

Editorial

PLANNING FOR GROWTH

The wind of change is blowing among Baptists. The Didcot offices present an unusual image for a historic denomination - progressive and dynamic. An imaginative team of senior appointments promises much energy, imagination and drive for the coming decade. The Marc Europe research shows that, like the new churches but alone among historic denominations, Baptists are enjoying numerical growth.

We welcome these developments, give thanks to God and assure our Union leaders of our prayers and support. But this is also a time for decisive questions. When the tide is turning, how can we best build on all that God is already doing? Space means only two issues can be raised here.

1. Growth

Growth is uneven. That is inevitable. Where decline has been rampant for generations we need to encourage pioneers with stickability. Where mobility is high, the sheer turnover of population means that a church may rapidly export its converts.

Numerical growth is not the only priority of the church of Christ. But we should never try to absolve ourselves from the priority of conversion growth. Has the time come for us to set targets for growth that reach beyond the local church? Our national goal could be expressed as a specific target number of new converts or as a percentage rate of growth.

We invite our national leaders to set an ambitious national growth target for Baptists in the coming decade.

2. Church Planting

If we want to see more Christians we also need to see more local churches. In many parts of Britain, high density population areas have no church presence. The visibility, credibility and availability of the good news are all undermined. If we use Jesus' methods we need to go where people are, and not wait for them to travel to us. That means church planting on a massive scale.

There's no one model of church planting which is a blueprint for everywhere. Some plant a new church. Some transplant life into an existing church that has become enfeebled. Some are developing models of one church with many congregations, whether those congregations meet in the same building or in several buildings across an area. Some churches are becoming mission centres for their region.

The Dawn project is aiming for one congregation for every 500 people. Icthus aim in London for one congregation per 1,000 people. It's thrilling to see how church planting has been taken up again by Baptists in recent years. But has the time come for this programme to move into overdrive, meaning a new scale of investment of people, prayer and money?

We call upon our national leaders to set a bold target for the number of new congregations we want to establish by the end of the century.



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The Mainstream Newsletter is designed to encourage life and growth among churches within the Baptist Union. On the understanding that contributors are in sympathy with this aim, they have full liberty of expression. Views contained in the newsletter are those of individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Mainstream executive.

AN EXTENDED REVIEW OF NIGEL WRIGHT'S

CHALLENGE TO CHANGE: AN AGENDA FOR BAPTISTS

It has been my consistent message as I have travelled the country this year that if the church is to survive it must change. So I wholeheartedly welcome this new book by Nigel Wright which details an agenda of change for us as Baptists. It is written in a warm, personal, open-spirited and humble style.

Change is called for for several reasons. First culture has changed and if we are to relate to it rather than to be an irrelevant ghetto, we must adapt to it. Secondly, we need to change to be even more obedient to Scripture than we are at present. Baptists are, above all, a Bible people, with no higher authority under Christ than that. Tradition is subject to Scripture. Thirdly, we need to change to rediscover our roots which got overlaid by a lot of rubbish and illegitimate growth as time has gone by. Nigel's book pays particular attention to the last two of these.

He sets out the fundamentals inherent in our Baptist tradition. He calls us to renewal, reformation, restoration, revival and reconstruction. He sets out his ideal church. It would not be everyone's ideal of a church and I wonder if its members would not soon flop down exhausted. But it is an ideal with which I identify and, thankfully, one that I begin to recognise in a good number of places I visit.

Chapters follow on the church meeting, association life, Union life, and denominational leadership. Final chapters encourage us to a fresh nonconformity, to re-examine our Anabaptist roots and to take practical steps towards transformation.

This book is not the writing of an angry young man! As one would expect from Nigel's pen, it is the writing of a theologian able to write at a popular level. It cannot be dismissed as the froth of the renewal movement. It is written with a grasp of history and an understanding of ecumenical issues. It dare not be ignored.

The church meeting needs to be reformed because it has got side-tracked into being a version of 19th century town council meetings, with proposers, seconders, votes and so on. After setting out a firm apologetic for congregational government, Nigel shows how we can be true to congregationalism whilst handling our church meetings differently.

Association life, in some, but mercifully not all areas of the country, is the low point of Baptist life. Few of our members see the need for associating beyond their own church. Again, a vigorous apologetic for associating is given. To belong to a network or fellowship of churches is of 'indisputable value' in giving the local church a greater dimension of church life. 'Localism' needs to be balanced by 'Catholicity'. But does it have to be done the way we currently do it? Are there not other routes to achieving the same ends, and precedence in our history for taking them? I welcome the provocation this chapter provides whilst struggling in practice to see how it would work out. But then life is messy!

Given my new appointment I read the chapter on the Union life with particular interest. Here, I think, events may be catching up with what Nigel sets out. Occasionally in this chapter he admits as much. He struggles with the way in which the Union has developed "bureaucratic structures" and argues that "bureaucracy and spiritual renewal are particularly unsympathetic to one another". He is particularly suspicious of tendencies towards centralization. Most seriously of all he believes the Union is in urgent need of a theological overhaul, resulting in a genuine commitment to our evangelical tradition (which he distinguishes from a commitment to an evangelical party).

His solutions lie in the pursuit of a policy of de-centralization, for the allowing of local variations, and for the Union entering into a self-denying

ordinance. He puts forward some interesting ideas of a minor nature but I am not convinced that his major argument hits the target here. And I do not think I am being defensive.

