

# The Fraternal

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**EDITORIAL.....3**

**THE SERVICE OF INFANT DEDICATION.....4**

Revd. Rodney Ward, B.A. Minister  
Alvechurch Baptist Church.

**NEWS FROM THE BMF GENERAL COMMITTEE.....13**

**YOUR LETTERS.....13**

**MISSION: AN IMPOSSIBLE PASSION?.....17**

Revd. Roger Hayden M.A. Minister,  
Haven Green Baptist Church.

**CELEBRATING PASSIONTIDE AND EASTER.....21**

Revd. Bernard Green M.A., B.D., Minister,  
Horfield Baptist Church.

**URBAN MISSION (2).....25**

Revd. Colin Marchant, B.D., Minister,  
West Ham Central Mission.

**OF INTEREST TO YOU.....27**

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## EDITORIAL

This edition of *Fraternal* is being sent to some 500 men on the Accredited list who have never been members of B.M.F. or whose membership has lapsed. It is our hope that we may thereby be able to strengthen the Fellowship both numerically and by the breadth and diversity of its membership.

Much has happened in recent years to make the Fellowship appear redundant in the eyes of some of our ministers. Some are suspicious of all wider contacts and association with ideas with which they do not wholly agree. At the other extreme, some have found such enrichment through ecumenical co-operation at the local level that another ministerial commitment at denominational level has seemed an unnecessary luxury.

It is to be hoped that all those who have stayed outside, for whatever reason, will give the matter further thought. To renounce christian fellowship of whatever form is never a matter to be taken lightly. It is even less understandable when we evade fellowship with men and women who are engaged in the same ministry, facing the same problems and joys, working in the same denominational structure, prey to the same frustrations and temptations.

Ministry can be an unbearably lonely vocation. No matter how fortunate we may be in the depth of love we share with the members of our churches it remains true that even the most sensitive of them can only with difficulty appreciate the hidden strains that we carry as ministers of word and sacrament within the Church of God. It may be that we sometimes turn to our brother ministers and meet even less understanding. If that is so, then it is a sad indictment of us and the validity of that conception of Christ's Church that we endeavour, in the power of the Spirit, to transform into a daily reality.

We hope that *Fraternal*, within the context of the wider work of the Fellowship, will increasingly become a means by which we communicate with one another, share our experience, make available to others what has worked and been meaningful for us, face the theological questions whose answers sometimes lead us off in different directions, and provide stimulus to our thinking and practice.

May God richly bless our ministry in the year ahead. May He keep us faithful in the lean years. May He grant to our waiting eyes a revival of true religion, glorifying to Christ and life-giving to the world.

# THE SERVICE OF DEDICATION OF PARENTS AND THE BLESSING OF INFANTS

## 1. The Historical Background

Ceremonies for infants, conducted by Christians practising Believer's Baptism, are of long-standing. John Clifford, at the end of the 19th century responded to the request of parents with a simple service in the home,<sup>1</sup> but this was not the first instance. The Paulicians in the Middle Ages conducted ceremonies for infants and there is evidence of early Baptist practices. Morris West quotes from the Covenant of Westgate Baptist Church, Bradford, which is dated 4.12.1753, "And as we have given our Children to the Lord by a Solemn Dedication, so we will endeavour through divine help, to teach them the way of the Lord and command them to keep it setting before them an holy Example worthy of their imitation and continuing in prayer to God, for their Conversion and Salvation",<sup>2</sup> and comments, "Many readers may be surprised to find such a statement in an eighteenth century church covenant. But it seems clear that both in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some Baptists practised a form of Infant Dedication on the authority of our Lord's blessing of the children. What is further interesting — and very relevant in the discussions about Baptism — is that there is some evidence to suggest that our forefathers thought the children of Christian parents to be in a different situation "theologically" to children of non-Christians. By the nineteenth century, the practice apparently had fallen out of use and out of mind".<sup>2</sup>

Michael Walker, writing on "The relation of Infants to Church, Baptism and Gospel in Seventeenth Century Baptist Theology", says of Thomas Grantham, "Grantham provides evidence that there may have been some form of Dedication Service in General Baptist Churches. His language is a little ambiguous, however, and it is not clear whether or not he is referring to a specific service. Taking the example of Jesus in the blessing of the children he claims that the children of Baptist parents are "devoted to God by the prayers of the church . . . and accordingly we do dedicate (them) to him from the womb . . .". He exhorts the Paedo-Baptist Churches to be content to follow Christ's example in the blessing of the children and not, by baptism, to do something altogether different and not commanded by Him. "They should do to their infants as Christ did to them which were brought to Him, either by praying for them themselves, if capable, or by presenting them to Christ's Ministers that they might do it for them in the most solemn manner . . .". It is clear that with the reference to the prayers of the church and the part that would be taken by the minister it is at least possible that there was some form of service for infants".<sup>3</sup> Speaking of the Particular Baptist John Tombes, he says he "could speak of the Children of believers as being 'born in the bosom of the church, of godly parents, who by prayers, instruction, example, will undoubtedly educate them in the true faith of Christ'".<sup>4</sup>

As far as the New Testament evidence is concerned, we may note that Luke records the circumcision and naming of John the Baptist and Jesus — Luke 1:57-66, 2:21-24. These Jewish practices were continued alongside Believer's Baptism among Jewish Christians for a time. Ultimately, however, the nature of the Gospel showed the church that circumcision was no longer necessary. It is difficult to determine whether there were other ceremonies for infants within the New Testament church. Some would say that Acts 16:33 and 18:8 show traces of infant Baptism, but Baptists in arguing against infant Baptism, would refer not so much to individual texts as to the total New Testament

account of Baptism, which is subservient to the nature of the Gospel. We can, however, say positively that Jesus valued children in contrast to the low estimate of them held generally by the world at the time. This latter point is made by G.R. Beasley-Murray,<sup>5</sup> who also says that the evidence of such passages as Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 3:20 is that children were present at the gatherings for worship where the letters were read out.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that there is no record of a service in the New Testament, equivalent to the service of dedication and blessing, does not mean that there are no Biblical and theological principles to justify such a practice.

## **2. The service — its theology and practice — with some problems noted.**

### **a) Thanksgiving**

The starting point of the service is the response of the parents to God, who is the creator of all things (Genesis 1 and 2) and therefore of the child who has been born to them. The Biblical emphasis is that God's creative power is constantly operative (e.g. Isaiah 40:21-31) and this is of vital importance to everyone's existence. Because God is creator, man is always dependent on God (e.g. Psalm 103).

God is not simply creator in a general way. He knows and cares for the whole of creation in all its detail and cares for each individual person (Matt. 6:25ff, 10:29ff).

God as creator is loving and powerful and wise. Man as well as being dependent on God can share in his creative activity. The child is the result of sexual union, preparation by the parents, involvement of the medical profession, and the whole community which contributes to the child's welfare in providing food, clothing, housing, education — c.f. Ecclesiasticus 38:24-34 for a picture of the whole community to which different people make their contribution.

