

## **100 NOT OUT!**

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Whether or not congratulation is in order, I leave readers to decide, but the fact remains that this is my 100<sup>th</sup> *Final Word* column. My first *Final Word* article was published on 13 November 2003, and I have been writing ever since. Almost immediately letters and e-mails began to come in – not only to the Editor but also to me personally. The personal letters and e-mails I have acknowledged – but not the public letters to the Editor. For from the outset I determined that I would not seek to defend myself – however unjust the comment might have seemed to be.

However, this week I wish to take the opportunity of correcting one misunderstanding, relating to the title '*The Final Word*'. As the previous editor of the *Baptist Times* will confirm, the title was her idea – and not mine. Never at any stage did I claim that I could have the final authoritative 'word' on any given subject. All I set out to do was to 'provoke' my fellow Baptists to take a fresh look at where they are at and where it was appropriate, to gain an idea or two. As I said in a letter to the Editor: "As a minister of a local church I know how easy it is to become isolated – my experience very easily becomes confined to my church. In such a situation it makes such a difference to read how others 'do' church, not in order to adopt ideas wholesale, but to take and adapt that which would be appropriate. What is true of ministers, I think would also be true of other leaders in the church". So please do believe me when I say that I have no papal pretensions!

Furthermore, precisely because I reflect on my own experience, it is inevitable that not everything I write is applicable to every church. My experience as a pastor is limited to just two churches – neither of which have been 'small' churches in the BU definition of the term. On the other hand, I do not write from the ivory tower inhabited by College principals and the like – with all due deference (for I too have been there) it is very easy once one is out of pastoral ministry to lay down the law about how we should 'do' church. No, I write from the sharp end of life. I know what it is like to struggle in ministry – and to keep on struggling. I know what it is like never to arrive at one's goal. I dare to believe that as a result I do have something to offer to my fellow strugglers.

But, to be able to offer even more, I need the help of *Baptist Times* readers. Please do let me know the issues which concern you, and I will be delighted to seek to address them in coming weeks. Email me at [pbeasleymurray@centralbaptist.f9.co.uk](mailto:pbeasleymurray@centralbaptist.f9.co.uk) ; or write to me at Central Baptist Church, Victoria Road South, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1LN.

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