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75 YEARS OF THE GENERAL SUPERINTENDENCY - WHAT NEXT?*

1990 represented the seventy-fifth anniversary of the appointment of General Superintendents within the Baptist Union. It seems an appropriate point for a review, not least because in the past few years there have been significant changes in the context in which the Superintendents exercise their ministry. Some of the developments were anticipated in the Baptist Union *Report of the Commission on the Associations* in 1964, which identified a 'growing pressure for more full-time Association Secretaries' and argued instead, albeit unsuccessfully, for a reduction in the size of the Areas and a substantial increase in the number of Superintendents.¹ There have been significant changes also in the wider context of the ecumenical and charismatic movements which are relevant to the exercise of pastoral oversight or *episkope* beyond the local church.

All too often the development of our Baptist thinking and church life has been reactive rather than proactive, essentially pragmatic and *ad hoc*, and inevitably has had an inadequate theological basis. The advantages of proceeding in this way, as in fact Baptists usually seem to do, are obvious: flexibility, diversity, participation, support by the constituency, and relevance to a varied and changing situation. The principal disadvantage is that others set the agenda and often priorities are determined by short-term needs. So from time to time it is vital that we reflect on significant developments in our denominational life and, as we dare to hope, on what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

I have summarised my own reflections under a number of keywords and phrases: Superintendent, Messenger, Association Minister, Baptist Bishop and Apostle.

I. SUPERINTENDENT

By the end of the nineteenth century the two main branches of Baptist life in this country had been grafted into a new Baptist Union. Inevitably there had been difficulties and tensions, most notably the Down Grade Controversy which led to C. H. Spurgeon's withdrawal, but apparently the Union entered the new century with great hopes and expectations, characterised by the launch of an appeal, half of which was for church extension and a fifth of which was spent on new headquarters in Southampton Row. The success of the Twentieth-Century Fund was an encouraging start for the newly-appointed General Secretary, J. H. Shakespeare. As Ernest Payne remarks, 'there was an almost breathless quality about the developments during the first ten years of Shakespeare's secretaryship'.² Towards the end of the decade, however, it became clear that all was not well with the general religious situation in Britain. Although the number of churches associated with the Baptist Union continued to increase, the membership figures began to fall by about two thousand a year.

Against this background Shakespeare launched his second great appeal for a capital fund. Although its main ostensible purpose was to supplement the stipends of the more poorly paid ministers, the scheme went much further than ministerial 'sustentation'. As originally proposed, it involved the re-organisation of the collegiate training under the supervision of the Union, but this proved unacceptable to the colleges who cherished their independence! It also envisaged centralised payment of ministers in the scheme, with each church remitting 'to the Central Fund the entire

* This paper, given at the Baptist Historical Society Summer School at Regent's Park College, Oxford, June 1991, is part of a larger sabbatical study on the biblical, historical and theological basis of association and oversight among Baptist churches which the author hopes to publish later.

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sum it raises for ministerial support'; where this sum was 'less than the minimum stipend', it would be 'supplemented out of contributions' from the wealthier churches. It recommended that calls to pastorate should be for a limited period, that each 'minister shall retire automatically at the end of the period for which he has been called, unless the call has been renewed', and that all such retirements from pastoral office would take place on 29 September! If a minister was out of pastorate, 'the Committee shall station him at a Church as minister in charge for one year . . . If after three consecutive annual changes, no Church shall have given him an invitation', he would cease to belong to the scheme.

Such radical proposals for ministerial settlement provoked some fears and objections and, in the newly-established *Baptist Times and Freeman* it was stated that it was not intended 'to push through any scheme which would violate the fundamental principles of Congregationalism, or interfere with the cherished liberty of each Church . . . to select and call their own pastor; but it is urged that the Churches, for the sake of greater union and brotherhood, should not insist upon a rigid independence.' This tension between local autonomy and centralised organisation periodically threatens the delicate balance within our Union. However, an amended scheme was agreed at the Assembly in 1912 and a capital appeal was launched. Two years later Shakespeare was able to announce its successful completion, but within weeks the country was plunged into a World War and the Union was faced with 'the question whether in war-time the Sustentation and Ministerial Settlement scheme should be put into operation'. Since the necessary funds were available, it was decided to proceed. The arrangements were put into effect from January 1916.

In his definitive history of the Baptist Union, Ernest Payne speaks of 'an elaborate and carefully worked-out scheme for ministerial settlement and removal, and the appointment of ten General Superintendents'.³ In his survey of the Superintendency in the *Baptist Quarterly* in 1973, Hubert Watson states: 'The appointment of ten General Superintendents was an integral part of the scheme.'⁴ It is fascinating, however, to discover that the original proposals do not mention the possibility of such appointments at any point and this component, which in retrospect proved to be of some significance, seems to have been an afterthought.

