

With Weapons of Righteousness

I found the story about Portrack so captivating that I have included it in full. There is so much that is instructive and encouraging in Roy Searle's article that it deserves our full attention and appropriate emulation. While one swallow does not make a summer, it does herald better things and helps us to look ahead.

Evangelicals have lost their way over the last century in relegating the corporate and social implications of the gospel to the Fourth Division. Now we are seeing it being promoted to the 'Fourth Dimension'. If we can say that Luther's Reformation gave the Bible back to the people; and that the Charismatic Renewal is giving the Ministry back to the people - then it seems to me that Portrack is an example of a Radical Evangelicalism which is sending Bible-believing, Spirit-filled Christians to the people of our communities to minister to their perceived needs.

For this to happen we need a reformation of our biblical understanding and Church programmes akin to some revolutionary ideas being seen in modern architecture. The Pompidou Centre in Paris and the new Lloyds Building in London wear their workings and service facilities on the outside for all to see. Likewise, the workings and service of the gospel are meant to be found on the outside, in in the community, not hidden deep within the structures of the church.

These concrete acts of mercy and justice form part of our "weapons of righteousness" (2 Cor. 6:7). But this does not exhaust the armoury of the gospel. The weapons of righteousness are wielded "in the right hand and in the left". There must needs be included, the cutting edge of the gospel's demand for repentance and faith, as well as the double-edged sword of showing mercy and doing justice. If we fail to use the right hand then we offer no more than the humanist can. And if we fail to use the left hand then we cannot gain a foothold within the heart of the community. These weapons of righteousness are irresistible when used together. We need to see more of this in our constituency!

Terry Griffith.

(I need your help. Please complete the survey in this Newsletter. And please make use of the church multiple order scheme if you feel the Newsletter has a wider usefulness!)

NEWSLETTER NO. 25 - APRIL, 1987

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MAINSTREAM SPANS THE GLOBE



They won't know it but delegates to MAINSTREAM 1986 have been leading the singing at services in the tiny chapel of the house in Gabarone, Botswana, where three Sisters of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin (Mother House in Wantage, Oxon) live and worship.

How can that be? Those who were at Swanwick in 1986 will remember Sister Margaret Magdalen who led one of the seminars. In May, she was sent by her community to work in Botswana and, included in the twenty kilos of luggage she was allowed, were the tapes of all the Mainstream sessions - very generously given to her at the end of the Conference. Not only have Richard Foster's talks been shared widely in Gabarone to the blessing of many, but she has used some of the worship songs on the tapes during Communion Services. At the press of a switch, David Coffey's voice has introduced a song, then 350 Baptist voices have filled the tiny little chapel enabling the congregation of only 6 to 12 people to sing their hearts out - indeed nearly take the roof off!! Apart from the vocal support, it is such an encouragement in a lonely situation, suddenly to be worshipping with a much larger, even if invisible, congregation and to realise that we are members of an enormous world-wide family. So, from Botswanam Sister Margaret writes:

"Thank you to all who were at Mainstream for your fellowship at the time.....and since. It was and has continued to be a source of real inspiration. We shall be thinking of you and praying for you as you gather again at Swanwick in 1987. May you be blessed abundantly as we were last year."



Worried & Helpless: Britain's U.B.40's



(Jottings from a Pastor's Notebook 25.1.87)

Sunday night: 'Called to pray for Arthur, a man on our estate who had contacted cancer. We went as a ministry group into the home. There was Neville and Babs, son and daughter-in-law who came to faith in Christ in recent years with Arthur and his wife Jean.

During ministry we saw the Lord in his grace and mercy demonstrate and reveal his love in a wonderful way.

Arthur and Jean gave their lives to Christ and he experienced a freedom from pain and anxiety.

As we came from their home, rejoicing with the angels, we looked out over the estate. We could see the lights on in Tom and Bridy's flat, (a couple who had recently come to the Lord) and Mabel's, their neighbour who had first shared her faith with them. There across the way the light was on in Jean's house (Jean who came to the Lord three years ago and who is now one of our church community workers). Next door to her, Anne and Frankie's house

(Anne is now our caretaker, who came to faith as a result of a visit to her home by one of our members) who then brought Jean to the Lord. I could see across to Fred's, who had been baptised last week and to Grace's house, (Grace who was converted following a visit from the church when she was bereaved).

Yes Lord, this is what it is about, a light in every street, a fulfilling of the vision you have given to your church. They may say in that recent government health report, that Portrack is one of the worst places to live, but I reckon that is not how you see it, for you Lord have plans to bring to these people, 'a future and a hope' and I praise you.

Background

Portrack Baptist Church, in the heart of industrial Teesside, is the only church situated in the local community that comprises of four estates (three council and one private housing) with a population of just over 6,000.

Founded by Welsh steel workers in the late 1800's it was run as a Mission of Stockton Baptist Tabernacle until its independence in 1980 when it called its first full-time Pastor, Roy Searle. In the last eight years the church has experienced renewal and growth that has led to significant changes in the life, ministry and mission of the church. From 29 members in 1980 the church has grown to an active membership of over 90, becoming a community church, yet with a wider ministry that is being exercised throughout the North East. The characteristics of the local community are bleak with all the attendant marks of deprivation evidenced: unemployment (48% and rising), poor housing, environmental problems, crime at an increasingly high level, many families that have experienced a break-up in relationships, glue sniffing and alcoholism and an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness, an inability to do anything about the worsening situation.

A pretty depressing picture by any standards but one that has to be seen against the vision that God has given to his church that is bringing 'a future and a hope' to the people whom he the Lord is making for his praise and who will declare his glory. God is building his church, extending his kingdom in power and we believe in nothing short of renewal in the church and revival among the people of our communities!

