



Newsletter No. 5.

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Editorial

This September some fifty or so of my young people will be going away to college or university - some will be leaving home for the first time, while others will be returning to their studies. Of these fifty or so young people, the majority will have found Christ here in our Church, they will have confessed their faith in the waters of baptism, and thereupon become members of our Church. And yet for all that, if the experience of past years is anything to go by, only one or two will attend a Baptist Church - or at least a Baptist Church in membership with the Baptist Union. This situation will not be, I hasten to add, because they will have lost their faith. Far from it - many are active leaders in their Christian Unions. They simply will not be worshipping in Baptist Churches, but rather elsewhere.

Our experience of course is not unique; it is typical of many Baptist Churches. Every year we Baptists lose hundreds of our young people to other Churches - not least to evangelical Anglican Churches. Why is this so? Because the preaching elsewhere is often more authoritative and more biblically centered, the worship is freer and contains a greater sense of celebration. In the words of my young people, the other Churches are so much more "alive".

I recognise that this is no new phenomenon. That was why our Baptist Student Societies were originally founded. But the situation today is worse. For in the ecumenical era of today, our Baptist Student Societies either no longer exist, or if they do, they are but a pale reflection of their former glory. What is more, as a Union we have disbanded with the necessity of having a full-time Secretary for student work - instead we appoint men (and women) to ecumenical chaplaincies.

I confess that I am concerned when I see so many of our most gifted young people being lost to the denomination. Of course the denomination is not the be all and end all. The Kingdom is of far more consequence. And yet if we believe - as I do - that our denomination has still a role to play within the purposes of God, that only believers baptism is Christian baptism, that the priesthood of all believers is worth fighting for.....then we must be concerned to see so many potential leaders lost. Yes, this drift to other Churches is not new - maybe this explains the dearth of men - and women - of stature in our midst. Is it not significant that while our denomination is basically evangelical in character, only a few of our number are to be found in positions of leadership within the evangelical world? If leadership is one of the keys to growth, then we have little to encourage us as a denomination.

I appeal to the University Churches to wake up to the responsibilities. But I appeal too to the Union to take yet another look at its strategy for mission at University level. Perhaps ecumenical chaplains are a luxury? Should we perhaps first see to our own house?

Paul Beasley-Murray.

PRAYER - a practical expression of faith.

A Letter from Tony Cross

'The majority of pieces in this Newsletter are inevitably news items of what God is doing or saying in Britain today. Where this particular item fits in I leave to you to decide. It is prompted by my recent attendance at Spring '80, a conference attended by about 800 people which concentrated on the needs of the Churches for the '80s. There is, however, a strong connection with Paul Beasley-Murray's editorial (Mainstream, April 1980), he concluded, "How large is our Faith in God?.....Let our confidence be in the God who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead and who is pouring out his Spirit on all mankind."

I was very much challenged at Spring '80 by my lack of faith, especially in my prayer. We all pray for revival, for conversions, for an outpouring of the Spirit and so on. What do we actually expect will happen? Wasn't it Shaw who described a Bishop praying in his study, pleading that God would actually speak to him. When they found the Bishop in the morning the Doctor said he had died of a heart attack, brought on by a great shock!

So we need to rediscover the power of prayer and pray, expecting God to answer our prayers. Isn't that part of what praying in Jesus' Name means? We need to pray specifically for national and local leaders and for others who are influential. What might happen if each reader of this newsletter earnestly prayed for Mrs. Thatcher or Kevin Keegan?

To pray earnestly means to pray constantly and consistently. Didn't Jesus talk of a woman's importunity being rewarded? We must show God we mean business and really start to pray.

In the editorial just quoted the lack of growth in the Church is explained by lack of confidence in God and reference is made to the story of the epileptic boy. In Mark's version of that story (Mk. 9: 29), Jesus explains the disciples failure as lack of prayer. We, like those disciples, become so absorbed in the problems we lose sight of the God who is omnipotent; expecting nothing will be achieved. We fail to ask or ask without real faith, expecting our prayers to make little or no difference.

So we need renewed confidence in God and need to express that confidence on our knees. Let us name our friends and others in our prayers. What we start God will finish.'

Tony Cross

SWANWICK CONFERENCE 1981

It was suggested to Alice by the Queen that it was feasible to believe six impossible things before Breakfast. Those who attended last year's Mainstream Conference will know that we matched this early morning standard and we were still believing the impossible after Supper. In this context, regulars will be pleased to note that Paul Beasley-Murray will be making a welcome return to the late-night spot on the Monday evening, but no surprise interviews are scheduled!

When planning the Conference, it was decided to take up the "Call to Commitment" document which was presented to the Nottingham Assembly. Its significance was summed up in a recent "Baptist Times" article which suggested, "Some may look upon the 'Call to Commitment' as just another document from the union officers. Nothing is further from the truth. It is the result of local responses from all over the country to the report "Signs of Hope". Three themes from the call will be considered - Worship, Learning and Leadership. We also noted the suggestion that Churches might study I Peter in the January to Easter period of 1981 and allocated three sessions of the Conference to studies based on this book.

Our speaker giving the Bible readings hardly needs an introduction. Dr. George Beasley-Murray entered the pastoral ministry in 1941 and after two pastorates in Ilford and Cambridge he was appointed in 1950 as the New Testament Lecturer at Spurgeons College. From 1956-58 he was at Ruschlikon Seminary and from there he returned to become Principal of Spurgeons. Over a period of fifteen years he directed the training of a generation of Baptist Ministers. Since 1973 he has been at Southern Baptist Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. He and his wife, Ruth, have recently returned to this country and after a three month tour of Australia will be living at Beckenham, Kent. Among his many appointments he has been Chairman of the B.U. Council and President of the Baptist Union 1968-69. He modestly lists his recreations as music and those who are familiar with his pianism may be assured that it is in our mind to request a performance at Swanwick.

The key area of learning we have entrusted to Professor Graham Ashworth, Associate Minister of Carey Baptist, Preston. It may rank as a first that someone known in the trade as a Probationer Minister is also listed in the 1980 edition of Who's Who. In this latter publication you will find the details of Graham's highly successful career as an architect, town planner and, since 1973, Professor of Urban Environmental Studies at the University of Salford.

