

A Pastoral Response to Declining Churches
Within a Scottish Baptist Context

Gordon Ballantyne

Dissertation submitted in Partial Fulfilment of BD
Degree

University of Paisley

2006

Used with Permission

Abstract

The Church in the UK has been in decline since the beginning of the 20th century and since the 1960s that decline has accelerated prompting numerous research projects into both the causes and the proposed answers to reverse such decline.

Such research has been predominantly sociological and missiological, and useful as they may be, they fail to take into consideration the actual experience of being in a church in decline. This paper seeks to fill that gap by providing a pastoral response to decline without neglecting the sociological and missiological factors which have contributed to the decline.

I have had the privilege of visiting a broad section of Baptist churches in Scotland, some growing to such a degree that they are recruiting new staff and looking for bigger premises, yet others struggling and threatened with closure. It is to the latter that this paper aims to focus, of faithful members who have witnessed their church fall into decline over the years and eventually close. It is an attempt to tell their story, to listen to their experience, in the hope that ministers and members of churches facing decline and possible closure may not see it as failure but as another step on their journey of faith in which they discover something new of the mystery-encountering God.

Introduction

Steve Bruce predicts that, ‘Three decades from now, Christianity in Britain will have largely disappeared ... Britain in 2030 will be a secular society’.¹ By his own admission his conclusions are determined by current trends based on the present state of organised religion in Britain, and although it could be argued that the future can never be assumed from the past, it is difficult to disagree with such conclusions.

Given this broad picture of continuing church decline this paper will seek to develop a pastoral response to decline in a specific denominational context of Scottish Baptist churches. If decline is only a peripheral issue borne more out of popular perception than the reality suggests then it does not warrant a pastoral response. However if it is real and tangible then it does indeed demand pastoral attention so to this end the first section will examine current statistics to gauge the present state of Baptist churches in Scotland in order to determine the extent of such decline.

Although pastoral care essentially deals with people where they are it cannot ignore the circumstances that brought them to their current position since the immediate past may offer some clues in seeking to move towards a brighter future. So in terms of pastoral care of churches in decline the second section will examine the contributory factors that led to the decline. It will endeavour to achieve this by examining the latest academic research on decline, as well as denominational studies that consider decline in Scottish Baptist churches, and most significantly, the input of a series of interviews from former members of churches that had closed or experienced serious decline.

Pastoral care ultimately seeks to minister to people so the third section will analyse the particular needs of people in a church decline situation again drawing heavily on personal interviews. The experience of church decline and closure parallels that of physical loss so parallels from *thanatology*, the study of death and dying, will be drawn to understand as fully as possible what it means to go through the process of church decline and closure.

¹ Steve Bruce ‘The Demise of Christianity in Britain’ in Davie, G., Heelas, P., and Woodhead, L., (eds) *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003), 61, 62.

The final section will draw on the previous two sections on the causes and experience of decline to move towards the actual pastoral response. This response will be in relation to a church seeking to reverse past decline as well as that of closure where there is no prospect of recovery. With respect to the latter the pastoral care delivered will endeavour to preserve hope which lies central to the Christian message and discover a sense of meaning leading to a deeper understanding of God and themselves throughout the whole process.

Chapter 1 The Context of Decline

Decline is not as easy to define as may immediately appear to be the case despite the fact that on average three churches a week close in the UK.² Christian Schwarz conducted one of the most extensive research programmes into church growth yet he recognised that quantitative growth in a church does not necessarily translate into qualitative growth so therefore it's possible for a church to be declining numerically yet remain strong spiritually.³

For the purposes of this paper decline will be considered in terms of numerical decline both in terms of attendance and membership. National statistics focus more on attendance whereas denominational statistics reveal details of membership.

This decline will first of all be considered in its broadest context in terms of the UK before moving on to its particular Scottish and Baptist context in order to clarify the exact state of decline in order to lay the foundation for developing a pastoral response.

a. Church Decline in the UK

The 2001 UK census revealed that 72% of the population described themselves as christian.⁴ This figure obviously takes 'christian' in its broadest sense, including those who neither actively practice nor even attend church but yet who sense some form of affiliation to the christian community. Compared to other recent surveys this appears to be high. The 2002 British Social Attitudes survey indicated 54% 'christian' affiliation and the 2000 *Soul of Britain* survey by the BBC revealed 42% affiliation to a christian denomination.⁵ Peter Brierley points out the 1990 Home Office figures for the prison population revealed that 72% of inmates professed to be 'christian', so although not a great advert for the Church it does perhaps more accurately reflect the degree of commitment of those who attach themselves in some shape or form to a christian heritage.⁶

² Peter Brierley (ed.) *UK Christian Handbook Religious Trends No. 5 – 2005/2006* (London: Christian Research, 2005), 12.13.

³ Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Handbook: A Practical Guide to a New Approach* (Moggerhanger, Beds: British Church Growth Association, 1996), 20.

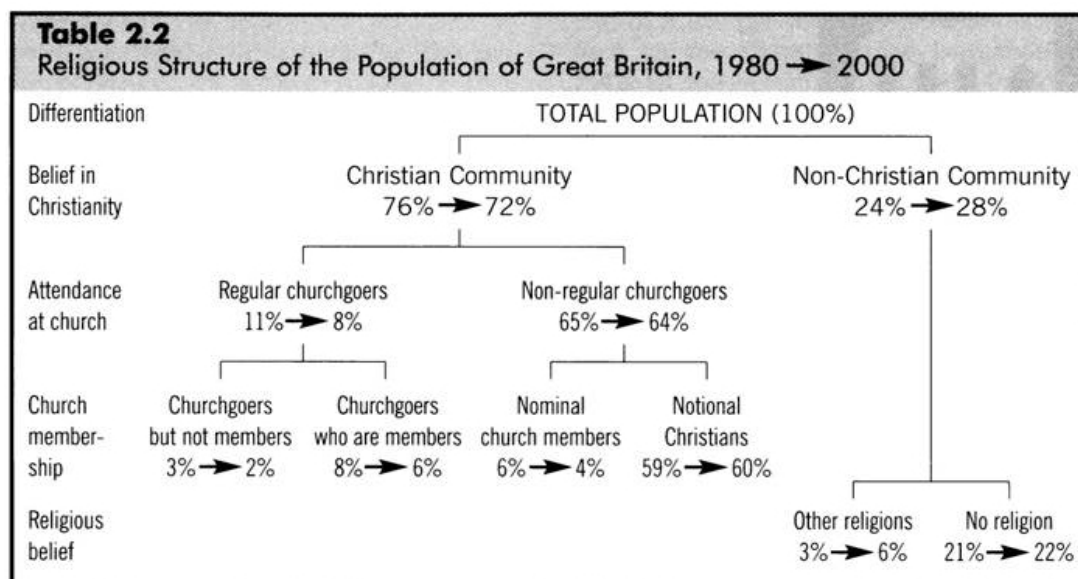
⁴ Brierley, *Religious Trends*, 2.3.

⁵ Jonathan Petre, *Survey Charts the Soul of Britain*,

(<http://news.telegraph.co.uk/htmlContent.jhtml?html=/archive/2000/05/28/nbelif28.html>, 19.10.05).

⁶ Brierley, *Religious Trends*, 2.2.

Table 2.2 in Religious Trends (below) displays the breakdown between nominal and active Christianity, showing a deep disparity between the 72% who profess to be christian and the 8% who regularly attend church.⁷



Numerically this 8% amounts to approximately 4.4m of the UK population, which may appear healthy, as what other voluntary organisation has a weekly attendance of over four million? However as Table 2.23.1 indicates this registers a decline of 1 million from the previous records 10 years ago.⁸

Table 2.23.1
Total UK Church Statistics

Year	Membership		Churches	Ministers	Sunday attendance	
	Total in UK	% of pop			Total in GB	% of pop
1990	6,634,335	11.5	49,321 ²	35,558 ²	5,369,770	9.6
1995	6,303,726	10.8	48,999 ²	35,074 ²	4,794,850	8.5
2000	5,913,572	10.0	48,250	34,537	4,379,880	7.6
2001	5,862,651	9.9	48,420	34,546	4,315,040 ¹	7.3
2002	5,766,614	9.7	48,165	34,144	4,224,220 ¹	7.1
2003	5,700,628	9.6	47,973	34,576	4,133,400 ¹	6.9
2005	5,634,324	9.4	47,635	34,449	3,976,060	6.8
2010	5,190,471	8.6	46,735	33,457	3,528,710	6.0
2020	4,559,551	7.2	43,890	31,639	2,683,950	4.4

⁷ Brierley, *Religious Trends*, 2.2.

⁸ Brierley, *Religious Trends*, 2.23

Perhaps haemorrhage may be too strong a word to use but nationally the picture is one of serious decline. It is also worth noting that churches are not closing at the same rate of declining membership thus leading to proportionally smaller congregations.⁹

b. Church Decline in Scotland

The UK statistics are useful as a broad background but given that the geographical focus of the paper is on Scotland then a closer examination of the Scottish church is required. In the past 20 years there have been three major church census' undertaken in Scotland, namely in 1984, 1994 and 2002. The results of these have been collated and published in *Turning the Tide*, the report detailing the findings.¹⁰ The salient points from the report were:

- 11.2% of the population attend church on Sunday (this is more than double the number that attend football matches!)
- Congregations are getting smaller, i.e. as with the UK churches in Scotland are not closing at the same rate of declining numbers attending. There are still over 4000 active churches across Scotland
- A third of all Scottish churches have 50 or fewer attending on Sunday
- The proportion of men in the church has increased from 37% in 1984 to 40% in 2002 though this is mainly due to women leaving the church at a faster rate than men
- The average age of a church attender is 47, compared to the population (Scotland) average of 39. Baptists have the lowest average age of 41, the Church of Scotland the highest at 51
- The rate of decline has been slower in suburban and city centre churches.¹¹

⁹ Brierley, *Religious Trends*, 12.13.1.

¹⁰ Peter Brierley, *Turning the Tide: The Challenge Ahead – Report of the 2002 Scottish Church Census* (London: Christian Research, 2003).

¹¹ Brierley, *Turning the Tide*, 31, 61, 75.

