

# The Fraternal

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# Editorial

It immediately brought to mind a very similar exercise which Baptists in the U.K. undertook as long ago as 1967. We called it "Ministry Tomorrow". Yellowing now, at the time it provoked something of a furore in that it estimated, ten years hence, that the denomination would be able to sustain in the region of only 400 ministers, unless (the crucial postscript) 'It pleased God to do some unexpected and creative thing among us'. Today, over twenty years later, there are some 2,000 names on the accredited list. 'Wisdom is justified by all her children?'

"Ministry Tomorrow" was recalled by the recent Anglican document, "The Ordained Ministry, Numbers, Costs and Deployment" which by now will have been chewed over in Synod. The spiralling cost of ministry, £184 million, while not causing the Anglicans to think in terms of quotas, since this would militate against the whole concept of call and vocation, inevitably begs questions about quality of ministry and job performance with the suggestion that 'firmer resolve' be demonstrated when a ministry is seen to be inadequate.

In its turn this raises the thorny issue of supervision, monitoring and assessment. A delicate area indeed! For among the professions the Christian Ministry is regarded as self-monitoring and self-assessing. Largely because so much is intangible and impervious to measurement. Whether we would be prepared to submit to such monitoring is another matter, demanding as it would a readiness to receive evaluation, criticism and comment. Yet, if it ever came, it might help save us from attitudes of mind, habits of relating and ways of working which are counter-productive, which all too soon become ingrained and obvious to everyone but ourselves.

The growth area of 'counselling' is increasingly taking into account, as a maturing discipline, the whole context of an individual's life. Consequently, Ron Messenger of West Ham Central Mission, shares his experience of and insights into "Family Ministry". This is followed by a plea from David Tennant for a "Theology of Generosity" in our churches, worthy financial management and a mission-oriented stewardship.

As an island people, we have long been susceptible to the impoverishing effect of 'isolationism'. Our next two articles reflect the value accrued and the insights gained by Harry Young in The Soviet Union and Gethin Abraham-Williams in East Germany. In our view there can never be too much international traffic between churches.

"Structuralism", a veritable growth industry in some parts of the world if not in the U.K., is the second in our current New Testament series. Finally, in the light of the Inter-Church Process and the risk of misunderstanding its nature, our General Secretary, Bernard Green, stresses the importance of this latest approach to Church Unity.

### **ERRATUM**

Page 5, first paragraph should read:

In the life of the church there are four main areas affected by the answers thrown up by that question. One of them is worship. Complaints often made by people who are 'different' is that most preachers think of the family as mother and father (both married for the first time) and two or three children (all legitimate): as though that is how it ought to be, how God intended it to be. The reality may be so different. Is there any room in the preaching .....

# FAMILY MINISTRY

Bob and Joan have been married for twenty one years. Six years ago life took a new turn when they became Christians within a few weeks of each other. Before long they were eagerly involved in the church programme. Bob was the kind of man the church had been waiting for as youth club leader, and Joan had a natural gift for visiting the sick and lonely. They take it in turns to go to the weekly prayer meeting, and, as often as possible, attend house-groups, separately and on different evenings. Their two sons, Charles and John, are now 18 and 16. Eight year old Celia was born with a spastic condition. Bob and Joan are much admired in the church for their dedication and zeal, a fine example of Christian commitment. Recently, however, both sons have been antagonistic in the home, staying out late and keeping doubtful company. On several occasions they've had brushes with the police. Bob and Joan don't always see eye to eye in dealing with the boys, and Celia is reacting to the tensions. She often finds it hard to sleep at night. Frustrated and distressed, Joan decides to talk to the pastor about the problem.

When I presented three or four fictional situations like this – all quite different – to a ministers' conference for group discussion, one minister told me at the end of the session that he had them all in his church! Not so fictional after all.

Where does the pastor start? With the 'bad' boys, or the handicapped girl, or with the spiritual problems of the parents? Clearly there is a malaise in the family as a whole. The problems of no individual are going to be resolved without reference to the whole family; and the problems of the family are not going to be resolved without reference to the church and what it is doing to the family.

This article is not a plea for pastors to rush off and train as family therapists; neither does it deny the valuable place that individual counselling has in our pastoral concern. But it is a plea for a clearer understanding of the family as a unit, an appreciation of the impact that the local church has on the family and an honest assessment from time to time of the pastoral attitudes of the church to real life situations.

One question thrown up straight away is what we mean by 'family'. There was a time when that would not need asking, especially in church. The scene has drastically changed; some ministers reading this will be working in a social setting of constant confusion. One parent families may seem to be the norm. Some children in the youth organisations may have changed surname three or four times. Most of the six million people in this country living in step families may seem to have moved into your parish. And so on. The stability afforded by recognised and accepted roles, with dad out to work and mum doing the washing and cooking at home, no longer holds. The tribal security of the extended family, all living within reach, has also largely disappeared. The social, emotional and spiritual upheaval from all this is immense, and challenges with daunting power our Christian traditions and assumptions. An open discussion of the congregation might be very disturbed – but, I hope, profitably, – by the question, what is a family?

## **Worship**

In the life of the church there are four main areas: as though that is how it ought to be, how God intended it to be. The reality may be so different. Is there any room in the preaching or the prayers for the single mother struggling with a couple of lively toddlers with different fathers? Or the elderly couple still caring for a handicapped adult son at home? Or the middle-aged woman living alone whose nearest kin are in Australia? And what do single people do with themselves in family services? This feeling of being different in relation to 'the family' can be so unsettling in the context of worship. The feelings of guilt, anxiety and anger question the grace of God and the right to belong.

At the same time many of the gospel words used repeatedly in worship are rooted in the home. Father, mother, brother, sister are all there – children's needs, knocks on the door at midnight, losing and finding, parties with the neighbours – all help to make up the gospel picture. Can we word our worship without the reconciliation and forgiveness which Jesus set superbly within the framework of the family? Can we find a better expression of the intimacy of Jesus with those who love him than 'My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home in him'. We need, then, to let worship embrace the family in all its diversity, the endless range of strengths and weaknesses and circumstances and bring the realities of home-life into the presence of the God and Father of all, whose love is utterly steadfast.

## **Teaching**

The second area of concern is teaching. In this age of high education and advanced technology, with training schemes for almost everything under the sun, there is mounting ignorance about how to live in a family. The divorce rate in England and Wales, now past 50% of marriages contracted, demonstrates how poorly prepared couples are for partnership. Those who are driven by lust for success in professions often fail miserably as parents. A Christian man addressing a group of businessmen in a plush London hotel said: "My great fear for you is that in ten years' time you will have more money than you need, you will have a higher standard of living, but you will have lived those ten years like paupers". Their impoverishing mistake was lack of time-investment in their children.

We must no longer take it for granted that because people are intelligent, or because they are Christian, they know how to make intimate relationships and sustain them. There is crying need for teaching at every level, not least the simplest and most obvious level. Take, for instance, the matter of the family eating together. In the Church we hold to the importance of the table; shared food is shared life. So at home, and in the passing of food with a 'please' and a 'thank you' there is the sign of giving and receiving in the mutual dependence of love. But in many homes now the table is ornamental, and in some it has been chopped up or given away. Meals are taken at different times, or in different rooms, in front of the TV. There is a rising generation who need to be taught how to sit at the same meal table.