Graham is a member of the Strategy Group for the Lancs. and Cheshire Association and serves on the Baptist Union Council. Since 1966 he has been a Governor of the Northern Baptist College. He has shared in establishing links with the Isle of Man Baptist Church and will be leading an Inner Mission there during the Autumn. He describes himself as the unofficial dry-rot Inspector of the Lancs. and Cheshire Association! He has not been invited in this capacity but for his wide experience in education and his strong commitment to discipleship training in the local Church and for what one writer called recently "His irrepressible joy of the Lord".

There was a clear indication from the Nottingham Assembly that we need to give priority to Worship. We have devoted a large part of Tuesday's timetable to this theme and have invited the Rev. Jim Graham of Gold Hill to lead our discussions. Jim's undergraduate days were spent in Glasgow where his contemporaries included Arthur Liston, Andrew MacRae and Peter Barber. He has been Pastor at Gold Hill since 1968. His wife, Anne, is a medical Doctor and they have four children. Gold Hill has strong missionary connections and this involves Jim in travelling overseas. In November he will be the speaker at the Central Thailand Conference for Missionaries organised by the O.M.F. He is an occasional contributor to the publication "Renewal" and will be giving the Bible readings at Filey in 1981. The fellowship at Gold Hill is held in high esteem and we look forward to the honest sharing that Jim will bring to his session.

Linked with this session on Worship will be three Discussion/Workshops. Music in Worship will be conducted by the Rev. Rodney Macaan

of High Wycombe. A familiar voice at Baptist gatherings, Rodney's musical ministry is well established within the denomination and beyond. Born in New Zealand he first came to London in 1964 to take part in the Commonwealth Arts Festival. This led to a contract with the B.B.C. Singers whom he joined in 1965. In 1968 his visa expired (this is to underline he was not dismissed) and he returned to New Zealand. By 1970 he was back in the United Kingdom and worshipping at Dagnall Street, St. Albans. On the advice of his Minister, Morris West, he applied to Spurgeon's to train for the Supplementary Ministry. Since 1974 he has been Associate Pastor at High Wycombe with special responsibilities for music. He has an extensive list of professional singing engagements and next Easter for the fifth year in succession will be one of the soloists for the Bach Choir in the Festival Hall performance of the St. Matthew Passion.

The second workshop, Drama in Worship, will be choreographed by the Rev. Myra Blyth of Sutton. Delegates to the Nottingham Assembly will recall the contribution made by Myra and the Sutton Arts Workshop. Myra studied music at the Royal Academy and received her theological training at Regents Park, Oxford. She organized a Christian Arts Festival in Sutton during May and those taking part included "Riding Lights" from York and the All Souls Orchestra. She has pioneered the Arts Workshop at Sutton and the Group contribute regularly to worship services and organize the occasional street theatre.

The third workshop will be devoted to Changing Patterns in Worship and this will be led by the Rev. Andrew Kane of Durrington, Worthing. Although born in Portsmouth, from the age of eleven Andrew spent five formative years in Kenya. He qualified in this country as a Quantity Surveyor and after training at Spurgeon's went to Durrington in 1970 where he has remained for ten years. When he first went to the Church there were fifty members and sometimes as few as fifteen on a Sunday evening. The 1980 membership roll is three hundred with an equal number present at both services on a Sunday. Andrew has opportunities of ministry overseas and in August visited Sweden. During 1981 he will be visiting the States for ministry. The spiritual growth and renewal of Durrington has been slow and gradual and those who know Andrew's ministry will appreciate the contribution he will bring to this sensitive area of change in worship.

In our final session on Wednesday morning we shall consider Leadership and no doubt reflect what the "Call to Commitment" stated as an urgent need, "to give priority to strategic spiritual leadership with a view to the growth of the Church". Our speaker for this subject is John H. Y. Briggs, Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Keele. His early days were spent at Chatsworth Baptist Church, West Norwood, under Frank Goodwin's ministry. Boys Brigade, Christian Endeavour and Dulwich Crusaders all made their contribution and John is still active in Crusaders as a Leader of the Newcastle under Lyme class. John is a member of the B.U. Council and Chairman of Mission Main Committee. He also chaired the committee that produced "Signs of Hope". In the University he has been appointed Chairman of the Board of Humanities (elsewhere called a Dean). He was consulting Editor to the Lion History of Christianity and has contributed to the Paternoster volume on Evangelical Social Ethics. His book "Victorian Nonconformity", reveals the focus of his teaching and this is further reflected in his hobby, collecting things from the Victorian period! He and his wife have three sons and describe themselves as "chauffeurs for B.B. and Crusader activities".

There is nothing new about the themes we shall consider at Swanwick. Veteran conference attenders may suggest that NEAC and Prestatyn have said it all before. Mainstream believes that this Swanwick Conference is set to make an important contribution to the life of our denomination. The Nottingham Assembly was marked for its spirit of optimism. We are now concerned that the call should lead to commitment. That is why you should book early and avoid disappointment!

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The challenge of the 'House Church Movement'

We are all aware that the charismatic renewal has been a dominant feature of the British Church scene for the last 20 years and has found fertile ground in not a few Baptist churches. We may not be as aware of the development in the last ten years of the so-called 'House Church Movement' which feels itself to be the new (structural) wineskins best fitted to contain the new wine of renewal.

The movement is of course a diverse phenomenon embracing different streams ranging from the 'angry young man' syndrome, expressing impatience with the traditional denominations, through to a conscious and thoughtful attempt to restore the Church to New Testament vitality unhindered by the deadening traditions to be found even in nonconformist churches. This latter stream reflects much of the original Anabaptist vision in the 16th century and tends to be associated with the highly successful Dales Bible Week and the teaching magazine 'Restoration'. Despite the name used above, many 'house churches' do in fact own their own buildings; some have developed out of former Baptist churches, others have come into being through members withdrawing from Baptist churches. Not surprisingly therefore, many Baptists feel themselves to be threatened by the movement although others have been influenced for good through it. Remembering that we were once also regarded with equal (if not greater) suspicion we cannot avoid the question, what is God saying to us through this movement? At the very least, it poses various questions.

