

tactic to lose something difficult to handle in a complex bureaucracy.

The key tests of exploring this way of working will include whether it helps the church to be more effective and efficient in its work and most crucially whether it sets more people free for the work and mission. That alone would be a significant step forward for many local churches.

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## **WHAT DO BAPTISTS MEAN WHEN THEY DEDICATE "THINGS"?**

**Paul Beasley-Murray**

“As *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship* (the Baptist Union liturgical resource) recognises, the difficulty we face is that “Baptists have not generally placed much emphasis upon sacred objects, places and ceremonies. Their free tradition pays more attention to the inward, spiritual consciousness of the worshippers”. So, for instance, our earliest Baptist places of worship were the plainest of “meeting houses”, devoid of any sacred symbols. Strange as it now may seem, less than fifty years ago the presence of even a wooden cross in many a Baptist church could be a matter of controversy, while only in the last twenty years or so has the presence of Advent candles on the communion table become acceptable.

And yet, in *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship* compiled by Ernest Payne & Stephen Winward and published first in 1960, seven pages were given over to ‘The dedication of church furnishings and memorials’. Similarly *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship* devotes three pages to such dedications and contains suggestions for the dedication of a communion table, lectern, a pulpit and a baptistery - but, unlike *Orders & Prayers for Christian Worship*, there are not suggestions for the dedication of an organ, window or a memorial!

As to the purpose of the dedication of furnishings, Patterns and Prayers offers three suggestions:

(1) It may be seen as the setting aside of objects for special use.

The thing dedicated will be a thing apart, e.g. the Table is not any table to be used for modelling and painting during the week;

(2) Its purpose may be that of praying for the ministry that will be associated with it;

(3) It may be a recognition that the God who fills all creation and may manifest himself in any part of it, chooses particular places where he discloses himself in special ways.

My initial reaction was to say 'Amen' to each suggestion. However, I then realised that in our context at least, the first of the suggestions is not actually applicable. For example, we have already agreed that our new 450-seater worship area will be 'multi-purpose', and that in principle we will have no objection to it being used for a secular concert or seminar. For that reason we have decided to speak of this particular space as 'the meeting place', as distinct from 'the sanctuary'. True, our hope is that this will be a place where we will meet with the Living God on a Sunday, but it may well be a very different kind of meeting point at other times in the week. So, although our new communion table will normally be used to celebrate the Lord's Supper, there may be occasions when aspiring party political candidates might sit around it when being interviewed at a meeting sponsored by the churches of the town. After all, it is just a table, and not an altar. Similarly, our new lectern will primarily be used for the reading and proclamation of the Word of God, but there may well be times when it is used by a speaker at a church growth conference. Likewise our new organ will be used primarily for the worship of God, but we hope there will be times when it is used to accompany a local choir.

On reflection, I also feel a little uncomfortable about the last suggestion, not least in the light of our experience over the past eighteen months, when as a church we have been worshipping in a local school. Our experience has been that God has been as truly amongst us in a school hall as he was with us in a church-building. True, some of our older people found the transition to a secular hall difficult, but was that because of memory or because of a lack of an organ, as distinct from one space being more sacred than

another? The question arises: to what extent is the temple theology of the Old Testament, present for instance in such passages as 1 Kings 7 and 2 Chron 7, applicable to the people of the new covenant, who now gather together in the name of Jesus (see Matt 18.20)?

Maybe, therefore, dedication is primarily praying for the ministry that will be associated with the new building or furnishings?

## **DO WHAT YOU DO DO WELL!**

### **Hedgehog**

One Sunday evening, over 30 years ago, I went with some friends to a well-attended Pentecostal church. The occasion sticks in my memory, not for the sermon (totally forgotten!), nor for the company (excellent though it was) nor even for the warmth of the welcome (I'm sure it was), but for the following reason. During the service, a lady was invited to the front by the pastor to sing a solo. To this day I struggle for words to adequately describe those five minutes of my life. It was dire! Apart from the mawkish music and sentimental lyrics, the poor lady could sing neither in tune nor in time. She did not hit a single note in the middle at the first attempt! Yet when she finally spared us any more ear-splitting agony, the pastor came forward to heap fulsome praise on her efforts. Me? I lowered my head lest my eyes betray what I was thinking. I was aghast (and still am) that such appalling amateurishness should be encouraged as a virtue. It seemed that, the poorer the effort, the more God was glorified!

I had hoped that such attitudes had disappeared during the intervening years, during which time we have become accustomed to the power of electronic wizardry to transform even the most hopeless of musical hacks into a skilled musician at the mere insertion of a floppy disc and the touch of a button. Nowadays a good PA system can transform a good preacher with no voice into an overnight superstar and computers can enable design hacks like yours truly to produce a half-decent looking card or leaflet.

But no! The truth is that the venerable tradition of amateurishness as a virtue lives on, not so much in our musicians,