawlessness to pervade society and the foundations of civil society would then have crumbled. How then should we account for some of the New Testament literature which are often cited to lend support to the death penalty?

St. Matt.5:21-22 *“you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you...anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”*

This extract from the acclaimed Sermon on the Mount, has Matthew placing some words on Jesus' lips which are traceable to the Old Testament literature. While some may see these as expressions giving support to the death penalty, we must be mindful that the contrast that is discerned in Jesus' teaching is not between the Old Testament and his own teaching. In fact in earlier verses, he had established the validity of the Old Testament (see 5:17ff.). What is at stake here is Jesus' awareness of the literal interpretation of the rabbinical tradition on the one hand and his correct interpretation of the Law on the other. The words of Jesus are then a commentary on the inadequate lifestyles of the scribes and Pharisees. It serves also as a challenge for those who would follow Jesus to exceed such lived obedience by being better and doing more guided by a higher moral code. As is implied in St. Matt. 5:21-26, in the divine economy, despising or hating another is just as evil as committing murder. The follower of Christ is challenged to practice a radical ethic and thereby participate in creating an alternative just society.

St. Matt.15:3-4 Jesus replied, *“And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honour your*

father and mother' and 'anyone who curses his father and mother must be put to death'."

In this passage Matthew records Jesus quoting a word about the death penalty from the Old Testament (Ex. 21:17), in an effort to make a point to the scribes and Pharisees regarding their moral inconsistency. In the situation, Jesus strikes hard at the scribes whom he claims are twisting and bending the Law in order to give credence to their interpretations and support for their traditions. He virtually accuses them of nullifying the word of God and the 'word of God' being referred to here, includes the word concerning the death penalty! While some may see this as a strong and clear acknowledgement by Jesus concerning the justification and validity of the death penalty, the question is, who is it that faithfully reveals God's will? The Christian will affirm that God's will is not determined through commitment to any legal code of conduct or religious tradition devoid of regard for justice and right relationships. From the teaching of Jesus in Matt. 15:17-20, it is the internal commitment expressed in loving external actions that best approximate to the life of greater righteousness. Therefore, this reference (15:3ff) ought not to be seen as a case in point of Jesus lending support to the death penalty.

From this brief Biblical overview, we can conclude that **the Bible does not contradict itself** on the issue being discussed. In both Old and New Testament we have reason to conclude that both bodies of literature place an invaluable premium on human life. The ethic demonstrated by Jesus is consistent with the revealed character of Almighty God. It is in bearing faithful witness to such ethic in our daily lives that the call to the life of greater righteousness is realized. This ought to be the guiding principle operating in our minds even as we seek to arrive at a justifiably theo-ethical position relative to the issue of the death penalty. To aid our search for the mind of God on the issue we will seek answers to the issues which follow.

The Question of the Sacredness of Human Life

That human life is sacred is an undeniable affirmation if the existence of God is equally affirmed. As Creator, God shares divine image with

all human beings without discrimination. The Christian Church has always maintained that all human life is sacred since we are created by God and in God's own image. Therefore, all people share the duty to protect and defend human life at all times and in all circumstances. Moreover, because human life is a gift from God, all people share the duty to nurture and enhance it. Accordingly, there is a moral presumption against human beings killing other human beings. In the language of secular morality, this inestimable worth of human life is expressed in terms of its inviolability than in terms of its sanctity.

Notwithstanding, proponents of the death penalty may argue that it is precisely based upon such solemn affirmation, that anyone convicted of the capital charge ought to suffer the death penalty. Such stance would find support, not only in the retributive spirit of the *eye for eye, tooth for tooth* principle elaborated on earlier, but also in Articles 1 to 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, if they are interpreted dispassionately. Take as examples from the latter, Articles 1 and 3:

Article 1: *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood; and,*

Article 3: *Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.*

Some persons have argued that where such profound fundamental human rights are violated, the offender has forfeited his own rights and must suffer commensurately, since *"the punishment must fit the crime"*. The "million dollar question" is, does the punishment communicate convincingly and incontrovertibly, the sanctity and / or the inviolability of life? If not, then the argument is flawed and the position is untenable.