When I ask couples or families in trouble how they resolve conflicts they frequently look as though a thunderbolt has struck them. What new idea is this? Christians among them may deny the conflicts, find a diversion (like going to the prayer meeting), bury the feelings, withdraw into silence, and then trail behind them a check-list of wrongs. Father may put his foot down, mother manipulates, the child appears to conform, but what hurt and anger is being stored up for next

time? Our healing ministry must involve teaching how to resolve conflicts at home, how to forgive and be forgiven, and restore one another in love.

Most families live on a very thin spiritual diet. No-one has taught them how to worship together; they are missing the vast resources of faith, hope and love for growing together and facing the crises and opportunities that confront every family. Not that prayer is ever a substitute for hard work in relationships. Don't push "A little talk with Jesus makes it right, alright" too far. But what a boon it is in family life when everything – work, leisure, holidays, money, house, examinations, neighbours and friends – is opened out to God in a natural way, as though we really believe he has made his home with us. Who will teach families how to do that?

### **Structures**

The other two areas of concern I mention more briefly. One is the structure of the church programme. During a day spent reviewing the programme of one local church the ministers, deacons and their partners were astonished to find that they had forty eight organisations and committees, and that some people present were involved in up to seventeen of them. The next question might well have been, what effect does this have on our families? We have tended to fragment the church community, with our meetings for women and others for men, youth groups and Sunday School for children; mostly so fruitful and not hurriedly to be swept away. As the story of Bob and Joan illustrates, however, the need for leaders and the need for the church to maintain its programme can blind parents to their own and their children's needs. The church then becomes a rival, even an enemy to someone in the family, with sad consequences. Solutions are not easy to find, changes are not easy to make. A review of our church programme, its content and structure will show whether we are helping or hindering the unity and stability of home-life.

### **Pastoral care**

My last point is the challenge all this brings to our ideas of pastoral care. Ministers report increasing calls for intervention in marriage and family crises; and the problems don't evaporate with a quick word of prayer. Alarmed at their lack of preparation, they may retreat into the more manageable one-to-one method, or avoid the situation altogether. A parishioner recently commented on the pastoral behaviour of the priest. "He leads worship well, is very good on the guitar and writes his own songs; but he doesn't visit people in their homes, can't face bereavement or conflict. He doesn't know what to say", she said. Of course, most of us are stumped for words, and fortunately so; we stand more chance of listening and feeling, and realising that what matters most is that we are there, facing the need, the confusion, the sorrow with those in our care.

I sat through one unforgettable night with a whole family, mother, four children including a baby, and a great uncle, surrounding the father as he slowly died on the settee. Then I called the doctor and the undertaker. It was profoundly moving to witness death unifying a family in a solemn celebration. There are many crises that are shattering because we allow them to be individualistic, "Woe to him who is alone" says the wise man of Ecclesiastes. When a family learns to face these together, and pool resources; when they listen to one another and accept one another's needs; when the strong supports the weak (and discovers one day that roles are reversed) immeasurable potential is avail-

able for healing and change and growth. They may need someone to open the way for them.

Time is always too brief, especially when there are so many distractions, including the average man, woman and child's four hours a day television. One family woke up to the fact that they had lost control of their time. They had no time to talk or play together, very little just to be together. They took the problem by the throat and made changes. One was a commitment to each other for a monthly family forum, with everything under discussion and everyone having the right to be listened to. The outcome astonishes them, and proves, at least to them, that their decision was a turning point. Such a move on a wider scale would save the pastor a great deal of time.

**Ron Messenger**

# **Theology of Generosity – Financial Management for Churches**

## **Introduction**

One of the dilemmas in viewing Church Management is the apparent tension between the Church's claim for its 'spiritual' or 'divine' nature and its human structure. Phrases like "The people of God", "The Body of Christ", "The bride of Christ" etc., can be used as excuses for being inefficient, impractical and other-worldly. Nowhere is this more evident than in church finances. I am not the only preacher who was given some advice by a deacon of the church 'not to preach about money'; there were more important things to say in the pulpit! Fears of being over-materialistic, of dictating to the Holy Spirit or even of lacking faith if we plan too closely ("The Lord will provide") are all ways of getting out of the challenge of careful and serious financial management in the church.

## **1. Facing the facts**

Money is a major factor in civilised urbanised life. The Church cannot exist without it, and has an awful lot of it. But we need a far greater dose of honesty about it. Honesty means facing the costs. Many think that 10p on the plate is sufficient or if I covenant 50p per month, I'm doing my bit. The £1 coin is not much these days when you are a professional earning a five-figure salary. It is not easy to value the Church's current worth – buildings, personnel, valuable possessions, furniture, lands etc. To be the Church in the world is to take stock of what we have and then ask how this can best be used to serve the Kingdom and the World. Facing facts means living with inflation and true living costs (is £7,000 a year really adequate for a professional man? Should we live off weddings and funeral fees subscribed by casual users of the Church? Is the provision of a house a mixed blessing? Do we need historic buildings, beautiful but costly to heat, not to mention unuseable for contemporary worship?) For too long congregations have been content to balance their books (even 'make a profit' as one Treasurer was heard to remark to the auditor!). Facing facts means overcoming the hang-up of prayer and spirituality being higher things and money and material things being somehow carnal or unworthy.

Of course, there are differences amongst us. Until recently the Church of England did not have to worry overmuch about its finances. Congregations had their clergy on the cheap, financed by the past from accumulated legacies,

income from lands and properties, and of course, it was always 'The Church Commissioners' problem not ours'. For Churches organised more connexionally, such as Methodism and the United Reformed Church, shortage of funds was often answered by cutting down the number of staff in a circuit or combining two smaller congregations in shared ministry. It was often accepted reluctantly but did not really hit the local congregation very much. After all, isn't the essence of Free Church life the power and place of the laity? For Baptists money has always been a more direct concern of the local congregations who either underpaid their ministers, or shared a minister, or did without. As far as Ministry is concerned, false notions of 'call' and 'poverty' have sometimes been the escape route for inadequate financial control. Poverty voluntarily embraced is one thing – poverty forced on someone is a different matter all together.

Many churches survived on bazaars, sales of work, Gift Days; all in the name of 'fellowship' of course! Churches of historic interest have balanced their books with collection plates at the door, or invitations to sightseers to make donations. Indeed, in some cathedrals charges are made.

The Church should not rely on the general public to balance its books by bazaars and sales. If the work of the Lord is worth anything it is worth *direct giving*, more effective and careful financial control, and not a hand-to-mouth existence. In the end, this is a spiritual matter. The Lord has provided. What is needed is not a concern for 'how can we pay our way', nor even a 'theology of money', not better fund raising techniques, but a practical "*theology of generosity*" which begins with the question "What does the Lord require of us?"

