

# The Fraternal

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# EDITORIAL

Each year, prior to the Annual Assembly, we hope to invite one of our ministers to share with us his hopes and concerns for the denomination. This year Bernard Green has kindly consented to do this for us.

The articles on prayer, together with those we published in our last edition, are the outcome of a working party that met at Regent's Park College a number of times, under the auspices of the W.T. Whitley Trust. Our magazine was asked to provide the platform on which these discussions could be shared with a wider audience and we were happy to comply with the request. We are grateful for the expressions of appreciation we have received for the articles we published last quarter.

Humphrey Vellacott's article was sent to us by the LBA Inner London Committee and, again, we were glad to have the opportunity of publishing it. We hope it will help all our readers as they think their way through their own pastoral situations.

Arthur Coffey continues to gather the material for *Of Interest to you* in spite of his heart attack last year. He has now retired from the pastoral ministry. We wish him well and look forward to his continued service within the BMF.

Among the deaths listed this month is that of Ernest Payne. We give thanks for his life and work. A Baptist minister, he brought honour to our denomination and our ministry.

## What Baptists Ought to be Thinking About in the Next Ten Years.

When one is given a title like this, the question has to be faced whether to write about the Baptist Union and Baptist Missionary Society, or about the local church scene and the Associations. This article is in no way intended as a denominational strategy, but as the expression of convictions about our life together in these various realms. Some are areas of difficulty; others are points of neglect; and yet others take account of the opportunities now being presented to us.

Let us begin by looking at *the Association and the Local Church*. Debate about the role of the Union has often taken place. Many fear what they have seen as steps towards centralisation. I am sure that this has never been power-seeking with any aim of undermining the rightful autonomy of the local church. It has been essentially a policy of encouragement and leadership, to establish stronger links between us all, to ensure better use of our resources and support of the ministry, to enable us to work in greater harmony and with some idea of a national strategy. This I am convinced is necessary. The worst thing that could happen is to place such a stress on local autonomy that we become simply a dispersion of independent units.

However, it is quite clear that the bridges of communication between the Union and the local churches are not as strong as they ought to be. Without

attempting to suggest reasons for this, I would urge that the key to improvement is in the Associations, with all our churches living and working together within them. Too much Association life consists of traditional assemblies and rallies, plus a plethora of routine, administrative committees. We must re-explore the purpose of the Associations in such areas as education, training, inspiration, fellowship, evangelism, social responsibility, and prayer. This will then make us ask about the relationship of the churches together, which needs to be expressed in far more realistic ways than a few enthusiastic delegates from each church attending rallies and committees. When faced with urban and social changes, either of decline or development, the Associations need to become the sphere in which local churches explore together the resources to meet the situation. I am also sure that it is in this context that we must much more imaginatively and vigorously consider the future of our many pastorless and rural churches. In recent years the Union has tended to a policy of its staff being more active within Association life. I think that this should be still more developed, with the result that Council and Committee agendas are more determined by the concerns arising within the Associations. The local church is undoubtedly the most important context of mission, but it will only be truly effective as it finds this sort of life with others in the Association and Union.

We also need to follow similar lines within the *Baptist Missionary Society*. For too long there has been confusion and overlap with county Associations and missionary Auxiliaries, frequently leading to separation of home and overseas mission. We have even developed in some parts of the land groups of enthusiasts who support one or the other but not both! This separation in mission is thoroughly unscriptural, as well as being wasteful. The time has come for us to establish patterns of cooperation which bring Association and Auxiliary together, coordinating their appeals, events and publicity, backed by a determined bringing together of the B.U. and B.M.S. at a national level.

Apparently a major problem in the past has been how to reconcile BU/BMS relationships with the Society's links with the Welsh and Scottish Unions. I do not believe that this is insurmountable, and it is of paramount importance that we once and for all tackle the English situation.

When we turn to *the local church* much thought is currently being given to concepts of church growth. Without doubt growth in maturity and in numbers is needed. There are many signs of hope, but we must honestly recognise that there are far too many churches in which there is a steady numerical decline and a predominantly elderly membership. The outlook for such churches is bleak, unless some earnest prayer and strategic thinking is undertaken, to ensure that new, younger leadership is grown for the future, and effective outreach is begun in the community around.

All our churches need to re-examine their patterns of fellowship. Gavin Reid in his valuable little book, *Good News to Share*, states that "the church on the corner is meant by Jesus to be Good News. Its members are meant to be Good News people .... Part of the Good News is that God's Spirit can take those who turn to Jesus and build them into a fellowship trying to support each other and to share the love of God in various ways. A local church is

meant to be a friendly neighbourhood Godsend!" He goes on to talk about the Gospel which we share and then concludes, "With such a huge truth in common nothing should prevent a quality of fellowship such as the world has never seen. Alas the world has not yet seen it ...." The building of pastoral churches is of crucial importance, particularly in a growingly impersonal society, and we must look closely at ways of becoming magnetic and open fellowships, with member to member ministries of care, encouragement and truly Christ-like love.

We also need to re-examine the programme of the local church. On the whole we are still trying to maintain a week of meetings structured several decades ago, without any deep assessment of aims, needs, or spiritual results. One thing the denominational report *Signs of Hope* has stressed is the need to keep the life of the church under constant review. Do we hold too many meetings? are they being laboriously maintained with diminishing returns, out of loyalty to the past rather than with a spiritual strategy for today and tomorrow? What do they provide for the care and growth of new Christians? Do they use the gifts, both natural and spiritual, which exist within the membership? Are there so many of them that there is no time to evangelise? How much leadership training is there? What account is taken of the changes in social, industrial and domestic patterns of life, which inevitably affect attendance? Are we taking enough account of the proven value of cellular structures and the small group potential for growth? I raise the questions without attempting to answer them, because I believe the answers will be different in each church. I have no doubt that in the next few years these are the sorts of questions Baptists must face if we are to grow as we should.