But to be true to the Christian understanding of God, our thanks must be directed to him not only as creator but also as Redeemer. God has not only created the child but has witnessed to his redeeming love for him in the death of Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving is therefore very wide-ranging. It is primarily directed towards God, but includes thanksgiving for other people, known and unknown, and the parents for the part they have been allowed to play.

It is commonly assumed that thanksgiving is the part of the service which all parents will latch on to most readily. However, pastoral experience indicates that the matter is not always so simple. We can think for example of the parents of a large family, finding themselves with an additional burden; the girl with an illegitimate baby whose guilt inhibits thanksgiving; or the parents of a baby with some disability. Such cases demand a great deal of pastoral skill if they are to be successfully resolved.

### **b) The acceptance of responsibility**

We have seen that man has a part to play in the creative process, so thanksgiving leads naturally to acceptance of responsibility. This acceptance is made by the parents and the church through promises.

#### **i) The parents' responsibility**

The fact that the parents accept responsibility, and this is seen as of paramount importance, has led to the service being called 'the dedication of parents' rather than 'infant dedication'.

We are pointed back to the marriage service – ‘Marriage . . . owes its existence to God, who intends that . . . children should be born and brought up surrounded by love and be given the instruction and correction which belong to a Christian upbringing’, (*Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship*). The New Testament emphasises the duties of parents in bringing up children. We can refer to such passages as 2 Corinthians 12:14, Colossians 3:21, Ephesians 6:4. Stephen Winward in *The Truth and the Life* sums up the teaching as follows: “Love is the whole duty of the parent to the child. It includes tenderness, affection, appreciation, encouragement, and the four main responsibilities of parenthood – to protect, to provide, to discipline, to instruct”.<sup>7</sup>

The pattern for parents is God himself – Ephesians 3:14-15. In showing love parents are being like God who loves all his children. Winward says, “It is through their parents that children first meet and are dealt with by God, and experience both His authority and His love”.<sup>8</sup>

The question arises as to what kind of commitment should be demanded of parents, before being allowed to participate in the service. It would seem that if the service is to be meaningful the parents should be committed Christians. The promises made relate specifically to bringing the child up in the Christian way. Some would say that the only adequate definition of the parents is that they (or at least one of them) should be church members. If this was a rule it would certainly make decision making on the part of ministers and church easier. But it would provide other problems. There are those who are not church members but who are sincere in wishing to bring up their children in the faith. However, there are undoubtedly many who request a service of dedication and blessing who have only faint glimmerings of what the faith is about. The problem of dealing with such parents is not made easier by difficulties of communication. Some people who approach the church are very inarticulate. Preconceived ideas in the minds of parents (or grandparents) can make it very difficult for the pastor to get the Christian point of view across.

There are several different courses of action possible in this situation. One is to limit the service to people who are quite clearly committed Christians. Where this is the practice the resulting problem is that people often find it very difficult to understand why they have been refused the services of the church. They may well feel rejected by the church and by God and harbour resentment for years. The other extreme is to offer the full service to all-comers. The problem here is that this seems to devalue truth. The parents may be happy, but minister and church are uneasy about people making promises they don't really understand.

A third course of action is to provide different kinds of service for different people. This might mean a full service including promises for committed Christians and a service of thanksgiving and blessing for those who are not at the stage where they can make meaningful promises. Some people would use the cradle roll service for the latter group. By taking this third course, pastoral care is offered to people who have approached the church, people don't feel rejected and truth is preserved.

It has been suggested that some people might feel they have been offered second best if they know that two different kinds of service are in operation. One would hope, however, that Minister and church would do all that they could to avoid this suggestion. In any event, no course of action is without its problems, in this situation, and there would seem to be less involved in this course than in others.

The mention of a service of thanksgiving and blessing for the uncommitted may raise a problem in some people's minds. The problem is stated in the introduction to "A service of thanksgiving and blessing" published for use in the Church of England. Is it "proper to give thanks to God for anything with someone who is not a church member and would not seem to be a committed Christian. The issue is not, of course, whether we should allow such into church services or tone down the language of our services for such, but whether we should actually compose services largely or wholly for them."<sup>9</sup> The report suggests that this is allowable because as we have already seen God's love and care are for all, and further adds that people can and do respond to God purely as Creator, having a sense of gratitude to God for his goodness. It goes on to say, 'Thirdly, it does not seem unscriptural for such folk to pray to God' and gives an appendix of scriptural evidence for 'Prayer with the unconverted'.

Problems also arise over parents who wish to be dedicated in a church other than one in their own community. No doubt this is to be discouraged. But there are hard cases – for instance the couple who have moved to a village where they attend an Anglican church, no other church being in the vicinity. They don't want their children to be baptised, so request a dedication service at their former church. Perhaps such a case is easier to resolve than that of the couple who have moved away and have been slow in settling down in any other church. The pastor might be able to use their request for a service as an opportunity to introduce them to a church near to their home where the dedication service could more meaningfully take place.

Parents of adopted children don't seem to present any special problem as far as the service is concerned. Prayers of thanksgiving could be adapted to their circumstances and might include reference to the adoption society, social workers, etc. However, it is recognised that this is a sensitive issue and would very much depend on individual parents. Many would probably prefer a service without reference to adoption. "A Service of Blessing upon the Adoption of a Child" has been published for use in the Church of England. It opens with the words, "We are glad that you wish to recognise before God the adoption of this child into your family".<sup>10</sup> At one point all the members of the family lay a hand upon the child saying,

"We receive this child into our family with joy;  
Through God's love he comes to us,  
With God's love we will care for him,  
By God's love we will lead him,  
And in God's love may we all abide for ever."<sup>11</sup>

The fact that a child is 'illegitimate' is no ground for refusing a service. The operative principle is that once a child has been born, whatever the circumstances, an attitude of thankfulness and the desire for God's blessing is to be encouraged. If the mother of an 'illegitimate' child can also make meaningful promises, so well and good. Of course, in the case of couples who are common law partners, the pastor may well be able to offer advice and help in terms of legalising the marriage.

One other point deserves mention. If the parents are to take their part in bringing up their children in the faith the church should be ready to give advice regarding family devotions, children's prayers, literature, etc.

It should be noted that in this section the minister and church have been seen as decision makers in terms of who should be given what type of service. Some, however, would want to argue that the parents are the chief decision makers in the situation and

that ultimately, having had the issues explained to them, they bear the responsibility as to whether or not they should bring their child for 'dedication and blessing' and make promises.

