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# The Fraternal

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## EDITORIAL

This is my last issue as editor. After ten years there is to be a new occupant in the Editorial Chair. On behalf of my BMF Colleagues, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Michael Walker for his willingness to serve the Fellowship in this way and wish him well in his new responsibility. Our new editor is a gifted writer himself; a man with a rich devotional spirit, good pastoral experience, and a keen lover of good reading, he is excellently equipped for the new task. We are fortunate to have such a man available and ready to help his brother-ministers in this way. These days of escalating costs are not easy for Christian journals and magazines, and increased subscriptions are inevitable. On the other hand "The Fraternal" is a strong and constant link with our fellow Baptist ministers and laymen through the world, and its importance can hardly be denied. I believe that in coming days its usefulness will be even greater. I have greatly enjoyed these years of service and wish my successor much joy and satisfaction in his work.

Raymond Brown

## A NEW KIND OF MINISTRY

"Association Minister to the Northern Baptist Association". What kind of a ministry is that? No-one really knows. Not even the one who holds the appointment! For this new kind of ministry is still being hammered out: and, even though it has been in existence for two and a half years, anything written in this article can only be regarded as a provisional judgment on its effectiveness. As far as we can ascertain, there has never been a ministry quite like this. Indeed, one of the attractions of the appointment was that there were no precedents to guide one and no traditions to fetter one. I have had the exciting task of trying to create, with the grace of God, a new kind of ministry which, if it succeeds in the North East, may well be adopted in other parts of the country. The Messengers in our history are, perhaps, the nearest equivalent ministry. Again, we know that the Northern Baptist Association in the 19th century appointed an Association Evangelist to evangelise South West Durham: but his was a much more limited ministry. There have, of course, been Association Secretaries charged, in addition to their administrative duties, with the pastoral care of the churches and ministers. A unique feature of the present appointment is that the Association Minister is set free from administrative tasks to concentrate on a preaching and pastoral ministry in all the 40 churches of the Association.

I had often thought that it would be an excellent idea if the Baptist Union were able from time to time to release experienced ministers to tackle special tasks. I had in mind, for example, churches where a split had just occurred. An experienced and trusted minister, lent to the church for a

ministry of six months or more, might well be used to heal the breach. Or again, I thought of churches which were well placed and well equipped but which had never realised their potential. New causes, so often served by men straight from college, might well profit by such a ministry by being encouraged in their out-reach and guided to develop on sound lines. Such tasks would often be very difficult but also very rewarding. But I had said to myself that this could never happen with the emphasis we so often place on the autonomy of the local church. Would such churches, however great their need, accept such an experienced minister for a longer or shorter period of ministry? I thought not. But I was wrong! When in the autumn of 1971 the Northern Baptist Association invited me to become the first Association Minister, it was just such an experienced and mobile ministry that its General Committee had in mind.

The Association Minister has both a wider and a narrower ministry. As to the wider ministry, it was hoped that he would be a friend to all the ministers and churches of the Association, using such gifts and experience as he had for the benefit of them all. He was asked to encourage evangelism and foster the spiritual life of the churches. It was hoped that he would help in the training of lay preachers and Sunday school teachers; that he would help to promote team ministries and the grouping of churches; that he would conduct Quiet Days and Teaching Missions. Seen in this way, it is clear that there is no end to the possibilities of this kind of ministry. For me this wider ministry has proved an enriching and rewarding experience. I have been accepted by the churches and have been privileged to share in their great occasions—ordinations, inductions and anniversaries. I have met the ministers in fraternal and retreats, the women of the association in a Quiet Day, and the youth of the association in week-end conferences. Indeed, the only problem of the wider ministry is that one has not the time or the strength to accept all the opportunities for preaching and service.

As if this wider ministry were not enough to occupy a man's full time and exercise his talents to the full, the association minister undertakes special assignments. For my first year in the North East I cared the young and promising church established at Beacon Lough, a new housing estate in Gateshead. The object of this ministry was to give the members a sense of churchmanship and to prepare them for their first full-time minister. It is a happy thing to be able to report that they are now enjoying such full-time ministry.

For my second special assignment I was asked to care for six (yes, six!) needy churches in South West Durham, namely, Bishop Auckland, Crook, Ferryhill, Hamsterley, Spennymoor and Wolsingham. The whole area had seen years of depression: and, while it ought not surely to follow, the churches had been depressed spiritually. One of the churches had actually closed. It has been my privilege to re-open the church at Bishop Auckland. It was a real venture of faith to do so. Before closing the congregation

had dwindled to five or six; there was dry rot in the building; and there was only £37 in the bank. This is exactly the kind of situation where the cause would have been abandoned if there had been no association minister to send in. As it is, the revival of the Bishop Auckland church is something for which to thank God. The money came in to deal with the dry rot and restore the building. There is already a congregation of 30 to 40, more than half of the congregation being young people. There had been no baptism in this church for 25 years! In the first year after re-opening there were two baptismal services and two more such services will have been held before this article appears. There is a well-attended mid-week fellowship for prayer and Bible Study and a Youth Fellowship on Saturday nights of upwards of 30 young people between the ages of 15 and 24: and in this meeting conversions are frequently taking place. The story is not quite so spectacular in the other churches but even so the churches at Crook and Ferryhill have had baptisms for the first time for over 12 years. The six churches have been formed into the South West Durham Fellowship of Churches and are beginning to grow together. They are beginning to share resources and do things together. They are, as I write, seeking the first full-time minister for the group. Laymen have joined the association minister's team to care for the churches of Hamsterley and Wolsingham and it is widely known that, through the creative planning of the New Venture Committee of the Baptist Union, the Fellowship of Churches has the dedicated help of Miss Enid Richard, a well-qualified and experienced Social Worker. It is not all success story, of course. One of the churches has yet to witness a similar break-through. But the blessing already received in the six churches is remarkable. We give the glory to God. The story has been briefly told simply to stress that this special assignment alone would appear to establish both the need and the fruitfulness of this kind of ministry.

In the present instance, the association minister is supported by the Northern Baptist Association and the Baptist Union Home Mission Fund. The project is regarded as an Initial Pastorate. The question of finance needs to be gone into very carefully by any association contemplating such a ministry. I am sure that it is essential that the minister's stipend (like those of the superintendents) should be paid by the denomination rather than by the local churches which he may from time to time serve. This gives him a necessary independence and standing when he walks into difficult situations. Moreover, while the churches which I have served have been able to contribute to association funds and such monies have been directed towards my stipend, the work of the association minister must never be determined by the ability of a church or churches to make such a contribution. The association minister might well be asked to initiate Baptist work in a new town where no fellowship exists and no contribution to stipend could be made. Again, with such a roving commission, an adequate housing and travel allowance has to be considered.