New Wineskins

There is the challenge that whereas Anabaptist and Free Church origins lie in withdrawing from the institutionalised Roman and Reformed churches in order to rediscover the nature of the Church as the people of God, we have in fact become institutionalised ourselves and in not a few cases the traditions we have developed are making void the word of God among us. The house churches lay great stress on the small house-group and on flexible worship and structures. All churches need a sense of security and in the house church this is derived not from set forms of worship, but from a strong and authoritative eldership overseeing and directing the church's worship and affairs. The security and stability are drawn from people rather than from an institution. The question posed for us is whether or not we have lost the true concept of membership as being 'members one of another' rather than members of a club or institution.

Restoration

A strong emphasis is placed on the belief that God is restoring his Church to its New Testament pattern and experience. Indeed, some churches call themselves 'restoration' churches. Instead of looking backwards, house churches look forwards and have a vision of a restored and mature church revealing the wisdom and glory of God to the world. Charismatic renewal is seen as part of this restoration with its rediscovery of certain gifts experienced in the early church; but this is not the whole story. There is, it is believed, the restoration of our understanding of the Kingdom of God, of covenant relationship within the church, of apostolic and prophetic ministries. It is not a question of these things not having been around for some centuries, rather a renewal in our understanding of their importance, just as our understanding of 'justification by faith' was restored through Luther, or of 'believers' baptism' through the Anabaptists and Baptists. This is a theme which ought to appeal to Baptists. A major thesis of the Anabaptists was that the church had fallen from God's original purpose for it and needed not so much to be reformed as to be restored. Is it not also a part of the Free Church witness that "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word"?

Spiritual authority

House churches place a great deal of emphasis on the 'Kingly Rule' of God and on the principle of 'delegated authority', that is: God exercises his rule in part at least, through men in whom he invests his authority. This applies to husbands and fathers 'ruling' in the home and to elders 'ruling' in the church. To most of us this might seem to have authoritarian overtones (new presbyter is but old priest writ large?) and yet it raises a much neglected question in Baptist circles - what is spiritual authority and how do we recognise it? With our emphasis on mutual submission embodied in the church meeting are we not in a good position to recognise spiritual authority without allowing authoritarianism?

Translocal ministries

Much that is now happening in the house church movement arose out of discussion in the early seventies surrounding the ministry of the 'prophet' and whether there are contemporary prophets and apostles. It is in this area that the movement is most open to misinterpretation and to the accusation of presumption. The mainstream of house churches is not asserting that there is a limited number of apostles and prophets to whom everybody must defer but that in addition to local eldership there are translocal ministries. Following Ephesians 4: 11 the movement asserts that in addition to pastoral, teaching and evangelistic ministries there are also apostolic and prophetic ministries. Apostolic ministry is concerned with pioneering, laying the foundations of churches, how to build a strong church and overseeing pastors. Prophetic ministry is concerned with discerning God's mind for the present situation, strategy, rediscovering insights from Scripture and applying them with authority to 'now' situations. These ministries are needed by the church to bring it to maturity and "until we all reach unity in the faith" (Ephesians 4: 13). In house church thinking a man of God may be to one church a teacher or evangelist, but to another he may have an apostolic or prophetic ministry if the church recognises this in him and desires it from him. When understood in these terms, the 'apostolic' ministry bears many similarities to the office of Messenger (apostle?) among the General Baptists of the 17th and 18th centuries.

What then is God saying to us through the house church movement? We would be untrue to ourselves if we replied 'nothing'. We must hear the challenge that if we desire to contain new wine we have to be prepared to develop new wineskins; that God has not finished restoring

his church and we must be ready to move with him; that Christ has given men of spiritual authority whom we must learn to recognise and receive, and that we need to seek God's face that he will raise up among us men of extraordinary wisdom, prophetic vision and spiritual effectiveness to help the Bride prepare for the coming of the King.

Nigel Wright,
(Minister - Ansdell, Lytham St. Annes).

As others see us.

Quotations culled from an international ecumenical team report on their visit to the North East last year.

Our general impression is that christian fellowship is felt strongly within the walls of the church building in terms of "Sunday worship", but that outside of it, within the context of the society, there was no real place for it, because christians considered their faith there was a matter of private concern to be ultimately interpreted according to one's individual conscience.

But Christianity is becoming less self-evident to the people of England, and Christians must be prepared to explain what and why they believe; they will have to learn to live as Christians among non-Christians, to be known as different. They must be able to articulate their faith, to discuss the Bible, and to challenge others to adopt the Christian life, in language which is personal and clear. This cannot be accomplished by each Christian working alone, but only in Christian fellowship. We did not see enough evidence of basic training for this kind of Christian life.

Relatively few Christians that we talked with were able to state clearly what they believed. Many were embarrassed when asked; some could offer only vague moralisms, others (usually clergy) propounded wonderful abstractions, and others simply dodged the question altogether. A person seeking to become a Christian might have a hard time finding a guide!

Traditional British reticence is not an adequate explanation. The main problem seems to be a lack of confidence in the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But if you believe in Christ, what makes you think that others cannot? If the language you would use to speak of him means something to you, why shouldn't it mean something to another person? There is too much negativism, especially among clergy: "It's no use talking about Christ in the same old language. No one will listen." Then speak of him in language that comes from your own heart (not just from your head).

Leaders of the church should feel a divine impatience with time wasted on secondary or peripheral matters, and must direct basic questions about the Christian faith and life to their people, being prepared to give their own answers as well.

It is important to train Christians to speak to others about Jesus Christ and the Christian life in language which people will be able to understand. But training and practical experience must go together. Do not get hung up in long planning processes, strategy sessions, etc., without action. Go and do it.