It had been at a meeting of the Ministerial Settlement Committee in January 1906 that J. H. Shakespeare first submitted some suggestions, 'with a view to securing the completer efficiency and freedom of our pastors and churches'.⁵ A circular letter was sent to every church in the Union, the Association Committees were consulted, and 'after protracted consideration', a phrase that appears more than once in the records, the Council agreed in January 1909 that 'these proposals should be brought before the Spring Assembly with a view to submission to the churches'. The Annual Report continues: 'The publication of the proposals . . . led to many interviews and a voluminous private correspondence with the Secretary, and also to a considerable correspondence in the columns of the *Baptist Times*'. As a consequence, the scheme was further amended before it was finally adopted by the Spring Assembly in 1912.

There is no mention in the Committee Minutes or Annual Reports of the appointment of Superintendents until a Sustentation Fund sub-committee on 18 January 1915, when it is recorded that 'After considerable discussion, it was agreed to recommend that the country be divided into the following districts, with a general superintendent over each . . .' So only a few weeks before this ambitious new scheme was to begin, a Superintendent was appointed for each Area in England and Wales, who was to be the representative of the Union for the Sustentation Fund and in all matters relating to ministerial settlement in his area. J. H. Rushbrook may be credited with the choice of title, prompted apparently by its use in the Lutheran Church.⁶ Very significantly, it was 'the intention and hope of the Assembly that a

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General Superintendent shall not be unduly absorbed in business and financial cares, but that he may be enabled, through the blessing of God, to exercise a spiritual ministry in the Churches of the area and promote their closer union and more effective co-operation.⁷ So, although these new appointments were prompted by the introduction of a scheme for Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation, from the beginning the leaders of the denomination saw the Superintendency as an evangelistic and reconciling ministry, rather than a mere administrative necessity.

II. MESSENGERS

Indeed, Ernest Payne argued that 'what seemed to some a radical departure in Baptist polity was, in certain respects, a return to the "Messengers", which had been a feature of the life of the General Baptists in the seventeenth century.'⁸ The term Messenger was 'used by both General and Particular Baptists to denote anyone who was commissioned by one church to preach the Gospel and form new churches, or who was sent by one church to another to settle a dispute or discuss matters of common concern'.⁹ In 1655 Thomas Collier was ordained by the Particular Baptists in the west country to be 'General Superintendent and Messenger to all the Associated Churches', but it was among the General Baptists that the relationship between the churches was strengthened by the general adoption of Messengers as a separate office or order of ministry within the life and work of all the churches.

The title chosen by our Baptist forebears may be traced to two passages in the New Testament, one in Philippians, where Epaphroditus is described as the 'Messenger' of the Philippian church, and the other in II Corinthians, where Paul commends Titus and then refers to some anonymous brethren who are 'the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ'¹⁰ (The original Greek is, of course, *apostolos* in both instances). The context indicates clearly that such 'messengers of the churches' were chosen and commissioned by the congregations concerned and that they have an itinerant preaching ministry. In seeking to pattern their church life on the New Testament, the early Baptists found within its pages an apostolic ministry wider than the local congregation.

So in 1666, when Thomas Grantham was ordained a Messenger, he says, 'I was elected by the consent of many congregations and ordained to the office of a messenger by those who were in the same office before me. The place where I was ordained was in my own mansion or dwelling house, the place where the church usually met . . . I was chosen by the consent of many churches to take a larger trust; and ordained a messenger to oversee the churches in divers places that had need of help.'¹¹

In view of present practice, the account of Joseph Hooke's appointment by the Lincolnshire Association in 1695 is instructive: 'At the first meeting it was proposed to call Mr Joseph Hooke to the office of messenger; and the proposal being approved, both by this association and the general assembly in London, and Mr Hooke and his church having also acceded to it, he was solemnly ordained to that office . . .'¹² As John Nicholson points out, 'the initiative lies with the local association, but their nomination must be passed by the Assembly and by the local church, the whole procedure culminating in a solemn ordination service by another messenger.'¹³

It is in the writings of Thomas Grantham, first published in 1671, that the office of Messenger is most fully expounded. He claimed that there were three kinds of ministers given to the Church, 'Messengers (or Apostles), Bishops (or Elders), and Deacons'.¹⁴ He points out that Bishops and Elders were one office in the New Testament,¹⁵ and that the office of the first apostles was unique and unrepeatable. He argued, however, that, although the Messengers may not be successors to the Twelve, they share many of the same functions as 'the first and chief apostles', being