It should also be noted that whilst the chief emphasis has been on the dedication of parents there is a sense in which they can dedicate their child to God for him to make of his child's life what he will. This makes the point that a child's life is not to be moulded according to the parents' desires, in terms of career, marriage, etc.

ii) The church's responsibility

The church also accepts responsibility for the child. This means seeing the child as in some way belonging to the community of the church. No doubt the development of Family Church aids this. On the other hand it should be made clear that the child who has been brought to a service of dedication and blessing has not been baptized and has thus not undergone initiation into membership of the church. What Morris West writes in *The Pattern of the Church* is relevant here. "There are many who feel that what is required is a reinterpretation of the idea of the catechumenate. This would mean that the children in the Sunday School are clearly acknowledged as children of the church community, already in a particular relationship to that community, and being educated by that community. In a sense, therefore, when the child enters the beginners' department of the School, he starts classes for baptism and church membership. To put it another way, the children of the School may be thought of as the church in embryo, being fed and nourished by the community until they are born into the Church in baptism."<sup>12</sup>

G.W. Rusling says of the catechumenate that it "must be a permanent feature of the Church's life. Our definition of the Church should make room for this fact. Though not yet baptised, those who are in the catechumenate stage are in a creative relationship with the Body of Christ. They do not belong to the indifferent or to the opposition".<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, "the Church as we know it in life, ever involved in mission, always has its catechumenate and cannot be fully understood or comprehensively described without it."<sup>13</sup>

Thus the church, at the dedication service looks forward to the child being involved in the life of the church and ultimately being baptized into the church. The church can do this in a way that parents may not be able to do, particularly when the service is not limited to children of church members. When the service has been limited to thanksgiving and blessing the church will not make promises because this can only be done in partnership with the parents.

a) The role of church members in general

It is normal for church members to make a promise at the service of dedication and blessing by standing in their places. The promise is a recognition of a responsibility shared with the parents of bringing the child up so that in time he will be led to Baptism. How can we make this promise more than a formality? Obviously it is not possible for every member to take a close personal interest in every child and every home. But all can see that the church is the kind of community in which it is possible for the child to be nurtured in the faith. Generally this means that all members will wish to see that they are growing in faith, hope and love. More specifically members should take an interest in the different branches of children's and young people's work in the church. This includes family church, Sunday school, playgroup, youth clubs and fellowships,

uniformed organisations. An alive church will be thinking of the child's total development. Parents will be welcomed and shown practical concern which can include such things as baby sitting, helping out when there is a family crisis (mother in hospital, etc.). The child should be made to feel part of a family — members speaking to children show them that they belong. From time to time adults, including the minister, can be given the opportunity to look in on the different departments of Family Church. Links with different families can be made through 'prayer partners' and visitation schemes. The provision of a crèche, supervised by church members, greatly assists parents with young families to attend worship. Where a crèche is not possible, church members by showing their tolerance of the presence of babies in church are helping parents in a practical way to see that there is room for them and their babies. Parents, of course, are often very sensitive about their babies making a noise during a service. In other words there are a variety of ways in which church members can fulfil their promise to seek to lead the child towards Baptism.

#### b) The Cradle Roll

The leaflet 'The Church's care for little children', makes the point that the cradle roll 'Is a generally used method among us but with wide divergencies. For some it is the beginning of many years of systematic pastoral care; for others it is little more than a record'.<sup>14</sup>

If the cradle roll is going to be a means of pastoral care two things would seem to be essential. (1) It must be the concern of the whole church. (2) Great care must be taken over the choice of cradle roll secretary.

The cradle roll itself is simply a list of names of children who have come into contact with the church through the services of dedication and blessing or thanksgiving and blessing. It reminds the church of those children who are not yet old enough to come to the Beginners' Department of Family Church or Sunday School. It is essentially temporary in the sense that children will normally cease to be the responsibility of the secretary after about three years.

The cradle roll secretary brings the roll alive by systematic visiting, birthday cards, the gift of a book of prayers on the first birthday, etc. Visiting shows the importance of caring for the child in the context of the family. In view of the important nature of the work, the secretary should be a mature Christian and should be appointed by the church. In 'The Church's care for little children' we read, "The church should be prepared to release this person from any other office she may bear, for she is no mere registrar, but the pastor, under the Minister, of a precious group of souls. As such she should receive the church's maximum support."<sup>15</sup> The assumption is that the secretary will be a woman but there seems to be no reason why this must always be so.

When names are frequently added to the roll, the secretary may need the assistance of a team of visitors. Sometimes 'foster parents' are appointed to keep contact with a particular family.

All the children's names should go on to the roll whether their parents made promises at the service or not. The chief point is that the roll is not a test of Christian belief but an expression of the church's care for the child. It would seem better to place the child's name on the roll at the initial service rather than to hold a special cradle roll service later. The child is in the care of the church from the moment the service is held, if not before. Sometimes, however, an annual service is held for parents and children currently on the roll in conjunction with the Beginners and Primary Departments.



We have used the term cradle roll because it is familiar. It has, however, a Victorian ring about it and sympathy is with those who have looked for another name. The report, *The Child and the Church* tried 'Family Register' recognising that this is rather cold.<sup>16</sup>

c) The Blessing

Morris West makes the important point that without the blessing there is no reason for the child to be present at all. Yet he also makes the point that "This act of blessing has yet to be given meaningful theological content".<sup>17</sup>

In the *Vocabulary of the Bible*, Chr. Sehft says, "The blessing is a word charged with power, through which God Himself, or a man who represents Him, causes the effective descent upon people, living beings or things, of salvation, prosperity, the joy of life".<sup>18</sup> Also, "When man gives a blessing, he does not draw from within himself, but from the wealth of God".<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, we can add that a blessing can't be called back, as the story of Jacob and Esau shows. The introduction to "A Service of Thanksgiving and Blessing" points to the problematic nature of the blessing in the service.<sup>20</sup> However, it says that when applied to people blessing carries the meaning of asking God to do well by a person. We might say that the blessing is an expression of deep love and concern of God through the Church.

The question then is whether anything actually happens to the person who is blessed. The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England which produced the report, *Baptism Thanksgiving and Blessing* asks, "What happens when a person is blessed? What difference does it make?"<sup>21</sup> It answers that at the very least the good will of God for the child is publicly expressed in words. Morris West would go further — "By this act of blessing the child is, in some sense, set apart from 'unblessed' children, and its feet set on the path which leads to baptism and church membership. That, at least, is the content of the general prayer of blessing usually offered by the minister. Thus, whilst there is no suggestion that the ceremony makes the child a church member, there is implicit the understanding that the child stands in a new relationship of dependence and responsibility to the church community at that place, and that God has, in blessing the child, set his seal upon this new and forward-looking relationship."<sup>22</sup>

Another question that we may consider is what form of blessing is to be used. 'The Dedication Service' by Stephen F. Winward uses the Aaronic form. Edward Hulme in an article in *The Fraternal* (Sept. 1972) says that the Aaronic Blessing "may be historic and poetic, but what 'the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee' means to 'fringe' people is anyone's guess".<sup>23</sup> His substitute is "May God protect and guide you. May you so learn of His love that you give Him your life". The Editors of *Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship* say in the introduction, "The Aaronic blessing, . . . with its wonderfully attractive 'The Lord make his face to shine upon thee', is not nearly so suitable for Christian Worship when put into language which shows how materialistic it really is"<sup>24</sup> (i.e. modern language).

The form in 'A service of thanksgiving and blessing' seems more suitable. "The God who created you, sent His Son to redeem you, and His Spirit to indwell you — may this God watch over you, enabling you to seek, to find and to know Him, through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen".<sup>25</sup> The blessing is partly the expression of a wish and the affirmation that the wish has been fulfilled cannot take place until Baptism.

The names of the child are pronounced at the Blessing not because the service is a Naming but because it is a means of establishing the identity of the child which is recognised by the parents and the community. The child matters as a person.