We have some friendly criticisms of this relatively new and very promising kind of Christian ministry. For one, is the Christian Gospel adequately represented by finding signs that God's creative

Spirit is at work in the world and encouraging these expressions of his Spirit? ("Mission in the Eighties"). Is it enough simply to baptise whatever good things you may encounter? The work of the Spirit is also to glorify Christ. (John 16: 14-15). Some of us wondered what was the difference between a chaplain and an industrial psychologist, if the chaplain never clearly expresses the faith by which he operates. (Not that many other Christians are in a position to criticise chaplains on this score!)

The Christian contribution to government should be made from within, from outside, and from beyond.

1. Christians should stand for election and seek appointed public office, and in those positions apply their faith to the decisions they face, while trying to move or rework the structures of government in favour of Christian principles. There may well be no clearly Christian point of view on many issues, and in such cases, it is not the particular philosophy which will mark a Christian politician's actions, but a fearless devotion to the people's welfare, without regard for his personal future - a willingness to sacrifice, to take the harder course when necessary. Christians must support and encourage such people.
2. Christians in every walk of life should keep in contact with public officials, raising questions of principle, proposing specific actions when possible.
3. Though being a Christian does not guarantee political wisdom, and Christians themselves will often disagree, there are great issues which cry out for Christian comment, and there are voiceless ones whom we must try to hear. There are actions and statements of people in power which must be challenged: this should be done ecumenically wherever possible.
4. On many issues Christians will join with non-Christians for common ends, adding their own depth to the discussion. For example, anyone might say that people of all races are brothers; a Christian goes beyond this statement to our common origin in God, and even to Christ's offering of himself for all.

The Church Outreaching - through Caring

It was at a Church Meeting in 1967 that "Outreach" plans for the Church were discussed. During this discussion the idea of caring for people we had already reached was aired. Out of this was born the Romford Baptist Church Housing Association Ltd. A couple of years later "Parkside" was opened for thirty elderly people. Some of these were elderly members of the Church, and some came to our notice from our house-to-house visitation in the vicinity of the Church. Caring and Evangelism are two sides of the same coin.

In "Parkside" we have twenty single and five double rooms. The residents are cared for by a devoted Christian staff and many voluntary helpers of all ages. It certainly has been an outlet for Christian service of many forms. (The Minister serves out the porridge most mornings!!!) The residents began their own devotional meeting on a Monday morning, at which the Minister conducts a monthly communion. On a Thursday evening a different member of the Church leads a devotional service. As the years went by the residents became more infirm

and ill. Our Matron would often sleep on the floor in one of the sick resident's rooms. Obviously this could not continue for long, and the elderly resident had to be sent to the local Geriatric Hospital. We came to feel that this was not right - that when they entered the 'valley of the shadow' we sent them off to "strangers". As a result of our prayerful thinking we built a Ward with four beds as an extension. It is beautifully furnished and overlooks well-kept gardens. Trained nurses and night staff supervise this Ward twenty four hours per day. Prayers are said and the Bible read each evening. There is a wonderful sense of the Lord's Presence there, and the Ward is full of serenity. Sometimes a resident who goes into the Ward is restored to health, so that she can return to her own room again. There is nothing morbid about the Ward and it has been a wonderful experience to witness our aged residents dying amidst such loving care and in Christian confidence. When they need us most, we are there.

As a matter of interest the Lord has so blessed this aspect of the Church's ministry that our second Home "Heathside" was opened last November by Nell Alexander. So altogether we now care for 51 people in our two Homes.

Through one of our Doctor members - who used to help in the Ward from time to time - the wider community was stimulated to embark on a much more ambitious scheme called "St. Francis Hospice". This whole venture will cost in the region of £750,000 and will provide loving care for 30-40 patients with terminal illness and cater for the needs of their families. A Chapel will be the focal point of this Hospice.

These caring activities of a local Church are an eloquent sermon to the whole London Borough of Havering.

Norman Wright,
(Minister - Main Road, Romford, Essex).

Whetstone Baptist Church.

Whetstone is an Industrial Village, seven miles south of Leicester. The Baptist Church became self-supporting in 1919 after being linked with a larger local church. For a long time most of the membership was made up of folk from the few large families who formed much of the village population, but in the last few decades it has also become a church to which people travel from the surrounding area. On my arrival in 1973 the active membership was 104, and it is now 132, so this is not a phenomenal growth story, but rather a situation which is quietly encouraging.

The growth of the church is in part due to its many traditional activities, but I will try here to isolate some particular local features.

Firstly, we do try and make all visitors feel welcome and I thank God for some of my older ladies who greet new friends with a warm handshake and the traditional local greeting "'ello me duck"!

Another interesting factor has been growth through people who have first come to us wanting to be married in church. This seems to me to be one of the few areas today where people still come to the church asking for help. Some of these have been divorcees and our diaconate have had some very hard decisions to make. We do not remarry everyone of course, but a number of folk have not only been married but also have found Christ, been baptised, and become members.

Some of these have been helped through our Evangelism Explosion visitation which, although it reaped a waiting harvest when it began, has been harder and less fruitful recently, although still playing a vital part in making and following up contacts.

One sad cause of growth has been by disillusioned Christians from other fellowships and although we are glad to help and re-establish them in the faith, we are very concerned for the unhappy church situations from which they come.

Lastly, I ought to record that virtually none of our growth has been from young people brought up within the church ("biological"), but it is made up entirely of people coming to us from outside. This is cause for concern for us.

Now, how has this growth shown itself?

It has had an expression in the wider South Leicestershire Fellowship of Baptist Churches to which we belong, which is becoming a vehicle for local joint activity. As a particular focussing of this we are very concerned for one small country church where at the moment we provide lay leadership, and in the future we have more adventurous plans for joint ministry.

Two years ago we thought through some of the church growth principles and set ourselves growth goals but now, as a result of last years Mainstream Conference, I shared my vision of the future with the diaconate and together we shared it with the church in a document called 'A ten point plan for growth'. One of the growth areas mentioned was in the family concept of a church which we recently fostered in a church family weekend, taking about 70 people (from 4 months to almost 80 years old) for spiritual and social re-creation, to Cliff College in Derbyshire.

There have, however, also been tensions.

