

Bristo Baptist

M a g a z i n e

March / April 2007

Holy Trinity



Bristo Baptist Church

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Editorial



In this issue we have a fascinating article by Brian Barclay about his journey out of the Mormon faith and into new life in Christ and how that involved facing up to the reality of the Holy Trinity. If you've come from a Christian background you might simply take the Holy Trinity 'as read' but for people like Brian that isn't the case. Belief in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the "Three in One and One in Three" as St Patrick referred to Him – is absolutely fundamental. Think of a seesaw – one where Christ is the fulcrum and Father and Spirit form the two ends. The Three are completely interdependent and if we focus too much on one or two of them, whether it be Father, Son or Spirit, at the expense of the other(s), then our faith becomes unbalanced.

As Charles Wiley has put it, God is "The One to Whom, the One by Whom, and the One in Whom we offer our praise". Let us worship the Holy Trinity in that way.

Robert Mill

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Dear Friends,

Understanding the Trinity is not about abstract metaphysics. It is about communicating with God.

I heard an account of something recently that affected the life of a fellow pastor and deeply touched mine. In another church, during a worship service, there had been an encouragement to listen to hear what God was saying. The pastor was encouraging people to listen to Father, as they met in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ. He was asking them to be open to the Holy Spirit.

No-one spoke. But after the service one little lady seemed, to the pastor, to have something to say. She looked hesitant. But the pastor pressed her, until she acknowledged that 'yes', she did feel that God had something to say. What was it? She looked embarrassed. And then she told the pastor.

"I felt God was saying to tell you, 'I've been missing you'."



Last Sunday evening, at Bristo, we had a time of quiet during the service, waiting on God.

Afterwards, two people mentioned that they thought they might have had something to share, but were not sure. This is not unusual! For God is closer to us than we realise, seeking to touch our lives in His way. One of these people realised that what was on their heart was appropriate for sharing with someone else, rather than the whole group. The other person had a picture, which they were not sure about. When shared afterwards, there was a quite satisfactory interpretation which I am sure was a blessing. What does this teach us?

Often, people express to me their difficulty in 'hearing' from God. But this seems to me not to be a problem, but quite natural. The Spirit of God deals with us, working in our lives to shape us into the life of Christ. His manner of working with us reflects what Father sees as a healthy involvement with Jesus. He delights when we humble ourselves from within, deeply

seeking after and searching for God. He looks to inhabit and fill us in Jesus' name as the Spirit of Resurrection, to breath life into those who crave for it, searching and seeking the touch of God. He would lift us up from 'death' into living in harmony with Jesus Christ.

And this is something that is not natural for us. Many of us are able and used to pursuing our wants, our desires, our wishes. Even as those who acknowledge Jesus and love Him, we are not used to that sense of listening and sensing Father's will that characterised Jesus' life on earth. Living in harmony with God is not what sinners do naturally!

It seems to me therefore inevitable that a genuine movement of the Spirit of God in our lives causes a level of uncertainty. We don't naturally live lives attuned to God. We are more used to being driven by appetites, passions and fantasies. Identifying and obeying what God is saying is not our normal way.

On the contrary, we should be suspect of any people who claim to hear God too easily, too readily. An air of 'certainty' often disguises a fear of rejection or worse.

'Certainty' can arise from arrogance or blindness to our own sin and weakness. Over the years, I have shared many 'words of knowledge' or prophetic words and pictures which have proven to be blessed of God, yet I am never 100% sure. There is always a sense of contingency and vulnerability. I have learnt never to wholly trust myself. This is how sinners must understand their calling to be saints. God makes us vulnerable, if we are to be used by Him. There is always an uncertainty that leads to dependence and demands humility.

But there is something else too. The Spirit of God delights to work in and through a group of people, through the 'body of Christ'. Jesus called and calls people into Christian community. He taught and teaches that we must not view ourselves as simply individual believers, but as part of a body of disciples. This is why the church is described as 'the body of Christ'. It is no accident that Jesus called together a core-group of 12 disciples. We begin to grow and develop, and find confirmation and verification of what the Spirit of God is saying, through participation in such a small family of believers.

We need others to confirm what God is saying and also to validate it as being true to Christ. This is why meeting together is so important.

And we need to consult the Scriptures, the Diary of the Confessing Community as well as God's Word to us, in order to prove that the 'This' of our present lives fits with the 'That' of the lives of the first disciples, who were closest to the way and teachings of Jesus. We need to see how the Spirit of God led and taught them, looking to a God-filled future, so that the 'Then' of the coming Kingdom of God that Jesus spoke of is mirrored in the 'Now' of our present journey and pilgrimage.