Now a word of caution. Let us not become so obsessed with the local church and its growth that we forget our ultimate goal. That is not the Church but *the Kingdom*. Church and Kingdom are not one and the same. The Church is called to be the bearer of the message of the Kingdom, the agent of the Kingdom, even in some sense a visible embodiment of the Kingdom; but the Kingdom is larger and wider than the Church. This means that we must avoid at all costs ingrown churches and evangelical hot-houses. There must be a stream of life and witness flowing out into the community, making its presence felt in the secular struggles of humanity. Our members must be creatively involved in the concerns of city, town and village. *The Ministry* is another subject of great importance in this context. Much has been written about changing functions of ministry, team ministry, every-member ministry, the ministry of elders, and so on. I do not wish to embark on that voyage here. However, I believe that the stewardship of the ministry is a matter of vital concern. We need to explore what are the essential tasks of the minister in the local church and then develop lay leadership in such a way as to release him for those tasks. In view of the significance of the local churches in mission we ought to ask awkward questions about how many ministers we can afford to tie up in Union and Association administration. New forms of ordained ministry are also being called for — in industry and higher education, in new towns and inner cities, in scattered rural areas, in ecumenical experiments, and in local radio. If our Union constitution and Home Mission Scheme inhibit these, surely we must

make constitutional amendments to release men and money for tomorrow's needs, rather than allow our constitutions to put the brakes on hard just at the moment of potential advance in some new pioneering work. I would make the same plea about ecumenical ministry. Some Baptists hesitate considerably here. Yet undoubtedly there are, and there are likely to be, areas of need in some of the spheres just mentioned where ecumenical ministry is the obvious answer. Let us not be so narrowly Baptist that we exclude ourselves more often than we should.

Any attempt to cover the subject which I was given for this article is bound to be incomplete. Most readers will think of matters which have been omitted, and I have not time and space to mention all that I would have liked. In closing therefore I want to refer without elaboration to a few topics which I am convinced merit further thought.

There is an urgent need for more teaching material and practical literature specifically related to our life as Baptists. Since the demise of the Carey Kingsgate Press we have not had sufficient supplies of such material. We still have a long way to go before we use the mass media effectively. With wider development of local radio and with the progress in video equipment and other electronic marvels, we must consider how these can be used for the Kingdom's sake. The Christian Training Programme, the "Released for Action" scheme, and other similar projects from within the Ministry and Mission Departments have given us an excellent lead in yet another area of urgent need — namely, the training of lay leaders and lay preachers. How crucial this is going to be if we are to grasp the nettle of pastorless and rural churches, and do more than simply keep them going.

These are exciting days to be in the Church and ministry. They are far more promising than my earlier years in the ministry. May God give us the spiritual vision, the apostolic boldness and the willing obedience that will match us to the hour.

Bernard Green

## **The Prayer of the Christian Community**

One of the great problems of personal prayer is its loneliness, the feeling that the burden of faith is carried alone, the sense of grievous inadequacy in the face of some of those contemporary needs for which we offer our prayers and the realization that our personal resources are limited and often inadequate. To begin to speak of prayer in the setting of personal devotion will serve only to increase the sense of apprehension that the individual feels when he begins to pray.

Personal prayer needs to start from the experience of prayer within community. This may occur at various levels, in church, in small groups or in the family. Here we shall concentrate on the prayer of the worshipping community met together for its Sunday celebration.

# WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

409, Barking Road, Plaistow, London, E13 8AL

My Dear Fellow Minister,

In my last letter to the Fraternal, I mentioned the possibility of Orchard House closing down. Since then, the inevitable decision has had to be made, and with effect from the end of 1979 we terminated our work among boys in Orchard House. I should like to place on record the gratitude of the Mission to those who have led the work there for something like 30 years. There are many men in the community today whose lives were radically changed through the influence of Orchard House. It is a matter of considerable satisfaction to me that Stuart Fuller, the last Principal there, has found a post as a Probation Officer in Essex, and will still be living not far from Orchard House and maintaining an interest in the Mission. We wish him and his family God's blessing in the future. I know that you will pray for us as we seek God's will regarding the future use of Orchard House. There is a possibility that it might be used at least in part as a Conference/Retreat Centre. There will be accommodation for something like 25 guests on a self-catering or full board basis. If you think this facility could be of use to any of your church groups, perhaps you would get in touch with me as soon as possible.

I am writing this letter early in March, and after years of waiting and planning and praying, there is tangible evidence that our new development is going ahead. The demolition contractors are now at work on the familiar buildings on the Barking Road, and we hope that by the middle of June the building of our Mission Headquarters, our new Home for Old People and the Hospice for the care of the terminally ill will begin. Already, we have appointed a nursing Officer who will be in charge of the Hospice when it opens late in 1981. He is a young man at present serving in the Medical Branch of the Royal Navy. He is profoundly committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, and eminently qualified to do the work to which we are calling him. We know that the Lord, who we believe has begun this good work, will bring it to completion and provide all that we shall need in terms of finance, personnel and guidance as we undertake this new and challenging task.

Finally, may I ask you to pray for us as we seek to discover God's will concerning the Family Centre. We believe that God is calling us to exercise a ministry in this vital area. We hope, before very long, to institute a programme of research, education, training and counselling. No one can doubt that there is a tremendous need for this kind of ministry. We want to place what experience and expertise we have gained at the disposal of the whole denomination, and we should greatly appreciate your loving and prayerful support. May the Lord bless you and give you deep satisfaction in your work for him.

Yours sincerely,  
TREVOR W. DAVIS, M.A.  
Superintendent.

## Prayer in the Sunday celebration

The early Fathers of the church sometimes referred to Sunday as the eighth day. Under the old covenant God rested on the seventh day, under the new Christ lay within the tomb. Under the old covenant God had completed the work of creation, under the new Christ, through the resurrection, inaugurated the new creation. Sunday is the continuing celebration that looks back with gratitude to the salvation brought by Christ in the cross and resurrection, rejoices here and now in the presence of the Risen Christ and looks forward to that consummation at the end of all things when God himself will be the light, the temple and the altar in the midst of his people.

'But this seventh shall be our sabbath, whose end shall not be the evening, but the Lord's day, as the eighth eternal day, which is sanctified and made holy by the resurrection of Christ, prefiguring not only the rest of the spirit, but also of the body. There we shall rest and see, we shall see and love, we shall love and we shall praise' (St. Augustine, **City of God**, quoted by A.E. Dyson *Freedom in Love* p.106).

