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## **Is there a word from the Lord?**

What is a prophet? Are you a prophet? Am I a prophet? Are there in fact such things as prophets? And are they really necessary?

This issue of MAINSTREAM begins to explore the claims made for prophecy in the church today. I am grateful to Peter Hetherington for sharing out loud his doubts and questions about these claims, and to Clifford Fryer whom I asked to write in reply.

The subject is by no means closed! Further contributions are invited, especially those in which fact predominates over opinion. In particular what I would like to be able to publish now are testimonies from people who exercise this gift or churches where it operates.

Anybody wanting a really illuminating introduction to this subject can be recommended to read "Prophecy" by Bruce Yocum, published by Servant Publications, Ann Arbor, U.S.A. It is available in this country from N.S.C., CREW Trust, 262A Fulham Road, London.

What ever our starting point on this matter, all of us should be able to agree with the apostolic injunction, 'try to excel in gifts that build up the church'. It is because we want to do just that that we need to hear the claims made for prophecy today, and allow those claims to be tested by scripture and their own fruitfulness.

The Editor.

NEWSLETTER No. 11.

September 1982.

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## PROPHECY TODAY ?

- A letter received from Peter Hetherington.

At our recent Mainstream Conference the word "prophetic" was perhaps the most over-worked piece of ecclesiastical jargon used. What does it mean today?

We were told that one speaker's ministry was "prophetic", This was contradicted by another who wanted a "prophetic" word to be given to all the churches of our land. It is clear that some would describe at least one utterance at the communion service as "prophetic". We were told that this was a word "from the Lord". Many more examples would be quoted.

Perhaps what caused me most concern was the expressed desire for a single prophetic word for all our churches, as if there is a "blanket" solution to every church's needs. David Pawson was given as an illustration of one who tours our country giving a prophetic word to all our churches (I hope that does not misrepresent him).

Are we in danger of getting very close to denying what the Bible teaches about both the church and prophecy? For example, the word "church" in the New Testament either refers to the local church or the universal church, comprising the church, triumphant, militant and expectant. It will meet for the first time when the Lord returns! Uses of such illustrations as "the Body" equally apply to either the local or universal church. They never refer to a denomination or a territorial church. If this is so then the teaching of 1 Corinthians 12 on the Gifts of the Spirit refer to gifts of God to the local church. This is not surprising if Matthew 18. 15 - 20 is right that when Christ's people meet in His Name, He is there. There is no higher authority than Him!

"Prophecy" is among God's gifts. Surely, one cannot be more radical than to believe that God has personal dealings with each local congregation. As far as I can see, it is an unbiblical alternative to believe that He simply expresses a national, impersonal, "cure-all" solution. Prophecy could perhaps be defined as a specific word from God to a given situation.

Is there a danger today of trying to replace one form of external human authoritarianism, which we repudiate, with another? It is only the Lord Jesus Who has "crown rights" in a local church.

Why must today's "prophecies" be couched in the first person singular? Where is the New Testament evidence for this? Why is the New Testament, which talks so much about "prophets" and "prophecy" (etc.) singularly lacking in evidence of "prophecies" in this format? Another question I want to ask is, have there been no prophetic ministries over the centuries just because these ministries were not couched in the first person singular?

I am still sufficiently old-fashioned to believe in the regulative principle in church life and worship (although, like most, I'm not completely consistent!) This makes me accept that "charismatic-style" worship (for want of a more easily understood term) is one of the legitimate options, although not the only one. But I also believe, and I don't think I am the only one left, that the New Testament must interpret the Old Testament and that for us the New Testament is "regulative".

The problem for me is that nowhere in the New Testament can I find support for either the present day practice of first person singular prophetic utterances or for "prophecies" which are divorced from the teaching ministry of the local church.

Of course, I know about such verses as Acts 11.27. But I don't think this argues against my point. I think it supports it, because it was a ministry of prophets in a local church which resulted in the local church at Antioch acting upon it. There is no indication that these prophets toured the country encouraging the churches to act in the one particular way. But even if this happened the ministry was within the local church. But I admit that this is an argument from silence, but so is the opposite argument!

What I do find is that in 1 Corinthians 14, where Paul is arguing for the practice of "prophecy" rather than "tongues" in public worship, v6 qualifies v5. In v5 Paul cites tongues and prophecy. "Now, brothers," he continues in v6, "if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?" Does this mean that "prophecy" is another way of describing revelation, knowledge or instruction? Perhaps 1 Corinthians 14.26 - 32 is even clearer on this. If this is so, or even if these terms are only very closely related, then the old-fashioned view of a "prophetic ministry" is not far from the truth! This, for example, would make all of the New Testament "prophetic"!

"Teaching" is, surely, a related gift, although teaching need not be "prophetic". It may well not have the "immediacy" of God's presence like prophecy, revelation, knowledge and instruction.

I have the privilege every Sunday of standing in the pulpit previously occupied for 35 years by one of our denomination's prophets. If a prophet is to be judged by the Bible's standard that fulfilment of his words shows that they were from God (Deuteronomy 18. 22), then Theodore Bamber was a prophet. I have to confess that when I hear the denial of such prophetic ministries I both cringe and am disturbed. I am disturbed because the repudiation of history is implicit in so much of present-day teaching. I cringe because if God speaks a word then surely we must not try to put Him into a straight-jacket of our making as to the format it must take, before we will listen.

## **LET THE PROPHETS SPEAK!**

### The Priority of Prophecy

"God is saying that someone here is suffering from a serious eye condition. It is at the back of the eyes and the left eye is worse than the right. You have consulted your doctor this week and have also been seeking a word from the Lord. God wants to heal you. Would the person concerned please call out 'It's me' and we will pray for you right away". There was an immediate response from a young man in the congregation of about 50 people. Detailed words of knowledge were given relating to six more people in the meeting, accompanied by a great surge of faith and praise from all present, and attended by signs following.