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itinerant ministers with 'authority to preach the Gospel in all places, at all times, to all persons', and 'to plant churches and to settle those in order who are as sheep without a shepherd'.¹⁶ Evidently there was some suspicion of the office, lest it should 'lead to setting up of Archbishops or some other anti-Christian usurpation',¹⁷ and concern that there was no one to correct them if they fell into errors of life or doctrine. So no doubt to reassure some, Grantham writes: 'Yet have they no dominion over [the churches'] faith, to force themselves upon them whether they will or no, especially such churches as they never planted . . . We give them no more superintendency that Timothy and Titus had . . . so that their pre-eminence was only a degree of honour (not of power) in being greater servants than others'.¹⁸

III. ASSOCIATION MINISTERS

In many parts of the country these local Baptist churches linked together in district associations, a term which had been used earlier to describe military alliances organised for defence purposes on a county basis during the Civil War and familiar therefore to officers of the New Model Army, many of whom were Baptists.¹⁹ As Rufus Jones points out, 'there were among them preachers who had been tailors, leather-sellers, soap-boilers, brewers, weavers, and tinkers, but the important point is that these preachers carried conviction . . . and constructed spiritual churches to the glory of God. They did in their generation, what tax-collectors and fishermen did in the primitive days of the Church; and it was vastly to the credit of these primitive Baptists that they rediscovered how to bring the gifts of laymen and unschooled members into play for spiritual ends.'²⁰

Although they were committed to the independence of the local congregation from the ecclesiastical and temporal power and authority of Church and State, from the beginning they also recognised the importance of their interdependence, valuing association with other congregations of like mind. The preamble to the Particular Baptist 1644 Confession emphasised that the churches which had covenanted together shared a common life, ' . . . though we be distinct in respect of our particular bodies, for convenience sake, being as many as can well meet together in one place, yet all are one in Communion, holding Jesus Christ to be our head and Lord; under whose government we desire alone to walk.' The term 'association' seems to have been used more widely among the Particular Baptist Churches, from which in fact most of our present Associations trace their origins.²¹

In a fascinating series of meetings of their messengers from 1652, the Abingdon Association of churches concluded 'that particular churches of Christ ought to hold a firm communion each with other; (1) In point of advice in doubtful matters and controversies remaining doubtful to any particular church, Acts 15: 1f, 24-28; 16: 1f. Which scriptures, compared together, shew that the church at Jerusalem held communion with the church at Antioch affording help to them as they could. (2) In giving and receiving, in case of want and poverty of any particular church, I Cor. 16:3. (3) In consulting and consenting (as need shall require and as shall be most for the glory of God) to the joint carrying on of the work of the Lord that is common to the churches, as choosing such messengers as we find in II Cor 8:19. And in all other things wherein particular churches ought to be serviceable and to manifest their love each to other . . . Because there is the same relation betwixt the particular churches each towards other as there is betwixt particular members of one church . . . Wherefore we conclude that every church ought to manifest its care over other churches as fellow members of the same body of Christ . . .'²²

The major theological principle agreed by the representatives of this group of five Particular Baptist churches was simple: the necessity for association between individual congregations was affirmed to be the same as that compelling association

between individual believers in a single gathered congregation. If we view the church as only 'a spiritual fellowship composed of an innumerable number of small compact groups',²³ then presumably an Association or Union is simply a federation of local churches and has no corporate identity. However, if we are to be true to the New Testament and to important insights in our Baptist heritage, then without losing the primacy of the local church, we must find a place for the 'more than local' in our Baptist ecclesiology.

In 1984 in *Dimensions of Church and Ministry* Neville Clark suggested that, although our 'Baptist churchmanship begins with and always returns to the controlling centrality of the local congregation', it also recognises that 'church expressions which are more than local/congregational are required'. He admits that they may be 'secondary and derivative' but they 'arise from the associating and covenanting together of local churches'.²⁴ The advantage of his suggestions, which I cannot detail here, is that they give ecclesiological significance to the 'more than local' in our Baptist polity without damaging the centrality of the local church. They also provide a basis for an *episkope* which is 'more than local', in which the superintendent is a minister of the Association, and the Union, as the pastor is the minister of the local church.

