



BAPTISTS AND CREATION CARE

Keith G. Jones

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- *Keith Jones is Rector of the International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, Czech Republic*
 - *In spite of a few outstanding exceptions, Baptists down the years and into the present have not focused much on care for the created world. Dr Jones challenges individuals, churches and BUGB to address these concerns seriously.*
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God blessed them, and God said to them 'Be fruitful and multiply; and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God saw everything he had made and it was very good. (Genesis 1.28, 31)

ON IDIOSYNCRATIC LECTURES

Many months ago, when the Baptist Historical Society suggested I might integrate my love of Baptist history with my passion for the theology of creation care, this seemed a bright, even alluring task, but with the passage of time and an examination of material, I have come to the conclusion that this is only the beginning of a work about which more must be done. It is not yet an adequate celebration of the concerns of our Baptist Union President, John Weaver.¹ I am clear enough where I want to begin and where we can see signs of creation care. I am also clear that we can end with the President galvanizing the whole Baptist Union to take issues of sustainable development, of recycling, of global warming and of renewable energy seriously as stewards of the bountiful creation

which our Triune God has given us. Such a vision cannot fail to catch the hearts and minds of a younger generation, at least that is my deep experience. Both my sons,² belong to Baptist communities and engage in this as a way of discipleship. Likewise, the students in Prague engage in our pursuit of being an eco-seminary, be it in subotniks (annual spring clean-up developed in communist eastern Europe), the care of environmentally friendly lawn-mowers (pygmy goats from the Cameroons), or the excitement of visiting our sister institution, the Orthodox academy in Vilémov, Moravia,³ with their Orthodox wind turbine dedicated to Saint Eliáš, solar panels, photovoltaic panels and biomass furnace.

Nevertheless, this is not straightforward. We have moments in our baptistic history when a concern for creation care is obvious and clear, but also epochs when there is no immediately discernable clue that such an issue featured in the lives of Baptists and their communities at all. In the underside of our history there may have been those who were engaged in a deep concern for our good – or bad – stewardship of the created order. As always, at the beginnings of such research ventures, it is the ‘kings’ and ‘princes’ who come to the forefront, perhaps later we shall uncover ‘the also rans’ who shared this deep concern and motivation.

ON CREATION CARE

Our world offers many attractive vistas. Some are magnificent: the Matterhorn rising high above Zermatt on a clear day with the alpine wind blowing a snow-dust screen off the sharpest escarpment, the coral lagoons around the Indian ocean island of Mauritius, with brightly coloured tropical fish, or Lake Ohrid fed by natural streams in the Macedonian mountains, where Saint Clement systematized the setting out of the Cyrillic alphabet of his mentors in mission, Saints Cyril and Methodius. Then we all have more localized and personal favourites – aspects of the created order which move us and draw from us a profound feeling of gratitude to Almighty God for the bounty of His creation. On rare occasions, we can even look at that created order where human beings have taken their stewardship seriously and thank God that the

commands of Genesis that humankind should care for the creation have not gone unheeded; true stewardship has not degenerated into rampant exploitation.

One such place for me is a Moravian vista some thirty kilometres north of the border with Austria. It is a scene today of rolling hillsides, ‘gentle undulation’, as the AA Journey planners of the 1960s used to describe such topographic features. The view is best from the pilgrimage hill to the south of the Moravian town of Mikulov. The rolling hills are home to fine vineyards and viniculture flourishes to the point that one of the smaller local vintners, Baloun, obtained prestigious awards at the French Wine Convention in 2006. In Mikulov’s public car park there is a plan of the town and vineyards, highlighting the major vintners, the Catholic pilgrimage shrine on the hill, the chateau built by the Liechtensteins, who arrived in the area in 1249 and began planting vines. The commentary at the bottom of the plan tells us that the vineyards were falling into disuse in the 1500s, neglected by the peasants, until the Haban came, and by their care and tending of these pleasant rolling hills, the land was restored and the vineyards recovered to give forth their fruit. Creation had been neglected, then restored.

We know the name Anabaptist better than Haban. In Anabaptist history we are familiar with Mikulov as Nikolsberg (the German name for the town in that era), to which Balthasar Hubmaier, the Anabaptist pastor/theologian fled when the Emperor began to persecute the Anabaptists of south Germany and west Austria. In Mikulov Hubmaier developed a vibrant Anabaptist community, protected by those same Lords of Liechtenstein whose vineyards they restored, until the arch-Catholic Emperor Ferdinand, as Margrave of Moravia, finally chased them away to the Principality they still inhabit and put in their place his own chosen Catholic and conservative Dietrichstein family, who ruled the estate from 1574, exploiting the land to over-production, causing a cut-back in wine production and leading to exports to Poland.

The theology of creation care about which our President speaks is not simply a new concern amongst us – a theological extra push in an age of environmental degradation. It is at the heart of one of the communities who mark out one of our baptistic beginnings in Europe.⁴