This happened recently in an interdenominational meeting in an Anglican Church in Ilfracombe. Some may dismiss this a small-time sensationalism from an unimportant town on the knee-cap of Britain, yet for those privileged to be present it was an experience of God akin to that of the woman who met Jesus and told the world "He told me everything I ever did". Furthermore this incident (and the many like happening in the Church today) embodies three vital elements of the prophetic word : it is specific, it is immediate to the situation and it is dynamic in its effect being authenticated by the power of God. Such ministry is a priority for the contemporary Church and the contemporary world.

## Prophecy is FOR the Church

Prophecy is listed among God's spiritual gifts for His Church. He has actually gone so far as to appoint prophets in the Church (1 Cor. 14:28). Those who seek to put Church history into dispensational pigeon-holes have wrongly taught that spiritual gifts, including prophecy, died out with the apostolic age. However, as the church has not died out and never will, so God's gifts for her will always be needed until the perfect comes with the return of Christ. Others would bring complications by geographical division. "The New Testament speaks only of local Church prophets" say some. Others reply "The only true prophets are those of the national Old Testament type. We need men of this calibre today. The local prophet is insignificant in the global village".

There is a simple answer to all this wrangling. Prophecy is for the Church. The Church is simply God's people. God will speak to His people in every situation; local, translocal, denominational, inter-denominational and universal. It is God's right to speak on all these levels. We must not seek to confine Him in any way.

It is important however to notice the particular attention given in the New Testament to prophecy in local congregations. I began this article with a local example for this very reason. We must do more than nod in the direction of this local emphasis. We must let the prophets speak in our assemblies. We must encourage our people to "earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially prophecy". We must throw off the self-imposed straight-jacket of a system which allows only 'the preacher' to exercise his ministry and effectively muzzles others. This calls for a level of leadership which is required to lead men rather than to lead set services, but we shirk it at our peril. Local Churches are edified by prophets (1 Cor. 14 : 4). Our people receive a simple direct message from God into their situation and I have seen many respond with life-changing effect. Unbelievers can be brought under conviction (1 Cor. 14 24-25). I believe that God often stirs up His Church at grass-roots level, and out of a prophetic Church will emerge the prophets who will speak with effect to the nations. We cannot expect such figures to arise if the spirit of prophecy is absent from ordinary christian people. The Generals may lead the war but they cannot fight it and win it. That is the task of the army. This leads me to a second point.

## Prophecy comes THROUGH the Church

Some theologians have eroded the power of the Church by refusing to give her special status as the exclusive people of God. What God is doing in the world is allowed to eclipse what God is doing in the Church. Thus she is left without a prophetic voice and relegated to a spiritual hospital or a voluntary appendix to the Department of Health and Social Security. Evangelicals who rightly abhor this view have not always helped. Some have retreated into a ghetto of fear after fighting a rearguard action against liberalism, modernism, secularism, and ecumenism riding triumphant on the back of the charismatic war-horse. It is sad that we can enter churches which still faithfully proclaim the gospel of salvation in Christ and find a museum of Victorian culture. Many have been further hamstrung by a doom-watch eschatology which expects no success this side of the Millenium. In the name of Prophecy this quacking lame-duck has usurped the place of the clarion call to advance expressed by prophetic voices confident in the unparalleled power of the gospel. This spirit of entrenchment among evangelicals has produced some able guardians of Biblical truth, some great expository preachers, and even some urgent evangelists, but there has been no strategy for advance and no prophetic voice to tell where God is leading His people today. I rejoice that the situation is

is changing, albeit slowly. I believe in God's people and I love His Church. I believe she is still central to God's purpose in the world. Therefore for the sake of mankind and the glory of God she must recover her prophetic voice, and with it her sense of progress. As God is saying the same things through prophets in many local churches throughout the world, great chords are beginning to sound once more in the hearts of believers as they begin to realise that the church still has a great future on earth. When God speaks to the world He speaks through the Church.

### Prophecy is FROM the Lord

Coming, as it must through imperfect channels, prophecy is nevertheless a gift from God, and a word straight from His mouth. Therefore we should not be embarrassed by the prophetic "I". It is surely the natural and personal way to speak to someone. It has the immediacy of direct speech rather than the indirectness of reported speech. God would not have us slumber through the yawning boredom of uneventful services, but He would rather speak to us with a directness that demands a verdict.

The Old Testament is a prophetic goldmine. We find God speaking as He wills : sometimes using "I" and sometimes "He". The Old Testament has not been popular in the kid glove days of post war Europe. It's rugged prophetism goes against the grain of the non-directive thinking of a permissive society. Many Bible believing Christians inadvertently relegate this three quarters of the Canon to a subordinate level, and regard it as useless for teaching christians about prophecy, praise and Church life. However, much is taught in the Old Testament that there is not space for in the New. While it is true that the Old Testament can only be interpreted through the New, the converse also applied that the New cannot be properly understood without the Old. To say otherwise would be to lose the unity of the inspiration of Scripture (2 Timothy 3 : 16). The Scripture is one, and that is why the Holy Spirit led the early Church to keep the Old Testament. Prophecy must be at one with the message of Scripture. It must be brought to the touchstone of Biblical teaching and weighed in the Spirit during the meeting. Disaster will occur if spiritual gifts are exercised to the neglect of clear didactic exposition of Scripture. I have often found that where good prophetic ministries are allowed to flourish the appetite for annointed preaching increases. Prophecy and preaching are not mutually exclusive, nor are they exactly identical. They are complementary in bringing the word of God and good preaching will contain the prophetic within it.

### Prophecy requires Action

Unheeded prophecy solves nothing. Prophecy while not possessing the permanence of Scripture, does have a definiteness and a relevance to immediate situations. A prophetic revelation may not have the broad sweep of great teaching that we expect from annointed expository preaching, but it is often given to hit the nail on the head. Most of us enjoy the general and timeless truths of Christianity and rightly so. We are less happy when God moves into the particular and demands specific change and advance in Church structures, in worship, in depth of fellowship, in openness to the Spirit and in making it our prior commitment to evangelise adults rather than children.

