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Planting 'authentic' churches

by David Spriggs

I share with Stuart Murray an excitement about the creative possibilities of church planting initiatives. Stuart writes:

"Perhaps the genius of church planting is the opportunity it offers to develop NEW churches, to experiment, to ask fundamental questions about the nature and function of the church and its role in society . . . This kind of church planting is happening . . . Youth churches, ethnic churches and 'churches for the unchurched'."

Stuart is aware of the danger of 'homogeneity' - churches which are made up of one type of social group and hence appear exclusive, thus denying the inclusive nature of the gospel. In this paper I wish to draw attention to another potential danger and hopefully promote an on-going discussion. I am concerned to develop an alertness which I sense is vital for a healthy Church in this land in the next millenium. Let me explain.

Recognising authentic churches

If we manage to plant anything like 20,000 churches in England by the year 2000, and if we have done our job properly there will be a far greater variety of 'church' than any of us have had to live and work with before. Each of these new churches would ideally be a Christian expression of the mini-culture in which they are planted. I envisage they will be far more like the 'soil' around them than is usual with a botanical plant! But will we, representing the established churches, be able to recognise them as authentically Christian churches? We shall need to be very sensitised to 'Christian identity' rather than 'Baptist identity' if we are to succeed. We need to be able to recognise 'authentic churches' for a variety of reasons.

If we do not have a proper awareness, if we take an all inclusive stance, then the enemy will sow his weeds in the Kingdon and many will be led astray. We shall not be able to distinguish cult from creative church. Although we may take the view that, 'only living churches will reproduce' there are two weaknesses in this. First the history of the cults does not suggest this is the whole story. Secondly a great deal of damage can be done during one generation - many can be led astray and destroyed, whilst the false plant withers.

'Established' and 'New'

However, unless we are very open we shall run into a potentially more serious and damaging reaction. My reading of church history is that the 'established' churches have always struggled to cope with the 'new' churches. By 'established' I mean 'sociologically accepted and integrated' not 'the state church', although at times these two overlap.

This is not only a modern phenomenon. We can see the process at work in the New Testament. The Church in Antioch provides a useful case study. Here, in Acts 11 we see the potential for division between the establishment, represented by the Jewish Christians and the new ethos of the Gentile Christians. There are different waves of evangelism, with different goals; these lead to a growing rift which proves to be a source of contention for many years. It leads to a great deal of wasted energy and much conflict. In spite of Barnabas' wise handling of the immediate crisis, and the openness to God's spirit exhibited at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), the division proves to be a thorn in the flesh of the expanding church. It is easy to imagine that without such godly responses the blight would have been worse than the devastation of Joel's locusts. Acts 15 makes clear that, from a biblical perspective, it is right to consider these issues and seek for God's solutions, even though this process may be demanding and time-consuming.

In general, it seems to me that once a type of church becomes 'established' God needs to raise up a new expression of church. Anabaptists, Separatists, Quakers, Wesley's Methodists, the Salvation Army and the House Churches are all examples of this process. Initially the new 'church' has vigour and resonance with at least part of the prevailing culture which leads to rapid growth (they are sowing in virgin soil) but also rejection by the 'established' church. Usually, in a generation or two, such new expressions of church become intergrated with society and eventually the established churches. Then the whole process needs to be reworked. My plea is that we do our utmost to break this cycle. Why?

A wasting disease?

My reasons are essentially twofold. First, it is very wasteful in terms of Kingdom resources. The whole process generates animosity, competition, criticism and a whole host of unchristian and negative emotions and experiences which disturb God and diminish our evangelistic effectiveness. Secondly the process of ostracising the 'new' Church by the 'established' church tends to emphasise and develop the differences and potential heresies and abnormalities of the 'new' Church. Whereas, if the 'new' church is fostered within the 'established' church then such abnormalities pass away like adolescent spots. Conversely the 'established' church can be refreshed by the new life, and become more effective for the Kingdom. In the end, a process of intergration

usually takes place; the cost of overcoming alienation is also high in terms of Kingdom resources. My view is that we should seek to avoid such a wasteful process happening in the context of Church Planting.

In order to do this we must discover ways of recognising 'authentic church' no matter how strange it may appear to those of us who, like it or not (and we probably do not), are inescapably 'establishment' conditioned. How then can we help one another recognise 'authentic' church?

Criteria for recognition?

