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CAN THESE BONES LIVE

I want to recount the story of a church resuscitation ministry in East and North London. I do so not because of any vaunted desire but to make some pertinent observations about the nature of leadership and the effectiveness of our Association (and denominational) structures. I am not going to speak about the exciting ministry of church planting. Rather, what I have in mind is the revivifying of closed or moribund or despairing church situations.

In 1967 a church in East Ham, on the verge of closure, accepted the offer of a minister (who was then in his mid-fifties) who was prepared to be their Pastor. It was impossible, except with the eye of faith, to see what a mighty blessing God would pour out as a consequence of that decision. (You can read about it in the second issue of this Newsletter!) I was converted under that ministry in 1971 together with many others.

In 1975 the East Ham church responded to a call from another Baptist church in Bow. This led to the financing of a Pastor and assistant (in fact, me) in order to re-establish the work there on a new footing.

In 1977 the East Ham church sent its Secretary (as Lay Pastor) and several members to another struggling cause in East Ham. Instead of being a glorified Sunday School Mission as it was then it is now a properly functioning church.

NEWSLETTER NO. 28 - APRIL, 1988

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'Mainstream' Newsletter is designed to encourage life and growth within the Baptist Union. On the assumption that contributors are in sympathy with this aim, they have full liberty of expression. Views expressed in the newsletter are strictly those of individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Editor, or of the Mainstream Executive and Advisory Council.

In 1979 I was sent by my church at East Ham to be Pastor of a church in Hackney which was within a hair's-breadth of closure. (The Secretary and Treasurer - one and the same person - was then 84 years old! Why did I do it??) I was just completing my training at Spurgeon's College.

In 1980 one of the assistant ministers at East Ham was sent to a church in Stratford with the support of the HMF.

In 1982 one of the other assistant ministers at East Ham was sent, with two other couples, to an empty building in Leyton (that church had been closed for 4 years). All that arose from a prayer offered in a Deacons' Meeting - beware Deacons' Meetings! This church is an Initial Pastorate.

In 1984 Humphrey Vellacott was called to the Vernon, King's Cross church (after 'retiring' from the pastorate at East Ham in 1983!) This church needed a consistent pastoral/evangelistic ministry. In that same year the church at Bow sent a full-time worker and several members to a nearby church in Poplar in order to re-establish that small congregation.

In 1987 my church in Hackney sent one of our members to be Pastor of a church in nearby Clapton. This is a church in receipt of an HMF grant. At the same time the King's Cross church sent its assistant minister to an empty building in Stoke Newington. In January of this year that church was reconstituted with 15 members and several services of baptism have already been held. Again the HMF is helping.

For each one of these situations the question "Son of Man, can these bones live?" was (and in some cases still is) a real test of faith. The answer given in each case was "O Lord God, Thou knowest" (Ezekiel 37:3). These bones have indeed come to life. The story so far involves a total of 300 baptised and 500 members added (and this does not include those churches started by Asian converts when they returned home). All these churches are in precisely those areas of Inner London where, at one time, others had doubted even the very survival of any Christian church.

This story demonstrates, firstly, that under God and in complete dependence upon his action to save the situation, that new congregations can arise from the dust through a thoroughly practical pastorally and evangelistically minded leadership. The preaching ministry in all these churches is unashamedly evangelical in the best conservative tradition.

Secondly, this story demonstrates the fact that it takes at least 5-10 years to establish a new congregation. As a matter of fact, most of these pastors are in first-time pastorates. Now what does that say about the expectations of our experienced ministers on the accredited list? There is a ministry of building churches from nothing and our ministry is not coming up with the goods. Must my congregation be limited to selecting my successor from fresh college graduates when that time comes? Shall we have to grow our own leaders and rely solely upon them?

Thirdly, this story demonstrates that our congregations need one another. Small groups of churches in the same locality can exercise an effective church expansion ministry. I firmly believe that the way forward in evangelising every corner of this land is through multiplying churches, not rationalising them. Indeed I am also convinced that a committed membership of only 50 is not too small a number for a congregation to start thinking in these terms. This is

where the action is and it only requires one church with visionary leadership and the spirit of self-sacrifice to begin this ministry. After all, there are pubs on nearly every street corner where I live - small and many is still beautiful.

Fourthly, this story demonstrates that we need our Associations and Union. Where would the resources for all this have come from otherwise. How much more difficult it would have been without the active support of the Officers of the London Baptist Association, the Area Superintendent, and the Home Mission Fund. But there is a cutting edge to this point and I will proceed to elaborate upon it.

The issue is this - are our Associations really exemplifying and promoting this kind of thinking and action to their fullest extent? I am convinced that the Baptist on the street is really (or would be) excited by church extension work of this local nature, but is left stone cold by most of what passes for Association life. We must banish the apocryphal Gospel of John text, "I have come that they may have meetings and have them more abundantly". The action is on the street while so much Association and Union activity appears to be committee bound. Now why does this appear to be so?

Partly it is because it is so. I recognise that much committee work is necessary and valuable. But one senses that too many of the 'willing' and 'available' rather than the 'gifted' are appointed to key positions. Also such committee structures are where the ecclesiastical political animals roam very happily. Such environments are difficult places for people of vision and action to live. This inbuilt bias within committee structures must be tackled and an anti-inertia policy formulated and applied. Is there enough vision in our Association life? And if there is why isn't it being communicated in such a way that our imagination is immediately captured?

Our Associations were formed in times of expansion by men of vision in order to channel the blessing of God more effectively. It is a scriptural pattern. The Associations need to recover, or encourage the development of, this sense of destiny. If the Union is the Associations associating, then the Associations must call the tune of growth and expansion if the Denomination is to make real strides forward. The emphasis must be on inspiring and supporting others to work together for the sake of the Gospel. We need visionary leadership. We need the right kind of vision. We will know whether we have got it right when we see it working out on the ground (and I am not a pragmatist).

