

A WORD AND SPIRIT

MAIN ) TREAM

NETWORK

**Magazine Issue 55. January 1996**

**Issue Theme: Building Bridges.**

## Introduction:

The 1996 Lent Groups, which some of us will be participating in soon, have for their theme this year: Building Bridges. That is also the theme of this January 1996 issue of the Mainstream Magazine. Our current BUGB President, an always affirming supporter of Mainstream over the years, Peter Tongeman develops this theme for us in the opening



article. The theme of race and racism is one that has not often been covered in the pages of this magazine in over 50 issues .....to our shame. I hope that Fred George's stimulating and probably restrained article will do something at least to correct that imbalance. Derek Tidball has kindly made time in his busy first term as Principal of LBC to write for us again - this time on post-modernism. Derek spoke for us in Hertfordshire recently and shared with us the memorable modern creed: Tesco ergo sum. Think about it after you have read his article! I include some reflections on bridge-building in the New Europe following on from a time of study leave this Summer to work on that theme. Frances Godden, helped by Harry, writes on gender for us in this issue. Finally that Baptist hero of internet surfing, Callum Jones, gives us some fascinating insights into how a recently trained and accredited Baptist Minister sees his ministry to date.

The issue finishes with details of a recent new Word and Spirit group launch and with news from an Executive in transition.

Michael I. Bochenski

St. Albans

Advent 1995

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# A LETTER TO THE CHURCHES



## FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE BAPTIST UNION

I am often asked when visiting churches, "What does the BU President do?" My response is to suggest that I am a roving ambassador for the Union. Travels so far have taken us all over England, into the valleys of Wales, over the sea to Ireland and briefly across the border to Scotland. One could say our job is to build or strengthen bridges. A bridge of friendship is comparatively easy to construct and is something we greatly value. The bridge of confidence in and commitment to the Union is in need of strengthening in many places. We have found it weak through lack of understanding of its purpose, and lack of interest in its goals. As for two-way communication across the bridge between Union and churches, to facilitate meeting, co-operating, giving and receiving, much more could be done than at present.

As a roving ambassador, I have a fourfold task. First, to learn what is happening, noting particular needs and concerns. Second, to share with others what has been learned - good ideas, imaginative schemes, successful ventures for the Kingdom. Third, to encourage and affirm, particularly where the work is difficult and demanding, standing with them in fellowship and prayer and fourth, to inspire by sharing what the Lord has laid on my heart concerning the necessity and relevance of a distinctive Christian lifestyle. Let me put something of this to you now.

### 1. *Lifestyle is well established in Scripture, in both Old and New Testaments.*

The commandments (Exodus 20) deal with attitudes and relationships. Expressed positively they include respect for parents, honesty, respect for life, faithfulness in marriage, truthfulness, contentment. Later guidelines given to Israel include provision for those who are poor, care for the disabled, respect for the elderly, acceptance of aliens and strangers (Leviticus 9: 9-10, 14, 32-34). When, under the influence of idolatry and the outlook of neighbouring nations, God-given guidelines are disregarded, the prophets recalled them to a lifestyle compatible with the nature of the God who brought them into existence. Worship of a holy, just and merciful God called for holy, just and merciful people. "What does the Lord require ... to deal justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8). In rebuke of those who thought they could embrace nominal religion - offering sacrifice, keeping festivals - then pursue their daily round of

oppressing the poor and exploiting the vulnerable, Amos exploded: "I hate your feasts, I can't stand your assemblies ... away with the noise of your songs ... let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a stream". (Amos 5: 21-24).

In the New Testament, John the Baptist's advice to those who professed repentance and were baptised related to lifestyle. "Let those who have food and clothing share with those who have not. Let those involved in finance be strictly honest and fair. Let those who bear authority speak the truth plainly and resist greed". (Luke 3: 10-14). When we turn to Jesus' teaching, he has much to say about life issues. For example, in an intensely materialistic society, his counsel to "Lay up treasure in heaven", rather than here on earth, challenges our preoccupation with money and possessions. Present day pressures pander to greed, selfishness, indulgence and a comfortable lifestyle. Jesus said, "It is hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom ...". Why? Because kingdom values of unselfishness, giving, sharing, sacrifice, love are the opposite of what is encouraged in a materialistic society. Further, Jesus' emphasis on love and forgiveness challenges our society that feeds on strife, division, retaliation, hatred and violence.

In Acts it was the lifestyle of believers that occasioned the amazed remark: "See how these Christians love one another!" Their relationships were not only marked by signs and wonders but by such a spirit of sharing and caring there was no needy person among them. The New Testament letters are full of advice about personal relationships, harmonious living, a caring attitude, a forgiving spirit, consideration for the weak and vulnerable, getting on together in the family and at work, the necessity of brotherly and sisterly love.

2. *Personal and corporate lifestyle are a necessary accompaniment of evangelism.*

I am concerned about our personal and corporate image as believers. George MacLeod of Iona once said, "The world knows quite well what our theory is. What they are interested in is whether we are prepared to show signs of putting it into practice". To quote another, "The gospel becomes credible when it is visible as well as audible" (John Stott). Frankly, our message of reconciliation through Christ has no credibility if relationships within a church fellowship are patently unreconciled. Our gospel of love in Christ has no validity if loving relationships and a caring attitude to people are absent. Every believer and every church is a visual aid that either affirms or contradicts the message we proclaim. In a world torn by strife, where the meaning of love has been twisted and distorted, we are called to demonstrate a better way. "Our Christian lifestyle is meant to be a nonconformist active subculture" (John Stott).

During our Presidential tour we have pursued a special interest in churches and projects that combine evangelism and social action. I am happy to say there are many imaginative schemes underway. There is widespread provision of Play Groups and Parents and Toddlers Clubs, meeting real needs but also forming bridges of friendship and care that engender receptiveness to the word of Christ. In deprived communities we have seen churches working to provide good but cheap clothing for families; facilities for washing clothes; drop-in centres for refreshment and meals; accommodation for the homeless; a meeting place for drop-outs; after school clubs for children giving opportunity to read, play and do homework; family centres providing counsel and support for children and parents; provision and support for unemployed people, and much more. All of which says loud and clear, in actions rather than words, to the people they serve: "You matter. We care. We stand with you"

The widening chasm between church and world, in terms of outlook and values, though recognised by most of our churches, is a gap we have not yet been able to bridge adequately. But engagement in social action that embodies understanding, care and practical support, is beginning to create a bridge which, if strengthened by love and prayer, will enable some to discover both the essential gospel message and the Lord himself whose Spirit prompted the action.