An accurate picture of churchgoing trends over the past 20 years in Scotland can be gleaned from the Brierley report. Table 2.1 lists the changes in denominational membership.¹²

Table 2.1: Churchgoers by denomination, 1984–2002

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>1984</i>	<i>% change</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>% change</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>% of total 2002</i>
Church of Scotland	361,340	-19	293,170	-22	228,500	40
Roman Catholic	345,950	-28	249,720	-19	202,110	35
Independent	39,370	+22	48,020	-6	45,010	8
Smaller denominations	29,120	+5	30,500	-11	28,640	5
Baptist	29,240	-16	24,530	+1	24,830	5
Other Presbyterian	28,680	-19	23,310	-5	22,170	4
Episcopal	20,000	+2	20,350	-7	18,870	3
Total All Scotland	853,700	-19	691,120	-18	570,130	100

The major denominations have witnessed the most rapid decline, recognised by the Church of Scotland as it attempted to reshape its life and ministry with the commissioning of the “Church Without Walls” report in 2001. The report acknowledges that,

The context is now overtly missionary with the collapse of the Christendom canopy. Pastoral presence, creative communication, and patient persuasion require a more proactive role for the Church of Scotland in the 21st century.¹³

The only exception to this rapid decline were the Baptists who after a 16% decline between 1984 and 1994 witnessed a marginal increase of 1% in the next eight years.¹⁴ This increase however as will be demonstrated is not a true reflection on what is happening in the majority of Scottish Baptist churches.

¹² Brierley, *Turning the Tide*, 16.

¹³ *Church Without Walls: The Report of the Special Commission on Renew and Reform*, 11. (www.churchwithoutwalls.org.uk, 19.10.05).

¹⁴ These figures group together all Baptist congregations in Scotland, those affiliated to the Baptist Union of Scotland, as well as Grace Baptist churches and Independent Baptist churches.

c. Church Decline among Scottish Baptists

Brierley's figures of a 2% increase in attendance at Scottish Baptist churches may signal a more optimistic future however these figures have to be taken alongside the denominational membership returns which reflect steady decline. Darrel Jackson, the former Mission Advisor to the Baptist Union of Great Britain, attributes this to a wider social disengagement of institutions leading to fewer committing to membership though whether Baptist churches would be considered to be part of the institution of the Church is open to question.¹⁵

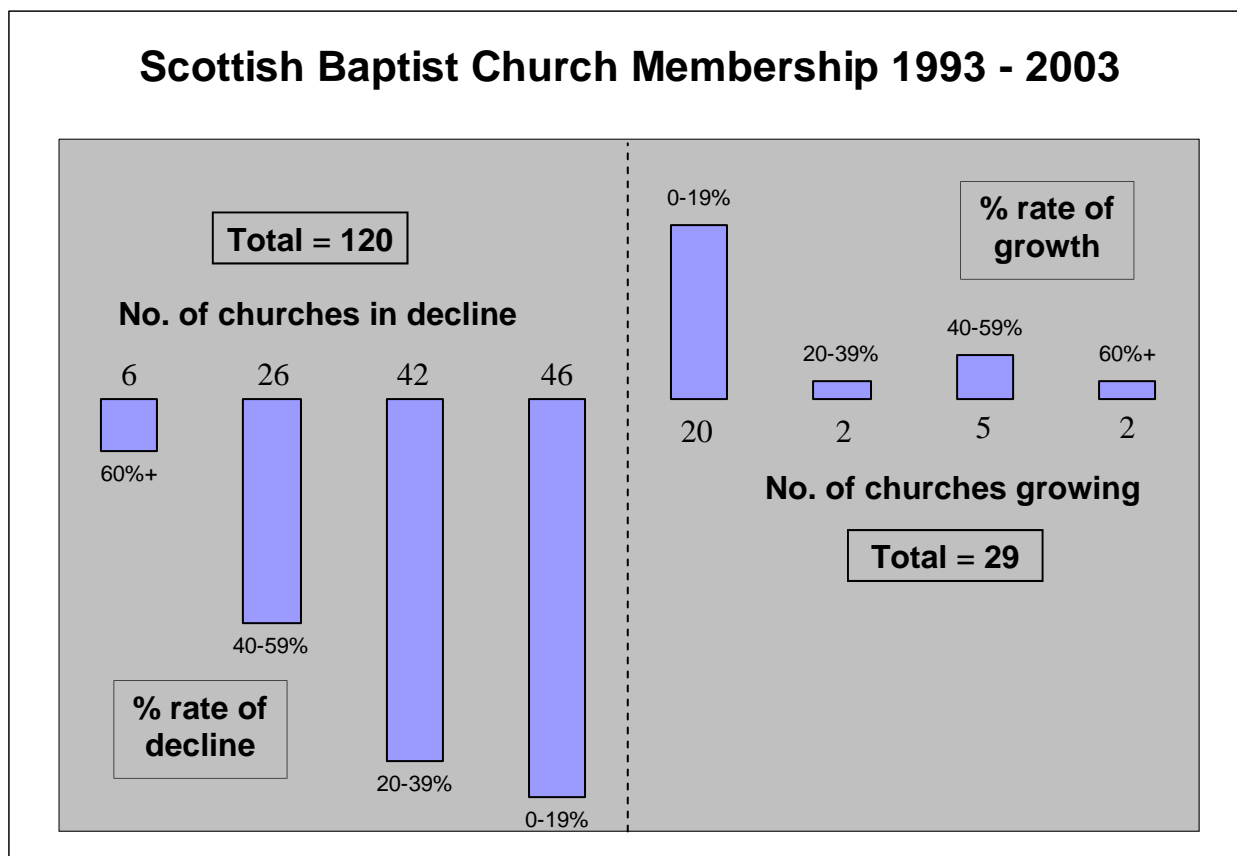
The disparity between attendance and membership may also lend weight to Grace Davie's 'Believing without Belonging' research though her study is based on wider residual belief in the midst of a populace increasingly ambivalent to organised religion.¹⁶ Jackson recognises that one of the consequences of the growing gap between attendance and membership is a weakening of Baptist identity. This is undoubtedly true given the strong focus of Baptist churches as autonomous gathered communities with shared accountability.

Membership figures reflect the underlying strength of the denomination. The total membership of Scottish Baptist churches reveals only a 3.7% drop between 1993 and 2003 however when comparing the changes in membership for individual churches over that period the results are more illuminating as indicated in Graph 1.¹⁷

¹⁵ Darrel Jackson, *Does the Future have a Denomination: Sustaining Baptist Communities in an Age of Insecurity*, (www.rpc.ox.ac.uk/theology-in-context/papershtml/jackson-d2001.htm, 22.10.05).

¹⁶ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

¹⁷ 1993: 14,589 2003: 14,042 from *Scottish Baptist Yearbooks 1994 & 2004* (Glasgow: Baptist Union of Scotland)



Graph 1

The changes in membership over the 10 year period reveal that 120 churches had declined against 29 which had grown. During the same period 12 churches had closed and 12 new churches had been established. Some of the closed churches had merged to form new churches and some of the new churches had been extension churches from larger churches so there has to be some qualification in reading the figures. Nonetheless the following points should be noted:

- When considering the overall membership figures the numerical growth in a handful of larger churches, e.g. Newton Mearns (grown by 89) Queen's Park (77), Perth (61) mask the level of decline in the small to medium sized churches
- The number of churches has actually increased, 169 in 1993 to 176 in 2003. This has led to a growth in smaller congregations, confirming Brierley's findings for the wider church as noted earlier. In 1993 only 38 churches had a membership of below 50, by 2003 this had risen to 75, 43% of all Baptist churches in Scotland. This clearly has an impact on the church's ability to sustain full-time ministry perhaps reflected in the fact that in 1993 33 churches were vacant rising to 40 in 2003.

Conclusion

Taking both Brierley's attendance figures and the BUS's membership figures what conclusions can be drawn?¹⁸ Obviously, membership details only reflect a partial picture and should not be completely relied on, however, these along with other recent denominational studies concur that the pattern is one of decline.¹⁹ Recently published figures for 2005 reflect continuing decline so therefore in the face of such decline a pastoral response is required.²⁰ The remainder of the paper will move towards developing a pastoral response to this decline first of all by examining the root causes, both theoretically and as perceived by those in the churches themselves.

¹⁸ BUS, Baptist Union of Scotland.

¹⁹ Two studies worthy of noting are David Hunt, *Reflecting on our Past: A Statistical Look at Baptists in Scotland 1892 – 1997* (Unpublished Sabbatical Report, 1997) and William Clark, *An Examination of the Causes of Decline in 25 Scottish Baptist Churches 1960 - 95* (Unpublished Sabbatical Report, 1997).

²⁰ 2005 BUS Statistics: Total membership – 13,769. This reveals a 2% decrease from 2003 (14,042).

Chapter 2 The Causes of Decline

Now that the context of decline has been surveyed and the reality of such decline established, this section will seek to move towards a pastoral response by first examining the causes of decline. A clear understanding of the causes is imperative since an effective pastoral response has to take into consideration not only the present state of the church but how it arrived at such a situation.

In order to achieve this, current academic research and denominational studies will be considered in dialogue with interview responses from members of Baptist churches that had either closed or experienced serious decline. A set of questions were used in the course of the interviews though these were not rigorously adhered to in order that the respondents had as much freedom as possible to fully express their own experience of decline.²¹ Five churches were selected, from three regions of Scotland, three of the churches were in urban locations and the other two in a rural setting. Fifteen people were interviewed, both individually and collectively, the purpose of which was not to provide quantitative research, i.e. hard analytical data based on statistical responses but to be qualitative in being as representative as possible. The most significant areas with respect to the causes of decline were the age of the congregation, displacement, the erosion of denominational loyalty, ineffective growth strategies and movement to other churches.

1. Mortality / Age Profile.

One significant factor is the age profile of the church. Peter Brierley notes that over the next 15 years, if current trends continue then the main reason for the drop in UK church membership from 5.6m today to an expected 4.6m will be due to mortality.²² Although Baptist churches in general have a more favourable average age of 41 compared to the established churches, this can vary with different congregations, and the statistics reveal a drift upwards in terms of the age profile. In 2001, 182 members of the Baptist Union of Scotland died, in 2002 it was 204 and in 2003 it had grown to 210, i.e. a proportionally increasing mortality rate.²³ To stand still they have to begin by replacing those who have died.

²¹ See Appendix 1 for the list of interview questions.

²² Brierley, *Religious Trends*, 2.23.

²³ *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook 2004* (Glasgow: Baptist Union of Scotland, 2004), 51.

Interviews

All of the churches questioned indicated a higher than average age profile, usually into retirement age. Responses such as ‘*We used to have a lot of children and young people*’ were not uncommon and carried a degree of personal sadness when some of the children in question had been related to current members.²⁴ Younger people did visit the churches concerned, some even became actively involved however it became increasingly difficult for them to remain when they could find more friends of their own age in other churches. The young people that were present in the churches were invariably involved in work among their own age group, one church recognised the dependence upon them and the problems when they were not available.