IV. BAPTIST BISHOPS

The very mention of *episkope* as the subject for my sabbatical study produced the inevitable reaction among some of our Baptist churches and ministers! Throughout this century there have been intermittent suggestions from the higher echelons of the Established Church that the Free Churches 'should take episcopacy into its system'.²⁵

In 1916 J. H. Shakespeare, in an address to the Free Church Council, concluded, 'We have reached a stage in the religious life of this country when, if we are simply denominations and not a united Church, we are doomed. The principle of division has spent its force and the era of unity must begin . . .'²⁶ However, when his book, *The Churches at the Crossroads*, was published in 1918, it became clear that he was advocating not simply a united Free Church but unity with the Church of England: 'Our aim should be nothing less than to bring to an end that tremendous cleavage in the religious life of this realm which followed upon the Act of Uniformity in 1662'²⁷ . . . and four years later, in a contribution to a collection of essays entitled *The Coming Renaissance*, Shakespeare expressed his own reaction to the overtures from the Anglican Church: 'In gentle and tentative language, the Lambeth Appeal claims that organic union can only be reached on the basis of episcopacy . . . When all is said and done, the acceptance of episcopacy by the Free Churches in the light of their history would be a tremendous act. Yet we do not think it is too great a price to pay . . .'²⁸

T. R. Glover led the opposition to this stance in the BU Assembly in 1919, arguing that 'if the price of ecclesiastical reunion be the acceptance of episcopacy, with the implied necessity of regularizing our ministry by episcopal ordination or reordination, the Baptists of this country . . . elect to stand by the priesthood of all believers and God's right to call and consecrate whom he will and how he will'.²⁹ In the following years it became increasingly clear that Shakespeare 'had gone ahead of the rank and file and had caused widespread suspicion because of his often expressed hope that the Free Churches and the Anglican Church might ultimately be brought together, for the sake of which he was himself ready to accept a modified episcopacy and even some form of reordination'.³⁰

Surely he would have rejoiced in the recent appointment of an *Ecumenical Moderator* at Milton Keynes, especially as it was described in *The Times* as 'equivalent to a bishop' and our own denomination paper said that 'in episcopal terms,

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Hugh Cross will be a bishop in all but name'.³¹ However, the three functions of a bishop emphasized in the Church of England report, *Church Relations in England* (1948), are '(1) ordination, (2) decision, in concurrence with presbyters and laity, on any changes in matters of doctrine and polity, and (3) the pastoral oversight of ministers and churches'. An Ecumenical Moderator may be entrusted with some responsibility in decision-making and pastoral oversight but ordination is another matter altogether. In response to that report, the Baptist Union argued that ordination is 'the public acknowledgement in the Church that a candidate has been called of God to the work of the ministry. To say that someone must of necessity by virtue of his office take part in such a service because, if he does not, there will be no regular or proper ordination would be to introduce a new and alien element, a legalistic and coercive element, into our church life'.³²

While most Baptists would not quarrel with that, some would question whether our present practice is correct, in which ordination is generally entrusted to a member of staff of the college where the ordinand has been a student, for it seems to put undue emphasis on academic study and pastoral training, whereas the most important element must be the recognition of the call. The Baptist Union Report on *The Meaning and Practice of Ordination among Baptists* defines ordination as 'the act, wherein the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, publicly recognises and confirms that a Christian believer has been gifted, called and set apart by God for the work of the ministry and in the name of Christ commissions him for this work'.³³ In the elaboration that follows the emphasis throughout is on the Church. Therefore it seems anomalous that the act of ordination is not entrusted unequivocally to an official representative of 'the Church' - the sending church, the calling church or the wider fellowship of churches in Association or Union. The most appropriate person would seem to be the one entrusted with *episkope* for the new minister.

Even if that argument were accepted, we would not regard the validity of the ordination as dependent on the participation of anyone by virtue of their office. 'Baptists have had from the beginning an exalted conception of the office of the Christian minister', stated the Baptist Union in 1948, in *The Doctrine of the Church*. 'His authority is from Christ through the believing community. It is not derived from a chain of bishops held to be lineally descended from the Apostles'.³⁴ Of course, apostolic succession and the historic episcopate have continued to be sticking-points in all church unity conversations of recent decades. That is one of the reasons why the recent Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and the German Evangelical Churches is so significant, because it acknowledges 'that personal and collegial oversight (*episkope*) is embodied and exercised in our churches in a variety of forms, episcopal and non-episcopal, as a visible sign of the Church's unity and continuity in apostolic life, mission and ministry'.³⁵

The question faced by the Baptist Union in earlier discussions was 'whether there could be Baptist Bishops, linked in the manner suggested with the episcopal successions of the past and exercising the functions mentioned.' Clearly others were setting the agenda, but in the contemporary debate the question is rather different: Do we already have Baptist bishops 'in all but name', exercising many of the functions that we believe are the proper responsibility of such an office within the Church and what, if anything, would be gained by recognising this fact by a change of title?