Lessons Learnt and Learning

Over recent years we have come to discover anew that evangelism and social action are not enemies but partners in the proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel, and that the Lord calls us to be his people in his world, equipped and empowered by him to be his agents in his redeeming of the world. We are discovering what it means to be in the world and yet not of it in a way that seeks to echo the life and ministry of Jesus to the people in our communities. Gone are the days of retreat and escapism that have left our communities with no Christian presence or voice! Acts 2:37-47 pictures the church from three perspectives:

- 1) Evangelical with an emphasis on conversions, the word preached, people in prayer, sound teaching, etc.
- 2) Social Action with the amazing quality of fellowship; selfless, sacrificial, sharing, etc.
- 3) Charismatic with the emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit in signs and wonders.

We have sought to embrace all three perspectives; evangelical, socially active and charismatic as we have sought to be the people God wants us to be in and for the community. We are involved in the life of the community for we have learnt that God calls us to be 'incarnational' in our life and witness, that a Christian presence precedes a proclamation of the Good News. What follows is but one of the outworkings and fulfilling of God's vision for his church here in Stockton in relation to how we as a fellowship are seeking to respond to the unemployed.

Beginnings of a Response

Our work among the unemployed stems from the church's increasing involvement in the local community. Being the only 'local' church in the community we feel a responsibility and commitment to demonstrating our care and concern for the people whom we seek to serve, thus echoing God's love for them.

Back in 1984 we had an experience which left an indelible impression on our minds in respect of the plight of the unemployed. As a fellowship we acted as sponsors for a three month work scheme requiring a joiner, painter and eight part-time (2 ½ days a week) labourers.

The labouring jobs were advertised for 3 days at the local job centre. We were astounded and yet saddened as we interviewed over ninety men for such vacancies. In the main these were men, many married, who were classified 'long-term unemployed' who had skills abilities and potential yet had been unable to secure regular employment. Time and time again we heard the stories of redundancies, and lay offs; before us was the reality and horror of unemployment. More recently, working as a Chaplain to the local Comprehensive School, I was saddened that only 4 out of 92 school leavers had secured real jobs. The rest had to be satisfied with a Government scheme.

The whole vexed question of unemployment has become so serious that we in a community of such high unemployment have just begun to rise to its challenge.

Economic forecasts predict a worsening situation; pessimism prevails. Politicians wrestle with the problems of inflation, industrialists struggle with world competition, technology transforms the patterns of employment which has fixed vocational educational and training patterns and employers and trade unions battle with redundancy and its social and economic consequences.

Now we can look at reports, trends and forecasts but need constantly to be reminded that unemployment is not however a problem of statistics but of people! The poignant personal and social tragedy that unemployment brings to an individual, his family and community are enormous. In ministering to the unemployed we have come to realize that there are two fundamental areas in need of ministry: the feeling of insignificance and insecurity.

As the church has grown and penetrated with the Gospel into the community we have become very much more community conscious. This is so important for any church seeking to respond to the unemployed. We need to understand the problem of unemployment with a particular reference to our local community; identifying and analysing reports and statistics, reviewing trends and discerning what prospects and potential there is in relation to the local community. Communicating with job centres, benefit offices, schools and local businesses to determine what's happening and likely to happen re: jobs in the area has been a vital component in our response mechanism as a church.

On Teesside, as in other areas of high unemployment, there are a number of very valid schemes, agencies and reports being undertaken by various church backed organisations. These can greatly compliment the local church's response, but I believe should not be a substitute or excuse for the local church not doing anything. Anyone can write a report or article in a magazine, 'doing the stuff' is surely where it counts most.

Open House

As a result of our greater involvement in the community, in 1984 we improved our buildings to create new kitchen facilities, lounge, two small rooms and a communal hall which enabled us to establish our 'Open House' ministry. (Although it should be stressed that you don't need buildings to care for people!) The buildings are now open throughout the week and is an 'open door' for the community.

We run a varied programme of activities which goes some way to meeting the 'felt' needs of the community; e.g. playgroups, parent and toddlers, unemployed drop-in centre, children's clubs, 'open' youth clubs, elderly lunch club and day centre activities and a walk assistance for the elderly scheme. Through our Open House Centre we are continually building relationships and meeting people's needs and that of the whole community. Under the M.S.C. Community Programme (C.P.) we sponsor a team of church community workers; a community development liaison worker, children's worker, youth worker and elderly care worker. In addition 14 care assistants are based on our premises who work with the elderly and housebound.

The workers are supported by volunteers from the church and a team of 16 pastoral assistants who are involved in the pastoral care and support of individuals and families in the community. Our evangelism team are also closely linked with the programme and visit and follow up as and when appropriate. The benefit to the community is seen in the lives of those who have been helped, encouraged and enriched by such a ministry, whereas the benefit to those who we employ as workers can be seen in the experience offered in a wide range of community based work and activities, working with people of all ages, backgrounds and needs in a team setting.

We are grateful to have Christian Relay, an M.S.C. Agency that handles all the administration of the project for us. As a church our responsibility is for the programme itself and the workers we employ, an oversight role.

One of the real frustrations that we experience with such a scheme is that every year there has to be a changeover of staff due to M.S.C. regulations. This leads to a lack of continuity both for the church in its relationship to the workers and more importantly for the community who have come to trust and rely on the support of the workers. To be free of outside regulations and some dreadful red-tape bureaucracy would be a major liberating step forward, but as no help is presently available from church sources, we, as with so many churches in the urban areas, are unable to proceed further in a way that would be more meaningful and lasting than under present circumstances and restraints. Nevertheless we recognise that our M.S.C. Community Programme has enabled us to strengthen our involvement and develop new ways of relating and responding to the unemployed and others in the community, giving support and encouragement to individuals and families, not only on church premises, but more importantly out in the community itself.

We realise that all too often our ministry is in treating the symptoms and not the causes or the injustices that we see much evidence of. However we press on, protesting when and where we can, speaking and writing for the people with no union card other than a UB40, and albeit in a small way

ministering to people who are affected by unemployment. People matter to the Lord and we through our programme, assert that people matter more than things. Continually we are finding needs that we seek to meet in Christ's name; discovering hurts that he alone can heal and transform.