*The youth club was run by both X and Y, however they both had to take time off for personal reasons at the same time and as there was no-one to replace them the club had to stop. They were doing a great job with the young people, sadly it never got off the ground again.*²⁵

This challenge in retaining children and young people became exacerbated where young parents faced the challenge of remaining in an ageing congregation with limited activities for their children or moving to a larger church in the locality where there was a more polished children’s programme. The Small Churches’ report produced by the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 2005 recognised this problem of both retaining and attracting young families and children,

Where children and young people are concerned, a ‘critical mass’ numerically is the key. If a church has a vibrant work among children or teenagers, it will in all likelihood be able to attract even more. However, once the church has only a handful of young people, only the very faithful (almost certainly children of church members) are likely to stay.²⁶

With the churches in question having moved beyond this ‘critical mass’ the age profile continued to increase and the integration of younger people became increasingly unlikely.

²⁴ Interview conducted on 19.01.06.

²⁵ Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

²⁶ *Small Churches Report: Report to Council March 2005* (Baptist Union of Great Britain) (www.baptist.org.uk/Resources/downloads.asp#SmallChurchesReport, 17.02.06), 17.

2. Population / Congregational Displacement

Another contrutory factor to church decline is congregational displacement. It can be argued that Baptist churches which developed in the 19th and early 20th centuries around the industrial heartlands suffered as a result of the rundown of such traditional industries, e.g. mining, steel and fishing, towards the end of the 20th century. William Slack, the General Director of the Baptist Union of Scotland, in a paper presented to the Baptist Union of Scotland Council in 2003 highlighted the closure of the Lanarkshire steel works in the demise of the surrounding churches of Motherwell, Wishaw and Uddingston, and the rundown of the shipbuilding industries on the Clyde affecting the churches in Port Glasgow, Greenock, Gourock and Govan.²⁷

Although this is no doubt a contributing factor, it is dependant of course on congregations being populated with people employed in such industries. Other large scale closures, e.g. the Linwood Car Plant in 1982 with the loss of 5000 jobs, did not have the same impact on churches in Renfrewshire, due to the fact that production line industries were predominantly serviced by manual workers whose skills would be able to be used locally rather than seeking similar employment in a different part of the country.

A more pertinent reason for population displacement in relation to church decline has been housing rather than employment based movement. Slack notes the demise of city centre Baptist churches, e.g. Dennistoun in Glasgow (from 400 to 30 today), due to the development of new towns and housing developments in the 1960s and 70s, such as Cumbernauld, East Kilbride and Livingston.²⁸ Those who remained within historic city centre churches increasingly found themselves in archaic buildings with dwindling congregations for whom maintenance and survival became dominant issues.

²⁷ William Slack, *Why Some Churches Fail and Close* (Unpublished Report to Baptist Union Council, 2003), 1.

²⁸ Slack, *Why Some Churches Fail and Close* (2003), 2.

Interviews

Three of the churches in the interviews were urban churches largely composed of members that lived within the vicinity of the church but in the 1970s and 80s a number of the congregation moved away from the immediate locality though continued to attend the church.²⁹ The main reason for this migration was higher living standards and the opportunity to move into more desirable housing.

People slowly moved away from around the church to the new houses being built. In many ways you can't blame them, they were just doing what was best for their families³⁰

The impact of this was that over a period of time the church became unrepresentative of the local community in which it was based. It also led to the development of a more mobile congregation, a phenomenon which Martin Robinson highlights,

It has always been possible to choose from a number of churches in the city, but ... even in rural areas mobility is an increasing factor which means that people do not have to think too hard before deciding to worship outside of their immediate community.³¹

This was borne out not only by the respondents in the urban churches who spoke of former members attending high profile city churches but even in rural churches where former members living close to their original church travelled fifty miles every Sunday to attend the church of their choosing.³²

²⁹ Interviews conducted on 14.01.06 and 07.02.06.

³⁰ Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

³¹ Martin Robinson and Dan Yarnell, *Celebrating the Small Church* (Turnbridge Wells: Monarch, 1993), 38.

³² Interview conducted on 03.02.06.

3. Erosion of Denomination Loyalty

Another significant factor contributing to church decline is the the erosion of denominational loyalty which Gibbs describes as a diminishing translation of attendance into membership.³³ Nigel Wright, former President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, highlights the demise of traditional Baptists, he writes of congregations,

...peopled by members from outside their own denomination. Indeed in the great majority of Baptist churches in the UK ... you are hard put ... to find more than a handful who would describe themselves as 'cradle' or 'pedigree' Baptists³⁴

Although this no doubt can lead to Baptists moving to other denominations it could have the reverse effect, which is the point that Wright was making. The author was present at a 'Newcomers Evening' of a Baptist church in which there were former Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists, as well as Baptists who had moved into the area. This is only likely to be the case in 'successful' churches that attract adherents from other churches, members of other denominations are unlikely to flock to struggling Baptist churches. The erosion of denominational loyalty will simply make it easier for Baptists to move on to other more successful churches, whether Baptist or otherwise.

Interviews

The assertion that members of other denominations did not settle in declining churches was borne out in the interviews. The churches in question were visited by those of other traditions but they did not remain for any length of time. One church noted that the lack of a Baptist pedigree contributed to them losing potentially valuable members of the congregation,

*A family moved into our community and came to visit us on a few occasions. The father had been actively involved in another Baptist church, in preaching and leadership, so we looked forward to their becoming an active part of our fellowship, especially the children who provided a welcome boost to our Sunday School. However they left us a few weeks later and began attending another church, which is not a Baptist church, but has more attending and has a bigger Sunday School. We all felt disappointed and let down.*³⁵

So it appears that for smaller churches the erosion of denominational loyalty is a double-edged sword, both by being unable to attract those from other traditions and losing potential members to other churches.

³³ Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Leicester: IVP, 2001), 18.

³⁴ Nigel Wright, *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), 47.

³⁵ Interview conducted on 10.02.06.

4. Changing Work/Life Patterns

An a wider sociological level, the changes in working/life patterns have had a marked impact of church attendance and subsequent decline. One of the most significant areas has been the changing role of women as this conflicted with traditional conservative expectations of women which prevailed longer in evangelical churches than in the wider society.

a. Women.

Callum Brown in his survey of the decline of christian influence in modern Britain states that one of the major contributory factors has been the 'depietisation of women', the changing roles and expectations of women especially since the 1960s, which emerged with the decreasing influence of the Church for women to conform to traditional roles in society.

The greatest impact of the dechristianisation of British morality has been upon women. The residue of Christian female piety, which by the late 1940s and 1950s had been deposited in the extremely vigorous representation of the respectable wife, mother and young girl, was washed away in the cultural revolution of the 1960s. British women secularised the construction of their identity, and the churches started to lose them.³⁶

The net result of this exodus of women from churches was that the men followed due to their deference to the religiosity of their wives and mothers. Brown uses confirmation figures from the established churches to support his theory so although it may be true in terms of the national picture it may not have had the same effect within the Baptist community.

b. Marriage/Divorce.

As with the changing expectations of women so the more liberal attitudes to marriage and divorce created tension with traditional values which were dominant in evangelical church cultures. Single parent families now lie at the very heart of the fabric of modern life. 'Family-friendly' Baptist churches attract traditional nuclear families, those who lie outwith the conventional family structure are not deliberately excluded, but just find it difficult to be accepted in the same way as those who conform to the traditional model.

³⁶ Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2001), 192. Brown has written a more recent reflection on the religious life on Britain in the 20th century in his forthcoming *Religion and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* to be published in June 2006.

Brierley in *Religious Trends* notes that only 1% of church-goers are in a co-habiting relationship, compared to the national average of 13%.³⁷ The rise in lone parenting with shared access to children, usually at weekends, has also made it more difficult for children to attend church, which in a Baptist context has had an impact on their growth given that, historically children's work has been a major area for new growth for Scottish Baptists.³⁸ Now with that ready pool of children no longer available, Baptists have suffered in attempting to come to terms with the empty Sunday Schools that no longer offer avenues for growth.

c. Work/Leisure Patterns

The changes in working patterns also proved a hurdle for churches to come to terms with the advent of seven day a week shopping and leisure activities. The 11.00am and 6.30pm Sunday services (still common in many Baptist churches) were designed around the needs of the 18th century farmer, not the 21st century consumer, so it's hardly surprising that evening services especially struggle in terms of numbers. Roman Catholic churches have long offered services on Saturday evening and nowadays non-Sunday services are beginning to appear across other denominations. Michael Moynagh points to Anglican churches that hold services on Saturdays and Mondays as well as different approaches to Sunday worship such as the Salvation Army holding a Sunday School in a supermarket!³⁹

Interviews

The high age profile of the churches interviewed meant that working patterns and employment relocation issues did not come into play however for the rural churches there was the ever-present reality of losing any young people they may have had to pursue higher education or employment outwith the local district.⁴⁰ The declining numbers, with the resultant proportional increase in the female congregational representation, predominantly older, had the effect of churches being forced to confront issues relating to the roles of women in ministry. One church in particular welcomed the input of the first female to be appointed to a leadership position in the church.⁴¹ Had the church not been in decline and there were an abundance of male members then it would have been unlikely that this woman would have found herself with such responsibility.

³⁷ Brierley, *Religious Trends*, 4.9. The national family composition statistics project a decrease from 62% to 49% for marriage and an increase from 25% to 33% for lone-parent families between 2001 to 2010.

³⁸ David W. Bebbington, *The Baptists in Scotland: A History* (Glasgow: Baptist Union of Scotland, 1988), 71.

³⁹ Michael Moynagh, *Changing World, Changing Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2001), 93, 128.

⁴⁰ Interviews conducted on 23.01.06 and 25.02.06.

⁴¹ Interviews conducted 19.01.06 and 03.02.06.

