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EDITORIAL

Publication dates mean that we cannot make the sort of quick response to the Annual Assembly that we would like. There was much in the Nottingham Assembly that merited further thought and discussion, both in what was said and in what had to remain unsaid.

It is our pleasure again to publish the full text of the address we heard at the pastoral session. Barrie White spoke cogently to our present situation and we are grateful that he here gives us opportunity to think through at greater depth the points he raised.

What is the annual assembly for? The question is not new, but radical answers that have been given in the past two decades continue to remain unheard. Paul Beasley – Murray will be speaking for many in his plea for a deliberative assembly and, with our local churches striving to give more adequate expression to membership in the body of Christ, there have been fewer more auspicious times for his ideas to be heeded.

Douglas McBain raised an issue that is quite as important as the concern that provoked William Carey's impatience at the Nottingham Association meetings in 1792. The material he adds here to what he has already written in the Baptist Times provides useful data for church growth.

THE MINISTERIAL TIGHTROPE

The text at the back of my mind most often when I am thinking about the ministry is 1 Corinthians 9.27 in the K.J.V. 'Lest ... when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway'. A man may lose his way in the ministry—I had almost written 'lose his soul'—because he fails to keep his balance. When I spoke at the Baptist Union Assembly about the ministerial tightrope and about keeping one's balance in the ministry I spoke with more inward diffidence than perhaps I outwardly betrayed. I felt diffident because I was speaking to a number of my brethren whose experience in the frontline of the pastorate was both far richer and far more extensive than my own. Nevertheless I had accepted the invitation to speak because of my belief that a man serving in the frontline is often so much taken up with immediate problems and immediate crises that he seldom finds time or opportunity to stand back from his work and to ponder it strategically.

The invitation stemmed from my complaint on one occasion in front of Wally Wragg about the difficulty many of us have of keeping a balance in our ministry. We seem to have far too many men who, on the one hand never seem to get out of their Bibles in their sermons and far too many who, on the other hand, never seem to get inside anything more solid than the Readers Digest. At the same time we have men who can run a Gospel Meeting in a Mission Hall who have no idea of how to lead a congregation into the heart of the Church's worship at the Table of the Lord. Equally we have men who seem to have forgotten that the heart of it all is a heart-changing, life-transforming encounter with the Crucified and Risen Lord without which all Christian politics, ecumenical debates and social action run dry.

We seem to have extremists of the left and extremists of the right and the only men who stand in the middle are those who do not know which wing to head for. I believe we need radical commitment to the centres! We need men in the centre who stand there not because they lack the wit and guts to get out of the traffic but because of a costly obedience to Christ who holds a place for both in his will and high purposes.

Sometimes our imbalance, ministerially speaking, comes from our mistaking the character and the needs of the people whom we have been invited to serve. I can give several examples of this—each of them, except my own, are somewhat caricatured and sometimes more than one man has contributed to the cartoon. I have seen them both in this country and in the United States. First, there is the mistake I made myself. I went out of college sure that the one thing I could do was to teach the meaning of the Scriptures and that what my church needed was a thorough-going course of Bible teaching. So I did it, in season and out of season I did it. Only as I came to know my people.

I came slowly to realize that they needed love and care and leadership and prayer and then more love and care. Bible-teaching was (and is!) a good thing—but a balanced ministry cannot escape into the classroom—or try to turn a local church merely into that.

Then there was the man who came to a church which he thought was far too middle class and complacent and pleased with themselves. So he set out to make them less comfortable, and less secure. Shortly he succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. If to make people more uneasy and unsure of themselves and their faith was success his was a successful ministry. Of course his image of his church was wrong—in reality he had in his church a group of people living at full-stretch and under great pressure. They needed, among other things, comfort.

Then there was the man who went to a university church. His image of his congregation was that of a body of high intellectuals thirsting for theological and literary jargon from contemporary international ideas markets. Upon that image was superimposed one of himself as a man of culture, of poetic and artistic imagination. Yet his people needed the proclamation of the age-old Gospel certainties—whether students or ageing saints—which alone has power to bind up the broken-hearted and open the eyes of the blind.

There was yet another. His image of his congregation was of them as obedient children to whom he would drone out his lessons drawn from the Scriptures of truth. If he stayed safely with saying what the Scriptures said without applying them too sharply himself to the people he could continue to speak safely of MY church MY ministry MY pulpit (to be guarded from the unworthy and the unsound.). He also had the habit of making gifted and able people (who seemed to threaten his 'authority' since they were not easily contented with easy slogans) so uncomfortable that they did not stay long as members. He was accustomed to pour scorn on human intellect and human 'intellectuals'...

What is YOUR image of YOUR congregation? It would be well for all of us, perhaps to ask ourselves how far we are clear about our aims—and how far, IF WE ARE, those aims square with Christ's purpose and aims. The balance of our ministry can be destroyed by two things above all others: an uncriticized but inadequate picture of our church—members and an uncritical reflection in our ministry of our own blindness and weakness.

On another occasion and in another place it may be that I would be able to spend the time necessary to expound fully what I believe to be the AIMS of a balanced ministry. These however, I must touch on briefly now before going on to write of the aspects of the ministry which must find their place in a ministry which is sufficiently balanced to achieve these aims.

The aims of a balanced (or adequate) ministry are, I believe, these: First, to bring the congregation TO GRIPS WITH THE WORD OF GOD.

This means taking the Word (and the community of scholars in their interpretation of that word) with utter seriousness. It does NOT mean pinning easy morals or theological slogans on to the end of sections of superficial sermonizing. It means a preaching and teaching ministry (embodied in the life of the minister as well as in the teaching of his lips) which takes as its central theme Christ crucified and risen for us men and for our salvation . It means taking the ministry of the Holy Spirit with the same seriousness that the New Testament does—it means recognizing his ministry in both the routine and dramatic. It means , above all , bringing the congregation to a deep obedience to the Word. Rightly to hear the Word of God is to be deeply scarred by a costly obedience to it.