Although the word *bishop* is found in the early Baptist Confessions, presumably our forefathers used it simply because they found it in their translations of the New Testament,³⁶ and desired to identify their church order with that of the early Church. The word *bishop* is derived from the Old English *biscop*, which can be traced via Latin to the original Greek *episkopos*.³⁷ Baptist hesitations, however, regarding the

use of the historic title are based on present assumptions regarding the office, not on the original derivation. 'The Free Churches have no objections to episcopacy', wrote E. A. Payne, 'if the word be understood according to the primary meaning of *episkope*',³⁸ and, in our reply to the Ten Propositions in 1977, the BU Council claimed that 'in many fundamental respects, episcopacy in this personalised sense, far from being a foreign body, can lay claim to recognition as a prized and familiar feature of Baptist life.'³⁹

Morris West, in his paper on *Church, Ministry and Episcopacy* in 1981, argued that there is an episcopal function proper to the local Baptist church: 'It is a church meeting which determines under the guidance of God to call a man to the ministry of that particular church . . . The minister himself who is called to the church will be expected to be one who exercises functions belonging to oversight . . . We believe that minister and church together stand in a succession of apostolic churches . . . and each have proper episcopal functions.' Then he adds, 'Thirdly, we have the Area Superintendents. Of all the ministry in our denomination, it is probably the Superintendents who have been vulnerable through our failure to come to terms with a wider concept of the whole Church . . . The Superintendents have never been defined ecclesiological and theologically. They are neither episcopally authorised by local churches together to minister in the context of those local churches, nor are they, nor can they be authorised by any wider fellowship which does not admit to any ecclesiological significance.'⁴⁰ Such a situation is quite unsatisfactory, not least in view of the growing importance of our ecumenical relationships.

V. APOSTLES?

Another challenge to our theological uncertainties has come from recent developments within the charismatic movement. The Restoration Churches are concerned not only with the recovery of the supernatural gifts of the Spirit and new freedom in expressions of worship but also with 'the restoration of apostolic and prophetic ministries'.⁴¹ They suggest that 'Part of the apostasy of the first-century Church was to abandon God's plan for successfully building His Kingdom . . . It is possible to be a Christian in a church without apostles and prophets, but it is not possible for that church to become what God would have it to be.'⁴² The claim made by the House Churches that they are restoring New Testament Christianity, and in particular scriptural patterns of leadership, has shaken the confidence of many Baptist churches attracted by their lively worship and numerical growth. In some instances this has led to a fundamental shift in the balance of power and responsibility from congregational to a presbyteral or even an episcopal structure.

The fact that in the past decade so many Christians have welcomed the opportunity to delegate their responsibility for personal decisions to others, although significantly many are decision-makers in their secular employment, is a strange social phenomenon that merits further enquiry. 'When shepherding assumes detailed control over the lives of others,' wrote David Watson, 'there will be a serious loss in personal responsibility . . . Since almost every Christian finds guidance difficult, it may initially be a relief to let someone else make the decisions instead. In the long run, however, this will keep the disciple in an unhealthy dependence on a human shepherd.'⁴³ Such a result is in marked contrast to the teaching of Ephesians where apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are given to the church 'so that the body of Christ may be built up . . . and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.'⁴⁴ In fact, we believe that participation by the whole fellowship in decision-making was an integral component of the life of the early Church.⁴⁵ Robert Banks points out that 'In several places in his letters Paul talks about specific aspects of the church's meetings, clarifies the principles upon

which decisions in this area should be based and gives concrete advice on the sorts of arrangements that follow from them. But nowhere does he address his remarks to a group of persons (or to any one person) who alone have responsibility for dealing with these affairs. This consistent and quite remarkable feature of his letters, so self-evident when one reads them . . . is apt to be overlooked. He constantly reminds the whole community of its obligations in these matters and calls upon every member to deal with them in a proper fashion . . . Clearly all who belong to the community share in the responsibility.⁴⁶

This full participation in decision-making was entirely consistent with the original concept of an *ekklesia*. 'It was the assembly of full citizens [of the city] . . . in which fundamental political and judicial decisions were taken . . . The *ekklesia* opened with prayers and sacrifices to the gods of the city . . . Every citizen had the right to speak and to propose matters for discussion . . . A decision was only valid if it won a certain number of votes by show of hands, by acclaim, by ballot . . .'⁴⁷ The use of the word *ekklesia* to describe the new Christian assemblies must have carried the connotations not only of its use in the Septuagint but also of the ideals of the Greek cities where many of the churches were being established. There was a risk in the adoption of such a word, and if the essential spiritual dimension is lost, then the church, then and now, becomes a mere democracy concerned only with the rules and procedures, parties and politics. As in the secular *ekklesia*, there are the constant dangers of party strife, of domination by wealth and influence, and power wielded by those with *charisma* over the mass of ordinary people.⁴⁸ We must never forget, however, that in the new *ekklesia*, 'in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ',⁴⁹ it is not the will of the majority but the mind of Christ that is to be determined.