Let me illustrate with three particular issues. At one point he writes "less well provided for areas could be provided for by the development of an equalization fund to which associations could contribute." But I thought we had such a fund. It is called 'Home Mission'. We might argue about how it works and we might well have room for improvement but the right structures are there.

Secondly, he argues that area Superintendents should be directly elected and employed by the churches of their own area rather than the Union. Having just been involved in the appointment of a Superintendent let me assure Nigel that even if the Superintendent is employed by the Union his appointment and subsequent relationships are very much in the control of the area. Eight local representatives sit with four Union representatives to make the appointments and the balance of discussion is self-consciously towards the local area. Appointments solely by the local area would not, I believe, result in better appointments or better relationships and may even be worse.

Thirdly, Nigel argues for a change in the Baptist Union Council towards more local representatives and less ex officio appointments. In theory the idea sounds fine. But already 66%, by my calculations, are locally appointed and 33% are not. He does not suggest how this latter number should be reduced. Thirty of them are co-opted to enable this council to ensure certain balances, e.g. a greater number of young people, if insufficient have been elected by the associations, as usual.

Perhaps this number should be cut down, or, instead of having all Principals of colleges sitting on the Council, perhaps there could be just two representing them all?

These issues highlight, to me, the major missing ingredient of the book. It is always implied but never explicitly addressed. When it comes to structures I believe more often than not we have the right ones. We have the flexibility, the emphasis on the localities, the funds etc. But structures have to have the right people filling them. They are as strong or as weak as that. Too often, I fear, we do not need to alter the structures but make sure we have put the right people in them. We need to be led by the able and not the willing. That will mean some gifted pastors and others giving more time to association and Union matters and less to their own church. I found myself saying frequently as I read the manuscript, "But that is exactly what we already do, in theory". It's the

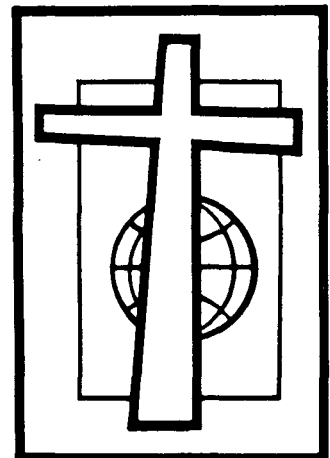
people who make it work or not, as the case may be.

The case for Baptist Bishops is one of his most crucial chapters, setting forth the argument, as it does, for greater care to be given to our ministers and greater mission orientation on the part of our Superintendents. This will necessarily involve the appointment of many more. Nigel wants to distance himself from the word 'Superintendent' and even puts forward a case for calling them 'bishops' - a word I find even less happy in its associations. I would settle for his other suggestion of 'Area Ministers'. Whatever the label, the substance of the argument is one to which we must give careful attention.

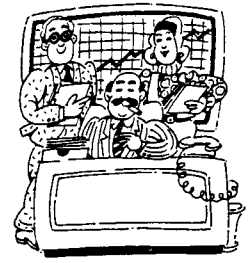
The book comes from the standpoint of one who is unashamed about renewal and unashamed about the radical reformation. Not all would start there and our Anabaptist connections in the early days are particularly a matter of historical debate. But it is their twin perspectives that gives the book its strength.

I believe this is one of the most important books written for Baptists for many a year and I hope every diaconate, every association council, every ministers' fraternal and many a church meeting and house group will read and debate it. It is an agenda we must address.

Derek Tidball.



TO STAFF OR NOT TO STAFF?



Nigel Coles

There is a new kind of 'AA' meeting - you can see its members huddled together in two's and three's at fraternals sharing similar struggles and difficulties. They are a growing number - the Associates Association. Their very presence begs some questions one of which challenges us in the area of church growth.

Which came first, the chicken or the egg? A good question with a debatable answer. However, when we ask which comes first - a growing staff or a growing church it seems that we have answered before even bothering with the question. By this I mean that by and large churches appoint additional staff because they need to cater for their existing membership (the results of growth) rather than appointing to grow the membership (the aims of growth). Additional staff are seen as necessary results of growth rather than a catalyst for increased growth.

This is but one symptom of the maintenance mentality which has infested our churches. We are, I suggest, very often asking the wrong questions. In simplistic terms, the church of 150 with one full-time pastor is asking how do we minister to the 150, whereas the church of 150 which has just appointed its second member of staff is to ask more realistically how do we develop to 300?

Background Attitudes

a) **Small church mentality.**

'We are a denomination of small churches' - I have heard this so often now I can almost smell it coming - the unspoken refrain seems to be 'and very proud of it we are too'. Of course, we do have many small churches, but why do we have so few above 300 where such growth is viable? Evangelism and church-planting appear to be almost synonymous at present which is a very positive trend in many ways, BUT,

- i) is our interest partly fuelled by our general inability to grow churches above 300?
- ii) our larger churches would be better equipped to themselves plant new churches if they thought more in terms of growth than maintenance.

b) **Unworkability of full-time teams.**

The word on the grapevine has been that they are full of problems - so much so that some churches (or should that read pastors?) believe them to be unworkable. - It's a good job we don't view marriage that way! Paul Beasley-Murray in an unpublished paper following a questionnaire for pastors and associates says, "My overwhelming impression is that, contrary to what some have been saying, Team ministries in Baptist churches are in good heart." Sure we have a long way to go, certainly there could be more input at, for example, college level in understanding the dynamics involved, definitely there will be difficulties, but there are full-time teams alive AND well.

c) **False guilt.**

In counselling individuals this is often much harder to shift than exposed real guilt. So too with churches believing the line that it is greedy or unfair for them to have two or more pastors when so many fellowships have none. I have heard it suggested on several occasions that the larger churches with staff should send one elsewhere where they cannot afford one. Again, we could question whether such needs should be presented as mutually exclusive or ask how best can we increase the Kingdom. Either way the effect of such talk has succeeded in stifling growth in some cases by taking on false guilt rather than looking for real growth.