Secondly, to bring the congregation to be the Body of Christ to its district. It must be both a proclaiming and a serving community. To care and not to preach is a vanity; to preach and not to care is a blasphemy! So the local church must be a community which triumphs in Christ rather than cringes before the demonic. Such high morale will be closely linked with having simple clear, attainable objectives; with having a trusted leadership and high degree of participation in the ministry by the members. How much ice does your congregation cut in its community? We cannot choose between evangelism or works of compassion as if they were optional. Christ ministered and still does minister to the whole man, the whole woman.

Thirdly, to bring the congregation famished to worship and to prayer. A people who are really getting to grips with the living word, who are involved in the stresses and strains, the disasters and tragedies of their neighbourhood who are bearing the burdens of their neighbours in reality and not merely in words, will come hungering and thirsting to Christ in prayer and Word and Sacrament. Such a people, by the very pressure of their need, will make even the poor preaching you and I produce really great preaching for it will be called out by a great need. Such a people will turn to prayer because all else in them has been exhausted and they hunger for the living God and no-one else will satisfy them. We can never be content with our ministry nor with our churches until the breaking of the bread (which proclaims the real cost of evangelism when God goes into that business) and the pouring of the wine are answered by the living both of the congregations committed to us and by our own lives. These are the three aims of an adequate ministry, of a balanced ministry. What then are the aspects of the ministry which must find a place in your balance or mine.

1. First, there is Teaching. I do not believe that my concern at how little serious ministerial reading is being done is mere Oxbridge academic arrogance. The best of our church members are reading much, much, more than some of our ministers. We cannot teach if we are not learning. If you have no time for reading you have your priorities wrong (just as has the man who hardly ever does anything else than read !). I believe that there are three matters of study to which we all ought to give attention:

(a) We ought to have one good book or commentary on the Bible on the go all the time. Alongside that we ought to have one stiff theological work which tests and deepens our thinking. Say, Moltmann's **THE CRUCIFIED GOD** or his companion volume **THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT**. (If you will not BUY because you are spending your money on the television then borrow !)

(b) We ought, everyone of us, to have a proper preaching and teaching plan so that we cover subjects systematically—and the Scriptures too.

(c) We ought to see that every group in the church has a proper syllabus for its study work—from the youngest to the oldest in the fellowship.

2. Then there is CARING. As I have said it is not what you say that carries real weight with people inside or outside your church—it is what you do. Knowing people—caring for people. Visiting people not because you must to keep them quiet but because they are yours to be supported and coaxed onward and upward in Christ. People are converted because they are cared for : God's care for them becomes real as we care for them. That means that we must have a social responsibility, that means that we (not normally the minister but SOMEONE in his church) may find our way into politics.

We have a responsibility for the country in which we live and for our fellow creatures.

Caring means planning organisations in the church which care for people. Caring means individual acts of kindness and thoughtfulness. Caring means getting into politics or supporting those who are. How many of us are seriously, deliberately building up teams of people in our church's to give second-aid after the minister has had to move on from one person in need to give first aid to another? Nothing builds a fellowship like encouraging people to care.

3. Then there is WORSHIP and PRAYER. As I go round the country I am surprised how comparatively little evidence I come across of creative experiments in worship. There are glorious exceptions to this rule but they are remarkably few. We do not need to be doing new things every week but there are far too many ministerial solos (still interspersed, of course, with outbursts of congregational hymn singing). We have a duty to think about worship, to teach about worship, to experiment

ment in worship—to help people to pray, to enter into the riches of the meaning of Baptism and the Lords Supper.

In sermon class at Regent's the highest praise a service can obtain from critics of that part devoted to prayer is 'it helped me to pray'. Do we use that test for that which we do in our congregations every Sunday? Would they come out of church next Sunday, did they last, saying, 'that service helped me to pray, helped me to come into the presence of God, helped me to speak to Him'

4. Then there is ECUMANIA. One of my friends (no ecumaniac, he) was rebuked by some church members for agreeing to a service of Christian initiation taking place alongside each other—from confirmation by a bishop to believers Baptism by the Baptist minister. I find the attitude of many Baptists to these matters very hard to bear. I know, of course, that the United Reformed, the Pentecostalists, the methodists, the Episcopalians and the Romanists are not as sound as we are. But surely you have noticed (rather uncomfortably and reluctantly !) that the Lord is apt to bless their activities even as he does ours. Can it be that he is, just marginally, less particular about some matters than we are ?

the Lords work is too great, too glorious, too demanding, for our exercises in human pettiness. We may, we must, argue with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must hold to those things which he has taught us with firmness and with grace. But let us not be afraid to venture into the ecumenical marketplace. Let us rejoice that both Cardinal Suenens (in Oxford) recently) and Billy Graham offer Christ. That fact does not answer all or even many of the ecumenical questions—but it is not a bad place to start. Some of us seem so afraid !

5. Then there is EVANGELISM. A balanced ministry not merely includes worship and ecumenical links and social concern—but also evangelism. We are in the business of changing lives or, rather, of seeing the living Lord transform and transfigure the lives of men and women like us. If we do not work for this, pray for that, yearn for that, then the very heart of the Gospel is lost.

You may call it outreach, you may call it mission—you may condemn evangelical choruses belted out by the unthinking; you may condemn evangelical sermons larded with sugary language but you must never condemn the offering of Christ, the central work of the church. Nor dare you say that that is not part of your personal ministry : what else is there if that is left out ? I believe that D.L. Moody was on the right lines when he once turned on his critics with words 'Well, gentlemen I prefer my way of doing evangelism to your way of not doing it. He was, I believe, standing on some very firm, and high ground when he said that.