3. *Christian lifestyle should embody a commitment to justice as well as love.* I read recently, "Baptists are quite good on love, but poor on justice". Our task is not only to provide an "ambulance" and care for casualties of an unjust society, it is to involve ourselves with others in dealing with the circumstances that actually create the casualties. That may involve us in actions to combat racism; drawing the attention of a local authority to unfair discrimination; addressing a member of Parliament concerning unjust practice; getting involved in political action. Our evangelical forebears had no compunction about political involvement over slavery, protection of children, the control of alcohol. Should we not also be active over unfair trading, marginalising of the unemployed, the use of anti-personnel mines that maim the innocent, care of the environment, just relationships between the affluent one-third and the struggling two-thirds of the world population? So far in our travels we have met few Baptists involved locally and politically as councillors; but a young Methodist councillor from Walsall left us breathless with his enthusiasm and commitment to the community. Where are our Baptist councillors and when will there be more Christian members of Parliament? We are conspicuous by our apparent lack of involvement.

## WHAT THEN CAN BE DONE?

Let ministers and leaders embark on an awareness campaign to inform about community and world needs and possible Christian involvement. This can be done through regular intercession in church services, imaginatively presented; giving opportunity for members of the congregation to share aspects of their life experience for information and prayer; praying regularly for your association and Union and its officers, highlighting aspects of the work; using the BUGB Magazine video that highlights what is happening around the country.

Identify an area of need in your community. It may relate to youth, the elderly, singles, dependent families, the homeless, disabled, mentally sick, or a matter of public concern. Make careful enquiries to identify specific needs. Make them a subject of prolonged prayer. Then plan corporate action.

Adopt a person or project in this or another country. Many of our churches have links in Romania, Poland, Bulgaria and other central European countries. Foster personal links, send a team to explore and help, bring representatives to your church to share their situation. Encourage giving, prayer and involvement. Encourage young people to get involved in a service venture like a BMS Action Team, Home Mission Task Force, Oasis or some similar challenging enterprise.

In such ways the gospel message is given credibility through lifestyle. Those who get involved practically frequently find their faith strengthened, their vision enlarged and their commitment considerably extended. If our mission is to be effective in this "Decade of Evangelism" we need to develop a lifestyle that embodies love, justice and a close walk with God.

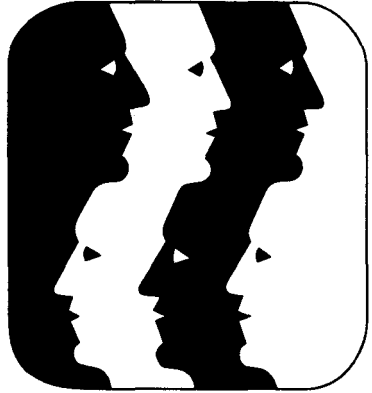
**Peter Tongeman, President of the Baptist Union 1995-6.**  
December 1995

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# BUILDING BRIDGES RACE AND RACISM

My experience of life in multi-cultural Britain over the last 30 years has revealed a huge gulf that exists between the majority white population and the visible minorities of Asian and Black people. The fears, prejudices and perceptions that inhabit this gulf support and sustain the evil of racism and racial discrimination in society. I have been called a "left-wing trouble maker", told that "going on about it simply makes it worse", or "it is my fault for being black and different", when I have challenged racism and discriminatory attitudes and practices. Sadly Baptist Christians are not immune to this evil. A church takes pride in its "multi-racial" membership whilst being exclusively white in its leadership. Another believes that issues of racism or discrimination are not a priority for them "because there are no black people in our church", oblivious to the multi-racial community all around them. It appears to me that Baptists have taken the easy and, sometimes, futile option of pious resolutions about racism and its evil effects, without the willingness to translate words into positive action by risking change and releasing resources to challenge and combat racism in church and society. Unless you yourself are black, it is difficult to appreciate fully the variety of ways in which racism does offend and hurt Black people. We cannot begin to dismantle the barriers, or build bridges, unless we take time to listen to the voice of our Black sisters and brothers in the church, and are open to a level of fellowship that shares the pain, anger and sorrow of being excluded and rejected because of the colour of your skin.



## AWARENESS

The starting point must be a commitment to an understanding of racism. There is a woeful lack of awareness of what racism is all about. Even a simple statement that multi-cultural Britain is also racist, elicits much denial and hostility and anger from many white individuals and groups. I am concerned that I often need to argue the case for recognition that racism is prevalent in our society and in our churches. If you are black you do not need any argument to convince you of this fact. You live with the painful reality every day. There is racism that is blatant. This is evident in verbal and physical abuse, discrimination in employment, education, housing; dubious and provocative treatment by police, immigration officers and law

courts. Examples of these are sometimes easy to identify, and many Christians would want to challenge and change these racist practices. But there is a more pernicious expression of racism that is subtle and not so easy to detect. This is more serious and damaging because it is practised by people in positions of power and control. They are often not aware that their words and actions support the belief that people of a particular race or colour are "inherently deficient or inferior". It is here that the church has failed most eloquently.

What a pity that the enthusiasm and zeal which Baptist Christians had for mission to Asia, Africa and the Caribbean was apparently lacking when Christians from these countries came to Britain and desired to settle in our churches. Black and Asian Christians do not want to be simply at the receiving end. Our place in the body of Christ is not as welcomed guests but as fully operative members of the body. Too many Black Christians are excluded and marginalised by the institutional racism in many of our churches. I believe that this is one of the reasons for the significant growth of separate black congregations in Britain, and is to be regretted. Unless there is a high commitment to a programme of racism awareness I do not see any hope for change. We need to understand what racism is all about, recognise the damage it is doing to our Black sisters and brothers and acknowledge the need for genuine repentance that will result in positive action to change attitudes and structures. Unless we do this it is unlikely that we will be able to build any bridges that will stem the tide of racism in our society. Christians have to face the challenge and demonstrate a life-style that gives evidence to the truth that the Gospel is for all people, and that black and white are of infinite value in God's sight.

My heart is saddened and my spirit is angry when I am told that God's unconditional love makes me a member of Christ's body but the members act in ways that make me feel that I do not belong to the body. Many are the times when I have been patronised, marginalised, or diminished, both in personal encounters and public words and actions. I have also known the embarrassment of being paraded as "a product of our missionary society". I know what it is to survive in the church, and especially in ministry, under these conditions. Despite all odds I have had to hold on to my strong conviction that God loves me just as I am. This miracle of grace has sustained me even though I have often wished and deeply desired and needed the body to demonstrate some of that grace-given love and acceptance.