Why do churches appoint additional staff?

- Very often to take some of the load off the current pastor. Ask your local Associate who was doing his work before he arrived and the one very likely answer is "the pastor". What happens often is the same work is done by more people. It may save the health of the senior pastor, but the reasons betray a maintenance rather than growth mentality.

- Very often to come and oversee work for which no suitable leader can be found within the existing fellowship. More often than not this is the youth work. I've lost count now of the number of people who approach me with the question 'I presume you look after the youth work?' I take great delight in the answer!

However, if we take Ephesians 4:11-13 seriously when Paul speaks of ministry 'to prepare God's people for works of service' we should take the addition of staff seriously when appropriate. "There are three requirements for a good programme within the church. The first is leadership, the second is leadership, and the third is leadership." (Lloyd Perry quoted in 'Dynamic Leadership' by Paul Beasley-Murray). This remains true whether the church is 50 or 1500 strong. Adequate staffing is but one way of seeking to meet this requirement. The changes in leadership skills called for as churches grow is by now well known:-

<u>Church size</u>	<u>Skills required</u>
1	Unskilled worker
2 - 65	Foreman
66 - 150	Supervisor
151 - 450	Middle management
451 - 1000	Top Management
1000 +	Chairman of the Board

My purpose in highlighting this here is to underline the point that without additional staff at say 150+, the pastor is being stretched in two directions and hence trying to fulfil two separate roles. Just as there are a limited number of people with whom one can have a meaningful relationship, so also is there a limit to the number we can meaningfully supervise.

If we want to prepare God's people for works of service it seems obvious that we firstly need leaders with the time and ability to do just that. (This principle still applies to small churches who may read "elders" or "deacons" for staff). One widely raised objection questions whether we shall end up with a group of specialist professionals who submerge the ministry of all believers. I have witnessed first hand the danger of re-introducing the old so-called one man ministry under a new guise with a modern flavour - "team ministry". This remains no more, but no less a danger with pastoral staff.

A personal example makes the point. Seeing the increased need for a higher degree of pastoral care in our own context, I took a day out a week to do a course in Psychological Counselling (I doubt if I'd have made the time if I was the sole pastor). A number of comments during and on completion of this course made it clear that for many counselling was being seen as my department which really meant "He'll do it".

I am pleased to say that I do less counselling than before, but do have responsibility for supervising and training others in the area of pastoral care. The result is that my own ministry is enhanced, those involved are growing in their own faith, and a far greater number of people are being satisfactorily helped than I could ever have the time for. The same applies to other areas of

church life, but pastors reading this know only too well what happens when you're too busy - you either do it yourself or it doesn't get done.

How do churches appoint additional staff?

From talking in hushed tones to other colleagues the answer seems to be often without much thought. There is a general feeling that someone is needed, but little thought given to what specifically is being looked for. A healthy relationship between full-time staff can overcome an inadequate job description, but some of the casualties would have been saved had more thought gone into the anticipated role before appointment. This need not rule out a large degree of freedom to develop existing or new ministries for job descriptions and priorities can be reviewed at agreed periods.

The larger the staff the more specialised roles become. That can mean that those with the required gifts are harder to find. Why is it that the Baptist Times accepts advertisements for other full-time and part-time Christian workers, but not for pastoral staff? It would certainly speed up appointments and when most associates appear to stay for three to five years, long intervals between staff is surely not a good idea.

At the end of the day the key issue is not whether leadership is by full-timers or not, but whether sufficient provision is made and opportunity provided for the ministry of the whole church to grow and develop. If this can be done without full-time staff all well and good - one church I know employs one full-timer and several part-time specialists. We can suggest two principles.

- 1) Good leadership is always shared, it doesn't become so when a church reaches a particular size.
- 2) There is no automatic recipe for growth, and that includes the appointment of extra staff.

When do churches appoint additional staff?

"Growing churches must give serious attention to the multiple staff concept. Many churches wait far too long to implement this. Only after the pastor has begged and cajoled, only after he has worked himself into exhaustion is the congregation willing to respond". (Gordon MacDonald in "Leadership" Winter 1983 p46). It seems that this is a problem not peculiar to the other side of the Atlantic. In our own situation I was the first full-time Assistant pastor the church had called, although the idea was first suggested seven years previously.

My own observation and conversations suggest that, in general, Baptist churches appoint additional staff far too late. It is usually done when the church has obviously (to the majority) become too large for one pastor to cope with and this

seems to be around the 250 mark - maintenance not growth mentality.

Something which has always interested me is that Anglican churches seem able to grow faster and larger than Baptist churches where the preaching, teaching, worship etc. is of a comparable nature. There are many other reasons for this but one contributing factor to sustaining growth is that they are adequately staffed. In such churches the clergy/laity divided we abhor is not highlighted more, but the possibility of Eph. 4:12 becomes a practical reality.