The main one concerns my time. With one evening per week spent on evangelistic visiting, the whole structure of my diary has had to be revised. There is also a time pressure when, before one discipleship class has finished, another has to be started for more new converts, and there is no-one else available or suitable to do this. A similar tension exists in pastoral care with more folk to care for, and less time to do it in although other people seem more ready to help in this direction, and we have just worked out a scheme of care for the future based on housegroups.

The other main tension comes from inbred ecclesiastical conservatism which is resistant to alterations and means we only change very slowly and gradually to make sure the fellowship is kept united. There are many things that will have to be modified but it is a frustratingly slow process at times. Another reflection of this attitude is the unwillingness to grow, coupled with the idea that when we have strangers and new people in, it is not as nice and comfortable as it was when we were smaller and we knew each other more intimately. Also the diverse spiritual understanding of a congregation makes it hard to effectively minister to everyone and I am aware that sometimes the deeper teaching and exposition demanded by the mature in the faith is neglected in the concern to help the newly converted.

I must not let you think we are without our failures.

Our midweek activities are often poorly supported (except for housegroups) and our prayer life as a church leaves much to be desired

with a number of indifferently attended meetings, but no vibrant prayer meeting where we all meet together. However, we are sure that God is doing His Sovereign work amongst us, and even sometimes, despite us, and we pray that as a church our work, worship and witness will extend the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus, and bring glory to our Father in Heaven.

Michael F. Elcome,
Minister - Whetstone Baptist Church.

Hawkshead Hill Baptist Church.

It is the 15th June, 1980. A congregation of about 90 people squeezed into Hawkshead Hill Baptist Chapel. On the communion table is a huge cake with candles, on the wall in large figures the number 302. The aisle is blocked by a carry-cot. A baby on the knee of an instant granny sucks happily at a feeding bottle; wide-eyed children blow out the candles, others join in the singing with tambourines or shakers. Most sit on the floor on brightly coloured cushions to make more room for the adults. The voices of local families mingle with those of visitors in joyful celebration. You have stumbled upon the 302nd Anniversary of the founding of this Baptist fellowship which combines neatly with the 3rd Anniversary of the re-opening of the Chapel and the 1st Anniversary of the re-constitution of the membership.

I assure you that gives one a lot of satisfaction. The patient preparation and sowing, the hard work of following up contacts all around the Lake District, waiting on the Lord in prayer for the re-birth of a church which was one of five in the area to have been closed. It is the end of 50 years of continuous decline.

And now here is a look at this work from a number of different angles:

1. The Association.

Since the Church had died and there was no membership and no services, strategic planning had to be done elsewhere and resources brought from outside. In this case it was the Lancashire & Cheshire Association which fulfilled this vital role. I believe that kind of initiative in church planting needs to be taken far more frequently than has been usual in the last generation and the Associations are one source of such initiatives.

In this case the Association combined with the support of the Home Mission Fund. Well done! Where next? Who is really responsible for church planting and strategic growth? In our case the backing of churches throughout the Association gave a dimension of care and support not felt by most ministers. I thank God for this sense of united action which I merely spear-headed.

2. Rural Ministry.

Gwynne Edwards' recent report has made the denomination aware of the special needs of rural churches and evangelism. Our experience here suggests that one good key can unlock a whole area and that rural ministry should be looked at as an area principle. From a base in the hamlet of Hawkshead Hill - (9 houses and a Baptist Chapel) we have been able to revitalise our nearest neighbours 20 miles away at Millom who have grown from a despairing handful to a busy little church with their own minister aided by the H.M.F. And we have families linked

to our fellowship right across South Lakeland. Each of these families is developing its own potential for evangelism and christian nurture in the village or town where they live. People travel widely in the country, 25 miles to shop, 50 miles to hospital, 12 miles to a swimming pool, up to 15 miles to school, 25 miles to College of Further Education etc. It's the pattern of life. So that though many will feel well served by the life of the local parish Church, others will feel it worth while to travel a good distance to a live Baptist Church. One good key can unlock a whole area spiritually. We have only just begun as yet, but the potential is very great. Mind you, the travelling expenses are very high!

3. Church Life.

Bringing to birth a new congregation means that you must establish the pattern, the tradition, the feel of the church yourself. This is a marvellous opportunity. I seized it with both hands. Our Church is a "family of families". There are no groups, only families. Worship and other activities normally include all age-groups. Church life includes all life not just the "spiritual" bit as far as possible. The Church goes swimming, owns hens and rears turkeys (on behalf of Operation Agri.), manages a folk-singer, runs a swap-shop for exchangeable goods through its Magazine, etc. The ordinary life of lots of lively people flows freely in and out of the church. One time of thanksgiving for "things we can do with our hands" turned into a spontaneous fashion parade! Many visitors say that the really distinctive thing about the service is the content of the notices which may announce a party as well as a prayer-time or ask for volunteers to pluck turkeys as well as for an open air witness!

4. Holiday-Makers.

The basic motivation felt by the Association in planning this work was ministry to holiday-makers, particularly to those who would not ordinarily go near a church. Progress here is slower mainly because I understood my task to be the establishment of evangelising churches in the area, communities with a vision of the opportunity around them, but some of our people had had experience of Church life which seemed to lose identity and integrity in its desire to attract holiday people. Some of our work here has been simply supportive of individual Christian people working for the Lord in the secular context. Examples are a Christian camp-site owner, the National YMCA Centre and the National Park Tourist Centre in which Christians work and witness.

Requests have also come from Caravan Club weekend rallies to conduct a service on site and many Christian camps for young people have rejoiced to find a live Church locally to which to bring their youngsters for worship on Sunday.

At the same time we continue to develop our own gifts in our fellowship and explore opportunities so as to present the gospel in really imaginative ways as street (or camp site) theatre, puppetry, folk evenings, barbecues, slide-shows. Negatively there is a need to overcome a slight feeling among local people of needing to resist the holiday invasion rather than minister to it, or to exploit it rather than serve it.

5. Isolation.

To minister in such an isolated spot needs some handling. To begin with when we first arrived we knew nobody, had no congregation, even the disused Chapel was unusable for the first few months while we planned and accomplished refurnishing and redecorating. At this stage we normally held the Lord's Supper round our kitchen

table on any occasion that Christian friends happened to visit us from afar!