It is necessary for us to recall this joyous origin of our Sunday worship and the hope towards which it looks. It is out of such joy that prayer springs. We shall find prayer elusive if our worship is characterised by Victorian stolidity and inflexible structures on the one hand, or an unhealthy pre-occupation with what is novel or trendy on the other. Joy in worship or in prayer is not the product of a well-calculated manipulation of the more volatile aspects of our human awareness. Joy rather springs from our faith that, by the sheer grace of God, we are guests at:

'... a delightful wedding feast ... where the laughter rings out, the dance has just begun, and the best wine is still to be served' (Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools* p.162).

Prayer is part of that joy, for we are a diverse community gathered in the presence of God who is our Father. It is diverse because all manner of people have been invited to share in the banquet (Luke 14:21-24), it is joyous because it is God himself who presides and who reveals himself to be our Father (Matthew 6:9, Romans 8:15). Our prayers are shared, they are part of the conversation of the whole Christian family. They are offered within the relationship of love, the love of Christ's people for one another, and the love that together God the Father bears for them and they for him.

At the heart of worship is Holy Communion. We call it by various names — the breaking of bread, emphasising the fellowship aspect of the meal; the Lord's Supper, emphasising the Lord's institution of the sacrament or communion, again emphasising our fellowship with one another and with Christ. In many traditions it is also called the Eucharist, from the New Testament Greek word 'eucharistia', which means 'thanksgiving'. It would be good if we Baptists could become more familiar with this word, coming as it does from the pages of the New Testament and catching the note of joyous thanksgiving that is sometimes lacking in our celebration of the communion service.

The Eucharist is full of contrasts that are instructive of the way we pray and what we pray about: (i) There is the contrast between matter and spirit.

Eucharist is celebrated with ordinary bread and wine, yet, however we interpret it, we recognise that Christ is graciously present in our celebration. Thus what is seen becomes either, at the least, a pointer to Christ and his love or, at the most, a vehicle through which it is given to us.

(ii) There is a contrast between the infinite and the intimate. Eucharist points us to God as he was seen in vision by the author of Revelation. He is distant and glorious (1.12ff; 4.1-11; 5.6-14). It points us also to him who sat at table and was made known in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:30). He is as eternity and less than arm's length away.

(iii) There is contrast between life and death. The Eucharist unites us with eternity and with all the people of God in the Church triumphant (Hebrews 12:1, 18-29). There is also the visible presence of our contemporaries with whom we now share in the adoration of God and are together recipients of his grace.

(iv) There is a contrast between sorrow and joy. The action of the Eucharist recounts the breaking of Christ's body and the out-pouring of his life's blood. Yet it is not a morbid recollection of a martyr death. Christ is alive and present with us. The wounds are there, as they were in the Upper Room (John 20:19) but the Lord is there also.

What does this teach us about prayer?

In the first place, that prayer has to do with the world in which we live and not with an activity that is spiritually divorced from it. Prayer is as fundamental as breathing. What we do together on Sunday must never be relegated to a ghetto activity that thrusts outside its walls our day by day concerns, earning a living, being politically involved, raising children, eating and drinking, making love. The corporate prayer of the church needs to recognise the world in which prayer is offered, the world in which its members live and the world beyond their immediate ken which is nevertheless the world of God's universal concern.

Secondly, in approaching God we have to hold a balance between awe and intimacy, between pious fear and adoring love. God is not to be manipulated, led safely on the leash of sound doctrine, impeccable liturgy or middle-class aspiration. In freedom we come to him who is free. He is utterly consistent with himself, but this does not mean that we can presume to understand all his ways and therefore always predict what he will do. It is especially important that we remember this in prayer. God is not 'in our pocket', there are no immutable laws of cause and effect which, if only we can discover them, will inevitably give the sort of divine response we deem to be fitting.

Thirdly, we live with life and death. We live with the witness and inheritance of those who have gone before us, with the life and death of those we love and with our own life and death. Our mortality and more, the mortality of our loved ones, makes us lean more heavily on him who is our hope and at whose hands we shall receive mercy.

Fourthly, in life we have to learn to live with both sorrow and joy. Prayer is not to be used as a path to what we normally construe to be happiness. As Hillaire Belloc once said, '... no grown man or woman can really be very happy for long — (only) reasonably happy'. We shall live with joy and pain, with success and with failure, in the 'fat' years and in the 'lean' years. Prayer



is not an insurance policy against the dark side of human experience. Rather it creates that faithful spirit that so cleaves to God that, through the power of the resurrection, joy is brought out of the darkest episodes in our lives.

These are some of the pre-suppositions from which the congregation prays. How can its prayer be made a corporate act? It is important that what we do is seen to be a shared activity, a joining of hands within the community.

(1) The traditional pastoral prayer, offered by the presiding minister on behalf of the congregation is not necessarily the 'ministerial monologue' it is lampooned as being by rather more enthusiastic supporters of liturgical or charismatic reforms. At its best, it is a sensitive voicing of the people's needs and aspirations, arising out of the tensions and blessings of life within the Christian church. It is uttered by one who is *at least* as near to the diverse needs of the people as anyone else and therefore can seek that healing balm that can be part of the benediction of worship. If the people are blessed by the prophetic role of the preacher they are also blessed by the pastoral role of the man or woman of prayer.

(2) In any congregation there are people who are involved in various aspects of public life. Their knowledge is expert, they are aware of the stresses and peculiar needs of the vocations they pursue. The prayers of intercession can be enormously enriched by such people being invited to lead. A depth and scope can be brought to prayer that will not always be possible if it is the sole responsibility of an individual. Further, the congregation will be more aware of the needs of the individual who leads the prayers. Our daily prayers for one another will be better informed. If a teacher has led the prayers then his fellow members will themselves be better able to pray for school teachers in the congregation, aware of the opportunities and problems that they face day by day.

(3) Opportunities for 'open' prayer can be afforded in public worship, though questions of acoustics and the differing backgrounds of the congregation may not always make this practicable. Such prayer is largely dependent upon a sense of homogeneity, a fair degree of open-ness between the participants and a freedom to respond. It is not nearly as well suited to public worship as it is to the small group.