DEFENDING THE FAITH



Simon Jones

I want to start by acknowledging a debt: I would probably not be a Christian today but for the writings of Francis Schaeffer. I was introduced to books from the founder of L'Abri in 1973 at a time when my infant Christian faith was under severe intellectual pressure: How do I know God exists? How do I know the Bible is true? Why is Christianity true in a way that other philosophies and lifestyles are not? Schaeffer's thinking gave me a framework within which to deal with those questions.

More than that. His writings on art and spirituality showed me that the Christian faith encompassed the whole of life and could be faithfully expressed in music and poetry, literature and pictorial art.

His influence on me was profound. I am sure he was one of the influences that God used to mould me into the sort of Christian I am today. But by the late seventies the framework that he had provided for my faith had been modified beyond recognition and elements in Schaeffer's system - the insistence on literal six day creation and absolute literal historicity of Genesis 1-11 - had been rejected as unnecessary.

Now in 1991 I am puzzled. Why has IVP repackaged and republished Schaeffer's first three works of apologetics, *The God who is There*, *Escape from Reason* and *He is there and He is not Silent?* The publisher's blurb describes them as "The three essential books in one volume" and asserts that "They analyze the sorrow and pain at the heart of modern culture." But I found reading them again a curious experience: a mixture of nostalgia and

So when do we appoint a second staff member? At 151 many will say they can't afford it, but why not? The church that waits until it definitely can afford extra staff may end up waiting a very long time. The church that is committed to growth will choose to afford extra staff, not for the comfort of the Christians but to reach the surrounding community. Andrew MacRae wrote a book called "Your Church First, Choose It, It Wants To Grow". Do you want your church to grow?

incredulity. Let me try to explain why.

Firstly by the mid-seventies, when I was at university, I realised that Schaeffer was selective in his approach to the authors he cited. That's inevitable. We all are. But Schaeffer's selectivity meant that he could present to his readers a stark, black-and white choice: on the one hand all the non-Christian and liberal Christian authors he cited were wrong (except in their articulation of despair) while historic, reformation Christianity was right. There were no grey areas in Schaeffer's world.

It struck me at the time to be a very unfair and unbalanced way of proceeding. There is much that is good, true and profound in secular literature, philosophy, psychology and even liberal theology; much that we renewed evangelicals might ponder. But the impression Schaeffer gives is that it's all or nothing. Either you accept the whole message of a book like *The Plague* by Albert Camus or you reject it all and accept the Christian faith. I'm grateful for Schaeffer for introducing me to Camus - *The Plague* is one of my favourite books! - for in him I have found much that is profound and thought provoking. Like Tony Campolo I have met the enemy and he is partly right!

Our apologetics must take account of the fact that we do not live in hermetically sealed units. We are all part of the world which God has made, we all bear the image of the God, however distorted by the Fall. Surely our case for Christianity should take what is true in the world and build on it. Schaeffer would argue that this takes no account of our presuppositions against those of secular man. I suspect that Schaeffer's approach

to non-Christian culture and philosophy is informed by a calvinistic understanding of the total depravity of man. He seems to see the unredeemed man as incapable of speaking the truth or being right and this seems to be overstating the effects of the Fall.

Secondly, I found myself at the beginning of the 1980s profoundly disagreeing with Schaeffer's social and political stance. Schaeffer was a Republican, committed to nuclear weapons, Western capitalism and the free enterprise culture. That's O.K.; it takes all sorts to make a world. My problem with Schaeffer's politics is that he equated the American dream and US foreign policy with a right interpretation of orthodox Christianity.

Having read some of his later works I found myself wondering how politically motivated his earlier, philosophical writings were. Was Schaeffer, propounding a philosophy of Christianity drawn from right wing politics? Schaeffer seems to be arguing that all non-Christian philosophy, such as that critiqued in the trilogy, led to socialism, marxism and totalitarian states.

Indeed in *How Shall we then Live* Schaeffer contrasts northern Europe which had a reformation with southern Europe which didn't and says that this is why northern Europe has a tradition of democracy whereas the Latin countries have a history of dictatorships. Quite apart from the somewhat questionable historical analysis, the theory completely ignored the fact that Nazism sprang up in the cradle of reformation.

Schaeffer's crudely conservative political thinking led him to the quite outrageous suggestion that Ronald Sider and those who argued like him were Marxists - a charge reminiscent of senior cabinet sources which described Faith in the City as Marxist theology!

Whether or not Schaeffer's politics grew out of his philosophy (and I think it is plain that they are closely linked), the lesson for us obvious. For too long evangelicals have kept the political/social and the spiritual/theological spheres rigidly separate - possibly as a result of Luther's two realms teaching. What we need to see is that our social position informs and influences the way we think and hence what we think and say. Our apologetics is affected by our social and cultural background. To meet Schaeffer on his own ground, we need to ruthlessly examine our presuppositions and ask ourselves whether we hold certain views and say certain things because of our faith or because of our background.