We have allowed preachers in our pulpits who cast doubts about the Deity of Christ. We have tolerated lifeless mediocre presentation of thrilling truths and not batted an eyelid. But let a man speak in tongues or prophecy and we are up in arms. I submit that Churches can be radical in theology while

remaining bastions of bye-gone days. Evangelicals can be more conservative in culture than in doctrine. We are too often content to use the Bible to defend our recent traditions, rather than to face the radicalism of its message, and implement the concrete we have sought to make our churches a last ditch refuge against a social tornado. But the Wind of God is also blowing and speeding us to do battle on the High Seas and win. This is what the prophets are saying with one voice.

It is because of our fondness for playing with words to prevent action; that I have not submitted a theological treatise in defence of prophecy. This is rather a heart cry to let prophets speak and be given a welcome hearing. They are not here to repudiate the past but to invigorate the present and the future. We must not deny our fore-fathers in the faith by being found unequal to the present. The time has come to halt this wretched numerical decline which has beleaguered us this century. There is an appetite for God among the people. They have no time for a voiceless insipid conservatism but will respond as ever to dynamic Biblical Christianity lived out in local churches and spoken out by prophetically gifted Christians.

## ELDERS IN SCRIPTURE (The second of three articles on eldership)

In the first article I tried to make out a case for multiple leadership possessed of scriptural authority operating within the local church. That case is based on the felt needs of the present church and ministry. Why, it may be asked, should we call our multiple ministry an eldership? Is there a scriptural warrant for what is proposed?

Scriptural warrant for this, as for other matters of church order, is of two kinds: what we can glean from scattered references to have actually obtained in the NT church (what the NT assumes), and explicit teaching about the shape and function of the church (what the NT prescribes). Traditional hermeneutics has tried to hold these together in the (perhaps naive?) belief that NT theory and practice were consistent with one another. It is a position I firmly hold to. Great good has come from the recognition in NT scholarship of the separate personalities and even the separate theologies of the several NT writers, but this has often resulted in a perverse tendency to see contradiction where none exists and replace harmony with cacophony. The effect has been to dissolve the authority of the word of God into the interesting but conflicting opinions of men, over whom the theologian must then exercise a patronizing rule. 'Divide et impera' has been our guiding light too long.

The value of the scattered references to leadership in the NT is that they are an unconscious, and therefore untendentious, witness to what actually was the case. Various terms are used: elders (Acts 14:23, 20:17, 1Tim 3, Tit 1, James 5:14, 1Pet 5:1ff); overseers (Phil 1:1, 1Tim 3:1ff, Tit 1:7); leaders (proistamanoi 1Thess 5:12, hegoumenoi Heb 13:17). The terms do not appear to be loaded with the fixed status of later times, and I take them all to refer to the same people - the leaders of the scattered local churches. It is in any case well known that elders and overseers can be shown to refer to the same people, on the basis of Titus 1:5 and 7.

From these references it seems safe to draw the following conclusions.

1. Although various terms are used, 'elders' is far and away the most common. Luke knows it; Paul knows it; John knows it; James knows it; Peter knows it. This is impressive testimony.
2. Elders or leaders are always mentioned in the plural (except where the

.....singular is generic, as in 1Tim 3:1, or where a named individual is referred to). Every NT writer expects there to be a plural leadership in the local church. Never once is there a reference to a single minister in the local context.

3. Some elders were full-time and paid. 1Tim 5:17 is the clearest evidence of this. We do not know how common this was, but there must also have been many elders who were not full-time in this way. What is striking is that there is no clergy/laity distinction anywhere in the NT, and no one can be referred to as ordained, either in the scattered references or in the explicit teaching.
4. These elders had authority. They are said to be 'over' the church (Thess 5:12), worthy of obedience and submission (Heb 13:17). They 'rule', according to the Pastorals, where the authority of office bearers over the church is everywhere assumed. They are shepherds, and the shepherd in the Bible is everywhere a kingly figure.

The authority of elders, let it be said, is to be exercised in a Christ-like way. The NT in giving authority to elders also redefines authority. Jesus everywhere taught his disciples to renounce worldly ideas of dominance, and to pattern themselves on his own example of the servant-king, and the epistles everywhere uphold this. But to say that authority is to be exercised in a Christ-like way is not to deny that authority. 'You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.' The authority of the servant-king is real, and the authority of the servant-apostle is everywhere assumed to be real too. Submission to Christ is to be expressed in submission to one another and to the leaders he appoints. Indeed we may say that obedience to God, like love to God, is meaningless if it does not find expression in obedience to God's anointed servants.

When we turn from NT practice to NT doctrine we are basically concerned with the Letter to the Ephesians, The key passage is chapter 4, where the purpose of the church is seen to be the growth of God's people in maturity of character and fruitfulness of service, and the aim of the ministry is seen to be a ministering people. The key to all this is seen to lie in the leadership gifts God has given: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. It is by means of these gifts that the whole people of God is equipped for service. With Michael Harper ('Let My People Grow' pp43ff) I believe we must see these as functions rather than as titled offices. By whom then are these functions performed? Not by one man, clearly, for some have one gift and some another. Who else, then, than by the elders we have seen to be a ubiquitous feature of NT church life (and who significantly are not mentioned by name in Ephesians at all?)

It is sometimes said that the elder represents a non-charismatic ministry existing in tension with the charismatic and designed to keep the charismatic in check. But Ephesians 4 gives the lie to this: the pastors and teachers are charismatic ministries and gifts of God's grace. What room can there be, we may ask, for elders who neither teach, pastor, evangelise, prophesy or lead God's people in pioneer situations? The coping stone of this argument, to my mind, is in Acts 20:17. When Paul wanted the leaders of the church at Ephesus, it was the elders he sent for. When these men met with Paul at Miletus, how else could they be described but as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers?

I conclude that the New Testament has searching questions to ask of any Baptist church that is not going cheerfully to set aside scripture as irrelevant in the ordering of its life, questions about the number of its ministers, questions about the authority of its ministry. How these questions might be answered will be the subject of the third article.