The nearest minister's fraternal is 85 miles away in St. Annes. I attend it when I can, but have also found good fellowship as a regular member of the Chapter meeting of the local Anglican deanery.

The background of church members is very diverse. From House Church to Catholic and everything in between. Most are new or young Christians. In such a situation it has been interesting to teach Baptist principles and gently encourage people to breathe the atmosphere of Baptist life, tradition and history.

Occasionally our folk, being weak in number and isolated, feel it worthwhile to travel nearly 100 miles for a service on Sunday night to be part of a large Church which is experiencing God's blessing and renewal and there is a growing relationship here as some of their people occasionally lead our worship and I sometimes meet with the minister and his deacons for prayer and ministry. I see more clearly today than before, the necessity and benefit of such relationships and we have found ourselves drawn towards a rediscovery of the significance of the office of messenger which was such a distinctive feature of Baptist life in the 18th Century.

Post Script.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this work has been that hundreds of people from far and near have seen in the re-opening of this tiny village Chapel suitably refurnished for family worship, a sign of hope, which far exceeds the significance of the long uphill struggle to actually establish a viable congregation with an effective ministry. Most people have seen hundreds of closed Chapels. Just one re-opening has been seen again and again as the good news that the tide is turning. A kind of day-star at first light that prophesies the certainty of a new day. I wonder if they are right?

Geoffrey King,
Minister - Hawkshead Hill Baptist
Church.

Rural Mission.

Gwynne Edwards - A Report on Baptists in the countryside.

The myth that the simple life in the country of necessity leads to God fearing and Godliness, have often blinded the church to the palsied state of Christianity in England's rural countryside. The tranquil life which Constable captured magnificently on canvas, or the awakened emotions of our poets gazing on the splendour of nature dressed in her Autumn tweeds, have rhapsodised the theme of rural simplicity. The delights of the environment and our subsequent enjoyment of undulating fields, beckoning townies to space and freedom, is one significant factor in the gains and losses in contemporary village, church life.

The paper presented at the B.U. Assembly this year confirms Joad's forecast of 1946 "the scale of the invasion of the country by the towns will be beyond anything that we have experienced or imagined. We are the last generation before the floodgates were opened and the waters of change pass through". Since 1951 over one million people have moved to the country. Villages situated in reasonable travelling distance to large conurbations attract the commuter, retired people, the well-to-do for whom the village residence has a status symbol,

the peripetetic week-enders who contribute little and are often resented by the locals. The 'gut' has been torn out of many villages by economic pressures and increased mobility. Closed schools, services, medical facilities withdrawn, shops and often the post-office unable to compete with supermarket prices have left the village pub and occasionally the church as the only two viable institutions remaining - and often the church appears more dead than alive! Rural Mission deals adequately with these symptoms.

The trauma of many of our village chapels is seen in small congregations, insufficient funds, painful self consciousness and inferiority with its resultant defensive attitudes, are part of the problem. There are other factors. The inter-marriage of families can be a limiting influence, causing the younger generations to shy away from responsibility and leadership. It also inhibits the decision making process through family loyalty taking precedence over church decisions. There is inevitable introversion through the frontier mentality which fights for its land, its rights and its privacy. Shyness and immunity to new experiments in worship and witness are often rejected because they are new. This is a strange phenomena when some of the greatest changes in modernisation have taken place in agriculture and in rural homes. Further research and expansion of this theme would be valuable.

To be more specific.

1. FINANCE

The report suggests that finance is not a great problem in terms of chapel maintenance. This begs the question, what standard of maintenance? Damp walls? Hard seats? Tatty paintwork, wooden floors, peeling decor.....? And what shall we say of wood worm and windows that emit draughts and foundations which are slipping and so few modern aids for the faithful Sunday School Teacher. What could I say more.....time and space forbid!

To expect modern villagers to extract themselves from their comfortable, warm carpeted tied cottage and to attend a musty Chapel on Sunday afternoons demands considerable will-power. Money is a part of the problem Gwynne!

Country ministers and lay preachers are constantly subsidising village chapels by high travelling costs incurred and the unrealistic expenses which are available. No, that is not a moan, but an input into the equation! If there is a case for keeping the doors open of many village chapels, then we need more money and a possible redistribution of Union funds - which begs the question of:

2. LEADERSHIP.

The report is clear about the tension of delegated or assumed leadership in rural areas. The twin observations that gentleness and patience and a certain 'ruthlessness which knows when the time is right for decisive action', has never been more needed. Anyone taking up the specialised ministry of England's rural areas needs patience, sympathy and the discipline to understand country life. Acceptance only comes after long periods of loving service. Section 3 is an excellent digest of a typical rural church scene. Delights and dangers are mentioned briefly but adequately.

The fourth section deals with means currently in use to bring new spiritual life to our villages. The diversity of group structure and team ministries for order, celebration and involvement is an "indication of the bursting life of rural groups". The truth is that such

groupings are not very numerous, taking a nation-wide view. Their effectiveness is often due to dedicated leadership which is in short supply. A plurality of Elders on a regional basis may be a partial answer, with training sessions arranged at Association level. Spiritual malnutrition is an illness which will only be corrected with loving, systematic, pragmatic teaching and preaching. The report highlights the problems of such ministry caused by a misguided independence. This is worthy of more study especially in the misguided assumption that anything planned or organised shackles the Holy Spirit.

Full marks to Gwynne Edwards for his comments on 'New Activities' (p.20) and 'In the Community' (p.21), these are stimulating and exciting. The very deep problems of survival have often been the seed bed of creative ideas which have produced spiritual growth.

In the penultimate section 'nitty gritty', questions are posed. Reflections on the nature of the church revolve around loyalty to the chapel as an expression of our presence in the community and the crucial question of independency. Does a service once a week with a handful of believers witness effectively to the living presence of the Risen Christ? Is the disproportionate amount of time spent on the upkeep of plant as distinct from being members of the larger community, a hinderance or help? Are we not more likely to gain adherents in a pagan society by the use of a house as the venue, rather than a draughty chapel building?