4. Ineffective Mission Strategies

The Church has always been one generation from extinction and so ineffective growth strategies become a major factor in decline. Scottish Baptists, it could be argued, are not only conservative in their theology but also in their resistance to change, e.g. traditional forms of worship remaining unchanged in many churches. This conservatism extends not only to worship but mission in terms of strategies employed to arrest decline. Towards the beginning and middle of the 20th century, as Bebbington notes, external growth in Scottish Baptist churches predominantly happened through children's ministry, evangelistic missions and door-to-door visitation.⁴² These produced significant results at times, e.g. Billy Graham campaign in 1956. However what 'worked' then proved ineffective in a radically changed post-modern society. William Clark highlights ineffective mission strategies,

Those churches which cling to what I have called a "soul-centred" understanding of the gospel and in many cases cling to the language of such a gospel, appear to have few points of contact with the society in which they are set and are seen not to be relevant to our modern age. There was little attempt to engage in apologetic preaching which sought to bring the gospel to bear on the questions people are asking... the situations described are not uncommon in Scottish Baptist churches today, ...such a narrow understanding of the gospel is, I believe, a major factor in their decline.⁴³

David Hunt, a Scottish Baptist minister, in another sabbatical report, noted in his survey of people baptised in Scottish Baptist churches between 1996 and 1997 that for almost 60% the journey to their conversion was a gradual process.⁴⁴ This concurs with a similar study by the Baptist Union of Great Britain in 2003, 'Voices from the Baptistry', which revealed that not only was it was a gradual process, but it was also closely linked to someone they knew as well as low key church events, in contrast to the high profile evangelistic events invariably led by a stranger, typically a visiting evangelist or team.⁴⁵ Hunt, in his study, draws on the more significant survey of spiritual journeys undertaken in the early 1990's by Bishop John Finney, in which he concludes,

The gradual process is the way in which the majority of people discover God and the average time taken is about four years: models of evangelism which can help people along the pathway are needed.⁴⁶

⁴² Bebbington, *The Baptists in Scotland*, 71.

⁴³ Clark, *An Examination of the Causes of Decline*, 11.

⁴⁴ David Hunt, *Journeys to Faith* (Unpublished Sabbatical Report, 1997), 58.

⁴⁵ *Voices from the Baptistry*, (www.baptist.org.uk/Resources/downloads.asp#voices, 26.11.05).

⁴⁶ John Finney, *Finding Faith Today* (Swindon: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992), 25.

Churches therefore, that key into this approach by developing a culture of relational evangelism and adopting a holistic view of mission engaging with local needs in the local community are more likely to experience fresh growth.

A contextualised theological revisiting of mission and the “Missio Dei” which, in the words of Andrew Kirk ‘flows directly from the nature of who God is’ would appear to be the foundation to effective engagement with the world outside of church.⁴⁷ Andrew Rollinson, in the 2005 Whitley Lecture, develops the theological basis in terms of the Trinity recognising the centrality of a relational approach to mission,

Building open, honest and sustained relationships of trust within our natural daily networks is probably our single most important (and possibly most costly) calling as missionary communities.⁴⁸

Rollinson also makes reference to the detached ‘enclosed garden’ mentality in which life within church communities become comfortable yet increasingly remote from the real world outside and so effective engagement becomes all the more difficult.

Interviews

Ineffective mission strategies proved to be a significant factor with most of the churches involved. With membership declining all of the churches recognised the need to cultivate new growth, both as part of their Christian missiological responsibility and also due to the fact that biological and transfer growth were insufficient to replace the lost members. The majority of strategies deployed were those which the church had used effectively in the past and so it was only natural that they should turn to them again. However, although they were deemed worthwhile at the time, they did not result in any significant growth in membership. The two main evangelistic strategies were visitation programmes and short evangelistic campaigns.

*We knocked on a lot of doors, especially when the new housing developments were established. We systemically covered the whole area, inviting them to our church, and although there was the occasional positive response, most people just weren’t interested.*⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Andrew Kirk, *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), 28.

⁴⁸ Andrew Rollinson, *Liberating Ecclesiology: Setting the Church Free to Live Out Its Missionary Nature* (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2005), 26.

⁴⁹ Interview conducted on 07.02.06

The evangelistic campaigns usually composed of a visiting evangelist or team to conduct a week long series of meetings and events, which had little lasting impact on the church. Two of the churches had close links with American Baptists who sent teams to their churches to conduct evangelistic missions. The presence of the Americans generated considerable interest in the local community and was effective in acquiring an audience though it became difficult to maintain the momentum when they went back home.

Historically, both of these evangelistic approaches were used effectively in the 19th and early 20th centuries but in a modern context became increasingly ineffective as people became both ambivalent and hostile to door step religious callers and suspicious of high profile campaigns.

5. Conflict and Division

Given that churches are full of human beings it's perhaps not surprising that despite their best efforts they do not agree on every issue, and so conflict and division is another cause of decline. Michael Fanstone suggests that Baptists are more susceptible to conflict due to their church government. Drawing on his 1993 survey of over five hundred people who had completely left mainstream denominations, he writes,

... of all the named denominations, it was in Baptist churches where we found the highest levels of complaint. Is it that they have most to complain about or does the Baptist system, which encourages active participation in church government by its members, promote this.⁵⁰

From a denominational point of view, Bill Slack would recognise this problem in Scottish Baptist churches, 'We know that some of our churches have been destroyed by internal warfare ... People don't want to be part of a church that is perpetually at war within itself'⁵¹ Likewise Bill Clark in his survey of decline among Scottish Baptists states that 'Some churches have never recovered from the effect of serious division.'⁵² He details the causes of division from worship styles to leadership power struggles stating that the effect is debilitating and strength sapping, 'Where a church's morale is low, it is, of course, difficult to have vision and see beyond the present to a better future.'⁵³

⁵⁰ Michael J. Fanstone, *The Sheep That Got Away* (Tunbridge Wells: Monarch, 1993), 92.

⁵¹ Slack, *Why Some Churches Fail and Close*, 5.

⁵² Clark, *An Examination of the Causes of Decline*, 14.

⁵³ Clark, *An Examination of the Causes of Decline*, 14.

Interviews

Conflict and division is perhaps an area which, though present, is not something you would want to talk about as it does not present the church in a favourable light. So although most of the churches acknowledged a certain degree of disagreement especially with respect to whether or not the church should close there was limited acknowledgement of the impact that long standing conflict had on their decline. Those taking part in the interviews remained in the church in the midst of any conflict so for them it was not a significant factor. One church however did acknowledge the impact that such division had on them,

We've had four major splits in my time, these were not major events resulting in splinter churches, but they were big enough to cause some to leave and attend other churches. I guess they had a demoralising effect over the years. The worst were the personality driven conflicts which I think people outside the church noticed. We live in a small community so word soon got around and we began to get a reputation for not getting on with each other, which wasn't the case, but mud sticks.⁵⁴

Another church noted that personality conflict resulted in them losing two of their leaders within a short space of time,

Had either of them known that the other was leaving then one of them may have stayed, but as it turned out they both left, and we suffered as a result. As a small church we needed all the leaders we had so to lose two at once was a major blow.⁵⁵

Baptist churches, therefore, due to their congregational government are indeed more prone to internal conflict, however although larger churches can live with this and can afford to lose some discontented members and leaders, smaller churches feel the effect both numerically and psychologically of division within their ranks.

⁵⁴ Interview conducted on 23.01.06.

⁵⁵ Interview conducted on 25.02.06.

6. Consumerism

Earlier it was noted that changing life patterns have had a detrimental impact on church attendance. One of the issues that lie at the heart of societal change is consumerism, and its impact on church life warrants particular consideration.

Mike Starkey in his book 'Born to Shop' examines the effects of consumerism especially on human identity, which once had been forged through the communities in which people lived and worked, now had been replaced by the products they consumed.⁵⁶ Writing twelve years later in 2001 Michael Moynagh describes the sea-change in consumerism that had taken place towards the end of the 1990s. He details the shift from mass consumption and the variety of choice, to mass customisation and the demand for personalised products, which up until now had only been the preserve of the wealthy minority.⁵⁷ This personalised consumer psyche will increasingly work its way into church life as David Lyon notes,

What happens to the religious dimension under these conditions?(consumerism) Does it tend to be reduced to a leisure pursuit? ... And how far does the consumer market-place encourage an interchange of beliefs and practices, so that elements from one meaning cluster flow into another?⁵⁸

Lyon, in other words, posits a mass customised faith from consumer conscious Christians. The 'Kendal Project' in 2002, a research project by the University of Lancaster, examining the spirituality of that town, discovered traditional forms of worship in mainstream and unorthodox churches as well as a 'holistic milieu' embracing the familiar acupuncture, herbalism and reflexology to the more obscure Greenspirit group, Sai Baba, and Universal Peace dancing group!⁵⁹ Russell Barr in his response to the findings of the Kendall Project questions whether the conclusions could be translated into a Scottish context.⁶⁰ However although his comments may be valid given the rural dimension of the original study compared to Glasgow or Edinburgh, its findings cannot be completely discounted.

⁵⁶ Mike Starkey, *Born to Shop* (Eastbourne: Monarch, 1989), 51.

⁵⁷ Moynagh, *Changing World, Changing Church*, 19.

⁵⁸ David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 81.

⁵⁹ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 157. The conclusions of the project do not detect a drift from mainstream spirituality to the 'holistic milieu' simply the growing presence of the latter in the midst of the former. The congregational domain of the study comprised 25 'churches' including Quaker, Spiritualist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Unitarians, the most notable absence being no Baptist church!

⁶⁰ G. Russell Barr, 'The Spiritual Revolution: A Response from the Parish', *Theology in Scotland* (Volume XII) Number 2 (2005), 36.

Whereas it's unlikely that many Scottish Baptists will leave church to join a Universal Peace dancing group, the more likely scenario is that they'll leave to find an alternative evangelical church.

The results of the 'Kendall Project' also highlight more general missiological implications since effective mission begins with a clear understanding of the surrounding culture. The challenge for Baptists lies in recognising this latent spirituality and seeking to contextualise the christian message in the midst of it.

Interviews

Although none of the churches specifically cited consumerism as a major cause of decline, it's impact was felt in other ways and was therefore a significant factor most notably when there was a larger Baptist church within the vicinity which proved to be a lucrative draw for some of the members. Some of the members of the smaller churches spoke of feeling threatened by the larger churches,

There was no doubting that the preaching in X Baptist Church was of a superior standard than ourselves, the minister there had a superb ministry. Although we ourselves chose to stay where we were, I could understand others choosing to go to that church simply for the preaching alone.⁶¹

This sense of feeling threatened by the presence of the larger church was not only due to the difference in the quality of the ministry on offer but also by the underlying pessimism which the smaller churches felt was the prevailing attitude of the larger church.

Although it was never openly stated, we knew that there were a lot of people in X Baptist Church whose attitude was one of 'Why don't you just close and come and join us'. For them it was just a matter of time before we gave in and closed.⁶²

These perceived attitudes led to a siege mentality and a hardening of position to avert this 'giving-in' to the pressure of the larger church. When a church is under threat and already feeling vulnerable it doesn't take much, whether real or perceived, to harden attitudes and make the transition to closure or merger a more difficult journey than it should have been.