This makes two major demands on the local church:

- A. A practical and applied theology based on needs, requirements, trends and means. This necessitates a congregation sitting down and examining itself and its work and costing it.
- B. An awareness of the essence of Christian giving with its background in the scriptures, with an understanding of the place of the Church in cultural and social settings. Theology is about wholeness and coherence, and the contemporary need of the church is to do its theology aware of its context. In modern society this must include economic factors, the handling of money and its worth, with awareness of the functioning of money in human behaviour.

## **2. The function of money**

Briefly, let's remind ourselves of some of the behavioural aspects of money and how these are present in the life of the Church:

- A. Accounting information serves as the basis for decision-making and is affected by decision-making both within and outside the Church. This phrase 'decision-making' is an important evangelical slogan in church life. It's a pity it is limited to the personal response syndrome and not widened out to include corporate planning. In planning, initiating, controlling, co-ordinating and even motivating, money is an important factor. Money is never neutral.
- B. Accounting is about people. The careful use of funds, the right use of information and its presentation is to do with power, authority and relationships in organisation. Of course, there are hideous sides to this as when monied people claim a hearing in church affairs, as when the items which claim the larger portion of the budget also claim the greatest





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importance. This is true in some churches with the Minister's salary; because it is the largest item it is seen to be the most important. Education, Sunday School Mission, Overseas Giving, etc., are often relegated to expendables. Thus whatever we call the Home Mission Fund, the appeal at local level is often reduced to an emotional call to "support poor ministers".

- C. Accounting information is about the place and function of an organisation in its environment: salaries, inflation, costs of repairs, changes in systems of Superannuation or taxation, all affect the Church. Overseas church leaders are aware of the fluctuations in aid to developing countries and consequences for church projects when diplomatic relations, or government cutbacks outside their own country, force them to be 'a Church in the world'. Nothing happens in a vacuum and the reality of this is often evident in terms of money.
- D. Accounting information demands careful structures and procedures. Hand-to-mouth management might be alright in its place ('contingency management' some call it), but it has been too often the typical motif for church finances. 'If the roof falls in the money will come – it always does'. To be efficient in our procedures may not be exactly next to being godly, but with careful procedures and established practices, a Church is free to organise its agenda to deal with the important things as distinct from the urgent, the pressing and the pragmatic.

### **3. Theology of money**

For some the word "theology" refers to matters reserved for professors or certain kinds of ministers. It is often used in the perjorative sense of 'talking about nothing' (a politician was recently accused in a TV broadcast of 'theologising'.) Theology is *about story telling*.

Balance sheets and accounts also tells stories. It is amusing to think that accountancy and theology might have some connecting point! A theology of money is about how money functions in a Faith context and how money is to be understood in the light of Faith. It is said that you can tell a church's theology by its balance sheet. Even the order of items indicates the priorities and concerns (e.g. Minister's salary first, followed by repairs and renovations, with Sunday School at the bottom – if at all!)

A theology of money will take account of:

- A. The biblical view of money and possessions, based on the teaching that *Life is gift*.
- B. Theology of the Church: For me *The Church is mission* and this governs everything. Mission is 'sharing with God in what He is doing in the World'. Some would not agree with that, but once a definition has been accepted as workable then everything follows from it. Thus the budget/balance sheet reflects the Church's theology or self-understanding.

### **4. Christian stewardship**

No discussion of Financial Management for the Churches would be complete without the place and practice of Stewardship. We've come a long way since the "Wells Organisation" first offered its services to churches in the UK. Many congregations were puzzled about services without collections (you put it on the plate at the door as you came in). Many were suspicious of American techniques, such as inviting people to big meals and then selling them envelope systems, budgeting etc.

Some still do not understand that you have to spend money to raise money.

It's a pity that in the popular mind stewardship is associated with *money only*. The Biblical basis of stewardship is about *giving and responsibility*, in a word, Stewardship is about *decision-making*. It begins with the question:

"What does the Lord require of us?"

It goes on to ask, 'What have we been given?', 'Where must we be to be faithful?' 'How are we to get there?'. It then lays the plans which involve setting free the resources. It takes seriously the view that decision-making is about setting goals and objectives and then getting on to achieve them. In this process *Budgetting* comes into its own. Budgetting tries to organise and structure the vital elements within the organisational decision-making process, providing the frameworks for authority, delegation and influence. It maps out the territory in money terms. Budgets serve a variety of purposes ranging from planning to co-ordination. When linked with stewardship they direct the decision-making so that stewardship is not an end in itself (setting resources free merely to plough back into the organisation). Thus theology, stewardship and budgets go together.

The theology of stewardship is well documented in other places, so suffice it to say now that stewardship is:

- an inescapable part of discipleship, not begging, but a stimulation to prayerful response to God in gratitude. (Begging is of the nature of a charity - a body to which the givers do not belong)
- responsible use of and attitude towards possessions.
- based on the belief in God who is creator (stewardship rather than ownership)
- Incarnation: The God who cares, who is active in saving his creation.
- is about total commitment, wholeness and completeness. Of course there are alternatives to stewardship (budgetting, things like 'freewill offering' (usually the excuse to leave the matter completely open); 'hand-to-mouth' (when the roof falls in they'll give - they always do); 'no policy at all' (leave it to the Lord or worse still the preacher - I'll give when I'm moved to give); 'charismatic approach' (by which I mean the appeal given for specific activities or enterprises; often used for emergency appeals like disasters). None of these are viable alternatives to stewardship.

As far as practicalities are concerned, I offer six main criteria for effective stewardship of resources, both financial and human:

- A. Offer choice of method so that the congregation/parish can have something of their own.
- B. Set the stewardship programme within a parish plan with working definitions, objectives, plans and aims and procedures and an overall guiding theology, hammered into working definitions.
- C. Personal contact at all levels - letters and phone are not sufficient.
- D. Careful teaching within the life of the church at all levels - sermons, newsletters, midweeks, even Sunday School and Women's Groups. Let the whole Church 'feel' the significance and importance of what is happening.

- E. A direct and definite commitment with the completion of a form or pledge card. The programme will lose its cutting edge without explicit personal commitment.
- F. A group responsible for the programme, its progress and its follow-up next year is essential.

### **Conclusion**

Clearly, more flesh needs to be put on some of these bare bones. In the end, financial management in the churches must be seen as an element in a Church's self-understanding and its life in God. Money is a spiritual matter. Theology cannot be kept out of it, and each church must do its theology in order to work out its life. This demands the establishment of coherent frameworks. Churches must face facts honestly. The resources are there – they're sitting on them. The Lord does not require anything of us for which He has not already given the resources. That is why it is not a theology of giving that is needed in the first instance, but a theology of generosity.

**David Tennant**

## **Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel!**

Last year, the Russian Orthodox Church celebrated its Millenium, with nation-wide rejoicing and thanksgiving. A thousand years ago, that imperious monarch, Vladimir the Great, commanded his obedient people: "Be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ". The people streamed down to the River Dnieper, so the historian tells us, "To leave behind, in the broad flood of its waters so much of their sins and their heathenism as was soluble and separable by the observance of this initiatory Christian rite."

Preparations for these ecclesiastical and civic rejoicings had begun when a delegation of four ministers from the London Baptist Association visited our Russian brothers and sisters in 1987. The radio-active clouds of Chernobyl had lifted, Glasnost ('openness') and Perestroika ('reconstruction') filled the air with new hope and expectation. Our arrival coincided with Ascension Day and the visit ended on Pentecost Sunday. In God's providence, the timing was perfect; the wind of change mingling with the wind of the Spirit.