I am certain that there will be those who will ask, "What is the relationship of such a ministry to that of the General Superintendent?" It is essential that they be friends and work closely together as colleagues. The new kind of ministry is in no sense a rival ministry but supplementary to the work of the superintendent. There are times when the association minister must say to a church, "That is not my province; you must ask the help of the General Superintendent." Our superintendents are given impossibly large areas and most, I feel sure, would welcome the help of an association minister who could ease their burden and give, perhaps, some additional pastoral care to ministers and churches, especially to young ministers.

I think that it is true to say that the Northern Association as a whole accepts the fact that the need for such a ministry and its effectiveness have been clearly demonstrated. Indeed, many would feel that we could do with **two** such ministers! Concern has been expressed lest the wider ministry be crowded out by giving the association minister too exacting a special assignment. This calls for very careful thought by the small and very responsible committee appointed by the association to advise its minister as to his special spheres of service.

In conclusion I would say that, if any other associations do appoint such officers, I hope that brother ministers may be found to adventure into this very exacting but richly rewarding work. Such tasks will stretch them to the full and call on all the experience they can offer. If they are seeking "a man's job", then here it is. And how thrilling it is to see a discouraged church with its faith renewed and effective once again for the Kingdom!

EDGAR W. WRIGHT

## THE CHURCH THAT GREW

I have been asked to write an article by the Editorial Board of the "Fraternal" and I count it a privilege to do so. The debt which I owe to Baptist ministers down the years is an incalculable one. But I hope above all that in seeking to set down some of the circumstances concerning the work of Poynton Baptist Church in Cheshire, I shall not be found guilty of merely telling a "success story". My chief desire is to testify to the unmistakable blessing of a mighty God.

The chief thrust of my Christian service until I entered my thirties was at Moss Side Baptist Church in Manchester. There I had served as a Sunday school teacher, superintendent and deacon. Lay preaching had begun gently and quietly. I grew to love the fellowship of the Lancashire and Cheshire area, and gradually the desire to serve as a pastor became more and more pronounced. Nearly three years as lay minister of a Baptist Church in Oldham proved a valuable sequel to all the preparatory experience in Moss Side. I sensed the need of men and women for preaching that was "earthed" and saw the immense opportunities that even a layman in full-time secular work could take up. My wife

and I began a careful reappraisal of our time and our timetables! The three children joined with us, and we loved every minute of our work with the Oldham friends.

With the settling of a full-time minister in the work at Oldham, we were able to pause and consider further opportunities of service. I had already turned away from a career in educational administration and begun lecturing in a teacher training college. I knew that the longer vacations would be of great benefit, not only for pastoral work, but also for personal renewal and planning. For just twelve months we waited.

A conviction that God was calling me to serve the Church at Poynton came one afternoon in July 1967 when I was working in my study at home. It was a most unusual experience for me, since though I knew where the Church was situated, I had never preached in it. Nor did I know any member of its tiny fellowship. But my conviction was indeed so strong that I got up and went to the kitchen where my wife was baking bread. She concurred and reached for her coat, believing we were off on a shopping spree! When I explained more fully, she stood by me, once again, from the very beginning.

The ensuing interview with the area superintendent was, as always, a most cordial one, but it was unusual. I shared the very personal experience which had come to me. He replied that the work at Poynton was in very low water indeed and that it was the association's hope to close it and dispose of the property. Three separate letters were sent to the church, indicating my willingness to serve, but no replies came. The lines of communication appeared to have dried up completely. I visited the superintendent again. It was now November. He put two questions to me. The first—had I, perhaps, mistaken the call of God? The second, (when I affirmed that it still sounded loud and clear)—would I, then, be willing to offer myself in person to the people?

To do that was one of the most embarrassing tasks I have ever undertaken, but it was a most valuable exercise in humility! I climbed the steps of the small, 120-seater building one foggy morning in mid-November 1967 to find a church warm, but entirely empty. And then a voice. In the tiny vestry, as I entered, were five middle-aged and elderly people gathered around an old coke stove, in prayer.

The welcome was gracious, but in true Cheshire fashion, it was not long before I was asked the reason of my coming. I breathed deep, voiced it and sat down. There was evident excitement at once within the group. It transpired that their resolve in July to commence a regular mid-week meeting to pray specifically for a pastor, coincided exactly with my conviction that I must go to them. That news, imparted by a lady, the oldest member of the group, had a profound effect upon the pastor-designate. For the first time in his life, he really **believed** that prayer worked.

The following Sunday I preached with a view, and thirteen members of church and congregation gave me a unanimous invitation to become their honorary minister. No time limit

was set. The previous week's offering had amounted to £2/2/6, so I knew that there was a commitment among them to do business for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Almost immediately, the local Council of Churches contacted me. Declaring their delight that the Baptist Church now had a leader, they gamely offered to decorate the whole interior of the premises. The church had simply to find the cost of paint and materials. Eagerly we got to work. A Catholic layman set up trestles and scaffolding and acted as foreman. The Methodist minister, Anglican vicar and Catholic priest all took part in the painting. Several Baptists appeared from nowhere, indicating their desire to be involved with me in the work of the church. Meantime, we worshipped in the Anglican church hall. I have spent some hundreds of hours since that date in local ecumenical discussions, many of them most frustrating. But though I am far from being an "ecumaniac", I shall always remember the impetus provided to our church growth by a very practical gesture of love from other Christians in Poynton.

The Thursday evening meeting for prayer and Bible study remained a central and vital feature of the church programme, and continues to be so. Wherever possible, the prayer is specific, concerning itself with goals and objectives yet to be reached, as well as with praise, confession of sin and intercession. Evening services continued, and on Easter Day 1968 the tiny morning group moved out of the vestry into the church for family worship, and twenty-two adults and children gathered. Gradually the blessing began to come. I tried my preaching to challenge again and again concerning a personal commitment to Christ and believer's baptism. Each baptismal service was used as a guest service. Many came to observe, and quite a number remained to work and worship with us. Each visitor was faithfully followed up with a personal call from my wife or myself. I learned to prop myself up against many a sideboard or mantelpiece in those early days so that I should have time to move on to make the next call. We started a Saturday morning cafe in the church basement, made a sandwich board, stuck it outside, and put the minister beside it. Regular customers started to come on a Sunday, sometimes as a whole family.

By 1969 the building was beginning to be too small for comfort. Our explorations for an alternative site in Poynton all proved abortive. It became clear that we were meant to tear down the existing premises and rebuild on the same site, using additional land purchased just after the war. Our need to be at the very centre of the township has been confirmed in countless ways ever since.

Two important developments occurred in 1971. The first was my reading of Jim Kennedy's book **Evangelism Explosion**. In his book Pastor Kennedy indicates how the challenge of the gospel and of commitment to Christ can be logically presented in the context of the fireside. The blessing upon his church and local community had been great indeed. Timidly, I set out alone one evening to present the gospel in this way to the husband of a Sunday school teacher. The

scheme was wonderfully blessed, and regularly now each Wednesday evening, teams set out on this errand. The Sunday school teacher's husband is now the co-ordinator of the church's outreach programme!

