

HAVE BAPTISTS GOT FAITH IN THE CITY?

The President of the Baptist Union, the Revd Dr Colin Marchant, has, in his inimitable way, placed firmly on the agenda of the denomination the quest for *shalom* in the city. At the 1988 Baptist Assembly in London the depth and significance of that word was unpacked in a series of Bible Studies by Dr Alan and Mrs Eleanor Kreider of the London Mennonite Centre, and in the Presidential Address.(1) Assembly delegates were encouraged to experience the 'other London' - away from Parliament Square, the Mall and Oxford Street - in a series of urban trails. At every point the plea was made for a missionary response to our centres of population which recognised that for justice, righteousness and peace to exist, personal, societal and structural change is required.

This has been an abiding concern of Dr Marchant's in his own pilgrimage of ministry within the city of London since 1965.(2) Is that concern shared by the denomination, how is it expressed, and what practical moves have been made within our Associations and the Union to support and to emphasise this concern?

The issues of justice and righteousness for the urban community are an abiding theme of the Biblical and Christian witness. The Prophets of the Old Testament, Jesus in weeping for the city of Jerusalem, the Revelation of John the Divine, all set a Biblical and theological motif which looks for the redemption of the *polis*.(3) From time to time the Christian Church and its members have not held that vision as clearly as the Biblical evidence would appear to warrant. In succeeding generations individuals, or groups, have had to re-assert the emphasis either to renewed activity in the areas of deprivation, as with William Booth and the Salvation Army, or in the area of a more adequate social critique as with, for example, the Christian Socialist Movement, F. D. Maurice, Charles Kingsley and their companions. Whilst we have not lacked individual contributions on this theme, perhaps in this decade in England (here used in the pure geographic sense) the attention of both the churches and the community have been focused on the issue of urban deprivation in all its complexity and despair, by a special working group appointed in July 1983 by the Archbishop of Canterbury. This Commission, though reporting to the Church of England, in both its membership(4) and its impact has spoken from the wider ecumenical constituency to church and nation.

The Report, which runs to 394 pages including appendices, was reviewed in the *Quarterly* in 1986 by the then North Western Area General Superintendent, the Revd A. Trevor Hubbard.(5) In welcoming the report, Mr Hubbard remarked:

That the church has manifestly failed to make the gospel live in our Inner Cities and other 'Urban Priority Areas' is clear... The evidence suggests that it is the gathered church type that is affected most by urban decay: local resources fail to maintain ministry and therefore mission, and the ailing body dies or amalgamates with another church in the suburbs before going under.(6)

Characteristically, Trevor Hubbard discerned three questions for Baptists and our pattern of ministry and mission arising from the

report. The first concerns the strategic use of resources, both money and personnel. What priority do we give to mission in the inner city? The second is to do with ministry - what style, what form of effective and validated ministry can be grown in areas where, traditionally, leadership is missing? Thirdly, what is the ecumenical dimension in all of this?

The questions deserve expanding, expounding and, to some extent, answering, three and a half years after the report was written and just over two years after Trevor penned his review, for there has been both positive and negative movement in that time.

This writer will take question three first, because underlying it is the greater and most compelling question of all about the nature of our faith and to whom it is addressed.

THE ECUMENICAL QUESTION

Mr Hubbard made the point in his review that the issue of mission in Urban Priority Areas (UPAs) was beyond the power and ability of any one denomination to tackle. The resources, limited in all the churches, must be pooled and employed in a strategic plan and not frittered away. Since that time we have entered the Inter-Church Process, (7) starting from the local with the *Lent '86* course. Then, moving through the denominations, addressing each other about our self-understanding, (8) to the four nations conference at Swanwick. From Swanwick emerged the declaration and proposal to move 'from co-operation to commitment at every level'. (9) Here, apparently, is offered a framework for ecumenical mission. This framework at local, regional and national level might address the issue of using resources in the Urban Priority Areas. It could be the fruitful way to achieve ecumenical stewardship, mutual trust and the hope of a common strategy in urban mission. In theory Trevor Hubbard has had his question answered. In practice, three doubts cross my mind.

First, is the Baptist constituency willing to take on board, with enthusiasm, the 'Swanwick' vision? The signs are not encouraging. The immediate reactions to the proposals, and the detailed report on the new Instruments (10) has engendered in parts of the constituency worries about over-heavy structures; the participation of traditions which may not hold the same doctrinal and missionary perspective as some Baptists; the concern that some unanswered faith and order issues cannot be left to be resolved at a later date, and the ever-present Baptist wariness of anything coming from 'them up there'.