(4) The congregation can be invited to suggest topics for prayer either by writing them on pieces of paper which are gathered up during the service or by handing them to the presiding minister before. This way provides open channels for people to bring their particular burdens for prayer without the drawbacks of 'open' prayer.

These are only a few suggestions. What works in one congregation will not necessarily work in another. What is important is that each congregation is open to the prompting of the Spirit and constantly seeking ways in which all the people of God have a heightened sense of involvement in the prayers of the church.

### **Personal Prayer**

Where the individual is grounded in the corporate Sunday worship of the church and supported by the closer fellowship ties of the small group, his

personal prayer life will retain a strong awareness of its corporate setting. Even though he prays alone, yet still he prays in fellowship. Prayer is not an activity that begins and ends when he goes on his knees and rises from them. Prayer is there before he prays and continues when he has ended.

As the Psalmist wrote,

'Thou knowest all, whether I sit down or rise up;

Thou has discerned my thought from afar off.

Thou hast traced my journey and my resting places,

And art familiar with all my paths.' (Psalm 139.2,3)

Corporate prayer requires a discipline of time and place. This is in part theological and in part because it is corporate. The time is set by the established tradition of meeting together on the first day of the week, the Lord's day. This, in turn, derives from the Jewish practice of keeping one day in seven holy, set aside for God, for the offering of the people's praise and the study of the holy scriptures. The discipline is also corporate — if there is to be any gathered community, then the community must know when and where it is to gather. Personal prayer requires no less discipline, of time if not necessarily of place. Prayer is not sustained by sudden flights of fancy, short-lived pious aspirations or short bursts of energy.

This sense of the corporate has, in the Christian church, traditionally been maintained by praying the Daily Office. The Daily Office is a simple form of prayer, based on the Psalter and the seasons of the Christian year. It provides a pattern of prayer that individuals can follow, knowing that countless other individuals in different places are engaged in the same acts of prayer.

The history of the practice is obscure, but there are good reasons to believe that it has its origins in Judaistic piety. Certain Psalms were recited at the beginning and end of the day. Acts of devout recollection at three-hourly intervals were also encouraged. In the church the morning prayer became known as Lauds and evening prayer as Vespers. The 'acts of recollection' became known as the 'little hours' of terce, sext and none, Christians being encouraged to offer brief prayers, wherever they were or whatever the task in which they were engaged, at nine in the morning, mid-day and three in the afternoon. The original intention of the Daily Office was that it should provide the core of 'the prayer of the church', an ongoing stream of prayer into which the individual Christian could enter knowing himself to be part of a far-flung community of prayer. Unfortunately, the content of the Office became more and more lengthy until finally it was delegated to the monasteries who ordered and centered their lives around the praying of the Office. Whereas this infinitely enriched the spiritual life of the monastic communities it left the mass of Christians still engaged in the life of the secular world without a form of prayer that had originally been designed for their needs.

In contemporary times there have been successful attempts to simplify the Office and restore it to its original role of 'the prayer of the church'. In this simplified form it consists mainly of morning and evening prayer. A hymn is said or sung. There are readings, one from scripture and another from Christian literature. Three psalms are prayed, the psalter being prayed

in rotation. After a short reading, a verse or two that narrows down the area for reflection, the Benedictus is prayed in the morning and the Magnificat in the evening. There is then room for individual petitions, culminating in the Lord's Prayer and a collect. The office ends with the blessing.

Clearly, Baptists will not take to this form of prayer as to the manner born or nurtured. They could, however, look in far less helpful directions for a style of prayer that is meaningful, provides a helpful structure and which is strongly corporate in character.

Churches could develop their own type of simplified daily office. Agreement to read the scriptures daily in one or another of the various scripture reading schemes would provide a common starting point for each individual's time of prayer. A simplified structure of, say, a psalm, the Lord's Prayer and a verse of scripture for meditation would reduce some of the aversion to 'bookish' prayer. Each church could have its own list of suggested topics for intercession thus providing a common point of attention. Within this structure the individual could create as much time for his own personal response to God as he felt he needed. The point is that when the individual feels his resources are at low ebb at least where there is a structure there is a prayer-life into which he can enter and he is spared the burden of raking around his limited spiritual vocabulary forever looking for fresh words to say.

Even without a simple office the church could still do much to encourage a corporate sense of personal prayer. Prayer lists issued Sunday by Sunday, suggested times in the day when members are encouraged to pause and remember a particular need, these provide some basis for people to relate to one another without necessarily meeting physically.

Michael Walker

## **Prayer in the Small Group**

'God's Frozen People'. Alas this title is still as pertinent today as when Gibbs and Morton brought out their book by that name in 1956. Our churches — yes, even our Baptist churches with their long cherished conviction of the priesthood of all believers — are for the most part frozen when it comes to the expression of their corporate life in Christ. Thus in many of our churches the focal point of togetherness is the Sunday service — the Sunday service where the average worshipper is called to affirm rather than to share, to react passively rather than respond actively; the Sunday service where the congregation sits in its serried ranks of pews, resembling more a theatre audience than a community of the Lord's people gathered together. Not that we would belittle the Sunday service: the large scale celebration of the faith in sermon and in 'liturgy', in the twin ordinances of Believers Baptism and the Lord's Supper, has a vitally important place. But the Sunday service does not do justice to the depth of our corporate life in Christ. An extra dimension is needed: the dimension of small groups.

One of the choicest fruits of the charismatic movement is its fresh emphasis upon the Church as the Body of Christ, and its subsequent development of the concept of 'Body Ministry'. 'Charismatics' have taken

the Apostle Paul to heart when he wrote: "For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them" (Romans 12.4-6).

As Baptists we too need to take seriously this concept of the Body of Christ where members are able to minister mutually one to another (cf. 1 Corinthians 12-14). For most of us this 'Body Ministry' is not practical — nor perhaps even desirable — on a Sunday. On the one hand our buildings are not designed for eyeball to eyeball contact; on the other hand, our congregations are generally too large for this kind of activity.<sup>1</sup> A number of churches are therefore finding it helpful to create small weekday groups alongside the main Sunday 'celebratory' group. In some ways their set-up reflects the initial pattern of the early church, where, on the one hand, they met in the Temple for worship, and on the other hand they met in homes for fellowship (Acts 2.46).<sup>2</sup>

In Acts 2.42 Luke describes the first Christians as spending their time "in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers". Doubtless much of this went on in small groups — not least the prayers.