When we meet together, we need to give space and opportunity for God to be God. To read and ponder the Scriptures. To allow what are, for us, sometimes deep ambiguities; and for them to challenge and change us, leading us to look deeper into Christ and to seek a fuller empowering in the Holy Spirit. To hear Him as He would lead us, in seeing how the 'This' of our present lives should be adjusted in the light of the 'That' of the early Church's triumphs and tragedies.

Those of us who are more forceful and directional, or who speak a lot, must learn to empty ourselves, at times avoid giving a lead and, if you're like me, to speak less! We need to acknowledge that God delights in manifesting Himself by His Spirit through the 'weaker parts'. To prefer one another and to allow the tentative touch of the Spirit to find expression, offered through a hesitant heart or wrapped like a pearl in a stuttered statement.

The mystery of the Trinity is revealed through the living presence of God touching our lives, calling us through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit deeper into the life of Jesus Christ, that we might know the love of Father and be caught up in His pleasure.

Let us go forward in it together!

In His love,
Jim

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ...

Matthew 28 : 19

ELECTION OF DEACONS

Our annual election of deacons is due to take place at the beginning of June. Appointment as a deacon lasts for three years with effect from the Annual General Meeting, unless foreshortened by decision of the members. Mr David Pollard, Mr Paul Watson and Mrs Lorraine Milne have each served one year of their current 3-year term. The remaining deacons, Christine Lumsden, Robert and Andrea Mill, Gill Scharer and Craig Smith, have completed their present term but are eligible for re-election.

This note outlines the responsibilities of members and deacons and sets out the procedures to be followed and the timetable for this year's election.

• Duties of Deacons

The deacons are responsible to the church for the day to day running of its affairs, seeking to guide the church as collectively we discern the Lord's

will as a congregation. They co-ordinate reports, bring recommendations to the church and implement its decisions. The deacons are also *ex officio* trustees of Bristo Baptist Church and so carry certain responsibilities under the charity laws. Above all, as the name (*diakonos*) suggests, deacons are servants of Jesus Christ and of this congregation, supporting the pastor in his spiritual leadership.

• Qualities of Deacons

We read in **Acts 6: 1-6** how the early church chose the first deacons. They were men of good report, full of faith, of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. In **1 Timothy 3:8-13** Paul advises Timothy of the qualities he should look for in deacons. They should be reverent, holding the mystery of faith with a clear conscience, tested and found blameless. In other words they should be

...they should be mature in faith, ready to listen to God and to the people they serve, seeking to encourage and care for others in service and leading lives which are honouring to God.

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• **Nominations**

Nomination for election to the office of deacon should be submitted in writing to any of the present deacons, together with the names and signatures of two referees, the candidate's express agreement having been obtained previously. Candidates, proposers and seconders members of Bristo Baptist Church. Nominations should be submitted not later than **6.30 p.m. on Sunday 13 May**. Ballot papers will be distributed

to members who participate in morning or evening worship on either **Sunday 20 or Sunday 27 May**. Arrangements will be made to issue ballot papers to the housebound or those prevented by illness from attending.

• **Procedure**

Ballot papers should be returned no later than the evening service on **Sunday 3 June**. For appointment as a deacon of Bristo Baptist Church not less than 2/3 of the total votes cast must be in the

candidate's favour. Two of the continuing deacons will act as scrutineers and Dr Purves will give private confidential intimation to the candidates before the result of the election is announced at the Annual General Meeting on **Wednesday 6 June**.

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The election of deacons is one of the most important responsibilities we have as church members and we each have a role to play. During the next few weeks may we all prayerfully consider the following questions:

Is God calling me to this task?

Whom has the Lord laid on my heart to nominate for this service?

Let us all in humility draw near to God and seek His will as together we go forward in the power of the Holy Spirit that we may *through love serve one another*. (**Galatians 5: 13**)

Christine Lumsden

TREASURER'S REPORT: MARCH 2007

It's getting close to the end of the financial year. This is quite a busy time, making sure all mission fund money is spent and making sure all funds due to the church are collected before the critical 31st March. Almost as important as this is making sure that I've remembered all of the correct passwords to complete the end of year returns. Here is a summary of the position of the church finances as at the end of February.

General Income	Budgeted Income to date	Income to date	Surplus to date
Church Offerings	34650	35399	749

Special Income	Budget	Giving to date	Shortfall (to date)
Designated offerings	2550	774	1776
Thankoffering & Mission	3500	1158	2342
	6050	1932	4118

The table overpage summarises our expenditure so far this year. Refurbishment expenditure and Repairs to the church buildings are both significantly above budget. There are also extensive repairs to be made to the manse, the final costs for these repairs are still to be confirmed. Expenditure over budget will probably be met from the Fabric fund.