Mark 10:13-16 is the normal reading used at the service. It does not give explicit authority for the service but has obvious illustrative value. The Lord shows a welcoming attitude and blesses the children, putting his arms round them and laying his hands upon them. We may follow his example and learn the lesson regarding entry into the Kingdom, which he explains. 1 Samuel 1 and Luke 2:22ff are also suitable (some might say 'more suitable') readings.

### **3. Literature**

- The Blessing of Infants and the Dedication of Parents* by R.L. Child (The Kingsgate Press)
- Worship and the Child*, Ed. R.C.D. Jasper, (SPCK, 1975)
- The Dedication Service* by Stephen F. Winward (B.U. Pub.)
- Baptist Principles* by Dr. W.M.S. West (B.U. Pub.)
- The Pattern of the Church*, Ed. A. Gilmore (Ch. 1 'Baptist Church Life Today' by Dr. W.M.S. West) (Lutterworth)
- The Church's care for little children – the Principles and Practice of the Cradle Roll*. Occasional Paper No. 7 (Free Church Federal Council Youth Dep't.)
- Your Child and his Prayers* (Christian Education Committee of the Bristol and District Association of Baptist Churches)
- Your Child and His Worship* (Do.)
- A Service of Thanksgiving and Blessing* by C.H.B. Byworth and J.A. Simpson. Grove Booklet on Ministry and Worship No. 5. (Grove Books – published for use in the Church of England)
- Services for Birth and Death* by the Revd. E.J. Hulme (Art. in 'The Fraternal') (Sept. 1972)
- A Service of Blessing upon the Adoption of a Child* – (Church Information Office.)
- Vocabulary of the Bible* ed. J.-J. Von Allmen (Lutterworth)
- The Child and the Church – a Baptist Discussion* (Carey Kingsgate Press, 1966.)
- The Child in the Church* (British Council of Churches report)
- The Concept and Content of Blessing in the Old Testament* by H. Mowley. (Article in "The Bible Translator")
- Baptist Quarterly Articles*
- Vol. 21 No. 5 Jan. 1966 "Church and Child in the N.T." G.R. Beasley-Murray.
- Vol. 21 No. 6 Apr. 1966 "Baptist Theology of Infancy in the 17th Century" M.J. Walker
- Vol. 19 No. 7 Jul. 1962 Dr. W.M.S. West, Editorial
- Vol. 18 No. 6 Apr. 1960 "The Status of Children", G.W. Rusling
- Vol. 21 No. 5 Jan. 1966 "The Relation of Children to the People of God in the Old Testament". R.E. Clements

### **General Note**

This report has been drawn up by the Rev. R.A. Ward, when Chairman of the Children's Committee, of the Bristol and District Association of Baptist Churches, Christian Education Committee, on the basis of discussions in that committee around papers drawn up by individual members of it. The report does not attempt to represent all the points of view of the Committee members, so in that sense is the responsibility of the Chairman. It has, however, been read to the committee and altered in some

respects as a result of criticisms made. One point deserves special note. There are several references to the forward look to Baptism at the Service of Dedication and Blessing. Some members of the Committee would prefer to talk in terms of looking forward to the child confessing Jesus as Lord, as being more ecumenical in its emphasis.

Thanks must be expressed to Dr. W.M.S. West and the Rev. Harry Mowvley of Bristol Baptist College who read and commented upon a draft of this report. Their comments have been taken into account but the author bears responsibility for this report in its final form.

Rodney Ward

## Footnotes

- 1 A. Gilmore (ed), *The Pattern of the Church*, ch. 1, 'Baptist Church Life Today', by Dr. W.M.S. West (G.B. 1963) p.14.
- 2 *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol XIX, No. 7, July 1962, Editorial by Dr. W.M.S. West, p. 290-291.
- 3 *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XXI, No. 6, April 1966, Michael J. Walker, "The relation of Infants to Church, Baptism, and Gospel in Seventeenth Century Baptist Theology", p. 250.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- 5 *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XXI, No. 5, Jan. 1966, G.R. Beasley-Murray, "Church and Child in the New Testament", p. 206.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 211.
- 7 Stephen Winward, *The Truth and the Life*, (G.B. 1963), p. 113.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 9 C.H.B. Byworth and J.A. Simpson, *A Service of Thanksgiving and Blessing*, (G.B. 1972), p. 10.
- 10 *A service of blessing upon the adoption of a child*, Church Information Office, p. 3.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 12 A. Gilmore (ed), *The Pattern of the Church*, *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 13 *Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XVIII, No. 6, April 1960, G.W. Rusling, "The Status of Children", p. 248.
- 14 *The Church's Care for Little Children*, (G.B. 1963), p. 3.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 16 *The Child and the Church — A Baptist Discussion*, (Carey Kingsgate Press 1966), p. 34 and 36.
- 17 A. Gilmore (ed), *The Pattern of the Church*, *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 18 J.-J. van Allmen (ed), *Vocabulary of the Bible*, Art. by Chr. Senft (G.B. 1966), p. 37.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.
- 20 C.M.B. Byworth and J.A. Simpson, *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 9
- 22 A. Gilmore (ed), *The Pattern of the Church*, *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 23 The Revd. Edward J. Hulme, "Services for birth and death", *The Fraternal*, (Sept. 1972), p. 37.
- 24 Caryl Micklem (ed), *Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship*, (G.B. 1967), p. 10-11.
- 25 C.H.B. Byworth and J.A. Simpson, *Ibid.*, p. 13.

## NEWS FROM THE B.M.F. GENERAL COMMITTEE

The General Committee has been concerned to keep all our members in touch with our work on your behalf. To this end, we intend to publish in *Fraternal* a brief report of each of our meetings.

Here are some items from the November 7th meeting.

Don Page and Wally Wragg represented us, by invitation of the Baptist Union, on the Working Group that is reviewing the Superintendency. We were able to consider a draft questionnaire that is to be sent to ministers and to make certain suggestions of our own.

A sub-committee has been set up to deal with the whole question of ministerial housing. The correspondence columns of this journal reveal both wide interest and diverse opinions in the matter. Along with other professions who live in 'tied' property we believe that, far from being an economic asset, the provision of such housing penalises us in the long term.

The executive committee presented a recommendation aimed to make the General Committee more representative of ministers at grass roots. The General Committee in turn believed that not enough thought had been given to the recommendations and referred them back to the executive.

Sidney Hall, after splendid service, is retiring from the office of Commonwealth and USA Secretary. His place is being taken by Arthur Coffey. Similarly, Don Page has given fine service as Membership Secretary and, upon his resignation, is now to be succeeded by David Piggott.

The future pattern of the Pastoral Session at the Annual Assembly was discussed. The speaker for April 26th 1978 will be the Revd. Andrew Macrae of the Scottish Baptist Union.

## YOUR LETTERS

### *House Purchasing (Philip Clements-Jewery)*

As one who bought a house in January 1976, I have followed with some interest the correspondence in *The Fraternal* on the subject of ministers buying their own houses. However, if our experience is anything to go by Peter Coleman's letter published in the October 1977 issue is rather misleading.