The other major event of 1971 concerned a small Baptist Church in a nearby township—Bramhall—which had fallen on bad times and was virtually extinct. One evening a deputation met the Church secretary and myself to ask whether Poynton could consider adopting Bramhall as a daughter church. It was eventually agreed to go ahead and the Church secretary was seconded, along with about sixteen members, to begin a new work there. It was hard to part with them and they were much missed from our activities. Yet in a quite remarkable way all the gaps left by this happy secession were rapidly filled. Most important, Poynton was challenged more and more to look away from its own considerable problems to those of the tiny group two miles away.

The church meeting took a firm line about this time concerning finance. The £42,000 needed to build and equip the new complex of buildings was to be raised by direct gifts or loans. The 10% giving to missionary and outside causes was to continue, to be increased as soon as possible to 15%. With just £3,000 in the bank, the contract was signed, and before 1971 closed, building was well under way. Half the new premises were built before the old church was demolished, and so the congregation was not again dispossessed for worship. The immense encouragement and thrust forward which the whole project presented were a powerful confirmation of the faith and confidence of God's people. Over three hundred people were now regularly gathering for worship each Sunday.

The progress and development since the opening of our new church in July 1972 have continued, but during the latter part of that year the burden of the work began to tell heavily upon me. There were times of great "dryness", and I realised that I was attempting to carry an impossible load. In the early part of 1974 two co-pastors were appointed to share the work, both also honorary. One, an ordained Baptist Minister with nearly twenty years full-time experience and now taking up secular employment, was brought in to lead the growing work at Bramhall. The other, a consultant veterinary surgeon, shares worship services with me and usually preaches one of the sermons. Though we see each other only once or twice mid-week, we are engaged in a constant dialogue by letter. Our "seed thoughts" provide much of the forward planning which is brought month by month to Deacons and church members. The team which has been formed has been a great personal strength to me, especially since it is reinforced by a church secretary and treasurer who bring their own dedication to the common task. Though every deacon now serving is still in his first term, the backing is impressive and I cannot pay high enough tribute to my colleagues. In April last year Sunday school work began on a Manchester overspill estate near Wilmslow. Classes started in a private house and soon moved in to the

nearby new primary school. Last September worship services commenced in a house in Wilmslow, and once again several members residing in that area will secede to undergird the witness there. The administration of the church programme has been carefully thought through. In addition to the pastors and the secretariat, responsibility is delegated through several co-ordinators. These cover outreach, inreach (nurturing of the members themselves), youth, fabric, Bramhall and Colshaw. The church publishes a "Who Does What" twice yearly from which it is possible to see clearly how each task is tackled, and by whom.

Meantime, the growth of the fellowship has pointed to the need for extensions to the existing new premises, and these are now under way. Though the most urgent need is additional space for Sunday school and youth, the church is building a book room which will form one continuous building line with the supermarket next door, and will front on to the busy main street. We hope to have it open through the week and to build bridges and relationships with many new contacts. My own vision is for a shoppers' creche to operate alongside it, and for the sanctuary to be open at least part of every day.

Though £18,000 is still owed to the church project, and £7,500 on the extensions, the church has gone forward in confidence. Offerings are now in excess of £150 each week, and the membership approaches 200. Always, when challenges and needs have been prayerfully considered and then clearly spelt out, the whole church family has risen to them. I am convinced that our experiences are, in miniature, a picture of what our denomination can do when goals and objectives are set clearly before our people.

Of course, there have been disappointments. Sometimes we have become physically and spiritually jaded in the work. But always God has blessed us and constantly we have been aware of answers to our prayers. If the story of what we have been able to accomplish by God's grace can in any way be used to challenge others for Him, we shall be well repaid for its telling.

DAVID PRINGLE

## A SECOND LOOK AT THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

I have called this article "A second look at the Sunday School" because, as long as the numbers are sufficiently high, and there are just enough teachers to cope, we seldom pause to take a second look, and honestly ask, what are we doing?

There has been a change in the role of the Sunday School that the Church has not fully noticed and appreciated. The first Sunday Schools came into being to meet a real social need; they provided an elementary training for children who otherwise would have had no hope of education. Religious instruction was a part of this general education.

The State has now assumed (to a greater or lesser extent) the responsibility of providing education. The original social

need to which the churches responded no longer exists, but the Sunday Schools do. Why? I would suggest that this question has never been seriously considered. The whole topic of Sunday Schools is emotive and because of this we find ourselves reluctant to discuss it. There are reasons for this: most churches are by nature conservative, and reluctant to let go of any structure that has proved itself, especially one as successful as the original Sunday Schools. Again, working with children is a pleasant experience, there is a real satisfaction that comes from contact with lively young minds, and it is also fairly easy to get a sizeable number of young people together. This, of course, can give the illusion of success. Above all, the desire to give children some understanding of the nature of God and lead them to a knowledge of the salvation that He provides in Christ, has led the Church to hold on to the Sunday Schools: but is the Sunday School the best way to achieve this?

In theory we are trying to reach the children with the Good News of the Gospel, and lead them into the Kingdom. But as I look at my empty pews and my own large Sunday School, I am inclined to think that we are not leading large numbers of children into a deep and lasting faith. I have the uneasy feeling that we are regarded as a free child-minding agency, and that many parents are willing to subject their children to a "bit of religion" for the sake of being rid of them for an hour or so on a Sunday morning. Perhaps more common is the idea that going to Sunday School will in some way "do them good". Here a basic misunderstanding of the faith shows itself, i.e. that Christianity is mere morality.

It is in the area of relationships between the Sunday School and the Church that there is cause for real concern. In some situations the Sunday School is independent of the Church; it has a life of its own. One gets the feeling that were the Church to die the Sunday School would live on. There are Sunday School leaders who see any incursion into "their Sunday morning time" as a threat; it is almost as though they own the children. Very often there is a resistance to change and certainly to the integration of the Sunday School into the total life of the Church. Often this loose connection is not only between Sunday School and Church but between Sunday School and other youth organisations, B.B., G.B., etc. Frequently it is a case of everybody doing "their own thing".

Perhaps more important is the effect that this independent life has on the children who attend the Sunday School. Very often we find that the children are meeting at the same time as the morning service and this means that they are taken out of the worship of the believing adult community to go to a child-orientated programme. My own Sunday School children are only in Church for special services, such as Harvest, parades, etc., and then their numbers are disproportionately large, often fifty per cent or more of the congregation being under the age of twelve. On these occasions we truly become a "Children's Church". The emphasis is governed by the high proportion of children. There are

special hymns, object lessons and illustrated talks, and if we are not careful these very features can reduce the Gospel to trivialities. They can leave children with the impression that this is what the Church is all about. The Gospel story becomes little more than a worm in an apple or black ink in a glass of water. On these occasions the commands "Let us pray" and "Let us give thanks" will, of themselves, no more induce prayer and thanksgiving than would the exhortation "Let us all be angry" followed automatically by a corporate fit of rage. If children are to understand the true nature of worship then they need to share with believing adults, not swamp them. Ronald Goldman suggests that up to the age of ten or thereabouts, many children understand religion as something done for them by adults. The Sunday School system can mean that children never worship as part of an adult community, and never gain an insight into the deep experiences of worship. For many of our young it is a case of "Now I have become a man I have put away childish things" and the Church is very much a part of that childhood.

