

Why Not?

It is characteristic of surging and vital faith that things get done. Barriers are broken; things long deplored are put right; things merely dreamed of are quickly put into effect; the gloomy expectations of man - you'd never get that through - we'll never be able to afford it - it'll take a long time - are confounded. So many of the chains that bind God's people exist only in the mind. Time and again, when people of faith with prayer and persistence ask 'why not?' we realise that there is no reason outside of ourselves why things should not be as God's word says they should be, or as God's spirit has long been promising that they should be.

Too often, however, it is just such faith that is lacking in our Churches. Too often we have the wrong kind of buildings for what we are trying to do, the wrong furniture in them to express what we are trying to say, leadership structures that deny gospel truths and stifle the Spirit's work, and we all know this and we do nothing about it. Year after year the same anomalies persist and Ministers say wistfully; Of course we'd like to, but.....

This must be the explanation for one of the saddest comments I have read recently. In "How to Plant Churches" Michael Griffiths says:

"The Christian Churches seem to have an infinite capacity for absorbing criticism, and adopting new ideas without it making the slightest difference!"

We are bombarded with words - conferences come and go - books roll off the press - movements rise and release a new set of ideas and enthusiasms into the Christian market place, and we agree with it all, but nothing happens. One may picture the Lord writing a letter to the Church in Britain, complimenting us on how much we have learned, and going on to say: "But I have this against you. It hasn't made the slightest difference".

This will be the last issue of Mainstream I shall edit. I am grateful to all who have taken the trouble to write articles that have made my work possible and your reading profitable. I leave the Editor's chair with relief and with the conviction that if Mainstream has a purpose it must be to encourage a generation of Gideons and Nehemiahs - men and women who will attack the problems in their local Churches, especially the things that are not what they ought to be with the words 'Why not? In Jesus' name, why not?'

Editor

NEWSLETTER NO. 20 - SEPTEMBER, 1985

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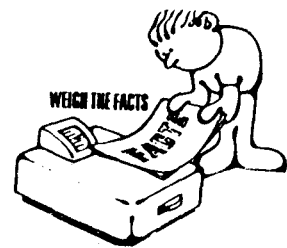
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Questions for the Present Time



When I was a student, my lecturer in philosophy used to get us to debate a most important question. In what does the dogginess of a dog consist? After all we call everything from a puny pekinese to a masculine alsatian; from a friendly scottie to a vicious dobermann, from a graceful dalmatian to an unkempt afghan, a dog. So what do they have in common? The question these days is akin to asking someone to describe the nature of a Baptist church. There is that indefinable something which they have in common and yet the variety of them almost makes it impossible to determine what it is.

What makes the matter worse is that whilst Baptist churches have been growing in diversity others have been flattering us by their imitation. In recent weeks I have preached in a Brethren assembly with a full-time minister (if they will forgive the word!) and a congregational church which practices believers baptism. In style of worship and in that ultimate authority rested with the local congregation they were virtually indistinguishable from us. Oh, and I have preached in a Church of England parish church which was not too different either!

But we must not deviate too far from the subject, so let's return to what is going on among us. Perhaps its worth stating the obvious to begin with because the obvious is often forgotten. Up and down the country there is a new sense of vitality and confidence. Some of it may be jumping on the band wagon of a passing trend but much of it is a new sense of confidence in God. Churches which cover most of the spectrum, though not all of it, are growing and experiencing spiritual life in a way that simply did not exist before the Signs of Hope report. Of course, this life has brought problems with which most of us were ill-equipped to cope. But so what? Better the problems faced in a maternity hospital than those faced at the funeral directors.

It has been said that there are three types of people in the world: those who make things happen; those who watch things happen and those who don't know anything is happening. And we have them all.

Like it or not, it is because of the charismatic movement in the sixties and the more recent house church movements of the seventies that things are happening. Statistically, the house church movements may still be relatively small - about 80,000 at the most. They do not form any uniform movement, only four or five identifiable groupings, each of whom have their special emphases. They relate to each other in varying degrees. Yet you simply cannot ignore them. Their influence stretches far beyond their own members principally through the Bible weeks, magazines, circulating cassettes and popular books. A few of our churches now look to them for kindred spirits rather than to other Baptist churches. How can that be so while others react strongly against the house churches?

Their influence has been partly positive. It has provoked us to examine our faith and to look at our structures, especially in regard to ministry, and see whether they enable life or stifle it. It has made us look again at spiritual authority and warfare and ask why they so often seemed to be lacking among us. It has opened up new dimensions in worship which the hymn-prayer sandwich did not provide. We need the humility to listen and learn from these movements. Our reaction has often been one of fear and condemnation. It has smacked of trying to preserve our own little bit of the empire. But why are we threatened so much by these new movements? Have we forgotten that we were once a disruptive new movement ourselves which was

despised by the more established churches? Is it not true to the history of the church that God has raised up new, and far from perfect movements, in every century, if not every generation to bring to light some forgotten aspect of truth? Should not our interpretation of what is going on at least be partially from this perspective?