When the church plant has some kind of relationship with an 'established' church this should not be a problem, at least initially. With the more hierarchical structures of the Anglican and Methodist churches and the Salvation Army, 'authenticity' will be conveyed by the relationship with the parent body. This should also help 'mother - daughter' plants from the Baptist or 'house' churches. However the more hierarchical the structure the less NEW the expression of church is likely to be.

Personal relationships can be a means of establishing 'authenticity'. Often this is the case. The leadership of a church plant is frequently well known to the leadership of the established churches. The 'new' leaders may well have been trained by the 'old' in some way.

Perhaps a 'Dawn Strategy' will be an element in this 'authenticity'. Where a church has been planted as part of a district Dawn Strategy, the group of churches belonging to that strategy will be in a prime position to discern its authenticity because they will know the culture, and the personnel as well as the distinctive style of church.

All of the above will require trust on the part of this wider national church to endorse the valuation of the more local church.

Another way forward is through the accreditation of the leaders of church plants. CHALLENGE 2000 is already aware of the need to train 60,000 new leaders by 2000 AD if we plant 20,000 churches. Whilst some of these 60,000 will be trained by the established churches and pass through some kind of official approval, it is hard to imagine that we can realistically cope with proper training and recognition of even 50%. More potently, it seems probable to me that the less like 'church' the plant is, the more likely is it that the leader will not have official recognition. So any style of 'official' ministry is unlikely to help us very far with the very situations which are most problematic.

What options are left to us? Will a demarcation of the marks of the true church help us? Such marks are likely to be very different to those of previous centuries or even decades. What might they be? The sacraments, the preaching of the word, an 'apostolic' ministry, adherence to a confession, the care and discipline of the members, the communication of the Gospel. All these 'signs' of authenticity may be metamorphosed almost beyond our recognition. but the

task of recognition, affirmation and fellowship are vital for the health of both the old plant and the new.

I would welcome response to this paper in two ways:

(a) comment and amplification of the pathways to recognition suggested above;

(b) case studies - either real or imaginary - of new forms of church with explanations as to why they are to be considered authentic. Such case studies will help us become more sensitive to what is 'authentic' church planting, in readiness for the explosion in growth for which we pray.

David Spriggs is Evangelism Secretary for the Evangelical Alliance.

Please send any replies to this article to 1.3.6. Group, c/o Spurgeons College 189 South Norwood Hill, London. SE25 6DJ

From the Sharp End:

Small is beautiful - a case study

by Geoffrey Reynolds

Portsmouth was the most densely populated urban area of the country outside London until the German Luftwaffe and post-war slum clearance destroyed large areas of older housing in the centre of the city. Whole communities were uprooted from Portsea island and rehoused in vast public housing estates on the mainland. Those who could purchase their own property moved to private residential developments especially "over the hill" around Waterlooville.

When our original Baptist Church in Waterlooville was built in 1884 it served a population of only 450. A century later this had increased to 44,000, with a further 9,000 added by 1990. There had been substantial residential development also further to the north but there was no Baptist witness in Cowplain, Horndean, Clanfield or Petersfield. In fact the next Baptist church was 28 miles away at Farnham. Demographic research showed the predominance of younger families, with 25% of the population of Horndean under 15 years of age and a catchment area of 15,000.

In 1984 twenty six members were dismissed from Waterlooville, with the encouragement of the Area Superintendent, to form a new congregation at Horndean. Although there was encouraging growth initially in the congregation and membership, there were serious difficulties, and some casualties, partly because of differences of expectation and ecclesiology. The church was committed to charismatic renewal but some members from outside the immediate area were impatient of Baptist church meeting and desired more directive oversight.

When the church called its first minister, with the help of a Home Mission Initial Pastorate grant, the membership halved. However, there were five families who were committed to the establishment of a Baptist church in Horndean and who had a call and a vision to evangelise this growing area where there was no strong evangelical witness.

Worship services were held from the very first Sunday in a Community Hall, and the church has never had any intention to secure its own buildings.

The nature of the available premises has determined the church's worship and life style. Without the ancillary rooms that most churches regard as essential, the development of a traditional Sunday School was impossible. So apart from the under 5s, there is no separate provision for children, and in fact no child can attend Sunday morning service unless accompanied by a parent! A fascinating reversal of the normal approach in Baptist churches which has argued in the past that the involvement of children in church gives access to non-church going parents. So the whole family shares in the morning service, with an overall theme developed in different ways appropriate to the various age groups, with music, readings, drama, a high level of participation and specially prepared workbooks provided for the children and young people. There is also a wide range of mid-week activities. 'Good News Down Your Street' was used in earlier years. Evangelism is based now on building relationships with every member being encouraged and trained to share their faith. The membership has now reached 68.

