

# Dan Taylor: a mature evangelical

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Drawing on material presented at The Centre for Baptist History and Heritage and Baptist Historical Society conference ‘What was New about the New Connexion?’ held at Regent’s Park College, Oxford on Saturday, 25 March 2017 and on twentieth century research on human development, I argue that Dan Taylor was successful because he was a mature evangelical.

The New Testament pays scant attention to the developmental processes that lead to more mature understandings of our situations in part because the disciples believed that the second coming was imminent and therefore did not see any need to consider how a Christian’s understanding might develop over a lifetime of faith.

## 1 Cognitive development

Drawing on research at the time Martin Wolins (1973) argued that children and young people pass through four broad stages in development:

- dependency
- nomocracy
- other orientation
- exchange.

At the first stage relationships primarily involve dependence on another individual; at the second relationships begin to be marked by rules; at the third rules are discarded in favour of more relational approaches and at the fourth a level of mutual respect is achieved which runs through all aspects of the relationship.

Those who have worked with children and young people will recognise at least the first three stages. At the primary school age, children primarily have relationships with individuals; even where primary school children assemble in groups, the relationships they have still tend to be individual with each member of the group. Similarly, their relationships with adults tend to be with individual adults in their lives.

In the late primary, early secondary school years, they begin to operate more in groups and to adopt norms and rules to govern those relationships. Infractions can lead to expulsion from the group. Later in adolescence they begin to realise that rules tend to be blunt instruments for managing group relationships and move towards norms which are informed more by the people in the group and the

relationships they have with them. I have never come across a group of young people who had moved into the fourth stage though I have met adults who managed their relationships in this way.

Some years later, Carol Gilligan (1982), studying the development of girls and young women, proposed a three stage framework:

- care for self
- care for others
- care for self and others.

She argued that children and young people's decisions at the first stage are driven by the needs of self, that, as young people join groups in their teens, their decision-making becomes driven by the needs of the group but that, to achieve real maturity in decision making, young people need to consider self and others. You cannot help others if you neglect yourself.

This is what Jesus is saying when He plucks part of a verse out of Leviticus:

You will love your neighbour as yourself (Lv 19:18).

If you love your neighbour more than yourself, you will gradually lose the ability to love your neighbour effectively; if you love your neighbour less than yourself, you will never be able to have a meaningful relationship with your neighbour because you will always be putting yourself first.

Meanwhile, Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) had argued that adult development is characterised by four broad levels in our understanding of relationships:

- micro, in which relationships are individual
- meso, in which relationships are with members of a group
- exo, in which relationships extend to other groups
- macro, in which relationships go beyond particular groups into broad political activity.

This framework has been used to examine the development of professional relationships (see, for example, Vander Ven, 1981) and, in my experience of training professionals, very few professionals under the age of 25 see their professional relationships as other than individual relationships with their clients/patients. Only in their thirties do many professionals begin re-frame their relationships in terms of a group of professionals who are working with a particular client/patient or a professional working with a client or patient groups rather than a group of individuals.

Those who become successful managers of professionals are those who have reached the third level of understanding relationships in which they operate within and between a range of groups to achieve professional outcomes. Those who have not reached the third level never succeed as managers because they continue to see relationships in terms of their individual relationships with the team or their relationships with their immediate group but without any concept of what might be appropriate relationships with groups outside their own team.

In chapter 11 'Achieving relationships' in *Competitive advantage*, Porter (1985) argues that successful management is all about achieving relationships. Yet a manager can only do this successfully if they understand how to develop relationships not just with individuals but with and between groups.

Early in the development of what are often called 'stage theories,' people tended to expect rigid conformity with the stages but it is now clear that:

- not everyone passes through all stages; for example, some victims of abuse in early life find it difficult to move beyond dependent relationships because they did not have a satisfying experience of dependency from which to move into any of the later stages;
- the impetus to move to the next stage can come from a stressful situation which causes a person to re-evaluate their current view of life; so those who have relatively stress free lives may not develop as rapidly as those who have suffered occasional periods of moderate stress;
- people put under significant stress can revert to an earlier stage as a way of coping with the stress.

In other words, the course of human development can be very variable with some people remaining, for one reason or another, at relatively low levels of development throughout their lives, regardless of their education or intellectual capacity, and others continuing to develop in the ways in which they see themselves and their relationships throughout their lives.

It is worth noting that Leviticus 19:18 can apply at any level of human development; it does not require a particular level of development, understanding or relationship, just that, at whatever level a particular Christian happens to be, they should apply the level of understanding they have about themselves to their relationships with their neighbours.

## 2 The Puritan pre-occupation

Pollard (2017) notes that the Puritan preoccupation had been with their own standing with God, pointing to William Perkins' emphasis on the Calvinist 'reassurance of faith.' A look through the *Complete Mission Praise* (Horrobin and Leavers, 2009) reveals a continuing concern among writers about their relationship with God and/or Jesus.