### **Church and State**

The Moscow Baptist Church received us warmly, affording us a status both flattering and undeserved. The church was filled on Ascension Day when the service was recorded, and as we now know, subsequently transmitted on Soviet Television. A long and penetrating interview with the Rev. Brian Cooper, our much travelled European correspondent, was also recorded at Pentecost. People crowded into every nook and cranny of the sprawling buildings, standing five deep in the aisles of the church itself for a three hour service.

On each occasion, there was total liberty to preach the Word with boldness – indeed, even words of greeting were disallowed unless they were accompanied by a word from the Lord to encourage the believers. As Alexei Bychkov expressed it: "In the way of holiness and Christian piety, to streng-

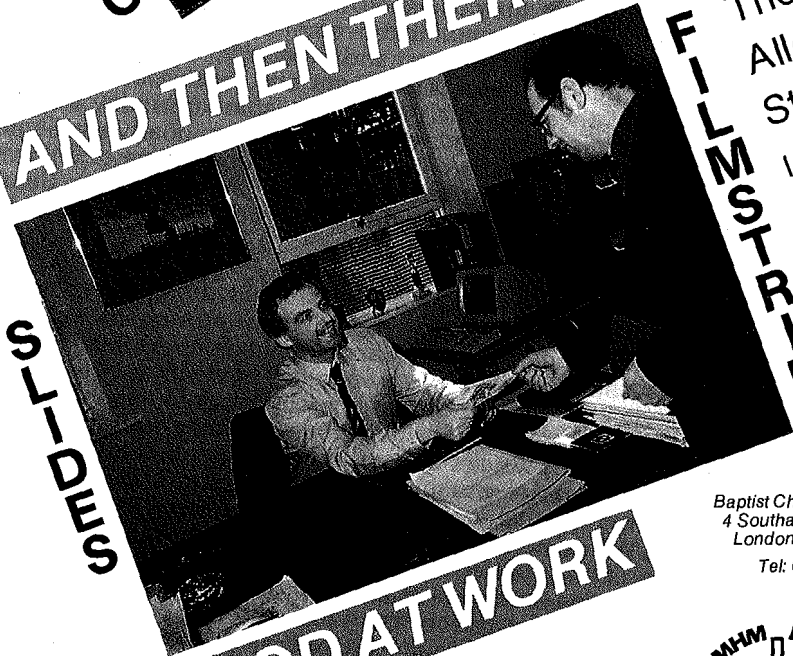
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then Christian love and the unity of believers according to the high prayer of our Lord". "Ours is a singing Church", he told us, "and singing should be edifying, giving guidance and instruction." So it was that excellent choirs, of youth as well as older people, talented vocalists and instrumentalists, enhanced the worship with their marvellous music.

Preaching by translation was a novel and an exhilarating experience. Our brother ministers repeated our basic cliché-free English (we had been warned!) in Russian, reflecting our gestures like a shadow boxer, and even reproducing our tone of voice! The response of the congregation was one of delayed reaction; the silence of incomprehension being followed by visible and vocal assent, and affirmation of the great gospel truths we joyfully proclaimed!

It was when we moved away from the capital to Vladimir, Tula, and Kalinin, cities within 200 kilometres of Moscow, that we received the most rapturous welcome of all from congregations which, unlike the over-visited Moscow Church, rarely, if ever, received fraternal visits from UK ministers. Modest wooden houses had been converted into prayer houses with few facilities or modern conveniences. Benches, sometimes without back rests, seated the people who in their radiance, seemed to beautify poverty and adorned their worship with uninhibited emotion and joy. Prayers were spontaneous, offered with fervour and intensity, and when on one occasion, someone came forward to repent and receive Christ, the tears cascaded down the cheeks of the people. We shared Sunday worship at Vladimir, when many participated with singing items, poetry readings and testimonies. A large number remained for lunch and a time of fellowship. Our meeting at Tula was on Tuesday evening and at Kalinin on Saturday morning. At each service, crowded congregations received the preaching of the Word with unwearied enthusiasm.

The Russian Orthodox Church lavished hospitality upon us, as at Suzdal, an historic city in the Golden Circle, renowned for the elegant architecture, of its many golden-domed churches and monasteries. Our host was the Archimandrite Valenti, obviously a theologian of deep spirituality and a man of prayer. He showed a profound interest in our situation, and asked many probing and searching questions. We also saw officials from the Department of Religious Affairs and confirmed that at least officially, the parameters of freedom are widening, restrictions are relaxing, and registered churches are planting new house churches, especially in the Greater Moscow region. We asked our own questions in an atmosphere of conciliation, rather than confrontation, and we never allowed ourselves to forget the bitter persecutions, not only of the past, but those which still, sadly, persist. Brave believers, in prison, labour camps or psychiatric hospitals, were lovingly remembered as we prayed for their release – promises oh so slowly implemented – and for an end to cruelty and injustice. In that Millennial year, there was hope that many will be set free, and restrictions on such as Christian education of children and church-oriented charities will be formally abolished by legislation.

"People are in prison because they have broken the law", it was explained to us, "otherwise everyone is free to profess any religion or no

religion". The West is accused of being poorly informed about religion in the Soviet Union, and even of misrepresenting the true position. Soviet Baptists enjoy the same rights as other citizens, we were told, and will continue to be patriots of their country and active in its political, economic and cultural life. We, ourselves, were reminded of Nathaniel's words to Philip when he proclaimed that he had found the Messiah: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?", he asked, with gentle scepticism. "Come and see" said Philip.

### **Lasting impressions**

We London ministers came and saw greater things than we ever anticipated. As our Area Superintendent, Arthur Thompson, put it, "We came home better men, deeply humbled, greatly surprised, wonderfully encouraged". Gorbachev surely deserves our support and our prayers as he tries to change what is, strange as it may seem, a grotesquely unequal society, with its top-heavy privileged bureaucracy; a super power in terms of space exploration and armaments, nuclear and conventional, but in living standards, homes and consumer goods, only a third world economy.

We can only say what we know and testify to what we have seen — a vibrant, singing, witnessing church, a Bible-loving people with whom we desire to build bridges of love. Their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of liberality. Truly, they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the Will of God. In response, our abundance must supply their want as a proof of our love. As a beginning, London Baptists have given 5,000 to provide an organ for the Kalinin Church, as it moves shortly into a larger building. Perhaps above all, we shared their almost obsessive desire for peace. Memorials to those who perished in the Great Patriotic War are everywhere, as shrines in the countryside. 'Peace to the World' is surely more than a wayside slogan — more than a propaganda.

"My heart is full of prayers for peace on earth" said Alexei Bychkov, who is Secretary of the All Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists (AU-CECB) — a word repeated in a Christmas message to Christians all over the world which we received in London: "We are deeply convinced that our witness to the gospel will help change the world and overcome evil, for peace begins in the human heart". It was my great joy to repeat these words in a Christmas morning sermon in the family service from the Kingston (Union St.) Church on television. A policeman wrote from 'sleepy Somerset' anonymously, "You put Christmas in its true perspective. I went out in the afternoon to arrest people with a smile!"