Our general approach to Sunday School work needs to be examined afresh. We draw no distinction between the child of Christian parents and those whose homes show little or no interest; all are given the same instruction. Yet the needs of these two groups are entirely different. In cases where one or more parents attend the Church, "... there is a more positive attitude to thinking about religion, to the Church and to such related subjects as prayer, than in homes where neither of the parents attend Church".<sup>1</sup> By the practice of mixing both groups are we not giving an unfair advantage to the children of Christian background in the competitive element of Sunday School life? Does it not also reinforce the idea among those less familiar with Christian concepts that, because they don't have the answers to our questions, perhaps the Church like so many other structures in society is only for the able? Surely with a difference of background as great as this, there is need for two very different types of approach. It presents a problem in terms of teaching. In class work, the needs of the child from a Christian background are not met or the young outsider, embarrassed by ignorance, is forced into silence. Whatever is done, one party or the other suffers. It is only a teacher of considerable skill who can hold the interest of both, and what Sunday School has a surfeit of these?

Do we fully understand the pressure that is put on children who come from outside? We set up a dual value conflict in the minds of many children. The Sunday School gives those who attend a system of values; we teach honesty, integrity, commitment and love. For us as Christians these values are the norm, but for very many children they come into conflict with the everyday attitudes of their homes. This is not to say that these homes are dens of iniquity; it is just that in most of them Christian values, while acknowledged, are not embraced. The child sees that the parents do not place the same value on truth at all times as his Sunday

School teacher, yet no fire from heaven comes down and consumes them. Is God not interested? Did He not see? Or is it perhaps the He isn't there at all? The home background is crucial, for it is here that the teaching is earthed.

Now, while we may feel that God has not confined Himself to any one school of educational psychology, Goldman's observations have a lot to teach us. He points out that non-Christian parents who are close to their children need not be too worried about them becoming overwhelmed by religious forces outside the home, for it is parental influence, unconscious and unspoken, that shapes the mind of their child. If we look at the facts we have the children for just over one hour a week at Sunday School, plus occasional visits at home by the teachers (if this is done at all). For the rest of the time the children are under the influence of their parents. Can we wonder that children adopt the values of their parents and reject the Church? The recognition of this means, in the words of the Baptist Union report, "The child and the Church", "This lays upon the Church, both as a corporate body and through its individual members and families, an important pastoral responsibility for these children. This means that the Church must recognise their spiritual needs and do all within its power to provide friendship, example, worship, prayer and hospitality which will bring its teaching to life, and make up to them what the children of believers receive in their family environment. Within this it must exercise a constant ministry of evangelism to their parents, holding before them the value of a family faith".<sup>2</sup> Without this support and interest they will have no-one with whom they can identify in spiritual matters. If teachers fail to provide this, then they will fail in their primary purpose. With children even more than adults, the faith is "caught rather than taught". Diana Dewar in her assessment of religious education in this country says, "A most sobering sense of responsibility must follow the realisation that to a great extent parents are the criteria for the breadth of the concepts of God formed by the child. Inevitably the child starts to create and keep images of God largely influenced by what he knows of his human parents".<sup>3</sup> To be effective as a teacher means a deep personal commitment to Christ and a real love for children. This is not soft option, or a job for youngsters who are still struggling with their own faith.

In many cases the Sunday School inoculates children against a mature faith. We give them just enough as youngsters to implant the idea that they know what the Church is about, but it is not always an accurate understanding. Religion is rejected not for rational and intellectual reasons, but for emotional reasons. It is not the conviction that it is not true, rather that they feel the pressure of unbelieving parents and friends. Even in terms of education we leave a lot to be desired. "There must be many for whom the freshness, pungency and simplicity of Christ's Parables are lost forever because they were taught them far too soon".<sup>4</sup> Their thinking sets far too early, their experience

of life limits their understanding, they settle for what Goldman calls "crystallised misconceptions". They never go on to a deeper understanding of the faith. At a later date when they are confronted with the demands of faith then they look back to this childhood experience; the simple solutions they then formed are now seen as inadequate for an adult world. These simplistic solutions, "crystallised misconceptions", become the basis for the rejection of the faith.

The great tragedy is that what is rejected is not the faith. It is a mish-mash of half-understood ideas, isolated Bible stories, dealing with a special people who lived in a far-off land, all very removed from daily living, in short a very disfigured and truncated body of teaching. We tend to think that these ideas will correct themselves as the child grows up, but this is far from the case for they carry these misconceptions into adult life. As Diana Dewar says, ". . . these ideas are difficult to erase in later years, particularly from the unconscious mind, and the importance of childhood impressions lies largely in their continuing effects as part of the basis of personality and thinking. It is widely accepted that ideas formed in childhood can, and do, go on producing behaviour patterns in contrast with the adult modes of thought and intellectual convictions born of maturity, although these contradictions may not be consciously appreciated".<sup>5</sup> We need to take care that we do not inoculate children against a deep experience of Christ.

If our Sunday School is going to be "evangelistic" in the best sense of the word, then we must take care not to give too much too soon. Our aim should be to establish a deep personal relationship with the children and their parents. We need teachers who will visit on a frequent and regular basis and who are able to share their faith with the parents. This in turn will mean smaller classes, and we shall have to be much more selective about our teachers. Establishing this depth of relationship may well involve class activity outside Sunday. In this way the difficulties presented by differing home backgrounds may well be overcome. Care should be taken to see that the children share in worship with the adult Church, and that separation between Church and Sunday School is kept to a minimum. In fact, there should be a positive fostering of harmonious relationships between the two. Should we not begin to consider how the Biblical concept of the family as a basis for religious education is to be interpreted today?

Why does the Sunday School exist? One could make out a case that there is no reason for its continuing existence, that it is an outmoded form of the Victorian Church, that it no longer speaks to today's needs. While at times one may feel like this, such an attitude would be an unhelpful case of over-reaction. We must see the Sunday School, not as an end in itself but as an integral part of the life of the Church, providing an environment in which children from various backgrounds may make an appropriate response to God. Through its ministry they could be helped to extend their awareness of God's nature until such time as they were brought naturally to intelligent personal commitment. This

kind of experience-centered instruction is only possible from those whose daily living is an evidence of the way in which they themselves have come to terms with the Gospel. The form the teaching takes will be very different from many of the fact-cramming sessions that now take place in many of our Sunday Schools.