The last thing we need in our public leadership positions are caretakers and more administrators. If I seem to speak out of turn or too harshly, I beg your forgiveness - but I would ask you to stand where I have stood these last few years. Ever since I was converted seventeen years ago I have always belonged to and worked in inner London churches, and I have never known what it is to be in a church that is declining. I simply do not know what it means to be in a church that is not growing in love, faith and numbers. If it can happen in the East End, why can't it happen everywhere?

Anyone and any structure that promotes the vision I have outlined above deserves our full support. We shall need each other, and we shall need to look beyond our own little empires, if our nation is to hear the Gospel. I am coming to believe that our Associations hold the key in our Baptist set-up. It will be their purposeful activity that will do most to initiate, and support those already involved in, church expansion ministries. I believe that our Associations can live too. Do you?

Terry Griffith.

STEWARDSHIP

A Neglected Dimension to Renewal



The very term "Stewardship Campaign" was an instant turn-off for me. It wasn't that I had distorted images of them as merely fund-raising efforts. My understanding was somewhat broader and more biblical than that. It was simply that stewardship as a concept left me cold and uninspired - hardly a taste of the sparkling new wine of the Spirit.

Four years into my first pastorate I began to change my mind. Like many churches we were committed to 'every member ministry'. Sermons, seminars and songs all helped us enthuse about the charismata of the Spirit. Many of us gleefully filled in yet another "Discover your gift" form. "What's your gift, Bro?" became the new conversation piece over coffee. But rapidly I began to sing. How was I to handle a steady stream of people actually offering to serve Christ's Body in new ways? I had been told of more than one ministerial colleague who had piles of filled-in "Discover your gift" forms (representing hundreds of partially discerned gifts) still lying on their desks. I knew how easily I could become one of them. I faithfully read all the books on local church renewal, and nodded approvingly every time I was told 'new wine needs new wine skins'. How you go about wine-skin production, however, was rarely explained. A radical stewardship campaign must be part of the answer, I concluded.

Actually the pilgrimage was not quite so personally flattering. The real initiative was not mine at all! We were in the throes of discussions about a second full-time worker and one of the deacons pleaded that first we take a long hard look at ourselves before we import. We discovered that 39% of the membership (our membership is 110) had no discernable role within the fellowship! The busiest 13% of the membership had responsibility for 48% of the jobs. One person was doing 9 different jobs, and that was not me! A second worker at this stage would only act as a smoke-screen to our appalling lack of every-member ministry. So the stewardship campaign idea took off in the early Spring of 1986. The task took 16 months of hard work, and is an ongoing thing.

"O No; Not a Computer! Where is the Spirit in all this?"

Four of us from the diaconate were set apart to direct the campaign. We began in earnest by taking a weekend retreat to a country cottage. Armed with appropriate membership statistics, a home computer and a clear conscience about Data Protection Acts, we spent a weekend in prayer, thought and hilarity. The 'appropriate membership statistics' included a list of the membership, each member scored 0-5 according to 8 areas of ministry. Two of us independently had done the scoring, according to how we saw the member, and the two of us then met and arrived at an appropriate score. We also scored each person for 'availability', taking health, occupation and family commitments into consideration. (So often in 'discover-your-gift-exercises' the initiative is left totally to the individual member. We deliberately started the other way round, with the leadership taking the first step in discerning gifts.) Our retreat preparation also had included drawing up a list of all the jobs in the church to which we felt God was calling us in the light of our vision for the fellowship to date. Each job requirement was analysed by scoring it according to the same 8 gifts we had used to weigh each member. (See below). All this had been put on computer, and we spent a few happy hours over the weekend asking our ZX to match job with member. It produced some intriguing lateral thinking for us. A new church secretary was nearly appointed on the spot!

JOB PROFILE

Job	Abilities							
	Teaching	Pastoral	Admin.	Practical	Evangelistic	Leadership	Worship	Preaching
House Group Leader	5	4	3	0	4	5	2	1
Pastoral Visitor	3	5	2	0	4	1	1	0

PEOPLE PROFILE

Name	Abilities								Availability			
	Teaching	Pastoral	Admin.	Practical	Evangelistic	Leadership	Worship	Preaching	Commitments	Health	Home	Occupation
Mr. X	2	4	3	0	1	4	2	1				
Mrs. Y	3	5	4	1	2	2	1	0				

Our own code

The News is Out

The fellowship was somewhat alarmed when we told them what we were doing! 'Campaign' became an appropriate word. Resistance had to be lovingly broken down, and the church mobilised into full-co-operation. It happened in three ways. First an eight week sermon series on stewardship took place. Second, in the early weeks of the series every church member received a letter outlining details of the 'stewardship process', and invited to fill in Lewis Middlebrook's 'Discover your gift' form. Thirdly, each of our six housegroups were given discussion questions following each sermon, and in that context members of the housegroups were invited to share their personal 'scores' with others. In this less threatening environment personal findings were lovingly questioned or enthusiastically confirmed. Not surprising, though, the housegroups still found "speaking the truth in love" somewhat difficult. But again, we were keen to build into our campaign a testing of gifts at each level.

Interviews? - You must be Joking!