At the command of a greater than Vladimir, Russian believers are now able to go down to the River Volga to be baptised, not any more at night with only a few to witness, but in daylight, by arrangement with the authorities, accompanied by the whole church. As the Millenium was celebrated throughout the Soviet Union, it was appropriate to ask the Lord, with Charles Wesley, for:

'a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer's praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of His Grace!'

**Harry Young**

# Do they know about us in the West?

Reflections on the Bible and the German Democratic Republic, arising out of a visit nine of us from Milton Keynes made to that country October 1987. Our party comprised five women and four men; seven lay and two ordained; five Methodists, two Anglicans, one Roman Catholic and one Baptist. The visit was planned by a local Methodist Minister in the interests of furthering East/West relations at the local church level. We stayed with church-associated families, for three nights in East Berlin, and for six nights in Leipzig.

Though the visit was something we did at our own expense, we were advised to apply for, and got, official status. That didn't mean we got waved through Checkpoint Charlie any quicker than other travellers, but it did help to register with the East German state that a party of Christians from the West had chosen to visit their country and their churches.

Of the various questions put to us in the course of many intriguing conversations was one that I have been unable to get out of my mind, namely, "Do they know about us in the West?"

In taking up that challenge, the story I have to pass on is that the Church in East Germany is struggling to interpret the Bible in the light of three major movements, the most obvious of which is *Communism*.

## **COMMUNISM**

If one's image of East Germany today is of a country where Christians are a minority and most of the churches are closed, then one's in for a shock! The German Democratic Republic, which is less than half the size of Britain (44%) and with 30% of our population, is certainly a communist state.

But it is also very conscious that, in addition to being the home of Handel and Bach, of Goethe and Schiller, it is the country where Martin Luther, leader of the Protestant Reformation, lived and worked. It even refers to the town where he nailed his 95 theses, and now lies buried, as Lutherstadt Wittenberg! And in 1983, the 500th anniversary of his birth was officially observed as Luther Year!

Following a much publicised understanding between Church and State in 1978, and thanks to substantial amounts of legitimate money from abroad, mainly from the West German Church, there are lots of new church buildings around, too, as good if not better in finish and furnishings than many we are erecting in Britain today! Thus the main Protestant tradition pursues its goal, "not to be a Church near or against Socialism, but a Church in Socialism"

Moreover, as Trevor Beeson, now Dean of Winchester, points out in his account of religious conditions in Russia and Eastern Europe, *Discretion and Valour*, ministerial students can either choose to train in a denominational college or in the theology faculty of one of the great universities, and the proportion opting for the state system has been as high as 45%.

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We considered the possibility of moving the Insurance Company to Didcot but found that, in the time available, we could not engage and train staff to replace those we would lose by leaving London. Our staff number 10 in total and travel in from various parts of suburban London. They have been either selected for their skills and experience or have become trained in our work. Larger insurance companies have moved substantial parts of their operations but the process can take at least a year and involve engaging staff from the new area in advance to be trained alongside the existing personnel. Quite apart from the expense of such an operation, which would involve moving the whole company, there would not be time to undertake it successfully whilst maintaining our service to our customers.

Happily we plan to join up with other units of the Baptist family remaining in London. There is no danger of our "growing away". We have not attempted to move into the wider insurance market. We were formed in 1905 to provide insurance for Baptist Churches and Baptist members and wherever we are or they are this will continue to be our commitment.

Yours sincerely,

**M.E. PURVER**

In Buchenwald, which we visited, Martin Niemöller, prophet of the Confessing church in Nazi Germany, has his photograph and details alongside that of Ernst Thälmann, and other Communist heroes.

As for the Bible, the Berlin Bible Society publishes about 200,000 Bibles and scripture portions a year, which are distributed through commercial and state owned bookshops as well as local congregations.

In keeping with our status as an official party, we requested through the local church, and were eventually accorded, a fruitful meeting with a civic representative in Leipzig – Siegfried Strauss, second in command to the Burgomaster of Grunau, head of the police, and local party official.

Admittedly the foregoing examples are only half the picture, but because it is not what we expect, it is worth emphasising. The other side of the coin is that Christian school teachers, for instance, have to be 'silent Christians' hoping their classes will see 'Christ incognito' in their approach to their pupils and their subject.

Again, while there are no official regulations on who can attain the higher posts in industry and the great state corporations, no one ever contested my assumption that in reality Christians tend not to be appointed. So I asked one highly educated young couple why they weren't actively discouraging their teenage son from seeking confirmation. Were they trying to make a religious or a political point? And the father replied, "I don't see the difference?"

This tension between church and state was perfectly illustrated for me in that the 5 Mark bank note has a portrait on it commemorating Thomas Münzer, who not only headed the rebels in the 16th Century Peasant's Revolt and was subsequently executed for his proletarian pains, but was also a well-known Anabaptist!

Asked on my return to Britain, to say what the churches here can learn from the churches in East Germany, one of the answers surely is that just as the church and ordinary churchgoers in the GDR have to try to discern what their discipleship requires of them in a socialist society, so we have to learn from them to discern what our discipleship requires of us in a capitalist society. And because capitalism sees and promotes itself as the defender of the church, rather than its adversary as does Communism, maybe our struggle is harder than theirs.

## **SECULARISM**

I sensed, though, that the major movement against which the church in East Germany was struggling to interpret the Bible was *secularism* which, of course, needs to be distinguished from materialism. As William Temple said: Christianity is a very materialistic religion; Christianity has to take matter seriously because God made it and because God became real in human matter in the child of Bethlehem. Secularism, on the other hand, rejects religion. It denies that it has any place in working out the answer to moral or ethical questions. It does not allow religion any place in civil affairs.

And the most astute of East Germany's church leaders know that their main struggle today is not with Communism, to which I sensed the average citizen was indifferent, but with Secularism. So there's a contemporary prayer from the GDR's Protestant churches which begins: "In my country only a few believe in

God...". And a Baptist Minister from Stendal, Konrad Krause, who was on a British Council of Churches visit to Britain in 1983, said to me when I met up with him again in East Berlin, "The church has many members, but not disciples".

This is borne out by church statistics. Though almost half the population still regard themselves as belonging to the Evangelisch church – the main Protestant denomination – and most of these continue to pay the voluntary church tax, far fewer are even nominal worshippers, and that was my impression too. (Proportionately the Baptists are a third of their size here)

What then is the reason for this secularism which, after all, unites us here with those on the other side of the Berlin wall, if it is not an inability to think through theologically the consequences of the prosperity industrialisation has undoubtedly brought?

Both in East Berlin and in Leipzig my hosts lived in well appointed flats. Admittedly the construction was functional and crude, and space less than we would consider adequate, at least for professional people, which they were; a teenage son and daughter, for example, having to share a bedroom. Nevertheless, both flats had fridges and freezers and colour television; and the home in Leipzig could have been furnished by Laura Ashley! Both the families I stayed with, where the main wage earners were a surveyor and an engineer respectively, were on the 'phone and had cars. The East Berlin family also owned a little self-built chalet nearby to which they went at weekends and holiday times.