FRANK RINALDI

- 1 R. Goldman, *Religious thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*. Routledge & K. Paul, London, 1964, p. 211.
- 2 *The child and the church. A Baptist discussion*. The Cary Kingsgate Press, London, p. 24.
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#### **THE CHILD AND COMMUNION—An explanatory note**

The Children's Working Group of the Baptist Union feel it important that Baptists should consider the place of children in relation to the Communion Service and, particularly, whether there are any circumstances where they might be allowed to take the bread and wine. The practice is growing among Anglicans, Methodists and URC Churches. The issue was raised at the European Consultation in 1973. We believe it is going to arise in published lesson material in the future. Therefore, Baptists would do well to consider beforehand the issues involved.

The Group set up a small working party consisting of David Tennant, Peter Saunders, Michael Walker, Simon Oxley, Stephen Winward and myself as Chairman. No document appeared to which all could give approval. David Tennant has written the following paper setting out the many areas of discussion. Readers will agree the subjects are immense. For this reason the paper does not claim to give the answers. I hope it will be a subject of discussion, and would be glad to receive any comments from you.

I would like to thank all members of the working party, but especially David Tennant. The paper is his own and he generously takes responsibility for it.

W. J. A. TURNER

#### **THE CHILD IN COMMUNION— AN ENQUIRY**

##### **The Background:**

Probably few Baptist Churches invite children regularly to Communion. But it is happening, sometimes at the prompting of a piece of experimental lesson material where it is thought right that the children should see Communion happening in the adult assembly. In many other traditions e.g. Church of England, Parish Communion is often "Family Communion" with children present who will approach the altar with their parents and receive a blessing when adults receive the elements. But the slowly growing practice in Free churches is being prompted by new attitudes to worship e.g. children might be present on a Festival occasion, or an Anniversary occasion or as a climax to a series of Worship services.

Into such a slowly growing practice questions are being asked by parents and ministers, not to mention the children themselves, about the possibility of children receiving bread and wine. Obviously this raises problems. The problems have arisen in the following areas:—

##### **1. Educational:**

The whole issue of the nature of education and its essential characteristics is sharpened. The stress on the difference between education and nurture and instruction, where it is instruction that emerges as the "intellectual" exercise and education as the "growth through experience" exercise with nurture as preparation for that growth and the means to it leads many to think that children should be present in Communion as part of their growth in the faith.

##### **2. Liturgical:**

Recent discovery into the Nature of Worship with stress on the Church as the People of God finding their *raison d'être* in the Liturgical Assembly, where the Liturgy (Worship) seen essentially as encounter with God where claims are made and response sought from all, again leads people to enquire as to which parts the children should be present for and absent from. In many churches they are present for the first part, then separated. In others they are present at the end. What is all this saying for Worship?

##### **3. Practical**

This follows on from (2). The whole notion of **family church** with stress on the three principles of Family of the Church worshipping, learning and enjoying fellowship **together** raises practical considerations as to **what, how much and when**. When Communion is seen as the focus of the Church Family at Worship the questions become critical and some say that the separation of the children is denying and even harming the concept of the Family of the Church **together**.

##### **4. Other Denominations:**

Other denominations are giving serious attention to these matters. Already the Church of England in its Report *Christian Initiation* has raised the question of children and baptism and communion. It has reaffirmed its practice of administering Baptism to infants and has questioned its practice of Confirmation.

It affirms the sufficiency of Baptism. It places the Confirmation act in the setting of training and nurture. It then questions whether children should take the elements in Communion but does not rule on this. The Methodists suggest two unresolved possibilities: that children should be received into full membership at an earlier age or received into Communion at an earlier age and then given membership later on. The URC reached "tentative conclusions" dependent on the local church and acknowledge that many questions about meaning of baptism and confirmation and relation of confirmation on to participation into Communion remain unanswered. But clearly the issue is not confined to Baptists though Baptists still have to place children firmly within the church without Baptism—one assumes that at least one merit of infant baptism is that children are **in** the Church.



## 5. Family:

In recent years there has been growing stress on the nature of **Family**. There has emerged affirmations of the solidarity of the family, and the importance of what children have to give within the family as well as receive. Family learning and environment are important. This has led very naturally to the value of the family worshipping together as part of their common life **as family**. When linked with notions of Family Church and stress on Communion as the Family Meal or focus of Family Worship, even the means whereby the family are given their identity in God, the problems of children participating arise.

All the above present the problem of Children participating in Communion. But for Baptists certain other issues are also raised. Some are old ones, some are new. Firstly, of course, the old issue of the status of children in the Church. The Report "Child and the Church" (1966) attempted to deal with this. It had a rough passage through the denomination and floundered on the following issues:—

- (a) The Nature and Scope of Atonement—actual (appropriated by faith) or possible (dependent on faith).
- (b) Incarnation or Cross—which is the focus?
- (c) Sin: original, guilt, damnation; children and sin.
- (d) Nature of the church: "fellowship of believers" and "those in fellowship with believers". Who are the latter? What is their status? Are children believers?
- (e) The relation of children of non Christian parents with the church and the relation of children of Christian parents with the church. The question of "relation" led easily into "status".

The whole issue was taken up in open debate in the Baptist Quarterly between Dr G. Beasley Murray and Rev. Victor Hayward (April 1967, October 1967, April 1968).

Once again the **Nature of the Church** is the essential issue with the related issues of **Baptism** and Initiation. To deny baptism to the child does not in fact solve the difficulty of the place of Children in the church. For if the child is not taken into the Body of Christ after birth then what is the precise relationship of that child with Christ and His Church. Is the fundamental issue still Baptism? Does a Baptist view of little children rest on baptism or vice versa?

The one positive thing that emerged from the foregoing discussions and which might be useful in the present debate is the issue of the **Catechumenate** and to this we shall return later.

### The Existing Practices in Baptist Churches:

In the past the practice in Baptist churches has been determined by one or other of the following convictions: Communion is for believers only; Communion is for baptised believers only. Since children are not reckoned as believers they were not baptised and were not present at Communion. This has continued up to the present in most Baptist churches. If they are present in church on "Communion Sunday" they will probably leave before Communion begins

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To the Readers of the "Fraternal"

Dear Friends,

"What seest thou else  
In the dark backward and abysm of time?"

The Tempest—Shakespeare

These lines or rather this line and half have always given me sombre pleasure. Sombre because there is a sense of brooding menace. Pleasure from the inherent richness of the imagery and the liquidity of the iambic pentameter—the lines flow.

There is something of this idea of a flash of remembrance in the darkness of forgotten time in Kipling's description of a storm.

"Every detail lighted from behind like twigs  
on tree-tops seen against lightning".

But that is all very well—it is sometimes pleasant, sometimes not so pleasant to flash back. It may be useful of course in recollection to enrich the discussions of the present. It may be unpleasant if the recollections sharpen a sense of opportunity lost or achievement missed.