6. Then there is the WORK OF THE THE SPIRIT. 'Well', said one minister in my hearing at some association meetings when someone asked him about the charismatic movement, ' Well, no, I haven't got any of that trouble in my church'. You could almost hear him say 'Thank God '!

Of course , I know and you know some of the excesses of the immature charismatic – he uses his experience as an excuse (a for claiming infallibility, 'Jesus told me ' (b) for dividing the fellowship, (c) for spiritual one-up-manship, (d)for imposing his experiences upon you.

But real revival, the work of the Holy Spirit, has always been accompanied by excesses. Some of us are afraid not because some abuse their experience but because the coming of the Spirit means life—and we feel we cannot control it.

We need to praise God for every true work of the Spirit. We need to seek more of Christ for ourselves! We need to rejoice in what God is doing in every part of his church and in every corner of the world.

7. Then there is HEALING. Do you postpone salvation until after death? In a sense we all do—and must. But God wills a greater wholeness, A greater health for us NOW than we know. Just as we know he wills a greater purity in us NOW than we know.

Why do we not have more healing services ? Not as gimmicks occasionally but as a regular part of our church's ministry where the concern and the prayers of the church are focussed in corporate prayer for those in need ? Ought we not to have the laying on of hands used among us far more deeply as a means of focussing those prayers (at the very least) as we seek wholeness of body, mind and spirit for each other.

After all medical science is at last catching up with the Bible by emphasizing how the three are all bound up together. What unrecognized hangups cause us to 'spiritualize ' all the healings we encounter in the New Testament ?

All these aspects need, I believe, to find a place in a balanced ministry where men are brought first to new birth and then to maturity in Christ:

What part have they in your ministry ?

Teaching Caring

Worship Inter-church relationships

Evangelism The Holy Spirit

Healing

We need to value the adventures, the excitement which God the Holy Spirit offers us!

Do you know the story of the personal report on one young subaltern in the First World War: 'His men will follow him anywhere - if only to find out what happens next'

This is the sort of leadership the Spirit gives - and we should give. If that seems a bit too exciting for you all I can say is: I feel middle-aged too!

But a balanced ministry is a team ministry. While Tom Smail's *Reflected Glory* (1975) is the best theological statement from the charismatic movement I have read, Michael Harper's *Let My People Grow* (1977) for all its Anglican context, is one of the most challenging books to come out of the movement - for ministers, at least. It talks a great deal about ministry by a team - ministry in a team from the congregation not merely the more usual (and clericalist) team of professional ministers.

I must end by putting to you three questions which I ended with at Nottingham. These are questions to men trying to do their professional best to be balanced ministers, questions which I have to put to myself and hardly, sometimes dare face and answer.

Question 1. Are you a better Christian for all your years and for all your experience 'in the ministry'? This is the question through which there echoes Paul's fear 'lest...when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway'.

Question 2. Can you still be touched by a vision of God's grace so that it pierces you to the heart? The old prayer (in its Series 3 dress) makes the point: 'We do not presume to come to this your table, trusting in our own righteousness but in your manifold and great mercy. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table but you are always the same Lord whose nature it is to have mercy'....

Question 3. The final question - whether you call yourself a 'charismatic' or not is 'are you prepared to seek more from the Lord Jesus than ever you have received before? Are you prepared to take what God gives and if necessary, launch out into the deeps of his spirit in obedience to his call?'

Barrie White.

SURVIVAL OR GROWTH ?

Further issues on the state of the Union

We are living in an era of phenomenal Church growth throughout the world. There are amazing developments taking place in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union among our fellow Baptists. In areas in the Far East, and Africa and South America the growth in the number of Christians is out-stripping population explosion, so that whilst in 1800 Christianity was largely confined to Europe and North America, since 1914 it has spread to almost all the countries in the world. Statistics indicate that the growth has been more in the last 100 years than in the preceding 1800 put together. It has been thought that material prosperity causes a decline of religious belief. But in the world's richest country there has been the most flourishing development in Church membership, particularly in the last 50 years, and it has been spearheaded by members of our own Baptist family in the Southern Baptist Convention. This is the fascinating background against which we must measure the decline in organised religion in Western Europe and in our own denomination in Britain in particular. Far from shrinkage being the inevitable rule for the Gospel in a secular age, quite literally it is the last thing in the world which we should expect. In this article I want to touch on some of the causes for decline, not elaborated on in recent articles in the B.T. and suggest some further curative steps.

Our historians rightly point out to us the existence of tensions and strains in our midst, and in our present parlous condition it is clear that if we are to grow together this characteristic needs to be closely analysed, understood and if possible eradicated. Let us therefore attempt a coolheaded look at the centre of stress points. The origins of this go back at least to the time of the "Down Grade" controversy in 1888 in the time of C.H. Spurgeon. E.A. Payne points out that this reared its head again in the 1930's when T.R. Glover almost sparked off a second "Down Grade" through his published views on the Atonement. Although we are still rather too close to the events for an objective assessment of them, most of us would frankly acknowledge that until the Assembly took its decisive vote in 1972 on the Christological issue, it looked highly likely that we were in for a third, and possibly final round of the same basic clash between liberals and evangelicals which could finish off our Union altogether. This was the signal for several churches and ministers to secede from the Union, leading a few of them to form a new evangelical association. In the end of the day it is quite probable that this recent manifestation of a fundamental inner strain has, in fact, been a watershed for us all, and that today we may be moving out of the era of confrontation which led up to it.

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At the time religious journalists described the outcome of the 1972 vote as a "lurch to the right", but it is doubtful whether "lurch" is the term to express what has happened. What is clear is that whilst we accept a considerable latitude in our view points over secondary issues for the sake of freedom of conscience, when it comes to the simple basics expressed in our Declaration of Purpose we are orthodox and evangelical Christians. If we have little time for official statements of belief we really mean the little credal basis we have since it is undergirded by our faith in Scripture. Since 1972 one significant trend in our life together has clearly confirmed this. The overwhelming number of men entering our ministry today are choosing to receive a training with a Biblical and evangelical orientation. In part this is a fruit of the resurgence of confidence in scholarship that was lacking in the evangelical circles of an earlier generation, but more than this it shows where the heart of the churches really lies. Essentially our churches today share the same simple biblical theology that characterises the world wide family. In our origins we are profoundly evangelical and in the difficult periods of recession through which we have been passing, in common with all the other churches in Western Europe, it is to this that we have been returning.