Part of the original vision of those involved in Horndean was the planting of further churches in the district. In September 1992 a congregation was established at Clanfield, an adjoining area of similar housing with further residential development to take place. The initiative was taken by Horndean after many months of prayer, preparation and planning. Most of the earlier mistakes were avoided. The original planting group numbered 18 adults, plus their children, and they are led by a Spurgeons student on the Church Planting and Evangelism course, supported financially by Home Mission. The congregation has grown with conversions, transfers and lapsed Christians restored to faith and commitment. Sunday morning services are held in a school with a similar worship style, all-age teaching and an evangelistic strategy.

A number of important conclusions can be drawn from this thrilling initiative:

1. You do not have to be a large church to be able to establish another congregation.
2. You should consider investment in buildings only if there are no suitable community facilities which can be used or you are convinced that the further growth of the church is being hindered.
3. You do need a clear philosophy of ministry, a common identity and an agreed mission strategy.

Geoffrey Reynolds is Superintendent of the Southern Area Association.

Why people leave churches

by Michael Fanstone

You, like me, must find it encouraging to hear recent Christian converts testifying to their new-found faith, and then to watch as they are baptised and become Church members. What is sad is that in most churches, while some are arriving through the front door, others, often silently and virtually unnoticed, are sliding out of the back door. Many church statistics suggest that a modern-day exodus is taking place.

What makes people, often Christians for many years, stop attending church? This is an important question that church-planters must face for one important reason at least. Unless we recognise that hundreds of thousands of people have left the churches in this country in past decades and understand the reasons why, we will not be able to preclude this continuing indefinitely in the future, even in new congregations.

The way the Holy Spirit is convicting many of us of the need to plant churches is enormously encouraging, and I am glad I was able to lead my own Church to plant out about two years ago. Since then, however, alongside the ongoing process of building up our new congregation, I have been undertaking research into why people drop out of churches. Certainly this has helped me to see how important it is when we plant new communities for God that we must NOT bring into them the same features that have provoked people to reject churches in the past. To plant provides the opportunity to do things differently from the beginning.

What then are the factors involved in the loss of hundreds of thousands of people from UK churches during this century? My research suggests that the following have had an important part to play:

1. Boredom In a survey I undertook of over 500 former church-goers, more than a third of them indicated that among the reasons they left church was that they found it boring. While they tolerated this for maybe many years, it ultimately got to the point where they decided they could stand it no more.

2. Irrelevance Again, over a third of former church-goers said that the irrelevance of the church and its worship to their everyday lives was linked to why they left. Church did not relate to their Monday to Saturday existence; it

seemed so distant and other-worldly. This is sad when we reflect that the Bible teaches about family life, marriage and divorce, attitudes to money and possessions, sexuality, death, bringing up children, and all the other issues that still affect us today.

3. Isolation A little under a third of the people I surveyed said that they left church partly because they felt that they did not belong. This is serious, the New Testament encourages churches to be loving and caring communities. Yet people do sometimes feel neglected, uncared for and unloved at church, and when they cannot stand the isolation any longer, cease attending. I do not blame them.

It is often easier to ensure a new congregation has worship that is lively and interesting, a lifestyle that is relevant and a real sense of community love and care than it is to radically change existing churches that sadly may perpetuate these problems. It is vital when we plant today that we do so in ways that help eradicate those factors which may have been such significant drop-out factors in the past.

Michael Fanstone is minister of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Gravesend.

This article is based on Michael's book, "The Sheep That Got Away", an examination of why people leave churches, which was published by Monarch Publications in August.

FACING A TASK UNFINISHED...

CENTRE PAGE PULL-OUT

- a valuable resource for church planters

The centre page pull-out in this issue of 'Planting Papers' lists all the towns in England of over 5,000 population which do not have a Baptist Union registered church.

The list was compiled by Rev John Metcalfe by comparing a 1992 A.A. Handbook with the 1992 B.U. Directory.

Four factors should be taken into account when studying this list:

- 1) The needs of the inner cities and larger conurbations are largely not included.
- 2) Some of these towns may be already adequately served by existing churches.
- 3) Some of these towns do have Baptist churches that are not registered with the Baptist Union.
- 4) Some of these towns do now have Baptist churches which were recently planted, although at different stages in being constituted (Congleton is one example).