BALTHASAR HUBMAIER AND THE BUILDING OF AN ANABAPTIST COMMUNITY

It may have been an accident of history which caused Anabaptist refugees to make their way from Switzerland, Germany and Austria to this 'edge' of the Holy Roman Empire,⁵ but Balthasar Hubmaier, the Catholic theologian, former Pro-Rector of the University of Ingolstadt, and right-hand disputant with Zwingli in Zürich, entered the arena to play a pivotal part. At Eastertide 1525⁶ Hubmaier, Catholic priest in Waldshut, was baptized by Wilhelm Reublin, one of the first Swiss Anabaptists, along with sixty others; then Hubmaier himself baptized three hundred more. Thus he began his journey of discipleship away from the Magisterial Reformation and towards his place as a significant theologian of the Radical Reformation. Persecution by the magisterial reformers in Zürich and the Catholic forces of the Empire led him, like many others, to seek shelter away from the imperial gaze and the persecuting fervour of the Reformed Church. So in July 1526 Hubmaier sought the protection of the Liechtenstein family – Leonhard (who was to be baptized by Hubmaier as a believer⁷) and his nephew, Hans.⁸ In doing so he joined many others from the Radical Reformation tradition. As Caspar Schwenckfeld observed, 'Swiss, Hutterites, Gabrielites, Pilgramites, Netherlanders, Friesians, Mennonites, Hoffmanites' all found space to be in these Moravian lands.⁹ The lands they developed were described, not unfairly, as 'the Garden of Europe', a designation attributed to others, but exploited by the Mikulov town council.¹⁰ Nowhere else in the world has two reserves of world importance lying next to each other: the Pálava UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and the Lednice-Valtice Special Area, and to these is added the charm of the historic town of Mikulov, with its many wine cellars.

Of the various Anabaptists who gathered in this 'safe' area, away from the immediate pressure of Protestant princes and Catholic cardinals, Peter Walpot¹¹ (or *Scherer* – the cutter) became the leader. Amongst their number were experts in hygiene, agriculture, viniculture and glazed pottery. According to local Moravian chronicles they engaged in forty-two different professions, carrying artisanship to perfection. In viniculture they introduced new techniques; in pottery

their white majolica glaze with the distinctive blue and yellow patterns became very important.¹²

Beginning with their Christocentric faith and holding to both a Christian orthodoxy in the essentials of faith and orthopraxy in the working out of discipleship in community, they resisted an approach to economics which demanded usury and laid emphasis on trade and sale of goods, preferring to develop patterns of community living and engage in agriculture. They were welcomed by the Lords of Moravia who had seen depopulation following the Bohemian-Hungarian wars and found people reluctant to settle in this 'borderland' close to the expanding Ottoman Empire.¹³ The very notion of discipleship – the orthopraxy of faith – made these artisans anxious to do good work, so the Moravian lords chose to protect them, even though Ferdinand, King of Bohemia and Margrave of Moravia, was a staunch Catholic and regularly demanded that the lords expel the Anabaptists and radicals.

Driven by this developing sense of gathering in community (though varying in doctrine as to how to live out that community), there was a common experience of land being worked, vineyards being restored to production, crops being harvested, land being cared for and a sense of the importance of the work being done. This was reflected in the quality of pottery in design and glaze, the mark of those with a concern for their environment. Later, the Anabaptist villages of the Moravian/Slovakian lands around the River Morava show that same sense of care. Villages, such as Sobotište, to this day bear the physical witness of carefully constructed communal homes, mill, meeting house and the open space of the central communal park, although later despoiled by Maria Theresa¹⁴ and the Jesuits who re-catholicized these lands in the mid to late 1700s, placing small chapels in the heart of the green landscape. Arising out of the Christocentric communitarian experience, therefore, an orthopraxy of creation care developed amongst these Moravian Anabaptists.

THE EARLY BAPTISTS AND CREATION CARE

In 2009 we will celebrate Baptist beginnings, marking 400 years since Smyth and Helwys reached Baptist convictions in Amsterdam, and the

emergence some years later of the first Particular Baptist Church in London. These first forebears had no apparent concern for the natural environment, although they seem to have expressed general orthodox beliefs about the place of God in the order of things. The confession of faith varies little from that of the Anabaptist communities as reflected in the Waterlander confession, where God is ‘Creator and Preserver of heaven and earth, of things visible and invisible’.¹⁵

The first Baptist groups, both General and Particular, had no doubt that the Creation was the work of God and ‘that God preserveth all creatures which are in being. That creation doth plainly declare the Power and Righteousness of God’.¹⁶ However, it is not easy to discern the same accent on discipleship and the implications for work on the land as that of the Moravian and Slovakian Anabaptists, nor their concern for the restoration and improvement of the natural order. We cannot reasonably detect any specific regard to the principles of adding to the environment by care for the nature and layout of the built environment, so apparent in the Anabaptist villages around the river Morava. The communitarian Anabaptists had a clear concern for the interaction of the built environment with the natural environment, not apparent in the architectural design and development of early Baptist meeting houses, which are generally utilitarian and functional.

Looking beyond Baptist beginnings to the enquiring spirit of the dissenting communities of later generations, can we discern reflection on a theology of creation care? Graham Ashworth observes:

It is with the Age of Enlightenment and the move from everything being centred in God to being centred on human beings that a cavalier attitude towards the Creation begins to emerge, and for the last 350 years the notion that we can simply take from the natural world what we want (as opposed to what we need) has flourished. With one or two notable exceptions it has only been in the last 60 years or so that foreboding concern has emerged.¹⁷

Philip E. Thompson, an American Baptist theologian, comments ‘over the past two centuries, Baptists have devalued physical creation *vis-à-vis* the spiritual as the means by, through, and in which God

works... we see a growing opinion among Baptist theologians that physical matter is less worthy, even less capable of being used by God in the transaction of saving grace.¹⁸ Thompson speaks out of the North American situation, but with notable exceptions, such as Nancey Murphy and Jim McClendon, he may not be inaccurate in terms of the USA and the situation may not be much better in Europe.