Firstly, while the 1974 Rent Act has made no difference to those ministers who bought a house and subsequently let it before the Act came into force, there exists a very different situation for those who wish to follow a similar course since that date. Under the Rent Act, a Building Society is in no position to evict tenants if for any reason it has to take possession of the property. The value of the property as security against the loan is therefore considerably reduced. Building Societies will not normally make an advance in such circumstances unless they can be persuaded to do so on the investment value of the house. The investment value is considerably lower than the vacant possession value, and therefore a prospective purchaser would have to find himself the greater part of the price of the house. I can report that the Cheltenham & Gloucester Building Society did advance us a mortgage on this basis, but obviously this is a course that is open only to those who have several thousand pounds capital behind them.

Secondly, I have discovered that the Inland Revenue have considerably tightened their regulations governing Income Tax relief on mortgage interest repayments. Such relief appears to be possible only if the house owner can claim that the house he is buying is his main residence. Such a claim might be allowed if a minister lives in his house for a part of the week; but if the house is being let to tenants there is no possibility of this; in the words of the Inland Revenue: "whether or not a house is a main residence is a matter of fact". There appears to be no allowance given for the fact that the house in question is the only house owned by the minister. There is an exception to this rule, but only if the minister is allowing elderly or infirm relatives to live in the house rent-free. I should also add that not being able to claim a house as a main residence means that capital gains tax, or a proportion of it, becomes payable if the house is sold.

For personal reasons we have accepted these limitations. We feel it right to have shared this experience, but as your correspondents have pointed out, there is possibly a better way of providing for retirement.

Yours Sincerely,  
Philip Clements-Jewery

### *Thanks From India (Ian Kemp)*

You asked me to let you know what response I got through your advertisement in *The Fraternal*.

We had nothing until September when four parcels of books arrived from "Feed the Minds" book service, St. Peter's Church, Eaton Square, London. These contained 34 titles, which will supplement our existing supply in a very admirable way.

Thank you very much for these. I know our librarian joins me in very real gratitude. If there is any further response to your appeal, I will let you know in due time.

Thanking you.

Yours sincerely,  
Ian S. Kemp,  
Union Biblical Seminary,  
Maharashtra, India.

### *All-age Sunday School, West Germany (Dr. Gunter Wieske)*

As a small contribution to your recent discussion about the use of Sunday and as a kind of second answer to Stuart Arnold's letter about American Sunday School material let me just give a few brief comments:

- (1) Until quite recently very few local churches had experiments with the All-age Sunday School. The large majority of pastors and churches thought that this would never work in Germany. Most churches were content with one hour of worship service each week.
- (2) In the beginning of 1976 German Baptists began to prepare for the "Year of the Bible" which all Baptist Unions around the world wanted to have during 1977. One part of our preparation was to study again the possibility of introducing All-age Sunday School, even against the resistance of the large majority in the

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To the Readers of the "Fraternal"

Dear Friends,

+  
B I L S T  
U M  
P S H I  
S.M.  
A R K

Pickwick Papers. Dickens.

After the delights of Dingley Dell you will recall that Mr. Pickwick discovered in the village "a small broken stone, partially buried in the ground"; the stone enraptured Pickwick who, at first blush, declared that it carried "a strange and curious inscription of unquestionable antiquity". Indeed even at second blush, when Mr. Blotton asserted that the inscription was only intended to read "BILL STUMPS HIS MARK" Pickwick still refused to be convinced.

He just didn't want to accept that a simple understanding was possible.

Now many Insured approach insurance policy wordings as if those wordings were of "unquestionable antiquity" in the sense that they were expected to be really "strange and curious". Some Insured carry an in-built stop in the mind which inhibits any glimmer of understanding. They remain in the Dickensian "dark lantern era" and seem to lack the will to pull back the shutter of the inhibition of prejudgement to let light out and in! Policy wordings, especially modern wordings, really can be readable.

Some problems do arise when an attempt is made by an Insured to bring within a policy wording some incident outside the intentions of both sides to the contract. Happily such occasions are rare but then it may be necessary to amend a wording to sharpen definitions. A policy is after all a legal contract.

Try reading a policy, as it were, verse by verse — you won't even need a commentary.

Good reading,  
Yours sincerely,

C.J.L. COLVIN  
General Manager.

unions' executive and in the local leadership. Everybody considered Bible study necessary but only very few persons thought that we could introduce a new structure in which fellowship, Bible study and evangelistic outreach would be the essential elements — week by week.

- (3) As a part of our preparation we took 27 pastors and lay leaders to the Sunday School Board of the Foreign Mission Board in Nashville/Tennessee in order to study their experiences and their material. Most of us had never seen this material but — like many Europeans — we thought that all that Europeans produced or thought they could produce would by itself be superior to American theological productions or similar materials. After really having studied both the material and the structures the 27 participants from West Germany became very, very humble. One consequence was that we decided as representatives of two free church denominations to learn as much as possible from the Southern Baptists and to cooperate in order to edit regular material for All-age Sunday School Work in West Germany.
- (4) We know that it is quite impossible to translate any or all of the material which is being produced by the 140 specialists plus theological authors each quarter. Their work is absolutely beyond European dimensions. We in West Germany are a very small denomination of about 67,000 Baptist members. So we decided to use
- a) the curriculum "Life and Work",
  - b) as background material 4 quarterlies which are being produced for adults studying texts according to this curriculum.
- 11 authors from two free church denominations are studying this material selecting what we can use and condensing it from 7 pages to 2 pages. Thereby we have a quarterly of 32 pages with about 13 lessons each and a pedagogical article in addition.
- (5) All-age Sunday School Work started on April 17, 1977 in West Germany. It was expected that we could win the interest of about 3,000 members within 1977. However, we had underestimated the hunger for the word of God. Today, as I am writing this letter, that is on September 5, 1977 we have already 11,000 church members who are participating week by week in the Bible study groups about half of them on weekdays.

We can only recommend to you honestly to test what God has given to others and then use as well as possible its permanent blessings. We confess that the All-age Sunday School is for West German Baptists the greatest structural and — as we hope — spiritual event which has happened to us since world war II.

God bless Baptists in Great Britain abundantly!

Günter Wieske  
(Home Missions Germany)

## MISSION : AN IMPOSSIBLE PASSION?

"Some people do not believe in missions," wrote James Denney, "they have no right to, for they do not believe in Christ." Denney knew that the origin of the Greek word faith is found in the debate between believers and sceptics. Faith is a missionary word. Faith and mission are two sides of a single coin. One without the other is counterfeit.

I was asked to write on why the passion has gone from mission in the present decade : and here is the clue, I believe. English Christianity is experiencing a crisis of faith: a crisis which deeply affects our passion for mission. We have no passion for the impossible. The idea of winning the world for Christ in one generation no longer holds our mind. John Mott and C. T. Studd were great visionaries — but experience has taught us it cannot be done. Almost nobody contemplating missionary work to-day would imagine that it will be for them as with Carey to India, never to return. The idea of a "career missionary", a professional soldier of the cross, is almost unthinkable. Much of this is linked to our place in the European economic table. It is no longer English money that finances mission overseas — largely it is German and Swedish money that goes to the ends of the earth in the cause of Christ's mission. We can no longer do it — let them take the strain.