It is surprising how often these days diaconates in particular (there is so very much at stake in church/hall buildings) in looking at their insurances will look backwards to what "we have always done" and then work from there, often still in money values of "yesterday" or a few days before that! Sometimes deacons when some disaster overtakes them recall ruefully failed intentions to cover this or that contingency or failures to lift sums insured for fire policies to realistic figures. "We didn't think it could happen to us" or "We meant to do something about it" are abysmal excuses. Indeed they are not "excuses" but invalid reasons for inaction.

The inflationary spiral can curl values out of sight unless remedial action is taken now. Inflation demands immediacy, a fresh look at money values which happen to apply today, plus bringing into calculations the probable curl for twelve months ahead when ideally figures must be looked at again.

The figures of yesterday are hopeless—it is today plus today's look at tomorrow which counts.

Yours sincerely,

C. J. L. COLVIN  
General Manager

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(along with others too). The general practice is to have Communion twice a month, one morning and one evening. In most churches it is a separate service after the main service has concluded, though this is changing somewhat. Still the opportunity is given for those to leave who do not wish to stay and for children to be taken out anyway. In very few churches is Communion weekly. Thus a child can grow up in a Baptist church without ever experiencing a Communion service.

Two things emerge: For us to be present at Communion is one thing, to Communicate is another. For our forefathers to be present was to communicate. Unless a person intended to communicate he would not by and large be present. Practically, of course, it is easier to refuse the elements if you have to leave your seat and proceed to the altar—for you need not leave your seat anyway, than it is to refuse the element offered deliberately to you in your seat.

Few Baptist churches of the main stream tradition limit participation in Communion to baptised only, though this would seem to be the norm for “the children of the Church”. However, the invitation is given to “all who love the Lord Jesus Christ. . .” with possible addition “and are in fellowship with His church”. But it is assumed that this means non member adults present, and members of other denominations. This issue is sharp: Can not children come into that category? Is the Baptist practice loose? Recent scholarship is questioning the separation of baptism and membership and communion. Should any non baptised person communicate? Is the separation of child and adult being made on non theological grounds existing Baptist practice being what it is? “Fencing” the Table with conditions about love and charity with neighbour etc., does not overcome the problem.

But it would be fair to say that on the whole the pattern is: first Baptism, then Communion. However, as outlined in section “A” of this document, questions are being raised on important considerations and insights of the present generation and when the “looseness” of Baptist practice is exposed, Baptists cannot escape the dilemma of Children present at Communion and if present then why not communicate?

### **Children in Worship:**

New things are being said about **Children in Worship** and this has been bound up with the changes in church organisation and “appearance” called Family Church and also with the passing on, on the whole, of the Sunday School. To separate Children and Worship now seems foreign to many people. The main reason seems to be the stress in former generations on **Instruction**. Children were within the Christian influence for instruction: the child was a receptacle into which knowledge was poured especially the Bible learned on the whole for its own sake. The shift has come about with a move from instruction to **education**. Education is now no longer the imparting of information to be absorbed uncritically. Education is an opened process committed to

growth and enquiry and discovery with stress on experience. So the shorthand phrase “from experience through experience to experience” has emerged. The difference is real.

This has posed a real dilemma, for even with the rightful shift in emphasis between instruction and learning and learning and education, “learning” is still King! Without disparaging the discovery and emphasis on education, worship is still left out and the Liturgy still is only seen in the rightful context (so thought) of learning. “What have I learned” is still the important thing.

This leads to a denigration of the “adult service” as being inadequate for learning because it is fixed and final and not free and active in the way the “children’s service” is. “Is the game worship or education” asked Neville Clark.

### **Reference:**

This has led to a rediscovery of the essential nature of the Liturgy. The concern for everyone is that they shall respond to the Call and Claim of God and commit their lives to Him. This must be prepared for. Although the call, claim and commitment to God can come at many points for it is beyond human control, clearly **confrontation with God is the corporate worship of the Church**. The confrontation takes place through the biblical tradition—Word proclaimed in scripture and sermon. In addition praise and prayer seek the presence of God and in sacrament it is expected and anticipated. It is **FOR this** that the child is being prepared, as are we all. It is **IN THIS** that the child and all of us are prepared. Why the eagerness to remove the child from the place of encounter? To keep them strangers from the Liturgy seems an odd preparation for encounter with God which takes place within the Liturgy. Now of course, there is more to be said. There are many practical considerations: the children are bored (whose fault is that!?) they won’t understand the language and images—they fidget—they are not “ready” to understand the body and blood, (what price readiness here? intellectual—spiritual—emotional. . . . Do any of us understand this mystery?). The issue raised is one of **consciousness** and whether this is the determinative factor. Yet it would seem possible that given the new definition of education and given the meaning of worship here hinted at, then the **Liturgy is the Education**. Children should be present in the Liturgy, a Liturgy aimed at presenting the tradition demanding a response from the claim made. The children will respond appropriately.

It would seem reasonable to go on to affirm that the children should be present at the Communion.

### **Children in Communion:**

The argument is valid and powerful: the Liturgy does not act merely at the conscious level. All participants are acted upon by the Tradition with unexampled force. All are exposed to its influence and force. The Liturgy has the effect of bringing us back to ask for more, and to ask for something more fully and complete than we can, at the present level of

experience, appreciate. Again this is true for everyone. The child is no exception. So he is present with everyone in the full Liturgy and exposed to its force. To bring a child from earliest years into contact with the throb of the church's worship and the focus of its family celebration is to offer him the greatest gift of the Church. Again it is churches like the Baptists who take a "middle view" that have the greatest difficulties here. If participation in Communion is restricted to the baptised then there is no problem.

If baptism is administered at an earlier age and confers membership of the Body of Christ, again, no problem. The problem lies with the in between. Two possibilities emerge: either withhold the bread and wine from the child, or offer him a fitting substitute. To include children regularly in the celebration and withhold the sacraments of bread and wine is odd, since the whole activity is aimed at **communicating viz, participating**. To speak of spiritual communion is odd since if a person is able to communicate spiritually then presumably they are able to do so "actually". On the other hand is a pat on the head a worthy substitute as is the case in some churches?

The following lines of argument for allowing children to communicate would seem to emerge. Note this is not arguing the case so much as suggesting lines along which the foregoing arguments and definitions seem to lead:—

#### **1. The Church is an Educating Community:**

Enough has been said already about education as the process of growth and enquiry through experience. Add to this the comment that education is concerned more with the person than assent to content, then attendance and sharing in communion would seem possible. Further, stress on "community" reminds us of the corporate nature of the church. Individual feeling, or understanding, is not ruled out obviously, but in worship and especially in communion we do something together irrespective of individual views and understanding. Thus "WE" believe rather than "I" believe . . . To take this a step further. The Church **nurtures** as well as educates. Nurture deepens the commitment in the process of enquiry. All have some commitment to be there at all. No-one's commitment is entirely complete. What matters the distinction of "child"/"adult" in this setting?