EVANGELICAL CALVINISM AND THE NATURAL WORLD

It is to the Northamptonshire cobbler, William Carey,¹⁹ that we turn for the practical outworkings of the evangelical Calvinism of Particular Baptists in the late 1700s and early 1800s. This takes some note of the created order, moving away from abstract orthodoxy of belief to real experiential Christian discipleship. As Mary Drewery says in her popular biography of Carey:

As he travelled from one primitive community to another, Carey could see the need for better methods of agriculture, for the tools and implements taken for granted in the rich farming county of Northamptonshire. He experimented to discover what European plants would thrive in the more extreme climate of Bengal.²⁰

Carey took over 108 botanical books and magazines with him to India and was so concerned for the proper care of land that in 1820 he formed the still-existing Agri-Horticultural Society of India.²¹ In later generations a steady stream of BMS Missionaries took agricultural, botanic and other skills as part of an understanding of the holistic mission of the church. They saw concern for stewardship of the creation as an inherent declaration that God so loves the world (John 3.16), so discipleship implied an engagement by believers with the whole created order. Carey wrote home not simply for Bibles and resources for the survival of his mission community but also:

I wish you to send me a few instruments of husbandry, viz scythes, sickles, plough-wheels, and such things, and a yearly assortment of all garden and flowering seeds.

His very last letter from Andrew Fuller included:

When I was in Sheffield last July, there was a Mr Cooper, gardener to Lord Milton, who was much interested in your 'Periodical accounts', and in everything concerning you, particularly your botany. I told him of Captain Kemp's ship going out, by which he might send anything he pleased, and I gave him your instructions as to packing and preserving them.²²

Carey had his successors in the BMS family, like David Stockley who served in the Agricultural and Village Uplift Centre in Bangladesh from 1954 to 1965. Stockley taught the better use of land to students who became 'pioneers of agricultural innovation in many different parts of East Pakistan'.²³ Later I visited David in the Littoral of Brazil. On a day of incessant jungle rain, we walked round his model farm inspecting the amazing way he was seeking to enhance the creation and watching amused as the village shop sold his milk ice lollies to the local children who, he believed, lacked calcium. Such concern for the environment, for responsible farming and the stewardship of creation ensures such characters stand out as rounded missionaries theologically believing in the need not only for personal but also holistic and community conversion to the truth that God so loved the world that he sent his Son. Yet throughout the last three centuries it seems that European Baptists, as opposed to many of those they sent to engage in mission in Africa, Asia and Latin America, have had no deep community desire to address issues of the theology of creation and its implications in creation care. Why is this?

WHY DON'T PIETISTS AND EVANGELICALS CARE ABOUT CREATION ?

Helle Liht, Assistant to the General Secretary of the EBF, has sought to analyse this²⁴ in terms of her own nation of Estonia, but many of her arguments resonate with the realities faced elsewhere in Europe. She notes that in post-communist Estonian society there are those who look to the church to be the upholders of community ethics. This is not

unusual. The former Czech President, the playwright and Charter 77 leader, Vaclav Havel,²⁵ challenged the Czech churches in the same way. Yet the response of the churches has essentially been in the field of intimate and personal morals – human sexuality, genetic research, euthanasia, abortion.²⁶ These topics have been easily and robustly engaged in. Whilst musicology demonstrates an admiration for creation, exemplified in central and eastern Europe in the hymn,

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works thy hand has made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.²⁷

Yet this is where it remains, in a simple community adoration. Set against this, Helle Liht sees the following countervalues, found to a greater or lesser extent within Baptist life in the 1880s and 1900s. Firstly, a dualistic pietism predominant in Baptist life in continental Europe and not unknown in the isles pronounces the world ‘corrupt and evil’, ruled by Satan, a world from which we need to be saved. Therefore, so Liht argues, the predominant attitude of baptistic communities in the past was to seek a ‘heavenly’ or ‘real’ home separated from the world.²⁸ Further, as Haddon Willmer argued in his Presidential address to the Yorkshire Baptist Association²⁹ in 1985, there has been this profound community misreading of John 3.16 which forgets the part of the verse which says ‘God so loved the world’ and focuses instead on a personal individualistic salvation. As Helle Liht describes it,

At evangelistic rallies the audience has been asked to replace ‘the world’ with their first name in order to emphasize God’s personal approach toward every single individual... People, and only people, are led across this divide one by one (as the path is too narrow to go together), from the devil’s kingdom to God’s kingdom and between these two worlds is a huge chasm.²⁹

The analysis of the word 'cosmos' may be discussed by Biblical scholars and theologians, but a narrow unpacking to mean 'me and me only' hardly seems adequate for what the Gospel of John declares in the prologue (John 1.1-14). The third attraction away from creation is the re-interpretation of the New Creation of Revelation and the resurrected experience of the regenerated Christian. A spiritual way of being is that which is important and materialism, matter, can easily be discarded. If this is the undergirding of our theology, no wonder we have had scant regard for creation and our role as stewards of it.

When I was a teenager, my home church, Tetley Street Memorial, Bradford, ran a stewardship campaign assisted by the Baptist Union Stewardship Department, led by the Revd Jim Findlay.³⁰ Though the materials provided sought to place the word 'stewardship' in the context of the whole created order, the reality was expressed in the three words – time, talent, treasure, with the accent on 'treasure'. I was appointed as chair of the publicity committee in the stewardship team, producing the brochure on the total stewardship of the church. Though our church could be made to reflect on our surroundings, and certainly we hosted meetings when our neighbourhood was subject to a regeneration scheme by Bradford City Council, the stewardship brochure concentrated on the individual and how the church assisted each individual, but not in any real way on the community and our neighbourhood, although this church was more enlightened than many in believing that the church had a place in society and should exercise stewardship beyond our doors.³¹

Whilst English Baptists may not have these personal and world-denying attitudes to the extent Helle Liht sees in Estonians (and I would add in Czechs and Russians, at least), we cannot deny that by and large there has been only a sentimental and romantic concern with the creation and our conception of stewardship has been at best reductionist, from the 1600s through until twenty, or less, years ago.