The matter will be settled in a formal sense by the Assembly at Leicester. (11) It may require a more committed 'push' from those involved in denominational life to turn the vision into reality.

Secondly, will the emerging ecumenical instruments take proper account of the style of church and church life which *Faith in the City* seems to believe appropriate for UPAs? The formation of the instruments of co-operation relies heavily on the participation of those with 'authority' and, in several instances at regional and national level, the place of 'Church Leaders'. This, in practice, seems to mean Bishops and their 'presumed' Free Church equivalents - Chairmen, Moderators and General Superintendents. How will the indigenous lay voice of women, men and the young from UPAs address these Ecumenical Instruments and what will be the response from bodies

inevitably coming to terms with issues of ecclesiology and authority? The local, unstructured co-operation between congregations is vital to urban mission, but one might question whether the churches in UPA communities will be able to find the voice to seek support, resources and access to the regional and national instruments on UPA terms. In short, will the new inter-church instruments be remote from the UPAs and will the very structure inhibit dialogue between UPAs and regional Ecumenical Councils? In my own limited experience of such negotiations involving UPAs (from November 1987 onwards) I, for one, have been involved in two episodes which suggest problems lie ahead. In the front-line of mission will anyone think the effort worthwhile?

The third point underlies and perhaps even demolishes the first two and the strength of the original question. What ecumenical card are we playing? At the heart of our pilgrimage is the question of Faith and Order. What sort of God is it that we have faith in, and how does such a God intend His creation to be ordered? If Jesus really means what He says in the declaration of His ministry at Nazareth that He has come 'to announce good news to the poor',⁽¹²⁾ and if the purpose of His broken body is that it be shared with the poor of the world for their healing, then perhaps much of our present concern about buildings and ministry in the inner city (not daring to take note of the massive expenditure in maintaining the church in suburban and central settings in the first world) is to deny the Gospel we are called to embody both by too narrow a vista and too churchy an agenda. The 'real share issue' might be much more fundamental and truly ecumenical (in the sense of the whole world) than *Faith in the City* presupposes.⁽¹³⁾

GROWING INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP

Trevor Hubbard, noting the proposals of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas (ACCUPA)⁽¹⁴⁾ in its chapter 'Developing the People of God',⁽¹⁵⁾ next turns our attention to the form of leadership required in UPA churches, how it is to be mobilised, trained and validated. *Faith in the City* concentrates on the need to develop lay leadership in UPAs. Baptists, with our emphasis on the 'priesthood of all believers', might be assumed to be well in advance of some other traditions at this point. In recent years our resources for lay leadership training have been essentially concentrated in the Christian Training Programme (CTP).⁽¹⁶⁾ This distance learning scheme of varied ability modules has much to commend it. However, success has brought problems in regional support and national under-funding. A new Education Unit within the Union might do something to improve the situation, but without careful supervision the nature of CTP can all too easily appeal only to the literate and articulate members of our suburban churches. As a denomination we put very little at national or regional level into lay leadership training. Those fortunate to live within travelling distance of a Theological College may benefit from evening courses mounted for lay leaders. The Manchester Christian Institute⁽¹⁷⁾ has provided a structure with the Christian Leadership Course and other lay leadership programmes. A few Associations have organised patterns of lay leadership training.⁽¹⁸⁾

Most of that which is offered has been developed in general for the whole church. Lay leadership training designed to face the

realities of life in UPAs is not yet at an advanced state. Some of the most enterprising work exists in groupings such as the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission (ECUM).⁽¹⁹⁾ The Salford Urban Mission and the Central Bradford Baptist Fellowship (CBBF) have both sought to provide specific courses for their own members and contacts, and the recently formed Special Projects in Areas of Municipal Housing in Yorkshire, bringing together seven churches, has sought, in a pattern of six monthly seminars, to address the issue of training. Other examples of lay leadership training for those engaged in UPAs may exist of which I am unaware. If ACCUPA is right that Christians from UPAs have frequently been overawed by finding themselves in a tiny minority on educational courses run by the Church and have been de-skilled in the type of training offered, then either ecumenically, or denominationally if we must, the work of training local leadership in an appropriate way in UPAs must be advanced.