Then came the crunch. How was our growing mass of facts to be synthesised? The four of us embarked on visiting each church member. We always went in twos, but swapped partners regularly, both to fit in with our own timetables and to guarantee a uniform approach. We visited members in a random order to avoid accusations of favouritism, but we did do ourselves and the deacons first. We devised a standardised form, (for our use only). Each interview (and we assiduously avoided the word as much as possible) lasted for an hour at a minimum. We always went to visit the members in their homes, and a number of visits lasted all evening. We obviously dealt with married couples as such. No encounter was less than enjoyable. It provided a marvellous forum for all sorts of hang-ups and visions to be aired. It was therapeutic in itself. After each 3 or 4 interviews the four of us met to report back, plot results and see how the overall pattern was developing. The questions we asked each member were fairly obvious....

1. How has God spoken to you during the stewardship process so far?
2. What do you consider to be your present role in the fellowship?
3. What have you learned about yourself from the 'Discover your gift' form?
4. Has this been confirmed by your housegroup? (At this point we often shared our own observations from our initial scoring).
5. What do you think this means for your future involvement?

We made copious notes during each visit, making sure people weren't put off by this. Clearly a lot of prayer and thinking was needed as we tried to synthesise our findings. New roles in the church were created, as we sought to respond to gifts we hadn't previously considered. Where there was a duplication of roles questions had to be asked. After each of our 'feedback sessions' we had to go back to the members we had interviewed and make definite suggestions. This was absolutely to the process. Having raised so much expectation among our folk it was nothing short of cruel to not inform them of our thinking. As you can imagine, all this took an enormous amount of time. A new breed of widowhood was created - stewardship campaign widows. At times our wives were less than enthusiastic, but we saw no alternative.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the moment you've all been waiting for. Your role will be. ..."

The thought of that happening scared us, but we were not sure how to handle the publication of our results. Everytime we went back to folk with positive suggestions we always added the rider that it was inevitably tentative until the whole process was through. But were we to go for a 'big bang' approach, and produce one definite picture or firm up roles as we went along? (By the way, the church was functioning pretty normally while all this was going on - no Carl Ortiz six months sabbatical stuff). In the end we opted for a bit of both. New jobs were commenced as soon as possible, whenever possible, but a final 8 page report with a comprehensive statement of all our findings was submitted to the church meeting. Nobody was taken by surprise. No name was placed on that list without full discussion at every stage. (There were, as you would expect, a few minor hiccups).

Was it all Worth It?

....Often we wondered..... Some are still wondering! A number of significant new roles came into being, ranging from a minute secretary to the diaconate (i.e. not a deacon), a part-time secretary for the Minister; to new housegroup leaders, a drama group and worship leaders. A 'bridge the generation gap' scheme developed, younger members being paired up with less mobile elderly folk. It became very clear that for many people and jobs the immediate reference person was the minister. A number of people were appointed as co-ordinators to prevent the bottle-neck syndrome. It certainly helped some fringe folk to feel more part of the vision for the church. The importance of Christian stewardship, in its many aspects, became plain to many. During a number of our visits we became acutely aware that the key issue was not identifying talents but a person's relationship to Christ. Opportunities to counsel people arose naturally and easily. We were surprised to find how many members found it hard to take initiative. They needed the 'excuse' of a stewardship campaign to encourage them. The hard statistics of it all are less impressive. We ended with 28% of our membership (as opposed to 39% at the outset) with no discernable job within the fellowship. A number of those are very elderly. Originally the busiest 13% of the membership had responsibility for 48% of the jobs. today their responsibilities embrace 38%.

We were very careful not to call our report 'the final Report'. We recognised stewardship must be a continuous feature of any healthy church. 15% of our membership joined while we were conducting the campaign! We have sought to build the principles of this exercise into all new members applications. My intention (still on the drawing board) is to write a new 'church membership' booklet, incorporating material which will allow every new member to go through the process. The diaconate has committed itself to raise the issue once a year with all

those on their pastoral list. A 5 year strategy for the church is being drawn up, also arising out of the campaign.

A Practical Theology Postscript

Again and again people questioned (rightly) whether all this work, form-filling, and computer print-outs were not a veritable quenching of the Spirit. It certainly can be. We sought to be as prayerful and in step with the Spirit as we could be. Underpinning all the above is a theological commitment that there is no fundamental dichotomy between the Spirit's leading and good organisation, prayer and hard work, renewal of hearts and renewal of methods. We are called to struggle, but to "struggle with all His energy, which so powerfully is at work" (Colossians 1:29). In the absence of much detailed methodology in print, I offer this modest approach as a model you may care to try and adopt. It comes with a prayer that our wine-skins will become a little less leaky.

Andrew Rollinson,
Minister of Westgate Road Baptist Church,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

"RE-BAPTISM" AND ECUMENICITY



"Anabaptists" - re-baptisers - our continental precursors were called. And the issue of "re-baptism" recurs throughout our history. The sharpest Baptist line (advocated by Terry Griffith in *Mainstream* No. 27) - is that infant baptism is merely an empty rite falsely called baptism: so we do not perform re-baptism. Of course denial of another Christian's profoundly believed-in baptism is extended still further with the US Southern Baptists, who allegedly re-baptise any Baptist not baptised as a Southern Baptist, and those Zairean Baptist churches who according to Chris Spencer do the same (*Missionary Herald*, p.23, Feb. 1988)! But I'll restrict my discussion to the ecumenical dimensions of the controversy of our practice of baptising those "baptised" as infants.

First, issues arise from the effect of our ideas on other Christians. And second, open debate raises further issues; if we want other Christians to look at the strength of our arguments with open minds, then we must do more than look at their weak spots with closed minds - nobody enjoys arguing for long with somebody whose mind is made up before hearing the arguments. Only in an atmosphere where Baptists also look openly and intellegently at the strong points in the paedobaptist case will the necessary goodwill be there for a reciprocally open examination. So what are the issues?