Again, this dualism appears at odds with Hebrew thought-forms. It certainly assisted in creating an atmosphere where physicality is denigrated. The attack on this approach has been led, in our own day, by baptistic philosopher theologian, Nancey Murphy, in her work on non-reductive physicalism.³²

The Mennonite scholar, Thomas N. Finger, judges that deep problems of our modern society result from psychological, spiritual and ecological alienation. He makes the point that ecological alienation often occurs because humans seek to aggrandize themselves at the expense of nonhuman nature and in violation of its processes. We take competition and conquest as our main patterns of relationship to the created order and war against it. 'But eventually nonhuman nature, which provides humanity its biological foundations, breaks down and wars against us.'³³

AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL SCIENTISTS AND THE WORLD OF NATURE AND GEOLOGY

Before Darwin, investigation of the natural world was generally thought of as a pious act, seeking to understand the wonders of God's creation as another aspect of the revelation of God's greatness.³⁴ This intensified with the growth of Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century. The amateur geologist became an important figure.

Despite the general lack of interest amongst the churches in creation care until the second half of the twentieth century, individual Baptists have been interested in every aspect of creation and Samuel Rowles Pattison FGS (1809-1901)³⁵ might be taken as one such example. A solicitor, influenced by the Hon. and Revd Baptist Noel, his deep passion was geology and he was twice elected to the Geological Society Council. Pattison was a classic nonconformist with an enquiring mind. He embraced the emerging work of geologists, suggesting the earth was older than the then common understanding around the calculations of Bishop Ussher. Pattison declared in the preface to *The Earth and the Word, or Geology for Bible Students*:

Undoubtedly the minds of many good men are uneasy at the suspicion of a conflict... just as on the eve of an important trial the young advocate is distressed by the prospect of contrary evidence equally credible. But in both cases the open examination removes, one by one, all the apparent discrepancies, and truth comes out all the more illustrious for the clouds which beset its course.³⁶

Theologically, many dissenters supported William Paley (1743-1805)³⁷ in his assertion of the argument of design for the existence of God, the creation demonstrating the existence of a superior or divine intelligence. Perhaps Robert Hall (1764-1831) was influenced by Paley in his 'Lecture on Modern Infidelity'. Against the mechanicalism of Paley, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) in his poetry, his later association with Wordsworth and his sojourn in the Lake District romanticized nature:

Nor fear, nor grief, nor vain perplexity.	clings
So will I build my altar in the fields,	And trace in leaves and flowers that round
And the blue sky my fretted dome shall be,	me lie
And the sweet fragrance that the wild	Lessons of love and earnest piety.
flower yields	So let it be; and if the wide world rings
Shall be the incense I will yield to Thee.	In mock of this belief, it brings
It may indeed be fantasy, when I	Thee only God ! and thou shalt not despise
Essay to draw from all created things	Even me, the priest of this poor
Deep, heartfelt, inward joy that closely	sacrifice. ³⁸

Coleridge was closely associated with Joseph Cottle of Bristol and through him with Robert Hall and Joseph Hughes.³⁹ This attraction to the wild places and a romantic view of nature received a positive evaluation from some leading Baptists, especially in relation to places of grandeur like the Alps. More recently Baptist author, Alec Gilmore has reflected on the work of John Muir and the wild places of the earth.⁴⁰

Romanticism eventually gave way to realism and we come to the present generation where four prophetic names stand out in our English Baptist family – Houghton, Biggs, Lucas and Weaver. Two have changed disciplines from science to theology and will be considered later. One is best known for his ecumenical work and will appear as a catalyst figure for the eco-congregation movement amongst Baptists. The fourth has become the principal scientific spokesperson in the United Kingdom on Climate Change. Sir John Houghton CBE FRS has been Co-Chairman of the Science Assessment Working Group of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, chairman of the Royal Commission on Environmental :Pollution, and a member of the British Government's Panel on Sustainable Development. A meteorologist by training, he has

described Global Warming as ‘a weapon of mass destruction.’⁴¹ His own deep Christian faith and his scientific pursuit of more understanding are contained in his book, *The Search for God: Can Science help?*⁴² He has become a noted exponent on the complex body of information surrounding the issues of climate change and has offered realistic actions for the concerned individual:

- Ensuring maximum energy efficiency in the home [and church]
- Maximum energy saving by using high efficiency appliances
- Energy saving by not overheating rooms and leaving lights on
- Support provision of energy from renewable resources
- Drive fuel-efficient cars and choose means of transport which minimize overall energy use – walking and cycling
- Check wood products come from renewable resources
- Through the democratic process encourage local and national government to deliver policies which properly take the environment into account⁴³

THE CONCERN FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE WORK OF THE AGENCIES

The concern for an adequate theology of creation care raises the search for a model of sustainable development. Graham W. Ashworth has reminded us that Sustainable Development is ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’⁴⁴ Graham Ashworth opened this up, adding his Green Code in an address to the IBTS/ECEN conference on a theology of creation care, organized in preparation for the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu (EEA3) in 2007.⁴⁵ The Green Code might be said to popularize the profound concerns of Sir John Houghton; Graham Ashworth himself has expressed the view that his task has been that of communicating the ideas of scientists like John Houghton in a ‘populist’ form,⁴⁶ so the Green Code exhorts us to:

- Cut down on waste (reducing packaging, reusing, recycling)
- Save energy and resources (electricity, water, gas)

- Travel sensibly (share transport, walk, cycle etc)
- Prevent pollution (domestic fires, garden bonfires, badly maintained cars)
- Care for surroundings (improving surroundings, tree planting etc)