In developmental terms this reflects the continuing hold of the dependency stage or the micro-system stage among young adults when relationships are conceived primarily as individual relationships. Of course, for Christians who have been victims of abuse, such a focus can be extremely helpful to them as they seek to come to terms with a breach of trust which they have experienced and work out how they can develop trusting relationships for the future.

But for those who have not suffered serious emotional harm and for those who have managed to deal with it to the extent that it no longer blights their lives, remaining in a dependent relationship is unhelpful in the long term.

However, the church has a long history of encouraging and reinforcing dependent relationships between those 'set aside' for ministry and those not. And, for those who are themselves in the dependency or the micro-system stages of development, these relationships can be helpful for a period but they become unhelpful when they inhibit development to any of the later stages.

As a growing Christian Dan Taylor found Wesley's authoritarianism restrictive and went in search of less dependent relationships.

## 3 Nomocratic relationships

Older children and young teenagers tend to pass through a period when their relationships are informed by sets of norms or rules. Some of these, like the norms which girls develop in relation to trust (Archer, 1992), are very important for laying the foundations for future relationships but young people given the opportunity to explore relationships normally move from nomocratic relationships into an other

oriented phase, in which relationships are based more on concern for the other, which will involve retaining some of the earlier norms but abandoning others as too restrictive.

One can see this as a central theme in Jesus' teaching, especially against the Pharisees, whom he thought had lost sight of the other as they focused on the detailed interpretation of rules which often had counter-productive effects. 'You will love your neighbour as yourself' replaces all the rules with a single, simple concern for the other.

In my experience, even when people have for the most part moved out of the dependency stage, they may still try to avoid personal responsibility for their relationships within a group even when they are capable of accepting it. I have encountered this on many occasions both as a manager when staff who were perfectly capable of making decisions wanted to defer them to me and in other situations where asking me to pronounce on something was a way for someone to opt out of making a decision which was really theirs.

Dan Taylor's solution to this was the experience meeting (Jones, 2017), held weekly in people's homes, at which members could share their experiences of the past week and relate them to their faith. By using a group format and by focusing on their experiences as Christians, Dan Taylor created an environment in which those who were dependent or still rule-bound in their approach to their Christian faith could move forward. Note that the minister was never present at these meetings; they were led by lay members of the congregation who, nonetheless, met with the minister to discuss any issues that had arisen.

It is important to say that groups can vary very widely in the relationships which they contain from ones which are themselves hierarchical within the group to ones in which the relationships are equal or all but equal. Experience meetings appear to have been the latter with everyone equally encouraged to contribute; this may have arisen from Dan Taylor's prior conviction that women should play an equal part in the church (Jones, 2017), of which experience meetings were one aspect, or from a rational decision that, if experience meetings were to be of benefit to all church members, no-one should be at a disadvantage in contributing. Whatever the case, equal rights for women is a natural consequence of recognising the importance of every member's contribution to a group which can only come after one has reached the meso-system level in understanding relationships.

## **4 From inward to outward faith**

Rather than focusing solely on the relationship he had with God as the Puritans had done, Dan Taylor focused on the consequences of that relationship as well, one of which was the responsibility to preach the gospel. He remarked that in all his time attending Halifax Parish Church he had never heard the gospel preached (Pollard, 2017) and he stressed the responsibility of all Christians to share the gospel. In other words, he saw Christian life as involving both a relationship with God and a relationship with his neighbours. Spiritually he had to care for self and for others (Gilligan, 1982).

This understanding, which led him to give primacy to the laity and not to those 'set aside,' can be seen as evidence that he had an exo-system understanding of relationships; they are not just between people in groups but also between groups, groups of believers on the one hand and groups of non-believers on the other, groups of Arminian Christians and groups of Calvinist Christians or, in the case of his former assistant, John Sutcliff when at Olney, between groups in the established church and groups of dissenters.

Because a group that intends to engage with other groups has to be clear about what makes it a group, those who established the New Connection set out six articles which would define them as a group to others.

But, just as individuals are nourished by the relationships which they have, so are groups by both the relationships which group members have among themselves and the relationships which groups establish with other groups. Articles do not particularly provide nourishment to a group, any more than creeds do; they can be used to define a group to others but the key purpose of a creed — and the reason why they are often recited by and largely known only to adherents — is to sustain the solidarity of a group. Creeds are the tools of a dependent or nomocratic rather than an other oriented group.

So the moves both towards testimony and experience and from ministers to churches represent the move by the New Connection from being a meso-system to an exo-system group. Testimony does not just provide evidence of adherence to the articles; it and experience provide nourishment to the group while Dan Taylor's concern to preach the gospel required a group that would interact with other groups rather than be solely concerned with its own interests. So the move from a meso-system group of ministers to an exo-system group of churches was an inevitable result of the chief aim of the New Connection.