Conclusion

Sam Goldwyn is attributed as saying 'Never Prophecy, particularly about the future!', but one thing that is certain to face the church in its ministry is the plight of the unemployed, a problem that won't easily go away in the future. When Ezekiel contemplated the situation of the people of Israel in exile he was overwhelmed by what he had heard and seen. So might we feel when we contemplate the current situation of the unemployed. That is those of us who know its reality in our ministry to people, for I dare to suggest for example, that many in the South sadly would have no comprehension of what it is to live in a street and be the only one in full-time employment, or to be one in over 800 applying for a forecourt attendant's job! What can be done? The following suggestions are by no means the only or best ways of responding to the unemployed but they may be of help in stimulating and encouraging church's in their response:-

Opening up premises for use by and with the community.

Establishing counselling and advice centres for the unemployed and their families.

Supporting financially those of the fellowship who need travelling expenses in search of work.

Sponsoring a Community Programme scheme. Using an M.S.C. agency to handle the administration and supervisory aspects of the project.

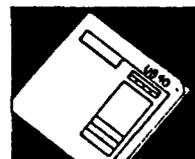
The scope and opportunities to create projects are limitless and should be no drain on a church's financial resources. It costs nothing but commitment, creativity and care to sponsor a scheme that provides employment and that is beneficial to the community.

Encourage the unemployed (and others!) to take up responsibilities in the various areas of ministry within the church. Turning a problem upside down and providing an opportunity!

Keep affirming the worth, value and significance of people who in their understanding of society, feel rejected but who are loved and precious in God's eyes.

A plan of action may take the following course:-

1. Pray about how the Lord would have you respond.
2. Discern the concern and interest of others in the church and community.
3. Discuss the resources and potential that can be released and contributed.
4. Clarify aims, goals and plans.
5. Research and evaluate continually, building an understanding of the nature and extent of unemployment in the locality.
6. Having decided upon appropriate action, launch out in faith. You can never trust the Lord too much!



As with many areas of ministry we've experienced many encouragements as well as frustration and opposition. Tobiah and Sanballat have their modern day counterparts! As with any new venture, breaking new ground we have known misunderstanding and difficulty.

As we've moved out in obedience to God's Word and at the prompting of his Spirit, we have nevertheless been thrilled to see God at work among us, bringing about both a response to the unemployed and a future and a hope for the people of Portrack!

Roy Searle
Pastor - Portrack Baptist Church
Stockton-on-Tees, Cleveland.

AN ASIAN PROJECT

By all indicators, Newcastle is one of the most deprived areas of Great Britain, and Elswick is one of the most deprived areas of Newcastle. The parish of St. Paul's is lucky in being small - only about five thousand residents - and in having no high-rise flats. Otherwise, it shares all the problems of the area.

- * Unemployment is estimated at 72%, and most of those in work receive Family Income Supplement.

- * House insurance premiums reflect the number of break-ins, and many people live in fear of crime.

- * Renovation of old terraces and replacement of the worst housing with new estates has only served to emphasise that environment is not the whole reason for social problems.

- * The ubiquitous litter and broken glass witness to the aimlessness of young people. Not more than 20% are likely to find employment when they leave school.

This is the area to which many immigrants come when they first arrive in Newcastle. It's cheap, and the concentration of a small Asian community in one district of a large city makes it the best place to buy halal food, learn English, remain faithful to religion, and find people to feel at home with. When people become more settled, and more affluent, they tend to move to neighbouring parishes, which therefore have increasing numbers of Asian residents.

In the spring of 1983, the leaders of St. Paul's church realised that God was calling them to respond to the presence of the Asians in the parish - mostly Muslims from Pakistan or the Sylhet area of Bangladesh. They live mainly in a few streets at the north end of the parish, so it would have been quite possible to leave them and concentrate on ministry amongst the needy white populace. But God's people were faithful to His call, and the Asian Project came into being. I am the second full-time worker, and started work in September, 1985.

What is the Project?

Our aim is to help the Church of Jesus Christ in West Newcastle to make a right response to the Asians in our midst. We want to obey Jesus' command to

love our neighbours as ourselves, and to follow Paul's pattern of "genuine love, truthful speech and the power of God" (2 Cor. 6:6&7) in all our relationships with them.

What does this involve?

Asians are, of course, people, and need the same response of love as do any other people. However, several factors particularly provoke us to ministry amongst them.

- * They are often disadvantaged.

Those in this area share the problems of the white population, but Asians anywhere may have language problems, and live in fear of contamination by local culture. All this, together with the difficulty of maintaining traditional family structures in housing designed for nuclear families, can result in social isolation and depression, particularly among the women.

- * They experience racism.

In Elswick, this takes the form of harrassment by children and coldness from adults rather than the riots seen elsewhere, but National Front activity makes complacency about the future impossible. New immigrants feel even unspoken hostility, and withdraw in fear; their children may fight back in resentment.

- * They don't know Jesus.

The Asians in our area all belong to religions other than Christianity, which may specifically deny central Christian doctrines. Their perception of our faith is usually governed by the equation "Christian" = "white British". I leave to your imagination what this implies to one whose only experience of white Britain is Elswick and the television!

Against all this, we remember the Biblical principle of care for the disadvantaged. We remind ourselves that all men are made by God, in His image, so that racist thinking undermines the centre of Biblical teaching about man. And we remember that Jesus died not for us only, but also for the whole world (1 John 2:2).

Genuine love must therefore constrain us to tackle all these areas, and to speak Biblical truth to both whites and Asians.

How shall we do this?

The Church does not exist for itself alone, or for some people only, but for the whole community including the Asians. It is obvious to most of us that we should bring the love of Jesus into difficult situations, and preach the Gospel to those that have not heard or understood it. The problem is that few of us do it.