Industrialisation has, therefore, brought people a much better standard of living, and in the process the relevance of religion has been lost. But the same is true for us as the 1985 report of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas: *Faith in the City – a call for action by church and nation* shows.

We also have to face up to the fact that there are those in our society too who would not allow religion any relevant role in civic affairs, certainly not a critical place, and who would reject that the Bible's insights had any part to play in finding answers to today's moral and ethical questions.

## **ECUMENISM**

My remaining impression was that the church in the GDR is also struggling to interpret the Bible in the light of *ecumenism*. If what we saw was typical, which I suspect it was, then compared even with Britain (and certainly with places like Milton Keynes) ecumenism is in its infancy in Eastern Germany.

In East Berlin, for example, we saw a church on a new housing estate for 165,000 people (Marzan), shared by the main Evangelisch denomination and the Methodists. But they hadn't worked through how two traditions, one potentially threatening because of its historical and numerical strength, and its large staff, the other understaffed and very conscious of its minority position in the nation's life, could still meet as equals and learn from each other. They had united communion services, depending on which tradition was presiding!

In a newly developed part of Leipzig (Grunau, with a population of 150,000) the local Evangelisch and the local Roman Catholic communities wanted to pool their resources and build one ecumenical church at the heart of this new suburban township; but they failed to convince the Catholic authorities, so there are

now two imposing buildings, St Martin's Catholic and St Paul's Evangelisch 30 yards apart, and side by side on adjacent sites, even if both parties also hold a set of keys to each other's premises! The path between them was being repaired when we were there and the workmen had put up a little sign between the two which said more than they probably intended: "No through road"!

Nevertheless the Evangelisch church is itself the result of a union between the Lutheran and Reformed traditions, and in St Martin's and St Paul's, at least, both Catholics and Protestants were more than aware of the drawbacks of their divided witness.

Klaus Fritzsche, senior pastor of St. Paul's and a convinced ecumenist, told us: "80% of those around us are outside either of our churches. We say the differences between us are considerable. For the outsider, however, the differences are imperceptible. I believe that anything we want to do together, we can". And Harmut Nikelski, his Catholic colleague, drove the point home when he explained how "we spent a lot of time discussing one possible shared project (a joint day centre for children), then we did it and now we wonder what the problems were!"

Whilst all the people we met clearly loved their country and were proud of its culture and its achievements, if there was a resentment that we detected, it was over the restrictions on freedom of travel. It is not easy for them to get visas to go outside the Eastern block. Visits from the West are therefore very important, even when they are on the very ordinary local level that ours was. It gives them a feeling of being in touch with the World Church. As an elderly Baptist woman, with shining eyes, told us late one evening, "It is so good to be together".

Nevertheless, there is an expectation among them that in the light of improved East/West relations things are getting better in this area and that it may become easier in future for them to get visas as tourists. Be that as it may, if we want Christians from the East to visit us in the West, there's one important thing we need to register. They will only be allowed to bring 15 East German Marks with them, and that is less than £5. A practical, ecumenical way in which we can help is to fund a visitor.

One must always be cautious, of course, of believing that one has 'sussed out' the way another country works from a comparatively short and essentially perfunctory visit. There are clearly aspects of life in the GDR that can only be understood by living there. There is no doubt, however, that the Church in both our countries is struggling to interpret the Bible in ways and in the light of major movements that are less dissimilar than we might previously have been led to believe.

**Gethin Abraham-Williams**

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# Fresh Perspectives in New Testament Exegesis: Structuralism

Classical biblical exegesis has been concerned to discover the meaning the author intended through his particular choice of words, images and grammatical construction. Structuralism, by contrast, maintains that a text has a meaning quite independent of what the author consciously intended. This is by virtue of its 'deep structure' or internal elements. The text has 'semantic autonomy'. This results, it is claimed, from characteristic brain patterns of which the writer is unaware. It is asserted in fact that every text can be analysed into a limited number of basic patterns characteristic of all human thought, irrespective of cultural origin. As a result, complete exegesis needs to take into account both the established historical-critical approach and the newer Structuralist one.

## The Basis of Structuralism

As a method, it is traceable to the Swiss linguist, **F. de Saussure (1857-1913)**, who maintained, against the etymologists, that it is not necessary to know the history of language to discover meaning, only the internal arrangement of that text before you at the moment (He compared it with a chess game where the present state of play is the important thing, not how it was arrived at). The former approach is *diachronic*, the latter *synchronic*.

Secondly, he distinguished between two sets of relationships every word has, namely the *syntagmatic* and the *paradigmatic*. The *syntagmatic* relationship defines that which a word has with the other words in a sentence. For example, in 'a baptism of repentance', 'baptism' stands in a *syntagmatic* relationship with all the other words in the phrase. This helps to establish its meaning. A *paradigmatic* relationship, on the other hand, is concerned not with the words actually chosen but those which might have been. So, in 'a baptism of repentance', the words 'fire', 'suffering' and 'spirit' are real options. This enables a 'semantic field' to be mapped out, helping to define the value of a particular word or term. In Paul, the genitive phrase 'of God' has the *paradigmatic* possibilities of 'righteousness', 'wrath', 'power', 'love' etc. Saussure concluded, 'meaning is choice'.

A third fundamental distinction he made is between *language (langue)* and *parole*. The first represents the entire language system shaped by a particular society. The second, that language system expressed concretely in an act of speaking or writing. Therefore the significance of the choice of a particular word is clear only when the full range of viable alternatives is known. For example, in the N.T., is the choice of 'agape' for 'love', as against 'eros' and 'philia', because the latter were known genuine options in the context, as is tacitly assumed?

**C. Lévi-Strauss** is another seminal figure in this area. He propounded the notion of the 'mythic structure' of the human mind, characterized by timelessness, and the way in which the myth serves to mediate the fundamental oppositions with which the human mind is preoccupied e.g. good/evil, male/female, natural/supernatural ('binary opposites').

'Structuralism' is not one method, but a variety of methods related by a common approach to language. France and the U.S.A. have been prominent in its development. In England it probably first came to the attention of the general public through donnish arguments in Oxbridge English Departments in connection with its validity.

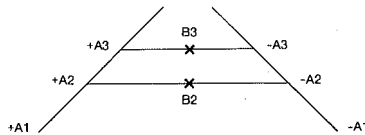
It can, of course, be applied to any literary text, and has been very influential in the field of anthropology, but its application to biblical texts in the U.K. has been slight. This is partly because a conceptual leap is required to use the method, and

partly because of the entrenched position of traditional exegetical methods. The great difference is that Structuralism does not aim at discovering the *meaning* of a text, rather of *clarifying* the meaning: its 'meaning effect'. It maintains that a number of meanings may be present at different levels ('polysemy'). Of the literary forms it is 'narrative' which has attracted most attention from Structuralists and in the biblical field, 'parables', because of their narrative structure and use of symbols.

Positively, Structuralism has been welcomed as a useful complement to traditional exegetical methods, particularly in taking into account the hitherto overlooked factor of the unconscious concerns of the human mind through which every text is mediated. Negatively, it has been criticized for its purely formal and analytical emphasis. Also for its claim that every text can be reduced to one or more basic patterns, irrespective of type or appearance. Overall, it is a demanding technique, not least because of the specialized language of linguistics into which one has to be initiated!