I realise for some, at the sharp end, such comments will be considered superficial. The influence of the house churches has certainly not always been positive and they have often grown by stealing our sheep rather than converting their own. They are movements without a history and show all the signs of making naive mistakes from which others learned long ago. They are mercifully free from the problems of institutionalism so they are flexible, goal orientated and well-defined. But with growth and time they are bound to suffer from the same problems of institutionalism from which more established denominations suffer. It is foolish to think that they will be able to float sublimely above them. In a fallen world the necessity of communication imposes them on us all, sooner or later.

What is more these movements have created painful division, from the North West of England to the Isle of Wight, and old relationships have been ruptured. They ought to be challenged as to how they can justify that. Does not the scripture have more to say about love and unity as a test of the Spirit's work than it does about chorus singing, lifting up hands or dancing in worship? Sadly, they have thrown up many spiritual casualties because they often sit loose to scripture and over-emphasise individual experience. Are they not in danger of acknowledging no authority but themselves? And if so, is it any wonder that all sorts of false expectations and teaching become possible?

Many of those who watch things happen have benefitted from the observations they have been making. And this is probably where the majority of Baptist churches stand. One of the key growth points in our denomination has been in the smaller evangelical churches, although not the very small ones mentioned in the recent Half the Denomination report. It is encouraging to travel up and down the country to fellowships which were struggling a decade or so ago and find them full and lively today. Two things distinguish them from what they were - ministry and worship. They have learned to share ministry more so that it is not the exclusive province of the one ordained man. Some have done this through creating elderships, others through pastoral teams and others just by ensuring that spiritual concerns are more central on the deacons agenda than they were. The teaching work of the ministry has been shared more, especially through the establishment of house groups which are frequently key means of spiritual development.

The ministry has also been shared more in terms of leading worship and here other changes have also taken place. There is a greater diversity of music sung these days. Some have introduced new material unwisely. As if there was nothing to gain from the rich depth of our hymn books, they have abandoned them for the latest chorus book. But who can complain when to the hymn book has been added a variety of modern song and choruses. Some, of course, are unsingable, but then is that not true of some in the BCH? Some are not worth repeating, but they will soon disappear. Many are greater aids to worship and praise than many of the Victorian homilies on which some of us were brought up. There has also been a greater diversity of contribution musically. The solo organist is an increasingly rare species. More often than not he is joined by a flute, some guitars and among the more adventurous even some drums. In my experience, for every occasion when they detract from worship there are a dozen where they have added to it. And since these have more biblical warrant than the organ who can complain? But they do!

These churches are not above questioning. Many of them strike me being like narrow boats on a canal. They were sailing on one level for years and recently they have entered a lock and emerged on a higher level. But is that where they are going to remain? Will they be stuck there for the next few decades or are they going to continue to be reformed and renewed? Is the incorporation of choruses in worship and a more open style of worship possibly a defence mechanism against the Holy Spirit doing anything more?

Their evangelical commitment also needs to be questioned. Traditionally, liberals have considered evangelical to be a dirty word, believing it stood for biblical naivety and social irresponsibility. More recently some of the renewal movement have also considered it a dirty word, equating it with dead traditionalism and sterile orthodoxy. Evangelicals need to stand both with and against their critics. Against the liberals we must 'guard and gospel'. With them, must we not show that we really do believe in the total authority of Scripture, rather than a narrowly interpreted evangelical version of it? And would not such a submission to Scripture lead us to break free from our preoccupation with our own affairs and speak with greater social and even political relevance? How can we claim to believe in the authority of a book, which includes Amos, Matthew 25, James etc., and be wrapped up solely in our own concerns?

Against our more recent critics we must assert the importance of correct doctrine and the centrality of conversion to spiritual experience. In emphasising other spiritual experiences are they not in danger of obscuring conversion? But with them, should we not reject sterile cerebralism and bring in experiential warmth to our religion? Was not our faith meant to be experienced and was it not meant to be an experience of the supernatural? If the distinguishing marks of evangelicalism are its commitment to scripture and a belief in conversion, now is the time to be true to our roots and not to sit light to them.

Then, there are, of course, those who don't know what is happening. They may have heard rumours of change but they have not experienced it for themselves and are frightened by the scare stories they have heard. They are 'bedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the traditions of the elders'. The way things are done has not changed in decades and any suggestion of change is actively resisted. Of course change can be unwisely managed and not all change is good. Tradition can be enriching and provides stability. But even so, questions need to be faced.

Surely tradition is not a museum piece but a living force? Is it not true that the trouble with arguing for Tradition is that we often do not really know what we are arguing for? The traditions we believe are so sacrosanct often only come from Victorian or Edwardian times and if we were really to be true to our traditions we would need to go back a good deal further than that. What a difference it would make to our practice of the church meeting and our views of ministry if we were genuine traditionalists! Then, is it not true, as that great traditionalist, Cardinal Newman, said, 'In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often'? But perhaps, most penetrating of all is the frank question, do you really want to be culturally irrelevant and spiritually anachronistic? Churches that have resisted change are almost without exception in decline. Some of them are sad spectacles as they boast of a glory which has departed. They speak of a past age both in their style and their spirituality and have no cutting edge for God in the world he loves so much. Is that not a tragedy?