#### **AFFIRMATION**

Black people need to be affirmed and accepted as being black and different. I am Sri Lankan. That is the way God made me and I am glad and proud of it. When I am asked to "integrate" the expectation is that I change and



abandon my cultural roots and conform to the majority white culture. I cannot do it and should not be expected to do it. John Perkins, the black evangelist, tells of his experience and the real need to be affirmed for who we are. As he ministered in the midst of white racism, whites often said, "John, I love your soul." They wanted to lead him to Christ without struggling against racial (and related economic) privation. Perkins's answer is profoundly Biblical: "My soul is in a black body. And if you really want to get my soul, you're first going to have to deal with this body." Surely, our understanding of God as Creator and Jesus as Saviour and the Holy Spirit as Enabler, should lead us to affirm the multi-cultural diversity and see it as God's precious gift to the church. The Gospel imperative of the love and acceptance of Jesus calls us to celebrate the rainbow culture that our Black and Asian sisters and brothers bring to our churches. We have to act with courage and faith to ensure that affirmation is more than sweet words. It must result in positive action. There are several ways in which we may do this:

1. Recognise the validity of Black and Asian spirituality and scholarship to our theological explorations, worship and mission. We have to remember that more than half of the world's Christian family is either Black or Asian.
2. Create an environment in the local church and the denomination where it is the norm to consider the gifts and skills of Black members when looking for leaders. This can provide the much needed positive role models for both black and white members. For this to happen there must be the willingness to release significant financial resources to train and equip potential leaders.
3. Ensure that black members are represented on our church and para-church decision making bodies. It will be interesting to know how many Black and Asian people are invited, elected, appointed, to serve on BU Council, BMS committees, or as trustees or management members of the Evangelical Alliance, Spring Harvest, TEAR Fund, or Mainstream for that matter.

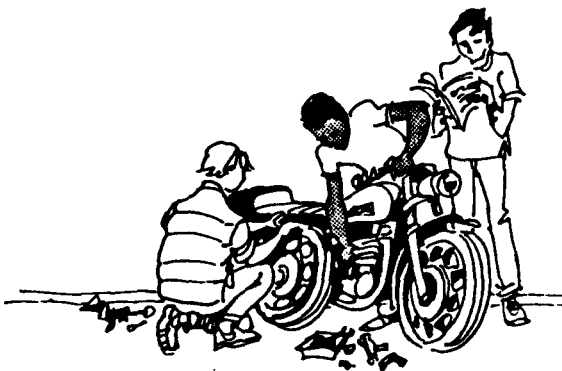
I do not want to belong to a church where the rich and creative diversity that God has provided is denied me because we have failed to affirm and encourage people of all cultures and races to be fully incorporated into the body. Racism is sin, and God is against it. So should we be. We have to repent of the sin of racism. What is needed is a repentance that leads to active reconciliation. It must be more than just an event of the moment, but a process of change. René Padilla puts it powerfully, "Repentance is much more than a private affair between the individual and God. It is the complete reorientation of life in the world ... in response to the work of God in Jesus Christ." This Biblical repentance will change racist attitudes and provide the spiritual impetus to seek justice for all. I long for, and work to see, the sign

of God's Kingdom here and now as it is anticipated in Revelation 7:9ff, where "every race, tribe, nation and language will stand together around the throne of God and worship Him declaring salvation comes from our God ... praise, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and might belong to our God for ever and ever! Amen!"

I close this article with a poem written by Pamela Uwechia of East Barnet Baptist Church for Racial Justice Sunday, 1995.

Are your ears listening?  
Are your eyes seeing?  
Is your heart open  
What do you see  
As I stand before you?  
Do I interest you, intrigue you?  
Do you want to know me?  
Know what I like?  
Know who I am?  
Can you accept me, know me, love me?  
For who I am  
And not for who you would like me to be.  
Could you dare to judge me  
On what I say or what I do?  
And not on the colour of my skin  
Or the difference between me and you.  
Are your ears listening?  
Are your eyes seeing?  
Is your heart open?

**V. Frederick George,**  
Pastor of East Barnet Baptist Church.



# A Beginner's Guide to Postmodernity

Postmodernity is the hot subject of the moment. But what is it? Since no-one is sure, perhaps the best advice is that offered by *The Independent*, "No one knows what postmodernity is, so use the word as often as you can". There are actually two closely related words. "Postmodernism" refers to trends and changes in the cultural scene and to movements in art, architecture, film, literature, music and the theatre. These trends are now affecting the wider academic world and, especially, the social and human sciences. The word "postmodernism" was first used in the 1930s but came into much more common use in the 1960s and 1970s. "Postmodernity" is a sociological term which is what we call the society which results from postmodernism. The one draws off the other. David Lyon has put his finger on the essential characteristics of postmodernity. "The postmodern, then", he writes, "refers above all to the exhaustion of the modern". It is a loss of confidence in modernity and all that the "modern" era was committed to. So, to understand postmodernity, we must look first at modernity".



## What was modernity?

Modernity is shorthand for that period which stretched from the medieval world to the current time. It was conceived during the renaissance and reached adolescence in the early enlightenment. Achieving full adulthood during the nineteenth century, many would say it has been suffering from old age, if not terminal decline, during the latter half of our century.

It was noted for various themes and characteristics:

- There was an ardent belief in progress as a good thing and a possible thing.
- There was an emphasis on reason and, with it, a rejection of believing anything simply because it was received tradition or taught by inherited authorities. This feature of modernity received great impetus from the philosophy of Rene Descartes who taught that true knowledge came not through exercising faith but by practising radical doubt. Later, Emmanuel Kant divided the world into that which is knowable through observation (by the senses and through empirical method) and that which is the unknowable (which was deposited in the realm of religion and ethics). So magic, superstition and religion, which had lent enchantment to the world, were replaced by the sterner master of rationality.

- Faith was, of course, still exercised. But the object of faith was now science. Philip Sampson has called the modern era, “the domain of progress through science”. All this bred a spirit of confidence and hope. The progressive forces of reason and science promised to liberate people from ignorance and irrationality and the ills they had brought in their train. Truth, justice and freedom became catchwords.
- The development of this modern way of thinking went hand in hand with industrialisation and urbanisation. It is difficult to know which was cause and which was effect, but the significance of the factory system and the city cannot be underestimated. In David Lyon's words, “The city is the crucible of modernity”.
- All this had an effect on the way politics was done and it gave rise to liberal democracy, with its commitment to tolerance, humanism, egalitarianism and rational bureaucracy, as the ideal form of government.