At the beginning of the 1980s, under the influence of the Restoration Community Churches, there was a danger that church meetings would be discarded in favour of apostolic authority and ruling elders. More recently the focus has been on the method of decision-making. So Nigel Wright, in *A Challenge to Change*, comments: 'Over the course of the years, with the formalizing of business procedures, there has been a parallel tendency in Baptist churches to conceive of decision making along the lines of parliamentary democracy, that is to say, in terms of motions, amendments, voting and majority rule. The result has been distortion. To manipulate the rules and procedures of a meeting does not require spirituality but a certain cast of mind learnt by those who know how to play power games . . . a shift is needed away from concern with constitutional methods to consensus, that is, sensing together what the mind of the Lord might be for his church and pursuing this on the basis of common agreement.'⁵⁰

When there is total agreement, then there is no problem in decision-making in any church! But the crucial questions are concerned with how to give expression to and deal with genuine division of opinion and how to prevent it leading to division in fellowship. The evidence of both scripture and church history should remind us that the majority is not always right. Sometimes it is the courageous individual who has discerned the will of God for his people and he or she is not necessarily part of the leadership. In accordance with I Corinthians 12, we need to listen more carefully to the inarticulate, heed the doubts and fears of the uncertain, and empathize with any hurts within the body of Christ. Unfortunately the experience of the last decade indicates that a strong leadership can be very insensitive to hesitations or objections within the membership, decisions on occasion may need to be challenged and accountability to the whole fellowship must be made clear. Power games can be played not only by those who 'manipulate rules and procedures of a meeting' but more seriously by those who manipulate people.

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As long as it takes place in a spiritual context of fellowship and prayer, a vote is a simple but essential device to enable the chairman of a meeting to assess whether the church has reached a consensus, or, on the contrary, to what extent there is disagreement. Such a method avoids any dispute at the time or in the future about the interpretation of the discussion, or of any agreement reached or decisions made. The most vociferous may not represent the silent majority, and the most diffident, who are often nervous of public speaking, may need the encouragement of a formal vote to express their considered judgement, especially on difficult issues. Undoubtedly in many congregations the church meeting needs renewal, but in principle and in practice I remain unconvinced that our decision-making procedures, which in essence should express the members' understanding of the mind of Christ, whether by simple show of hands or secret ballot, are untrue to our understanding of scripture or inappropriate to our understanding of the church.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Where there is fellowship, Christ gives *episkope*.⁵¹ In a local Baptist church that *episkope* may be exercised primarily by the Church Meeting, but it is also focused in the ministry of those called by Christ and the Church to give oversight and pastoral care. In the wider circles of fellowship in Association and Union, Christ also gives *episkope* which may find expression primarily in corporate discussion and decision-making in committee and assembly, in ministerial recognition and corporate trusteeship. As in the local church, however, it is also focused in the personal ministry of those called to exercise leadership in our Union and regional or translocal oversight in our Associations.⁵² Increasingly in the local church and in the wider fellowship we have recognized that such *episkope* must be collegial as well as corporate and personal.⁵³ This requires mutual trust, if confidences are to be shared and if consultation is to be more than superficial, but the time and effort involved is more than repaid in more effective ministry. (I am more than willing to pay tribute to the invaluable partnership of my Area Pastoral Committee and the Area Team which includes the BMS Area Representative and an Association Evangelist, as well as the three Association Secretaries).

A collegial *episkope* is also exercised by ecumenical Church Leaders, particularly in respect of Local Ecumenical Projects, and Baptist Superintendents meet regularly with their counterparts in other denominations. As we are all aware, many branches of the Christian Church recognize a threefold pattern of ministry in bishop, priest or presbyter, and deacon, and clearly this embodies some fundamental differences from a Baptist approach to ministry. However, within our current ecclesiology it may be argued that we also acknowledge a threefold office: the area *episkopos* or superintendent (with Association ministers or secretaries), the local *episkopos* or minister (or ministers and elders), and the lay *diakonos* or deacons. Unlike the Anglican or Roman orders, in our Baptist understanding the difference between such offices relates not to priesthood, for we believe in the priesthood of all believers, or to hierarchy, for we recognize that all ministry is *diakonos*,⁵⁴ but primarily to the person's calling, gifting, training and ministry. Baptist churches are committed to every member ministry and both the local minister and the Area Superintendent can be described as the first among equals. It is a question of function, not of status. Both are called of God, in the words of II Timothy, to 'preach the word . . . Correct, rebuke and encourage, with great patience and careful instruction',⁵⁵ and opportunities ought to be provided in the Area Ministers Conference and Association Assembly for the Superintendent to exercise a ministry of Word and Sacrament. As a minister is expected to exercise a leadership role in a local church as part of his ministerial function, so in the Association a Superintendent