Baptist churches are certainly not mere reproductions of each other. It is an exciting period of transition and inevitably therefore a time when we should be asking questions. The fundamental question is who would want to be a Rip van Winkle and sleep through this revolution?

Derek J. Tidball.

Church Membership Re-Evaluated



How scriptural is our practice of church membership?

Along with several other features of our institutional church life, our practice of church membership seems to have escaped the discipline of being subjected to the searchlight of scripture. This article is an attempt to do this.

Our current system of membership is, by and large, shaped more by the demands of our secular state for legal regularity than by the Word of God. In order to do things decently and in order within our society the individual community of believers must of necessity assume a form and double as a legal corporation within that society. The gravitational pull of this demand is that the church moves from being a charismatic-organic community determined by the criteria of Scripture to being an organisational-institutional syndicate determined by the criteria of secular society. In this are the seeds of some distortions which are evident in the church of our day and which are particularly reflected in the following areas:

1. A distortion in our understanding of the church

The concept of church membership is well-rooted in scripture and grows out of an organic model which sees the church as the living Body of Christ guided by the Head and activated by the Spirit (Romans 12:4 & 5; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-13, 27). In this sense, church membership is neither a choice nor an option - it is an inherent part of Christian existence. It is not something to be applied for or admitted to. It is a given. In scriptural terms being a member means being a redeemed, functioning part of the new community. It is a functional reality rather than a legal status.

Nowhere is the distortion between the biblical model and much current practice so clearly perceived as in the kind of church meeting (occasionally to be found in Baptist circles) where "members" who are not functionally part of the local body (and may not even attend it) appear to exercise their constitutional right. By the criteria of scripture such members are not members (or if they are, are in a backslidden state which deprives them of an authentic voice within the congregation). By the criteria of the secular society and the legal corporation, they are members with all the rights appertaining thereto.

The root of the distinction to be made is that the church is not a club but a covenant people.

2. A distortion in our understanding of decision-making

Karl Barth describes the church as "a brotherly Christocracy". As such the local congregation does not fit governmentally into any of the standard human systems. It is not a democracy, an oligarchy, a hierarchy, a meritocracy or an autocracy, although perhaps it may at any given time seem to correspond with the characteristics of all or any of these categories. The essential question in the local church is what does the Head want and how do we find that out? The distorting factor in the constitutional approach to church membership is that it locates authority not in the will of God but in the will of the majority.

There is a reaction against traditional Baptist democracy in some streams of the house-church movement in which some (not all by any means) give a high value to the willingness to submit to another who takes decisions on my behalf. Democracy is regarded as being akin to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit in the hierarchy of evils. Voting is anathema. Discernment is the prerogative of the anointed. To substitute oligarchy for democracy does not however result in Christocracy.

One of the challenges facing Baptist churches is to discover a biblical model of decision making which follows neither the democratic nor the oligarchic options and which does not fall between them but which exists beyond them. The biblical picture is one where authority sometimes resides with the congregation (Acts 6), sometimes with the elders (Hebrews 13:17), sometimes with an individual (Paul against Peter - Galatians 2), sometimes with a prophet (Acts 11:28), sometimes with the immediacy of God's word to a gathering (Acts 13:1-3), and sometimes with the considered mind of leaders and people in resonance with what appears to be the mind of the Spirit (Acts 15:28). Perhaps the nearest definition we can give to this indefinable process is to see it as a godly consensus which searches and waits for the word of the Lord. It is a long way from the kind of gathering which, having gathered a small section of the worshipping community, preoccupies itself with resolutions, amendments and counter-resolutions.

3. A distortion in our understanding of discipline

Discipline is far more than a periodic revision of the church roll with suitable leniency towards those who are related to existing members of the congregation! Such an approach is orientated towards the question - who still has the right to vote? Biblical discipline is orientated to the way we walk and our confirmity to Christ. Marlin Jeschke has it right when he sees discipline as 'discipling', drawing people into greater faithfulness to Christ as Lord.

How are these distortions to be overcome? There is clearly no substitute for abiblical renewal of understanding concerning the nature of the church and its membership, discernment and discipline. There is equally clearly no alternative but to adopt some legal and constitutional form if communities of believers want to administer monies, own property and observe the proprieties of society. The best we can work for is to minimise the distortion that such institutional forms will tend to introduce. What are the alternatives?

(1) One possibility is to abolish the whole concept of constitutional membership and to establish communities which relate organically. The only way to become a member of such a community would be by being a member functionally. With this model membership would not be a matter of satisfying a certain procedure of entry but of a joining of hearts and minds. It would rely on a declaration of commitment and would cease automatically if this commitment were withdrawn. The focus in this model would be upon the quality of relationships between individuals and the community rather than on the formality of being a 'member'. Shorn of the constitutional element decision-making would be conceived of more in consensus terms with an individual's contribution being weighed by the quality of its content rather than on a 'one-man vote' base. Certainly such a model would have justification in scriptural terms. It would also have its own gravitational pull of a different kind since the constitutional form it would need to adopt would locate power higher in the hands of its office-bearers or its trustees. This could, of course, work well, but it would also minimise the authority of the congregation.