This is further accentuated by the inadequacy of the alternative theology in the crisis situation in which we have found ourselves. Theological radicalism has within it a kind of in built, self - destructive urge since its interests are secular, and it trades in speculation and uncertainty. To their credit, proponents of this view point have not attempted to hide this.

But it is not an adequate diet for hungry sheep, nor does it produce a fresh generation of its own healthy lambs.

In such a situation the only hope for making headway against secular trends is by fresh direct evangelistic outreach, but this is an activity which radicals have long since discarded. As a teenager converted without any Church background of any kind I could not have cared less for those churches which preached a diluted non - miraculous social gospel. Today's youngsters are growing up in a far more secular society which is profoundly pessimistic too. I well remember the angry scorn with which some 6th - formers without any Christian profession

met a somewhat bewildered Bishop Robinson when he visited my old school in the 1960's. Such youngsters cannot be expected to be attracted or held by any gospel message unless it offers them a word of hope. A diet of situation ethics mixed with religious uncertainty is not adequate for these needs. Inevitably therefore, in an age of decline it is the churches whose message and ministry are most distinctively gospel centred which survive best, and those whose approach is least clear which go to the wall first. This is all substantiated by writers on the subject of church growth, like the liberal oriented scholar Dean M. Kelley in his book. "Why Conservative Churches Grow". In the context of our own life, with the inevitable shrinkage of radicals and the withdrawal of some right - wingers too, it is possible

that we are now beginning to move away from those inner strains which have produced such an unhappy spirit of sourness, bias and bitterness, within what is, after all, only a small, limited and loosely – knit fellowship of believers. I have the feeling that none of us can afford to look back on these days of tension with particular pride. The arrogance of the radical wing has only been countered by suspicion on the other side. Perhaps we all have things to learn from this, and can seriously attempt to re–build a fresh measure of non–partisan confidence, first in the Gospel and secondly in one–another, which will produce more harmonious fellowship in days to come.

Before leaving the realm of church politics what of the new evangelicalism which may be emerging? It has five positive characteristics which I enumerate and comment on briefly:

1. While it accepts the need for developed hermeneutics, it is strong in its conviction of the trustworthiness of Scripture which is the basis for all our belief in matters of Christian faith and conduct. Of course “sola Scripture” is the basic reformation position with which Rome is increasingly aligning itself these days too. It is a position which is impossible to maintain if an anti–intellectual stance is adopted, but ultimately the explanation behind it is one of faith itself. Just as the Bible is the sourcebook of every other belief, so it is there that the doctrinal basis for the trust in Scripture is to be found also.

2. It recognises the need for social involvement with the gospel in a way that its immediate predecessors have ignored. There are many examples of this kind of thing ranging from the Shaftesbury Project sponsored by the Evangelical Alliance, and the Lausanne Covenant by the international gathering there a few years ago. But the desire is to come out of a pietistic attitude into one of real involvement.

3. It is open to the creativity which is characteristic of the charismatic movement which itself promotes a radical review of existing Church structures. In churches where this is evident the concept of the one man ministry is really being replaced by the ministry of the body and also a new incarnational concern or a Doctrine of Creation, which has formerly been overlooked, is emerging.

4. In contrast with other evangelicals who balk at the word, it positively encourages ecumenical contact. Again this is an outstanding effect of the charismatic movement through which Christians from a variety of religious backgrounds are sharing in common experience of renewal which itself forces them to face up to profound ecumenical questions concerning the shape of the church to come. Maybe the prize which has so far eluded ecclesiastical statesmen is going to be discovered in this unexpected way. That is certainly the viewpoint of Cardinal Suenens on the Catholic side and it is echoed by other responsible spokesmen on the Protestant side.

5. New evangelicalism is a religion of the heart as well as of the head in which brotherly bonds are fostered and creative reflection encouraged. One of the most frequently repeated comments on a two day conference recently held

at Pilgrim Hall reflects this. It was on the quality of love and caring shown through the conference. There is indeed an anxiety to avoid further fragmentation which has been so characteristic of the past. New evangelicalism will have shed its divisiveness and will be strong enough in its orthodox conviction to hold us all, and broad enough in its spirit not to stifle speech or thought. Turning to the practicalities of church life it is here that one of the first steps towards a positive change is being taken in the rediscovery of a doctrine of Church leadership. In many cases this has degenerated almost out of existence so that Pastors are paralysed into inactivity, and again the causes for this must be exposed and examined. Undoubtedly one of the reasons is plainly financial. For too long the sheer economic exploitation to which many Pastors have been subjected has been regarded as the norm when it is nothing short of a spiritual sin and a social injustice. Its effect is seen in a bland indifference in our churches and a lowered morale among ministers. If a church does not maintain a high level of practical concern for its own servants it is hardly likely to have much left over for those with whom it has no connections at all. The beginning of a solution to all, is again in our own hands however. For we have the priceless opportunity of the regular preaching ministry committed to us, and it is my belief that if we preach positively the doctrine of leadership which is there in the Scriptures it will not be long before it produces a changed attitude in our churches.