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is appointed to lead,⁵⁶ although that has not always been our expectation of the office. Expectation is important because by and large in such appointments you are likely to get what you expect! If the denomination expects its Superintendents to be administrators, and burdens them with more and more administrative tasks, or pastoral advisers, to be consulted by churches or ministers only in times of crisis, then it may be argued that that is what the denomination will get, instead of the leadership that is needed.

For a minister, such a relationship begins with the call of the local church, who have sought the mind of Christ and, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are convinced that this is the will of God for the minister and the congregation. As we are all aware, this relationship is crucial to effective ministry. If the role of the superintendent can be likened to that of the minister within a congregation, then he must be called by the churches which are to be within his pastoral care. This principle was embodied in the practice of the General Baptists whose Messengers were elected by the churches and had 'the government of those churches which had suffrage in their election'.⁵⁷ It is a principle which needs to be clarified and strengthened in our present procedures.

If our theology of association is to replicate our doctrine of the church, then (i) the Superintendent must be called, and be seen to be called, by the churches through the Association, as well as appointed by the Union; (ii) his leadership role will be recognised within any Area Team and within the Association in both its constitution and practice; and (iii) his pastoral office, often described as *pastor pastorum*, must be accepted fully by the ministers within his pastoral oversight. 'Within the context of the wider fellowship,' writes Paul Fiddes, 'Christ calls some to be pastors of the pastors. If a General Superintendent cannot effectively do this, then it may be that the Area is too large . . . or that there is no real conviction about the value of Association life within the churches, or that a Minister does not admit that he too needs a pastor.'⁵⁸ In my experience, all three possibilities may be true! However, if Baptist Christians are to fulfil their calling in this decade, then, I believe that we must renew our theology and practice of association, strengthen our fellowship in the Gospel and, in particular, safeguard the pastoral and evangelistic ministry of those called 'to care for all the churches'.

NOTES

1. **The Report of the Commission on the Associations, 1964**, in *Baptist Union Documents, 1948-1977, 1980*, p.34ff.
2. E. A. Payne, **The Baptist Union: A Short History, 1958**, pp.164f.
3. *Ibid.* p.175.
4. H. L. Watson, 'The General Superintendents', *BQ*, 25, 1973, p.146.
5. BU Ministerial Settlement Committee Minutes, 29 January 1906.
6. In an unpublished letter from J. H. Rushbrook to J. W. Ewing, 13 May 1924: 'General Superintendent was in fact a title to which I personally directed the attention of Dr Shakespeare as that used in the Lutheran Church . . .'
7. **Baptist Union Handbook, 1916**, Report of Assembly business, p.276f.
8. Payne, *op.cit.*, pp.182f.
9. J. Nicholson, 'The Office of Messenger amongst British Baptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *BQ* 17, 1957-8, p.208f.
10. Phil. 2:25; II Cor.8:23 (KJV), apostolos in both instances.
11. Adam Taylor, **History of the English General Baptists, 2 vols.**, 1818, p.413.
12. *Ibid.*, I, p.319.
13. Nicholson, *op.cit.*, p.215.
14. T. Grantham, **Christianismus Primitivus, II**, 1678, p.119.
15. *Ibid.*, p.121.
16. B. R. White, **The English Baptists of the 17th Century, 1983**, p.115; A. C. Underwood, **A History of the English Baptists, 1947**, p.120; Grantham, *op.cit.*, II, p.119; IV, pp.154f.
17. Grantham, *op.cit.*, IV, p.164.
18. *Ibid.*, pp.164f.
19. cf. W. T. Whitley, **A History of British Baptists, 1923**, p.90f; R. G. Torbet, **History of the Baptists**, rev.edn. 1963, p.44; White, *op.cit.*, pp.66f.
20. Rufus M. Jones, **Studies in Mystical Religion, 1909**, pp.418f.
21. cf. White, *op.cit.*, pp.79f.