(2) Another possibility (and one which existing churches which are already committed to some form of membership by their trust deeds would have to opt for) is to refashion membership in a 'covenant' direction as opposed to a 'constitutional' direction. In addition to re-educating the existing membership this would include:

a) A period of catechism for those seeking membership to unpack its true significance and a dropping of the procedure of automatic transfer from one church to another since this implies a commonality of understanding which in our day of theological pluralism cannot be assumed.

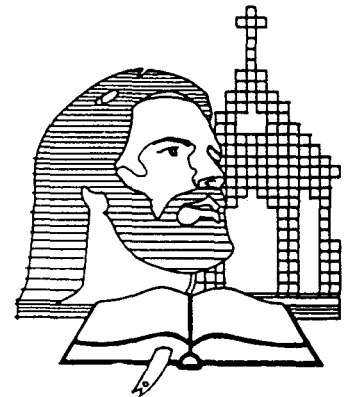
b) Finding some way of making organic and constitutional membership co-terminous either by a periodic membership renewal or by causing membership to lapse automatically on non-attendance or non-involvement. This would obviate the problem of non-attending members still exercising constitutional power.

c) A distinct shift from a constitutional model of decision making to a consensus model which embraces the whole of the church's life and not just church meetings. This does not necessarily imply a total rejecting of voting and election but sees them as relative tools that may be used in certain situations for certain purposes rather than as the norm in the discernment process. The norm should be 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us'.

To move in the direction described in these alternatives presupposes a unity of agreement and common vision in the local church. It may well be that without such a basis they are unworkable. It may also be that the institutional-constitutional model that so many churches work with (with all its distortions) in fact both conceals and reinforces the fact that they are societies rather than communities and are badly in need of spiritual and biblical renewal.

Nigel Wright.

When is a Baptist Church not a Baptist Church?



...and who says so?

If the title of this article sounds somewhat strange, blame the editor! However, it is not simply the editor's dry sense of humour which underlies the questions. Rather these questions reflect some of the radical changes overtaking (yes, that is the word!) many of our Baptist churches. All of us - hopefully - recognise that change is here to stay. No church can stand still, not least when it is experiencing the winds of the Spirit blowing through its midst. But does there come a point when a church has changed so much that it no longer can meaningfully belong to our Baptist family? And if so, at what point is it?

Baptists have no 39 articles. True, we have a variety of past confessions of faith, but not one of them is necessarily binding upon us today. What we do have, however, is a constitution of the Baptist Union, which includes a declaration of principle followed by a listing of the objects of the Union. To my mind, as far as English (and no doubt some Welsh) Baptists are concerned, this must be the final arbiter of what is, and presumably what is not, a Baptist Church.

THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLE

For the sake of those who do not have ready access to the Baptist Handbook, let me first print out in full the declaration of principle:

"The basis of the Union is:-

1. That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His Laws.
2. That Christian Baptism is the immersion in water into the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, of those who have professed repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who "died for our sins according to the Scriptures; was buried, and rose again the third day".
3. That it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelization of the world.

Authority, baptism, and evangelism - these are the three salient points out-lined by the Declaration of Principle. Of course, there is much more to church life than mentioned here - whether it be for instance involvement in social action or the exercise of spiritual gifts - but nonetheless these three points are each characteristic of Baptist life. Let's look at them in greater detail:-

(1) Evangelism

A Baptist church fails to be a Baptist church if it hasn't a passion for souls that are lost. "Every Baptist a missionary" was the great watch-word of J.G. Oncken, the pioneer of Baptist work in Continental Europe. It surely is no accident that William Carey and Billy Graham are Baptists. A hallmark of our life together has always been evangelism. Certainly, of all the mainline denominations we are easily the most evangelistic. To my mind a Baptist church that fails to put evangelism at the top of its agenda is a Baptist church only in name.

(2) Baptism

A Baptist church fails to be a Baptist church if it doesn't baptise believers! This is so obvious, it scarcely needs to be said. But let me point out one thing: baptism is clearly linked with evangelism, for it is all part of the disciple-making process. This being so, I fail to understand how some Baptist churches can welcome into their fellowship those who have been converted in their midst, but who have not been baptized. This surely is a perverse operation of the 'open membership' principle: open membership only makes sense when it is applied to those who have been in good standing with another church. Otherwise we totally betray our standing as a Baptist church.

(3) Authority

Baptism inevitably leads to church membership (or, if it doesn't, then one's theology is defective!) which in turn leads to participation in the "Church Meeting". Here, of course, is today's crunch point. For there are churches in our Union who are discarding the Church Meeting, or rather discarding the Church Meeting as the final authority - under Christ - in the church. Authority rather is being centred either in apostles outside the church, or in the pastor and elders inside the church. The Church Meeting is no longer "the occasion when as individuals and as a community the members submit themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and stand under the judgement of God that they may know what is the mind of Christ (1948 BU statement).