Jesus himself on one occasion said: "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18.19,20). Jesus spoke here of the twos and threes. No doubt we can quite legitimately apply this to the twenties and thirties, the two hundreds and the three hundreds, and even the two thousands and the three thousands. However, in the first instance this was spoken of the small group, and so this gives particular encouragement to the creation of small groups for prayer.

The advantages of the small prayer group are several. Firstly, it is here that the new Christian may learn to pray. All too often we have expected new Christians to grow on their own in the Christian life. Yet we ask this of no ordinary child: for him the family is where the learning process begins. This is particularly applicable to prayer. It is not enough for prayer to be part of the syllabus of a baptismal class — rather what is needed is 'on the job training', the experience of a small praying group. For in the end prayer is not taught but 'caught'. Unfortunately, sometimes the only prayers a new Christian hears are the prayers of the minister on a Sunday. This is not enough. The new Christian needs to see 'ordinary' Christians bringing 'ordinary' concerns to God in prayer. The small group often forms the best setting for this activity. Here the new Christian may — perhaps for the first time — see others praying. In so doing he learns not so much the jargon of prayer (heaven forbid!) as simply how to pray.

A second advantage is that it is in the small group that many busy housewives have been helped to pray. Whether we like it or not, there are many mothers with young children who find it difficult to establish 'Quiet Times' of their own — this is especially true of those who have non-Christian husbands. For them the weekly small prayer group has been a spiritual lifeline. Such a prayer group might meet of a morning for an hour. The

difficulty here is the children. Some groups pray while the children play in their midst; others take turns in looking after the children in one room, while the rest pray. Alternatively some groups meet of a late evening when the children have gone to bed. Contrary to expectation, such groups do not necessarily need a strong leader. What is, however, needed is the willingness and openness to share concerns. Very often in such groups half the time is spent in sharing — for only then can matters be meaningfully brought to God by the whole group.

Thirdly, it is in the small group that Christians in general can develop in their Christian life. At no stage do we 'come of age' — or, at least, not in the sense that we become incapable of further growth. We all have much further to go along the path of prayer. Thus it is that we learn not to abuse prayer. All too often our private prayers are thoroughly selfish and non-Christian (did Jesus promise to answer the prayer of 'two' or 'three' precisely because this selfish element is more likely to be lacking?). Furthermore, it is in meeting with others that our prayer life receives stimulus and encouragement. We all go through periods of spiritual dryness. This dryness can be relieved in the sharing of our prayer life. Indeed, it is our belief that the key to the renewal of personal prayer and devotion lies in the taking of our corporate life in the family of God more seriously.

Fourthly, in the small group all may participate. The large group inhibits, whereas confidence is quickly gained in the small group. Opinions vary as to the maximum size of the ideal small group. In our opinion, if a group grows to twelve in number, it should consider dividing into two further groups. Not to divide is to head for difficulty. It may be that it is precisely because many of our churches have not taken small prayer groups seriously that the traditional mid-week meeting has become dead — if not non-existent. Where the mid-week meeting still flourishes, we suggest that for the actual time of prayer, the meeting be divided into small groups. There are various ways of doing this: for example, people can be numbered off or divided up into groups according to the month in which they were born. If such divisions prove artificial, the ice can easily be broken by, for instance, getting each member of the group to name one thing for which they are thankful to God, and one thing for which they need prayer: prayer can then be made for each person in the group by his or her neighbour to the right!

Fifthly, it is in such small groups for prayer that the joys and problems of the Christian life are shared. In the large group prayers tend to be abstract and impersonal, whereas in the small group prayers can become concrete and very personal. In other words, instead of just praying for 'them', we begin to pray for 'us'. It is at that stage that for many of us prayer begins to become real and vital.

Needless to say, if such prayer groups are to get off the ground, there must be honesty and trust in the relationship — there must be depth of fellowship. It may be true that prayer leads to a deepening of fellowship, but fellowship is also the necessary presupposition for prayer. Fellowship, unfortunately, is a much abused word. Thus Howard Snyder in his provocative book, *New Wineskins*, writes: "Most of what passes for fellowship in the church — whatever its value — is something distinctly less

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## To the Readers of the Fraternal

Dear Friends,

"I thought my policy was Comprehensive"

Anon

In letting "C" stand for Comprehensive on this alphabetical insurance ramble, I am grasping a nettle. The word has been much misunderstood and frequently a source of irritation between Insurers and Insured. "But surely comprehensive covers everything!" has been heard at least as often as the other stock phrase above. My dictionary defines Comprehensive as "including much", and this seems to me a good definition. "Much" is of course very different from "everything".

Probably because of its tendency to be misunderstood, the use of the word comprehensive to describe insurance policies has decreased of recent years, although it still persists widely in motor insurance. It was once common as a description of what we call our Houseowners and Householders policies on the buildings and contents of private dwellings. These covers are very wide but we would not pretend every eventuality is covered. One very good reason for this is that our clients would not wish to pay for every risk to be covered. For example, just losing ordinary household items as distinct from loss or damage by fire, theft etc., can be a nuisance, but of no serious financial importance. However, for a stone to be lost from an engagement ring is a very different matter. Most people would prefer to reserve this "All Risks" cover at comparatively high cost for a limited number of items, and take a chance on losing ordinary domestic articles.

It can be a question of priorities. It would be quite tempting to issue a sort of "all-in" Church policy even if we avoided the dreaded word "Comprehensive". However, not all Churches are exposed to the same risks. A Church built on the top of a hill can find other uses for its funds than flood insurance. Again, the amount of money diaconates have available for insurance varies from Church to Church and I return to my theme that first, fire insurance must be arranged for a proper figure and liability insurance. That secured, many other worthwhile covers must be selected according to individual circumstances.