‘The adoption of a sustainable lifestyle provides us with the capacity to ask others to do so and the consequence is good news for the planet.’⁴⁷

Such an agenda is not simply for the English churches and this concern has moved beyond the domestic. So, both Christian Aid⁴⁸ and Tear Fund⁴⁹ have been looking at issues of sustainable development in the light of environmental concerns, not least climate change, which has a profound effect on the poorest communities. As Director of Christian Aid, Professor Michael H. Taylor, a Baptist minister, sought to contribute to the discussion about the poor and the environment. Later he addressed concerns in the west about the degradation of the environment in the two-thirds world, advocating radical participation in global economic issues, to seek consensus and a fair share for the poor and dispossessed.⁵⁰ As Paula Clifford says, ‘climate change is a justice issue. Poor people suffering most from the effects of excessive carbon dioxide emissions are those who have done least to cause them.’⁵¹ A Baptist layperson, Tim Jones,⁵² heads up the policy on climate change for the World Development Movement. From another angle, Michael H. Taylor, is seeking points of coherence with concerns about sustainable development and social change, as he has sought to find dialogue partners between Christianity and Islam.⁵⁸

Individual Baptists and organizations to which British Baptists give support are seeking to widen theological reflection and dialogue beyond these shores and the confines of one faith tradition. This pioneering work is not always supported by the wider Baptist constituency.

THE THEOLOGY OF CREATION CARE: A FOUNDATION FOR MINISTERIAL FORMATION

To find an English Baptist theologian addressing a theological exposition of creation and creation care both theologically and practically we have to wait until the present time. In the wider baptistic community, Nancey

Murphy,⁵⁴ James W. McClendon Jr and Thorwald Lorenzen have in the last twenty-five years engaged with these issues. Now John Weaver has combined his first discipline of science (geology) with theology and offered two significant books exploring the doctrine of creation and the concern for the environment.⁵⁵ In his theology of earthkeeping, Weaver draws us back to the importance of a fully-orbed doctrine of stewardship, pointing out the importance of this theme in Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, the Celtic Church, Francis of Assisi, Jürgen Moltmann, Leonardo Boff, Sally McFague, Brian Horne⁵⁶ and others. He concludes:

Christians must learn to think and act ecologically; repent of extravagance, pollution and wanton destruction; and recognise that human beings find it easier to subdue the earth than they do to subdue themselves. Christians face the task of articulating the gospel with relevance; to speak prophetically and relevantly to the environmental and social issues of our day; and rediscover an holistic doctrine of creation.⁵⁷

The great German theologian, Moltmann, maintains,

An ecological doctrine of creation implies a new kind of thinking about God. The centre of this thinking is no longer the distinction between God and the world. The centre is the recognition of the presence of God *in* the world and the presence of the world *in* God.⁵⁸

Weaver, with Lina Andronovienė and Petra Veselá in Prague, has led the way amongst European Baptists in encouraging all those engaged in formation for baptistic ministries to include reflection on Environmental Theology and effective action. To date, no British Baptist College has been listed as engaging with this issue systematically,⁵⁹ though my own institution in Prague has in both curriculum and practice.⁶⁰

ECO-CONGREGATIONS AND THE GREEN MOVEMENT

The engagement of Baptist congregations with an applied theology of creation care belongs to one of those seminal moments when lives interact even in the ordered world of the Council of the Baptist Union of

Great Britain. Dr John Biggs⁶¹ made Christian environmental concern a theme of his BUGB Presidential year in 1989. When the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland was created in 1990, Environmental Issues became one of the networks and John Biggs the Baptist representative. At the Baptist Union Council in November 1998 the Revd Craig Millward tabled a question as to whether the Baptist Union was doing anything to carry forward the resolutions agreed by the Second European Ecumenical Assembly at Graz, Austria, in the summer of 1998. A somewhat bland answer was offered on behalf of the Faith and Unity Executive and John Biggs intervened, or exploded, to lament that the ecumenical group had plans, but no finances from the denominations.⁶²

Then Professor Graham W. Ashworth⁶³ intervened to say that the organization he directed (EnCams/Going for Green) had substantial funds and might be able to assist. This turned out to be a good marriage, for Ashworth had the resources and CTBI had access to the networks of churches and denominations. Sadly, some other grant and trust funding never materialized⁶⁴ but Going for Green was able to assist and hence the Eco-Congregations programme took off. As John Biggs comments:

For us within EIN it was not just a dream come true, but a wealth of resources beyond our hopes – not just a project officer with an office, but part of a team in Wigan with all the back-up facilities, the work on fund raising largely done for us, expertise on media presentation to hand, earlier experience from setting up the Eco-Schools programme and the running of a pilot scheme.⁶⁵

The level of activity increased, with EnCams funding a co-ordinator, Dr David A. Pickering, a United Reformed Church minister who had been part of the EIN group. Thus the interaction of two Baptists, with impeccable track records on creation care, in the Baptist Union Council led to the EnCams Environmental Charity resourcing this longed-for development, with the earlier EIN 'Roots and Branches' ideas expanded into the Eco-Congregation⁶⁶ development, with a paid co-ordinator, theological reflection, liturgical resources and practical applications. This was advanced and promoted amongst the whole family of churches in England, Wales and Scotland (the EnCams charities did not have a four-

nation remit). An impressive manual was published and soon congregations of all Christian traditions engaged with this concern. The programme has been received and worked with best results in Scotland.⁶⁷ However, although the interaction of two former Presidents of the Baptist Union was so significant, Biggs sadly notes that:

Over the years there are relatively few Baptist churches, relative to the size of the Union, who have taken up the scheme. The preponderance has come from the URC, the Methodist Church and the Church of England, in that order.⁶⁸