Here the work of professional adult educators must be harnessed to the task, though the average UPA Christian community may not understand quite what is being suggested, for example:

religious believers seem particularly vulnerable to cognitive dissonance, since if they take their religious commitment seriously, they are likely to experience tension within their world of alleged knowledge.⁽²⁰⁾

The business of developing lay leadership skills in UPA communities will require a further shift in methods and resources to achieve appropriate results. In Salford the work on small groups sharing and learning together has been fragile and has required a high ratio of equipped personnel to group members. In Bradford the educational aspect of the CBBF Asian Project has demanded a major commitment from the Home Mission-funded worker,⁽²¹⁾ together with the expertise of ministerial team members including the Revd Donald Hudson, one time Vice-Principal of Serampore College in India. This serves to illustrate some of the multi-faith and multi-cultural issues which many UPAs have to face.⁽²²⁾ Leadership skills, to be effective, must not take people out of their environment, yet need to have a firm base in Christian theology and culture. In addition, we cannot afford to ignore the community context which, for many, will be far removed from the white anglo-saxon suburban communities we are in danger of regarding as the normal context for Baptist life and mission. The majority of our material for lay leadership training is designed with one pattern in mind. Courses like the Christian Training Programme rely on literacy and information. Academic and professional people who, by and large, chart the pattern of training available, characteristically have large amounts of information - the minister's study piled high with books - but often we make very little use of it.⁽²³⁾ I think of a Deacon in a Baptist church set in the heart of a UPA who struggled for years to complete the CTP course, overcoming a handicap of illiteracy and with excellent support from church and tutor. She brings gifts and leadership to her church in an effective way, but one cannot help feeling we failed her by the patterns of teaching offered and the skills required before the information could be received and assimilated.

Associations and, in our large cities, Districts of Baptist churches, might well address themselves to the issue of how those

within UPA churches can be helped to learn about Christianity and to develop leadership skills using methods which avoid the verbal solo and the use of the written text wherever possible. The methods to be used should concentrate on unlocking the treasure-chest of stored experience, utilizing group work and noting the importance of relationships and emotions. These things cannot be organised centrally, but require more resources than will normally be available in one community.(24) In that sense they offer us a challenge to work at the business of interdependency with imagination and purpose. Of course the Education Unit at Baptist Union level will have a role as a 'think-tank' for developing methods of group learning suitable for use in this way within the constituency, but the needs and problems identified require a very different approach from those offered in CTP, Equipped to Teach and the Youth Leadership Training Course.(25)

If indigenous lay leadership can be trained in new ways, what of the stipendiary ordained and separated ministry? *Faith in the City* suggested that the patterns of theological formation on offer within the Church of England did not adequately train people to minister in UPAs. Some went further, saying:

that their training has not simply been inappropriate but in many ways has positively unfitted them for the urban ministry to which they find themselves committed.(26)

Our Baptist Colleges have, to a large extent, modelled themselves on the pattern of university education and its pursuit of theological excellence. The historic reasons are easily identified in the struggle of the dissenting academies to prove themselves equal to 'Oxbridge' in learning. Today, we might want to argue that the needs of the churches present a different agenda to that developed by academic theology within traditional university departments. Some of our Colleges appear to have recognised this by the creation of congregation-based patterns of training and integrated programmes seeking to marry the acquisition of the *corpus* of academic theology with practical reflection on the church and the world. Yet such developments are resisted with vigour in certain quarters. On the opposite side of the debate, some ministers in the front-line argue that developments to date have only scratched the surface of what is necessary.(27) What will best enable the people of God in a UPA to grow in their Christian maturity and develop an adequate and coherent lifestyle and mission? Someone skilled in New Testament Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic, who knows a reasonable amount about the theological controversies in the first three centuries of the Christian church and can hold his, or her, own in a debate about logical positivism? Or someone who can help a base community work out how the gospel of the servant can help them, as powerless people in our modern self-seeking community, to obtain a measure of justice and shalom? Perhaps both are required. However, the fear is widespread that the balance is tilted in one direction.

In Sheffield, working in the context of the Manor Local Ecumenical Project (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist), and particularly with the St Swithun's/Manor Baptist unit, Ripon College, Cuddesdon, has attempted to face this challenge. Four students from the College work with Team Vicar, Richard Atkinson, for the equivalent of two

terms, discovering the nature of ministry in this large inner-city housing estate. They continue their academic work, but do so as they reflect on their day-to-day experience in Sheffield. Mission studies explore such themes as urbanization, secularization, implicit religion and evangelism. The ecumenical and team context of the work is emphasised through the LEP which has five Anglican clergy, a woman Baptist minister and a male Methodist minister.(28) In Manchester the Northern Baptist College has similar placements in inner-city Moss Side and Salford. That said, it is still the case that the majority of our students undergoing theological training are not being equipped to understand the UPA scene. One young minister with a natural ability to work in a difficult UPA coal mining area commented to me that his theological formation was of only passing use faced with the realities of ministry. His College is one training many of our future ministers.