### Does postmodernity exist?

There is an old proverb which says, “If you want a definition of water, do not ask a goldfish”. They are too close to it to understand it. So it is not surprising that we should find it hard to understand just where we are at the moment. Whether we are living through the death throes of modernity and whether a new era, called postmodern, is coming to birth is hotly debated. Some say that the future will not be radically different from the past. Some say we are merely in a transition stage and we do not yet have any idea of what form of society will come into being in the future. Others say all that we are experiencing is just the latest phase of the modern era and it is misleading to call it postmodern as if it were radically different. Still others say that a new and distinctive form of society, most aptly labelled postmodern, can be discerned. But, however you evaluate it, something is going on and we had better be aware of it.

Trying to understand postmodernity is like trying to pick up a slippery bar of soap. You think you have just got hold of it when, *oops*, it slips out of your hands. You read one writer and come to terms with his or her viewpoint only to discover that someone else, who also wants to claim the label “postmodern”, is saying something radically different. But, as Pauline Rosenau has pointed out, that's part of its appeal. The idea of postmodernity is broad, varied and difficult to identify. Part of its magic is that open-endedness and its lack of definition makes it at one and the same time attractive to the affluent, the desperate and the disillusioned of the Western world. Rosenau points out that postmodernism receives scant attention in Eastern Europe or the poorer parts of the world. In part it may be, she suggests, the luxury of a generation for whom scarcity seems remote, who are

preoccupied with liberty rather than necessity and with the individual rather than the collective.

### **Where did modernity go wrong?**

Nonetheless, it is easy to see that modernity is being called into question on a widespread scale. The enterprise of modernity is considered by many to have failed and to have done so monumentally. These are some of the reasons given:

- It has failed to produce results. The time taken to achieve the progress envisaged seems so long. The problems of hunger, disease and ignorance are still with us, not to mention the awful unleashing of violence, such as in the Second World War and the Holocaust, which seems so at odds with the values of the enlightenment.
- Science has not only produced tremendous positive results, but also some very destructive results as well. On occasions these resulted from scientists abusing their disciplines. But, more significantly, the unintended consequences of much scientific endeavour has been responsible for producing negative side effects. The effect on the environment of nuclear testing is one example. For many, the achievements of science have turned sour.
- The modern world, with its view that human beings are rational creatures, fails to satisfy the mystical, metaphysical and emotional dimensions of human life. Modernity is often compelled to be silent when it comes to questions of purpose or ethics; questions to which we desperately need answers. Many of its key concepts have not been used to bring freedom or enlightenment to people in an even-handed way. Rather, they have become tools for the powerful and have led to different forms of oppression.
- Perhaps, in any case, with its emphasis on doubting everything, modernity carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction. If we learn by questioning and doubting, then why not question and doubt modernity itself and all that it stands for?

Modernity seems to have been good in theory but in practice has left many dissatisfied and led others to conclude that it cannot deliver on its promises. Whatever we conclude about the existence of something called "postmodernity", it seems obvious that modernity has not been abolished overnight and been replaced by postmodernity. At present we have to say that modernity and postmodernity are like railway lines which are running parallel and will run parallel for some time to come. So, if that is modernity, what is postmodernity?

## **The characteristics of postmodernity**

*The demise of the big story.* Postmodernity challenges all global, all-encompassing world views and grand theories, whether of a political, social, theoretical or religious nature. The main grand theory (known as a meta-narrative) it challenges is that of the enlightenment itself, with its sub-texts of truth, justice, freedom and beauty. Communism and Christianity are equally seen as “metanarratives” and, therefore, considered as unacceptable as means of viewing or interpreting the world. Postmodernists do not want to establish alternative grand explanations or comprehensive world views as they see these as impossible. Rejecting the grand theory means that it is the local that triumphs rather than anything at a distance. One leading proponent of postmodernity, Jean-François Lyotard, has even defined it in these terms: “simplifying to the extreme,” he writes, “I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives”.

*Fragmentation.* Metanarratives unify stories, hold things together and give us a coherent view of the world. Since postmodernism rejects the big story it breaks the world, and our understanding of it, into a multitude of fragments. In the world of art, the collage becomes the most fitting form. In the world of communication postmodernity will not admit that rational communication has any privileged status. In the social realm, diversity and the extension of choice are welcomed. In the media, it is reflected in the fast moving images of the TV and film and in the rejection of any logical development in drama in favour of storylines that crisscross back and forth and move between image and reality. Even the quest for finding our true selves and making some sense of our own stories in any unified way is abandoned as a futile modernist quest. It is suggested that there is no possible unity to our lives. We are only a story composed of disconnected episodes which make us, not an integrated being, but merely a series of selves constructed as appropriate for the various settings in which we find ourselves.

*Consumption dominates over production* We live in the consumer-dominated world where shopping is no longer a chore and necessity but has become a major leisure pursuit and an arch symbol of our culture. Out of town shopping malls are the new temples. Their architecture apes the sacred buildings of previous generations. This has many ramifications for us. Advertising, the media and the service sector now dominate over manufacturing and our culture is moulded by commercial factors. So a film like *The Lion King* is produced and a whole industry is created around it. On the back of it videos, toys, clothes, books, trips and a whole range of products are sold, all of which children must have to keep up with their peers. Adults, of course, are no better. The best way to sell a classic of English literature is to screen it on the television and then book sales will soar, videos will sell like

hot cakes and everything from calendars to umbrellas can be produced to go alongside it. And they'll sell. In such a society image becomes everything; not meaning. The child may not need a new pair of shoes and the latest fashion may not be appropriate either to his or her feet or needs, but, if the advertisements have indoctrinated the peer group that a particular type of shoe is fashionable, then it is a cardinal sin, leading to intense social ostracism, not to be seen wearing them.

In the postmodern world everything becomes an item for consumption, including those things which previously had been offered for free. Health, meaning, truth and knowledge itself are all measured, packaged and marketed so that they can be consumed and, of course, so that they can make a profit. This has had a profound impact on managerial values. No longer are people able to enter the health or education professions as a vocation. They are governed instead by efficiency, statistics, costs and profits. Such a change has produced a major structural strain in our public sector and many a personal strain which has led to stress, breakdown and early retirements. Religion itself is not free from the dominance of consumerism. "The faith" has become a marketable commodity where consumer needs have determined the nature of our worship, the programmes in our churches and, even, the content of our gospel. How much this is unavoidable, given the wider cultural context, and how much we should seek to resist it is a matter of debate. External forms may be able to change without loss but when internal commitments to faith change and doctrine is not just translated to make it appropriate to the latest form of culture, but radically transformed, then it is another matter.