This is, I suggest, because we share the attitudes and ignorances of the rest of the population. Some of us are simply frightened and feel ill-equipped to cross cultural barriers. Others are racist. We may not express ourselves like the National Front, but it is not hard to find Church people afraid of Asians, doubtful as to the possibility of their salvation, uncertain of their full status as human beings, and resentful of their residence in Britain. Underlying all this is an immense ignorance of Asian culture and religion, and of relevant Biblical teaching.

In addition, Christians are often ignorant of their own faith. If we do not

understand the uniqueness of Jesus, we will not see the need of sharing Him with others. If we see His uniqueness, but not the cultural issues, our evangelism will not communicate the Gospel. The average Muslim asked to become a Christian will hear, "I want you to give up your culture, betray your family and abandon your moral code". No wonder he will say, "No, thank you!".

Now, if we are to love Asians as ourselves, we have to start by relating to Asians. This is the foundation on which we can build community relations, aim for social justice, share friendship with lonely people, listen to teenagers going through the agony of growing up between two cultures, and tell people the good news of Jesus.

My vision is that, throughout our area, Christian people should be relating to and praying for just one Asian family each. They may then want to get together to pray for one another in this, to discuss what they are learning, and to study what they need to know. That way, prayer and knowledge will grow. It is as this happens that genuine love for our neighbours will increase, that we will struggle to speak the Truth so that it can be understood, and encourage one another to call on the Lord to act in His power.

If this is to happen, we need to see changes in Christians. So our priority is Prayer, teaching Christians, and sharing with other churches what we are learning. We therefore have

- * a central support group, which meets fortnightly for prayer and study,
- * awareness of Asians and their needs integrated as far as possible into worship and teaching in church,
- * occasional resource evenings open to all who are interest,
- * visits by Christians to the mosque and the Sikh gurdwara, which have been reciprocated when groups of men from the mosque have come to the church to discuss aspects of the Christian faith,
- * monthly magazine articles available to local churches,
- * a worker (me) available to speak to groups,
- * a bookstall and a small resource library,

The project has also been used to provide experience and provoke thinking for students in theological training - a key area if ministry among Asians in Britain is to expand.

How are we getting on?

Sometimes, I think we are getting nowhere. It is slow work seeing Christians move out in this ministry. Most people are already so busy in the Lord's service that they have no room for Asians; and we need the most dedicated disciples for this long-term, patient work which may not show fruit until the next generation.

However, when I open my eyes to see what God is doing, things are in fact quite encouraging:

- * perhaps half the active membership of St. Paul's have some contact with Asians. Many are trying to get to know them, and see this as part of their Christian witness,

- * a number of Asians have joined us on church outings and at services,
- * church members have joined mini-bus trips with Asian and white children in the summer, attended activities at an Asian ladies' language class, and helped with a childrens' party at Christmas,
- * Christian staff and parents at the church school are taking their responsibility to Asians seriously,
- * we visited the parish with a card in five languages at Christmas, and went carol singing on Christmas Eve.

My own home, in the middle of the Asian community, has been at the centre of a number of activities. I am now known to many and am available to those who want help with filling in forms or taking children to the dentist; and mothers are happy for their children to come to my house to colour in, bake cakes or read stories. Following the Asian pattern of "open home" for religious festivals has been particularly encouraging.

Other churches are also slowly responding. The most involved so far is the local Baptist Church, where several people have regular contact with Asians - through a multi-cultural embroidery class, volunteer English teaching in homes, helping children with schoolwork, or chatting to neighbours or colleagues at work. Recently, some church members have started to meet for prayer and study, and one comes to the central support group.

In discussion with other ministers in the area, I have found an encouraging concern to make a faithful Christian response to Asians. Most are too busy and feel too ill-equipped to do much, but have people in their congregations who have natural contacts with Asian people. If these can be built on, the pattern seen at the Baptist Church may be repeated and the ministry spread without over-burdening church leaders.

That is the vision:

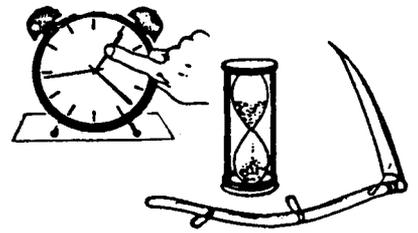
- * Christians in loving, prayerful relationships with Asians, meeting needs, breaking down barriers, removing misconceptions, turning back to the Bible for help, and so being able to make the message of Jesus clear.
- * in churches or areas, these Christians coming together to learn and pray.
- * from each group, someone coming to the central support group, which will continue in prayer and study, and act as a resource for others.

We see only the beginnings of this at present. The future is in the hands of God - and that is not a platitude. In all that we are doing, it is evident that the work is His and not ours. Steps forward are not only made in dependence on Him, but often obviously by His initiative. And that makes the work exciting. We often go forward uncertainly, sometimes fearfully, always aware of the spiritual battle we are fighting, but knowing that God is doing a new thing among us. I am convinced that one key to blessing for the whole Church in our area - and in Britain - is our right co-operation with Him in His work amongst Asians.

Ida Glaser
Asian Project Worker
Newcastle

(The Baptist church referred to in the article is Westgate Road, of which Andrew Rollinson is Pastor.)

Back to the Future



Prologue

In 1987 Baptist Churches in Yorkshire are looking back to their roots in order to plan for the future, for it was in 1787 that Dr. John Fawcett of Hebden Bridge, best remembered now as the author of the hymn, 'Blest be the tie that binds', gathered together the Baptists of the North of England at Colne and re-formed the Lancashire and Yorkshire Association from which the present Lancashire and Cheshire and Yorkshire Associations have developed. Fawcett was a man of vision and enterprise and he laid solid foundations. Out of that initial gathering grew the work of church planting, the training of ministers, the creation of funds to build and repair chapels, and the start of the scheme which today we know as Home Mission.