## USING AN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Five years ago I went as a guest of Campus Crusade to some American churches, which were not typical or traditional local churches, but whose bold ventures in seriously applying Scripture to American Culture were producing some outstanding churches, which were growing both in quantity and quality. This experience changed my personal life and ministry. It prepared me to receive the principles of the Church Growth movement. Basically I myself learned to take scripture much more seriously than I used to think I did, and that has been worked out in my ministry in three areas which overlap.

In the first place it concentrated my mind. I feel now that the Church's single and supreme objective must be to "make disciples of all nations". I had always been Evangelical and Evangelistic, but I saw that too many other things had claimed my attention. Disciple-making is much more than Evangelism. It means causing believers to grow to Christian maturity. This happens by a) having a vital experience of God's word, b) learning to share one's faith in a vital personal relationship with others in the local body, and c) the vital experience of sharing one's faith with non-believers. So our church here at West View has been restructured in order to achieve the objective of making disciples.

Principles of management have been applied. We scrapped some meetings and organisations which in our judgement were doing little or nothing to fulfil the objective. (There are more which I would like to see go but one has to be careful not to injure the body one is trying to heal!) I hope that every member knows that the job of the church is to make disciples of all nations.

Secondly, I learned so much about leadership. I have stopped trying to be the omni-competent, one-man-minister which I used to think I had to be. What a relief! We hear a great deal about multiple leadership in our churches but I think few really understand it. Multiple leadership to me means multiple-paid Staff. That is, a Youth Pastor is a Youth Pastor. He should be set free to work with Youth, not be expected to visit, preach, and conduct funerals. If he concentrates on what he is called and gifted and trained to do, he will become even more skilled at it. The same principle would apply to any other full-time staff man, whether for Evangelism, Education or whatever.

We began our multiple leadership by recognising (not with official ceremony) Pastor and Deacons as a leadership team. We have made it our business to relate to one another as closely as possible, to pray together, sometimes to relax together, (we have not studied enough together) and to support one another. Unless we are united or personally committed to a matter, then we do not introduce it. We feel it is important to lead by example. We are not "recommenders" to the Church Meeting. We make decisions and implement them - though never without communicating fully with the fellowship, and asking for feedback. From time to time we need the whole body to endorse matters that affect the whole body, e.g. in the calling of a Youth Pastor, but we are not those who "cannot do anything without the authority of the Church Meeting. We seem to have won the confidence of the body, because there has been no record of bad decisions and no complaints either. After all, scripture shows us that leaders are to be obeyed, followed and supported, for they are the ones who are accountable to God more strictly. (Heb 13.17, James 3.1)

We now have a full-time but temporary Youth Pastor loaned to us from First Baptist Church, Modesto, and we have a part-time honorary "Minister of Pastoral Visitation". As Staff we meet weekly to pray for ourselves and the fellowship, plan, report, and seek to minister to one another's needs. It is important that we should be seen to back one another to the hilt, even if privately we may have to express disagreements on some points. From time to time we spend a whole day in future planning and praying. On Sundays the Youth Pastor and the Church Secretary all sit on the platform and one of us leads. Our third staff member does not



have the gift of up-front leadership but he shares news of his ministry with the fellowship on Sundays from time to time. We are aiming to let it be seen that the church has a team or staff leadership, so as to have confidence in the total leadership, not just the Pastor.

The third area in which I have had to change is in the life of the body. Our Baptist principle of the Fellowship of Believers has taken on a new meaning for me. On Sundays there is much freedom for individual participation. We have no fixed pews or pulpit, so we can meet in a semi-circle around the platform. We frequently have a sharing time for joys and needs to be made known and prayed about on the spot. Sometimes in the service we form small groups of four to six for a sharing and prayer time. Chairs are re-arranged and returned with minimum sense of disturbance.

One meeting we abandoned was the Thursday night prayer-meeting and Bible study led by the Pastor. Instead we formed Home Bible Groups, for discipleship. Leaders were selected, (Jesus never asked for volunteers), trained and appointed to groups. We have evening groups for couples and singles out at work on different nights, and afternoon groups for women. A commitment to the group is expected. Casualness about attendance ruins a group's cohesion. Each member is expected to prepare the study. At present we are working through John's Gospel. This is broadly prepared by myself and prepared in detail by the leader. The leader is not a teacher! The members are not there to listen passively! The leader's job is to enable members to share insights from their preparation. There are five elements in our Home Bible Groups, which the leader is trained to include each week. 1) Bible, 2) Scripture memorisation, 3) Sharing of joys and needs, with 4) Conversational prayer, about those things and other matters inside and outside the church, 5) Outreach planning, when the members encourage one another with a) How they have shared their faith with non-believers, and b) How they plan to during the ensuing week. The leaders meet with me on alternate Sundays at 9.00 a.m. They complete and submit a report form for each meeting. The time is spent in sharing group successes - and failures, in continuous training and review. (The other Sunday morning at 9.00 a.m. is for the New Members Class.)

I am greatly indebted to my American Experience for the concept and structure of this Home Bible Group ministry. It will be obvious that there is a good deal of discipline, fully accepted rather than imposed. How can anyone ever become a disciple without discipline? The discipline has to start at the top by example. There is also considerable accountability. "People don't do what you expect. They only do what you inspect", I heard several times in America.

There was considerable apprehension two years ago about abandoning the traditional midweek meeting, but I think nobody would want to re-form it now. The groups are so much more enjoyable and meaningful. Most of the group members never went anyway.

As I write, all this may sound rather high-powered and perhaps even exciting. In reality it seems very ordinary. We have not had spectacular growth in numbers, though our membership has nearly doubled from 34 to 63 in nearly three years. I think we are more spiritually alert and mature. We have more than quadrupled financially since we began, and I repeat began, to practice biblical stewardship of money.

In conclusion, I do not think any casual visitor would get the impression that there was any American influence on our church, except perhaps in the accent of the Youth Pastor! I hope though that those visitors who were biblically aware would see that we were attempting to take Scripture seriously.