Expenditure	Esti- mated	Actual	Expected to date	% to date	Expected total
Employment	32500	22931	24375.00	94.08	25015.64
Supply	1000	350	750.00	46.67	381.82
Energy	6200	3430	4650.00	73.76	3741.82
Insurance	2880	2955.8	2160.00	136.84	3224.51
Refurbishment	1000	5371.11	750.00	716.15	5859.39
Furniture & Equipment	2300	323.85	1725.00	18.77	353.29
Repairs	3000	13503.82	2250.00	600.17	15000.00
Tuning	150	142	142.00	100.00	142.00
Council Tax	2600	2260	1950.00	115.90	2054.55
Repairs to Manses	2000	0	1500.00	0.00	
Phone	800	877.19	600.00	146.20	956.93
Office	500	113.97	375.00	30.39	124.33
Subscriptions	800	352.63	600.00	58.77	384.69
Children & YP	650	542.84	487.50	111.35	592.19
Outreach / Publicity	1200	478.32	900.00	53.15	521.80
Literature & Copyright	500	137.88	375.00	36.77	150.41
Care Van	100	115	75.00	152.88	125.08
Fellowship	500	300	375.00	80.00	327.27
Sundries	1000	852.89	750.00	113.72	930.43
Total Expenses	59680	55038	44760.00	122.96	60041.41

Paul Watson

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE HOLY TRINITY

Before I came to faith I was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, popularly known as the Mormon Church. Like many other religious groups claiming the exclusive privilege of infallible revelation, Latter Day Saints deny the doctrine of the Trinity as understood in the historic confessions and creeds which have sought to summarise the Bible's teaching. To Latter Day Saints, the doctrine is self-contradictory, irrational and contrary to Scripture. In my struggle to break free from what I came to regard as a cult to find the true and living God, the Trinity was a stumbling block, one of many due to having worn the Mormon glasses with which I had become used to evaluating other beliefs.

I did not realise until further investigation that the Trinitarian concept I had rejected as a Mormon was in fact a straw man. The Mormon Church misrepresents the doctrine by claiming falsely that the Trinitarian belief that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God means the same as saying that they are

one *person*. Having made this basic error they then point out the absurdity of Jesus praying to himself, when a normal reading of the gospels would show that the Father is not the same person. However, the Mormon distortion is not the historic Christian faith, which recognises that Father, Son and Spirit are distinct persons. The Latter Day Saint's case against Trinitarian theology breaks down, then, in at least this one point. Having misunderstood the real meaning of Trinitarianism, then, does this mean that Mormons are Trinitarian without realising it?

Not really. There is more to the true concept of Trinity than the simple recognition that there is a divine Person, the Father, another divine Person, the Son, and yet another, the Spirit. The Mormon concept of God is that of a divine man, a superman if you like, with the physical body of a glorified man. Jesus, as the resurrected Lord, is a duplicate of this, while the Holy Spirit lacks a physical body but nevertheless has human form. It would take too long to go into the

reasons given for such beliefs and would not be relevant to the present article, which is testifying to the way I was led to an understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God, suggesting why this makes most sense. The main point I wish to make in presenting the Mormon concept of God is that it is not truly Trinitarian, but tritheistic, that is to say, a belief in three separate gods. (Mormons are in fact polytheists, since they believe that there are an infinite number of gods and potential gods, as human beings can become gods - and goddesses. They worship their version of the Biblical God since they believe that he is the creator and lord of our particular universe, and so our responsibility is to him and not the unknown gods of other universes.)

I came to realise in my journey to and in faith that the Bible is consistent in its witness to one, not three (and far less many!) Gods, yet we learn that Jesus is presented in the New Testament as truly man, yet more than man, One to whom the nature and attributes of God, including eternity, are ascribed, and to whom every knee shall bow and

every tongue confess as Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). Here Jesus is given the honour received in the Old Testament only by God Himself in Isaiah 45: 23, while the Old Testament acknowledges one Lord which we should worship and obey (Deut. 6: 4-5). Is Paul saying that Jesus is Himself that Lord? So we meet in Scripture at least one Person other than the Father who is God, the One who in John's gospel was not only *with* God, but *was* God. Likewise, the Holy Spirit is said to have the attributes of personality (we are warned not to grieve Him, and you do not grieve an impersonal force), and divine attributes, such as the omniscience seen in His searching out the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10). Besides, blasphemy is a sin which can only be directed against God, yet blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a terrible possibility, according to Jesus.

All of this leads to the conclusion that the doctrine of the Trinity is a reasonable inference from Biblical revelation, not some irrational man-made mystification, as some have alleged. If Father, Son and Holy Spirit are each said to have

attributes which by definition only God can have, then not only the Father, but the Son and the Holy Spirit also, must be God. This is confirmed by the fact that the work of creation and redemption is ascribed in different places to all three. Yet God alone is the Creator and Saviour of man. God must therefore be not a single personality, as He would be if He were only the Father, but three-in-one. Baptism in the one name (not names, notice!) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit confirms this (Matt. 28: 19).