Thirdly, reading Schaeffer again in 1990/91 I was struck by how much he was responding to the concerns of the Sixties, of student revolutionaries and popular existentialism, the drug, hippy and

counter cultures. I wonder what a well-read (for Schaeffer is really speaking to a literate, even literary audience who read widely) twenty year old would make of the trilogy. The works have a curiously dated feel, like reading the very polemical tracts published by protestants in the early days of the reformation or sectarians during the English Civil War - much in them is fascinating and thought provoking but difficult to apply to the present day. It is like eavesdropping on a conversation between two enemies in some long forgotten war, interesting but slightly inconsequential.

Effective apologetics must be contemporary. It must deal with issues that concern people today and show how the Christian message makes sense of them. Above all apologetics must make sense of the Christian message to those who assume that it is a crusty relic from the past. Unfortunately Schaeffer's trilogy, while relevant to the concerns of the late sixties/early seventies no longer scratches where people itch. Where is the Francis Schaeffer for the 1990s and beyond?

A final word needs to be said about approach. Schaeffer seems to establish an unbridgable gulf between Christian teaching and secular thinking. Indeed in *The God who is There* he argues that it is necessary to take the non-Christian to the logical extreme of his non-Christian views - even at the risk of suicide because of the despair this process can induce in people - before he can leave his old life and embrace the new.

But is this really what the Bible means by repentance and faith? Cardinal Newman observed that "it is as absurd to argue men as to torture them into the Kingdom". Yet that seems to be precisely what Schaeffer is seeking to do. At the end of the day you can win the argument but not the person as Jesus found with Nicodemus. Schaeffer himself points out that men like Aldous Huxley and Bertrand Russell had moral reasons for not wanting the Christian faith to be true. That in itself suggests that conversion is more than an intellectual exercise.

Perhaps the current emphasis on a demonstration of the truth of Christianity in changed lives, through signs and wonders is a helpful balance to the rather arid feel of Schaeffer's apologetics. His faith was anything but dry as *True Spirituality* showed. He more than many evangelicals in the 1960s and 1970s understood faith to fire the emotions and imagination. He himself wrote poetry that expressed his love for his Lord and encouraged others to do likewise. His sermons in *Ash Heap Lives* exude a warmth his apologetics lacks.

But Schaeffer is at his strongest when he speaks of us needing to stress that faith is not just a leap in the dark. We trust God because of certain objective realities about him - i.e. that he's there,

that he's spoken, that he has acted in Jesus Christ to deal with the problem of sin and that he offers forgiveness to those to reach out to him with faith. His apologetics make their appeal solely to the mind and perhaps we would do well to ponder whether we shouldn't also appeal to the emotions and imaginations of those who do not believe in Christ.

I want to finish by acknowledging another debt to Schaeffer which is this: he consigned to the dustbin of history the false notion that thinking people cannot be Christians, that we have to leave our brains at the door of the church.

This is something which the renewal movement (if we can still call it that) must take on board. For there is a ghastly anti-intellectualism about much of renewal which divorces from the real world and saps its effectiveness in promoting the gospel.

Schaeffer showed that Christianity stands or falls on whether it is true or not, not on whether it gives me a buzz, makes me healthy, brings me friends and a sense of belonging or showers riches upon me, not even on whether it works. Paul says that renewal starts in the mind (Rom 12:2) and perhaps some of the more worrying trends in renewal - such as the growing problem of Christians acting only on 'words' and not on scripture, the rise of gurus and strong leaders who do our thinking for us, the mentality that says that Jesus has triumphed and problems are easily dealt with by five minutes of ministry after a knees-up - could be countered by a stress on sanctified reason, spiritual thinking and biblical good sense.

Josiah's renewal was driven by a discovery of the Law and the reading and application of it to all of Israel's life (2 Ch 34). Before him Hezekiah's renewal movement was clearly built on what the Torah said, out of which came a revival of worship and faith. It was the same with the renewal under Ezra and Nehemiah. John the Baptist began a renewal movement in first century Judaism with a call to repentance, which means a change of thinking. All these movements sought to bring renewal not just to the community of faith but also to society at large. Our renewal must likewise stress clear, biblical thinking and reach out beyond the confines of our churches to the wider world. As Schaeffer renewed the church's engagement with philosophy in the sixties, so our renewed churches need to find an apologetics that speaks to our society in the nineties.

Perhaps if this were the case our apology for the Christian faith today would be more sure-footed, showing the truth of Christianity in a world of competing faiths and philosophies and showing the relevance of Christianity in a world crying out for wholeness, stability and direction. In the decade of evangelism let's acknowledge our debt to Schaeffer (taking full account of his weaknesses and learning from them) and move on to an apologetics that engages the real concerns of the today's world for the greater glory of God and the extension of his kingdom.



WORKING TOGETHER - EFFECTIVE ASSOCIATION



David Slater

Barrie White has rightly pointed out that the practice of Association is difficult in Churches which stress local independency so strongly(1). Association life is at a minimum and of decreasing importance to most Baptist Churches and Church members. The renewal movement has done nothing to improve the situation, rather it has aggravated the decline. I think there are various reasons for this.

1. There has been increasing mobility across denominational barriers leading to lower levels of commitment to any particular denomination. We

cannot any longer rely on denominational loyalty to guarantee the success of Association life.

2. The evangelical churches have largely left the practice of association to those not so persuaded because they have been so busy evangelising.

3. The Associations themselves have not always produced events and directions that would encourage participation by those concerned to see the kingdom of God extended.

4. Church membership is undervalued by the majority of Christians. They are less committed to the local church and therefore to the denominat-

ion.

