

EDITORIAL – TEN YEARS AND STILL THRIVING

Paul Beasley-Murray

In March 1994 a new interdenominational agency was launched - Ministry Today. Initially known as the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry, right from the beginning the focus of Ministry Today was on the well-being of the ministry. For as that great 17th century pastor observed: "All churches either rise or fall as the ministry doth rise or fall - not in riches or worldly grandeur, but in knowledge, zeal and ability for their work". Or to re-phrase the sentiments in modern language: "The key to the health and growth of the churches is its leaders".

We later discovered that the name Richard Baxter suggested to some that we were a group of modern-day puritans, so eventually we did away with our original title, and adopted instead our present title: Ministry Today.

Although over the years the thrust of our work has remained the same, our mission statement has changed. At first our declared aim was "to promote excellence in the practice of ministry, enabling ministers and other pastoral leaders to become increasingly effective in the mission to which Christ has called them". But then we discovered that the first concern of many, if not most, of our colleagues is not to excel in ministry, but to survive in ministry.

So we re-phrased our mission statement, with the result that our present aim is: "to provide a supportive resource for all in Christian leadership, so that they may survive, grow, develop, and become more effective in the ministry to which Christ has called them".

We have not totally ditched the concept of excellence - this journal is surely testimony to that. However, as we know all too well from our own experience, local church ministry can be incredibly pressurised and demanding. Our desire is that, through what we offer, church leaders will be helped not only to survive the crises, but also enjoy the challenges of ministry today.

It is interesting to look back upon the titles of past conferences: 'How to survive as a pastor'; 'Conflict, spirituality and egotism'; 'Gospel and truth in a fragmented society'; 'Spiritual direction'; 'Ministering to people in the workplace'; 'From maintenance to

mission'; 'Hatching, matching and despatching'; 'Lasting the course'; 'Lost shepherds?'; 'Seasons of ministry'; 'Keeping the batteries charged'; 'Walking upright'; and 'Style, pretence and reality - personal integrity in ministry'. The majority of them have had the personal well-being of the pastor in mind.

By contrast, the articles in our journal have been wide-ranging, although always with the needs of ministers in mind. The first issue of the journal was perhaps fairly narrowly focussed with articles on 'Abuse in the church'; 'When differences tear apart the body of Christ'; 'Management and the resolution of conflict'; 'Why clergy are leaving the church'. However, the three issues in 2003 dealt with such subjects as 'Keeping sermons fresh'; 'Re-thinking church'; 'Genetic determinism and the priesthood gene'; 'Spirituality in suburbia'; 'Exploring the new cosmology'; 'Christendom, clericalism and church'; 'Bulk-standard theology'; 'Older people, Gospel and Church' 'Towards a theology of stewardship'; 'Some reflections on depression'; 'How I pray'; 'Carers, not counsellors'; 'Is our evangelism working?'; 'Friends in the church'; 'Ten years of women priests'; and 'Chaplaincy in a modern university'.

A constant in every issue of the journal has been the large number of book reviews, which have normally taken up a third of the space. Unlike reviews of the same books appearing elsewhere, these reviews have again always had the needs of ministry in view.

Yes, from beginning to end the needs of leaders in local churches have been, and continue to be, uppermost. Although the standards of *Ministry Today* have been of the highest, our concern has not been to promote the latest advances in academic theology, but rather to help ministers reflect on the practice of ministry. Very much a 'hands-on' organisation, we are unique in that there is no other inter-denominational group in the UK concerned for the well-being and general development of Christian leaders.

Not surprisingly, the membership of the Board of Ministry Today reflects this emphasis on grass-roots ministry. Most of us are local pastors and parish priests, and even those of us who are not presently in local ministry have been there at the 'coal-face' and remain committed to the welfare of the ministry. What readers, however, may not immediately realise, is that the Board is made up of a group of extraordinarily interesting and able men and

women. In my experience most committee meetings are dull, but Ministry Today Board meetings never fail to stimulate and stretch me.

THE BIBLE & THE MATRIX

Tony Watkins

No film has generated as much discussion as *The Matrix* and its sequels, *Matrix Reloaded* and *Matrix Revolutions*. Just six months after the first film came out, there were millions of postings on Internet discussion boards, many of them dealing with serious issues. Since then we've seen thousands of websites spring up which analyse the film from just about every viewpoint imaginable.

Is *The Matrix* Christian?

A variety of groups have claimed *The Matrix* for their own. There has been a great deal of discussion within Christian circles about the metaphors, names and concepts within the film. Some of this is entirely valid; some of it tries to push the connections too far and comes unstuck; some, naively, even argue that *The Matrix* is a Christian film. Far too many Christians, it seems to me, have failed to allow for the fact that there are Buddhists who find it to be rich with concepts from their own worldview, plus Hindus, Gnostics, existentialists and postmodernists, not to mention fans of Greek myths and Arthurian legends.

Writers/Directors Andy and Larry Wachowski have used Christian ideas and imagery in remarkably sensitive ways (compare with Andrew Niccol's overwhelmingly negative use of Christian imagery in *The Truman Show* released the same year as *The Matrix* 1999). There are several obvious parallels with the gospel, with some of the most powerful and emotional in *Matrix Revolutions*. But the Wachowskis are not Christians - their first film was a lesbian film noir called *Bound* - and they did not set out to make a Christian film. One writer wrote that it 'functions as a kind of Rorschach [ink blot] test, setting in motion the universalized process of