#### **2. The Solidarity of the Family:**

Recent psychological and sociological research reveals the importance of the family as a unit. Family environment and family learning are important. The welcome given to the family at Dedication rather than just the child finds a rightful place in this setting. The family in worship together exposed to the Liturgy and Tradition is important. The child whilst he does not understand all that is going on is within a family unit where "the language and the syntax" (Neville Clark) of the Liturgy will be learned. Here the family is stressed and the **link with family and church** can be explored. To share the Communion together is part of their common life in Christ as a family. In the same way they may well break

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their breakfast bread together “in remembrance” before they leave for Church.

### 3. What place readiness?

Mention has already been made of consciousness and its relative importance hinted at in the context of Liturgy. “Readiness” must also be looked at similarly. It has been popularised by R. Goldman. One does not have to agree with Goldman’s complete conclusions to appreciate the significance he has given to readiness. But if readiness means intellectual acceptance then it is obvious that children (and many others) are not ready for Communion. But if readiness relates to capacity to have faith and experience the presence of God, then many children are ready.

### 4. The invitation common in Baptist Churches to invite to the Communion “all who love the Lord Jesus Christ”:

As has been mentioned above, fencing it around with other phrases makes little difference. If we are serious about it then many children love the Lord Jesus Christ (and are probably more in fellowship and love and charity with their neighbours than their elders . . . !). They have a zeal and a devotion that is exemplary in many senses. To take the invitation further: Such an invitation covers non members adults even non baptised adults in most Baptist churches. This seems to suggest that the **real** difference is not baptism/faith/membership but Child and Adult. Once we begin to “open” or to “qualify” because we don’t really mean “open” at all, then we must be careful exactly what qualifications we make. On the present practice children could respond to the invitation quite gladly.

### 5. Communion is proclamation:

Setting forth the tradition as much as many other parts of the Liturgy. “Ye do **proclaim** the Lord’s death.” The proclamation is for all—the converted, the unconverted. It will speak at every level. It will demand a response appropriate to each level. Children should not be separated. They will make their response at their level. Children are not adults in the making. They will make a response at every level to a claim made. Don’t we all?

### 6. The Family of the Church:

To delay baptism until mature profession of faith is made and, therefore, deny it to infants poses the question of the status of children, especially of Christian parents, to the church. Already the phrase “welcome into the family of the church” has been used. Many Baptists are saying this at Dedication. It signifies something different from membership of the Church. It is time to give greater understanding to this, and to realise that the children of members have a different relationship with the church than others. It could be argued that Communion is restricted to adults only, to believers baptised only. It could be argued that it is for the Family of the Church and those welcomed into it. It will assist in their preparation for responsible membership and be part of the journey to commitment and full initiation into

membership and, therefore, self chosen discipleship. Decision to "join" will also be decision to "opt out" and not to participate in the Liturgy and Communion any more.

#### The Catechuminate:

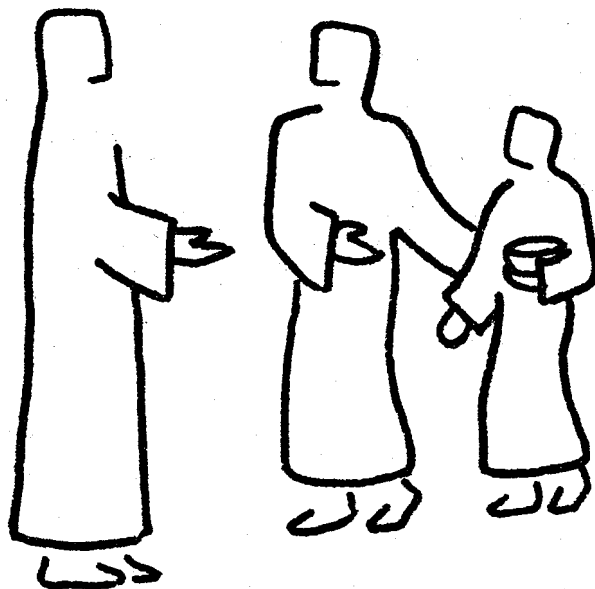
The above would seem to be leading to a resurrection of the early church notion of the **catechuminate**. It was used to signify those who, whilst not in membership with the church, by baptism and laying on hands were in the church by virtue of their attendance and presence at worship and activity. It would seem to fit in with the notion of **preparation** used above recognising the element of growth in the process of becoming, which although it does not end at Baptismal decision does recognise the latter is significant and vital. The catechuminate includes both adults and children. They have a pastoral relationship with the church. Here the children of believers find their place and also recognise their privilege, a privilege of influence that by virtue of their parents' faith and membership of the church they have the influence of home and the benefits of partnership of church and home. Many persons within the catechuminate may well have come to faith but not to baptism. Baptism signifies the transfer from catechuminate to membership of the Body.

However, two things need to be said: Firstly, more attention must be given to **the admission into the catechuminate**, for although we have said that these people are not "in the Body" they are within the influence and realm of Grace and not entirely "in the world". The other thing to be said is that membership itself needs to say more about responsibility for the work of God, i.e. Mission. Perhaps here the inclusion of laying of hands rather than just right hand of fellowship admission has its place. There is a "commissioning for service" in being made a member, there is a responsibility to work for God in seeking membership of the Church, there is an "ordination" into the People of God and the Mission which is the Church.

The difficulty arises in two senses: Firstly, is Communion to be reserved for those initiated into membership and withheld from the catechuminate? The consensus amongst Baptists would be "yes". The other is, at what age does one decide to go from catechuminate to the Church. Repentance and Faith seem to be the touchstone. Some would argue that children are capable of these two (cf. the Southern Baptists baptising as they do at 7, 8, 9 years of age). In considering repentance and faith all the warnings about consciousness, and readiness indicated above must be heeded.

To return to the issue of Communion. The norm for Baptists would seem to be that Communion is reserved for the baptised member. No rules can be given and new insights and understandings into worship, mission, learning and status of child and family are raising problems relating to Communion and Children. Baptists would still presumably affirm the freedom of the local church working under God to practice what it considers to be right and proper but we cannot ignore what is happening amongst us.

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## Conclusion:

It is tempting to deviate from the point recognising that so many issues are inter-related. Baptism and Initiation are still vital for Baptist views on the Church and the Gospel. However, ecumenical contacts and closer worship and work across the denominations not only raises the same questions for others but also exposes each to the other's practice and experience. It is equally tempting to be at the same time, conclusive and piecemeal.

All that the foregoing has tried to do is to raise an issue that is being raised in practice by new insights and experience, and to suggest "lines" or "directions" in which argument might go. The phrase current about "doing theology", by which I understand response to God in a situation leads some who have commonly been held together with others under a label such as "baptist" to belong elsewhere on certain issues and the place of children may be one such issue.