The leadership crisis is not easy of solution. The report hints at possible new departures from what hitherto has been the Baptist pattern. These need to be given a fair wind at this crucial time, not by some B.U. 'boffins' only, but by associations involving ministers and deacons in depth enquiry. If Elders is an emotive term let us not be afraid of the function and concept - what's in a name? A group of part time sharing Elders in an association, could bring new impetus and much needed leadership to our villages. Training could be localised.

The report makes stimulating reading and suggestions of life amidst much barrenness. It could be a primary pathway leading to renewal of our rural areas so that Jesus Christ may again be seen to be 'walking in Englands green and pleasant land'.

Patrick J. Goodland,
Minister - Gorsley, Herefordshire.

Release for Action

Commenting on 'Release for Action' is rendered difficult by uncertainty as to what it is about which one is commenting. It is clearly intended to be a 'do-it-yourself' study kit about local church leadership. The essence of any DIY kit, is, however, that you can have a photograph or other indicator of the end product. Your objective is clear, you know with what you will finish.

With 'Release for Action' the end product is far from clear. It will be some form of shared leadership but each local church will have to identify the form and structure that is most suitable to itself and then how to harness the gifts of the members to that form and structure. Such work is notoriously difficult even for practised people in more secular organisations. For the inexperienced to attempt it in a local church setting without more precise guidance may be asking too much.

To have to say this is a great shame in that the basic objective of encouraging a fellowship to consider the whole question of shared leadership, and indeed much of the material which is assembled in 'Release for Action' and in the associated background papers, is excellent. It is the lack of organisation of the material which is unfortunate.

It is assumed that one person in a church has taken the initiative and obtained the books. He or she will then read and familiarise themselves with the contents before introducing the subject and the material to a small group of interested fellow members. The material consists of two articles on leadership from different perspectives followed by notes on an introductory, and five main, sessions of study and thought. There follows some six appendices of helpful supporting material. One of these Appendices is a list of the Background Papers which form the second volume of the programme.

The only way to appreciate the material is to see oneself as the initiator in ones own church. The two articles on leadership were interesting to read but were hardly a basis for "giving an explanation on the concept of leadership, the Scriptural authority for it, and how it can help the local church" as the initiator is enjoined at the Introductory Session. The background material might help but it is not cross referenced in any way. The initiator would have the same difficulty with the five sessions entitled "Communications", "Relationships", "Individual Gifts", "Shared Leadership", and "Where do we go from here"? The same lack of structure and cross-referencing of the support material persists. Furthermore, whilst all the subjects are obviously of relevance to the main theme of local church leadership, the absence of an overall frame of reference is likely to make life difficult for the study team.

In view of the importance of the subject of the study package and in deference to the project team, who prepared, it is a matter of regret that this attempt to tackle such a difficult subject does not really lead a church in its exploration of the subject. With more guidance, within an overall framework and more cross referencing, much more could probably have been made of the same material and the work of the local group made easier.

Alan Wilkinson,
Member of Altrincham Baptist Church.

PRAISE GOD.

Ed. Gilmore, Walker & Smalley, B.U. Publications, £3.95.

The trouble with the study of worship is that there are distinctly two parts to it. There is the work of the scholar, studying, for example, the papyrus fragments of ancient eucharistic prayers. But this academic study is light years away from the business of standing before a congregation on a Sunday morning, with hymn-book, Bible, and perhaps guitar and visual aids for the children, and trying to lead a variegated congregation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in true and worthy worship of Almighty God.

As one who has done both sorts of work, I feel I must begin by complaining that too often these two kinds of work are confused, and it is assumed that experts in one discipline will be helpful in the other. This, I feel, was something of the trouble with the "liturgical movement" and it has its roots back in the romantic antiquarianism of the Victorian era, and the Oxford Movement in particular. Prayers and orders of services may be collected, but that is no guarantee that they will be any use at all to other and later ages. What people did in the past may well be just an awful warning of what to avoid. And it is worthwhile noting that ancient service-books were very different from literary texts. No two ancient service-books before the advent of printing were exactly alike. Indeed, the earlier back we go, the more ephemeral they were. Prayers could be written on a leaf of papyrus, and after use it could be used to add up the cost of your shopping. The worship of the Christian community will always be a

living thing, and collections of prayers must always be in some sense a negation of that.

Praise God is divided into three main sections, the Christian Year, Scripture sentences and prayers, and Sacraments and Ordinances. It is good to see a return to the usage of the Christian Year, if only because it provides a framework for Christian teaching that will hopefully protect the congregation from the minister's pet themes, However, one could have wished for slightly better introductions to the various parts. Are the compilers unaware that Lent began as the period of instruction for candidates for baptism during the patristic period? And I feel I must complain most strongly that Good Friday has virtually no mention in the prayers of the redemptive death of Christ, freeing us from the penalty and power of sin.

The second section shows the great diligence of the compilers in acquiring prayers from all kinds of sources. Since anyone's choice will not please anyone else totally, I will not complain. But I must ask about how these are meant to be used. Are they to be in addition to normal extempore prayer? Or in place of it? Or to offer seed thoughts to the minister before he prays? Also, I find it rather ludicrous that Harvest is described as "Occasion of Thanksgiving", and a missionary service as an "Occasion of Mission". I would like to see the response of the average congregation when they hear in the church notices that there will be an "occasion of Mission from the BMS next weekend". Also, one omission I noticed; where are the prayers to be used when the collection is taken. This "occasion" comes with remarkable regularity in most churches.

The third section, containing the orders of worship, is in general sound and unremarkable. With our Baptist insistence on the freedom of the Holy Spirit to lead our worship, these orders are at best in the nature of good advice. I did notice, however, that no acknowledgment was given in the Sunday worship service to the widespread practice of having children in for the first part of the service, before they leave for Sunday School classes. As to the prayers prescribed, again it is a matter of personal preference. But I did wince at the mention of "Consigning the body to the flames" in the funeral service.