The Question of the Deterrent Argument

The theory that capital punishment "deters" murder rests on a basic assumption, that is, *fear influences people and that most people fear death; therefore, the threat of a judicial sentence will influence people to refrain from murder.* Unfortunately however, the fear of

death does not govern people to the degree this assumes. If it did, neither wars nor extreme sports would happen, drivers would obey speed limits and wear safety belts without coercion, and the tobacco and alcohol industries would not have survived. If rational instinct for self preservation is to be cited as a reason why capital punishment must "work", then most of history, as well as most contemporary human behaviour would have to be discounted. Commenting on North American statistics, reputed Human Rights organization, Amnesty International writes:

*...the "deterrence" theory does not account for the most striking homicide statistics; of all forms of homicide, the one that takes place most often, always entails the death of the perpetrator: **suicide**. It would appear that people are more inclined to kill themselves than to kill anyone else".*

The mass of the statistical evidence about murder rates and capital punishment supports this notion. At the very least, it has not yet been proven that capital punishment prevents murder, and it is irrational to base a policy on the assumption that it does. Starting with the simplest of statistics, if capital punishment reliably prevented murder, countries with capital punishment should generally have a lower murder rate than countries without. Such is not the case however. The United States, with a highly developed and prosperous socio-economic culture, *(a factor which generally reduces murder rates)*, and which allows for the death penalty in several states, still has a murder rate which is about three times as high as most other western industrialized nation. Nowhere in western civilization has it been established that the use of capital punishment by a country has served to decrease the murder rate.

Even a casual examination of the available figures makes it clear that if capital punishment has any effect on the disposition to commit murder, it has less effect than most other social factors. A society with the goal of protecting innocent people has no reason to institute capital punishment before changing many other socio-economic, political and criminal justice policies which have a much

greater effect on the murder rate. Caribbean countries are still lagging behind in this regard. The integrity of the Caribbean Court of justice and the credibility of the judgments to be pronounced cannot be separated from this reality in the quest for a Caribbean liberation ethic.

Reknowned barrister Lord Anthony Gifford QC writes;

"Is the death penalty a deterrent to would-be criminals? I very much doubt it, and the statistics around the world do not show it. People commit crimes for a variety of reasons: greed, power, duress from their gang leaders; the belief that they will not be caught; as well as the lack of opportunities to make a living lawfully. I can imagine a case where the death penalty would be an encouragement to crime: a man who thinks that witnesses to his crime could bring about his execution might well take care to ensure that no witnesses survive to tell the tale."

What cannot be successfully challenged however, is that whether or not the death penalty "deters" offenders contemplating murder, we cannot deny its capacity of preventing the offender from ever repeating the crime, which must first be indubitably proven. Therein lies the greatest challenge, which leads directly to our third consideration.

The Question of the Imperfection of Human Justice vs. the Finality of the Judgment

One of the most compelling arguments against capital punishment involves the obvious risk of executing an innocent person, and a number of related risks. Perhaps the most serious concern of all, involves the prospect of an innocent person being coerced into a "plea bargain" by the threat of a capital prosecution. At the same time no jurisdiction considering the enactment of capital statutes, or considering enforcing a death sentence, can completely eliminate the dreadful possibility of an innocent person wrongly accused, convicted, or even executed. Experience has also shown that this fear has considerable justification. Indeed, the laws of probability suggest that, given an indefinite series of trials, any event, however

unlikely in any one trial, eventually grows into a certainty. Maybe, the real question then, concerns not whether the use of capital punishment will result in the execution of an innocent person, but when, how often and is the risk worthy of being taken.

It is conclusive from available evidence that the maintenance of a relatively good record in regard to capital punishment has come at a very high financial cost to most economies. Even the most passionate advocates of capital punishment admit that capital trials cost exceedingly more relative to the alternatives. Even with sophisticated safeguards, innocent people get convicted, and questionable executions still take place. No country can boast a perfect record in this regard, even while we all hold our respective justice systems in the highest regard. In the face of human imperfection and the irreversibility of the act, the justice system can become liable for what it was designed to prevent. The contradictions get even more controversial.

Summation

It is a popular trend of thought that only public executions can demonstrate that civil society will not tolerate offenses against the sanctity / inviolability of life. This is a moral contradiction which cannot stand the rigors of theological and ethical scrutiny. Regardless of its prevailing history, it is simply a substandard *modus operandi*, which employs the killing of people to teach people that killing people is wrong. Rather than increasing reverence for life, society's acceptance of the death penalty erodes it; rather than creating a sense of security, reliance on the death penalty nurtures and encourages hatred and violence. A state's preference for the use of the death penalty permits elected officials to ignore the real causes of crime, such as poverty, inequity, lack of opportunity for education and employment, broken homes, substance abuse, and the availability of weapons. Rather than reducing the level of crime and violence in our society, the death penalty, as a tool for societal problem-solving, only makes matters worse.

Addressing an International Association of Law Libraries in 2009, Lord Anthony Gifford stated that, around the region, it is only the English-speaking Caribbean that clings to the death penalty. He noted that it had been abolished in Haiti and the Dominican Republic; that there have been no executions in Cuba since 2003; in South and Central America, only Guyana, Suriname and Belize retain it. The position in Puerto Rico is complex: the death penalty has been abolished by the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, but under US Federal law, the prosecution can demand it for federal capital offences.