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22. B. R. White, ed., *Association Records of the Particular Baptists of England, Wales & Ireland to 1660*, Part 3: The Abingdon Association, 1974, pp.126f.
23. R. C. Walton, *The Gathered Community*, 1946, p.122.
24. BU Council, November 1984, *Dimensions of Church and Ministry*.
25. Payne, *op.cit.*, p.293.
26. See R. Hayden, 'Still at the Crossroads? - Revd J. H. Shakespeare and Ecumenism', *Baptists in the Twentieth Century*, 1983, pp.45f.
27. J. H. Shakespeare, *The Churches at the Crossroads*, 1918, pp.162-78.
28. J. Marchant, *The Coming Renaissance*, 1922, pp.87-9.
29. H. G. Wood, *Terror Reaveley Glover*, 1953, p.153, quoted by R. Hayden, *op.cit.*, p.47.
30. E. A. Payne, *The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England*, 1944, p.131.
31. *The Times*, 11 December 1990; *Baptist Times*, 22 November 1990.
32. Payne, *Baptist Union*, p.297.
33. The Meaning and Practice of Ordination among Baptists, in *Baptist Union Documents 1948-77*, p.74.
34. *Baptist Union Documents*, para.4, p.8.
35. The Meissen Declaration between the Church of England, the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the German Democratic Republic: *On the Way to Visible Unity*, General Synod 931, 1990.
36. Acts 20:28 etc. *episkopoi* translated 'bishops' in Wyclif, 'overseers' in Tyndale. cf. II Cor. 8:23 *apostoloi ekklesion* translated 'apostles' or 'messengers of the churches' (Tyndale and KJV).
37. See OED, eg. 1382 Wyclif: 'bischopis'.
38. E. A. Payne, *Free Churchmen Unrepentant & Repentant*, 1965, p.46.
39. *Visible Unity in Life and Mission*, Baptist Union, 1977, p.6.
40. W. M. S. West, *Church, Ministry and Baptism*, BU Occasional Paper, 1981, p.9, para.16.
41. A. Walker, *Restoring the Kingdom*, 1985, p.135, quoting *Restoration* magazine, Nov/Dec.1983, p.40.
42. *Ibid.*, p.144.
43. D. Watson, *Discipleship*, 1981, p.71f.
44. Ephesians 4:11f.
45. E. Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament*, 1961, p.73.
46. R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 1980, p.139.
47. L. Coenen, in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* ed. C. Brown, 1986, p.291.
48. e.g. Church in Corinth, cf. W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 1983, pp.117f.
49. I & II Thessalonians 1:1.
50. N. Wright, *A Challenge to Change*, 1991, p.65, cf. pp.91f.
51. P. Fiddes, *A Leading Question*, p.43. Eph.4:11f.
52. Fiddes, *op.cit.*, pp.43f. cf. *Messengers*, p.7.
53. J. F. V. Nicholson, 'Theology of Episkope', *BQ* 30, 6, 1984, pp.273f.
54. cf. Rom. 11:13; I Cor. 3:5; II Cor.6:3f.
55. II Timothy 4:2 & 5. Note: in principle the Superintendency is open to men or women although it has been difficult to avoid the male gender in every reference in this study.
56. cf. *The Doctrine of Ministry*, 1961, in *Baptist Union Documents*, p.48.
57. White, *English Baptists of the 17th Century*, p.119.
58. Fiddes, *op.cit.*, p.46.
59. II Corinthians 11:28 (KJV).

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REVIEW

Don A. Sanford, *Conscience Taken Captive*, Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society, Janesville, Wisconsin, 1991. 82pp. \$3.00

Readers will find this a fascinating account of a group of Baptists who did not survive in England but have continued to develop in the United States. The Seventh Day Baptists (not to be confused with the Seventh Day Adventists) represent a further Baptist attempt to reconstitute what they believed to be the one Biblical model for the Christian Church. From the beginning they rejected any central authority since this seemed to them to threaten the Biblical requirement for the autonomy of the local congregation. It was not until 1929 (p.54) that a denominational centre was built. Growth recently has been real: 36% of the churches listed in the 1990 Yearbook of the denomination were founded after 1970. Unease with interdenominational Councils on 'biblical, theological and political grounds' led to a withdrawal from the ecumenical movement but the Seventh Day Baptists have stayed firmly within the BWA. This is an interesting book pointing to other valuable sources for the further study of the Seventh Day Baptists. It is to be followed by a more substantial volume, *A Choosing People: the History of the Seventh Day Baptists* by the same author, to be published by the Broadman Press in April 1992. Orders for the present volume should be addressed to: Seventh Day Baptist Historical Society, 3120 Kennedy Road, P.O.Box 1678, Janesville, WI 53547-1678.

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