But what has all this got to do with the Declaration of Principle? The Church Meeting is not even mentioned! True, but it is assumed. Look at the first section of the Declaration of Principle carefully: the sole authority within a Baptist Church is the Lord Jesus, revealed in Scripture, made known

to the Church through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Nothing is said here about the authority of apostles, pastors and elders. The clear implication is that God's will is made known through the reading of the Scriptures and through the gathering together of the Church. In other words, through the Church Meeting. A Baptist church is therefore not a Baptist church when the authority of the Church Meeting - under Christ- is not taken seriously. Or to put it another way, a Baptist Church is not a Baptist church, when the elders seek to administer and interpret the laws of Christ.

THE OBJECTS OF OUR UNION

But we have not finished. The Declaration of Principle, signed by every Baptist minister prior to accreditation, is clearly linked to the objects of the Baptist Union. Again, for the sake of those who do not have a copy of the Baptist Handbook, let me print out in full these objects.

"The objects of the Union are the advancement of the Christian religion, especially by the means of and in accordance with the principles of the Baptist Denomination (this being the main purpose) and the following objects but so that these objects are ancillary to the main purpose and not so as to extend the objects of the Union beyond such main purpose.

1. To cultivate among its own members respect and love for one another, and for all who love the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. To spread the Gospel of Christ by ministers and evangelists, by establishing Churches, forming Sunday schools, distributing the Scriptures, issuing religious publications, and by such other methods as the Council shall determine.
3. To afford opportunities for conference, and for united action on questions affecting the welfare of the Churches, the support of the ministry, and the extension of the Denomination, both at home and abroad.
4. To promote fraternal relations between Baptists in this and other countries.
5. To obtain and disseminate accurate information respecting the organisations, labours and sufferings of Baptists through the world.
6. To confer and co-operate with other Christian communities as occasion may require.

Space does not permit me to go through all these objects. But let me elaborate just one or two points.

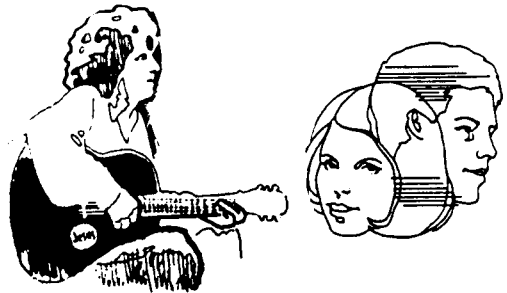
1) However we may dot the 'i's and cross the 't's, the clear implication is that a Baptist church will want to associate with and co-operate with other Baptist churches. Whatever our links may be with other Christian churches, first and foremost a Baptist church will have fellowship with other Baptist churches, and will seek to engage in wider home mission along with other Baptist churches. This does not rule out other groupings, but it does rule out groupings which would seek to rival the affection toward and support of other Baptist churches.

2) A second hallmark of a Baptist church, evidenced by these objects, is that it will want to be concerned for the wider Baptist family that lives beyond these shores. Clearly this does not rule out interest in what God is doing beyond our Baptist family, but it does imply that we will be concerned for the BMS, the European Baptist Federation and the like. In other words, a Baptist church is not a Baptist church where the concerns of the wider Baptist family are peripheral, where membership of the Union is but nominal.

Membership of the Union involves commitment. And it is precisely because of that sense of commitment that Mainstream came into being. As we expressed it in one of our earlier publications: "MAINSTREAM is composed of people standing in the mainstream of Christian life in general and Baptist life in particular. Theologically this involves a wholehearted commitment to the Gospel as expressed in the Union's declaration of principle. Ecclesiastically it involves a wholehearted commitment to the life and work of the denomination....."

Paul Beasley-Murray.

Effective Youth Work



Several months ago I was asked to write for the Mainstream Newsletter under the heading "Young people - how to win them to Christ and disciple them within the Church". Of course if I had all the answers to those two questions I wouldn't be writing a newsletter article, rather I'd be writing a book for one of the better-known Christian publishers guaranteed to become an all-time best seller! Therefore, the obvious needs to be stated again - I have no absolute answers but can simply reflect upon some of the principles I believe the Lord has shown me through my experience of leading and visiting youth groups.

Over the last seven years I have been privileged to travel extensively within this country and to some limited degree abroad, being able to experience many shades of evangelical opinion and sample the youth work within the most forward-looking churches with all the latest ideas and facilities at their disposal, through to the most traditional setups where youth work consists of a strict diet of Bible Study with rather sparse helpings of table tennis and no other fillings! I've been able to work with the small church struggling to maintain a witness without adequate leadership, but doing their best to handle a handful of difficult teenagers, through to the biggest churches with several full time workers, one of whom often specialises in youth work. The conclusion that I have reached through all of this is that the first and foremost principle in Christian youth work is one that's as old as the church itself and has nothing to do with the trappings of modern high-tech evangelism, sophisticated structures of youth leadership and grand youth programmes. It can be summed up in the one word "example".