1. **Inter-Church discussions.** The mind-set of some in our denomination is based on total capitulation of other denominations on this issue. It will not happen. Committees don't work that way! If we don't want Baptist representatives to express positive things on baptism which in such an ecumenical context imply a positive dimension to paedobaptist experience, we should withdraw from all committees that discuss baptism!

2. Local church relations. In areas where ecumenical co-operation is more than skin-deep, progress is often characterised by phases of cheerful co-operation interspersed by episodes of awkwardness as churches trip over each other on divisive issues: baptism is sometimes the issue. I remember the time in fraternal when we were discussing baptism, guided (loosely) by the Lima Report, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. I raised the issue that in our denomination we baptise on profession of faith, often even if the candidate has undergone paedobaptism, and asked for the reaction of the others, whether they were "shocked and surprised" etc. One member of a staunchly paedobaptist denomination clearly was: "If you baptise one of mine, I'd have your guts for garters". Asked to explain this symbolic phrase, he added that if I baptised anyone already baptised by his church I "would no longer be a member of the fraternal" as far as he was concerned. And that applied even if that candidate had lost all contact with his denomination since infancy. Confronting that issue with a personal case involving his denomination hasn't happened yet (just!) The baptismal issue can clearly raise temperatures!

3. Church membership candidates. Increasingly, people seek membership in a new area not in the church of their previous denomination, but in the church which 'feels' right (e.g. same worship style, most friendly, etc). As we encourage them to be baptised (but also, in open membership churches, offer the back-door entry of profession of faith), are we right to encourage them to reject an experience which they may see value in? (Another issue concerns those baptised in adult years, whether in Baptist churches, where they now allege they were not "really" Christian then, or in Anglican churches as a legal requirement for marriage undergone with no faith at all).

4. Re-Baptism: the biblical evidence. We will need to look carefully at the (naturally rather limited) biblical discussion of this issue. There is, of course, no case of people baptised as infants being either re-baptised or refused baptism. However, a case of re-baptism occurs in Acts 19, where the Ephesian 12 having been baptised by John, and seen as disciples (v.1), are nonetheless baptised by Paul. The interesting thing to me in this is that Paul neither renounces John's baptism, nor sees it as a reason to forego Christian baptism. Paul says two positive things about John's baptism: that it signified repentance; and that it signalled preparation for the coming Messiah (i.e. Jesus - v4). He could have added that it was a baptism in water and not in the Holy Spirit, and that it was not, like Christian baptism, in the name of Jesus/the Trinity (v.5; Matt. 28²⁰). It strikes me that here is a possible model for a Baptist understanding of paedobaptist experience: that like John's it is inadequate - in this case omitting personal repentance and faith; but that it does not need to be renounced as such (any more than infant dedication).

5. Re-baptism: the evidence of the Fathers. A similar examination is needed to see how the once-for-all-ness of baptism is tested against the third century issue of whether those baptised by heretics needed Christian baptism. Also a Baptist response is needed to the development of baptismal doctrine in a time when infant baptism was increasingly practiced.

6. Paedobaptist experience. It follows from point 4 that we do not need to feel uncomfortable in relation to candidates who allege that God was at work in their infant baptism - just as we should be positive towards similar experiences of God's blessing, guidance etc. through infant dedication. We bring children to be blessed by God: we should not be horrified if he chooses to take us seriously! What we still strip away from infant baptism is its quality as baptism: signalling a

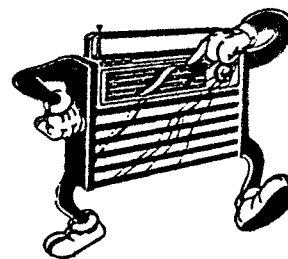
personal faith-response to Jesus; and personal entry into the invisible Church, and thus salvation. At most we welcome infants into the family of the (visible) Church - both local and world-wide. It follows from this that the negative polemic we give church membership candidates about their experience 'point 3' can be considerably altered.

7. Set alongside this, a positive evaluation of baptismal experience is needed. We need to set behind us the empty apologetic which says 'nothing happens' (except either a witness and/or a simple obedience to a biblical injunction). Clearly baptism was an electric moment in the Acts - even allowing for the fact that Acts selects the 'highlights'! I see a parallel with other experience - e.g. that of forgiveness. When someone prays honestly for forgiveness, we believe God forgives them. Sometimes there are obvious external signs of forgiveness being received and changing the person; sometimes a counsellor is not aware, but the person is very aware; and sometimes the person is not aware - but we believe God honours his promises, and often, even in the third type, the reception of forgiveness becomes obvious as the person starts to behave differently. So also with baptism: sometimes the blessing is obvious to outsiders; sometimes only to the candidate; and sometimes it's not obvious - but becomes clear with the passing of time.

Conclusion: as ecumenical dialogue deepens, and as we try, in the spirit of the Swanwick declaration, to move on "from co-operation to clear commitment to each other," baptism will remain the most obvious divisive issue as far as we as a denomination are concerned. But I hope I have shown that the pursuit of a N.T. position on baptism need not mean despising the experience of others.

Anthony Thacker. Oadby Baptist Church, Leicestershire.

RADIO-ACTIVE



Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.....

This is the story of two radio stations. Once upon a time (1984 actually) two radio stations were due to go on the air. Both were commercial radio stations which meant they could play lots of records and had a responsibility to reflect Christian things in some way or another. One station was in the South of England, the other in East Anglia. In the South of England local Christians saw the opportunity and spent at least two years getting together a team which could produce a Sunday morning breakfast show. At the other station..... ah well.... that was a different story. For one reason or another the Christians missed the opportunity.... nobody much came forward there. And when the station opened it might have done so without any Christian programme at all.

Are you sitting slightly uncomfortably now?