Why do we feel that mission is now an impossible passion? Among many contributory factors I identify three. First, there is a crisis of confidence in our nation. In respect of overseas mission it relates directly to our loss of an Empire. Nineteenth century missionaries went from Britain to every part of the globe, supremely confident in the message of the cross as the only answer to human need. They were also just as sure that the message was most effectively delivered in our English cultural, economic and political envelope. The Gospel and the Empire were in humanity's best interest. All that is now gone: gone for good and probably best gone. Missionary work to-day is still recovering from the shock of bereavement. The Empire is dead. The message was married too closely to the spirit of the age. We are widowed: sad at our loss, a little bewildered as to the future, and the passion for mission has receded.

Stephen Neil wrote in *A History of Christian Missions*, (p. 450), "Whether we like it or not, it is historic fact that the great expansion of Christianity has coincided in time with the world-wide and explosive expansion of Europe that followed on the Renaissance; that the colonizing powers have been the Christian powers; that a whole variety of compromising relationships existed between missionaries and governments; and that in the main Christianity has been carried forward on the wave of western prestige and power."

In Britain itself, industrialisation, secularism, and moral apathy, together with the loss of our role as world power after 1945, and our failure to find a national purpose, have created a crisis of confidence in the nation at large. The Church in Britain since 1914 has experienced a real decline as a moral, political, and evangelistic force. We are now in what Donald Cranfield has called a "survival situation". The Church shares this crisis of confidence, this lack of identity in the nation. A decade ago Alasdair MacIntyre wryly expressed our situation as a nation when he wrote: "The creed of the English is that there is no God and that it is wise to pray to him from time to time." No wonder the passion for mission has departed.



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## II

Dialogue between world religions, and a growing awareness of them, has deeply affected the passion for mission. The dialogue must be welcomed: but clearly the evangelical blade is a little blunted. There are of course, those who still maintain that all other religions are morally wrong and utterly false. Yet it is a strange fact that to-day, the most conservative missionary candidates, theologically, are offering for work with the United Mission to Nepal, where mission policy and government law are at one in demanding that missionaries do not "preach" the Gospel. There are still those who seek a syncretist answer to the problem: though this usually means a reductionist attitude to truth, both Christian and non-Christian. Hans Küng, in his book, *On Being a Christian*, pleads for Christian missionary activity to be concerned not only with religions but with believers. "In a word, then, there would be neither arrogant absolutism, not accepting any other claim, nor a weak eclecticism accepting a little of everything, but an inclusive Christian universalism, claiming for Christianity not exclusiveness, but certainly uniqueness." (p. 112).

Britain to-day is a multi-racial, multi-faith society. In Brixton, for example, the HMF Baptist Church and the Maoist centre for political revolution stand cheek by jowl, emphasising where the frontiers of mission are in Britain now. A gospel distribution in Southall recently was only possible when full account was taken of the variety of Asian languages which its inhabitants speak. Old assumptions about religious education in schools are being challenged in Leicester, Birmingham and Bradford, where the majority of pupils have a positive alternative to Christian faith. All of which presents a challenge to our understanding of Christianity; there is a crisis of confidence amongst British Christians who are having to relate their faith to other faiths, here, in their own backyard. The note of the Christian Gospel is muted in such company: the passion for mission wanes — its demands are too exacting.

## III

The rise of indigenous national churches around the world is the third factor in this crisis of confidence. The doctrine of the Church was not seriously brought into play in nineteenth century mission work. Presumably all Christians hoped one day the "mission" would wither away and churches evolve — but very little was done to encourage this. From mission to Church has brought a crisis for missionary endeavour. The "career missionary" can no longer exist. Among those offering for missionary service to-day, very few imagine that it will be for a life-time. On the field there are no mission stations. Missionaries go to work with the national church, at that churches request, to do specific tasks, under the direction of national Christians. There are no mission stations where a new missionary can gain stability and expertise from missionaries with twenty or thirty years experience. Help must be sought from the national pastor or leader. The culture clash for new missionaries, far from other missionaries who could help, is heightened; and the frustrations are many. It may be that a new missionary has great zeal, but finds this is not appreciated in a local church where indifference and indeed opposition to an outsider is manifest. In fact the same things happen to missionaries as happen to new

ministers in Britain. They find the training does not fit them very well for the task. There are frustrations because of church deadness; financial strains and stresses; and the temptation comes that you can fulfill your vocation better in some other profession. At home or abroad, there is a crisis of confidence, because nobody seems to be quite sure just what the task is.

#### IV

Is there no passion for mission to-day? Yes — but it is to be found in a new understanding of the missionary task of the Church. The Lausanne Conference on World Evangelisation was a watershed. John Stott, seeking to answer the question: What is the right relationship between evangelism and social action?, answered: "Social action is the partner of evangelism." Evangelism and compassionate service belong together in God's mission to the world. Christ sends the Church to be salt and light for all humanity (*Christian Mission in the Modern World*, p. 27). Candidates offering for missionary service to-day see themselves as international Christians who have skills to offer the world Church, and they want to serve Christ by helping their fellow Christians in very specific parts of the work. It may take five years or twelve months — that is irrelevant. What matters is their passionate concern to love their neighbour, so that their neighbour becomes truly human.

Hans Küng can help us here. He claims that to be a Christian to-day means to be truly human. That does not mean "simply affirming all that is true, good, beautiful and human". Christians seek a truly radical humanism which can "integrate and cope with what is untrue, not good, unlovely, inhuman: not only everything positive, but also . . . everything negative, even suffering, sin, death, futility. Looking to the crucified and living Christ, even in the world of to-day, man is able not only to act but also to suffer, not only to live but also to die". (*On Being a Christian*, p. 602)

There is a significant shift in the Church, in respect of the passion for mission. Evangelism and social action are at long last seen to be partners. But even more significant is the fact that the passion for mission comes from the churches of the Third World. They are seeking that all should be truly, radically human through Christ. Christian liberation theology is not the latest theological fad for consumption by professors of theology. The context of their theology is the reality of the inhumanity which they experience. The question they ask of theology is this: Has God any word for us from the incarnate Christ who proclaimed liberty to the captives? Derek Winter's vivid Latin American Diary, published by Epworth as *Hope in Captivity* (1977), helps us to understand that Bonino, Alves, Gutierrez and all the rest are relevant because they have a passion for mission which will enable their fellow-Latin Americans to become truly human. Their ministry is prophetic because the theology is earthed in issues that matter, and people that matter.

It is here that to-day's passion for mission is to be found. British Christianity has yet to learn that theology, to be relevant, must relate to the context of a life situation. It must answer the fundamental questions humanity is asking about the world. European Christian culture wrestles with its own inhumanities: where are those with a passion for mission who will show us how even we can be human in Christ?

Roger Hayden

## CELEBRATING PASSIONTIDE AND EASTER

Every year since entering the ministry in 1952 it has been my custom to celebrate Passiontide and Easter with a series of special services. This is important theologically and liturgically, and the Christian Calendar offers a natural framework for the church to grow in spiritual understanding year by year through the expression and exploration of the central truths of the gospel.