It is example, love and genuine christian commitment evident in the lives of the leaders that makes the difference between a group in which new Christians are regularly born and nurtured into maturity and the ones which only seem to produce a superficial attachment (though this often includes some kind of profession of faith and even baptism) which soon melts away with the passing of years, in some cases even months! This is not to decry detailed planning and the use of all the facilities and ideas available, but to state quite bluntly that without sincerity and depth of commitment to Christ from the leadership, such ideas, instead of producing strong Christians, will only produce church 'groupies' who hang on because they are fascinated by, and strongly attracted to, one new idea or gimmick after the other. If we are not careful we simply build a youth group hungry for

sensation, for a visit of the latest christian rock group or most popular christian speaker! One thing large numbers sometimes tend to hide is a forever changing clientele - in other words though the size of the overall group is maintained, youngsters come in excited for a month or two and then drift away again, only to be replaced by somebody else. Paul said 'imitate me as I imitate Christ' - and that must be the goal of each youth worker.

When we have got this main principle of example established, we are in a position to realistically ask how we build an effective programme that will not only win young people for Christ but ensure their development into mature Christians? Of course, this is a complex question but what can be clearly stated is that many youth groups never get anywhere because they don't know quite where they are trying to go. It is not good enough to hold out the vague hope and goal that everyone will be converted and grow into being good church members. If these are the aims of your group they must be closely examined and planned for in a more precise manner. If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably never get there!

Youth groups flourish best where there is some overall co-ordinating group of leaders who work together and represent the whole spectrum of youth work within the church from Junior Church to Y.P.F., Brigades to Youth Choir. Such a group should meet at least once every month. In this way, practical acknowledgement is given to the fact that the individual young person is not the property of any one of the youth movements within the church, but that they are working together, often with the same young person, to produce a mature christian. The work of the different youth activities therefore need to complement one another, working towards the same goals, without producing conflict in the life of the youth of the church. This conflict may otherwise arise with regard to use of time, too many commitments on too many nights of the week, as well as direct clashes in dates requiring young people to be in two places at once! It can also show itself in other areas, with conflicting principles and standards being taught, or the variety of teaching and directives being given at any one point in time raising difficult questions within the life of the teenager, with which he is ill-equipped to cope. It is also good to have a deacon sitting on this 'Youth Council' to ensure that there is good understanding and liaison between them and the Diaconate. Too many youth groups suffer from a breakdown of communication between themselves and the rest of the church or at least its leaders.

At least once a year the Youth Council should set aside some time, preferably a whole day, when they are able to Retreat together to look at the goals and aims of the young people's work within their church. Here the strengths and weaknesses of the group can be discussed and overall targets or aims set in the light of these findings. Such aims could be to see:-

more conversions

new members added to the group

more integration between the different
youth groups in the church

more development of leadership gifts amongst
the young people

a greater depth of commitment to evangelism

Having set these overall aims or targets, short-term goals should be set, addressing the problem of "How we get from where we are to where we want to be?" There are always practical steps that can be taken towards achieving these aims. The group should clearly identify these and set them down on paper. For instance, to enable leadership qualities to be encouraged amongst

young people, the existing leaders must:- (1) identify those young people with leadership qualities, (2) make those young people aware of their leadership potential, (3) set up a youth leadership training course, (4) begin offering opportunities for those gifts to be exercised - this means taking risks - handing over authority, allowing young people to make mistakes, (5) set up a mechanism whereby lessons can be learned from those mistakes and the gifts encouraged further rather than squashed.

These short term goals or objectives should then be timetabled, i.e (1) By the end of next month we will draw up a list of those that we believe have leadership gifts. (2) In two months time we aim to have spoken to all of them about the potential we believe they have, and have called a meeting with them together. (3) In the next two months we also aim to have set up a leadership development course with training on how to lead a youth group to start in 3 months time. (4) Within four months from now we aim to be giving those on the course practical opportunities for expressing their gifts. e.g. To be handing over the leadership of worship or of some of the teaching. (5) By this time next year we aim to have moved beyond the training stage to a situation where in reality some of these we now recognise as having leadership potential are actually fulfilling that role within the life of our church.

Thus goals have been set and it therefore becomes easy to monitor the progress being made. If after six months the Youth Council, at its monthly meeting, sits down and acknowledges that they have not achieved these short-term goals or have fallen behind on them, then they can reassess and ask themselves the question "why is this not working? Is it that we are trying to move too fast or in the wrong direction or with the wrong tactics?" Then a revised timetable can be set up and again progress be made.

As another example, take the resolve of a youth council that more conversions should be seen within their work - this is their overall aim. Now goals must be set (1) within the next month we aim to have worked out a programme for our youth group with a strong evangelistic emphasis running through it, which will include both inviting interesting christians along to talk who possess a strong testimony, and giving clear teaching on what a christian is and what it means to be "born again". (2) In two months we aim to start that programme (this may be a new meeting or something within already existing frameworks). (3) In three months time we aim to begin calling for a response, inviting our young people to become christians themselves and ensuring that the opportunity to do so is given within our programme. (4) In four months time we aim to have established a nurture group for those we are praying would have responded to our message and become christians.