Two Yorkshire Baptist churches were among those which did something. Wakefield Baptist Church in West Yorkshire was soon being cited as an example of what a congregation could do. They

discovered that their green group enjoyed putting their faith into action. The group offered their enthusiasm and energy to the local nature reserve, where it was gratefully received. Their efforts led to a mucked out pond, some footpath building and maintenance, a link between church and their local nature reserve, a sense of pride in their achievements, some positive publicity in the local press and the strengthening of the church fellowship.⁶⁹

Gildersome Baptist church, south of Leeds, embarked on a programme to take seriously their own curtilage, including developing the graveyard as a heritage and wildlife centre, making open space available for use as an educational resource by local schools, and creating a sensory garden and a wildflower meadow.⁷⁰

Meanwhile a URC minister with close Baptist connections, the Revd the Lord Mawson of Bromley-by-Bow, who grew up at Girdlington Baptist Church in Bradford and trained for ministry at the Northern Baptist College, was working in the east end of London. He spearheaded the development of the collapsing structure of an old congregational church into a Healthy Living Centre, including a project bringing together the mentally ill and physically disabled in a gardening venture.⁷¹ This was another flagship example of an Eco-congregation where things really happened.

So that interchange in the BUGB Council released resources which affected both biblical and theological reflection and practical action.

COMMUNITIES OF RESTORATION: RESPECTING THE EARTH

Beside this development of creation care as a theme within local English Baptist churches, over the past decade in Christian communities there has been growing concern with renewal of a theology and action of creation care. Such developments hardly represent a general trend, but from some prophetic communities others may learn and be encouraged.

The environmental groups of the United Kingdom churches participate in the European Christian Environment Network, formed in 1998. Consulting with the Revd Dr Peter Pavlovic of ECEN,⁷² I found that ECEN refers to work done by the Church of Scotland, the Episcopal Church in Scotland, the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the United Reformed Church, but you will search in vain for any reference to work of the Baptist Union. Wherever we turn in these ecumenical networks we soon come across Graham Ashworth and John Biggs, while Sir John Houghton is cited everywhere as an authority and John Weaver has blazed a trail. The only material even noticed or accessible in the baptistic church communities, however, is a single leaflet from the Mission Department produced in October 2007.⁷³ The work on 'Five Core Values' done by Anne Wilkinson-Hayes⁷⁴ and others in the late 1990s, published in an accessible form in 2001, does have within its 'Prophetic Community' section, 'pressing for an increased share of world resources to be devoted to international development and conservation.'⁷⁵ However, the report of the Five Core Values Working Group to the Baptist Union Council in 2001 had no actual proposal in the field of creation care and sustainable development.

It seems the Baptist Union has not devoted any time or energy within itself to the initiative in which former Presidents played such a key part; this might reasonably be a challenge for those of us who care about this issue. A challenge nationally – could Baptist House, Didcot, consider becoming an eco-office building? A challenge in theology – which of our UK-based colleges might begin the journey to being an eco-seminary?⁷⁶

It seems there is an absence of substantial and fundamental change within the Baptist Union of Great Britain over the past decade.

Let me turn, then to communities where more might be possible than in the national structures of the Union or the life of local gathering churches.

THE NORTHUMBRIA COMMUNITY

So let me start with the Northumbria Community to which many Baptists in England belong. The co-leaders are Baptist ministers, the Revd Roy Searle, President of the Baptist Union in 2005, is the community bishop and the Revd J. Trevor Miller, the abbot. One of the priors of the Mother House at Hetton Hall is the Revd Norman Cumming, and one of the two official 'Visitors' to the community is the Revd W.E. Whalley, Senior Regional Minister of the Yorkshire Baptist Association.⁷⁷ The Northumbria Community has sought to explore historically the way of being church in the Celtic tradition and the contemporary exploration of a new monasticism. The close affinity with nature of the Celtic saints has led the Northumbrian Community to take a deep interest in creation and consider how an adequate theology of the creation and creation care spills over into a way of being in community. The explicit programme that others have actioned is not so visible with Northumbria, though modest steps in environmental living occur in the mother house. One of my colleagues has described the Northumbrian community as having a 'romantic' view of creation and creation care but, although they have a vegetable plot at the Mother House and incorporate Celtic creation images in the liturgy, the Community has not engaged with the real driving force of stewardship of the creation. The romantic notion is expressed in the blessing song,

May the road rise up to meet you
May the wind be always in your back
May the sun shine warm upon your fields
And the rain fall gently on your face
Until we meet again, may God hold you,
In the hollow of his hand.⁷⁸

Alex Alexander observes that this romantic Celtic notion has so far not been worked out in the way it was for the monastic orders of the past.⁷⁹

IBTS, PRAGUE

More robustly, IBTS in Prague has not only taken hold of the theology of creation care in its liturgical patterns, prayers and songs,⁸⁰ but also in developing a module in the Master's level degree programme, a module on creation care and environment issues in its Certificate in Applied Theology, and a practical concern for the creation through the work of an Environmental Management Group in the seminary, with recycling, organic husbandry and land-care, programmes of energy conservation and the like which, in the light of analysis done by Martin Hodson in 2006, place IBTS as the leading theological institution for integrated creation-care activity in Europe.⁸¹

As Lina Andronovienė (Lithuania) and Petra Veselá (Czech Republic) argue in their description of environmental theology and work at IBTS,

Theological enquiry at IBTS often begins with welcoming the 'mess' of life and taking a careful look at a situation of a concrete community of faith with an effort to describe that particular situation and discern the theological convictions which have brought it about and are reflected within it.⁸²

At the heart of the IBTS programme is an environmental policy which sets out these core areas of concern,

- (i) Environmental concerns throughout our Curriculum and Education Programme
- (ii) Environmental management of the institution, our estate and buildings
- (iii) IBTS involvement with and encouragement of good environmental practice in the Prague region and the local community.⁸³

To deliver these, IBTS is devising a range of specific activities.