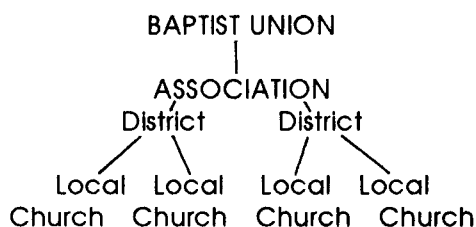
5. Society has become highly individualistic and the meaning of community lost in large measure.

With these things in mind and in light of the changing face of denominational structures at Baptist House, what response may we make to the depressed state of Associations?

1. A CALL TO THE ASSOCIATIONS

I think we need to help Associations realise how far they are away from the original intentions and aims of association. It demands that we explain to each Baptist Church and continue explaining it until it sinks in, that the Church is more than the local church. Perhaps we don't have a high view of the Associations because we don't have a high view of the local Church⁽²⁾.

Associations should not see themselves as "umbrella groupings" within a pyramidal authority structure, thus:



This bears greater resemblance to Anglican Parishes, but is not the Baptist way. The Associations should serve the churches but so often don't. The first call is to recover the original intention of serving and supporting the work of the local Church.

This means adjusting the agenda of every meeting held in the name of the Association. One of the key reasons for lack of support from the local churches for the Associations is that they so rarely seem to be "doing" anything. We have a General Committee, Strategy Committee (both of which I have participated in during several years in Devon and Cornwall) and numerous other committees which seem mostly to concern themselves with maintenance and not advance. While it may not be true of all Associations, it is of most.

The nature of Association Assemblies and Meetings must also change. On rare occasions I have been stimulated by Association Assemblies. Most of the time I go because I have a responsibility to go in the name of Fellowship. If Baptists are so prominent in the life of para-church organisations and in the large celebratory gatherings (Spring Harvest et. al.) why on earth do our bread and butter meetings have to be so shatteringly dull? If the average age of attenders is to come down, we have to do something different, related to life in the church today and not do things because we have always done them this way. Partly this is because little of our Assembly agenda is forward looking. The young will only get involved

if they realise that the Association is looking to the future and not living in the past.

We also need to be setting an agenda that scratches where people itch. It is relevancy we need. The great success of Spring Harvest is that its seminars and celebrations deal with things that are happening or are about to happen. Doing things this way is risky, of course! We may have to risk finances, effort and gifted people to advance the kingdom. We may make a few mistakes along the way. But doing that is surely a lot better than making nothing.

2. A CALL TO THE CHURCHES

The local church must take some of the responsibility for the lack of effective fellowship among Baptist Churches in the Associations. Much of that responsibility lies with the leaders of those local Churches.

We are often guilty of the hypocrisy of expecting from Church Members what we do not and are not prepared to give to Associations. By this I mean that we teach our members (possibly!) the importance of commitment to the local Church and to every member of that local Church. Love has to be expressed by actively sharing the lives of others, supporting them, helping them, caring for them, praying for them etc. When we are invited to make a similar contribution to the wider church structures of a denomination of churches with whom we might reasonably be expected to have some common ground, we do not do so.

It is particularly important for growing churches to take these responsibilities seriously. We already have enough denominations. In the States, successful Churches become movements, become denominations. Do we really want to tread that path? Will we be responsible for further dividing the body of Christ? Or will we rather demonstrate brotherly love as an example to the people in our care.

In order to see this change, I believe the following steps need to be taken:

1. The corporate nature of the Church must be preached actively. It must also be lived out. The community of believers must be seen by those outside it. People must be committed by covenant to one another.

2. Churches must take responsible and well-informed decisions in the Church Meeting to become more involved in District and Association life. Renewed Churches especially must give a lead and an example.

3. Introductory courses for Church membership should be established as widely as possible in our Churches, explaining the need for contacts with the wider Church. Too many people see their involvement in the local Church only in terms of

what they get from it (benefits) rather than what they will bring to it (responsibilities).

4. People should be appointed from within our Churches who will be able to take an active part in inter-church structures locally.

5. The gospel should be preached including the call to involvement in the local Church. Too often and for too long, the gospel has been preached as requiring an individual response only.

3. A CALL TO CHURCH LEADERS

If we are to make demands of the Associations and the local Churches, we must also recognise that much of this will be generated by those leading in the fellowships. We hear all too often things such as, "We let the BU get on with it by itself", "I'm simply a Christian and don't care about denominations".

Many leaders do the same. Few are willing to be involved in things that may well initially be rather dull and ineffective, taking the long term view of helping the structures to become what God wants them to be. There may also be several spin-offs into the life of local Churches.

1. People in the pew might not rely so heavily on the gifted and charismatic leadership for their spiritual food.

2. People in the pew might be encouraged to become active in the ministry of the church. One of the biggest difficulties for churches today is getting people committed enough to DO anything. If the minister or ministry team were committed to the wider church by way of example, it might stimulate leaders to train others to take up the ministry of all believers.

3. In this way gifts and latent talents, will be discovered and activated to the glory of God and the church grow more quickly. Pressure on leaders may also be relieved.

4. Baptist Churches may become leaders in effective inter-church relationships.

It is simplistic to say that denominations do not matter. Whether we like it or not we have them. Differences in the early centuries of the Christian Church were strong and sometimes violently expressed. It is also a denial of biblical truth to be insular in the local Church. Although neither of these is acceptable Christian practice, they are both prevalent today.