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# A DISTURBING REPORT ON COMMITMENT

## IN FROM THE MIDLANDS

By Bryan Gilbert

Baptist congregations in the Midlands are more equipped with good buildings than with evangelistic zeal. They are pleased with themselves, inward looking, self contented, gracious, bible reading people with a strong sense of fellowship but a poor prayerlife and little interest in missionary work.

Nobody would say a thing like that without either a chip on his shoulder or some inside evidence to support it, and I like to think that the chip on my shoulder is no bigger than anyone elses!

When the ONE STEP FORWARD MINISTRIES released me from much of the O.S.F. responsibility and gave permission for a wider ministry, I offered my services to some of the Midland Baptist churches to develop the theme of our Call to Commitment. 14 churches from Notts., Derby, Leics and Warwickshire ranging from 294 members down to 42 members and including city and village situations invited me for two consecutive midweek meetings. The first meeting was entitled "CALLED TO CARE" and the second "CALLED TO GROW AND COMMUNICATE".

"An excellent presentation and challenge that could not fail to stimulate prayerful response to the claims of Christ for commitment", was how John Waghorn of Belper described the series. Another minister commented "Two very penetrating, and in many ways uncomfortable, sessions which caused us to look critically at ourselves and which hopefully will provide a challenge to deepen our commitment."

These quotes are included to indicate that a lot of thought and work went into the preparation for these evenings. A Commitment response card was designed. A thought-provoking personal questionnaire was prepared as well as acetates for the overhead projector and slides that focused on spiritual growth.

### THE FIRST SESSION

The visual presentation on the Overhead projector highlighted the many aspects of the local church and touched upon the questions that would be answered later. It was a time when I could ask about the number of people taking the Missionary Herald, or Bible notes. Questions about attendance and giving, as well as the prayerlife and pastoral side of the church.

Secondly our attention was turned to the scriptures as we studied aspects of the Body of Christ and our call to care about the total ministry. Everyone was then given the questionnaire.

In the beginning it was never my intention to produce any kind of report, but because each church was using the same questionnaire in similar circumstances each time, it began to be obvious that the overall findings might be of interest.

We all admit that statistics can prove everything and nothing, so allow me to explain how we worked out the final results. The total membership of the 14 churches came to 1719 but only 459 of these attended the first meeting. Each person was asked to give a mark up to ten beside each question, first for the whole fellowship and then for their own situation. The questions were carefully explained and honesty and realism were encouraged. Afterwards, the sheets were collected and percentages were worked out for each question. If fifty people answered a question and gave it 250 marks out of the possible total of 500, then the final mark was 50%. The percentages for the 14 churches were then added together and an overall picture can be seen at the end of this report. Of course it would be possible to argue that the people did not have enough time, or know all the answers or fully represent the whole church, etc..... but we have to remember that those who came to the mid week meeting were the more enthusiastic ones from the fellowship and each church had the same set of circumstances.

Therefore one church might be excused for saying that their prayer life was poor, but 12 out of the 14 churches all saying the same - there must be a weakness!

The questionnaire covered the subjects of Fellowship - Prayer life - Worship - Pastoral concern - Giving - Missionary Interest - Scriptural emphasis - Graciousness of all the leaders - Evangelistic interest and the condition of the premises. Those who did not know the answer could put 'Don't know' and the results were adjusted accordingly.

At the close of the first evening, everyone was encouraged to express their care by asking another person who was spiritually uncommitted to attend the second meeting a week later. Very few people took the challenge seriously and instead they demonstrated their commitment to care be either coming alone, or staying away. This response was all the more surprising in view of comments like "Gentle, but refreshing. Good to have the same things said by someone else", or another minister who said "The gentle but effective probing of the church's strengths and weaknesses helped us to recognise our need to grow".

It made me feel that the time for 'agape gentleness' is fast passing when it comes to stimulating our fellow Baptists into action!

## THE SECOND SESSION

On the second evening, the results of the questionnaire were made known and then compared with other churches already visited (but not named). Gradually a picture began to come together as church after church revealed the same kind of strengths and weaknesses, despite their situation or size.

13 out of 14 churches admitted that Evangelism was a weakness and the memberships of 10 out of the 14 said they had little personal interest in evangelism, and they were talking about 'interest' not 'gifts'. One could have understood their response if we had asked the question 'Do you have evangelistic gifts?' but instead we asked them 'How interested are you personally in evangelism?'

After the somewhat sobering look at the local responses, it normally led into a time of open prayer. Very often there was a long guilty silence, finally broken into as the members began to seek the Lord's forgiveness and help.

After prayer we had an unusual bible study. Instead of simply teaching Spiritual Growth from a bible passage, I had put together a series of slides from around the world that began with physical birth and then sought to capture the spiritual parallel. The content of the study was based on the book 'LORD, HELP ME TO GROW' (Published by One Step Forward.)

Songs and a brief message summed up the evening as we approached an opportunity of personal commitment. The Commitment Card which everyone had been given was studied and time was given for their response. Although some did ask for baptism and membership and various meaningful commitments were made, the majority of those present did not feel able to make any commitment.

We felt that there were a number of reasons for this limited response. Firstly, the potential for conversion response was missing from the meetings, most of those who came were already baptised members. Secondly, the commitment card was not the major climax of the series but only formed an opportunity within the whole.

## RESULTS

### CHURCH FELLOWSHIP:-

### STRENGTHS -

The highest mark overall for the strength of the churches was for premises -

The mark for Fellowship within our Baptist churches came second -

69%

67%

The graciousness of ALL the leaders within the churches came third - 64%  
 Pastoral concern by the whole fellowship for those in need was  
 fourth - 64%

\* \* \* \* \*

CHURCH FELLOWSHIP:-

WEAKNESSES -

Interest by the whole church in missionary activity overseas was  
 weakest with - 42%  
 The prayerlife of the church as reflected in attendance and  
 support was - 45%  
 The third area of weakness was the lack of interest in Evangelism  
 with only - 47%

\* \* \* \* \*

PERSONAL RESPONSE:-

STRENGTHS -

The enjoyment of public worship was the highest personal response - 70%  
 Secondly, the membership felt their personal giving was good - 65%  
 The fellowship agape love they enjoyed one with another came third - 57%  
 Fourthly, came their personal bible reading - 57%

\* \* \* \* \*

PERSONAL RESPONSE:-

WEAKNESSES -

My personal interest as a Christian in overseas missionary work - 41%  
 My personal interest in evangelism and bringing others to know  
 Christ - 44%  
 My personal prayer life is a weakness (true in 11 out of 12  
 churches) - 48%

\* \* \* \* \*

Could these results possibly be a reflection on the general situation of our Baptist churches or would other areas of the U.K. have responded differently? We would all like to think so. If however, these anonymous results are any indication of the prayerful, missionary minded, evangelistic heart beat of our denomination, then we may talk big, but the body is slowly dying. We need to remember that the people who came to these mid week meetings, tend to be the more faithful enthusiastic believers. If these are the weaknesses of our strong members, then what does it say about the rest of the congregation and future of the churches?