The purist will argue we need the gifted academics (in short supply is the cry of some), we need the enthusiastic evangelist and church planter to harvest the silicon valley 'crop', and the good all-round pastor administrator to hold together our well established and flourishing suburban causes. No doubt we do. Yet the Macedonian call comes from UPAs as well! We need every one of our Colleges to develop, as a matter of urgency, a course or module in urban/inner-city ministry and to set a target of at least 50% of students leaving our Colleges from, say, 1992, to have had some relevant training in UPA ministry.

THE QUESTION OF THE STRATEGIC USE OF RESOURCES

Trevor Hubbard's first question I have saved until the end. How does the Baptist Union of Great Britain view the challenge of the UPAs? This article has examined the need for resources of personnel and money to make an adequate response to the plight of the urban poor in England and Wales. What priority does such a call have against the many other demands upon our Baptist community? Against the urban scene is offered the glitter and sparkle of almost instant church growth achieved, so we are regularly informed in the *Baptist Times*, with relative ease within the boundaries of 'Network South East'. The Baptist Urban Group (BUG)(29) was formed to act as a pressure-group on behalf of those people concerned with mission in UPAs who have been anxious that the Home Mission grants made available to ECUM and Salford might be the first and not the last devoted to such demanding mission. A series of meetings with the Chairman of the Home Mission Working Group and the Secretary for Home Mission has sought to convince them that the review of the Home Mission Scheme has in its proposals all that is needed to make applications for such specialist work possible.

The Baptist Union Council, in accepting the major recommendations of the Review Group, has clearly endorsed this general view. Dr Marchant and myself, on behalf of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association, evaluated the Salford Project in the autumn of 1987 and, in the light of our report, the Home Mission Grants Committee agreed further funding until the next five-yearly review. In Yorkshire, the Special Project in Areas of Municipal Housing has attracted two 100% grants with a provisional commitment to a third. Other similar initiatives in major population centres have been supported. The case might, therefore, have been answered.

I confess to a certain unease. This comes from an initiative taken four years ago in my own Association. Work in UPAs needs to be understood by the wider church. There are sensitive and useful ways in which thriving suburban churches can help. However, experience has demonstrated that suburban churches can make the wrong sort of approaches and offer the wrong type of help to UPA causes. They come with their methods, rather than listening to experience and noting the needs. They come believing they have everything to contribute and nothing to learn. I have been involved in the closure of two UPA churches in one city in which this was an important and devastating factor. After careful thought a pilot project for a worker to be based in a UPA church, but to have as part of his or her task developing dialogue between the 'successful' suburban and the hard-pressed UPA churches in one city, was mapped out and presented to the Baptist Union. We were promised visits and serious consideration. To date we have not had the visits and, if it has been considered, the Association does not know the result. Certainly we suspect a marked lack of enthusiasm for the project in Home Mission circles. Now, the particular method and pattern might be wrong. However, no one has ventured to say in what way.

The truth might be that people are happy to commit a certain percentage of resources from our national common purse to such work (say, a figure similar to that devoted to ecumenical activity, traditionally an area of Baptist suspicion). Yet the crusading zeal is lacking to help people change their concepts and their expectations towards the missionary tasks in UPA work. UPA churches often have, as their focus, the search for a more just, righteous and peaceful society, rather than the successful building of powerful contemporary *ecclesia*.

At that point the Baptist Urban Group may still find a problem. Sympathy with the needs is undoubtedly there in the staff of the Union and the Committees of the Council. A steady flow of grant applications for defined ministries within UPAs could well be supported. All this could still leave untouched helping the whole Baptist family to see, understand and participate in the work of urban and inner city mission.

If that is the case, the next time Home Mission faces a financial crisis, will the temptation be to cut at those points where there is only a limited chance of a financial return from the investment in UPAs in order that scarce resources might be deployed in the more prosperous areas, building up newly planted churches which will quickly become net contributors to the fund?

For the 'whole' Gospel to be offered to our nation a balanced use of Home Mission is required in the rural, the suburban, the ecumenical, the UPAs and specialist ministries. Have we matured enough in Christ to achieve that?

CONCLUSION

I have sought to explore Trevor's three questions. As this article is published, he completes his term as a General Superintendent, presumably freeing himself to observe developments in a more detached way. I have attempted to show that I, for one, believe these questions present important challenges to us as we approach the twenty-first century. This issue of the *Baptist Quarterly*, by concentrating on the

church in the city, gives us all the opportunity to reflect on the missionary challenge in the heart of our large urban communities. The questions I have explored and the way I have explored them have been, almost inevitably, coloured by my own experience of working in an Association with four major urban conurbations. (30) My pressing of the points of debate within our denominational, educational, ecumenical and Home Mission agenda is intended to promote the urgent debate of key issues which is what Trevor hoped for and we have not yet had.