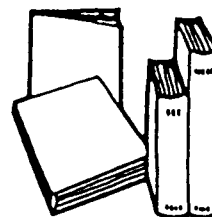
It is clear to see that in this way our youth work is given direction and motive. We can easily chart where we are going and by what steps we are going to get there. Of course the danger is that we can become too success orientated, with failure to reach our goals and objectives bringing despair and disillusionment, but this need not be the case. Our goals should not be seen as a marathon course we have set ourselves, but rather as pointers and guides to help us in the direction we want to travel in. They are our servants, not visa versa!

Lastly, it is important to say a bit about the actual contents of a youth programme. (1) There is no need to spend hours despairing of what you will do with your youth group next Sunday (In fact the programme should have been set and planned months in advance). It is important to grasp just how many excellent aids there are available:- teaching courses, videos, films, soundstrips, outline activities, Bible Studies; Youth leaders' Manuals and many more. Become aware of the resources that are available to you as a youth leader. Write to Scripture Union, Scripture Press etc. and have a long chat to your local Book Centre Manager. (2) Involvement and activity. We remember about 10 per cent of what we are told, 50 per cent of what we see

and 80 per cent of what we do. Teaching about the christian life and discipleship will never produce a strong mature christian unless it includes involvement. If you are teaching about evangelism your youth group must have the opportunity to express this. If they've talked about sharing their faith with others you must provide the environment and setting which enables them to do it, perhaps for the first time. Teaching must never be sterile, divorced from practice. We are the first to bemoan the fact that this is so often the case in the lives of many Christians. We must, therefore, take care not to build the very same principle into our youth groups by default. Biblical teaching must incorporate a healthy emphasis on 'doing'.

Steve Chalke.

Book Reviews



TWO BOOKS ON CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

'Leadership': Philip Greenslade: Marshalls (£3.95 (208pp)

'A man under Authority': Charles Sibthorpe: Kingsway £2.25 (248pp)

Most of us have heard the story of the town dweller who stopped to ask directions from a farm worker leaning on a gate. After some moments of silence, the countryman replied: "Well, to be truthful, if I were going there, I wouldn't start from here!"

Philip Greenslade is a Baptist minister, part of the leadership of the King's Church, Aldershot, who has been very involved in teaching and co-ordinating their leadership training programme, 'Towards Leadership'. He is also the co-editor of a bi-monthly bulletin under the same title which is, according to Arthur Wallis in his introduction: 'the most significant publication on leadership that is being issued regularly in this country.'

Clearly, wherever Greenslade is heading, he begins from a particular 'restorationist' view of the Church and its structures. His route, inevitably, is by way of paths previously trodden in both training course and bulletin.

Charles Sibthorpe is an Anglican layman working with Colin Urquart in the 'Kingdom Faith' ministries. He, too, is travelling familiar paths previously walked in 'The Hyde Leaders Weeks' which he has been organising for a number of years. If you want to begin your 'leadership' journey at a point of personal challenge and encouragement and walk a 'path of holiness', then this book is for you.

There is clearly a need for leadership training in the growth situation of many Churches. 'Church Growth' teachers have been advising us for decades to expand our leadership base before the Lord expands our memberships! The nature of the 'leaderships' evolving differs in local detail, but most often involves brothers whose previous training and present commitment has not afforded to them the opportunities available to those in traditional 'Minister' roles. Books, manuals and courses taken part-time at weekends and in evenings at local centres are essential and both these books are worth the time to a brother growing into leadership. Greenslade deals with 'patterns' of leadership. The large format paperback is easy to read and the sections short (if not concise). Headings are a little 'gimmicky' and the book ambles, sometimes passing the same landmarks more than once, to a predictable destination. Sometimes I felt that more support from illustration and argument would help me to believe conclusions stated. For example:

"In the dynamic of the Spirit and in the security of godly relationships, apostolic initiatives are not blunted, nor the congregational feelings over-ridden."

Ideal perhaps - but how? The great strength of this particular journey for me is that it is through 'sheep country', where the model of the leader as 'shepherd' is dealt with helpfully. There is much straightforward teaching in these pages and useful checklists and practical suggestions abound.

Sibthorpe emphasises 'Qualities', rather than structures of leadership in a challenging, comprehensive and unpretentious itinerary. The arguments are clear, the scriptural basis exhaustive, and the constant emphasis on the leader's own life before God as the measure of his 'right to lead' seems to me very close to the heart of the matter. Every minister and leader would benefit from a careful, thoughtful and prayerful walk through these chapters to this destination:

"Leaders in his Church have the responsibility:
so to live in relationship with God that they are channels for his power.
so to work by the principles of his word that the reign of God touches the lives of lost humanity.
so to liberate others that the work of God grows and multiplies".

Both these journeys are worth taking because, in many ways, they were never intended to be similar, but, given the choice of only one journey. I would walk with Charles Sibthorpe.