### Structuralism Applied

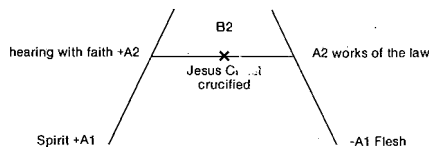
To illustrate Structuralism two examples are chosen from contrasting types of N.T. literature. The first is a Pauline theological argument, Gal. 3:1-5, which comes into the Structuralist's category of 'mythical structure' whereby fundamental oppositions are identified and then resolved. This resolution is attempted by breaking them up into secondary oppositions which may then be mediated. Schematically, such mediation is typically illustrated:



Where +A1/-A1 is the primary opposition, +A2/-A2 and +A3/-A3 are the secondary oppositions and B2 and B3 are the mediations.

To attempt the analysis it is necessary to reduce the text to sentences of the shortest possible length. These are called 'mythemes' and enable the various oppositions to be more easily identified.

In the case of Gal. 3:1-5, the fundamental and underlying opposition appears to be 'Spirit/Flesh'. Structuralists maintain that because it is a real and fundamental opposition, it cannot be resolved directly. The way to this is through secondary oppositions and their successful resolution. Here the secondary opposition is 'hearing with faith' which is a positive mytheme and 'works of the law' which is negative. The resolution is indicated as 'Jesus Christ ... as crucified'. Such a model may be represented schematically:



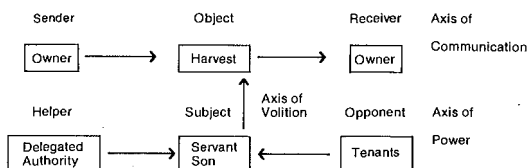
Thus it is that by hearing with faith (through the mediation of Jesus Christ as crucified) the realm of Flesh is replaced by the realm of Spirit.

This is a very simple example and the objection may be that we do not learn anything significantly new about Pauline theology. The Structuralist would counter that his aim is primarily to make clear the Apostle's conceptual outlook, in terms of the polar opposition of his thought, by an analysis of his language.

The second example comes from a narrative text, the Parable of the Vineyard, Mk 12:1-11. **A.J. Greimas** (after V. Propp) concluded, after an extensive study of folk stories, that the following structural pattern is discernable to a greater or lesser extent in a narrative sequence: an ordered state is disrupted (contact can't be carried out); attempts are made to re-establish original order; the original state is re-established. This succession of sequences is the framework of a 'deep structure': 'contract syntagm', 'disjunction syntagm' and 'performance syntagm'. Not every narrative may reflect all three sequences, however.

In the case of Mk 12:1-11 the social order of the vineyard is disrupted when the tenants abuse the owner's agents (and son) sent to collect his quota of the harvest. Repeated attempts to re-establish this order fail and will only succeed, it is projected, when the owner himself takes action personally.

An *Actantial Model* i.e. the various action functions, may be constructed as part of the analysis:



The axis of communication carries the aspects of transference, transmission and real or rejected reception. The axis of volition, the aspects of plot or project. And the axis of power the aspect of dynamism needed to pass from volition to action, either in negative form (opponent) or positive (helper).

Once again the object is to analyse the semantic structure of a narrative in order to make clear its constituent elements and how these relate within the deep structure of the text.

## Conclusion

In conclusion it must be emphasized that this is only the briefest introduction to Structuralism, a technique which is still in its infancy, and in the process of refinement and development. As an exegetical tool, it is hoped that it might provide help with questions of authorship and redaction, and the distinguishing of various cultural categories of literature within the N.T.

**Michael V. Jackson**

## Further Reading

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Fortress Press 1976.
- ed. I.H. Marshall *New Testament Interpretation*  
Paternoster 1979
- ed. A. Richardson & J. Bowden *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*  
**Article** 'Structuralism' by R.F. Collins SCM 1985.
- P. Henry *New Directions in New Testament Study*  
SCM 1980.





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# Churches Together in Pilgrimage

We are now well into the fourth year of the Inter-Church Process. During 1989 the participating denominations are asked to decide whether they wish to be members of the new ecumenical bodies being proposed. The purpose of this article is to trace developments since the Swanwick Conference, 31 August – 4 September 1987, and to describe briefly the Baptist Union's position.

That conference was the climax of two years of "prayer, reflection and debate" which were the basis of the Process. Since as far back as 1982 church leaders and representatives of the widest spread of Christians ever coming together in this country had been stressing the need to be more sure about "the nature and purpose of the church in the light of its calling in and for the world". It is important to grasp that the proposals now before us are not a sudden rush of ecumenical blood to the head! We also need to recognise that the primary motives had a strong theological and missionary foundation. To interpret the Process in terms of ecclesiastical joinery or bureaucracy is to misunderstand it entirely.

Four key documents have emerged since the Swanwick Conference. They have been widely distributed for discussion within our denomination. Without any doubt Baptists have consulted their constituency more fully than any other denomination has. The final proposals were sent to every church in readiness for full debate at this year's Baptist Assembly. This was deliberate. Our ecclesiology is not hierarchical; we are a Union of local churches, associations and colleges. Therefore all three have been drawn into preparation of preliminary responses to draft proposals and now the decision about the final proposals.

The four documents are:-

**1. The Swanwick Declaration** – the statement approved by the three hundred and thirty representatives present at Swanwick. It called all churches to "move from co-operation to clear commitment to each other, in search of the unity for which Christ prayed and in common evangelism and service of the world."

**2. Not Strangers but Pilgrims** – the conference report. This explained the context and content of the pilgrimage and set out aims and principles for new ecumenical bodies to take over from the British Council of Churches in September 1990. Within the report was a flow-chart for decision-making, to culminate in denominational decisions at the appropriate levels in the Spring and Summer of 1989.

**3. Reports of Working Parties on Ecumenical Instruments.** These contained draft proposals which were able to be amended or substantially revised. They were in fact considerably amended. Many felt that in moving from vision to structure the spirit of Swanwick had been lost. The intention to discover ways of creating true partnership between the churches locally, regionally and nationally and using the resources of each denomination was in danger of being lost in a heavy superstructure with greater emphasis on centralisation than on local initiative.

The response submitted by the Union was based on many contributions from churches, associations and colleges. It was the judgment of the Advisory Com-

mittee for Church Relations that "in the present ecumenical scene the active involvement of the Union and the churchmanship it represents is demanded of it by the Gospel, *provided only that such engagement is sharply critical and deeply constructive and that the significant issues of Faith and Order which divide the churches are continually, explicitly and honestly confronted.*" It is of the utmost importance that the words in italics are weighed carefully, lest members of the Union too hastily make accusations of compromise or theological sell-out.

**4. Churches Together in Pilgrimage.** This contains the definitive proposals for ecumenical instruments. They are significantly different in approach and content from the earlier draft. The book has been sent to every church, association and college in the Union. It is also being carefully considered by the Baptist Unions of Wales and Scotland who are fully involved at their respective national levels. A commentary on the contents of the book, drawing out the key passages and the significant issues needing discussion, has also been sent by the Union with the book, and the General Secretary prepared a document answering crucial questions raised in correspondence with him.