Some Conclusions.....

We can rejoice with the strengths that were revealed. We praise God for good premises in which to serve the Lord - or should it be 'from' which to serve the Lord? Buildings in good condition, in the right place, are a very real asset and a base from which to extend the Kingdom.

Fellowship, agape love and koinonia are things that we have all tried to encourage. They are vital ingredients for a growing church. They provide the right environment into which to bring the seeking person. But, are we bringing the seeking person into the cosy atmosphere we have created and enjoy so much?

Students of Church Growth know full well that gracious leadership within the local church is normally a sign that growth can be expected, that is, if the other ingredients are also present. Ingredients like prayer, witnessing, outreach, expectant faith and bible based ministry. Are we as Baptists aware that it takes more than graciousness to sin the world and engage in spiritual warfare?

These results have only confirmed a discovery we have made over the years in One Step Forward. Churches will take readily to OPERATION AGAPE and even

enjoy the experience. They begin to get a little hot under the collar when the emphasis is on Spiritual Growth and they are challenged to make a commitment. By the time they come to part three of the programme and discover that DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING is important and Instruction in the use of Spiritual Gifts can be costly, then there is a cooling off period. We have sadly found that few churches who begin the programme, really get involved with part four - EXPRESSION EVANGELISM. Now I can see why. The memberships of our churches are just not interested in sharing their faith.

The survey, with all its limitations, has revealed a general ignorance caused through disinterest in the affairs of the Baptist Missionary Society. Few people take the Missionary Herald each month. Special Missionary events, except for the traditional weekend once a year, are few and far between. The thought of having a member from the church on the mission field is not even in the mind of most of the congregation.

Some of the congregations visited expressed acute embarrassment as their own weaknesses became apparent and it is hoped that this stimulus alone will help stir them into action.

One positive conclusion to what I have seen already is the publishing of an aid for ministers called THE FIRST STEP. Realizing that most pastors here in Britain only give an open invitation on the occasion of a baptismal service, there seemed a need for something suitable to be offered to enquirers and others under conviction as they leave the church after a challenging service.

THE FIRST STEP has been written especially with this situation in mind. Copies can be offered by the minister at the close of the service with the knowledge that anyone asking for this booklet is also indicating a desire to 'take the first step' and receive the Lord Jesus Christ. (Individual copies can be ordered at 30p each + pp from the address below, or larger numbers can be ordered at reduced prices).

A further contribution towards helping strengthen the weaknesses and utilize the strengths is the publication of "EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM THROUGH THE LOCAL CHURCH" by David Greenaway the U.K. Director of O.S.F.. This comprehensive manual with art work for visual aids can be ordered from the same address at £3.95 plus p&p.

One Step Forward Ministries, High House, Walcote, Lutterworth,  
Leics. LE17 4JW. Telephone: 04555 2413.

## NEWS and REVIEWS

### REPORT FROM STEVE FLASHMAN

If you are thinking about going into full-time Youth Evangelism you will need the following essential equipment: a supply of Milk of Magnesia Tablets for the times when you are force fed by certain Youth Group's enterprising young 'chefs' who will dish out their special recipe on unsuspecting visitors; a set of dry clothes for the times when you will be thrown into the nearest swimming pool; an alarm clock so that you can get up before everyone else gets you up; a pair of rubber gloves when negotiating door handles covered with tooth-paste; a supply of anti-Brut spray to counteract an over-enthusiastic make-up squad; be able, discretely of course, to give as good as you get whilst maintaining the dignity that befits the Guest Speaker; take along a pair of black plimsoles, a rope and catsuit for getting out of tight situations! There are of course a variety of different interpretations of the above man-ouvres, so be ready for any eventuality!

Life has been exciting during the last four years that I have been an itinerant Gospel Singer/Youth Worker!

I became a Christian early in life and from the beginning the Lord gave me a desire to communicate to today's generation in words and concepts that the man on the street could connect with. I started preaching when I was sixteen in little village chapels. Opportunities for which I will always be grateful.

After working for three years I studied at Spurgeon's college where a firm foundation for future ministry was laid. In 1978 I completed a five-year period as Pastor at South Ashford Baptist Church in Kent and it was from there that the Lord led us into the present Ministry. I say 'us' because my wife, Sue, and two children, Rebecca and Sarah-Jane, are very much part of the ministry, and we feel the Lord has led us together into the present direction of our work. The Baptist Union 'seconded' me and at the beginning of last year the Home Mission Fund started to help towards our expenses.

We do not have a fixed income or a permanent home, yet the Lord has opened up so many doors of opportunity and graciously shown much fruit from the many thousands of young people we speak to each year.

We look upon our Ministry as a service to the churches. We are not hit and run men! We have a follow-up system which we run in connection with local churches and are in touch with many people at the moment who are gradually being built into local church situations.

There are three main areas of work that I am involved in: Concerts/One Night Stands ..... we use music and visual effects with dissolved slide sequences on a 12' screen. I sometimes use a Band but mostly have the help of just one person who travels with me full time, responsible for lighting, sound and visual effects.

School/College Work ..... we go right into classrooms taking lesson periods in English, Sociology, Philosophy, Music, etc. talking from a positive Christian point of view without preaching. We use this opportunity as pre-evangelism and invite the young people to events in the evenings when we can be more direct.