⁶¹ Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

⁶² Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

Conclusion

The causes cited above are wide and varied and overlap in many instances, e.g. congregational displacement through the influence of consumerism and the erosion of denominational loyalty, so the analysis of such decline is more complex than it may appear. Indeed the perceived causes may also be clouded by personal desire to paint the best picture on the church's history as well as the efforts of the church members.

The perception of the causes is critical in developing a pastoral response especially in those cases where there is prospect of a recovery, since it is the perceived causes that are easiest to address when drawing up plans to arrest the decline.

For all churches, however, whether or not there is any prospect of recovery, an appropriate pastoral response has to respond to people where they are in terms of their present and recent experience and so to this end the psychology of decline in terms of what it felt like will now be considered.

Chapter 3 The Experience of Decline

Any attempt to develop a pastoral response for any situation demands a certain degree of empathy. This section will seek to do that by forging an insight into the actual experience of living through church decline and closure.

Andy Peck, exploring church closure in the UK, describes it in terms of a funeral, he writes

Attending a funeral is rarely enjoyable, but when it's a church you are saying good-bye to, it's specially hard. Closing a church means the end for a community of believers, which had stretched back decades, even centuries. When the front door is locked and the lights are turned off for the last time, it can feel as if God himself is being ushered out.⁶³

The metaphor of the funeral is apt given that for all of the interviewees the experience of decline and closure was difficult, and to talk about it years later still evoked painful memories. It was like a death in the family and their experience was similar to that of the dying and grieving process and so to understand it more fully it will be considered in the light of *thanatology* comprising both dying and bereavement psychology, the former dealing with the prospect and process of closure and the latter with the aftermath.⁶⁴

Numerous studies on grief have been conducted, the most prominent being that of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, who in 1970 highlighted five stages in the dying process, namely Denial/Isolation, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance.⁶⁵ Colin Murray Parkes building on the work of Kubler-Ross, identified the stages as Alarm, Searching, Mitigation, Anger/Guilt, and Gaining a New Identity.⁶⁶ Others such as Peter Speck sought to condense it into three distinct stages; Shock and Disbelief, Developing Awareness, and Resolution.⁶⁷ More recently Catherine Sanders of the Tampa Bereavement Group developed a theory detailing five stages; Shock, Awareness of Loss, Conservation and the Need to Withdraw, Healing, and Renewal.⁶⁸ For the purpose of this study and for clarity the areas that will be considered in relation to the death of a church are: Attachment/Loss, Anger/Guilt, Denial/Isolation, Acceptance and Adjustment.

⁶³ Andy Peck, *Finishing Well* (Christianity Magazine, January 2006) (www.christianitymagazine.co.uk/engine.cfm?i=92&id=474&arch=1, 18.02.06).

⁶⁴ Thanatology: The study of death, dying and grief (Oxford Concise Dictionary)

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁶⁶ Colin Murray-Parkes, *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican, 1980).

⁶⁷ Peter Speck, *Loss and Grief in Medicine* (London: Bailliere Tindall, 1978).

⁶⁸ Catherine M. Sanders, *Surviving Grief... and Learning to Live Again* (New York: Wiley, 1989).

a. Attachment and Loss

Most attachment theories highlight the need for safety and security, and so any prospect of loss will be fiercely defended for self-preservation. William Worden, analysing the psychological impact of impending loss, states that,

When the attachment figure disappears or is threatened, the response is one of intense anxiety and strong emotional protest... If it is the goal of attachment behaviour to maintain an affectional bond, situations that endanger this bond give rise to certain specific reactions. The greater the potential for loss, the more intense these reactions and the more varied.⁶⁹

Although Worden develops his attachment theory around human relationships, especially the bond between child and parent, it could equally be applied to churches and long standing church members. Ann Faulkner cautions against underestimating the depth of loss involved in any relationship where there has been strong attachment, she writes,

Only the person suffering the loss can put a value on that loss... one of the vital roles of those working with bereaved people is to assess the magnitude of the loss from the individual's perspective.⁷⁰

Similarly Christopher Golding reminds us that 'Life presents us with a series of bereavements'⁷¹ and Bridget Cook notes the grief associated with such losses other than that of losing a loved one,

There are other losses which constitute major life events and which can cause grief reaction and psychological trauma similar to those experienced by someone who has just lost a partner in life through death or separation.⁷²

When it comes to losing a church there is very little in the way of prior preparation since for most people it is only likely to happen once in their lifetime, as least with churches to which they have formed a strong attachment. It also calls for great sensitivity especially from outsiders who invariably become involved and approach the situation from a different, usually pragmatic perspective and are unable to empathise with those in the church for whom the prospect of loss carries with it deep emotional trauma.

⁶⁹ J. William Worden, *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (London: Routledge, 1991), 8.

⁷⁰ Ann Faulkner, *Working with Bereaved People* (London: Churchill Livingstone, 1995), 5.

⁷¹ Christopher Golding, *Bereavement: A Guide to Coping* (Marlborough, Wiltshire: Crowood Press, 1991), 153.

⁷² Bridget Cook and Shelagh G. Phillips, *Loss and Bereavement* (London: Austen Cornish, 1988), 25.

Interviews

In the church context, the main causes of the attachment included long standing family involvement often stretching back decades. One man questioned acknowledged this generational link with the past,

*The pew that I sit in week by week was not only the same one my parents sat in, but their parents as well. Even though there are only a few of us each Sunday, it means a lot to me to sit in that pew, it's personal.*⁷³

When asked of their involvement in the church the majority relished the opportunity to share of their active participation in the past activities of the church and for the older members of the church the closure of the church signalled the end of a lifetime's sacrificial service.

The strongest cause of attachment lay in the community in which the members formed an integral part. Relationships are developed in context, and so the prospect of changing church would lead to inevitable loss. The church building was more than bricks and mortar, it was a place filled with so many memories of weddings, funerals and baptisms, of tears and joys, a close knit community who had become like family to one another.

*My husband was buried in X Baptist Church, and my children grew up in the church. To many people it seemed like a building past its sell-by date, with no future, but for us who've been here for years it's priceless. You can't put a price on memories.*⁷⁴

During the process of closure the prospect of this loss of community brought with it great fear as life would never be the same again, even though they would still remain in contact with their friends. Averil Stedoford, in analysing separation anxiety in relation to attachment theory explores the fear of dying, she states that,

The existential fear of death, of ceasing to be, lies deep in everyone and usually remains unconscious. It's presence profoundly influences people's behaviour... Most people never really believe in the possibility that they could cease to be.⁷⁵

For the church members who had been attending the same church since childhood, it seemed easier to come to terms with their own physical death, due to their faith in the resurrection, than with the prospect of the death of their church since with this there was no prospect of resurrection, life would never be the same again. They never imagined that there would come a day when their church would 'cease to be'.

⁷³ Interview conducted on 10.02.06.

⁷⁴ Interview conducted on 03.02.06.

⁷⁵ Averil Stedoford, *Facing Death: Patients, Families and Professionals* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1984), 69.

b. Denial/Isolation

According to Kubler-Ross denial is the first stage of the dying process, a coping mechanism to the shock of impending death, she states that ‘Denial functions as a buffer after unexpected shocking news, allows the patient to collect himself and, with time, mobilize other, less radical defenses’.⁷⁶ The main problem in applying the Kubler-Ross model to church decline or closure is that the latter is not usually dependent on a ‘crisis of knowledge’ that would happen in the breaking of bad news in terms of a terminal illness. The ‘crisis of knowledge’ for the church usually occurs much later, and would be a final confirmation of the inevitable closure.

With the process of physical dying there is a sense that no-one else understands what it feels like despite the fact that death is a daily occurrence. Similarly no matter how many churches close it only happens to most people once so there is not a pool of experience from which to draw on to alleviate the isolation. Alicia Cook highlights the fact that this sense of isolation is not simply a psychological reaction to impending death but can be real and tangible through the withdrawal of those around the dying person, she writes,

...there is often a social avoidance of the dying, which may be the most significant contributor to the dying person’s isolation. Society may withdraw because of the fear of death, uncertainty as to how to interact with the dying , and/or a feeling that the patient is becoming a burden.⁷⁷

In similar fashion this ‘social avoidance’ of dying churches, and the failure to talk about the church, even when it had closed, only served to reinforce this sense of isolation.

⁷⁶ Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, 35.

⁷⁷ Alicia S. Cook and Kevin A. Oltjenbruns *Dying and Grieving: Lifespan and Family Perspectives* (Orlando: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1989), 15.

Interviews

Although denial did not emerge suddenly it did play a significant factor in all the churches in the study, all spoke of this being present particularly during the period of decline when the prospect of closure became a realistic possibility. For one of the churches in particular where closure was a foregone conclusion due to the state of the building there was a common voicing of resistance to closure,

No-one wanted the church to close, yet deep down we all knew that it would be virtually impossible to remain in the building given the cost of the repairs. So we kept putting it off until our hand was forced by the state of the church finances, even then, it took a lot of courage for someone to even suggest that we might possibly close.⁷⁸

To admit it and talk about it would have felt like a sense of betrayal to both the current and deceased members who had served the church over the years. In some cases this sense of denial was compounded by influential individuals who reinforced the denial for the wider congregation.

All the churches acknowledged a sense of isolation which was most pronounced with those that had closed. This sense of isolation remained even when they had joined another church,

It may seem strange but even though I am now in membership in X Baptist Church and it has been a while since Y Church closed, I do not feel as if I am in fellowship with the people there, I still feel alone.⁷⁹

Denial in evangelical churches is endemic given that church decline is a taboo subject, since by definition churches are expected to grow, and so to talk about it would be an acknowledgement of defeat. It is also only expected to happen to others, especially 'others' who only had themselves to blame, e.g. from a different theological position. A pervading optimism dominates the evangelical landscape, for example, a cursory reading of the annual reports by the aided churches in the Baptist Union of Scotland all reflect optimistic futures, of anticipated growth in both membership and income. Such optimism is understandable with churches depending on external aid however it may simply delay the inevitable hard choices and avoid tackling the more radical steps needed to reverse the decline.