Over the years that vision has been realised by the commitment of many thousands of men and women in country villages, small towns, inner cities and developing suburbs. But enormous changes have taken place since those earliest times. The industries upon which the traditional wealth of our great Northern cities has been built have largely disappeared or shrunk to a fraction of their former importance; sweeping social changes have radically transformed the lives of ordinary people; and the churches have not been immune, suffering steady decline in numbers and influence for most of this century. The flame of the original vision has burnt very low. Yet it has never been completely extinguished and as Baptists in Yorkshire and Lancashire prepare to celebrate their Bicentenary a new spirit is abroad, there is a change in the air. To help the churches discover what God is saying to them today as they face the challenge of 1987 the Association is presently engaged in a three year project called Advance 87 which, it is hoped, will enable churches to rekindle the spirit of adventure and hope, of Fawcett and his contemporaries.

Act One

The project is in three parts and the first part is a process of Evaluation. Individual churches are being encouraged to invite a team of three trained people from other churches in the Association to make an assessment of their life, work and witness. The church requesting the Evaluation begins by collecting information about the area in which it is situated, the attitude of local people to the church, the structure of church membership in terms of age, sex, gifts, etc., location in the community and other relevant sociological factors, the structure of church life in terms of meetings and activities, both on and away from church premises, and what we might term the 'nuts and bolts' of church administration, such as the agendas for church and deacons' meetings.

When the material has been assembled, it is forwarded to the Association office and the team of evaluators is then appointed. The evaluators study the material carefully and then begin to visit the church, attending services, mid-week activities, and talking to minister, deacons, and members, as well as doing their own survey of the local area. This process can last a month or two and when it is completed the Evaluators meet together to draft a report on their findings which is then printed and presented by the Evaluators at a special deacons' meeting. The object of the evaluation is to help a local church take an objective and analytical look at what it is doing, to commend it for its strengths, and encourage it to work at any areas of weakness that may emerge.

At the time of writing almost half of our 120 churches are involved in the Evaluation process and initial results are encouraging. We recognise that it is not an easy thing for a church to invite others in to look objectively and critically at the effectiveness of its impact upon the surrounding community, but we believe this to be of vital importance as we wrestle with the question of how the church can best be the agent of God's Kingdom in the world today. Once the Evaluation is completed the church is left to work at any recommendations that have been made, but after six months have elapsed the Area Superintendent will make contact to see what the church has actually done about the Evaluation. To encourage our churches in this project, and to prove that we try to practice what we preach, the Association itself is also being evaluated by a team of outside observers!

Act Two

The second phase of Advance 87, as the title suggests, is planned to take place mainly during this year in order to coincide with the Bicentenary Celebrations. Following the Evaluations we are encouraging all of the churches in the Yorkshire Baptist Association to advance by taking at least one small step forward in mission outreach in 1987. It must be emphasised at this point that we are not presenting the churches with a prepared plan and asking them to conform to it, but rather exhorting them, if that is not too strong a word, to discover for themselves what the Holy Spirit is saying about their life and situation and act accordingly.

As a result it would appear that no two churches are doing exactly the same thing although a number are working along parallel lines.

- the churches at Thornaby and South Bank on Teesside have invited the Association Missioner to lead separate weeks of outreach in June and September;
- several of our churches are looking seriously at planting new causes in adjacent towns and communities;
- Sheffield Road Church, Barnsley concerned that the traditional mid-week prayer meeting was attracting a very limited number, have formed prayer cells meeting in homes and seven of these have started;
- the churches in Doncaster are co-operating with the other denominations in the town in a mission with Jim Smith of C.P.A.S. during November;
- Cemetery Road, Sheffield will be holding a One Step Forward Campaign;
- the small fellowship at South Ossett, having visited several thousand homes in the town last year, are looking forward to a week of outreach with Doug Barnett of Saltmine Trust in September;
- after being in the doldrums for a number of years work amongst young people is growing again and a number of new open youth clubs have sprung up;
- obviously in an area like Yorkshire the needs of the unemployed are always to the fore and several churches are investigating practical ways of helping.

The list could be multiplied several times over as the churches get to grips with their task, and although none of the items mentioned is revolutionary or innovative by themselves, taken as a whole we do feel that they represent a significant step forward in the work of the Association. Perhaps the greatest encouragement comes from the fact that we are discovering that if

our churches are given the right sort of lead and stimulus they are both willing and able to move forward. Coming after more than seventy years of steady decline this shift from being in reverse to slowly edging forward comes as a welcome relief, and perhaps reminds us that we work better together rather than in isolation.

Act Three

The third phase of Advance 87 emphasises the nature of new converts and discipleship training for all Christians. We are praying that a considerable number of people will confess Jesus as Saviour and Lord during this year and our great concern is that both they and those already established in the churches will be firmly grounded and taught the meaning of being committed to Christ and His Kingdom as a life long process of discovery and challenge. We are very well aware of the criticisms made of similar schemes to ours so we are underlining the fact that we are concerned with people becoming disciples rather than just making decisions. The thinking behind this phase of Advance 87 is still very much in its formative stage, but the Education Group of our Commission of Christian Witness, a kind of Association 'think tank', is looking at this whole area of Christian life and particularly at the many schemes of discipleship training which have become available in recent years. One which is highly recommended by those who have tried it is Master Life and several of our churches are already involved in this.

The End?

What will happen when it is all over? Well there is a sense in which we hope it will never actually reach that point, because we are seeking to build into the project a process of continuous assessment so that when Advance 87 has run its course, sometime towards the end of the decade, we as an Association of Baptist churches will have learnt so much about the work and witness of our churches that we will be able to use the knowledge gained as a springboard to launch us towards the work of the Kingdom of God in the 1990's and beyond.

Credits:

Harry Weatherley,
Yorkshire Association Missioner
(and a cast of thousands).

Square Roots & Other Radicals



(Being an essay review of

THE RADICAL KINGDOM, Nigel Wright, Kingsway Publications, £4.95, pp187.)