New Testament Churches would not be content with a man-pleasing ministry on the one hand or dominating diaconates on the other. We have only to look at such passages as Hebrews 13:13 and 17, 1 Tim. 5:17, Phil 2:12, 1 Thess. 5:22 1 Cor 16:16 to see that in their situation leadership as a whole was clearly expected and responded to. At least these Scriptures point to a situation in which once leaders have been appointed in churches they are expected to lead, and the churches are prepared to follow. There are no grounds here for anticipating the emergence of a class of petty dictators, "Popes in their own parishes" lording it over the flock, for the standards that are set are too high to allow that kind of behaviour. But let the pastor preach the biblical doctrine of these texts, and look for those who are prepared to meet the exacting standards that they set and it will not be long before we are rescued from the doldrums into which our leadership has fallen.

In practical terms this teaching demands a reform undertaken in three directions simultaneously:

1. It demands a change of outlook so far as Pastors are concerned in which we are prepared to test and challenge our present structures by Scriptural standards with a view to bringing the two into line, and this takes great personal courage. Most of our churches are averse to change.
2. It requires a willingness by the churches to share the sacrifice which Pastors are making by offering them stipends which are equivalent to the average earnings of their working members. In most cases I am

assured that this will mean a substantial rise for Pastors' salaries!

3. It requires a willingness on the part of Pastors to recognise that they do not possess all the gifts necessary for building up a healthy Church in themselves. Therefore they will be keen to discover and develop the gifts of other leaders in their midst, even to sharing of responsibilities and position with them. So long as these other leaders are prepared to share the same degree of commitment and conviction that is expected of Pastors such a sharing will be beneficial to the whole fellowship.

This demands a fresh approach to Church membership which is equally important.

In so far as membership can be justified at all as a practical expression of commitment to Christ's Body, it is clearly more demanding and supporting than we have often made it out to be. Regular attendance of services and some participation in the churches financial support are not an adequate expression of this. Once we accept the Pauline view of the church as the body new standards begin to emerge. According to J.A.T. Robinson "The appearance on which Paul's whole faith and apostleship was founded was the revelation of the resurrection body of Christ not as an individual but as the Christian community. Since he saw Christ in the church he was persecuting it seems that he can no longer look into the eyes of a Christian without meeting there the gaze of Christ". As John shows in his epistles, to be a Christian means to be willing to share Christ in fellowship with others. Being in the body, a believer recognises that this function will be distinct and yet it will be exercised effectively only in harmony with others. He sees that prominence in the Body does not indicate priority, and only in our participation with the whole is body growth and blessing obtained. In order to take his place there not only does the Christian need to receive the charisms the Spirit has for him, but he also needs such a release of the Pentecostal Spirit that all the kalaidoscopic varieties of which the Spirit is capable to open up to him. It is as our membership begins to come nearer to this that it becomes meaningful and thus the decline syndrome begins to give way to one of positive advance.

In this brief review of factors which can lead to positive growth, finally a fresh look at our Union activities is called for. The place for a central organisation in a decentralised body is surely that of being a service agency for the constituent members, and a catalyst for fresh ideas by which the members can be further stimulated. There is no serious possibility of the Baptist Union becoming the Baptist Church. It is therefore to the positive aspects of growth of the members that our central body should be committing itself without reservation.

An example of the kind of aid which can be given is in the Superintendency. In these days when we are talking about growth it is appropriate for us to consider the need for other skilled itinerants to assist in evangelism and also

WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

409 Barking Road, Plaistow, London E13 8AL.

My dear Brother Minister,

At long last we are able to report progress on the alterations and new building scheme on our Barking Road site.

The first stage of the project was the alterations to our Church premises, and these are just on the point of completion. There is no doubt that the alterations will be a great benefit to the work of the Memorial Church.

The Department of the Environment have just given sanction for us to accept the lowest tender for the work to start on the new flats and the builders will be in the site by the time you read this, and the 20 months building operation will begin. With a little imagination you can sense some of the chaos we are likely to experience during the next two years, but we look forward very much to the completion of the scheme, and shall value the prayers of you and your people.

I am glad to report that the Revd Stuart Fuller, B.A. has accepted an invitation to become the new Warden of Orchard House, our Home for boys in need of care and protection. Stuart and his wife Janice are well – known to many of us at West Ham as they were both on our staff at the beginning of their ministry, and we are delighted that they are joining us again.

You really do not need me to tell you that we rely on the spiritual and material backing of our friends in the churches, and that all contributions will be gratefully received !

May God's blessing be on you and on your own ministry.

Yours very sincerely,
STANLEY TURL
Superintendent of the Mission.

stimulating church growth. The fact that such organisations as One Step Forward are already largely supported by Baptists indicates that the finance is there for such ventures if we are bold enough to start them. It is also possible for the Union to call together area based conferences throughout the country in which matters of church growth and development can be seriously examined, local conditions allowed for and plans laid for steps in the right direction. And without disregarding the large amount of work already being achieved by our Central Council, it is perhaps time for us to consider limiting the terms any member can serve on this body in order to increase the flow of fresh blood at this crucial level. At least such a step would create a sense of life and concern which would be positively healthy, but the final decisions as to what we do will only be taken by ourselves.

Douglas McBain.

**Members are reminded of the Fraternal
library facilities, both for groups and
individual members**

**George Neal asks that any books due back
be returned to him**

THE ASSEMBLY; A DELIBERATIVE BODY?

Yes, said the President. "We meet as a deliberative body of Christians who, agreeing in the belief of evangelical truth, and desiring to maintain the ordinances of the Gospel as our Lord hath delivered them to us, take counsel together that we may act, as far as possible, in promotion of the efficiency of our body through its various organisations."

The President was George Gould. The occasion was the Autumn Assembly of 1879.

Times have changed. The Assembly has degenerated into a Baptist jamboree. It has become more a time for back – scratching and flag – waving, and less a time for brain – storming and policy making. Would to God that we would celebrate the centenary of Gould's address by holding a deliberative assembly again!

In practise today's assemblies are not deliberative assemblies. We saw this so clearly at Nottingham. The Programme Committee had not expected the Council's report to be challenged. We went there as delegates – but they thought we were rubber stamps. At the second session at which the report was presented, no microphones had been installed for our use, no time had been allocated for us to raise any issues. The same kind of thinking was present on the last day, when the education resolution was passed.