Yours sincerely

M.E. Purver

General Manager

than *Koinonia*. It is 'cheap fellowship' parallel to Bonhoeffer's 'cheap grace'. At best it is a friendly fraternizing — appealing but easily duplicated outside the church".<sup>3</sup> Fellowship is indeed more than friendly fraternizing — it involves sharing at the deepest of levels. As Michael Griffiths puts it: "Christians need to become aware that they are not solitary searchers after truth, isolated wrestlers with temptation, and lonely worshippers confined within the limits of their own subjective religious experience".<sup>4</sup> Paul calls us to "help to carry one another's burdens, and in this way ... obey the law of Christ" (Galatians 6.2). But this can only be done in the small group, bound together in the fellowship of prayer. There we can indeed sorrow and rejoice together (1 Corinthians 12.26). There we can fulfil the injunction of James 5.16: "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you will be healed".<sup>5</sup> Such sharing does not come easily to most of us. For to share means that we have to cease to pretend.

Ideally the church gathers for worship on a Sunday and for fellowship in small groups during the week. The actual time of each group meeting will, of course, vary. Housewives may meet of a mid-morning, but businessmen (and women!) may prefer to meet of an early morning. We know of a group that meets from 6.45-7.15 a.m. — the members then return to their homes for breakfast prior to going to work. Other people may prefer to meet of an evening or on a Saturday morning. The time is unimportant. What is important is the regularity.

Sometimes, however, a church may set aside a special time for prayer. Thus, a church may at regular intervals hold half-nights of prayer. These can be profitable provided (a) the larger group is divided into small groups; and (b) these small groups are changed around during the evening. We do not suggest that such evening be entirely devoted to prayer. At regular intervals time will be spent in sharing needs — preferably according to some structured pattern. Coffee will perhaps be served half-way through. It's amazing how quickly the evening slips by! Indeed, in our experience, the longer such a session, the better. Needless to say, one must be comfortable: often a large private home is the best setting. Church growth experts tell us that such a structure leads to growth. However, in our opinion such a structure is not only the key to numerical growth, it is also the key to spiritual growth — both of the body as a whole, and of the individual in particular. For only within the small group is real 'body ministry' possible — the kind Paul describes when he writes: "By speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way into Christ, who is the head. Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love" (Ephesians 4.15,16: cf. Colossians 2.19).

Paul Beasley-Murray

## Notes

1. Eduard Schweitzer calculated that the pattern of worship carried out in the Corinthian church could not well be carried out with a congregation of

over fifty. What happens when one does get large groups meeting regularly Sunday by Sunday and having open contributions is that a very confined group of men largely lead the service: the ministry of one man is replaced by the ministry of the few.

2. This pattern of meeting in the Temple and in homes did not last for long. As the church spread from Jerusalem it rapidly lost its Jewish roots. True, the Jewish Christians of the Dispersion will have worshipped in the synagogues until the last quarter of the first century, when they were finally driven out on the charge of being heretics (the letter of James was addressed in all probability to the members of a synagogue); but for Christians of Gentile origin worship will have centred on the home. Church buildings as such did not exist for the first two hundred years of the church's existence. Churches were organised almost exclusively in homes — in cities like Rome, where there were thousands of Christians, there will have been scores of such house churches — constituting in each city one church. It could be maintained that by arguing for small groups by reference to the early church we are in fact seeking to make a virtue of what was a necessity. We believe not: mutual ministry was basic to Paul's thinking about the church, whereas, for example, his teaching on women's veils was not!

3. H A Snyder, *New Wineskins* London 1977 p82.

4. M Griffiths, *Cinderella with amnesia* London 1975 p133.

5. James was speaking of the physical healing, but we can no doubt apply this more generally to the healing of the whole man — body, mind and spirit. Indeed we may apply it to the healing of relationships, both within and without the group.

## **A Church in the Inner City**

*(This article was originally presented as a paper to the Inner London Committee of the London Baptist Association.)*

I find myself embarrassed when asked to speak or write about my own church. Credit and blame are nearly always wrongly apportioned. Also one has received so many glowing accounts which when examined on the ground prove to have been either gross exaggerations or even completely false. But at the request of the Committee I suppose the bald facts may be stated.

It was nearly 12 years ago that I was called to East Ham - a church which had fallen on bad times but was strategically placed in east London. Our first morning congregation consisted of four adults met in a great barn of a building listed as having 1,000 seats. Today on any Sunday morning 150-200 are normally present. Of these over 90% have recently found Christ or been restored from long backsliding. Many have gone from us all over the world.

The offerings have risen from £3 to £200.



The congregation is multi-national and closely integrated. In a recent gathering we identified representatives of ten different ethnic origins.

From our congregation three other congregations have been financed and staffed and are making steady progress.

Presumably the Committee do not want an account of the appalling frustrations and crises and failures and disappointments during these years. We all know too much about them already. But I refer to them just to avoid giving the impression that the going has ever been easy. Far from it!

I was asked to put my point of view about ministerial attitudes and qualifications for the rescue of our ailing causes. I propose therefore, to state six principles which I see as essential.

(1) A recognition that all blessing is *The Action Of God*. It is He who takes all initiatives and sustains all His people's work and worship. A careful reading of the Acts of the Apostles leads to this conclusion. Is there a single instance there in which advance was made as the result of man's calculated planning? Perhaps the choice of Matthias could be considered an exception. But the result of that was hardly earth shattering!

If this is so, and if the same principle applies today, then it is to God we must turn. Without His initiative and sustenance we shall be flailing around in ineffective activity however efficiently we operate.

Ask yourself, what is the prime cause of our weakness and failure? Surely, if we are honest, we shall admit that it is that God has withdrawn His blessing and favour from us. If so, then clearly our first business is to get ourselves and our people absolutely right with Him. This must pre-occupy us completely before we make any moves at all.

It means also that our primary weapon is prayer. Now I am not talking of just increasing prayer meetings, and our own time spent in prayer. It is not words that are needed, but a complete reliance upon God in everything and at all times, both by ourselves and our people. We must look in all things to Him, and in nothing to men or methods. "My soul, wait thou only upon God".