This means that IBTS includes within worship, prayers, songs and theological programmes an understanding that caring for and partnering God in the wonder of creation is an essential part of Christian discipleship and ministry. We seek to ensure that the notion of stewardship is inherent in all our teaching and training programmes, not just in some with an ecological tag. We recognize that in both the Old and the New Testament God has an abiding interest in the *world* which he created and for which his son died. We encourage all who come within our community as lecturers, students, visitors or workers to carry out a personal environmental check-up and discharge their duties in such a way as to contribute to the life of the Seminary as an environmentally sensitive contributor. This means that we have a constant programme of training and alerting our staff, students and visitors in such matters as good waste management, energy conservation, pollution reduction and environmental enhancement. Each November we have a focused 'environment month', in November and Spring 'subotniks' (special weeks of campus tidying up), an eco-seminary 'spot' each week in our community life. A small herd of goats eat our grass, we are creating a natural meadow and re-introducing Bohemian meadow plants to our site. We engage each autumn in tree planting and in co-operation with the Orthodox Academy at Vilemov we have submitted plans to install solar and photo-voltaic panels. We are exploring the possibility of replacing our gas furnaces as they reach the end of their operational lives with biomass furnaces.

SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

As I commented in my prefatory remarks, there is much work to be done in researching this issue of Baptists and creation care. I have only scratched the surface.

Anabaptist communities from the 1520s for over a century provide the most integrated orthodoxy and orthopraxy in a theology of creation and its implication for believers. Baptist communities moved away from orthopraxy to a greater concern for orthodoxy in belief, together with a desire to spiritualize faith and accentuate the spirit over against the body, in contradistinction to Hebrew thought. As a result, a theology of

creation and its implications cannot easily be detected in the early Baptist churches, not until William Carey began to engage in holistic mission in India from the early 1800s onwards.

Some individuals within our Baptist churches had an interest in the created order beyond exploiting it, but only towards the end of the twentieth century certain prophetic voices began to be raised amongst us as philosophers and then theologians began to ask deeper questions. Scientists Sir John Houghton and Dr John Biggs, Professor Graham Ashworth, the town planner turned environmentalist, and Dr John Weaver and Dr Ernest Lucas, both scientists turned theologians, have awakened Baptist communities in England. Nevertheless, the response of Baptists to this theological and practical issue has not been of a par with that of other major traditions – the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church and the Church of England have both provided resources and mobilized congregations.

IBTS has become a recognized centre both of theologizing on the issue and engagement in practical activity, being at the centre of the movement to place environmental theology at the heart of ministerial and community formation.

Through the presidency of Dr John Weaver we must hope for some awakening of the Baptist conscience in this area. I am grateful to the Baptist Historical Society for the invitation to map out the first groundwork in anticipation of serious later research into this topic of concern.