A LIST OF TOWNS WITHOUT A B.U. CHURCH

(The town's B.U. area number is listed alongside its population)

ALFRETON, Derbys.	23,000	3	COCKERMOUTH, Cumbria.	7,174	1
ALSAGER, Ches.	13,000	1	CONGLETON, Ches.	26,000	1
ALTON, Hants.	16,500	11	CONSETT, Co Curham.	22,904	2
ANNFIELD PLAIN, Durham.	10,859	2	COOKHAM, Berks.	5,998	11
ASHBOURNE, Derbys.	5,991	3	COULSDON, Gter. London	28,888	9
ASHINGTON, Nthumb.	23,000	2	CRAMLINGTON, Northumb.	30,000	2
			CRANLEIGH, Surrey.	12,000	8
BAKEWELL, Derbys.	4,043	3	CULCHETH, Ches.	8,500	1
BALDOCK, Herts.	9,664	7			
BANSTEAD, Surrey.	14,880	8	DAVENTRY, Northants.	17,220	7
BARTON-ON-SEA, Hants.	21,323	11	DAWLISH, Devon.	12,118	12
BATLEY, Yorks.	41,317	2	DENHAM, Bucks.	7,500	7
BECCLES, Suffolk.	9,500	6	DENTON, Manchester.	37,764	1
BICESTER, Oxon.	20,300	11	DINNINGTON, Yorks.	7,670	2
BIRSTALL, W. Yorks.	10,254	2	DORRIDGE, W. Midlands.	6,500	4
BLANDFORD, Dorset.	8,000	11	DRIFFIELD, Gt. E. Yorks.	9,600	2
BLAYDON, Tyne & Wear.	15,809	2	DUNMOW, Gt. Essex.	5,621	6
BLUNDELLSANDS, Merseyside	11,400	1			
BROMBOROUGH, W. Mids.	14,569	1	EAST GRINSTEAD, Sussex	25,000	8
BROWNHILLS, W. Mids.	18,200	4	ECCLESFIELD, S. Yorks.	32,000	2
BUCKINGHAM, Bucks.	8,075	7	ECCLESHALL, Staffs.	5,850	4
BUDE, Cornwall.	7,685	12	EDENBRIDGE, Kent.	7,471	8
BURNTWOOD, Staffs	26,000	4	ELY, Cambs.	12,000	6
BUXTON, Derbys.	20,797	3	ELLERSMERE PORT, Ches.	63,000	1
CAISTOR-ON-SEA, Norfolk	7,000	6	FAWLEY, Hants.	12,585	11
CAMBOURNE, Cornwall.	20,000	12	FILEY, Yorks.	5,770	2
CARNFORTH, Lancs.	7,221	1	FORDINGBRIDGE, Hants.	5,690	11
CARTERTON, Oxon.	11,012	11	FRODSHAM, Ches.	9,080	1
CHANDLERS FORD, Hants.	17,530	11			
CASTLEFORD, W. Yorks.	40,000	2	GAINSBOROUGH, Lincs	20,593	3
CATERHAM, Surrey.	30,334	8	GLASTONBURY, Som.	7,488	5
CATTERICK, Yorks.	7,438	2	GLOSSOP, Derbys.	25,339	3
CHAPELTOWN, S. Yorks.	22,647	2	GOOLE, Humberside.	18,310	2
CHEADLE, Ches.	59,828	1	GROBY, Leics.	6,411	3
CHELSEFIELD, Kent.	12,375	8	GUISBOROUGH, Cleved.	18,581	2
CHERTSEY, Surrey.	11,923	8			
CHESTNUT, Herts.	16,700	7	HAILSHAM, Sussex.	14,950	8
CHESSINGTON, Surrey.	19,258	8	HARPENDEN, Herts.	28,797	7
CHESTER-LE-STREET, Durham	34,975	2	HARWICH, Essex.	15,407	6
CHILWELL, Notts.	12,360	3	HASLEMERE, Surrey.	10,414	8