For there was no debate. True, the lifeless resolution did not warrant debate. But debate was fobbed off with a panel, to which questions had to be previously submitted. What have we come to!

At the Tuesday morning session I had the temerity to question the President's handling of Douglas McBain. It so happened that Douglas McBain raised an important issue, an issue that no doubt would have been dear to the heart of George Gould, an issue deserving deliberation, and certainly an issue more vital than that of welcoming the Lord Mayor. But, and this is my point, had Douglas McBain raised an issue of minor importance, or indeed an issue of no importance at all; he still had the right to be heard – and to be respectfully heard!

My first action on arriving home was to reach for my Baptist Handbook and for the President's History of the Union. What I wondered, was the precise function of Assembly? What was the relationship between the Council and the Assembly? I had always – perhaps mistakenly – conceived the relationship between Council and Assembly to be analogous to that between the deacon's meeting and the Church Meeting. The Deacons direct the day – to – day business of the Church, while items of major importance come before the Church. True, such items may be pre – digested by the Deacons, but never the less come before the Church Meeting. And woe betide any Diaconate that tries to steam roller anything through the Church Meeting! One of our Baptist distinctives is the Church Meeting, when as individuals and as a community we "submit

ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and stand under the judgement of God that we may know what is the mind of Christ ". In the local church there is hierarchy. But is that so of the wider church ? Observers from other Baptist Unions were amazed to see the way in which the grassroots were treated.

The Handbook and the President's History of the Union did not give the answers I looked for. Article V of the Constitution (" OPERATIONS ") simply states : " The Union shall act by the Assembly and through the Council ". So I wrote to David Russell, our General Secretary, and asked him for his interpretation of this section: what did the prepositions mean ? He replied " Some years ago I asked this exact question of the Honorary Solicitor but did not receive a very enlightening answer. My own judgement is that the Council, through its representative and elected members, can act in the name of the Union in determining policy and future action, except in so far as it is laid down in the constitution or some other rubric that the Assembly itself shall be the responsible body. I would imagine that the decisions of the Council could be called in question by the Assembly through the presentation of the Council's Report and matters referred back to the Council for further consideration. The Assembly has not been regarded as a judiciary body, but more of an inspirational gathering. However, there are matters which must receive the approval of the Assembly before they can become law, as it were. But for the most part it is within the province of the Council rather than the Assembly to act and to make decisions which will facilitate the working of the Union throughout the year. " With what David Russell says of the Council, I entirely agree. The Council plays a vital and necessary role in the Union's life. But the Assembly has a role as well – a role which extends beyond that of inspiring and rubber – stamping. The Assembly does have powers. We would do well to keep those powers alive.

The question arises, can the Assembly today in fact be a deliberative assembly ? Was the constitution framed for a time when our numbers – or at least the numbers attending the Assemblies – were smaller ? The Sports Hall at Nottingham with some 2,000 delegates was a far cry from the sixty or so ministers crowded into Dr. Rippon's vestry. But NEAC 77 has proved that such an Assembly is a feasibility – and it has proved it at Nottingham of all places! There the congress broke down into groups as small as ten for deliberations. It is of course not just a matter of breaking down into groups. At Nottingham we had groups – unwieldy, unmanageable groups, but groups all the same. But what was their purpose ? They were simply discussion groups whose thinking had no outlet beyond that of the group itself.

I believe that we need to take several leaves from NEAC'S book. To make the most of a deliberative Assembly, we would need not only to select certain issues before the Assembly for discussion, the Council would also need to prepare draft statements for the Assembly's consideration. As at NEAC, the Assembly would be totally free to amend, re – draft, or even reject its contents.

THE BAPTIST INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED

4 SOUTHAMPTON ROW, LONDON, WC1B 4 AB

To the Readers of the " Fraternal "

Dear Friends,

"Perhaps the greenest cabbage – leaf ever grown in a garden was wrapped about this steak, before it was delivered to Tom. When he (the butcher) saw Tom putting the cabbage – leaf into his pocket awkwardly, he begged to be allowed to do it for him " for meat " he said, with some emotion, "must be humoured, not drove."

Martin Chuzzlewit – Dickens.

Quite recently, in my office, I handed to a deacon a carefully typed policy, folded with precision, and to my dismay our model policy form was roughly bent across and stuffed into the crowded pocket of an overfull brief case. This excerpt from Martin Chuzzlewit flashed into my mind and I nearly burst out with " a policy must be humoured, not drove."

What do deacons or the Insured of our many personal policies do with our care – fully prepared documents ? The short answer is "Mostly lose 'em " !

There are however deacons and others who mistakenly lock policies in the Bank or in a safe where incidentally later endorsements never follow. Policies should be treated with the respect due to their appearance and content but they should be at hand with the treasurer's papers at all meetings for on the spot information.

The death of many good intentions insurance – wise is that fatal Minute "The treasurer undertook to discover details of the policies and their whereabouts and to report back " So many treasurers just don't.

But above all remember if you have an insurance problem to let us wrap it up for you – we'll put in the emotion too if you like!

Yours sincerely

C.J.L.Colvin

General Manager.

As at NEAC, we would do well to break down into small units and not just meet in plenary session to consider such a document. Furthermore, for the delegates to act as delegates, their churches should have had the opportunity to see the draft – statement before the assembly – or if not the draft statement itself, they should have had an opportunity to consider the issues themselves. NEAC produced three paperbacks in preparation for their congress. Surely we could produce something ! As for what to discuss, this year we could profitably have deliberated on the “10 Propositions – the next step” or on the ideas contained in the “Let My People Grow” document. These of course, are not the only issues possible. The Liverpool Assembly showed an immense interest in the subject of Healing, interest which has never been followed up at Assembly level. Or would not the Assembly benefit from an in – depth study of the challenges offered by the Charismatic Movement ?