But to return to the question of the Child and Communion. The problems remain, yet certain things are clear. Whether the child is present in the whole Liturgy, or part of it or none of it (if this is what some deem to be the way), we must allow God to engage the child and elicit response from him, however limited we think that response is. But when he is present in the sanctuary and in the Liturgy—all of it or part of it, and whichever part we think he should or should not be in—we must offer him authentic worship not a distortion or a children's version. Thus when the child makes his choice to belong, he shall belong to people he has known and share something familiar to him, not new and strange.

DAVID TENNANT

## INNER CITY: ANOTHER VIEW

A fundamental gospel concept to me is **dying to live**. This theology of victorious Christian commitment is seen most starkly in our inner city church life. The inner areas of our major cities are either dead or dying. So many churches in these areas are struggling to survive when they should be dying to live. Some have given up, sold out and gone elsewhere; others are trying to imitate the successful suburban churches and are in despair because they are failing. (And as Mr Williams' article in the last "Fraternal" showed . . . Inner and Outer City calling for help to be saved from failure.) A minority are prepared to take the most difficult way of dying with their neighbourhood so that they might live both to their neighbourhood and to God.

At Small Heath we know something of the pain involved. Over the past 10 years almost 300 members have left the district, yet we still go on. The first real challenge was accepted eight years ago and we moved into stewardship. From this came a mission amongst the West Indians who were rapidly moving among us. In the last four years our membership has declined from 262 to 161 and must decline

still more as the neighbourhood is further vandalised by Local Authority Planning policy.

However, far from wanting to desert such a desperate situation we are all the more determined to stay. In the last four years we have baptised 21 new members and though this in itself is not a missile of rebirth it is something.

The new challenge has come to us from the neighbourhood itself. This we are trying to meet as we battle with the Local Authority for the local community. First we did a survey on the housing conditions around the Church and published a report which has gone into three editions and proved of value to community groups all over the country.

This was followed by a Church sponsored "Community Workers' Lunch" which has gone on for 2½ years and has had an average attendance of not less than 50 people each month.

From this we have been involved in the heart of the community life; helping to launch a community newspaper, calling a public meeting to launch a Federation of Community groups; supporting Muslim applications for Prayer houses; working closely with the Social Services Advice Centre; backing two play groups which now use our premises, campaigning with the Community Relations Committee for more workers; and providing accommodation for the Department of the Environment Inner Area Study.

Viewed from a denominational point of view and an historical point of view we are a dying church. But, remarkably we are alive and vigorous and slowly we are earning the right to be heard in the district.

From David Sheppard's book "Built as a City", we have gained great encouragement. (Three copies are circulating among our Deacons and Members!). His contention that a church to be a "real" Church must be of and for its neighbourhood we take seriously. Hope lies not in people from other areas coming into our area to help maintain a dying structure; it lies in the realisation that if God has a mission for us in the inner city then He will give the required gifts for that mission to be successful. If there are no gifted people to do the old familiar jobs—Captain of this, Secretaries for that—then we say we ought not to be doing them.

No, I cannot agree with Mr Williams. I see something far more fundamental needed, a vision of what a "people of God" in an Inner Area should really be and the courage to accept it, knowing that the only way to it lies through the darkness of dying.

That vision is not yet clearly seen. We know we shall never be like a "Hall Green" or "Shirley" and the sooner we in the Inner Ring stop craving to be like them the sooner we shall be able to get on with being church of the people and the church of God.

If you don't believe what's happened to our Inner City these figures might help. 48% of the population is English, 22% Irish, 18% Asian, 9% West Indian and the remainder European Immigrants. This is the front line. This is where it's happening. If Christ is to be found anywhere it's here.

Help we do need and our fellow Baptists must be made aware of it. But to be most effective in their help they can provide through Association and District manpower and money directed to this Home Mission Field.

W. A. DIXON

## TIME FOR GOD

The purpose of this article is to persuade the minister who reads it to exclaim that it is the very thing he has been waiting for and then to rush off to a Deacons' Meeting to discuss how his church might co-operate.

Co-operate in what? In a scheme to provide training in Christian mission for young people through practical experience of the day to day life of a local congregation; not necessarily in any "special" campaign designed to run for a specific period of time, but mainly through the regular events of the church's life, its ordinary programme of meetings and activities.

I am really trying to capture attention for "Time for God", the young people's voluntary service scheme launched by the Baptist Youth Movement in 1965. Over 120 young people have done valuable voluntary service through it.

In fairly recent times we have been reviewing the scheme, and two points of considerable importance emerged during the review and have subsequently been incorporated into the scheme:—

- (1) The time has come for *ecumenical developments* in the scheme, and it has been taken up by the United Reformed Church and the Churches of Christ. It is not that they have introduced a similar scheme in those denominations. They have come into *our* scheme, so that "Time for God" now operates on an ecumenical basis and young people have an opportunity to do Christian service in a denomination different from their own if they wish.
- (2) The *training aspects* of the scheme have been strengthened. "Time for God" has always had an educational purpose, but we feel the emphasis should now be increased, "Time for God" is not just a way of filling in one's spare time constructively, but an opportunity to learn something about the many ways in which the Christian Church shares in the mission of God's love for men.

It is in connection with the strengthening of the learning aspects of the scheme that we need better co-operation from the churches. We have several Christian "institutions", like West Ham's Greenwoods, and Hereward Wake House, the headquarters of the Northampton Association of Youth Clubs, who regularly open their doors to TFG volunteers. What we lack are opportunities in ordinary local churches.

This concerns us because the Christian mission is daily sustained by the ordinary, often uneventful life of the local congregation. The joys and problems of Christian advance are as well known in the average church as in the other places which engage in more specialist activities.

What is most important is that when in due course the young people who are part of TFG settle down to married life and family responsibilities and their careers, they are likely to be members of our "ordinary" churches and will be carrying responsibility in a variety of ways for the continuing life of the church.

If their period of voluntary service can give them a vision of the potential of an ordinary church, and if they can be helped to see how the events we often describe as mundane fit into God's greater purposes, it will be, to say the least, an investment in their future and in the future of our churches.

So we need more local churches to see that by each taking a volunteer for a period between two months and a year, they can share in the vital work of the Christian education of our young people. We are not really asking if you can *use* a volunteer, but rather, if you can help train one.

It is not necessary to have a special job that needs doing or to be a large church of several hundred members or to be a financially well endowed church. But it is important to see the "Time for God" scheme for what it is, not a cheap labour device by which a church can get jobs done at a give-away price, but a training/learning partnership between a whole Christian fellowship and a young person.

The practical considerations are important, too. A church would have to be able to cover the volunteer's travelling expenses and pocket money of £2.50 per week, though even that can sometimes be met from other sources. The church also provides full board, free of charge.

The type of work volunteers do varies. It can include manual work, secretarial work, pastoral and social work and evangelistic work. Not infrequently it is a little bit of everything.

Before you rush off to that Deacons' Meeting, there will probably be many more questions you would like to have answered. If you care to get in touch with Bill Simmons at the Baptist Union or Martin Howie at the BMS, they will be only too glad to take the matter up with you.