Needless to say that's a true story and fortunately the Lord had other ideas. He'd put me on the East Anglian station as a news reporter who was quickly seized upon to come up with a weekly programme of Christian music and news. I'd come from newspapers but, as the programme controller put, "you've had a bit of hospital radio experience, haven't you?" Somehow, by the grace of God, I came up with the goods. But it could so easily have been another story.

The point is that local radio is so accessible, so ready and willing to use local people either in, or making programmes. For a start they generally don't pay you..... it's a labour of love! And that looks good on any programme controller's budget sheet. But for Christians with a bit of ability and enthusiasm it can mean the way to an audience which in one broadcast will far exceed the number of people in their congregations for a whole year.

At the very least most stations welcome a "Pause for Thought" slot. If yours doesn't have one it may well be because nobody's bothered to volunteer to organise it. On the other hand it may have pause for thoughts which make you cringe by their awfulness or abysmal theology..... but what are you doing about it? Have you sent in five sample scripts for a week's worth yourself?

How would you go about doing it? First listen to the station, or stations. How does the audience differ? Most probably the BBC station has a higher speech content and could well be pitched at a slightly older audience who, it might be presumed, might just have some church background. The commercial (or ILR..... Independent Local Radio) station may well be pitched at a younger audience with a snappier approach.

In either case they'll be looking for no more than a minute and a half which will grab the audience's attention, keep them listening and also provide a nugget of thought or pre-evangelism.... and that may seem a tall order to those who couldn't possibly manage on less than 20 minutes, three points and a fair sprinkling of theological jargon.

But give it some thought.... some pause for thought.... and see whether you've got it in you. Just think of the audience you'd be reaching! Having written your scripts find out who is the religious producer and get in touch with him.

But there are other ways of getting into the media. A lot of what is said in pulpits or church magazines is worthy of a wider audience. You could always see that the occasional copy of the magazine finds its way to the local newspaper or radio station. Mind you, don't overdo it. We had one local clergyman in an area where I worked who was constantly wanting to hang and flog.... it was good as a story the first time but got boring after that!

On the other hand my own minister quite unexpectedly spoke out against Hallowe'en on the Sunday before the event. He put some good points about children talking to strangers, and accepting sweets from them, before moving on to the more obvious spiritual dangers. I had him on the air the next morning in the breakfast show.... and comments were coming in long after that 3½ minute broadcast and clips on the news.

It may be that you are an expert in a particular subject. Maybe you've worked as a missionary in one of the world's trouble-spots, maybe you feel strongly about keeping Sunday special.... the list is endless. Yet every journalist and radio station wants a contacts book crammed with people who, at the drop of a telephone, are able to comment on various issues. You could be one of them. And think of the influence your comments could make on the wider community.

Believe me, as one who's worked in newspapers and local radio (both ILR and BBC) for nearly 20 years the media is wide open.... it's up to us to take the opportunities.

The BBC recently announced that it will be opening seven new local radio stations to complete its network. They'll come on the air over the next three years and it's reckoned they could tap four million listeners.

What are you going to do about it?

Tony Mallion.

Tony Mallion is a news producer with BBC Radio Norfolk and a member of Gorleston Baptist Church.

WELCOME!

oo oo oo oo oo oo oo

TO THE CHURCH

A new ADMINISTRY training day helps worshippers feel at home by tackling the neglected subject of welcome at church.

The day is designed for members of church welcome teams and all responsible for leading groups of stewards and sidesmen. But it is no dull day just on how to give out hymn books. Delegates analyse what goes wrong with the way churches welcome both visitors and members, examine the purpose of a stewards'/sidesmen's team, have to try their hand at welcoming other delegates who role-play some awkward visitors, and decide on the action they must take back at their church. Administry staff follow-up every delegate six months later to see what has been achieved.

Sessions during the day range from theological reflection to an analysis of a Winnie-the-Pooh story, from direct experience of what it is like to feel unwelcome to the provision of material to help churches put similar training sessions on themselves.

"Our aim", explains John Truscott of ADMINISTRY, "is to stretch people's minds to see the value and importance of a good welcome. At the same time we want to give practical training in how to do it well and provide a forum for exchange of ideas. We show that the purpose of welcome is first and foremost to prepare people for worship. This involves all kinds of gifts, skills and experience and hence the need for training. But in addition a good welcomer is both a pastor (for regular church members) and a potential evangelist (for visitors). Most British churches fail dismally in this area. They simply haven't seen how critically important it is."

Delegates who have attended the days held already have seen the subject in a new light. "The whole day opened my eyes to the great importance of being a steward", commented one London delegate. "Up till now I thought of stewarding as a series of duties and rarely thought of asking God's help", commented another. "The theological aspect is important."

ADMINISTRY also publish a DIY training kit for churches' own use on the subject of welcome.

Dates and venues for 1988:-

21st May:	SHEFFIELD (St. Thomas' Crookes)
11th June:	ALBANS (Christ Church Centre)
1st October:	MIDDLESBOROUGH (St. Barnabas)
19th November:	TAUNTON (Creech St. Michael)

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Renewal

DOWN TO EARTH



(A review article of *Renewal Down to Earth* by Robert Roxburgh, published by Kingsway, 1987, £5.95, 255pp)

"Surely, not another book about renewal!", I thought as I embarked on this volume. Especially if it were the usual, "God told us how to do it, we were completely obedient, look what happened and aren't we marvellous" kind of story!

But fret not yourselves, this book is not in that league. It is infinitely more readable, honest, inspiring and practically helpful than other Do It Yourself Renewal Manuals. Indeed, it is the honesty and practical applications which makes this an inspiring and readable book. I can thoroughly recommend it.