This is the most difficult lesson of all for us to learn. But it must be learned before ever we start on the path of recovery.

(2) Having taken this position we must now insist on *Positive Attitudes* about everything. Our churches, by and large, have lost hope because they have got into the habit of blaming or crediting men, organisations and circumstances. They have ceased to expect God's intervention and live by calculation and expediency. The result is disaster.

Perhaps we ought to drop the word "faith" and substitute the word "hope", which after all, is scriptural enough. The idea of "faith" has become divorced from the idea of a living, active, God. It has become devalued by modern thinking and is often used by those who still exclude from their consciousness the idea of God in action. Somehow we must restore this idea and get our people into a state of expectancy.

If this can be done then every deacons' meeting and every church meeting will be transformed. Decisions taken will be positive, definite and expectant. Every gathering of God's people will be joyful and fruitful. Every apparant obstacle will become a rung in the upward ladder of progress and will not bring depression but elation. We shall learn to "laugh at impossibilities".

(3) Alongside of this there must be *A Ruthless Teaching of Christ's Way*. Our commission is not only to "preach the gospel ... baptizing ..." but also to "teach them to observe all that I have commanded you". Indeed this *is* our Gospel. Salvation without this is no salvation at all. The house built on sand is the house of the man (or the community) which "hears the words of Jesus but does not do them".

His way is stated in the manifesto of the Kingdom - the Sermon on the Mount. All of us must stand on these principles or we build on sand.

It is our business as ministers to press His teaching home unashamedly and constantly. And we must apply it specifically to every situation and to every individual. The main demand is for absolute and unconditional love to everyone associated with us, regardless of likes and dislikes, of past offences and present temperament. It must be made absolutely clear that the Christian way involves the end of self interest and the giving of priority to the other - *Always!* No-one has a right to call themselves a Christian who will not come this way.

Such preaching will inevitably give much offence and especially to some "established" Christians. But it must be persisted in. If some leave on account of it, this must be accepted, though with tears. In due course God will fill the gaps.

(4) *Gimmicks are Out*. They are but the expression of passing fashion or cursory interest. They seldom leave anything worthwhile behind them. Even the ubiquitous pop groups can be a dangerous diversion, though they may have a value in providing light relief to the main serious programme. Entertainment has its place, I suppose, in any community! But if the church tries to live on pop groups or gimmicks or any other kind of tit-bits, ill-health and general decline are quite inevitable.

In this connection I have a special antipathy to the youth emphasis. "Glorious youth" — "the hope of the future", etc., etc., are phrases for Nazis and Communists and other materialists, not for the Church. The Church is a single unit or it is nothing. All ages within it must be fully associated and mutually dependent. If you once allow anything else every age group will suffer and the body as a whole become feeble. The old and the young, and all ages between, become deprived. All of us need each other always. Any division of interest is sophism and grievous to the Spirit of God.

(5) *A Completely Open Attitude to all who bear "The Name"*. I take John 15:2 very seriously. "No branch can bear fruit of itself but only if it remains united to the vine". The blessing of God is on *all* His people and the life of every branch depends on its attachment to the whole body which is Christ's body.

The question arises "Can this be done by a full Biblicist like myself?" Well, we have tried to do it, and I think we have succeeded in some measure. Of course the non-Biblicists tend to draw off and get on with their job in their way and leave us to get on with ours. But one can avoid the severing or souring of relationships if an attitude of complete goodwill is maintained. At our services we pray for all the neighbouring churches individually by name, and their ministers. And we don't pray *against* them but *for* them!!

If we can't do this is it not a confession of weakness rather than of strength? Our living Gospel can give a good account of itself in the rough

and tumble of theological, philosophical and sociological controversy. If firmly and graciously persisted in, it will come out of the melée victorious, or at least commanding the respect of the others. Of course some may reveal themselves as “enemies of the Cross of Christ”, in which case they stand exposed by the encounter before God and man. Our witness has been to them the “witness of death unto death”, which, after all, is part of our ministry (2 Cor. 2:15, 16).

(6) In all this we must teach *The Bible as it is*. It must not be put in the straight-jacket of a particular tradition. It is the great desacralizer of all traditions — a sword destroying all our sacred cows. Kierkegaard’s “No-one any longer reads the Bible humanly”, is no doubt an overstatement, but I would go with him so far as to say that very few do so. Too often it is used to feed our prejudice. The Bible is a revelation of the living God and refuses to conform to any school of theology. Ludicrous attempts to define the indefinable lie at the root of much of our weakness. The personal living God of Biblical revelation will do in our day what He chooses to do and not what we want Him to do. He has never conformed and He never will. He is asserting His freedom and rights *Now*, as He is seen to do on every page of Scripture. He delights in breaking all the rules we make for Him.

But having said all this, under pressure from my colleagues, I must insist that our story is one of abysmal failure rather than success. What are 200 worshippers, or for that matter, all the worshippers in our area, as against the total population? If all the people in our one street only were to turn up we could not seat them. Let us be realists and keep our eyes on the great unfinished — indeed the hardly begun, task. We can only say that at least there stands among the multitude a small community that is for God and His glorious Son Jesus. We wait on Him for the breakthrough. The big thing is yet to come.

Humphrey Vellacott

## Book Reviews

**The Bible and the Future** by A.A. Hoekema. Paternoster Press. viii + 343pp £8:00.

Go into almost any Christian bookshop and you will quickly be confronted by rows of paperbacks at an attractively low price, with gaudy covers and eye-catching titles, each of which claims to be the definitive explanation of Biblical prophecy and the final word in interpreting the signs of the times. Many of them are written in a racy journalese, which, coupled with dogmatic assertions which slot the events and personalities of contemporary history into the Biblical prophecies (subject to revision every now and again in the light of events, of course), appears most persuasive. In such a situation this book is to be welcomed for its sane approach to the Biblical text (as opposed to the fanciful sensationalism of some interpretations), its sound exegesis which rightly emphasises the historical and literary context of the