Youth Weekends ..... with an emphasis in Bible teaching for Christian young people.

During the last year I have worked in Belgium, Germany, Holland, Canada and America, although the main part of our work is in the UK. It's been good to have the opportunity of taking part in several TV programmes and numerous Radio interviews, and I've just released my second album entitled "Signwriter".

The purchase of new equipment can be a burden. We recently spent £1200 on projectors/Screen, etc. for visual communication. We believe we must be professional in our approach so that we can honour the Lord in our presentations. We are committed to grass roots ministry and are ready to break into previously uninvaded territory in our attempts to reach needy people with the Good News of Jesus.

During the last 30 years there has been a revolution going on among young people. A music revolution, where sounds have been used to shout ideas to a mixed up world. Often feelings of frustration and rejection have been laid in front of us by young people and largely the church have been unable to understand or connect with these feelings in a positive way. There has been a sexual revolution and we are paying the price for this with 160,000 kids in one parent families in England today. I believe we need to speak God's word into social issues and not be afraid to get into conflict situations with the liberating word of God. But I believe we need to re-think the way we say things and sometimes the way we do things, so that we can declare loud and clear, Jesus is Alive Today!

## REPORT FROM JARROW

I suppose the first thought that springs to most peoples minds when they hear the name "Jarrow" mentioned is the march (or Crusade as the people here prefer to term it) in 1936 to London for work. The achievements of Sir Charles Mark Palmer were staggering. Neither space nor indeed my brief allows me to say more than the minimum except that the wealth of this small shipbuilding town had undoubtedly rested upon his enterprise. However, by 1934 the unbelievable had happened - Palmers was no more. The Crusade to London was to draw attention to the terrible plight of the people. I suppose those who have never visited this town in the North East corner of England would have a picture in their minds eye of a very depressing, dingy, dirty place in which to live. Particularly of course if they lived through this period of time and remember this march.

June and I have lived in Jarrow now since 1980. September to be precise, (I am the Baptist Minister) and during that time we have been pleased to re-educate relatives and friends who have either stayed with us or called in on their way to somewhere else.

Jarrow has had a very long and interesting history spanning 1300 years. Last year this was celebrated in a number of ways with events of one kind and another. The highlight was when we all gathered in St. Paul's Church to record a programme for the BBC Songs of Praise. The history of Jarrow as a community begins with the founding of the monastery of St. Paul's in 681 by Benedict Biscop, a local nobleman turned monk. It was in that monastery that the Venerable Bede spent his whole life leaving behind a legacy of learning. St. Paul's is still used every Sunday for worship.

Palmer had given employment to refugees from the "Potato Famine" in Ireland which probably accounts for the present very high Catholic population of the town. It is also strongly High Anglican.

The Anglican parishes have been formed into an extremely efficient team ministry of 4 churches with 6 clergy. The Charismatic Movement has also had its influence in one and possibly two of those churches. There are signs too of its influence in one of the Catholic churches where they have discovered a prayer meeting.

Our Church is situated on the edge of the town centre within easy reach of the bus station and Metro (railway) station at present being built and due to be opened in 1983. It is possible to catch a bus from anywhere in or on the outskirts of Jarrow to the bus station. Directly opposite our church is a low Anglican church which is not linked to the other parishes and with whom we have a good relationship.

Free Church decline in Jarrow has been most marked. Church after church has been closed and pulled down so that now only the Methodist and ourselves remain. We have a realistic membership of 43. having a closed membership, in practice, our fellowship size is around the 50/55 mark. About 15 of these, members and adherents meet on a Sunday evening in a community centre on the outskirts of the town as an outreach mission. This began as an ambitious scheme just after the Second World War, which alas has not fulfilled all the hopes many had for it.

The work here is hard and progress is slow. Like most small fellowships we lack workers and those we do have are seriously overworked, but we have been much encouraged by the few young families who have begun worshipping with us. We are entirely self-supporting with an enormous building to heat and maintain. At the moment we have a short fall in our income of frightening proportions. It is cushioned however by monies accumulated during a 3 year interregnum. However, we maintain our target giving to the Home Mission Fund

and we support the B.M.S., along with other causes dear to our heart. We maintain the principle of direct giving and so have an annual Thankoffering which last year (November) brought a record of over a thousand pounds. This represents real sacrificial giving on the part of many of our older folk. Last year we had enormous expense in having to have the halls and church rewired. Fortunately, one of the younger men in the church was able to do the work, thus saving labour costs. We anticipate also a large bill for structural repairs in one of our rooms along with essential maintenance at the manse. However, a few weeks ago someone from the fellowship, who wishes to remain anonymous, gave a cheque for £500 to the Church Secretary towards these expenses.

Lest you should think that our encouragements lie only in these financial matters, I am writing this at the end of January on the eve of my first baptismal service here. Two candidates, both in middle age will pass through the waters tomorrow. One, a lady, returned to the church some months ago having been away for about 15 years. Since her return she has not only encouraged us by her faithful attendance at services but also at the Prayer Meeting, and now she wishes to follow her Lord's command and be baptized. She is one of a few who have returned to worship amongst us. The other candidate is a man who has attended our mission for about 9 years before coming to faith just before Christmas. Following counselling, he too asked to be baptized.

There are other encouragements too, but I wish to end on this point. Ours then, is not a startling story of rapid growth or anything like that, but God is blessing us in a quiet way, and we thank Him.

Eric B. Parker, Grange Road, Jarrow.

#### BUILDING MEMBERS TO MATURITY

Dr. Ralph Neighbour is famous in the Southern States for his wise and strong seminars in building converts and church members to maturity.

He is visiting this country to introduce his seminars here on November 22nd - 26th.

40 places only are available and the first 40 to apply will get them. The cost is £25 for the week (including materials) but applicants will need to arrange for bed and breakfast in the London area. (Some can be arranged). Applicants must come for the full time.

The place is Muswell Hill Baptist Church, Dukes Avenue, Muswell Hill, London, N10.