There are a number of things that made me warm to renewal a la Roxburgh, to the man himself and to what he stands for in the present ferment of faith. In the first place he writes,

"For many years I resisted pressures to write about renewal."

Anyone who resists pressures to write about renewal has almost certainly got something really worthwhile to say - or is that too cynical?

The style of the book is different from those I have read which deal with the same subject. It is, as Bob sets out to make it, an intensely practical volume packed with illustrations drawn from his own wide experience of personal and corporate renewal. Yet it is far deeper than simply being a personal testimony. (As an aside, I must say that I have had my fill of Church and personal experience stories because so many of them seem too shallow in their biblical roots). There is theology written in every page which governs the practices of the Church.

As I read, and often re-read many passages, I was impressed by the openness and honesty of the writer. It is good to be reminded that there are others besides myself who have struggles and are prepared to admit to them. It is even better to be reminded that men of his standing in the Christian community are men "just like us". Most people in the Churches can do without slick, instant cures for Church maladies. It is helpful to know that the practices of renewal cannot be transplanted from one Church to another without prayer and modification. I respect Bob's view that renewal has only touched a minority of Churches in Britain, many having made only cosmetic changes to worship and structures.

There is an insistence throughout that the Church is people and not plans and that ideas and innovations are only good as they bring people into a closer relationship with God. The book begins with an outline of the personal renewal which the author experienced. The principle, forged on the anvil of harsh realities, internal power struggles and personal spiritual bankruptcy, is that change only comes "in direct proportion to the sense of need" (p.15).

I have already stated that the book is practical. It is also spiritual. I would not make a contrast between those two as if they were mutually exclusive. The chapter headed "Renewal is Spiritual" sets the tone because it follows the opening one concerning Bob's personal pilgrimage.

In both its spirituality and practical guidelines for renewal, Bob draws on his wide knowledge and experience in various countries and types of Church. That breadth of background prevents the material being parochial and from putting forward the notion that "this is the only way to do it". With biblical guidelines and the Holy Spirit as the guide, each local Church must create structures which will enable it to be and to do what God wants in their own sphere of service. So, we don't "change for the sake of changing" (p.67), we do appoint leaders who "strong, open, patient.... visionary and Spirit-filled" (p.70). We may see renewal break out in our denominational Churches without having to break free and form a "house Church". At the heart of the matter is what you believe the Church is! That will determine what structures will be formed.

There is no pulling of punches when it comes to explaining the cost of renewal. There is cost in personal relationships, in the traditions we hold dear, in money, in turning over our ideas of leadership, in stress and in every department of faith and the Church. But in making a start, we need to be assured that "renewal will involve a steady walk with milestones along the way and an accelerating pace as we keep in step with the Spirit (p.110).

I found the last two chapters on the consequences of true discipleship stimulating. They are visionary, realistic and faithful explaining what renewed Christians and renewed Churches should be, do and where they should go. And the conclusion seeks at least a little to look into the future of renewal, accenting the need for "renewing", a constant and ongoing renewal at every stage.

But I was left with a number of questions and somewhat frustrated that no attention was given to these matters. For instance, whilst it is quite clearly stated that there would be problems associated with renewal, I don't think there were many guidelines given to the Pastor who is struggling with traditionalists. Traditionalists today know that if their Pastor stands for an ongoing renewal, the old patterns of worship and the structures designed to "hold the fort" are disappearing, never to return. If so, then heels will be dug in until they stand in trenches like those in Flanders. There is little guidance here to help the hard pressed Pastor cope with the tensions of the irresistible force meeting the immovable object.

Nor, indeed, is there much help here for the Christian hungry for personal renewal and thirsty in the parched land of a traditional Church. The book might make the longing all the more painful.

More serious is that I wonder how much of what is currently taking place in Millmead can be related to the hundreds of Churches in the country which are only a fraction the size of Millmead. I know that Bob's early ministries were in "small" churches, but I felt that much of the book would have left the Pastor of a small Church thinking that it was all "pie in the sky". The talk of dozens of full-time workers, TV studios, overflows, and so on would be likely to lose as many adherents as it gained.

If the book was truly to be about "Renewal Down to Earth" then I think it may be too far from the average Church and its Pastor. But perhaps that is what Bob is getting at - to challenge us to put away our small vision and go for the vastness of what God wants for each local Church.

David Slater.
Kingsbridge.

ANY OTHER PROPHECY



Dear Editor,

I write to express appreciation of Steve Gaukroger's recent article on the Church Meeting (Newsletter No. 26) - but also to take issue with him on one vital point. Is it right to remove AOB from the agenda as Steve suggests? I think not.

The voice of the 'prophets' must be heard - nowhere best can they be heard but at the Church Meeting. But if there is no AOB slot, then where can they raise their voice? There must always be a space at Church Meetings for people to share what they believe the Lord has laid on their hearts - and for what they say then to be weighed.

Clearly, for the most part I would not expect 'prophets' to major on the trivia of church life, such as the untidiness of the church kitchen! But surely the abuse of AOB is not a reason for doing away with it altogether. What do others feel?

Paul Beasley-Murray.

Dear Paul,

I was also impressed with Steve's article on the Church Meeting and I am hopeful that he will write again, on the topic of Deacons' Meetings.

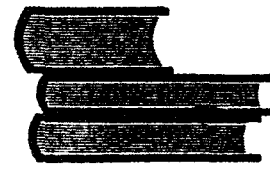
I happen also to agree with Steve on excising AOB from the agenda. Or rather, I insist that any additional items to be included on the agenda must be notified to me before the meeting begins, where upon I make a decision about whether to deal with the matter at the meeting or to defer it to the Deacons' Meeting. The 'prophets' will have to keep silence except on the matters already before the Meeting.