⁷⁸ Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

⁷⁹ Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

c. Anger/Guilt

Anger is a natural emotional response to loss which may according to Junietta McCall mask a sense of guilt.⁸⁰ Steve Scrutton notes the functional importance of anger to bereaved people by turning the ‘victim’ who feels abandoned and helpless into the ‘attacker’, he states that ‘Anger represents an outlet for disbelief and frustration, protecting the individual from unwanted intimacy and underlying despair’.⁸¹

Interviews

Two of the churches questioned felt abandoned by their ‘mother’ church. This sense of abandonment arose due to the withdrawal of support, either financial or in terms of human resources, from the larger church. Churches in decline increasingly become dependent on outside support to sustain them, so the withdrawal of such support effectively becomes the death knell for them, so anger and resentment inevitably accompany this sense of abandonment. One interviewee commented,

*We were angry when X and Y pulled the plug on our support for we knew that after that there was no way back for us. It felt like a stab in the back, they had lost faith in us, and it was no surprise that our relationship with them became strained.*⁸²

Anger, even vociferous and hurtful, seemingly out of place for those professing christian faith, should be expected as it is part of the grieving process. This anger, which was invariably directed towards the ‘mother’ church only reinforced the withdrawal and sense of isolation as other churches struggled with how to ‘interact with the dying’ especially as they had been the major contributory factor in its closure in the eyes of the members of the smaller church. Jeanne Katz describes ‘distancing’ from those involved in the care of the dying, ‘By practicing ‘detached concern’ and withdrawing from the dying person, carers protect themselves from painful emotional encounters’.⁸³ Likewise ‘mother’ churches may practice ‘detached concern’ by attending to the practicalities of closure but neglecting the deep emotional and spiritual trauma for those involved.

⁸⁰ Junietta B. McCall, *Bereavement Counselling: Pastoral Care for Complicated Grieving* (New York: Haworth Press, 2004), 49.

⁸¹ Steve Scrutton, *Bereavement and Grief: Supporting Older People Through Loss* (London: Age Concern, 1995), 93.

⁸² Interview conducted on 25.02.06.

⁸³ Jeanne Samson-Jatz, *Death and Dying: Caring for Dying People* (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1992), 21.

With respect to guilt the interviewees did not speak as openly on this, as it was in effect an acknowledgement of personal failure, however it was clear that behind the anger and frustration at the decline and closure lay a sense of guilt which like all guilt was difficult to talk about. Junietta McCall in her examination of guilt and grief identifies it as a normal part of the grief process as the bereaved individual reflects on the events with the end result of this 'internal sorting and review process' producing guilt.⁸⁴ She differentiates between true and false guilt and the impact that guilt can have in the grieving process, and stresses the need not to dismiss the guilt but assist the bereaved in working through such guilt to effect a resolution.

The causes of the guilt lay not only in the decision to close the church after so many of their forebears and contemporaries had sacrificed so much time and effort to establish it, but also over possible factors which they had been directly involved in which led to the decline of the church. For example one church had experienced a number of minor splits over the years, so on reflection questions were asked, leading to guilt, over whether anything could anything have been done to prevent them.⁸⁵

d. Acceptance

Acceptance is coming to terms with the loss, the initial acknowledgement of the reality of the situation, the emergence from denial. With physical dying Allan Billings identifies the usual response of unwarranted optimism in the event of terminal diagnosis to attempt to raise the morale of the dying patient.⁸⁶ Although this is done with the best of intentions, it hinders acceptance which is strengthened through the individual taking more control over the situation, e.g. setting their affairs in order. In a study of older people dying of cancer Bibbi Thome identifies the importance of retaining some degree of control, she concludes that, 'The power to choose their approach to daily life with cancer proved to be crucial for their constructive handling of the disease and the outcome.'⁸⁷ Retaining control, especially during the closing process, proved to be a significant path to acceptance for the interviewees.

⁸⁴McCall, *Bereavement Counselling*, 94.

⁸⁵ Interview conducted on 23.01.06.

⁸⁶ Allan Billings, *Dying and Grieving: A Guide to Pastoral Ministry* (London: SPCK, 2002), 104.

⁸⁷ Bibbi Thome, 'The Experience of Older People Living with Cancer', in *Cancer Nursing: An International Journal for Cancer Care Vol. 26 No. 2* (2003), 95.

Interviews

For the individuals in the churches questioned, the path to acceptance was largely dependent on individual circumstances, one interviewee expressed relief when the final decision to close was taken, as the weight of responsibility was lifted from their shoulders.⁸⁸ Others struggled with the closure of their church and comments such as *'I wept when the pews were ripped out'* revealed not simply regret over what had happened but grave reservations in accepting the original decision.⁸⁹

The churches that closed welcomed the fact that they were given almost complete control over the final closure process in terms of what would happen to the congregation and assets, both financial and structural. The more they talked about it, the easier it became to come to terms with it.

Murray Parkes notes that *'...it was the funeral service that brought home the reality of what had happened'*⁹⁰ and in a similar vein Golding describes as one of the purposes of the funeral *'... a need to share that person with others who also knew and loved him or her'*.⁹¹ As a rite of passage funerals fulfil many different functions both for the person bereaved and the wider community.⁹² The closing/merging services of the churches in question reinforced the reality of closure by bringing together the community of faith both past and present on one final occasion to both validate the life of the church and offer thanksgiving for those who had served the church over the years

For the three churches concerned only one of them had a 'closing' service, the other two had a uniting service as they merged with another church, though in effect it was closing in that Sunday services would no longer be held in the building even if it continued to be used for some other purpose. All who were interviewed spoke of a 'moving' service, in many ways akin to a memorial/thanksgiving service where, although tears were shed, it did carry an air of celebration for what had been achieved in the past. One interviewee said that,

⁸⁸ Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

⁸⁹ Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

⁹⁰ Murray Parkes, *Bereavement*, 86.

⁹¹ Golding, *Bereavement*, 84.

⁹² Catherine Sanders lists six purposes of the funeral: to forge acceptance, to bring friends and family together, provide spiritual strength, validate the life of the deceased, recognise the significant change in the lives of the bereaved, and to provide the bereaved a public opportunity to acknowledge their love for the deceased. See Saunders, *Surviving Grief*, 181-182.

*The closing service was tremendous, the church was full with those who had served the church over the years, the worship brought back memories of years gone by. In fact, if it wasn't for the rain pouring in through the roof, I'd consider keeping it going!*⁹³

Just as careful preparation goes into the funeral service of a deceased person so these services were meticulously planned with contributions from significant people from the history of the church which all served to have the desired effect in bringing a celebratory sense of closure.

e. Adjustment

Adjustment is the final stage of the grieving process where the individual progresses to a degree of normality in as much as life can return to certain routines. Scrutton correctly highlight the fact that 'It is impossible for bereaved people to forget entirely; loss remains part of our lives'.⁹⁴ A complete return to normality is unrealistic, a healthy adjustment to new circumstances should be the objective. The funeral service can mark the new beginning which can be as difficult to cope with as the initial grief. For those around the bereaved person, life returns to normal, but for the bereaved themselves life will return to a radically different 'normality' than that which they had known before.

Interviews

For the interviewees the adjustment after the 'closure' appeared to be shaped by a number of factors including the level of attachment to the original church, and the degree to which life in the previous church had become replicated in a new environment. The two churches which merged with larger churches had contrasting experiences. One merged with a church that in terms of membership was only three times the size of its own so it was able to preserve its own identity and influence in the united church whereas the other church merged with a church much larger than itself and so lost its own individual identity. It would seem that in terms of adjustment the members from churches that joined larger churches felt that they had simply been absorbed into the larger church and so the process of adjustment became difficult. One interviewee from that church when asked for advice on the whole experience stated '*Don't merge with a larger church!*'.⁹⁵

⁹³ Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

⁹⁴ Scrutton, *Bereavement and Grief*, 111.

⁹⁵ Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

The church that completely closed allowed its members the freedom to seek new churches according to their individual preference so this resulted in some settling quickly into neighbouring congregations whereas others took two or three years before taking up membership in another church. Clearly there is no ideal solution, the former ‘merging’ option retains the original community yet the members are ‘forced’ into a union that may not suit everybody, whereas the latter leads to a fragmentation of the original community but yet allows the freedom for the members to find a ‘spiritual home’ which they find most comfortable.

Conclusion

‘A dying individual is a living individual’.⁹⁶ As with people so with churches; this section has served to demonstrate that although churches may be in decline and have very few signs of life in terms of viability and growth, they are very much alive and need to be treated accordingly with the utmost care and attention. Even when they ‘die’, they continue in some shape and form as the congregation disperses or merges with another church. In light of the personal responses by those who have experienced decline the next section will seek to frame a pastoral response.

⁹⁶ Cook and Oltjenbruns, *Dying and Grieving*, 4.

Chapter 4 Pastoral Response

The first section demonstrated that decline is a live issue and will remain so in the foreseeable future. This demands a response both strategically with diminishing financial and human resources as well as pastorally, since when considering churches in decline it is essentially the people in such churches that need to be cared for. The previous sections on both the causes and experience of decline served to open a window into the psychology of decline from which to develop such a pastoral response. This final section will attempt to do that by first of all dealing with the question of whether to close or attempt to continue a church in decline then exploring how to tread these paths in order to achieve as successful an outcome as possible.

Continue or Close?

The decision on the future of any church is not an easy one, however the fact that they are contemplating to make such a decision is a recognition of a state of decline and a determination to shape a different future from the immediate past. Procrastination or even complete avoidance of the issue was highlighted earlier when exploring denial in church decline, it can be easier to avoid the issue since the only envisaged outcome was closure.⁹⁷ Roger Fritts, in the context of physical loss, notes that ‘Denial is a problem when, because of it, we do not receive help that can improve our lives’.⁹⁸ The first step then, in developing a pastoral response to decline is to acknowledge and work with such denial, which will then move the process forward by opening up for deliberation the issues that need to be addressed.

The question of who actually delivers this initial pastoral response is not clearly defined. None of the churches in the interviews had their own full-time minister who could offer ‘professional’ pastoral care so it had to come either internally from within their own congregation or externally from a local church or the wider denomination. This is made all the more difficult in a Baptist context where local autonomy is highly valued and attempts to offer support may be misconstrued as unwelcome interference. This was especially problematic in the case of the smaller churches with mother churches whose influence and involvement in the decision making process was met with a degree of suspicion.

⁹⁷ See page 28.

⁹⁸ Roger Fritts, *Coping with Loss: Denial* (www.cedarlane.org/00serms/s000206.html, 20.02.06).