In fact, in introducing experience meetings, Dan Taylor had already laid the foundations for an exo-system level church, one in which groups of members would interact both among themselves and with other groups in the church and so would develop the skills and orientation to interact with groups outside the church. J. G. Pike's description of experience meetings as 'proof of piety' (Jones, 2017) greatly understates the power of experience meetings to contribute to an outward-looking church.

## 5 Reason and revelation

In his testimony to the church in Whitechapel (Taylor, 1818, p. 470), Dan Taylor says:

I believe that the whole creation gives proofs of a Deity; and that man is capable of forming such reasonings and arguments from the evidence of wisdom and power presented to our view in the several objects that our eyes daily behold, as are sufficient to manifest the workmanship of One, who is infinitely superior to mere mortals. But, however evident this may be . . .

. . . there is an apparent necessity of a fuller discovery of the mind of God to man than the light of nature, in order to understand how we can be accepted with him.

This 'fuller discovery,' he says, is to be found in the Bible.

Dan Taylor's acceptance of reason and revelation was typical of his age and was to find its highest scientific expression in the work of the two great nineteenth century scientists, Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell, both committed Christians. For Michael Faraday, his work was solely about revealing the wonders of God's creation and he was passionately anti-patents because he believed that no-one should be able to 'own' any part of God's creation. He ended up with one of the longest lists of scientific publications in history because he documented every experiment that he did in order to prevent anyone else from patenting what he had discovered.

The idea that reason and revelation might not be in harmony really dates from the middle of the Victorian era when a number of clergymen, including Baden Powell, then Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford University, proposed that science and the Bible were addressing different issues (Parker, 1860) and this thesis has become widely accepted over the past 150 years particularly by scientists working in western Christian countries but not by scientists in other countries and, in relation to the broader issue of science and faith, not by scientists from Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist backgrounds (Eklund, 2016). Dan Taylor would certainly not have accepted the idea that reason and revelation dealt with different questions and would have engaged all his rational powers in combating it.

## 6 The wider vision

Copson (2017) has posed the question as to why Dan Taylor continued to maintain good relationships with the old General Baptists long after the formation of the New Connection and even after attempts to heal the breach between the General Baptist Assembly and the New Connection appear to have failed. Among the answers given to this question were that Dan Taylor:

- stressed fellowship
- made alliances with others
- hoped that others would recognise the error of their ways and
- brought New Connection influence into the General Baptist Assembly.

But why would he want to do this? One reason might be that Dan Taylor had reached what Bronfenbrenner (1979) calls the macro-system level of understanding of relationships in which, like the web of relationships which characterised the New Connection churches (Jones, 2017), Dan Taylor was using a web of relationships, not just with General Baptists but with Particular Baptists and others, to preach the gospel in whatever way he could. No relationship was to be left unturned if it could lead to the preaching of the gospel in some way, whether that was through the relationships he had with individuals, with groups or through his students.

His macro-system level of understanding may also have inspired him to send his students out to look at things which might not initially appear to be relevant to ministerial training, such as the visits to the Houses of Parliament, the British Museum, a Jewish funeral and a hanging on which he sent John Goadby (Shepherd, 2017). If you have a macro-system level of understanding, you see connections, and therefore potential relationships, which may not be apparent to someone at an earlier stage in the development of their understanding of relationships.

## 7 'Out of the ground'

E. P. Thompson's description of Dan Taylor coming 'out of the ground' (1963) may be closer to the mark in understanding why Dan Taylor became the person he did than he might have suspected.

The coal seams that emerge from Beacon Hill in Halifax, a few hundred yards from where Dan Taylor was born, are part of an extensive set of coal seams laid down over millstone grit stretching from Scotland to the East Midlands when this land mass was at the equator just over 300 million years ago. Working these seams simply involved digging into the side of the hill. But, as none of the seams are more than one metre wide, children were used to mine the seams, which explains why Dan Taylor started mining at the age of five.

In a classic study into why mechanised mining was less productive when it was introduced than conventional mining, Emery and Trist (1960) found that mechanised mining cut across the social groups which had sustained the productivity of miners who, for example, allocated work according to group members' knowledge and capacity, thus making best use of each member's strengths.

Given the dangers of mining in the eighteenth century, it is unlikely that miners in the eighteenth century were any different from their successors in the twentieth century in developing arrangements within their groups which would play to the strengths of all members of the group for the benefit of the group.

It is difficult to think of any other eighteenth century occupation in which group relationships were so important both for the safety of the workforce and the productivity of the group and Dan Taylor

was exposed to this throughout his formative years. Thus he emerged into adulthood with a far more advanced understanding of group relationships than most of his contemporaries and went on to develop and deploy that understanding throughout all that he did in the service of His Lord.

We may recoil with horror today at children being sent into a mine at the age of five but Dan Taylor was able to turn that experience to advantage throughout his life.

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