Having been trained for ministry to Churches belonging to a particular denomination, I have a responsibility to that denomination of local churches as well as to God and to people. Of course the primary responsibility is to the people and for the Church in which God has given me pastoral care. But it is not the SOLE responsibility.

How can we move forward? I would like to suggest a number of practical responses:

1. Ministers and members of ministry teams should give priority to ministers' fraternal. First to the

Baptist Fraternal, second to Evangelical Fraternal and third to ministers of other denominations in the locality.

2. Leaders of growing Churches have something positive and valuable to share with colleagues. District and Association life is one important area. If we remain locked up in our local churches, how is the light to be spread? This probably will mean sitting on committees and going to assemblies which initially may not be super-exciting!

3. The local Church needs to be taught to "give away" its leaders' time and talent if the Church as a whole is to grow. This is costly but a necessary part of corporately denying self and taking up the cross!

4. Local church leaders must take a long, hard look at church structures and especially the format of the Church Meeting. Denominational and inter-denominational issues are rarely, if ever, discussed in the local church. This needs to change.

Changes have to be made all round. Associations and Districts have to be led by forward looking people and their agendas have to reflect the needs of today's world as well as the Church.

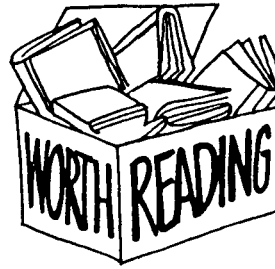
Churches have to see themselves as microcosms of a whole and not be so insular. To do this their relationships with other Churches within and beyond the Union have to broaden and deepen.

Above all, ministers and other church leaders (elders and deacons) have to have their horizons extended to encompass more than the comfort of "home".

(1). Barrie White, In A PERSPECTIVE ON BAPTIST IDENTITY, 1988 published by Mainstream.

(2). see Terry Virgo, THE LOCAL CHURCH, New Frontiers Magazine, February 1990 for an excellent resume of the value of the local Church.

REVIEWS



LIFE STORY - LIFE STYLE

Christian Witness in Today's World

Harry Weatherly.

B.U. C.T.P.

Congratulations to the B.U. on their new style C.T.P. manuals. The quality of production, clarity of lay-out and new format are all made for a great improvement on the old booklets. Also to be commended is the attempt meet a variety of needs and indeed markets. (This particular volume, as well as being part of the C.T.P. course, also doubles as a group training course and to that end includes an appendix offering outlines for eight sessions of study).

Covering such areas as "telling your story", life style evangelism, making contacts, ways of witnessing and, thankfully, nurturing new believers, Life Story - Life Style is essentially a manual of personal witnessing. It offers a whole range of practical helps, illustrations and guidelines (The four spiritual laws, concentric circles of relationships etc.) Not much new here but a useful collection from various sources.

It would be wrong, however to give the impression that this is merely a rather sterile collection of hints and tips. Throughout there is an attempt to base guidance on scripture and on the example of Jesus in particular. Furthermore the style is warmly personal with good use of illustrations and stories. The author comes across as what he is, an evangelist with a pastor's heart. Interest is also maintained by a good use of interesting quotes.

Just one or two minor quibbles... the inclusion of brief summaries at the end of each unit would have helped when using the manual as a text book. It would have been good to see more space (an entire unit?) devoted to the place of the Holy Spirit in witnessing and while there is comment on evangelism through mums and toddlers groups and leisure time activities, reaching warm contacts, yuppies and senior citizens I was disappointed not to see something on witnessing to men.... but then I don't suppose you can have everything.

All in all a highly commendable little volume. The last unit in particular whetted my appetite for more on developing an evangelistic strategy in the local church.... another C.T.P. manual perhaps, know what I mean Harry?

Glen Marshall.

THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN BIRTH

David Pawson

This is an exceptional book: exceptional in the writer's determination to press home his basic thesis; exceptional in the thoroughness with which he has gone about his homework; and exceptional too in the depth and penetration of many of the insights. Not that it's always an easy book to read. The middle section in particular ("The 'What about....?' passages") can be quite heavy going. But that isn't David Pawson's fault; indeed, we should thank him rather for having had the courage and perseverance to tackle head on a long list of New Testament passages which most of us probably prefer tacitly to ignore.

Pawson's thesis is basically simple. Healthy Christian initiation consists of four elements - four stages in a process, if you like. These are: repentance towards God; faith in Christ; baptism in water; and reception of the Holy Spirit as a conscious experience.

The most controversial of these, of course, is the fourth - reception of the Holy Spirit as a conscious experience. I have to admit that I was sceptical about it before I started - and that I remain sceptical at the end. To my mind the killer-texts for Pawson's theory (notwithstanding his very ingenious interpretations) remain Acts 2 v 38 and Romans 8 v 9, both of which seem to imply very strongly that reception of the Spirit is in fact an automatic, and therefore at least possibly an unconscious, part of the "package" (to use one of Pawson's words).