As a matter of interest I have found it more helpful to have Deacons' Meetings a week after, rather than a week before, Church Meetings. That means that the Deacons follow up any decisions and discussion rather than try and sow up decisions beforehand. Also we call our Church Meetings 'Prayer and Decision-Making Meetings'. After all, that is what we are attempting to do isn't it? We hold these meetings every month (on the night when we don't have the regular weekly homegroups) and the attitude to these meetings has improved greatly because people feel that they really are involved in the decision-making process.

Yours sincerely,
The Editor.

P.S. Thank you for writing. I don't get much readership response to specific articles in the Newsletter.

Reviews



Biblical Creation and The Theory of Evolution: Douglas Spanner, Paternoster, £6.95, 124pp (text) + 12 Appendices, with notes and indices, =191pp in toto.

The author is currently a minister in the C. of E., having held the Chair of Plant Biophysics in the University of London. The book is extremely stimulating, lucid, precise and very closely argued. Douglas Spanner sees no conflict between evolution and biblical creation as correctly interpreted. The text teems with scripture references, all of which are presented with care and respect.

Spanner's aim is to set out the right use of scripture and science, and so to commend the doctrine of God the Creator to a world that has lost its way. There are excellent treatments of creation and providence, chance and necessity, theodicy, probation and myth (some of these are to be found in the appendices). All the relevant passages are referred to and some words subjected to detailed exegesis.

Some of his views will sound provocative to evangelicals. For example, he argues that the primal creation was not idyllic, and that when Paul teaches that the creation was subjected to futility (Romans 8), he is in fact referring not to the Fall, but to the state of the created order from the very beginning. The creation is called 'good' not because of the absence of any degenerative processes at the beginning, but because it was good for the purpose for which God had created it.

Spanner is prepared to accept the longevity of the antediluvians at face value, but argues for a localized Flood in the Mesopotamian floodplain. It is at this point that the issues bite. One can accept that Genesis 1 must be interpreted with regard to literary considerations, but that still leaves us with the issue of Noah being the head of the race after the Flood. Spanner also sees Adam and Eve as two individuals chosen from among many to be representative heads of a new race made in the image of God. Genesis 3:20 is not to be taken as a statement of fact, but as a statement of faith i.e. that despite the Fall, life would still continue through Eve. These aspects require further debate.

The author is very fair in dealing with all the views discussed. Now that Scientific Creationism seems to be at a dead end (see the Latimer Studies Booklet No. 23/24 'Creation or Evolution - a false antithesis?' by Poole & Wenham), Douglas Spanner's book is a very welcome contribution, along with Henri Blocher's 'In The Beginning' (IVP), to the quest for a coherent evangelical doctrine of creation.

Terry Griffith.
Hackney, London.

ONE LORD, ONE SPIRIT, ONE BODY

The Ecumenical Grace in the Charismatic Movement
Peter Hocken. Paternoster. £3.95.

The author was awarded his Ph.D. from Birmingham, England for his earlier definitive work on the origins of the Charismatic renewal in the U.K., published as "Streams of Renewal". A Roman Catholic priest, he reveals again an astonishingly accurate understanding of the many denominational, theological, historical and personal variations to be found in Protestantism. As a committed ecumenist he has a profound respect for those whose traditions are different from his own. As an

Englishman resident in the U.S.A. he is familiar with the twin extremes either of non-denominationalism - a rejection of the value of our traditions, or denominationalism - a desire to keep our own church at the centre of our attention at all costs.

Hocken is convinced that the ecumenical element is actually of the highest significance in the renewal. I agree with that. It is also the occasion for more suspicion as far as the ultras are concerned in conservative evangelicalism. It is also tacitly ignored by restorationists committed to quick growth methodology. Whilst against all negotiated theological trade-offs Hocken calls for a cross-centred submission to the fulness of God's revelation only to be found in the totality of our traditions. He insists on the cross being kept at the centre of renewal as endangered by carnality as the rest of the Church is by unbelief.

I warmly commend this important book written by a thoroughly evangelical Roman. Ecumenism will not - cannot go away. Hocken urges us all to examine it again through the activity of the Spirit. The process will never harm our Baptist convictions. It will broaden our sympathies.

Douglas McBain,
Chelsea, London.

CHRISTIAN ANARCHY

Vernard Eller. Paternoster. £11.40.

Here is a disciple of Jacques Ellul trying to outdo his master. It would appear that the followers of Ellul in the U.S.A. are developing an "Ellul School" of theology. They are seeking a title for this school and have hit upon "Christian Anarchy". One major purpose of this author is to justify that title. I think he not only fails to do so, but risks destroying his master's influence by the use of the term 'Anarchy'.

True, Ellul used the term in a late passage in one of his books (Theology of Law) - at least, one of his translators did; but surely Ellul himself would be too conscious of the dangers of misinterpretation to adopt it as a general description of his Biblical stance. My 1986 Chambers' Dictionary defines anarchy thus:- "a complete absence of law or government; society in which government abolished as unnecessary: utter lawlessness; chaos; complete disorder." How dare we adopt such a term for any Biblical theology?

Perhaps the one thing lacking in the background thinking of even the best continental (and some U.S.A.) theologians, is the British experience of the slow devolution over centuries from tyrannical power to practical democracy. They need to know our puritan and free-church record here, to take the edge off some of their absolutes. Our author might then cease to make such extreme remarks as:- "there is no such thing as a Christian biblical morality", or "humanity's blessed end is to be total anarchy". At certain stages in our British development, and in our wielding of power on a world scale, we showed that there is such a thing, even if we never fulfilled the dreams of our best Christian statesmen.