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prophetic passages, its understanding of the nature of Biblical prophecy, and the clarity of its presentation. This is not the book to go to if you want a detailed blueprint of the events leading up to the end; but if you want a straight-forward presentation of Biblical teaching this volume is ideal. The book rests on the solid theological foundation of the dual aspect of Biblical eschatology — present and future, realised and yet to come. It proceeds to discuss death, the intermediate state, resurrection, millennial views, the second coming, judgment, the signs of the times and the new heaven and earth (the latter, rightly, refusing to spiritualise away the Biblical hope for a renewed earth). Inevitably when dealing with such a vast range of controversial subjects there are parts (but only a very few) which seemed unsatisfactory, e.g. the discussion of the intermediate state, and the large number of (sometimes quite unnecessary) quotations from writers supporting Hoekema's approach. But overall the book is to be warmly commended. Which makes it all the more frustrating that it costs so much. For few of those hooked on the sort of approach outlined at the start of this review are going to spend eight pounds on such a volume. Perhaps they might run to £2.50, for which they could get Bruce Milne's "I want to know what the Bible says about the End of the World" (Kingsway Publications), who presents a similar case to Hoekema, just as cogently, but more briefly. Both books provide a much-needed corrective in the area of Biblical eschatology and both can be read with much profit.

John F. Maile

**A Survey of the New Testament** by Robert H. Gundry, Published by The Paternoster Press, 400 pages — Price £6.

As its name suggests this Book goes in for breadth rather than depth but within the limits implied in this diffuseness this is in fact its great value. It covers in a remarkably comprehensive way not only the context of the New Testament but also its background and the general historical and geographical context of the New Testament. From this point of view it is bound to be a book of considerable practical help to any of us involved in the teaching of the Bible. The book is divided into four parts, the first relating to the cultural and religious background, the second to the life of Jesus, the third to the early expansion of the Christian faith through the work of the early Christian community and the fourth an examination of the Epistles.

The material relating to the Gospels is particularly helpful and provides endless background data for any series of sermons on them. It is set forth as a useful blend of factuality and theology. Corresponding to this there is also a useful attempt to harmonise the data of the four Gospels as much as possible to provide a coherent outline of the career of Jesus and though the treatment is conservative, difficulties are faced honestly and the argument for historical credibility is made without any artificial attempt to find a solution to all problems. There are many useful features about the lay out of the book. It is liberally dotted with all manner of pictures and illustrations of significant places, coins, scrolls, maps etc. There are also summary outlines of all the New Testament Books together with useful and comprehensive

charts that set out problems of dating and authorship. Another helpful device is that each page has a broad margin on which there is set down in one word, or in a phrase, the issue or theme that is being dealt with on any given page.

To have all this material under one cover and brought together in such a skilful way will save preachers and teachers a lot of time which otherwise would be spent in tracking things down, but essentially it is a factual book and therefore perhaps primarily a reference book to be used for background material rather than to be read through from cover to cover. It would be of a special help as a supplementary text book on New Testament introduction, either for intelligent laymen seeking to understand the material of the New Testament better, or indeed for theology students.

T.K.S.

**A Long Way From Home** by J.A. Walter, Paternoster Press, 217 pp. £4.20.

Sociology has been sometimes accused of describing the obvious by the incomprehensible. Those who share the view should not be deterred by the sub-title of Dr Walter's book 'A sociological exploration of contemporary idolatry'. He writes with Peter Berger's insight and with a pen as lively as Andrew Greeley. The difference is that he is British and therefore addresses a situation familiar to us.

His argument is that, far from becoming irreligious, we have simply substituted idols for God to which we render a homage as devout as that of any convert. He covers the areas of work, the nuclear family, suburbia, individualism, ecology, culture, the media and change, finally gathering them all into a theological appraisal.

They are subjects upon which ministers are often wont to air their views. Tony Walter's book might just help us from avoiding in our preaching the affirmation of what is nothing more than idolatry. Particularly in the use of our western nuclear image of the family as a model of Christian fellowship we can advocate a pattern that both distorts the Biblical witness to the fatherhood of God and perpetuates patterns of relationships that are isolationist and defensive rather than universal and inclusive.

A splendid book, excitingly written, it challenges us to re-think our too easy analysis of society's ills.

**The Meaning of Heaven and Hell** by Elwin Shackleton, Gem Publishing co., 91 pp. £1.50

**Jesus Christ: Priest and Pioneer** by Elwin Shackleton, Gem Publishing co., 97 pp. £1.50

Readers of the *Baptist Times* need no introduction to the work of Elwin Shackleton. Until his untimely death in 1979 he was a regular contributor to

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its pages, his word characterised by clarity and a patient unfolding of the meaning of Holy Scripture in the brief space within which he had to work.

These two books are the substance of two of the series he wrote for that paper. The first cannot fail to be of assistance to us as we try to find a true path through difficult ground inter-sected with cul-de-sacs that being well worn seem to promise a destination that is, in fact, never reached. Elwin Shackleton's book will help us to present to men and women the fearful alternatives of glory or alienation.

The second book consists of bible readings in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Here again, Shackleton's little book will help us to traverse ground that many would otherwise find difficult.

We owe our gratitude to his publishers for leaving us these examples of the diligent and quiet work he did among us.

M.J.W.

## OF INTEREST TO YOU

We are incorporating some news items from our brethren serving with the B.M.S. together with news of our brethren serving in Commonwealth countries, as well as USA. We are alas inclined to despair at times, when we view the world situation, but when we read reports of what the Lord is doing, this gives us great encouragement. May we be diligent in our intercession for our many brethren. Let us rejoice in the truth — **OUR GOD REIGNS.**

**Deaths.** We commend all those who mourn to the God of all comfort.

Robert Henry Brennan

Alice Mabel Chambers (widow of C.C. Chambers)

Edmund Forsdike (husband of Frances)

John Halliday (husband of Penny) result of an accident.

William Dodds Jackson

Gertrude Maude Jenkins (widow of Hugh)

Leslie J Gomm (husband of Beryl) Adelaide, South Australia.

Ieuan Emlyn Thomas

Ernest Alexander Payne (husband of Freda)

Mary Joan Quicke (wife of W.G.E)

Winifred Willmott (formerly Deaconess)

**Retirement** — We would assure our brethren of our prayers

Arthur Coffey

D.R. Griffiths

Maurice D. Kendrick

John Pike