This book is an exploration of the current church scene from the perspective of 'restoration'. Restoration has lately become the identifying label of the so-called 'house churches', but while the book is at times in dialogue with those churches, it is really saying that 'restoration' is an idea older than these churches and wider in its implications that they have themselves grasped. For restoration is nothing less than the Anabaptist vision and as such must include not only the restoration of the New Testament experience of the Spirit and the restoration of New Testament patterns of church leadership, but also a restoration of Jesus' teaching and radical demands as the norm for behaviour and for the church's social stance. The unifying thought in the book is that Jesus is our norm and that the task today is to restore the church to where he always intended it should be.

This position commits Nigel to fighting on two or more fronts, on the one hand defending the Charismatic experience with some success against an evangelicalism that would deny the relevance of New Testament experience for today, and on the other hand taking issue with a restorationism that grounds its ideas in the Old Testament rather than the New. The chapter on authority in the church is especially good here, challenging hierarchical models of leadership in the name of Jesus, as is the chapter on discipline in the church. Jesus, not David is to be the model! New Testament values, such as freedom and love, are to be restored, not just New Testament 'structures' and a New Testament supernaturalism (much as we need that too!). In the same way the chapter on bringing about change in the church is full of wise words in the service of showing that the end does not justify the means, and should be read by all who are involved in changing the church - preferably before they begin!

Having said all that by way of unstinted praise, I must take issue with what I see to be the book's less satisfactory ideas. The first of these is the identification of the 'Powers' with the 'structures' in chapter 4 and thereafter. This is a fashionable theological idea in some circles. Following one Hendrik Berkhof the words of the apostle Paul about Principalities and Powers are seen to refer not to demonic intelligencies (though people like Nigel who believe in such things can still say that the demons use the structures), but to the religious, moral, political structures of society. These structures are seen at work in for example South Africa or Northern Ireland where the intractable nature of the problems and the way that individually decent citizens are seen to participate in corporate evil suggests that it is the structures of society themselves that work against the Kingdom of God.

Against this I should want to say:

1) The identification of the Powers with the structures is by no means agreed. It received, for example, a careful refutation from John Stott in 'God's New Society', pp.267-275. More notice should have been taken of this.

2) People who talk about structures in this way are forced to personify them in a way reminiscent of evolutionists talking about evolution, so that we have Nigel saying, 'Once established those structures assert themselves. They see themselves as being self-existent. They demand attention and influence simply because they are. They require loyalty to themselves and lose sight of their intended aim.' (p.74). I want to ask: how can a structure do all that? Only men can do that, or superhuman intelligencies. We have demythologized only to remythologize again.

3) So what is the attraction? Why should any one want to do that? The answer is that while identifying the Powers with the structures enables liberals to avoid the embarrassment of talking about demons (we can talk about the demonic instead, whatever that may be!), it enables the likes of Nigel to adopt a generalized anti-government stance, since if the structures are the Powers, then any structure, i.e. organisation or authority, can be represented as demonic, which is useful if on general grounds you wish to commend a politically radical stance.

4) The absurdity of this can be seen in the development of chapter 4 itself where we start by talking about the gospel as the answer to corporate evil and end up by commending translocal ministries in the church. Because the restoration movement has attempted to restore the concept of apostolic (defined as translocal) leadership it has challenged the structures of the church. As such it is on the side of the angels (so to speak!) and that is why it has been opposed. But we surely cannot conclude that whatever advocates structural change opposes the structures, that is to say the Powers, that is to say the devil? Obviously this is not the place for a full discussion of the Powers theology, but it certainly needs one before it will do all that is being asked of it.

The same is true of an idea made popular by John Howard Yoder in his book 'The Politics of Jesus', namely that in the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus was declaring a Jubilee in literal terms and that the church is called to adopt the socio-political stance implied by that. This too Nigel adopts on p.126 in a chapter calling for radical political involvement by the church. I have two problems with this. The first is that the Jesus of the gospels simply does not behave in the way demanded of him by political Christians. True, there are some apparently radical or provocative gestures, but you cannot run a political campaign on a few gestures. A moment's serious comparison of the careers of, say, Mahatma Gandhi and Jesus will be enough to make the point. Glaring injustices confronted Jesus, but he has nothing helpful to say. But if he did not engage in the hurly-burly of politics, how can he act as a norm for us in such activity?

Secondly, while making all sorts of radical noises about messianic communities and life-style Nigel in common with most such advocates has very little to offer by way of practical model or instruction. Well, it's a short book and a wide-ranging one so perhaps one should not be too hard, but the movement he represents on this issue presents to this observer at least a glaring credibility gap which is likely to be filled in true messianic fashion not by people making speeches in the streets but by people doing the stuff without a lot of fuss - as of course many are.

I am glad to have 'Restoring the Kingdom' on my bookshelf, but I value it more for those parts of it that rest on its author's careful appraisal of renewal and restoration in the light of scripture and experience, than for those that in my judgment do not.

Alastair Campbell,
Pastor, Broadmead Baptist,
Northampton.

BOOK REVIEWS



Jesus and the Kingdom of God, G.R. Beasley-Murray, Paternoster, 1986, 446pp.
£19.95. (hbk.)

This is a magnificent book. We are led through the jungle thickets of New Testament scholarship. Our guide's machete cuts through the views of others efficiently. The difficult and circuitous route is made manageable (just about in some places for a 'ducky and horsey' minister like me) and leads to an El Dorado. This book is a spell-binding tour of the synoptic gospels but should only be attempted by those with a training in NT Greek (and a healthy bank balance or a generous book allowance). But it is worth the effort. Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God is opened up in a penetrating and stimulating way which must surely aid the preacher in the task of exposition.

Throughout the book I was again and again impressed by the fact that a grasp of the OT is essential for understanding Jesus and his message. Also, GRBM demonstrates that "No interpretation of a saying of Jesus on the kingdom of God can be right that diminishes its strictly eschatological content" (P.101). The divine sovereignty is at work concretely among a needy humanity, but it also brings the divine blessedness or the divine condemnation in the future.