NOTES

- 1 C. Marchant, Presidential address *Shalom*, London, 1988.
- 2 Dr Colin Marchant has extensive experience of ministry in the inner city. He is involved with the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission and is author of several books and articles on urban mission.
- 3 Cf. D. Sheppard, *Bias to the Poor*, 1983, and *Faith in the City*, 1985, pp.47ff.
- 4 The members of the Commission were all Anglican, but the resource bodies and advisors included ecumenical groupings such as the Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission. Evidence was taken from a wide range of people including the Baptist Union of Scotland, the Black Pastors' Conference and Paul Weller of Greater Manchester Ecumenical Council.
- 5 A. T. Hubbard, review of *Faith in the City: A call for action by Church and nation*, *BQ XXXI*, 8, October 1986, p.401ff.
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 The Inter-Church Process, of which one segment was the ecumenical Bible study series *Lent '86*, has sought to involve thirty-two Churches in an exploration of life and mission within these islands.
- 8 The Inter-Church Process has published the following booklets as part of the exploration: *Lent '86*, *Reflections*, *Observations*, *Views from the Pews*, *What you said*, *The Swanwick Report*, *Proposed Ecumenical Instruments*, 1986-88.
- 9 Cardinal Basil Hume at the Swanwick Conference in 1987. The Revd J. F. V. Nicholson suggested the following list of stages in ecumenical progress when Ecumenical Officer for England with the British Council of Churches: competition, co-existence, co-operation, commitment, communion.
- 10 The Inter-Church Process *Proposed Ecumenical Instruments*, 1988.
- 11 This article was written in the summer of 1988 when the denominations were still seeking reactions from their constituencies to the draft proposals. The situation will have moved on by the time this edition of the *Quarterly* is published.
- 12 Luke 4.18.
- 13 This point was enunciated in a striking fashion by the Revd M. H. Taylor M.A., B.D., S.T.M., Director of Christian Aid, when delivering the University Sermon at Leeds, 8th May 1988.
- 14 Authors of the report *Faith in the City - A Call for Action by Church and Nation*, 1985.
- 15 *Ibid.*, Chapter 6, p.106ff.
- 16 The Christian Training Programme of the Baptist Union of Great Britain: a distance learning scheme using manuals and, if possible, a local tutor.
- 17 The Manchester Christian Institute, sponsored by several church

agencies, including the Northern Baptist College.

- 18 For instance, the Training Resources Co-ordinator in the Yorkshire Baptist Association.
- 19 The Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission: a London-based agency partially funded by the London Baptist Association and Home Mission.
- 20 John Hull, *What prevents Christian adults from learning*, 1985.
- 21 Until recently this was Ms Gill Robinson, a Church-Related Community Worker of the United Reformed Church, trained at St Andrew's Hall, Birmingham in theology, comparative religion and community work.
- 22 See elsewhere in this issue the article by the Revd W. E. Whalley on this theme.
- 23 A quick estimate of the number of books on Christianity in my own modest study indicates something like 3,500, ignoring the cardboard boxes consigned to the loft awaiting a larger study!
- 24 For example, see the work of E.U.T.P. described in *Learning without books*, St Bride's Church Centre, P.O. Box 83, Liverpool L69 8AN.
- 25 These represent the three major courses offered in the Baptist Union of Great Britain for adult education. All require the same type of verbal, reading and comprehension skills. The same point can be made with regard to the National Christian Education Council and Scripture Union materials where the methods to be used with children vary, but the sources for training the Junior Church Teachers and for use with adult groups require skills not always found in our congregations.
- 26 ACCUPA op.cit., p.119, para.6.56.
- 27 Some work has been done on this by the Salford Urban Mission ministry team.
- 28 For a full account see Alan Billings and Richard Atkinson, 'Responding to Faith in the City', *British Journal of Theological Education*, Vol.1, No.3, Spring 1988, p.3ff.
- 29 The Baptist Urban Group. Convener, the Revd K. W. Argyle, M.A., B.D.
- 30 Within the county of Yorkshire we have the major conurbations of West Yorkshire (population 2.05m), South Yorkshire (1.29m), a significant part of the county of Cleveland including the large Borough of Middlesbrough, and the sea port of Hull (268k). Just one of the five metropolitan districts in West Yorkshire, the City of Leeds, has 711k population, making it the second largest municipal authority in the United Kingdom by population (the city of Birmingham is the largest with 1004k).

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