HASSOCKS, W.Sussex.	12,880	11	MARKET DRAYTON, Shrops.	9,751	4
HATFIELD, Herts.	32,296	7	MARLBOROUGH, Wilts.	7,000	5
HAVERHILL, Suffolk.	13,849	2	MARPLE, Gt.Manchester.	18,684	1
HAXBY, N.Yorks.	11,444	2	MARSKE, Cleveland.	9,942	2
HAYLE, Cornwall.	6,179	12	MATLOCK, Derbys.	13,867	3
HEDGE END, Hants.	13,000	11	MIDHURST, Sussex.	6,106	8
HEDNESFORD, Staffs.	15,050	4	MURTON, Co,Durham.	7,355	2
HELSTON, Cornwall.	10,000	12			
HEMSWORTH, W.Yorks.	9,646	2	NESTON, Ches.	15,000	1
HESWALL, Merseyside.	31,031	1	NEWMARKET, Suffolk.	16,129	6
HEXHAM, Northumb.	9,500	2	NEW MILLS, Derbys.	9,000	3
HIGHWORTH, Wilts.	8,556	5	NEWPORT, Shrops.	10,423	4
HINDLEY, Lancs.	21,484	1	NEWQUAY, Cornwall.	15,615	12
HOLMES CHAPEL, Ches.	5,520	1	NORTHFLEET, Kent.	21,413	8
HOLMFIRTH, W.Yorks.	22,000	2	NORTH WALSHAM, Norfolk.	9,424	6
HUNGERFORD, Berks.	5,024	11			
HYTHE, Hants.	16,655	11	ORMSKIRK, Lancs.	15,264	1
HYTHE, Kent.	12,900	8	OTLEY, Yorks.	14,250	2
			OTTERY ST MARY, Devon.	7,360	12
IVYBRIDGE, Devon.	5,649	12	OXTED, Surrey.	10,655	8
KENDAL, Cumbria.	23,550	1	PENRITH, Cumbria.	12,205	1
KESWICK, Cumbria.	5,645	1	PENZANCE, Cornwall.	19,579	12
KINGSWINFORD, W.Mids.	15,838	4	PICKERING, N. Yorks.	6,000	2
KIRKHAM, Lancs.	8,537	1	PONTEFRACT, S. Yorks.	29,047	2
KNARESBOROUGH, N.Yorks.	14,000	2	PORTISHEAD, Avon.	12,058	5
KNOWLE, W.Mids.	16,872	4	PORTLAND, Dorset.	13,884	11
KNUTSFORD, Ches.	13,751	1	POULTON-LE-FYLDE, Lancs.	17,576	1
			PRESCOT, Merseyside.	24,423	1
LANCING, Sussex.	18,000	8	PRESTWICH, Manchester.	32,000	1
LARKFIELD, Kent.	12,500	8	PRUDHOE, Northumb.	11,500	2
LAUNCESTON, Cornwall.	6,365	12			
LEEK, Staffs.	20,000	4	RAINHILL, Merseyside.	19,000	1
LEE-ON-SOLENT, Hants.	7,068	11	REDBOURNE, Herts.	5,171	7
LETCHWORTH, Herts.	32,190	7	REDRUTH, Cornwall.	34,774	12
LICHFIELD, Staffs.	26,000	4	REIGATE, Surrey.	21,711	8
LIPHOOK, Hants.	7,100	11	RICHMOND, Yorks.	7,700	2
LISKEARD, Cornwall.	6,930	12			
LITTLE HULTON, Gt. Manch	10,750	1	ST. IVES, Cambs.	14,840	6
LITTLEPORT, Cambs.	5,000	6	ST. IVES, Cornwall.	11,065	12
LONGRIDGE, Lancs.	7,151	1	ST. NEOTS, Cambs.	12,566	6
LUTTERWORTH, Leics.	6,717	3	SALTBURN, Cleveland.	6,127	2
LYE, W.Midlands.	13,205	4	SANDBACH, Ches.	16,400	1
			SAWBRIDGEWORTH, Herts.	9,000	7