There are many outstanding examples of exegesis of parables and difficult sayings of Jesus. In some places I can hear John Wimber shouting 'Hallelujah' when GRBM touches on the signs of the presence of the Kingdom. However, GRBM does come to a different conclusion about the saying of the Violent Kingdom to that of Wimber (and Ladd). The analysis of the parable of the Sheep and Goats raises some important theological implications which merit further investigation. Both Ladd (in his NT Theology) and Carson (in his Commentary) argue for a restricted sense of the term "brethren" in this parable.

There is much sane thought and comment, as well as a few light touches, e.g. "Surely those exegetes who want to cut down the figures (e.g. from ten thousand talents to ten) have locked their imaginations in their filing cabinets". (p.115). But I have to confess that some parts of the discussion I found esoteric and questionable. I enjoyed in particular the sections on the Incalculable Kingdom (Lk. 17:20-21), the Strong Man Bound (Mk. 3:27), the Unjust Steward (Lk.16:1-8), the Judge and the Widow (Lk. 18) the Lord's Prayer and GRBM's summary chapters. Serious preachers cannot fail to benefit from studying this book which yields pure gold.

Terry Griffith,
Hackney, London.

Decide For Peace - Evangelicals Against The Bomb, compiled by Evangelical Peacemakers, Marshall Pickering, £3.95.

This book is worthy of our attention. It is not an easy book to read - there is no nice simple precis at the end which saves us having to read the whole.

The appeal of the book is that Christians should make decisions about nuclear weapons. The argument about the deterrent value of the Bomb is not considered valid. We are to choose against and activate against the Bomb. The contributors' belief is that we have choice. Throughout it is argued that, "Peacemaking.....arises directly out of the gospel. It is not the latest trendy evangelical agenda that people are jumping aboard."

The book if read with an open mind will certainly make us think and consider the direct and indirect implications of our choices. The more that is spent on weapons the less there is spent on other things. The overall tool that is used is to challenge our attitudes and most basic Christian convictions and securities. This leaves a longer lasting conviction than reams of statistics and gory medical facts which play on fears.

The strength and weakness of the book is its number of contributors. The biographical snippet on each helps; and serves to illustrate the varied background of this viewpoint. Whatever your current view, and however loudly you voice it, why not let this book challenge you?

Jane Hassell,
Bow, London.

Entering the kingdom - a fresh look at conversion, Monica Hill (Ed.), MARC/Europe, pp145, £4.95.

This is a thought provoking collection of essays by George Carey, Arthur Glasser, Chris Sugden, Lesslie Newbigin, Jeffrey Harris, Peter Brierley, Michael Wooderson, Malcolm Saunders, Roy Pointer and the editor, and it deals with a neglected subject: What does it mean to be converted? Non-evangelicals have feared to look too closely at conversion in case it challenges their doubts; evangelicals in case it disturbs their certainties. And both will be challenged. By all the authors it is made plain that the Kingdom must be entered, and entered by personal faith. At the same time it is the Kingdom that must be entered, not merely a private contract of assurance and commitment.

All the opening essays warn of the danger of seeing conversion as a once-in-a-lifetime experience with few moral implications. In the two most powerful essays in particular Chris Sugden warns against a conversion which is not a conversion to Kingdom values, and Lesslie Newbigin against a conversion that adds Jesus to our Western presuppositions without challenging them or changing our minds. The gospel of the Kingdom is good news to the poor and 'What the good news of the Kingdom means to the poor defines what it is to mean for everyone (p.46). 'Multiplying examples of personal Christian religious experience is not the conversion of England if the underlying worldview is not challenged.' (p.62). Both these fine essays arise from experience in India and deserve to be read and pondered on.

In the light of this it is disappointing that the later essays by well-known friends Michael Wooderson (Good News Down the Street), Malcolm Saunders (E.E./Teach and Reach), and Roy Pointer, while admirable in their call to seize the present opportunities and mobilise the church in well-tried ways of outreach seem uninfluenced by what the opening essays are saying. What they say is very good, but it is the best of what we know already - evangelism addressed to the individual offering eternal life. The book unfortunately contains no testimony to any Western experience of how individualism has been overcome and a more rounded presentation of the gospel made in the tough spots of our country. Roy Pointer may be right to say that 63,000 first time conversions from the 1984 missions is not to be sneezed at, but he does not ask with Chris Sugden what they have been converted to.

Despite this 'Entering the Kingdom' is one of the most stimulating books I have read this year, and I heartily recommend it and urge that we all wrestle with its challenge to our present practice.

Alastair Campbell,
Northampton.

Eyes That See: Douglas McBain, Marshall Pickering, 149pp, £4.95. (pbk).

As a young pastor committed to allowing God to minister to His Church through the Holy Spirit, I discover daily almost that I am still in 'nappies' spiritually., being called upon to face some complex and some strange situations which seem so hard to read and understand. Where do I turn? The title of this book thus whet my appetite with the hope of practical guidance in discernment. The book certainly centres on the need for discernment and the spheres of usefulness for such a gift, but for me the practical applications of the gift (despite the chapter headings) did not quite touch the 'nitty gritty' situations facing me every day.

We left to discern the meaning of the gift of discernment too, nowhere being specifically told. Discernment is variously described in phrases which are easily missed, such as: "...God given insight and the capacity to weigh things carefully..", "common sense enlightened by the Holy Spirit..", "a God given facility for seeing how the devil has sprung the trap on us..", "there is often a supernatural element about discernment... there is also an intellectual base which must not be overlooked.." ..These are helpful. Some would question whether these constitute 'the Spiritual gift of discernment' however.

The most practical and therefore helpful chapter for me was 'Discernment and the Ministry of Deliverance' because it went through theology into practice.

The chapter on 'Discernment and Scripture' was a strong and ringing reminder of the need to be thoroughly soaked in the scriptures which 'builds up the resources of our understanding on which wise judgements can be safely based.' "The scriptures rightly interpreted bring us to sound conclusions and clear perceptions." - Good stuff!