*We can no longer be confident about knowing anything.* In the modern world "I" was the subject and "I" could observe, test and "know" truth about objects. In the postmodern world the distinction between the subject and the object is dissolved. There is no objective world to observe (as Descartes taught) and there are no fixed points of reference. This leads to a mistrust of science as a sure way of knowing our world. Equally, it leads to a mistrust of history or the social sciences or any discipline which works on the basis of rules of evidence, theories or agreed methods. Theories and much that arises from observation are merely the tool of oppressors - just as grammar is thought to be the way in which a language is governed. In the realm of writing this has led to a radical shift in our understanding of the role of the author. The author's intention is now considered irrelevant. As Umberto Eco says, "The author should die once he has finished writing, so as not to trouble the path of the text". Author intention is replaced by a free-floating text and readers make of it what they will. No meaning exists beyond the words themselves which are signifiers which float free from the person who has spoken or written them and in which the reader can only detect traces, rather than

confident meaning. Leslie Newbiggin has described this as a picnic where authors bring their words and readers bring their meanings. This approach is summed up by the famous postmodern word, "deconstruction". Similarly, in the media no such thing as reality exists. Reality has been dissolved into its representation. Image and reality blend to the point where we are only left with the image. Simulcra, a copy of a copy of which there is no original, is another word beloved by postmodernists.

*The superiority of present over the past is questioned.* Modernism rejected the past, tore down old buildings, questioned traditions and rejected ancient ways. High rise tower blocks demonstrated modernity at its height. Buildings were new, efficiently designed, cost effective, without frills or human softness. Straight, square buildings, piling one storey on another, maximised the use of land. The architecture of a city like Plymouth, rebuilt after the war, is a prime example of modernity. Under modernity, the best is always the latest. But post-modernism sees a renewed relevance for the traditional and can incorporate it without embarrassment. Buildings have become softer, they blend more into their land context. They have shape, light and even waste space in a way that modernity would not have permitted. The atrium symbolises the shift. The shift is by no means confined to architecture. A wide spectrum of factors that modernity set aside - emotions, feelings, intuition, reflection, cosmology, magic, myth, mystical experience - postmodernity brings back to the centre of the stage. A postmodern culture, therefore, gives space to the sacred and the irrational.

*The possibility of rigid boundaries is questioned.* Modernity compartmentalised academic disciplines but postmodernity undermines any rigid disciplinary walls. Interdisciplinary studies are becoming common. Hierarchies of knowledge, that is whether objective knowledge is superior to subjective knowledge, have collapsed into a melting pot. Gender distinctions are questioned and the boundaries between fact and fiction, image and reality, and past and present are no longer significant.

*Mass culture triumphs.* Previous generations have observed a distinction between high culture and popular culture. Postmodern culture has seen the decline of elites and of high culture. Popular culture has triumphed and become an accepted art form. So Pavarotti sings the lead music for the World Cup and people who previously would have been too embarrassed to admit watching *Coronation Street* or *Dallas* now openly confess, without shame, their addiction to TV soap operas. Popular culture, not least because of the media, has levelled us all.

*Loss of hope.* As we have seen, modernism was a confident culture with a belief in progress and it was, therefore, hopeful in ethos. But the modernist hope has collapsed, often into outright despair. Maybe it was inevitable since,



as we have mentioned, it was built not only on a belief in progress and in the confidence that we could sort out our problems, but also on doubt thus ensuring that it pulled the rug out from under itself. With the demise of modernity, there is a rejection of any hope and a consequent rise of anxiety.

### **What can Christians make of it?**

Since postmodernism is only just emerging and we do not know how substantial and enduring a cultural form it will be, it is difficult to be too confident about our approach at this stage. Whether enduring or not, we can say that Christianity has always, and rightly, adapted to the many different cultures in which it has found itself and has done so with a large measure of discretion and discernment. To be sure it has not always got it right. Sometimes it has been too undiscerning and embraced a culture wholesale in a detrimental way. At other times the church, or some streams of it, have been unnecessarily resistant and too great a distance has been built between the faith and the culture. But there is no reason to assume that Christianity will not adapt to postmodernism, nor that it will be unable to communicate its message to this emerging culture. It will just take time to adapt and to learn how. There are surely some things about postmodernism which we should positively welcome.

- We should welcome the deposing of arrogant rationalism which often became an idol to modern men and women.
- We should welcome the rediscovery of the spiritual dimension of humanity and the rejection of using human beings for efficiently defined ends, but in such a way that the human spirit was discounted.
- We can welcome the dethroning of the idea that “modern is best” and, as a historic faith, rejoice that people are prepared to look more to the past for values and answers.
- We can welcome the openness of people to listen to the stories of others, which gives us a first-rate chance to share the story of our faith.

On the negative side, Christianity is a metanarrative and if postmodernity rejects all metanarratives it is difficult to see where Christianity fits. The collapse of truth and objectivity, the merging of image and reality, the worship of pluralism and relativism and the strengths of the gods of consumerism and the failure to understand and speak the language of hope make the task difficult. Philip Sampson has expressed what many feel: “It is difficult to see how the Gospel can faithfully be conveyed within the tunnel vision of postmodernity”. Reason and truth are key concepts in Christianity; but they have little place in modernity. Some are already pointing the way forward. Among them is Graham Cray who has highlighted three themes which should enable us to make a humble, sensible and effective engagement

with postmodernity. They breathe a different spirit from the old certainties of evangelical proclamation which called individuals to decisive change and dramatic conversion. They are the themes of community, journey and spirituality. But, just maybe, they are the key to effective evangelism today. The problems may well lie not in the area of evangelism but with the claims of subsequent discipleship which seems so often to make demands in flat contradiction to the values of postmodernity. But then Christianity has always walked, on the one hand, the difficult road of cultural engagement and, on the other hand, that of being a genuine counterculture. Postmodernity gives us a chance to learn what *that* means all over again.

Derek J Tidball - Principal, London Bible College

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## Building Bridges - Western and Eastern Europe.