Over the years many Free Churches have shied away from observation of the Christian Calendar, though more recently through the influence of the British Lessons Council and the Joint Liturgical Group this has been remedied. Without such observation our preaching and worship can be seriously impoverished. By it we can be led into a wider, deeper appreciation of the faith we proclaim. For example, Advent can so easily degenerate into getting ready for Christmas, which often means little more than Christmas carols and stories extended over several weeks. By when Christmas Day comes, there is almost nothing left to celebrate! Whereas, a proper recognition of Advent will unfold the great prophetic teachings of God's action in history, the hope of His kingdom, the call to prepare the way of the Lord, the Christian hope of the Final Advent, and all that is involved in the assertion that God is a "God who comes". This offers a much larger context in which to set the celebration of Christmas, and inevitably it will enrich our Christology. The same is true of Passiontide and Easter.

Lent provides a good opportunity each year to focus attention in detail on the life, work and teaching of Jesus. This can be done by working steadily through a gospel on Sundays and mid-week, or by picking out key incidents in our Lord's life — baptism, temptation, teaching, healing, conflict, transfiguration etc. — and so moving to Passion Sunday, two weeks before Easter. The ground is then prepared for a spiritual pilgrimage with Him who at Caesarea Philippi began to warn His followers of His forthcoming suffering and death, and called them also to a cross-bearing discipleship. From that point He set His face towards Jerusalem and moved inexorably on to His destiny in death and resurrection. There is such a wealth of material on this theme, theologically and biblically, that it is a most beneficial discipline to preacher and listeners alike to come to terms at depth with some aspect of it each year. If we are in danger of getting into the rut of a narrow interpretation, expressed incessantly in fixed verbalisms, here is the opportunity to help us move towards a larger and more inspiring faith.

Next comes Palm Sunday, with its theme of King and Kingdom, with the open declaration of His identity and purpose, with the challenge to us to decide between being a spectator at the side or a pilgrim on the road, with the encounter of the divine love and the secular city (or was it holy?). This begins Holy Week in which I have planned a short service each evening, taking a theme stage by stage through the week, or considering the events of that final week one by one. Often a few people have attended the first night, but the numbers have steadily grown through the week, and as the custom has become established in the church interest has increased yearly. By Maundy Thursday when we have lived over again the events in the Upper Room, we have begun to sense a new spiritual depth, which has prepared us for Good Friday.

Good Friday has taken many forms. There have been morning and/or evening services, sometimes united or ecumenical, sometimes simply our own congregation. The church has been open throughout the day for quiet prayer, and a steady stream of people from the district have used it. Last year we introduced a new feature, an afternoon session

for children, run on holiday club lines, but with an overall theme suited to the day. This proved a valuable addition in our Christian education programme, because otherwise Sunday work with children has to jump from Palm Sunday to Easter Day, with early or late reference to the final week, and Good Friday in particular.

In Nottingham for many years it has been the custom of the City Centre Group of Churches to have a united Lenten Witness, setting up a cross outside one of the churches on Ash Wednesday, and then moving it to another church in procession each Saturday morning. The route planned always involves going through a major shopping area where crowds of people are gathered, and a short act of worship takes place when the cross is erected. This Lenten Witness comes to its climax on Good Friday when the cross is carried in a large silent procession to the city centre where it stands for the whole day. Each church takes a turn in maintaining a continuous vigil at the cross, a practice which has led to many opportunities of witness and conversation, and has produced many remarkable scenes of humble prayer and devotion. In towns and cities which recognise the day less and less, such witness can be of immense worth. The united open-air service which marks the beginning of the vigil is always well attended.

Saturday of Holy Week is a quiet day of waiting. I have always encouraged believers to make it a day of personal prayer, preparing for Easter celebration. It is also the day for decorating the church with spring flowers to add to the sense of festivity the next morning. All this creates an air of expectancy and excitement; and with the worshipful and theological climate that has been created as we moved forward in spiritual pilgrimage, Easter seems to come with a burst of praise.

Easter Day events can be many and varied. Early morning communion and breakfast, family festivals, special choir music, baptismal services with their obvious symbolism of death and resurrection — all may contribute to the whole-hearted celebration. And it need not stop there, with Easter hymns sung once a year! It can continue in the weeks following, as we unfold the New Testament message of God's continuing work through the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit, with the observance of Ascension Day and yet another significant climax at Whitsun and Trinity Sunday.

Surely enough has been written to indicate the theological and biblical value of such observation of the Christian Year. Our people are so hazy about doctrinal matters. We too often feed them with preaching that is shallow and superficial, more exhortatory than educating, and more devotional than theological. Our services of worship easily become routine, lacking theological depth and purpose, and our prayers are often vague. Here is a way to discipline ourselves in the preparation of worship and preaching. It will make us explore the depths of Christ together. Its gains in our understanding of the Godhead, the eternal purpose, incarnation and atonement, sacrifice, resurrection, eternal life, the Ascension, Trinity, Christology, discipleship, etc. are sure to be many, and this must quicken worship and faith. Those who wish to pursue this further will find help in such publications as *The Calendar and Lectionary* by the Joint Liturgical Group, edited by R. C. D. Jasper and published by the Oxford University Press, and *The Story of the People of God*, edited by Rodney S. Matthews, with a foreword by Dr. Ernest A. Payne, and published by the British Lessons Council.

It remains for me to give outline details of a few themes prepared for use in Holy Week and Easter, in the hope that these might stimulate readers to work out similar ideas in their own situation.

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JESUS** – Palm Sunday: The King. Monday: The Lamb of God. Tuesday: The High Priest. Wednesday: The Beloved Son. Thursday: The Servant. Friday: The Redeemer. Easter Sunday: The Lord.

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CHRIST CONFRONTS . . . ?** – Palm Sunday: The life of a city. Monday: Vested interests. Tuesday: Closed minds. Wednesday: Expediency. Thursday: Status seeking. Friday: Human wrong. Easter Sunday: Death.

**THE VICTORY CHRIST WON** – Palm Sunday: The victory of meekness. Monday: The victory of service. Tuesday: The victory of obedience. Wednesday: The victory of sacrifice. Thursday: The victory of love. Good Friday: Passion readings and music. Easter Sunday: The victory of life.

**THROUGH LENT WITH MARK** – this reached its climax, after working through Mark's Gospel each Sunday in Lent, with a Holy Week series as follows:– Palm Sunday: A borrowed donkey. Monday: A cursed fig-tree. Tuesday: A rejected stone. Wednesday: Wasted ointment. Thursday: A shared supper. Friday: A refused drink. Easter Sunday: An empty grave.

Into such programmes we have occasionally fitted special music by the choir such as Handel's "Passion", Eric Thiman's "Last Supper", and Stainer's "Crucifixion". More recently, in Bristol, we have adjusted the programme to include a number of united services within the local council of churches.

No doubt other patterns of celebration will have been evolved by various readers, and if any of them wish to write with information, I for one would value it. Twenty five years' experience convince me that in devotion, theology, liturgy and faith this sort of celebration, at Passiontide and Easter, is a path to personal and corporate maturity.