All of these considerations are just a sample of what may be found in any standard textbook defence of Trinitarian doctrine. Coming away from a Mormon concept of three gods, even in the light of these considerations, was nevertheless still difficult. Although I could now see that Christians were not guilty of the nonsense of teaching that God was one Person pretending to be three, as Mormonism alleged that they did, I still had the

impression, listening to Christian friends, that they held to some deeper mysterious concept of the nature of God as trinity which was just as irrational and needlessly obscure. I still tended to the view that the image of God in which man was created was a physical one, and that would mean that to be a divine Person was to have a distinct bodily identity. But now at least I was prepared to consider that this was not true of the Spirit, who was said to indwell the body of true believers and could hardly be thought of having

I came to see that if the Holy Spirit could be considered a Person without the attribution of bodily human likeness, and, as Jesus said, God was Spirit ...

a personal localised human shape. If a true understanding of trinity would seem to mean that the three Persons were *distinct*, but not *separate*, as I was now being told, what was the difference between these terms?

I came to see that if the Holy Spirit could be considered a Person without the attribution of bodily human likeness, and, as Jesus said, God was Spirit, I was free to reconsider whether all the anthropomorphic language in the

Bible about God's arm, hands and feet should have to be taken literally. After all, if the Father is said to be essentially invisible, so that the Word had to take the finite form of humanity to make him comprehensible, this suggested rather that the Father was not confined to human dimensions or naturally comprehensible to the creaturely limitations of the human mind. Also, if Spirit is not subject to the limitations of physical laws, perhaps there was also room enough for mystery that transcends human thought, even for an inconceivable intimacy of divine fellowship in which the Father and the Son not only exist alongside one another but also "in" one another. "I am in the Father and the Father in me." It may be more true to consider, as some theologians came to do as they meditated on the implications of the nature of God, that each Person has all of God because of this interpenetration of Persons in the one Being of God, than that each Person contains one third of God. This was also based on the view that God's "substance" was pure, simple and indivisible. Even if we suspected that this last view was a

product of human philosophical speculation, should it be ruled out as irrational or impossible? If in the created realm scientists have had to reckon with such paradoxes as the nature of light somehow simultaneously existing as waves *and* particles, even though we cannot conceive or imagine how this can be, why should we naively assume that the ultimate Mystery of the transcendent God be reducible without remainder to our tidy manageable human concepts?

However, refining concepts and indulging speculation is one thing. True spiritual understanding is another. It is only as we humble our hearts and bow our wills to journey in fellowship with the triune God in the time-bound reality He has chosen to enter for fellowship with us that we can learn to discern Him in faith, hope and love, and in the fellowship of the human community He has chosen to place His name and reflect His glory.

Brian Barclay

COMING EVENTS

Easter Play West Princes Street Gardens, Saturday 7 April, 2.30-5 p.m. For more details visit: www.easterplay.org/

Easter Day 2007 (8th April)

This Easter, we will celebrate Easter as a congregation and as part of the whole body of Christ. There will an opportunity to gather in the morning before our 11.00am Celebration for a short Easter Communion followed by breakfast (not lunch this time!). In the evening, we will have a chance to gather with thousands of others to praise the Risen One!

Early Communion @ 8.30am
Church B'fast @ 9.00am
11.00am Bristo Easter Celebration

On Easter evening, I encourage you all to join with thousands of Christians from across central Scotland at the following event:

Resurrection 07 Highland Hall, Ingliston, Easter Sunday 8 April, 7.30 p.m. "Reclaim Easter from the bunny" and celebrate the Resurrection with thousands of others. There will be worship, bible readings and a speaker, as well as an exhibition (from 6 p.m.) of Christian agencies operating in Scotland. Tickets free but must be obtained in advance from Wesley Owen, got online (link through the Bristo website) or from the pastor.

Please support this ambitious event and order your tickets now!

HELP NEEDED WITH MAGAZINE

The Bristo Magazine requires a new production editor from June 2007. If you have suitable IT skills and feel led to help the fellowship in this way then please speak to any of the existing team (Robert and Andrea Mill, David Polland) at one of the services.

Service Times

Sunday

Morning Celebration (including Junior Church) 11.00 a.m.
 Evening Celebration 6.30 p.m.

Tuesday / Wednesday / Thursday

Cell Groups (refer to weekly sheet for times / locations)

Monday

Prayer Meeting 10.00 a.m.
 International Soup 12 noon
 Badminton Club 6pm - 10pm

Tuesday

Home from Home 1.00 p.m.

Friday

IT Youth Club 7.30 p.m.

Saturday

Morning of Prayer 9.30 a.m.

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