There is also real confusion, I think, in David Pawson's use of words such as "essential" and "necessary". Water-baptism, for example, is necessary for justification (p.229); yet Pawson concedes that under certain circumstances people can in fact be justified without being baptised. What does the word "necessary" actually mean, then? So I for one find myself differing quite radically from the author in some of the things he is advocating. (I also find his addiction to exclamation marks a touch irritating!) Yet I am extremely grateful to him for his book. Its overall effect was to make me feel ashamed of the inadequate way in which I have so often "birthed" new believers. For me, the most valuable and hard-hitting emphasis in the book was neither of the baptisms (water- or Spirit-) but the one on repentance - the need for us to under-

go a deep and radical change of heart and life, rather than slide into God's kingdom on the strength of a shallow prayer and a passing feeling. (I always fondly imagined I was fairly good on this aspect: Pawson's book has persuaded me otherwise; I emerge, accordingly, bruised but grateful.)

It's strange, in a way, that a book whose basic thesis is (in my opinion, anyway) mistaken should be so extremely helpful. But there it is. Pawson may be wrong in certain things, and quite important things at that: but he is most certainly right on various others, and deserves a serious hearing.

Collin Sedgwick.

Michael Marshall,
**Great Expectations?
Bible Training for Evangelism
in Parishes,**

Bible Reading Fellowship, 143 pages, £3.95.

Michael Marshall, one time Vicar of All Saints, Margaret Street, now Episcopal Director of the Anglican Institute in St. Louis, USA, has written a most readable book of studies on the Acts of the Apostles, which is intended to move us 'from the celebration of Easter joy to a new commitment to Pentecost mission'.

I very much warm to Michael Marshall's imaginative approach to Bible study. Written from an Anglican perspective, *Great Expectations?* is ideal for a group of churches wanting to break away from the traditional pattern of Lenten House groups and do something new. The studies, based on the NIV, divide into six sections: Expectation, Experience, Explosion, Explanation, Expansion, Expression. Over the six-week period there are stimulating comments (normally two pages in length) on the reading for the day. In addition, every week there are questions for group discussion.

Here is a great ecumenical tool for the Decade of Evangelism. I warmly commend it to readers of *Mainstream*.

Paul Beasley-Murray.

Carolyn Headley,
**Readers and Worship in the
Church of England:**

A look at the liturgical role of Readers in the 1990s, Grove Worship Series No. 115, 28pp. £1.60.

I have decided to write a review of a Grove booklet, which for the most part has no relevance whatsoever to readers of the *Mainstream* newsletter. Why then review it? Because there is an underlying argument, of which we

Baptists who do not have "Readers" or their equivalent need to take note. Indeed, we need to take note of this booklet, precisely because we do not have "Readers" in our denomination.

Within the Anglican communion Readers are "Theologically trained lay people whose ministry is recognized not only locally but by the wider church". Although Readers may visit the sick, publish bans of marriage and bury the dead, the prime role of the Reader is preaching, teaching, and leading worship.

In the past Readers have often been seen as exercising a "second-class" ministry, taking a service when the professional "clergy" are not available. Carolyn Headley argues against such an approach. In her opinion, "Readers should be used out of choice, as complementary to the ordained ministry, and alongside it, not as those whose only role is a pseudo-clerical gap-filling ministry". Thus when it comes to preaching, "the lay-ness of Readers is their strength and virtue - not their shortcoming", for in a way that is difficult for full-time pastors, Readers are able to bring fresh insights precisely because they are living out the Christian life in the world. "Preaching", writes Carolyn Headley, "is therefore a prime function of the Reader, not by reproducing the style and approach of the clergy, but having the freedom and courage to preach from the heart out of the experience of life, with theological reflection".

"So what?" some Baptist critics might say. In many of our churches shared ministry has long been a reality. Preaching is not confined to the professionals. This is, of course, true. And yet, we Baptists for the most part have not taken shared ministry seriously. The vast majority of those Baptists who share in the ministry of preaching have received no training. Only a relative handful ever take the Christian Training Programme's course in preaching and become accredited "lay-preachers". It seems to me that here we should begin to learn from our Anglican (as also our Methodist) friends. Training is important. We have long recognised that when it comes to pastoral ministry, giftedness is not enough - rather those gifts need to be developed through attendance at one of our theological colleges. But surely training is also necessary for others too? Why should it be assumed that anybody sufficiently gifted may preach? Furthermore, why should it be assumed that anybody sufficiently gifted may lead worship, without having any understanding of that particular science (yes, worship-leading is more than just an art)?

Carolyn Headley makes a number of helpful comments about initial training programmes for Readers, and also about in-service training. Recognising that worship styles and patterns are forever changing, she argues: "For Readers to

continuing education is important". Perhaps more provocatively, she also advocates methods of review and appraisal: "It must be possible to withhold a licence. Such a system is obviously very unpopular and hurtful, but if Readership is to be seen as a role-model or 'flag-ship' for lay ministry, then it must be of the highest possible standard".

I find her arguments both persuasive and challenging, particularly within a Baptist context. In many of our churches shared ministry has resulted in sloppiness and the second-rate. This need not be, if training were to become an essential prerequisite to ministry. What form might such training take? From my present perspective as a College principal, I would urge people to take advantage of what the colleges have to offer in terms of evening classes and leadership weekends. Undoubtedly would-be leaders should also take advantage of the material which the BU's Christian Training Programme has to offer - incidentally, please note, that the BU has upgraded its CTP material considerably. However, at the end of the day the key trainer is surely the local pastor: sharing ministry must inevitably involve training people in ministry. Pastors worth their salt will surely want to regularly run short courses on preaching and worship-leading. At least, after reading Carolyn Headley's booklet, they should want to do so!

Paul Beasley-Murray.

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