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| <p>1 The Revd Dr John D. Weaver. President, Baptist Union of Great Britain 2008-2009, Principal of South Wales Baptist College, and Adjunct Lecturer in Environmental Studies, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, Czech Republic.</p> <p>2 One son is project researcher on Climate Change and refuses to travel anywhere by air, the other works for Christian Aid, which is profoundly committed to sustainable development in the majority world.</p> <p>3 V i l e m o v a c a d e m y
http://www.orthodoxa.cz/ accessed 31 March 2008</p> | <p>4 On European Baptist beginnings see the forthcoming book by Ian M. Randall celebrating the baptism of Smyth and Helwys in 1609.</p> <p>5 Traditionally the Margravate of Moravia has been linked to the Kingdom of Bohemia and in the 1340s Charles of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia, was elected Holy Roman Emperor. By the 1500s with the south-east extremities of Europe becoming prey to incursions from the Ottoman Empire, parts of modern Slovakia and of the Margravate were seen as a frontier zone of 'Christendom' against the steady encroachment of Islam.</p> |
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- 6 On Hubmaier see Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr*, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1798.
- 7 Hutterite community, *The Chronicle of the Hutterian brethren*, Rifton NY: Plough Publishing, 1987, p 48.
- 8 On these developments see Jarold K. Zeman, *The Anabaptists and the Czech Brethren in Moravia 1526-1628*, Paris: Mouton, 1969..
- 9 Zeman, 179-181.
- 10 For the reference and reasons see http://www.mikulov.cz/main_eng.php?Akcce=prochazka_krajem accessed 10/04/2008.
- 11 Peter Walpot (1521-1578), a Swiss Anabaptist, became leader of the Hutterites in Moravia. Under him the community grew to about 30,000 baptized believers.
- 12 On Anabaptist, or Haban pottery see Hugo Vavrečka, *Ceramic Collection of Keramische Sammlung*, Prague: Kentaur/Polygrafia a.s., 1995.
- 13 On all this see Wernur O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation*, Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- 14 Her Imperial Majesty, Maria Theresa, self-styled Holy Roman Empress, 1745- 1765. A devout Catholic educated by the Jesuits.
- 15 William L. Lumpkin *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1959, p.44 'A Brief confession of the Principal Articles of the Christian Faith'.
- 16 Ibid p.176, 'The Faith and Practice of the Thirty One Congregations'.
- 17 Graham W. Ashworth, 'Creation Care and the Church: the call to a sustainable lifestyle' in *The Place of Environmental Theology: A guide for seminaries, colleges and universities*, John Weaver and Margot R Hodson (eds), Prague: IBTS, 2007, and the Whitley Trust.
- 18 Philip E. Thompson 'Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: Historical, Theological and Liturgical Analysis' in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, Fall 2000, Volume 27, Number 3, Valparaiso, IN: 2000, NABPR.
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- 22 Quoted in S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey*, p.323.
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- 24 Helle Liht, 'Restoring relationships: Towards Ecologically Responsible Baptist Communities in Estonia', Unpublished MTh dissertation, IBTS Prague, 2008.
- 25 Vaclav Havel, playwright, dissident, President of Czechoslovakia 1989-1992; President of the Czech Republic 1993-2003. Havel was created GCB in 1996 by Queen Elizabeth II.
- 26 Ibid p.9.
- 27 Translated from the Russian by Stuart K. Hine (1899-1989), but with origins in a Swedish folk melody. *Baptist Praise and Worship*, 62 Oxford: OUP, 1991.
- 28 Helle Liht 'Restoring relationships', p.14.
- 29 Helle Liht, 'Restoring relationships', p.15.
- 30 Jim was the father of the former Deputy General Secretary of BUGB, the Revd Myra Blyth. The actual adviser was the late Revd John Matthews, spouse of the Revd Ruth Matthews.
- 31 Stewardship Campaign Brochure, Tetley Street Memorial Baptist Church, Bradford, 1970.
- 32 Nancey Murphy, *Theology in a Postmodern Age*, Nordenhaug Lectures 2003, Prague: IBTS, 2003.
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- Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1997.
- 34 I am indebted to J.H.Y. Briggs for this insight. See also Doreen Rosman *Evangelicals and Culture*.
- 35 On Pattison see Faith Bowers, *A Bold Experiment: The Story of Bloomsbury Chapel and Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church 1848-1999*, London: Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, 1999, p.113.
- 36 S.R. Pattison, *The Earth and the Word, or Geology for Bible Students*, London: 1858, Preface.
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- 39 I am grateful to Professor John Briggs for pointing this out to me.
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- 42 Sir John Houghton, *The Search for God: Can Science Help?* Oxford: Lion, 1995.
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- 46 Personal discussion with the author. IBTS, Prague, 24 April 2008.
- 47 Graham W. Ashworth *ibid* pp.17-18.
- 48 Christian Aid is the official relief and development agency of over forty British Christian Churches. Since the 1990 restructuring of the ecumenical instruments, BUGB has been represented on the Board by successively Keith G. Jones, Anne Wilkinson-Hayes and Graham Sparkes.
- 49 Where Baptist layperson Stephen Rand has been very influential.
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- 52 Timothy K. Jones, Deacon of Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church, London, son of the author.
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- 56 See for instance, the report of the Archbishop's Commission on Rural Areas, *Faith in the Countryside*, Worthing, West Sussex: Churchman Publishing, 1990.
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- 58 Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation. An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (Gifford

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- 59 See Martin Hodson 'Environmental Theology Course in Europe – Where are we Now?' in Weaver and Hodson, *The Place of Environmental Theology*, p.107.
- 60 For the IBTS Environmental policy, <http://www.ibts.eu/about/environmental-policy>. Accessed 20 April 2008.
- 61 Dr John Biggs was Reader in Chemistry at the University of Hull.
- 62 I am grateful to Professor Graham Ashworth and Dr John Biggs for their comprehensive assistance in this section. The BUGB Council Minutes for 1998 in the BUGB archives in the Angus Library give the skeleton outline of this exchange.
- 63 Professor Graham W Ashworth, currently Research Professor at IBTS in Environmental studies and Professor of the Environmental Studies in the Law School at Salford University. Formerly Director of the Going for Green and Keep Britain Tidy charities. President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2000. He took as his Presidential theme a concern for the environment and for rural churches.
- 64 Information to the author from Graham Ashworth and John Biggs, April 2008.
- 65 Notes from John Biggs to the author, 18 April 2008.
- 66 www.eco-congregation.org Accessed 27 April 2008.
- 67 I am grateful to Professor Ashworth for this point.
- 68 Personal information from Dr John Biggs to the author, April 2008.
- 69 *Eco-congregation: The Churches' Environmental Programme*. Module 11, Community Matters p.5. Wigan: CCBI and EnCams, 2001.
- 70 *Ibid.*, p.6.
- 71 *Ibid.*, p.6.
- 72 Information about ECEN can be obtained at www.ecen.org
- 73 BUGB *Mission Files* 'In the beginning God created... Genesis 1', though the introduction admits the ideas are partly taken from the Methodist Church in Great Britain.
- 74 The Revd Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, one-time Social Affairs Adviser in the BUGB Mission Team. Now a regional minister in the state of Victoria, Australia
- 75 *5 Core Values for a Gospel People* (Didcot: 2000, BUGB)
- 76 As defined in Weaver and Hodson, *The Place of Environmental Theology*.
- 77 Others deeply involved include Philip and Elizabeth Webb in Exeter, the Mayder-Graysons in Wallingford and former BMS Missionary, Joan Parker in Bradford.
- 78 Parting song of blessing sung at the doors of Hetton Hall to those leaving the Northumbria community.
- 79 Alexandra Alexander, 'Looking Backwards to Move forwards: A New Monasticism for the 21st Century', Dissertation submitted to IBTS, Prague in part fulfillment of the requirements for an MTh in Applied Theology. April 2008.
- 80 IBTS has a partnership with the Northumbria Community and they share many worship resources together.
- 81 See Martin J. Hodson, 'Environmental Theology Courses in Europe' in Weaver and Hodson, *The Place of Environmental Care*.
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- 83 IBTS Environmental policy, 2002.