One of the churches expressed how helpful a denominational leader had been in the early stages when they were seeking to reach decisions on the future of the church,

He was a great help to us, he didn't come with any answers, instead he simply provided the platform for us to make the decisions. He came a few times and got to know us, we appreciated this as by the end we sensed that we were more than a church to him, he got to know us individually and understood something of the pain that we were going through.⁹⁹

From this it is clear that outside involvement, if it is to be effective, should be from someone who is respected by the church, with sufficient experience to be able to constructively facilitate the deliberations whilst remaining impartial and supportive throughout. The church must make the decisions itself for as effective a resolution as possible, however an experienced moderator can move them forward in that process.

The ultimate decision around the question of closure will be determined by a number of factors, the most significant being:

- External circumstances, e.g. essential renovation in order to comply with statutory building regulations
- Church finances, especially assets and savings.
- Size of congregation
- Age profile of congregation
- Location and alternative places of worship.

Any one of these could potentially signal closure, e.g. a dramatic drop in numbers or essential renovation with no substantial financial resources, though in practice it will be a combination of them. However it would appear, at least from the churches that took part in the interviews that the most critical factor is the state of the church finances. The two churches that had not closed did not have any significant debt or concern over the state of their property so although they had very small congregations they did not sense that closure was inevitable since they were still self sustaining though in a limited capacity, i.e. unable to support stipendiary ministry. Churches that have access to substantial savings through selling off part of their property or legacies can exist indefinitely as long as they are able to pay the bills. This accounts for a large number of smaller older congregations able to continue whereas otherwise they would be forced to close.

⁹⁹ Interview conducted on 07.02.06.

Other factors that had been noted earlier as contributing to the decline now have a bearing on the prospect of a recovery. The age profile is significant in terms of attracting younger people into the life of the church, the location and alternative places of worship raises questions as to whether people would even consider coming if there is a like-minded thriving church down the road.

A church in decline will inevitably consider the need to change in order to reverse the decline however this is an area fraught with difficulty. Ultimately the price of change may be too much, as the church that emerges may be radically different from the one that had been known and loved.

When all the factors have been taken into consideration the church may proceed with one of two options, namely,

- a. Continue with change. This will be in a restructured fashion, implementing agreed changes in an attempt to reverse the decline.
- b. Close. This closure may actually involve merging with another church but the existing congregation and building will cease to function in its original form.

A possible third option embracing both of the above is the decision to close whilst at the same time establishing a new church separate from the original church. In this situation the original church is allowed to die, and supported in the process, with the new church comprising of those most open to change from the original church. This option allows both the old and the new to coexist, for new life to emerge in the presence of death, a theme which will be considered in more detail later. This in many respects would be the ideal response to closure as it facilitates a healthy transition between the old and the new however in practice it is difficult to implement for a number of reasons. The new church would effectively be a church plant which is difficult in itself to establish but when it is still living with the responsibility of supporting a dying church then it becomes even more difficult to establish a life of its own. The pastoral response, though not neglecting this third option, will focus on the two original options, namely, to continue with change or to close.

a. Continue with Change

No-one wants a church to die, and as has been seen earlier the level of attachment to a church can be deep, covering generations and a lifetime of personal involvement, so this option will be the most favoured if it is the only one that can guarantee the continued presence of the church. However, the attachment is not simply to the church per se but the church in its present form so any prospect of change may be difficult. In other words change will be heartedly embraced as long as everything stays the same!

Dan Southerland explores change in a church context and offers reasons why this can be problematic not only with implementation but sustaining it over a longer period. He states that change is difficult because,

- People can only handle so much change
- People feel awkward when asked to do something new
- People think first about what they must give up
- People are at different levels of readiness for change
- People tend to revert back to their own behaviour the minute the reason to change is removed.¹⁰⁰

From a pastoral perspective, this awareness of the difficulty of change is critical in seeking to support a church through such a transition. What may appear insignificant to one person will be a major hurdle for another to overcome, and so demands sensitivity. Yet along with the sensitivity and desire to maintain unity there needs to be a determination to deal with issues which will require radical change in order to reverse the decline. Kerry Thorpe recognises the pressure to conform in such a delicate situation, he states that,

There is an enormous pressure on those in leadership to 'keep people happy,' not least because life appears so much simpler that way. There is a kind of false value that sees the absence of conflict as an expression of biblical unity.¹⁰¹

The initial decision to continue was one borne out of deep unhappiness with the decline so although there may a consensus that change is necessary, the process involved will inevitably not please everybody and lead to more unrest at least in the short term.

¹⁰⁰ Dan Southerland, *Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 111.

¹⁰¹ Kerry Thorpe, *Doing Things Differently* (Cambridge: Grove, 1997), 10.

In such a situation the execution of the change is just as important as the change itself, Jonathan Lamb, contemplating change in a church setting, suggests avoiding the actual term ‘change’ preferring growth as it ‘carries more positive connotations’.¹⁰² However, no matter how user-friendly the terminology it will only soften the pain of change to a certain degree, loss is loss no matter how it is presented.

This is not an easy path as it will involve much pain with no guarantee of growth so it needs to be open to continual reflection and review. The danger of course lies with reverting back to previous patterns of church life once the church’s future has been secured, or compromising with the degree of change required, applying cosmetic rather than radical change. Despite the difficulties, this option at least offers the prospect of a future for the church unlike the option to close.

b. Closure

Closure is a last resort, it carries an air of finality and is only arrived at after all possible alternatives have been explored and exhausted. When the decision to close has finally been taken the pastoral responsibility moves primarily to oversee a healthy closure.

In the previous section thanatology provided a helpful parallel with the experience of church decline and likewise the principles inherent in palliative care can provide similar building blocks for the care of a terminally ill church. This care is intentionally pastoral which as David Lyall acknowledges, is ‘... a phenomenon which is both simple and complex’.¹⁰³ At its simplest form pastoral care is caring for people, its complexity derives from its object to provide spiritual support in time of trouble with the traditional resources of prayer, Scripture and sacrament within the community of faith respecting the uniqueness of each individual’s spiritual journey.¹⁰⁴ Seeking to provide pastoral care in the face of life’s tragedies is difficult enough, however when that tragedy involves the end of the community of faith that has been the mainstay of support for years then the task becomes even more difficult. The object of pastoral care in this context should be to provide meaning, engender hope and draw a sense of closure to enable the congregation not simply to move on but to be enriched in some way.

¹⁰² Jonathan Lamb, *Making Progress in Church Life* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 8.

¹⁰³ David Lyall, *Integrity of Pastoral Care* (London: SPCK, 2001), 11.

¹⁰⁴ Lyall, *Integrity of Pastoral Care*, 12.

1. Meaning

It can be difficult for the congregation to find meaning and purpose in the loss of their church as this cuts across both their own earlier experience and theological understanding of the church as an organism which by nature grows under God by human help. The sight of a church dying, especially one's own church, raises doubts and uncertainties which need to be addressed.

Dr Robert Twycross, Clinical Reader in Palliative Medicine at Oxford University, headed a working party commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1990 to consider the Church's response to the care of the dying within a hospice context. Twycross recognises the historic unease that the medical profession had (and still has to some degree) with terminal illness as it is a final admission of defeat, that medicine ceases to offer anything more in a curative capacity. He argues that the Christian paradox of strength in weakness turns this 'failure' into a source of discovery, he states,

Terminally-ill patients are going to die, and death is failure. The theology of weakness and failure, however, invests a comatose patient with a status which is no lower than that accorded to a patient who is responding well to the curative skill of doctors, nurses and therapists. It could be said that a patient who is totally unable to help himself, who is utterly weak and has failed to respond to curative treatment, comes nearest of all to identification with the Saviour of the world.¹⁰⁵

Later, Twycross states that 'Christian faith is not problem-solving but mystery-encountering'.¹⁰⁶ In other words there are no easy answers to the problem of suffering and death but faith provides the opportunity for fresh encounters with God. With the death of a church there are no easy answers, and even if the contributory factors are understood by everyone the questions of 'why us?' will remain. So although answers to such may remain elusive, a mystery-encountering sense of meaning may develop in the death-throes of the church as the theology of weakness and failure is explored. Perhaps there will be more to discover of God and humanity in a dying church than in a thriving growing church.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Twycross (ed.), *Mud and Stars: The Impact of Hospice Experience on the Church's Ministry of Healing - Report of a Working Party* (Oxford: Sobell, 1991), 32.

¹⁰⁶ Twycross, *Mud and Stars*, 85.

2. Hope

Hope lies at the heart of the Christian message and even in a context of hopelessness it should still carry resonance. Christian hope is centred in the death and resurrection of Christ and this praxis of resurrection should remain the bedrock of faith. One of the churches interviewed stated that in the weeks leading up to its closure a number of different speakers came and preached on Sundays around the theme of death and resurrection which proved to be a source of encouragement, a realisation that God had not forgotten them.¹⁰⁷

This hope, as real as it may be, must not be limited to simply a theological affirmation of faith, but must take tangible form to release its true power. Jurgen Moltmann wrestles with this contradiction and tension of the Church as both ‘...the object of hope and the object of experience’.¹⁰⁸ He subsequently states that,

The experience of the church as it has come into being is linked with the practice of the church that is in the process of becoming. The ‘wealth of past experience’ is made available for the future as ‘the wealth of untried possibilities’. In so far as that happens, the church’s hope for the kingdom of God opens up perspectives for the hoped-for church of the future, and out of the hoped-for future church guiding lines for present church action emerge in their turn.¹⁰⁹

His optimistic ecclesiology is derived from his ‘Theology of Hope’, a resurrection-centred theology in which the Church lives now in light of what it will be in the future.¹¹⁰ A dying church therefore is not simply a reflection on the past but a link with both the past and the future, it provides the opportunity to experience the perennial nature of the Church, constantly evolving throughout the ages. For the churches that were interviewed, they continued after they closed, at least the congregants continued to worship elsewhere, and during the period leading up to the closure they made preparations for this fresh experience of Church. This preparation was difficult as it marked the end of Church as they had known it, but also signalled the beginning of a new expression of Church, relevant to a fresh generation. The Church is the most enduring of institutions and this visible manifestation of it in its transition stage exposes something of its mystery and sustainability with its ever-present capacity to transform and renew with each generation.

¹⁰⁷ Interviewed on 06.02.06.

¹⁰⁸ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 24.

¹⁰⁹ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 25.

¹¹⁰ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988).