Perhaps I was expecting too much from this book but for me it fails to throw any new light onto my many questions. Having said that, it is all good sound material we need to hear again and again. How about knocking it together with "Come Holy Spirit" (David Pitches)? We may end up with a sound, readable and practical help for ministry.

Stephen Peake,
Leyton, London.

Money and Power by Jacques Ellul. Marshall Pickering . £6.95.

Here again is a memorable piece of work by a great man of the Spirit, a profound thinker and a very practical family man. It should be read by everyman who is struggling to work out a Christian way of handling money and power, or the lack of them.

I dare not start quoting, but certain things stand out in my mind. The escape by modern idealists from personal responsibility for their own money, by absorption in changing the system, which they blame for all misuse of money, including their own. The sacramental nature of wealth to modern man and the desacrilising of it by our Lord and the Scriptures. The stark alternative for us all of Mammon or God. The impossibility of the ordinary

man understanding real Christian generosity, with no strings attached, and no hidden motives. The supreme importance, and at the same time the utter unimportance, of money. The danger of using the poor as a political weapon. And especially the emphasis that the Christian antidote to this common fever is LOVE - not the presence of absence of money, but pure self-giving LOVE!

Of course, Ellul leaves many loose ends. How could anyone avoid doing so with such a subject? He leads us up some blind alleys but the main burden is clear enough. It is the call to detachment from all money dependence and money love.

Perhaps, if any criticism is to be made, it is a failure to appreciate the part God's sovereignty plays in the whole business. It is fashionable today to scoff at the lines of the old hymn "The rich man in his castle, The poor man at his gate, God made them poor and lowly, He made them rich and great." But we still have our great minds and our limited ones, our rulers and our ruled. Jack is still not always as good as his master. Every factory has its skilled and unskilled. And this is not all due to the system, or to the greed of the 'haves'. "There is a Providence that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will". But Ellul will perhaps prevent us using this line as another way of escape from the challenge of Mammon.

Humphrey Vellacott,
King's Cross, London.

"Message on a Shoestring" - A Publicity Handbook, Chris Radley 1986 MARC Europe, 160pp. £2.25.

Gothic print and churchiness are out, and we are encouraged to recognise our audience - to know that they are actually living in 1987. If you are already aware of the methods and materials available for presenting a relevant image of the church and the Gospel to your constituency, then this book has nothing new to say.

The book has three sections: 1) planning - a longwinded account of how to establish a committee - a quarter of the book is spent on the sort of people needed and their expected duties. 2) solving - practical ideas for publicising events, money raising, stewardship, and various activities. There is an ideas section - 50 ideas based on the experience of British churches. Sadly there are only a few new suggestions - does this tell us something about the Church in Britain today? One idea that appealed to me was "Understanding the Natives" - information for newcomers to Liverpool, explaining such wonderful phrases as "Blind Scouse" - a meat stew without meat, eaten in the interval between when the housekeeping runs out and the Giro is due. But how about explaining the Church to the natives, I thought - sin, grace, righteousness? 3) Doing - practical help in design and layout. A lot of known information, but conveniently pulled together in one book.

The book's theme is summed up in these words - "Being amateurs - doing it voluntarily - is admirable. Being amateurish - doing it without discipline - is silly."

My one grouse is that the book talks too much about raising money - one image the Church surely needs to lose.

John Weaver,
Rushden.

Tyne and Wear Christian Directory. MARC Europe. Price £2.95.

For someone like myself whose retrieval system is suspect, this regional directory is a must. It lists the 500+ churches and 250 Christian organisations in the region. Contact addresses, a brief description of the church's theological flavour, membership size, and times of services are all included. It is well done, with a quality of style and print we have come to expect from MARC Europe publications. As far as I can see, it is accurate, although on the page of church officials, neither our Superintendent or Association Minister are listed, and in the analysis of church membership our recent statistical encouragements are not mentioned at all. I'm pleased to see many of the house churches listed, as often they are elusive when it comes to contacting them.

There is an introduction, trying to draw an overall picture of Christian life in the area. This is rather bitty and non-significant.

In spite of quibbles, I hope every area will soon have this useful aid.

Andrew Rollinson,
Newcastle.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Theatre Craft, Nigel Forde, MARC Europe, 189pp. £2.25. Written by a director of the Riding Lights Theatre Company. Styled as a reference tool and introduction to the practical issues facing a drama group. Covers acting, stagecraft, characterisation, directing, writing, stage management, theology of the theatre and role of the artist.

Going South: John Reynolds, Marshall Pickering, 189pp. £2.95. Autobiographical account of spiritual experience arising from spending two seasons in the Antarctic. Author is a lecturer in geophysics and a Baptist, to boot. Some b/w photos. Looks fascinating.

On the Thirty Nine Articles: Oliver O'Donovan, Paternoster, 160pp. £5.95 (pbk). Not to be confused with the book on the Thirty Nine Steps. Only for those who are O'Donovan fans or those who would really like to know what Anglican bishops or priests are supposed to believe. Actually, it would make an interesting read for any wanting a succinct refresher course on Reformed theology. Proves to be a warm-hearted, Christ-centred and topical book.

Ten Worshipping Churches: ed. Graham Kendrick, MARC Europe, 192pp. £2.25. The genius of this series is that it is an easy read, an inspiration to faith and teems with lots of 'throw-away' hints and solid ideas. Of interest is the exposition of scripture in the section about Clarendon, Brighton. Ansdell Baptist gets a chapter. Other examples from more traditional churches ensure a wide appeal and usefulness.

Kind David: Tom Houston, MARC Europe, 180pp. £2.25. This material was originally preached in Kenya and has been re-worked to bring out clearly the lessons about leadership with which David's life abounds. Pithy, vital principles of leadership preface each chapter. Short, lively sections bring home the message. A worthy successor to Redpath and Brown.

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The 1988 Mainstream Conference will be held at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire from Monday 11th to Wednesday 13th January. Details of programme and speakers will be announced later. The cost will be £33 and a £5 non-returnable deposit will book a place.

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