It is good that a list of the sources is given for all the prayers. Although it will be impossible to ascertain, one would like to know how many will be used, and how often, in say the next ten years. However, the resource list at the end of the book is remarkably limited. In music, have the compilers never heard of Youth Praise or Sound of Living Waters? In prayers, the compilers obviously lean towards the ecumenical and catholic side of the churches. And if they are going to list various denominational church service-books, to be complete they ought to mention the Anglican 1662 Book of Common Prayer and the Series 3 services, from which they borrow prayers in the next text.

So, what am I going to do with my copy of Praise God? I shall keep it as a source for ideas, especially when I need stimulation in spiritual dry periods or when I feel in danger of getting into a rut. As commanded by the apostle, I shall "Test all things, and hold fast to what is good". But I do not think that it will become either an indispensable or even a regular companion of mine as I prepare for worship or actually conduct it.

Michael Smith,
Minister -Golcar, Huddersfield.

BOOK REVIEWS

John White - Parents in Pain - I.V.P. £1.75

The versatile pen of John White is illuminating as he tackles the contemporary rebellion of many teenagers to Christian truth and values. He develops this theme sympathetically, not from the standpoint of an observer, but as a father of a rejector. This tragedy in his own family life is interpreted delicately from the wealth of his experience as a loving father, trained psychiatrist and compassionate pastor.

This book will encourage, challenge and lift baffled parents out of the sense of failure and guilt if they are caught in this dilemma and will prepare parents of young children for the difficult teenage years.

Highly commended.

Michael Griffiths - Shaking the Sleeping Beauty - I.V.P. £1.75

Martin Goldsmith - Can My Church Grow - Hodder £1.25

These books both have authors who have served in the Far East with O.M.F., both have been engaged actively with planting and growing churches, both will be sharing the fruits of their experiences with future 'growers' in training colleges. Michael Griffiths is Principal elect of London Bible College and Martin Goldsmith is a Lecturer at All Nations Christian College.

The emphasis of the Griffiths contribution is on the abilities and requirements of God's instruments, for planting and perfecting churches. The spiritual requirements are seen as taking precedence over human methodology.

Martin Goldsmith's book is practical and draws attention to the awakening consciousness of many churches in the western world. He is aware of barriers which have held up growth and sensitively exposes areas where rethinking is essential. Liberal in verbal illustrations and quotes, it applies missionary principles to a pagan western world as a means to church growth.

The Lion Encyclopaedia of the Bible

Colourful, attractive, with a high proportion of visual material, these books are proving invaluable aids to Bible study. Excellent for reference in Bible study groups and Sunday School programmes. They come in 10 separate parts and at 95p each they are excellent value.

List of titles: The Environment of the Bible.
Archaeology and the Bible.
The Story of the Bible.
Key Teaching and the Bible.
Religion and Worship in the Bible.
People of the Bible.
Home and Family Life in the Bible.
Work and Society in the Bible.
Places of the Bible.
Atlas of the Bible.

Patrick J. Goodland
Minister - Gorsley, Herefordshire.

Cyril J. Davey - Sadhu Sundar Singh - S.T.L. Books, P.O. Box 48,
Bromley, Kent - pp. 158 - £1.25

As a schoolboy, I heard many thrilling stories about this Christian holy man, and years later I stood bareheaded by the tiny bungalow in North India from which he set out on his last journey into the mountains, from which he never returned.

Here is a very readable account of some of the incredible experiences of this legendary figure, who, after a dramatic conversion, travelled all over India and into Tibet, preaching the Gospel and rousing the Church.

This book is a tonic and a challenge, besides providing illustrations for talks to children and adults. Buy it.

Stanley Browne,
President of the Baptist Union.

Malcolm Smith - Follow Me - £2.50

Malcolm Smith - Turn Your Back on the Problem - £2.00

(Both available from Anfield Music, 201 Monument Rd., Edgbaston,
Birmingham 16)

"If I had my time over again", said one famous preacher, "I would concentrate much of my ministry on a small group of people with leadership potential". This is what Jesus did. Out of the many who followed Him, He chose twelve. He did not get them to read a series of books, attend His lectures or do a course. He simply asked them to come along and live life with Him as His apprentices. He called them to be with Him. The Pharisees also had their disciples. They taught them doctrine and procedure. Jesus disciplined His men in the living of life. Paul seems to have done a similar thing. Wherever he went there was a band of young men with him, apprenticed to him and learning to be Christian leaders. Malcolm Smith's book, Follow Me, is about discipling - "investing your life in others". He tells the story of how he discovered discipling and its importance. It could bring new power and meaning into our ministries.

Turn Your Back on the Problem is equally easy reading and again telling a personal story. Malcolm Smith is an American Pentecostal minister who became bogged down with his problems and had to learn to take his eyes and mind off his problems and fix them on God. His problems did not vanish, but he was changed and his situation became changed too. A word for us all.

Lewis Misselbrook,
Dept. of Mission - Baptist Union.

Ronald Sider - Christ and Violence - Aslan Books - 92pp - £1.25

From the Author of Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger comes another profound and prophetic book which strikes at the soft underbelly of the evangelical church - our lack of the radical lifestyle and witness demanded by the Gospel. Ronald Sider clearly draws inspiration from the Anabaptist-Mennonite-Quaker tradition with its strong peace testimony. Without shirking hard questions (although also without answering all of them) Dr. Sider addresses the issues of economic, political and military violence in our world and asserts that the cross of Jesus is not only the means of our reconciliation to God, but also God's 'No' to violence of all kinds. The reviewer found this book deeply challenging and disturbing and sensed that here some of the hard

words of Jesus, which we least like to hear, were being made sense of. Like Rich Christians this is a book we cannot afford to ignore.

Nigel Wright,
Minister - Ansdell, Lytham St. Annes.

With reference to the two books by Lawrence Crabb (Effective Biblical Counselling and The Principles of Biblical Counselling) reviewed in the last edition of our newsletter, these are published in America by Zondervan Press but can be obtained in this country through:-

The Religious Book Shop,
79 Reginald St.,
Luton LU2 7RD.

or

Anfield Music,
201 Monument Rd.,
Edgbaston,
Birmingham 16.



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