In Africa, from where so many Caribbean people had our origin 33 out of 54 countries have abolished the death penalty, either by law or in practice, including Rwanda where thousands are being tried for genocide. In South Africa, the Constitutional Court in the case of *Makwanyane* ruled that the death penalty contravened the right to life, to dignity and to freedom from cruel and inhuman punishment.

In the world as a whole, 135 countries, 69% of the world's nations, have abolished the death penalty. In December 2007 the UN General Assembly passed a resolution by a majority of 104 to 54, with 29 abstentions, calling for a worldwide moratorium on executions. Of the countries that do regularly execute people, the following six countries account for over 90% of executions worldwide: China, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Pakistan, and the United States. It does look as if the English-speaking Caribbean is swimming against the tide of world opinion!

An opposing position to the use of the death penalty should neither be construed as a lack of compassion for those who have been touched by violent crime nor as a blatant disregard for the tenets of the Holy Scripture. In fact, consistent with Scriptures, those who suffer unimaginable grief, as a result of the senseless murder of one dear to them, deserve the love and support of everyone, of their families, friends and churches, as well as the compassion and care of the communities in which they live. They have a right to expect that justice will be done and that the perpetrator of a crime will be

punished swiftly and effectively. In the same breath, we must point out that the survivors' well-being cannot justify demands for vengeance. True emotional, spiritual, and even physical healing is found in the compassionate embrace of Jesus Christ, who himself practiced forgiveness and teaches us to do the same.

A sentence for life may be a life-giving sentence. A sentence for life can release these victims to begin their healing. A sentence for life also provides the time for the offender to repent for her/his crime, to attempt to become a productive member of her/his community, and hopefully, to reconcile with the family and friends of her/his victim. It gives the community the opportunity to see the possible healing of victims and villains. A sentence for life can end the confusion and stress, often experienced by personnel of the Department of Correctional Services, who in striving to help all offenders change their behavior, are called on to support or participate in a process, which often denies the condemned offender sufficient time to reform.

A Recommended Position

In light of the above, this paper recommends a call for legislation for a moratorium on the death penalty in the English speaking Caribbean, as well as a detailed and comprehensive study of the theory and practice of capital punishment. It is incumbent upon the region, in the interest of promoting the good of all, to examine the manner in which this or any penalty is being applied, free of all parochial and partisan prejudices. This writer believes that such a comprehensive examination, conducted in a fair and balanced manner, will benefit both opponents and supporters of the death penalty by providing a better understanding of the issues involved and the people often implicated along with their socio-cultural, political and economic circumstances. Such study will elicit enlightened relevant information regarding race, class and gender issues, the mentally ill, juveniles and inaccessibility to justice factors.

Through ministry to family and friends of victims and offenders, as well as corrections personnel and the community, we can touch the

hearts of those who are affected by violent crime, as Jesus expects us to do. While there are many in the Church who still support the use of the death penalty, through discussion and teaching we can build popular support for change of attitude and policy. Through advocacy efforts aimed at legislators and local government officials, we can establish a public policy that is rooted in a consistent ethic of life; the abolition of the death penalty and the implementation of a penal system that serves the dignity of all through rehabilitation. Finally, this paper invites all concerned to work toward remedying the causes of crime.

Conclusion

Abolition of the death penalty is not a solely religious issue, but an issue that affects the common good. As human beings, we are committed to defend the gift of life that God has given to all peoples, including those who inflict great harm upon others. Therefore, we ought to oppose capital punishment not just for what it does to those guilty of horrible crimes but for what it does to all of us as a society. Increasing reliance on the death penalty diminishes all of us and is a sign of growing denial and disregard for the Imago Dei. We cannot overcome crime by simply executing criminals, nor can we restore the lives of the innocent by ending the lives of those convicted of their murders. The death penalty offers the tragic illusion that we can defend life by taking life. There is always a better way; it's the way that seeks to preserve life amidst hope.

Sources

1. Amnesty International – The Death Penalty. London; Amnesty International Publications, 1995
2. Atrznr James - The Black Minute, Daring Press 1983
3. Benn, Tony & B. Zepheniah - Caribbean Justice, Working For the Abolition of the Death Penalty. Online, Internet. 03/06/10
4. Callam, Neville - Capital Punishment; CJRS Vol. 15 No 2 1994
- 5 Gifford, Anthony (2009) "The Death Penalty: Developments in Caribbean Jurisprudence," *International Journal of Legal Information*: Vol. 37: Iss. 2, Article 7.
6. Potter, Harry - Hanging in Judgment, Religion and Death Penalty in England. SCM Press 1993
7. Tillich, Paul - Love, Power and Justice – Oxford Press NY 1960