### The New Europe?

Almost all of the nation-states of Second World Eastern Europe now share broadly similar goals. To create free market economies similar to those in First World Western Europe, to privatise much of their state industry and to move in the direction of becoming more genuinely liberal democracies, if only in appearance. The pace and conviction levels vary enormously here however. The attractions to First and Second World companies and business people of the New Europe are obvious. The European Union's population is an estimated 325 million. Eastern Europe's 160 million people. Russia's 148 million alone almost equals that. As a commercial market, too, the potential is enormous especially if significant progress is made in the Second World to improve their GDP levels as the C21st approaches. This, of course, is what all the fuss in the papers about European integration is really all about! Mammon again. But what of God and the Church of Jesus Christ? All of these peoples form quite an evangelistic challenge to us all.



#### Integration

The possibilities for a full political integration of Europe in the early C21st are perhaps best demonstrated by the unification of Western and Eastern Germany in the early 1990s. That remains the model that many others wish to emulate. Other Second World countries also hope to become EU members

as soon as is practicable. The Warsaw Pact (the now obsolete Second World mutual defence treaty) has disappeared and there are possibilities at least of Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) by the end of the century. A new organisation, unthinkable before 1990, called the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe has also been formed to try and develop military and political co-operation across Europe. Such early signs of First World and Second World integration, or bridge-building, should not be taken to guarantee the eventual outcome however. There are serious problems and clear signs of disillusionment with the New Europe in both East and West. Here are some examples. The quotes are from 'The New Democracies in Eastern Europe' by Sten Berglund and Jan ake Dellenbrant (Edward Elgar Publishing Limited 1994).

*The new democracies are vulnerable:* 'Almost everywhere, the new democracies seem fragile. Semi-authoritarian regimes masquerade as democracies...Instead of consolidation there is fragmentation ....At the extreme it is possible to argue that democracy is only an outer crust. Necessary institutions are missing...Where they exist they do so without public support or understanding'

*Capitalism is creating poverty as well as wealth:* 'Now that Communism has been discredited, Capitalism especially must be its own sternest critic...When we see it exported to the old Socialist countries of Western Europe it is revealed to be good for some but not obviously for the many'

*Some First World companies experience considerable frustration and leave.* 'Firms seeking to set up in Poland find themselves battling with a lethargic and incompetent bureaucracy, out-dated and obstructive laws and inexperienced or greedy officials. While many struggle on and succeed, others give up or go elsewhere.'

*The showpiece of integration - unification in Germany - has already revealed many problems.* Eastern Germany has been rapidly de-industrialised and is experiencing high levels of unemployment. Differing policies on social issues such as abortion, free nursery education, public transport and subsidies for housing rents have caused considerable friction. Crime, prostitution, racist behaviour and drug-taking levels, as elsewhere in the Second World, have been rising. Western Germany has been experiencing unprecedented recession as a direct consequence of unification. The country is still effectively divided into those who see themselves as *Wessis* and *Ossis*. One young German executive put something of this dramatically: 'If they had to buy some underdeveloped country, why couldn't they have chosen a smaller, cheaper one'.

The key decisions on future integration are due to be taken at the 1995-6 EU Inter-Governmental Conference and its offshoots. This threatens to make Maastricht but a prelude to the real debate! The early signs are that this Conference will turn into a confrontation between those who want a more tightly integrated Europe (eg Germany) and those who want a looser Europe (such as Britain). The former believe that integrating the former Second World countries into the EU will lead to a more stable Europe for the C21st. The latter believe that the economic and social costs for member states are too high. The potential for enlargement is considerable and could conceivably mean a EU of some 26 states. More if the former Yugoslavia reaches equilibrium and - at last - peace. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; Poland, the Czech Republic; Slovakia; Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria as well as Cyprus and Malta are all potential members by the C21st.

### **Baptists in Eastern Europe.**

As for Second World, East European Baptist Christianity in the 1990s this is deeply impressive. It has been my privilege to examine it during a recent time of study leave. With limited resources in material terms and in all the turmoil of economies and democracies struggling to be reborn, spiritual rebirth is also happening all over the Second World. My studies of Baptist life in the Eastern Europe of the 1990s have further confirmed the view that the future of Christianity in the C21st may well lie more in the Second and Third Worlds than in the First. Here are some of the evidences from the early 1990s for this conviction:

Extraordinary church-planting statistics.

Creativity and success in evangelism.

- ⇒ New and revived seminaries.
- ⇒ Missionary zeal.
- ⇒ Renewed churches.
- ⇒ Social and community action projects.
- ⇒ Thousands of conversions and baptisms.
- ⇒ New and young visionary leadership.

These are in evidence right across the Baptist Second World. In my book I share many specific examples of this. Evangelism taking place side by side with all kinds of community and social action programmes from homelessness projects through to the care of the victims of war or of environmental catastrophe. If *praxis* really is the commitment to integrated Christian faith and action, in the light of theological reflection, then there is overwhelming evidence of such *praxis* throughout contemporary Eastern Europe.

### **Towards a Baptist One World Alliance.**

The significant role being played in all of this *praxis*, with very limited

resources, by the European Baptist Federation (EBF) deserves far higher prominence among Baptists in all three Worlds. Since 1949 the EBF has nurtured Christian co-operation among its member Unions, bringing people and resources together for the good of all. This has been achieved in a territory that stretches from Scotland and Spain in the east to the Pacific shores of Russia in the west. From Scandinavia in the north to Italy in the south. And all from small headquarters in Hamburg, Germany and with very limited resources of both staff and finance. By the time of the 1994 Lillehammer Conference the EBF had grown to embrace 47 Unions, 10,000 churches and some 750,000 members. And the EBF is of course just one major constituency of the broader Baptist World Alliance. Other major areas of the BWA are to be found in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean islands, Central America, the Middle East and South America as well as North America. Please God the BWA will increasingly reflect the vision and experience of Third and Second World Baptist leaders as the C21st approaches.

The number of baptised members in the Baptist World Alliance is 41 million people, belonging to some 152,239 churches. When to this figure are added the millions of worshippers and children and young people as well as the wider community contacts then the real figure may well be as many as a hundred million people. As Baptist Christians, we must never forget the inter-connectedness of Christianity across all our world. It is not exaggerating to say that the BWA is perhaps uniquely placed in World Christianity to lobby for express and demonstrate the solidarity between the Three Worlds in the *global village* of the new century and millennium. In Europe Baptists are the most prevalent of all Christian denominations. Globally, we are present in more countries across the world than any other Christian tradition including the Roman Catholic Church. This provides us, of course, with major opportunities to demonstrate the truths both of Ephesians 2 and Matthew 28. Here's to much more bridge-building in the late 1990s, please God!