SEAHAM, Co. Durham.	21,184	2	THORNE, S.Yorks.	17,000	5
SEATON, Devon.	5,490	5	THREE-LEGGED-CROSS,		
SHAFTESBURY, Dorset.	5,937	11	Dorset.	9,821	2
SLEAFORD, Lincs.	10,000	3	TORPOINT, Cornwall.	9,250	11
SNODLAND, Kent.	8,200	8			
SOUTHAM, Warwicks.	5,207	4	UPHOLLAND, Lancs.	7,332	1
SOUTHBOURNE, W.Sussex.	17,713	11	UTTOXETER, Staffs.	10,013	4
SOUTH OCKENDON, Essex.	17,582	6			
SOUTHWICK, Sussex.	11,060	8	VERWOOD, Dorset.	9,821	11
SOUTH WOODHAM FERRERS,	16,500	6			
Essex.			WADEBRIDGE, Cornwall.	5,000	12
SPENNYMOOR, Co. Durham.	17,740	2	WALKDEN, Gt. Manchester	39,466	1
STAINES, Surrey.	52,815	8	WANTAGE, Oxon.	5,000	11
STAMFORD, Lincs.	17,412	3	WASHINGTON, Tyne & Wear	60,000	2
STANDISH, Gt. Manch.	11,504	1	WESTHOUGHTON, Gt. Manc.	5,422	1
STAPLEFORD, Notts	18,095	3	WETHERBY, Yorks.	9,496	2
STONE, Staffs.	12,080	4	WHITBY, N.Yorks.	14,160	2
STOWMARKET, Suffolk.	11,050	6	WHITCHURCH, Shrops.	7,567	4
STRATTON, Cornwall.	7,685	12	WHITEFIELD, Manchester.	27,650	1
STREET, Somerset.	9,607	5	WILLENHALL, Staffs.	24,667	1
STRETFORD, Manchester	44,810	1	WILLERBY, Humberside.	22,000	2
SUNBURY-ON-THAMES,	28,436	8	WILMSLOW, Cheshire.	29,000	1
Surrey.			WINDERMERE, Cumbria.	7,956	1
SUTTON-ON-SEA, Lincs	8,700	3	WITHAM, Essex.	21,912	6
			WOMBWELL, S.Yorks.	17,174	2
TADCASTER, Yorks.	6,380	2	WOOTTON BASSET, Wilts.	12,000	2
TADWORTH, Surrey.	35,679	8	WORKINGTON, Cumbria.	26,123	5
THINGWALL, Merseyside.	16,325	1	WORKSOP, Notts.	35,000	3
THIRSK, Yorks.	17,000	2			
THORNBURY, Avon.	14,850	5	YATE, Avon.	21,000	5

Acts for today

This is an extract (pp. 111-113) from the recently published book "Acts for Today" by Michael Green, price £7.99. It is reproduced by kind permission of Hodder & Stoughton.

In many parts of the Western world, church planting seems an irrelevance. The countryside has been planted with an excess of churches, over many centuries. True enough. But the vitality of those same churches has been gravely eroded over a process of time; they have suffered attrition by apathy, scepticism, division and other factors. People have voted with their feet. They will not return to such churches, however hallowed they may be by tradition - unless it be for a white wedding, or a funeral. Does this mean then, that such people, who constitute by far the majority of the population in Europe, are to be denied the chance to hear the gospel in terms they understand? The whole history of the church says a resounding 'No' to that. If the wine-skins are so brittle that they have to be broken, so be it. The wine of the gospel must be served in more flexible wine- skins. That is what happened in Europe in the Reformation. It happened in England again at the Great Ejectment, when more than 1600 of the best clergy in the land went over to Nonconformity. It happened again in the Evangelical Revival. Whereas many won to Christ through that great movement stayed within the established church, thousands moved out with John Wesley, to form a church life which made evangelism, worship and pastoral care more real to ordinary people. In our own day the House Church movement has despaired of sufficient new life coming fast enough in the mainline churches and has started up a remarkable network of new churches, initially in homes, but subsequently meeting in cinemas and other public places; they are even building their own schools for the raising of their young.

Church planting will never be out of date. It will never be irrelevant. Circumstances will always arise where it is vital, and my years spent recently in North America have given me a fresh understanding of the need for it, and a fresh admiration for those who go out on a limb, without prospects, salary, or housing, to found a new church for God. In Britain some of the lively churches within the Anglican fold are refounding other Anglican churches which had died and been closed. This is not always appreciated by the hierarchy; it rather cuts against the traditional policy of inviolate parochial boundaries. But it is happening, and the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It works. Church

planting is taking place even within the heart of that most overchurched (but underevangelised) nation, England, and with the tolerance of its bishops. In the light of this, it will be valuable to glean some principles for the Acts which could be useful in our day. Of course, the circumstances are utterly different. I am not for one moment suggesting that we can simply take over wholesale the methods of the early Christians. I am suggesting that it would not be a waste of time for us, who are so unsuccessful at it, to see how they, who were so successful, went about it.

Before we look at individual churches, one or two general observations are perhaps in place.

First, it is undeniable that the early Christians thought that founding churches was part of their commission. They were in the propagation business. They realised that they needed to export, or die. The churches I admire most are those which share that outlook, firmly rooted as it is in the express command of Jesus to his disciples (see Matt. 28:18-20). I was much struck, when visiting Guatemala a few years ago, to find a very lively church which over the past twenty-five years had founded over 800 churches!