Certain fundamental principles have remained unaltered throughout the Process, despite fears to the contrary often being expressed.

\* What is proposed is not a scheme for organic union or a "super church".

\* The emphasis is on inter-church partnership at local, regional and national levels, not a para-church structure operating over against or in place of the member churches.

\* The basis of membership is clearly trinitarian, with a scriptural Christology and commitment to aims which prompt the question — is there any valid reason for Baptists to hold aloof from other Christians who accept such a basis and commitment?

\* Each church/denomination will operate within its own authority structure. In our denomination that means that no local church will be compelled or pressurised against its convictions. It also means that differences between us need not divide us. As Baptists we must hold to our historic principle of respect for each other's conscience before the Lord.

The Baptist Union Council will determine the nature of the resolutions to be proposed at the Assembly in April. It is to be hoped that delegates will come prepared with an understanding of their church's mind to share in the assembly debate and decision. Prayer and study together during the three months before will have been crucial. Above all, in keeping with our ecclesiology, we must come together trusting the living Christ in the midst of those who gather in His name to lead us by His Spirit. He will not be free to do that if delegates are mandated to vote one way or the other even before the debate has taken place. Our purpose in assembling is to discern His mind for the denomination as a whole.

Maybe it is providential that this year's assembly is residential, for we shall have lived, worshipped, talked and prayed together for several days before we reach the point of decision. My prayer is that we shall find such unity with diversity among ourselves that we shall see the possibility of it among Christians of different denominations and be able to move forward in faith and love together.

**Bernard Green**

# Book Reviews

**Restoring the Kingdom** by Andrew Walker (Hodder and Stoughton, 1988, 368pp £2.95)

This easy-to-read, expanded edition of Andrew Walker's history and analysis of the Restoration Churches is a useful resource and reference book for church leaders. He holds generally to his well-known distinction between such churches: R1 and R2. His reasons for a second edition are to bring us up to date and to reflect further (with the benefit of critical comment and wider exposure to Restoration Churches) on the meaning and future direction of the movement. It's a book to have on your shelves, but you might only want to beg or borrow if you have the first edition.

The history of Restorationism is traced back to its theological roots in Brethrenism and Pentecostalism. He also tries to establish a case for the influence of Irving and the Catholic Apostolic Church. Towards the end of this book, developments since 1985 are surveyed and the conclusion is drawn that the Restoration Churches need to become strategic in their evangelistic mission if they are to make a real impact upon the Church life of this country.

Part two of the book is a description of the principles and practice of Restorationism, looking at its eschatological view of the Kingdom and ecclesiology, with its special emphasis on apostolic authority and discipling. The practical subjects discussed are its organisation, apostolic teams, the practice of shepherding and the place of women. The issue as to whether Restorationism has become a denomination is also tackled directly.

The only area where its scope is limited is that of theological reflection. Some of the questions we would want to ask are about ecclesiology – narrowly based on specific vogue ministries (apostle and prophet) rather than that of a gathered community, and also a concern lest it develop an ethic of legalism.

However, this is a book to help church leaders have some of the mystique (and fear?) taken out of their view of Restorationism, and a good read will help prevent judgments being based on one or two horror-stories.

**Stephen Ibbotson**

**It Makes Sense** by Stephen Gaukroger (Scripture Union 1987, 128pp £1.95)

This book seeks to present a popular defence of the reasonableness of Christianity. In eleven chapters the writer examines many of the issues which are raised against the Christian faith, and thereby seeks to show its inherent plausibility. He looks at such subjects as the God of love in a world of suffering; the uniqueness of Christianity amidst a plethora of world religions; science and faith; the person of Jesus. He also seeks to explode some popular misunderstandings about Christianity: "Isn't it out of date?", "Christians are hypocrites", "Church is boring".

The book is well-written. There is a persuasiveness and logic in the writer's argument, and he presents his evidence capably. Moreover it is a most enjoyable book, full of light-hearted anecdotes and humour.

Occasionally the writer bites off more than he can chew as, for example, in his treatment of theodicy and atonement. But the most disappointing part of the book is chapter 5 in which the writer seeks to prove the reliability of the scriptures. He insists, without much scholarly approval, that all the New Testament books were written down only forty years after Jesus' death. He also wishes to emphasise the harmony of the biblical books without seriously acknowledging their diverging themes and details. Moreover, he puts great emphasis upon the volume of early manuscript evidence without considering textual variants or textual corruptions. One could also question his view of prophetic fulfilment in the scriptures.

A generally well presented and entertaining book, it is weakened by some occasional shallowness and oversimplification.

**Stephen Greasley**

**Letting Go** by Ian Ainsworth-Smith and Peter Speck (SPCK 1982, 168pp £4.50)

*Letting Go*, subtitled 'Caring for the Dying and Bereaved', has become a classic in its field. The authors are both Anglican Chaplains working in large London hospitals, so it is not surprising to find the book liberally laced with personal experience from their hospital life. I found the book very practical and in its seven chapters it looks at the grieving process, rites and customs surrounding death, and the needs of pastoral carers.

The first four chapters look at death as an opportunity for growth in character of those involved, suggesting that 'letting go' is part of the process of moving from the first expressions of grief to resolution. These chapters are illustrated very well with case studies and two of the best charts I have seen in the literature on the subject. 'When grief goes wrong' is the subject of chapter 6 which discusses the more frequent types of problem encountered. Chapter 7 surveys the challenges to the minister, and the final call is to have the courage to be with the dying and bereaved.

The heart of the book for me is chapter 5 where the writers give a framework for pastoral support. Here their emphasis on the sacramental seems to presume that most people will be familiar with the Anglo-Catholic tradition. I needed to translate this sacramental emphasis through my non-conformist convictions, so that it could be useful in my personal situation at the Mildmay Mission Hospital. Having said this, I think it is one of the best practical books available on this subject.

**Peter Clarke**

## **Holiday Suggestions**

### **Flat – Buxton, Derbyshire**

A double-glazed, fully furnished, two-bedroomed, upstairs flat, with central heating, in a recent Barratt's Estate, on the edge of Buxton, 'The Heart of the Peak District'.

The flat is offered for use by ministers' families on the basis of sharing in the running costs and treating it kindly! For example, including normal fuel costs, two adults £40 per week, three adults or family of four £50 per week. For more details, contact Rev. David Poley, 14 King's Way, Harrow, Middx. HA1 1XU (Tel: 01-427-7396)

### **Cottage – Dyfi Valley, Powys**

Refurbished, two bedroomed, 'inglenook' cottage on the southern tip of the magnificent Snowdonia National Park in the lovely Dyfi Valley. Fully furnished, sleeps 4/5. Special rates for ministers, missionaries and others in full-time Christian work, for holidays and sabbaticals: ie. £60 April to September: £40 October to March. Bookings from Tuesday to Tuesday.

Contact G. Abraham-Williams, 10 Millhayes, Great Linford, Milton Keynes, MK14 5EP (Tel: 0908-661302)