Inevitably such a deliberative Assembly would have to be radically different in structure from our present assembly. Deliberation could not be confined to one or two meetings; it would have to determine all the sessions – both plenary and sectional. Our present sectional meetings would have to be eliminated – whether they be organised by departments of the BU or BMS, by the Colleges, or even by the BMF! Other treasured events like the Annual Missionary Service would cease to feature. Indeed some might feel that all the main public meetings should go.

Such restructuring would be a painful process for some, but it would be a liberating experience for many. As surely as a rose bush needs to be pruned to give a beautiful bloom, so the Assembly programme is in need of major – reconstructive surgery if it is truly to benefit the denomination at large.

Such an Assembly would, of course, attract a different clientele. Those who are attracted by the present pattern would perhaps not attend a new – style assembly. But would this not be an advantage ? Instead of churches sending the retired as delegates, young folk would eagerly take time off work to participate. Our present Assemblies are not known for their vision and vitality, their intellectual depth or their spiritual heights. I believe that a deliberative Assembly could be a step forward in releasing the Spirit in our midst.

A deliberative Assembly of the nature I am proposing would involve a good deal more preparation. It would also involve a good deal more expense. But it would be time and money well – spent . It appalls me to think that at our last Assembly some eight thousand working days assuming there were 2,000 delegates) and some £75,000 (£20 per delegate plus travel plus other costs) were devoted to meetings of no real great substance. Can we justify this kind of expense in the face of the current economic pressures facing our churches ? Can we justify such expense in the face of the needs of the third world ? Surely only if something worthwhile is achieved. But how much was achieved at Nottingham ? Is it not significant that the media devoted much space to NEAC,

but – apart from the Baptist Times – very little space to our Assembly. NEAC, of course, has the advantage of only meeting every ten years, we meet every year. But have we not got the intellectual and spiritual resources to stage a Baptist NEAC occasionally? Could we not hold a deliberative Assembly everytime we hold a residential assembly?

A deliberative large scale Assembly is a possibility – I hope it will become a reality.

Paul Beasley-Murray

BUYING A HOUSE – ANOTHER WAY.

In the last edition of "Fraternal" there was an article describing how one minister and his wife had managed to buy themselves a house with a view to their eventual retirement. They themselves only live in the house for a minimal amount of the time, for the rest of the time the house being let.

There is another way to house purchase by Ministers, namely to buy a house which will be their permanent residence. This is the way by which the present writer and his wife have achieved their goal of house ownership. The basic difference of this method is that it fully involves the Church, and indeed is only possible with the co-operation of the Church. But a growing number of Churches in our denomination are appreciating their responsibility towards their minister and his family in this respect. It will mean that the Church's greatest asset – its manse, becomes the means by which the minister can buy his own home. For this reason it will be absolutely necessary for the minister to share fully with his diaconate and his membership his feelings and hopes on this subject (remember that if they are "average" people, over 50% of them will own their own homes.)

How should a minister go about this, and how much will it cost? The figures which I shall give are the actual costings to ourselves. Final details of approach however, must obviously depend upon the individual case. The very first thing for the minister and his wife to do is to open a savings account with a Building Society. There are number of Societies who take a kindly attitude towards ministers because they have Baptists among their senior officials. Remember, though, that it is the local manager who has a major share in any decision concerning a mortgage so ensure that he is fully conversant with the problems of ministers and broadly sympathetic towards them. Try to save even a little regularly, since it may take several years actually to achieve your goal. In the meantime your savings will be earning tax-free interest, and you will be building up towards the deposit on the house, as well as getting your face known in the Building Society's office!

Having started your own "building fund", discuss the matter frankly with your officers and diaconate. If they are sympathetic the main question will be how the Church will be involved, and what use will be made of the manse. There are two possibilities: ... to let the manse, with the minister receiving either the net or gross income, depending on the generosity of the Church: to sell the manse, using the investment income as the means of providing the minister with a housing allowance sufficient to enable him to repay his mortgage, and all the other expenses. The minister would then find a suitable house of his own choice, which will be both adequate for his needs and within his price range (on which his B.S. manager will advise him). In some cases the Church may consider selling the existing manse to the minister, but in the writer's experience this is fraught with too many legal complications.

Letting the manse has the apparent advantage that the Church retains its property and will continue to benefit from rising property values, and will have a manse for any future minister who may not wish (!) to buy his own home. There are however, serious snags: unless the house is let furnished it will not provide a very large income: the Church will still have to maintain the property, which may not leave very much to pass on to the minister: it may be difficult to regain possession of the property. However we know cases where this method has been used, apparently without problems as yet, by careful choice of tenants.

The way which we have chosen is that of the church selling its property so that the investment income is available to the Church (another complication in our case: the Church in fact only owned 25% of the manse !)

The first thing will be to discover via a local estate agent the approximate value of the manse, and the approximate cost of a house to the minister. The two prices may be roughly the same, they could be very different. We will suppose however, as in our own case, that the two figures are roughly the same at £15,000.

If the Church sells for a net £15,000 after payment of legal fees etc, it can expect to be able to invest that for approx, 12% and thus receive some £1,800 interest p.a. tax free. If the minister is to buy a house costing £15,000 he will need to have available at least £1,500 plus a further £500 to cover legal costs, removal, etc., and be able to obtain a mortgage of £13,500. In our own case we were in fact able to find £3,000 of the purchase price, and so needed a mortgage of £12,000 which we were granted by a Building Society. Thus the cost of purchase in our case is a) Repayment on £12,000 option mortgage over 20 years: £102.30 per month... £1,227.50 p.a.
b) Cost of a Mortgage security policy on our two lives, to ensure that if one dies during the period of the mortgage the house becomes the property of the other: £56.76 p.a. c) House Insurance: at present £23.75 p.a.
There will also be the question of rates, and other expenses for decoration,

maintenance etc. We therefore have to allow £1,500 p.a. from the outset. Obviously some part of that must come from the pocket of the minister (or his wife).