What a rebuke, what a challenge! Incidentally, the evangelistic zeal of that chain of churches did not eclipse social concern. They were the first to bring help and rehabilitation when a terrible earthquake devastated a sector of the country and evoked subsequent world support. Part of that international aid was used to provide people with temporary new housing, but as is the way with temporary encampments, they tended to become rather permanent. Round the two open air washing stations, one for men and one for women, in the centre of the camp, were the most densely packed dormitory-type buildings that you could imagine. I found that the colporteurs from the Bible Society of Guatemala had gone round the camp, and had started what became several new churches in that complex. That is the sort of thing the early church did. They saw it as part of their calling.

To put it another way, they took seriously the outward orientation of the church. Different denominations, over the course of time, settle down into prevailing characteristics. And for most denominations it would be fair to say that the prevailing orientation of the church is inward-looking: their leadership, their organisation, become introverted. Church looks like a club for the pious, rather than the Jesus revolution breaking out.

The second general observation is this. The early Christians did not await consolidation, and train leaders, before moving out further. We tend, if we are ever engaged in church planting, to pay inordinate care to education, financing, and future leadership. We may stifle the project by over-protectiveness. But it is apparent from the Acts that churches like Thessalonica, Philippi, Lystra, and many others were founded after the apostles had been with them for a comparatively short time. After that they moved on. Sure, they came back when

they could, and wrote when they could, and commended another travelling teacher when he was heading that way. But on the whole they expected the God who had brought the little congregation into being to sustain it by providing adequate leadership. Their leaders would never have passed our Selection Boards, but they seem to have done what was required of them!

Again, as you look broadly over the Acts, I think you will not be able to discern any very highly structured church growth programme. There is no overarching body determining how it should all happen. Evangelism and church planting on the whole seem to have happened spontaneously without heavy planning. I am not denigrating planning: there needs to be proper planning behind any work for God if it is to take root and grow. But there was no monolithic, preconceived outreach plan. The planning was done by the Holy Spirit, and he seems to have guided the Christians into the appropriate approach for different situations. This meant that they needed to keep depending on him, and could not degenerate into producing a technique. Had the apostles sat down to plan the outreach in Acts, it would have looked very different from what actually happened, and it would have been microscopic in scope compared with the breadth it attained when the Holy Spirit led them in their ways.

Flogging an imaginary hobby-horse?

EDITOR'S REPLY TO PHIL JUMP

“My problem is with the irritating and predictable tendency that we Baptists seem to have that, every time we discover a new truth or direction in our life together, we have to form a ‘club’ of those interested....”

“As long as the few ‘closet’ themselves within the confines of a separate organisation, they will minimize their influence on the many and at the same time be in danger of fuelling their own hobby horse mentality”

- Phil Jump, Spring 1993 Planting Papers

Phil concedes more of a case for the 1.3.6. Group than he realises. Not only does he agree that a group like 1.3.6. “allows ideas to be nurtured and developed to the point where they can be introduced to the denomination as a whole”, he also recognises the need for the sharing of ideas and experience with people of like mind.

I would want to add that pressure groups are very necessary for a time. Those who want to see church planting higher on the agenda throughout the Baptist Church are naturally going to be more effective if they get together. And there have been results. The 1.3.6. Group can justifiably claim some of the credit for the high profile of church planting in the recently produced B.U. National Mission Strategy.

But the crux of Phil’s argument is based on the misconception that 1.3.6. is a “separate organisation” whereas it is a network. This is not just playing with words.

The aim of 1.3.6. is not to be an exclusive organisation of church planting experts. Rather it is a diverse network not only of those who are experienced in church planting, but also those who are involved in church planting and those who are seeking help with the issue of church planting. It is not a group which simply fuels the interest of enthusiasts and ‘closets’ them away in a separate organisation. Rather, it helps support what is already happening on the ground all over the country and serves to facilitate, enable and encourage further church planting initiatives.

Perhaps ‘Planting Papers’ has been at fault in not making clearer the aims of 1.3.6. The express purpose of the group has been to be “the resource kit of the many”. This is why, for example 1.3.6. has designed resource packs for

Association Days on Church Planting and begun to establish a consultancy system for those needing guidance about church planting.

Phil then goes on to highlight a wider issue: ministerial training and how exactly to recognise different gifting and emphases in training. The B.U. is presently wrestling with this.

This question could be addressed in greater depth in a future issue of 'Planting Papers', but briefly my response would be this.