However, with the author's main stance I entirely agree. It is both Biblical and radical; and there are many gems to be culled from the book. In particular chapter 10 on Onesimus and Philemon is a little

masterpiece, and by itself makes the book value for money. Read it, but please read your Ellul first.

I suggest a prayer "Thank you, dear God, for Calvin, but please deliver me from some of his disciples; and thank you Lord for Luther and for Barth and for Ellul - but please Lord deliver me....."

Humphrey Vellacott,
King's Cross, London.

Graeme Goldsworthy, **Gospel and wisdom: Israel's wisdom literature in the Christian life.** Paternoster, Exeter, 1987, 202pp., pbk., £4.95.

Graeme Goldsworthy is an Australian Anglican minister with a longstanding desire to make the Bible relevant to today's church. He has already shown us how to interpret the OT from a Christian perspective (Gospel and kingdom) and how to understand The Gospel in Revelation. Now he attempts what many would regard as a greater obstacle, in trying to reawaken Christian interest in the Wisdom literature. In fact, these parts of the OT (James unfortunately is largely ignored here) deal with practical living in the real world, contrasting sharply with our modern restriction of wisdom to mere intellectualism. The church at large, and ministers in particular, have a great deal to do in recapturing a true biblical wisdom. This is precisely Goldsworthy's aim, as he demonstrates for ordinary Christians that true wisdom relates to redemption in Christ, and that it is for all God's people, both in the old or new covenant. He brings together Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes with NT Christology, notably in the Gospels and 1 Corinthians. The result, despite a somewhat pedestrian and uninspiring style, is a guide which is always safe and sometimes challenging, and which should make the reader's faith more thoughtful and more practical.

Martin J. Selman,
Spurgeon's College.

EMBRYOS AND ETHICS - The Warnock Report in Debate

Ed. Nigel M. de S.Cameron. Rutherford House Books £8.90.

I well remember the evening I went to hear Mrs. Mary Warnock (as she was then) lecture at Newcastle University on 'Does a human embryo have rights?' I came away impressed with such a clear communicator, but deeply disturbed with what had been said. The Committee of Enquiry into Human Fertilization and Embryology, which she chaired, had just made its submission, "the Warnock Report" (July 1984). Both her lecture and her report so clearly avoided what for me was the central issue, namely the nature of the human embryo. Instead it espoused unbridled utilitarianism. Since then I have made it my business to read as much as I could on this issue.

"Embryos and Ethics" is one of the best responses I have found. It consists of a series of 10 short essays, first given as lectures sponsored by Rutherford House (the theological research centre in Edinburgh). The authors represent a variety of disciplines. Theologians, ethicists and clinicians all state an impressively united case against experimentation of human embryos and the disposal of spare embryos in in-vitro fertilization techniques.

The central issue, the status of the human embryo, is approached from many different angles. The oft-heard saying that the pre-14 day old embryo is, at best, "a potential human being" is fiercely attacked.

T.F. Torrance's position is asserted that the embryo is not in the process of becoming something else, but continuing to become what he or she already is. The importance of the incarnation is stressed, God joining Himself with human flesh precisely at the point of conception. An exposition of Psalm 139 points out our personal identity is based on God's relationship with us, having a historical continuity from embryo to mature adult. A particularly useful essay is one by Richard Higginson because he deliberately employs other than specifically Christian arguments. The famous clinician, the late Ian Donald, (who invented the ultra-sound scan) gives a sober warning as to where all this biotechnology is already leading us.

As Christians we cannot afford to ignore the reproductive revolution which has such potential for good and evil. Here is a readable book rooted in the realities of present day I.V.F. treatment on the N.H.S., and the painful dilemmas of childless couples, which gives some clear ethical markers. It combines a happy mixture of strong moral logic with Christian passion. The book ends with an essay by, surprisingly, a geriatrician. For me it had the desired effect. "Where", I was made to ask, "will it all lead?"

Andrew Rollinson,
Newcastle upon Tyne.

Books
RECEIVED



Hymns For Today's Church: Editors, Jubilate Hymns; Hodder & Stoughton.
Words and Music (h/b) £12.95.
Words only (p/b) £2.95.
Melody Line Edition (h/b) £6.95.

The first edition has sold extremely well and a good number of Baptist churches have decided not to wait for the new Baptist Hymnbook to be published before purchasing their new supply of hymnbooks.

The second edition contains an extra 20 hymns (including 'King of Glory King of Peace' and some more traditional versions such as 'Holy, Holy, Holy'). There is a new paperback version which is reasonably priced, as well as a new Melody Line edition. The overall feel and appearance of the hymnbook has been improved. I understand that a supplement for insertion in the first edition will be available to make the two editions compatible. The indices are remarkably detailed and set a new standard to be followed.

The new Baptist hymnbook has a lot to match up to and will need to be produced quickly before more churches opt for this compilation as their choice of hymnody.

New Beginnings, Old Paths: Keswick Convention Ministry; STL, £2.50, 249pp. The main courses are four Bible Readings on Elisha by Raymond Brown, and another four by David Jackman on 2 Corinthians 2:12-7:1.

Man to Man: David Hall, Marshall Pickering, 187pp, n.p. Subtitled 'Every Man Complete In Christ' with foreword by Clive Calver. Takes a long hard look at the values men should aspire to live by and thereby to communicate to the next generation. practical, wide-ranging and honest.

Why? Probing the problems of suffering: Dr. J.T. Whitney, £0.50 (+15p. p+p), 24pp. Available from author at 75 Church Road, Hadleigh, Benfleet, Essex. SS7 2DR. Results of discussion sessions for volunteers working in a hospice. Suitable for group discussion. Author is a Head of RE in a Sixth Form College and an Elder of a Baptist Church. Orders of 10+ copies post free.

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