Send deposit of £5 to the Secretary of the Muswell Hill Church, Mr. Donald Hardie, 100 Powys Lane, London, N13 4HR.

TURNING THE TIDE by Paul Beasley-Murray and Alan Wilkinson Bible Society,  
110 pp. £2.25p.

It was something of a surprise to be asked by the editor to review a book which has already been in circulation for a year! But it is a good opportunity to encourage those who have not yet read it to do so and to encourage those who have to ask themselves what, if anything, they did as a result of reading it.

The book contains three strands. Firstly there is Paul's pilgrimage through the discipline of church growth. Secondly there is the story of his, and others, struggles to apply their discoveries to Altringham Baptist Church. Thirdly there is the report of the findings of a much wider survey conducted by Paul Beasley-Murray and Alan Wilkinson. The intertwining of the three strands makes for a lively and readable account of academic church growth which has its feet firmly



planted in one local situation. Some may wish the strands had been separated out more but there really is no excuse to end up believing, as one previous reviewer apparently did, that what was being recommended as a formula for success was that ministers should model themselves on Paul Beasley-Murray and churches on Altringham Baptist. Mã genoito, as Paul (the Apostle and doubtless the minister) would say.

Setting out to establish whether Peter Wagner's seven vital signs for a healthy church applied to the UK, the author's establish that five of them seem to do so. Nonetheless this is not presented as a cheap formula for success and they readily admit that there was in the case of each sign a significant proportion of churches displaying the sign which were failing to grow. The results lead to some uncomfortable conclusions especially in the area of ministry. 'Energy rather than experience may be the premium' (p.32). Growing churches tend to see their ministers as good administrators. The theological position of the church does have an effect on whether or not it grows. The one man ministry pattern imposes severe limitations on growth what ever the size of the church. A shared ministry becomes absolutely essential for a church of 300 members and over. But most churches experiencing growth have worked hard at the pastoral care of their members and a good deal of the care is exercised by a pastoral care team or others delegated by the pastor.

A second very important contribution made by this study is the concept of spiral growth. Paul and Alan lead us through their thinking as to how the stop/go pattern of growth which many experience can be overcome by a more continuous policy of growth. Not everyone will be able to, or want to, adopt their patterns. But everyone should be challenged by their thinking.

Perhaps the greatest weakness of the survey is that it chose to exclude churches of under 50 members from investigation. If they think growth up to 100 is difficult growth up to 50 is even more difficult. In the experience of this reviewer 50 becomes a more viable number on which to build further and the pace of growth changes after that. Since so many of our churches fall into that category it would have been good for this to have been given some attention.

Some will not like the breezy style of the book. But then some object to the idea that the church should be growing and lively on principle. Like it or not, however, the regrowth of the church in England remains one of the greatest challenges facing us. We all need to be humble enough to admit that we can do with all the tools and help we can get in this area and we should be grateful that Turning the Tide offers us so many helpful and provocative insights.

Derek J. Tidball, London Bible College.

Siegfried Grossmann, Stewards of God's Grace, Paternoster Press, 192pp £4.20.

Today's Christian market has been flooded with books on the Holy Spirit. However, Steward's of God's Grace is a book with a difference. For this is a careful and scholarly work which sets out to tell the story of the world-wide Charismatic Movement (from a non-anglo-Saxon perspective!) Examine the teaching of the New Testament, and make practical suggestions about the ways in which individuals and local churches may respond to the Holy Spirit's working. Many will no doubt particularly appreciate the last section, which proves to be both balanced and helpful. Although Grossmann clearly stands within the charismatic stream, this is a book to be read by all church leaders, whether charismatic or not!

Paul Beasley-Murray

'THE FIRST STEP' and 'NEW HORIZONS' by Bryan Gilbert, One Step Forward.

'First Step' aims to meet the need of the enquirer within the fellowship. Bryan Gilbert sets out very simply the steps to be taken before a person can experience the joys of the Christian faith: admitting our need, repentance from sin, believing in the love of God and asking both for forgiveness and for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Each is illustrated by Scripture quotation and reference. The 'Bad News' of human failure is contrasted with the Good News of Christian experience, and the enquirer is encouraged to accept the gifts of God with thanksgiving. The booklet limits itself very much to the scope of its title and needs to be used with other follow-up literature. The production is adequate for the 30p price.

'New Horizons' is a revised edition of a study booklet many of us have found useful for individuals and beginners classes. It contains nine studies on topics of Christian teaching and commitment. I am glad this series has been given its new look.

John Hopper, Northampton.

WE HAVE ALSO RECEIVED. . . . .

90 IDEAS FOR EVANGELISM (from B.U. Dept. of Mission) Just that! A gold mine of resource and common-sense. Every deacon should have a copy.

WITNESS SIMULATION GAME (from the same stable) Would anyone who has USED it send an account of its effectiveness in not more than 200 words to the Editor?

PARTNERS A new bulletin of Mission and Evangelism in Britain Today. Published 3 times a year. Anglican flavour.

1983 MAINSTREAM CONFERENCE

The 1983 Mainstream Conference will take place at Swanwick from 4.00p.m. on Monday, 17th to 1.00p.m on Wednesday, 19th January, 1983. The theme of the conference will be Key Issues in the Local Church. The three main sessions will deal with the following areas.

1. The sources of our Authority.
2. Your local Church - who calls the tune?
3. Your local Church - can it go it alone?

A much greater time will be given to workshops and discussion with the possibility of some required reading beforehand. There will also be a longer period on Wednesday morning for worship, word and sacrament.

Please complete the booking form below and book early to avoid disappointment.

MAINSTREAM CONFERENCE BOOKING SLIP.

The Mainstream Conference will be held at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire from 17-19th January, 1983. The total cost will be £23. A None returnable deposit of £5. books one place.

Please book.....places at the 1983 conference.

I enclose a Cheque/P.O. of £5. per person,  
Cheques payable to MAINSTREAM (Baptists for Life and Growth)  
please.

Name:..... Send to: The Rev. J. Ramsbottom,  
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