Tony Matthews.

Bound to Love - the Covenant Basis of Baptist Life and Mission by Paul Fiddes, Roger Hayden, Richard Kidd, Keith Clements and Brian Haymes. Publisher: Baptist Union. 77 pages. Price £2.75.

This collection of essays promises well in offering to lay bare the covenant basis of Baptist life and mission, but is ultimately disappointing. There are good things here, however, such as Paul Fiddes' overview of covenant in the Bible, and Roger Hayden's account of covenanting among Baptists (so rich in the first two centuries, and so disastrously abandoned). Keith Clements gives us a very provocative critique of Churches that exist for the sake of community, rather than seeking community for the sake of the Kingdom. This is the best thing in the book, and worth pondering by all types of Church folk today.

What is disappointing is that there is no attempt to work out what would need to happen in the Churches they love for covenant once again to become the basis of Baptist life. It is clear what the authors do not like. They do not like 'restorationism', as expressed by the Basingstoke Community Church in particular. They do not seem to have asked whether Basingstoke is typical, whether the form that the search for a better Church has taken at Basingstoke is the only one to emerge from the Charismatic renewal, whether the House Churches are unchanging and not rather themselves on a journey of faith. Above all, perhaps, it is implied that the motive of anybody setting aside the Church Meeting in favour of leadership by the Elders must be lust for power, yet the restoration people believe that they are bringing glory to God, and healing to broken people. Not much dialogue here, one feels, of the sort the authors want to see with other religions. Better a Buddhist than as Charismatic!

Covenant may once have been the basis of Baptist life, but it is plainly so no longer. What is implied by covenant is well expressed in the question Roger Hayden gives us from the Church book of the Church at Frome in Somerset.

"Question 1: Do you solemnly give yourself up to the Lord and to the Church to watch over and be watched over, to perform all the duties and enjoy all the privileges of the House of God?"

"Give yourself up..... to be watched over?" Few Baptist Churches could ask that with a straight face today. But they could do so at Basingstoke!

Alastair Campbell.

Your Gift of Administration by Ted W. Engstrom.

An informed look at the subject of administration is the basis of Ted Engstrom's book. He writes from many years of active international administrative experience. He explains administration in the context of a God given personal gift which enables the recipient to fulfill a leadership role, listing forty qualities and traits of those possessing the personal gift of administration. The writer emphasizes the importance he places on administration and organisational leadership being a revealed and bestowed gift of the Holy Spirit of God.

The office of administration is reviewed with the function of the Administrator being held up as a key leadership activity, giving it a prominence not normally associated with day to day church life. This may be due to the writer's world organisational perspective, rather than from the local church viewpoint. The question is, therefore, how much of this applies in the life of the local Body of believers? The writer leaves the impression, at least, that the basic principles are the same irrespective of size.

The book contains useful information about administrative effectiveness. While being informative, much of this can be found in many business administration books. However, it is concise and sound advice written in a Christian context which will make it a useful tool for those seeking basic knowledge in order to grow in administrative skills.

The message of the book is that Administrators have a leadership role to play and Church Leaders should ensure that their own administration is effective. It is not just the matter of routine paperwork with which it is sometimes associated. Later chapters concerning encouragement, enthusiasm and creativity deserve a wider readership.

In the foreword to this book it is suggested that Moses, Joshua, Ezra and Nehemiah were administrative giants, so all church leaders might find this an important addition to their bookshelves.

Brian A. Tibbert,
Brickhill Baptist Church, Bedford.

PRAYER, A guide to its content and practice 18pp.

Available at 80p. including postage and packing. A special offer of 5 booklets for £2.30 is also being made in the initial publication period.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP - come contemporary issues 35pp.
Available at 80p. per copy - or £1 including post.

Both booklets available from the Yorkshire Baptist Association, 1 South Parade, Headingley, Leeds. LS6 3LF.

Even a member of the Lancashire and Cheshire Association has to view Yorkshire Baptists with respect! Always to the forefront, they have issued a new booklet on prayer, and re-issued in booklet form what were a collection of discussion papers on worship. Both are well-worth buying.

As regards the guide to prayer, it divides into two basic sections: What is Prayer? and How do I pray? In one sense it says nothing new. Yet on the other hand it puts the familiar in a fresh way. I would warmly commend it for the use of new Christians who want a practical guide to the nuts and bolts of prayer. Alternatively, it could well offer something to the Christian who has got 'stuck' and needs to be encouraged to work at prayer again.

The booklet on Christian Worship deals with the communion service, architecture, new music in worship, the ministry of healing in worship, use of charismatic gifts and the house group in the life of the local church. I note that when I reviewed the first edition I wrote: 'They are well written and provide much information and mental stimulus. They could certainly form a useful basis for a series of house group studies on worship'. As I re-read them this time, the thought occurred to me that they could well be used by deacons - instead of launching straight into the business of the evening, deacons could be encouraged for the first hour to give thought to some of the major issues facing us today.

Paul Beasley-Murray.

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