3. Closure

Although the death of a church marks a transition and can be ‘mystery-encountering’ in this sense, it remains a death for which grieving will lie at the heart and from which pastoral support will seek to draw a sense of closure on the life of the church. The key elements in this are thanksgiving and celebration of the past, the opportunity for reflection, and a public recognition of the life of the church. The latter is in effect the funeral service of the church which is the final public statement of closure. Andy Peck, writing on church closures, highlights the need for celebration and thanksgiving,

Just as a funeral can celebrate the life of the person who has died, a closure can include a celebratory service, thanking God for the lives touched by the ministry of the church. This celebration does two things: it takes proper note that the present congregation stands in a long line of faithful witness and also allows people to recognise that church is partly about missional community, and that the mission at this time has come to an end.¹¹¹

In a similar vein Rev. Andrew Rollinson, the Ministry Advisor of the Baptist Union of Scotland, reflecting on the recent closing service of a Baptist Church which he conducted, indicated that the central themes around which the service was structured was thanksgiving for the past as well as the present need to grieve, concluding with the final commissioning. Rev Rollinson also noted that the deacons of the church continued to meet after the church closed primarily to oversee a smooth transition for the members of the church into new churches, a reminder that pastoral support does not end with the closing service, people still need support afterwards.

Where these three elements are present, meaning, hope and a sense of closure, they will of course offer no guarantee in the face of the pain of loss, since even the best strategies can be ineffective given the individual nature of grief. Palliative care for churches is not an area of practical theology with a rich seam of current academic research. Denominations are having to face up to decline and closure on a more regular basis, and pastoral responses will begin to emerge that may offer a more defined approach. Until then, the path that many churches take may well be well-intentioned attempts to make the best out of an unwelcome situation.

¹¹¹ Peck, *Finishing Well*.

Conclusion

John Drane, in a recent article for a Scottish Baptist publication for church leaders, suggests that within the next twenty years up to 120 Baptist churches in Scotland may disappear either through closure, merging, or affiliation with other denominations.¹¹²

He bases his estimates on current trends and the Church's failure to reflect changes in society and even if it may appear to be overly pessimistic the future for Baptist churches in Scotland does unequivocally appear to be that of continued decline. No doubt new churches will emerge to replace those closed though not in the same shape or form, but despite this the question of ministry in existing declining churches remains for the foreseeable future.

Contemporary theologies emerge out of context and so a 'theology of closure' is beginning to take shape amidst the backdrop of decline. In its wake pastoral strategies will be developed seeking to offer practical support to churches in decline.

Ministry to dying churches has a long way to go to be accepted within the mainstream of practical theology, as it goes against the grain of all that ministry was intended to deliver, namely life and growth as opposed to death and a sense of failure. Palliative care took a long while to emerge from the shadows into mainstream medicine since it was the ultimate admission of failure. Many believed in palliative care when it was unfashionable to do so and pioneered research and bold initiatives to the degree that nowadays in medical circles death is a genuinely acknowledged part of the life cycle.

Hopefully, palliative care for churches will receive a more sympathetic hearing within Church hierarchies and so the death of a church will become as equally important as its birth and growth and a rich source of encountering the mystery of the Church that in death life is ever-present and hope springs eternal.

¹¹² John Drane, 'The Future of the Church' in *Praxis* (Glasgow: Baptist Union of Scotland, Spring 2006), 3.

Appendix 1

Interview Questions re Church Decline

Introduction:

1. *What do you know of the origins of the church, how long had it been established when you began to attend?*
2. *Why did you choose to go to that church? What attracted you to it in the first place? How long were you a member/adherent of the church? How were you involved?*
3. *What are your recollections of the strongest period of the church during the time you attended? Why do you think it was strong at that time?*

Factors Contributing to Decline:

4. *During the latter stages what was the average age (approx.) of the congregation? Were there many young families in attendance?*
5. *Did members of the congregation move away for work/family reasons?*
6. *Did members of the congregation stop attending or become less committed in their involvement due to increasing pressure from their working lives?*
7. *Did members of the congregation remaining within the locality choose to attend other churches, if so what do you think were the primary reasons for their decision to go to another church? What did the other churches have that your church did not have?*
8. *Without seeking to be personal, in general terms what did you think of the leadership and vision provided by the minister/deaconate at the time?*
9. *Evangelism. What type of strategies / evangelistic activities were attempted? What success or otherwise did you have?*
10. *Networking. What degree of collaboration did you have with other churches, both Baptist and other denominations?*
11. *Were there any other significant contributory factors? e.g. Finance, Building Maintenance*

Experience of Decline:

12. What impact did the process of decline have on the congregation? Did it create division, if so what were the main reasons for the division? Or did it help to cement and strengthen relationships within the church?

13. Were you aware of a sense of denial during this period? Or was there a pervading optimism that the corner could be turned and the church revived?

14. What emotions would best sum up the experience of both yourself and those you knew in the church at the time:

Anger Sadness Frustration Hurt Disappointment Indifference Resignation
Defeatism Other

15. Did you feel supported throughout the process? Or let down? If so, by whom?

16. (If church closed) Did you have a formal closing service? If so, what was it like? Did it help to bring a sense of closure to the whole process?

17. (If church closed) How easy or difficult was it to adjust to life in another church?

Reflective Opinion:

18. Looking back, would you have done anything any different?

19. What advice would you give to churches / individuals in a similar position of decline?

20. What do you miss most about the church?

Bibliography

- Bebbington, D.W., *The Baptists in Scotland: A History* (Glasgow: Baptist Union of Scotland, 1988).
- Billings, A., *Dying and Grieving: A Guide to Pastoral Ministry* (London: SPCK, 2002).
- Brierley, P. (ed.), *UK Christian Handbook Religious Trends No. 5 – 2005/2006* (London: Christian Research, 2005).
- Brierley, P., *Turning the Tide: The Challenge Ahead – Report of the 2002 Scottish Church Census* (London: Christian Research, 2003).
- Brown, C., *The Death of Christian Britain* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2001).
- Cancer Nursing: An International Journal for Cancer Care Vol. 26 No. 2* (2003).
- Church Without Walls: The Report of the Special Commission on Renew and Reform* (www.churchwithoutwalls.org.uk).
- Clark, W., *An Examination of the Causes of Decline in 25 Scottish Baptist Churches from 1960 - 95* (Unpublished Sabbatical Report, 1997).
- Cook, A. S., and Oltjenbruns, K. A., *Dying and Grieving: Lifespan and Family Perspectives* (Orlando: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1989).
- Cook, B., and Phillips, S.G., *Loss and Bereavement* (London: Austen Cornish, 1988).
- Davie, G., *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
- Davie, G., Heelas, P., and Woodhead, L. (eds), *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2003).
- Drane, J., 'The Future of the Church' in *Praxis* (Glasgow: Baptist Union of Scotland, Spring 2006).
- Fanstone, M.J., *The Sheep That Got Away* (Tunbridge Wells: Monarch, 1993).
- Faulkner, A., *Working with Bereaved People* (London: Churchill Livingstone, 1995).
- Finney, J., *Finding Faith Today* (Swindon: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1992).
- Fritts, R., *Coping with Loss: Denial* (www.cedarlane.org/00serms/s000206.html).
- Gibbs, E., and Coffey, I., *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Leicester: IVP, 2001).

- Golding, C., *Bereavement: A Guide to Coping* (Marlborough, Wiltshire: Crowood Press, 1991), 153.
- Heelas, P., and Woodhead, L., *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).
- Hunt, D., *Journeys to Faith* (Unpublished Sabbatical Report, 1997).
- Hunt, D., *Reflecting on our Past: A Statistical Look at Baptists in Scotland 1892 – 1997* (Unpublished Sabbatical Report, 1997).
- Jackson, D., *Does the Future have a Denomination: Sustaining Baptist Communities in an Age of Insecurity*, (www.rpc.ox.ac.uk/theology-in-context/papershtml/jackson-d2001.htm).
- Kirk, A., *What is Mission? Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999).
- Kubler-Ross, E., *On Death and Dying* (London: Routledge, 1989).
- Lamb, J., *Making Progress in Church Life* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).
- Lyall, D., *Integrity of Pastoral Care* (London: SPCK, 2001).
- Lyon, D., *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).
- McCall, J.B., *Bereavement Counselling: Pastoral Care for Complicated Grieving* (New York: Haworth Press, 2004).
- Moltmann, J., *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
- Moltmann, J., *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988).
- Moynagh, M., *Changing World, Changing Church* (London: Monarch Books, 2001).
- Murray-Parkes, C., *Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican, 1980).
- Peck, A., *Finishing Well* (Christianity Magazine, January 2006) (www.christianitymagazine.co.uk/engine.cfm?i=92&id=474&arch=1).
- Petre, J., *Survey Charts the Soul of Britain*, (www.news.telegraph.co.uk/htmlContent.jhtml?html=/archive/2000/05/28/-nbelief28.html).
- Robinson, M., and Yarnell, D., *Celebrating the Small Church* (Turnbridge Wells: Monarch, 1993).

- Rollinson, A., *Liberating Ecclesiology: Setting the Church Free to Live Out Its Missionary Nature* (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 2005).
- Samson-Jatz, J., *Death and Dying: Caring for Dying People* (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1992).
- Sanders, C. M., *Surviving Grief... and Learning to Live Again* (New York: Wiley, 1989).
- Schwarz, C., *Natural Church Development Handbook: A Practical Guide to a New Approach* (Moggerhanger, Beds: British Church Growth Association, 1996).
- Scrutton, S., *Bereavement and Grief: Supporting Older People Through Loss* (London: Age Concern, 1995).
- Slack, W., *Why Some Churches Fail and Close* (Unpublished Report to Baptist Union of Scotland Council, 2003).
- Small Churches Report: Report to Council March 2005* (Baptist Union of Great Britain) (www.baptist.org.uk/Resources/downloads.asp#SmallChurchesReport).
- Southerland, D., *Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).
- Speck, P., *Loss and Grief in Medicine* (London: Bailliere Tindall, 1978).
- Starkey, M., *Born to Shop* (Eastbourne: Monarch, 1989).
- Stedeford, A., *Facing Death: Patients, Families and Professionals* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1984).
- Theology in Scotland* (Volume XII) Number 2 (2005).
- The Scottish Baptist Yearbook 1994* (Glasgow: Baptist Union of Scotland, 1994).
- The Scottish Baptist Yearbook 2004* (Glasgow: Baptist Union of Scotland, 2004).
- Thorpe, K., *Doing Things Differently* (Cambridge: Grove, 1997).
- Twycross, R. (ed.), *Mud and Stars: The Impact of Hospice Experience on the Church's Ministry of Healing - Report of a Working Party* (Oxford: Sobell, 1991).
- Voices from the Baptistry*, (www.baptist.org.uk/Resources/downloads.asp#voices).
- Worden, J. W., *Grief Counselling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner* (London: Routledge, 1991).
- Wright, N., *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002).