*This article draws on material prepared by the Editor for the 1996 Regent's Study Guide which - God and the editor willing! - is due to be published later in the year.*

Michael I Bochenski

St Albans

Advent 1995

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# Building Bridges - Families and Gender

## Reminiscences.

The request to write this article left me with a big question mark. Of all the places I have been where my gender was a problem, the family was not really one of



them! Had I any comment to make? Thinking this matter through, I concluded perhaps I had, and I hope you will forgive me for reflecting on where I have come from. I have a letter written by my mother when I was less than two years old, in which she was struggling with my antics and commenting that I should have been a boy! This continued to be a challenge for her, and me. I was forever being told that I should be more lady-like. I always held my brother (ten years older than me) and his friends in high regard; they did such interesting things! My regret was that I lacked a brother nearer my own age with whom I could have a good fight!

Isaiah writes "Remember the rock from which you were hewn". My paternal grandmother was a business woman over a century ago and I had an aunt who also succeeded in business where many men would have failed. The war years turned my mother from a submissive wife into a very capable lady who, despite ill health, managed a very large garden as well as us three children. When my father returned home there was a large adjustment for them both to make, but for me the beginning of a new relationship. I loved arguing with my father, although I rarely won, but he always accepted me as a person of value. Even though he had been an army officer he was no male chauvinist and this was reflected in all his dealings with women. Ability to do a job was more important to him than a person's sex.

God was good in providing for me a husband who had also grown up with an able mother and grandmother. It was his grandfather who commented "An able woman always has her enemies." A look at our own family, now all grown up and independent, also shows that male/female stereo-types do not necessarily work out in practice, and as a parent of two boys and a girl I could give examples, but they wouldn't thank me! So what does this teach us about "Building Bridges - Families and Gender"?

## Lessons.

*Wrong presumptions put up barriers.* It teaches us that our presumptions may not be correct. God has made both male and female in his image. Over the centuries there has been a build up of inaccurate conclusions concerning the characteristics which go with the sexes; presumptions which again and again through history have been proved wrong.

*People are all individuals with many qualities which are not governed by gender. One glimpses God's sense of humour as mankind continually tries (unsuccessfully) to presume that the distinctions between the sexes are clear-cut. They are only clear-cut in respect to reproduction. In almost every other aspect of persons there are many exceptions to what we regard as the norm.*

*In families, in the nuclear family, in society, and particularly in the family of the church and denomination we need to recognise that every individual, male or female brings something special from God. If we are to live in wholeness as communities this must be acknowledged and the full potential and varied gifting of all persons valued and nurtured for the benefit of the whole. As we look at the baby in the pram, maybe we should begin to be more interested in the bundle of potential and surprises than in whether the child is wearing pink or blue booties.*

*We must recognise individuality. As a family there are times when we notice particular genetic characteristics that have been passed down the family. These may have missed a generation, and do not necessarily appear in the same gender. They are always mixed with other characteristics to make an individual who is unique. This can be a great challenge! As Christians we should stand back in wonder and see what God has done. We need to give every individual encouragement and space to be what they are. At the same time we need to nurture them into developing their individuality within the community, starting with the family. This will mean teaching them that other members of the family are individuals too and all need space to develop.*

*Time must be made for listening. Listening is a skill which we all find difficult. We hear what we want to hear; we are constantly hearing wrongly or misinterpreting what we hear. Listening is not just hearing words but understanding body language and learning to stand in one another's shoes, seeing things from their point of view; not presuming we will know what they will want, or what we think would be good for them!*

*Listening in this way takes time. It is a fact that so often we do not give time to really hear what others are saying. This is very clear in the church meeting or other public debate where time is rarely given to tease out what is being said by an individual who speaks, and even less to the unspoken contribution of the silent members. The family is where we should be learning to listen to one another at a depth greater than mere words. We have a society which only has time to take on board the contributions of those who are able to communicate well, and by that we usually mean in words, sentences and ideas that are acceptable to us.*

*A bridge is something that stretches out across a space. We need to reach out to those on the other side as they in turn reach out to us. Those of the opposite gender may or may not have a very different starting point from ourselves.*

Hearing with understanding is an essential tool in building bridges.

*Mutual respect is essential.* Gender does bring different understanding and priorities. I remember a church planting conference where the (masculine) concept of penetration was challenged by the more female concept of bringing to birth and nurture! The situation requires both perceptions.

*Families can easily be dominated by one gender or the other.* The male members of the family need to respect the fact that the girls may not enjoy continually hearing about the different qualities of cars or football teams. The female members need to respect the fact that the boys may not enjoy continually hearing about fashion or the ups and downs of the latest 'soap'. Respect means we will listen and try to understand those things that others find enjoyable. Respecting one another means that we will be ready for surprises, ready to discover that cars or 'soaps' can both contribute to life, widening our horizons; ready to find that in a family the girls may just be more mechanically minded than the boys and that the boys may just be more interested in social interaction and how it is portrayed than the girls. Major concerns regarding wife battering and abuse of all kinds would diminish if there were real respect for every member of every family.

*Partnership should be our ideal.* A bridge is a demonstration of partnership. Think of some of the bridges you pass over as you travel. Two very different geographical or sociological environments holding hands, linked together, with people coming and going. Bridges take time to build, whatever their construction (and with a civil engineer as a husband I know a little about this). A bridge-builder needs to understand the terrain, the building materials, the stresses involved and many other factors if the bridge is to stand the test of time and not result in disaster. The family is the testing ground; the place where the different potentials of the individual are discovered, tested, developed and moulded. It is where experiments at 'construction' are made in a safe environment. There are many variations of design in bridges - and families. Preliminary preparations in bridge building takes many months; difficulties are discovered and overcome.

## **Scripture.**

If our society is to build bridges and use all its members for the benefit of all, the family is where, together, we start. And the gender thing? What does Scripture say? There are a few verses at the end of this article which you can consider. Above all we must remember that God made male and female to work together in his world. Jesus demonstrated this in his life and his attitude to women. Paul recognised it too (though some would try to suggest otherwise) - "all one in Christ". The family is where each of us first encounters other people. It is where the foundations are laid. We must



understand and respond to the God given responsibilities to nurture one another in that environment in accordance with God's will; listening to one another, respecting one another and working together for the good of all and not simply for our own comfort or self satisfaction.

As we approach the end of the century, the gradual recognition and practice of equal opportunities (though I realise that many would question this) means that stereo-type no longer dominates the thinking in many families. As Christians, we should be in the forefront of this movement because of our understanding of how God has created us and what the Scriptures teach. These matters need to be developed. The churches and our Baptist Associations and Union should set an example, because we have a gospel for all people, both male and female, a gospel which proclaims God's love and salvation for every individual.