Nevertheless the Church is still going to be in receipt of rather more than that amount from its investment income, so it should have an annual surplus to re-invest, either as a counter-inflationary measure, or perhaps even to put up as a deposit for any future minister.

There are a number of problems with which it is impossible to deal in this article, but which require consideration...

1. The fact that basically a housing allowance is regarded as taxable income.
2. The need to make a leasing agreement with the Church, to give it a beneficiary interest in your house, and thus qualify for rate relief, and also for tax relief on the cost of heating, lighting and cleaning of the manse.

Buying a house is not something to undertake lightly, and without the advice of an expert: (most Churches or Associations include chartered accountants who will be only too glad to help) But where individual circumstances and the understanding and goodwill of the Church permit this may well prove to be " a better way ". Do not regard this as a financial investment (though if the value of the house increases by 8% or more p.a. over the period of ownership you will make a profit) but rather as an investment in the happiness and peace of mind which comes from the security of your family.

Dear Brethren,

My copy of *The Fraternal* travels by surface routes and reaches my desk some months after it has been read by the brethren in the United Kingdom

This means that I have only just had the chance to read Rex Mason's, article, *A Sabbath Soliloquy*, which appeared in the January issue. Whilst I agree with his general thesis that much more effective use could be made of Sundays in British Baptist churches I must vigorously protest two of his sentences. Because it is so long since the article was published let me set the context of his thought and then repeat his sentences. Mason has been asking how better education and improved opportunities for fellowship might be offered in a two-and-one-half to three-hour block of time on a Sunday. He suggests that the first half could be used for ' teaching at all levels '. After a period of fellowship Mason suggests that the Church might engage in worship. He recognizes that this is the regular pattern of American church life, he rejects the " All-age Sunday School " concept and writes, " I think my hesitations arise from the fact that they tend to be based on American models as their pattern.... and, what is worse, use American literature as the basis of their teaching programme. Such literature is usually an affront to intelligence and an obstacle to faith ". I find it difficult to believe that Rex Mason, whose fellowship I so valued in former days, could have written such prejudiced words.

The national origin of these methods and materials can never be used as a reason for rejecting them. An Oxford tutor ought to marshal facts, not parrot prejudice. What does he mean by 'American'? Sunday School materials and methods promoted in the United States are as varied as the colours of the rainbow.

Generalizations are simply not possible. I think that many ministers who read his article would interpret it in the sense of Southern Baptist Convention Sunday School materials and methods, because through the years, British Baptists have been told constantly of our work. I recognize that the periodicals we publish are not as well known in Britain as are the commercially produced and promoted publications of Scripture Press or Gospel Light. The Baptist Sunday School Board has always strictly respected the stance of the Baptist Union and has never engaged in any promotion of its concepts in Britain.

What are the facts about Southern Baptist materials and methods? Just as in Great Britain main line denominations in the U.S.A. have seen decline in the past decades. Southern Baptists have continued to grow, both in the Old South and in the eastern and northern states. After a levelling off period in the 60's we have seen an upturn in the 70's. There is no doubt whatsoever that the Sunday School has been a major reason for the continued expansion of Southern Baptists. Sunday School not only teaches the Bible but it is the means by which church members are continually motivated and organized for aggressive outreach to people in our amoral, secular, materialistic society. It is also a centre of fellowship. Every person who comes into a SBC church has a place specially designed for him in a Sunday School class. Teaching methods (for all ages) are under constant review and are designed not by laymen (or by preachers) but by professionals trained in schools of education. They are so carefully developed that they can be used successfully in a church full of PH.D.s and in tiny churches in the folds of the Appalachian mountains.

Mr. Mason's most unacceptable statement refers to American Sunday School literature as being 'usually an affront to intelligence and an obstacle to faith'. Such a statement is utterly appalling; there can be no way by which such a destructive generalisation can be justified. I can only conclude that Mr. Mason is writing out of bleak ignorance. The Baptist Sunday School Board produces splendid materials designed for all ages in such a variety of publications that even their titles cannot be listed here. In the adult age group alone we already publish one curriculum which covers the Bible systematically and a second which is Bible based and takes psychological development into account in its selection of passages. A third series, in which Bible books will be studied systematically, is soon to be added. Because the Convention gladly includes in its membership people and churches of many types, study guides are printed to meet different levels of education, simplified, regular and advanced. In teachers' guides scholars whose academic status (in theological, Biblical and educational disciplines) cannot be challenged are used as writers.

(For instance, Dr. G. Beasley—Murray recently wrote background material for a quarter's study in Romans.)

The results of such materials and methods are seen in Baptist Seminaries where more than 7,000 students extend facilities to their limits, in Sunday School evangelism which sends people out every week of the year to reach the unchurched in congregations which pack large church buildings for two, and some times three, services on Sunday morning, in giving in which the tithe is seen as a minimum gladly to be exceeded, in plans deliberately and skilfully laid to reach the masses in our great population centres which lie outside the traditional south, in loving churches where members bear one another's burdens.

The effects continue in social impact too. A great number of churches have voted to intergrate their memberships. Southern Baptists have established great hospitals, drug rehabilitation centres, child care centres, family counselling centres, children's homes, Christian schools and colleges and so much else.

Can such results follow a study of materials that are ' an obstacle to faith ' ?

Our work here has its serious weaknesses and imperfections.

But when I see the President of the United States carrying his Bible to Sunday School, with his Baptist Sunday School Board quarterly tucked in its pages, I am encouraged to think that the work we do here is neither an affront to intelligence nor a hindrance to faith.

My cordial greetings to all who remember me !

Yours sincerely,

A. STUART ARNOLD.

The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Nashville
Tennessee, U.S.A.