It is important that the Baptist Church gets away from the 'jack of all trades' mentality that has at times characterised ministerial training in the past. Specialisation is vital. I am sure Phil would not disagree with the need for specific training in youth ministry for example. One possibility may be for all those trained (worship leaders, pastors, evangelists, youth workers, church planters etc) to be given the umbrella title of 'minister', only each one would be a minister **'with special training in...'** This leaves the freedom for a minister to develop their gifting and training during their ministry, something which Spurgeons College itself has been exploring.

In the end I think Phil may be surprised just how much agreement there is between us. I would agree with Phil that there should be less compartmentalisation of ministry. And part of that would be to include some form of training about evangelism and church planting in all ministerial training courses.

Colin Cartwright, Editor

Charitable Status

Following the 1960 Charity Act, regulations were issued stating that a Place of Worship need not register as a Charity if its Trustees included one of the Trust Corporations named in the Charities (Exception from registration and accounts) Regulations 1963, Number 2074. Similar regulations will be issued in due course under the 1992 Act.

Baptist Churches therefore do not need to register unless they have only private Trustees. And new church plants may apply for membership of the BUGB, and nominate a Baptist Trust Corporation as Trustee of any of its property, including tenancy agreements or rented property or manse leases before they have purchased a property of their own.

Certificates of Excepted Status and any further advice can be supplied by John Barfield, Manager of the Baptist Union Corporation Ltd. at Baptist House, Didcot.

BOOK REVIEW

Sari 'n' Chips

By Ram Gidoomal

Monarch, 1993, £3.99

If the Church in Britain is serious about church planting and sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with the world, it needs to recognise those from around the world who are literally living on its own doorstep here in the U.K. which includes many thousands of Asians who have arrived here since the last World War.

This fascinating book gives a picture of life in Britain through the eyes of an Asian - that Asian, being Ram Gidoomal, who arrived in England in 1967. Ram tells the story of his own personal struggle to adjust to the Western way of life and that of his family who have faced many difficulties. Ram reflects on the difficulties facing Asian children in our schools and the challenge of Western ways placed upon Eastern minds; the persecution of racism, ridicule and rejection; intergration of second and third generation immigrants and the internal family pressures that brings. The author also gives a very comprehensive insight to educational and employment challenges facing the Asian today.

This well-written and compelling book arrests and maintains the readers' interest as Ram injects his own personal conversion from Hinduism to Christianity and how God has worked in his life. He concludes this refreshing book by saying that in the 1990s there is now more awareness of the development of church life on the Indian sub-continent itself, the development of theology in a contextualised way and the working through of pertinent issues. He affirms with passion it is possible to accept Christ while retaining your cultural identity - you can stay a brown Asian and still be a Christian. This is certainly a book for our time and one that needs to be read by all church leaders and planters to help give fresh appreciation of how we may win the Asian generation within our towns, cities and nation.

Reviewer: Clive Doubleday, Director of Communications, Spurgeons College

Ram Gidoomal is Chairman of Christmas Cracker, a Trustee of Oasis Trust, Director of South Asian Concern and Director of the South London Training and Enterprise Council.

Ram is jointly leading a new study course starting at Spurgeons College in January of next year. The 'Leadership Development for Asian Ministries' programme is a short, innovative course designed to enrich the ministry of the church. The course tackles key theological and social issues from an Asian perspective for the benefit of both Eastern and Western lay people and full-time Christian leaders. The course comprises of ten two-hour evening sessions. Each session will be presented as an individual unit to allow students to come as they are able. Sessions include: 'Culture, Context and the Bible', 'Theology Through Asian Eyes', 'South Asians in Britain' and 'Cross-Cultural Communication'.

From the Editors

Why 1.3.6. ?

1.3.6. in itself implies a growing sequence of numbers appropriate for the multiplication of churches. But the real significance is found in 1 Corinthians 3:6. Paul writes: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (RSV).

Thus the title '1.3.6.' serves to remind us that, despite all our human efforts and diligence, we are still totally dependent on God himself for success in church planting.

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Correspondence Welcome

Please write to the editor of the 1.3.6. 'Planting Papers' with any of the following:

- ☆ responses to articles published
- ☆ suggestions for topics you would like to see addressed
- ☆ your own articles/case studies/opinions/research
- ☆ details of local church planting events/launches/conferences
- ☆ book reviews

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Planting Papers is the magazine of the '1.3.6 Group' - the network of Baptist Church Pastors (formerly BACIP) 1985 aims to promote all aspects of Church Planting within the Baptist Union and beyond, based on 1 Corinthians 3:6. All contributions - in sympathy with this aim, have full freedom of expression, and views cannot be said to necessarily represent those of the 1.3.6 Executive or editors.

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