Bernard Green

## **TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE? NO BUT . . .**

Each quarter a very large sum of money is spent on posting **FRATERNALS**, because most of them are posted individually. If we were able to save on postage we would have more money available to spend on the production of the actual magazine. This is in fact possible, because as the number of magazines despatched in the same package increases so the cost per magazine decreases. If two are sent in one envelope the cost is reduced from 7p each to 5p. If the number reaches 5 or more the cost can average as little as 3p – more than two for the price of one!

Ministers who are near neighbours, or members of the same team ministry: Fraternalists who meet monthly. There are many possibilities. If you can help in even a small way it will be appreciated.

Please contact the Distribution Secretary, Jim Clarke, giving details of names and addresses or for further information.

**WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION**  
409 Barking Road, Plaistow, London EL3 8AL

My dear Brother Minister,

I am hoping that 1978 will prove in God's good time, to be a year of advance for the work of the West Ham Central Mission, and I invite you to join us in our prayers that this may be so.

I have intimated to the Church Council here that I would like to be released from the Superintendency of the Mission, and my folk here are busy seeking my successor. I have now moved to Suffolk but I am commuting to West Ham for three days a week in order to keep things going pending the arrival of my successor.

In the meantime we are pressing ahead with new plans. We are now beginning to see the bricks rising on our building project, in which we are collaborating with the Baptist Men's Movement Housing Association, and we hope that the first residents will be in by the early summer of 1979.

We are negotiating for a house to be a "satellite" for the work at Greenwoods and we are hoping to start work in this new place early in 1978.

I am also negotiating with a very generous Trust in the hope that it may be possible to make arrangements for the complete rebuilding of our Old Ladies Home (Rest-a-While), but this at the moment is a hope and not a fact!

You see therefore, that we will need all the support in prayer and gifts that we can get during this coming year, and I ask my brethren in the ministry to support us by encouraging their people to take an interest in what we are doing. Above everything else, we ask for your prayers, which have been such a great power in the past history of the Mission.

May God's blessing be on you and on all your own fine work.

Yours very sincerely,  
Stanley Turl  
Superintendent of the Mission

## URBAN MISSION (2)

### Signs of Hope

In my previous article I tried to "set the scene" and sketched out the situation the churches now face in the centre of our big cities. Analysis is easier than answer. Many are teasing out the causes of the urban crisis, few have solutions. But for Christians there are real "signs of hope" for those with eyes to see. The Spirit is working in a variety of ways and I want to list some of the evidence.

In spite of retrenchment, introversion and social difficulties there are lively, loving and active congregations which have reversed the tide of numerical decline. I know of one Baptist church once doomed to close, with an active membership of 6, which under imaginative and able ministerial leadership has grown to 60 and exercises a vigorous local mission. Within the ministry there can be found fresh approaches and new patterns. Many of the team ministries represented at a B.U. Conference in 1976 were set in areas like Bradford, Dagenham and West Ham. More men are engaged in "tent" ministry as they earn money in youth work, teaching, the social services or industry. As churches group together, ministers find themselves responsible for two or more congregations and they are joined by "supplementary" ministers. We have yet to parallel the Bethnal Green experiment of training men for the ministry in their own setting.

Since the city is dominated by buildings our use of premises is both practical and symbolic. The planning of new churches and the adaptation of older premises now carry an unmistakable message of openness and community involvement.

But these basic and traditional aspects of church life (congregation, ministry and building) are being supplemented by new, and in some cases disturbing, features. New congregations are coming into being. Some are charismatic "breakaways" from traditional churches and many of these are Baptist in origin. I know of at least seven "house-churches" in East London which have Baptist origins and offer an intense, evangelical, pentecostal fellowship. Alongside these have come "shop front churches or centres" as Christians have offered their services to the community or reached out in evangelism. In most cases these centres contain a small residential community, a worshipping fellowship, and agencies of outreach. In few instances are they linked with the older churches.

Perhaps the strongest movement is that of the Black churches. Nationally the recent Evangelical Alliance UK Mission Report underlines the numerical growth (125,000) and vitality of these churches. Locally, many of us have watched churches with esoteric labels (Miracle Ministry Mission, Church of First-Born Assemblies, Cherabim and Seraphim Church, Bible Truth Church of God, etc.) take over redundant Free Churches, move into community centres or co-exist alongside white congregations. Their singing is great, their enthusiasm unbounded, their fellowship warm but one wonders about their continuity and relevance to those of their own race with social problems like unemployment and family breakup.

At the same time Asians in the urban scene are gathering for their own religious purposes. I work in a Christian centre for community and caring and we have six Asian groups worshipping alongside two West Indian churches. These Asian groups are Buddhist, Hindu and Sikhs. Close to us we now have a Mission Mosque, a Hindu Temple and two Sikh centres. The presence of non-Christian religions offers a double opportunity. The dialogue in a multi-faith council is paralleled by evangelical action. A redundant local vicarage near us has been taken over by a group of young Christians who are engaged in a mission to Asians.



In the sphere of wider community concern Christians are well to the fore. One of the signs of the times is "A Seminar on Church and Community Development Work with especial reference to the Baptist Union" arranged by our own Ministry and Mission Departments. For a long time Christians in the urban area have been working with others in the local community in action groups. Here in Newham agencies like Mayflower, Newham Community Renewal Programme, Durning Hall and Lawrence Hall (where I work) are working with thousands of local people who share in a "self-help" programme of activity within the community.

Although one of the key urban issues is housing few have fully realised the prophetic work of housing associations in churches like the East London Tabernacle which have been superceded by national associations like the Baptist Men's Movement Housing Association. Here at West Ham the 60 new flats being built will provide sheltered housing for OAP's and base housing for younger people who want to stay in the area and exercise a ministry. The right use of housing like this will provide a strong, locally rooted, Christian Community living alongside our church buildings. Even more importantly, some of our young people who should have moved to the suburbs are now staying in the inner city as an act of commitment. This is one of the really strong "signs of hope" with a counterpart of the searching interest shown by some Baptist Federation Groups who are asking questions about their own role in the future of the urban.

The problems of communication in a largely non-verbal society are being met in many ways. The Christian Publicity Organisation has joined the Scripture Union in the publishing of visual material carrying the Gospel message in print. A wide range of "communities" have come into being to offer an alternative Society to urban men and many of these (whether charismatic or social) are strongly Christian. Within all this, as I indicated in the previous article, are many projects and personalities who have been "infected with the urban bug". The Anglican Evangelical Conference in April this year held a workshop in Urban Mission and now they are calling together a wider group (including Baptists) to take stock, to pool thinking and experience on two themes - "The Gospel for the City" and "Christian Presence in the City" and to plan a longer term strategy for giving the demands of Urban Mission a higher profile amongst the wider Christian Community. This concern is shared by Baptists and cities like London now have their own group of urban activists.

All these manifestations are undoubtedly "signs of hope" and often are clearly the work of the Spirit. But they are only signs, bubbles in the urban river, perhaps with some evidence of a current but far from a tide and certainly not a flood! The magnitude of the problem can be seen in Government research, concern and financial injections. But for believers in the living God there are flashes of light against a sombre background. You will be hearing much of Urban Mission in the future!

Colin Marchant