See:- Gen.1:27; Lk.2:48-52; Jn.19:25-27; Rom.12:3-6;  
1 Cor.7:3-4 (who rules?!) Gal.3:28; Eph.5:21; Phil.2:1-11.

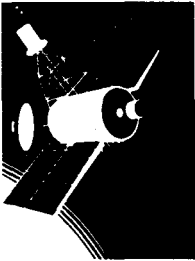
Main text by Frances Godden

Fine tuning by Harry Godden

East Midlands Baptist Association.

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## BEYOND PROBATION



There are two hobbies that I thoroughly enjoy. One is Star Trek (yes, this Baptist minister is a fully fledged "Trekkie"), the other, computers. The first means that I am virtually unavailable on Wednesdays and Thursdays



between 6.00 and 6.45 pm (BBC 2 has the better of me). The second means that I am updating data, sending or receiving

e-mail, producing church publicity, "surfing the net", exploring different types of software, and, occasionally, trying one or two computer games. But lest I become too absorbed at my computer desk I have a "screen saver" message that faithfully and colourfully ambles across my monitor screen after every 5 minutes of computer inactivity. This message is a constant reminder that there are more important things than the USS Enterprise or CD-Roms. Simply put, the message reads: *Building a biblically functioning community is honouring to God.*

I am now just under five years on from my ordination to the Baptist ministry and one year on from the completion of my probation. I had to do four years' probation as I trained at London Bible College rather than a Baptist college. As I reflect upon these years there are many causes for wonder and excitement as well as several points and issues that I have on my mind. It staggers me that God would chose to call me to the task of preaching and leading. Paul is able to begin several of his letters with the confident statement: "called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God". While I have no doubt of my calling, I remain aware of my weakness for the task. Yet it is something truly incredible to share in leading worship and preaching God's Word before God and His people. There is still much to learn and experience but I cannot but wonder at the glory of being the gathered community of God - the dynamic of being church. To share in leading the people of God is truly awesome. I guess it is true when it is said that the most dangerous word in any human language is "church" for this word describes the unique, wonderful, and dynamic intersection between God and His people. Yes, that God would chose me is staggering.

This leads me to raise some of the issues and questions. More than anything I am convinced that at the heart of ministry lies the discipline of hermeneutics. Ministry is essentially hermeneutics, because the task for us must be to interpret Christianity faithfully and accurately to today's cultures and into today's hurts. I suspect that the interpretative key for this task is Christ-like love that is inspired by the Spirit of God and reflected in Christian community. But how to inspire church members to this end and how to begin to model this in my own life are the questions that loom large on my horizon. My experience is that, while many in our churches are engaged in demanding jobs at home or in the workplace, there are few who are equipped to work through this issue. Nevertheless I am convinced that the church must be the place where believers experience true community and are encouraged and taught how to live this out in the world. To this end I am discovering that Paul's view of community was much more one of experience of the Spirit in a dynamic and captivating way. I therefore wonder whether the so-called "Toronto Blessing" should at least cause us to consider the place of the Spirit in this task of hermeneutics. For further thoughts along these lines read "Gospel and Spirit" and "God's Empowering Presence", both by G.D. Fee.

Another issue that I have come across in the last five years has arisen through the influence of several of the church members at North Bushey who are in influential management positions in their employment. It has been instructional for me to debate with them the differences between leadership and management. Unfortunately, my training did not really deal with issues of vision, managing change, establishing strategy, and developing review

structures. Yet, in industry these themes are all part of management. What I have found is the need to utilise such ideas in the church. Naturally, I hope I am aware that the church is a different type of "organisation" (I prefer the word "organism") from a business, but I am not convinced that the distinction between the practise of management in business and the practice of leadership in the church is as great as we make it. Let me quote from an article in the Telegraph where the new head teacher of a local comprehensive, with a career in business management, defines management: "Management skills are about people; encouraging them to give of their best." To me this seems part of what leadership is. And to refute the belief that management is about product while leadership is about people he goes on to say, "If you let organisation or funding take over, you have a problem."

In conversation with church members I believe that management in business (*if conducted well*) has much to offer the church in providing approaches to Christian leadership. At North Bushey we have therefore developed a mission statement that we believe keeps us focused in the direction God would have us go. It reads: "to enable non-committed people to become life-long worshipping disciples of Jesus Christ." This statement is not intended to ride rough-shod over people but to encourage them to take who they are and the gifts God has given them and so serve Christ in building His Kingdom. Several weeks ago we managed to buy a pool table for a very reasonable price. On the third Wednesday of every month we are running a pool evening at the church building - we are the only place in North Bushey with a pool table (even the pub over the road doesn't have one!). On Friday evenings a group of us from the church play badminton. In January some non-Christian friends and some members of the church are going on a go-karting evening. What we are discovering is that to reach people who are beyond the fringe of the church is extremely hard.

In a small church this becomes a real "catch 22". We want to be off the Home Mission grant by the end of the millennium, but to do this requires tangible numerical growth in the church. Yet without the resources to sustain quality initiatives this becomes ever harder. The reality is that "ministry" is going to have to change. Personally it is too easy to view the evangelistic efforts of the church as a way of sustaining my own income. Perhaps we need to view "ministers" as missionaries who are there to equip church members to be missionaries in their weekly routines. But if this is so then "ministers" also need to be missionaries who will build genuine friendships with non-Christians. Furthermore, church members need to be encouraged to see all aspects of their lives as testimonies to Christ. For those in the work-place this must become the imperative. But then I ask myself how well equipped I am to preach and teach a model of witness that is appropriate for the work-place. I know what pressure is and I understand something about team building and

hard work, but my ministry doesn't require me to put my ethics on the line or risk my job over a principle. Once again hermeneutics as the key to ministry resurfaces.

*Building a biblically functioning community is honouring to God.* Indeed. And even though the words in the previous paragraphs are "easier said than done" and the task facing the church in the west is daunting, nevertheless, the prospect of serving the church into the next millennium fills me with excitement and wonder.

**Revd. Callum Jones** North Bushey Baptist Church, Herts.

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## **Launch of a Word and Spirit Network in the Central Area.**

A new Word and Spirit network grouping was launched in Hertfordshire recently. The initiative was taken by Andy Cowley, Senior Pastor of Bushey Baptist Church, Herts. The pattern for the day followed that adopted elsewhere, not least in the pioneer Northern Leaders' Meeting. Coffee and biscuits were served as people arrived. Worship led by Andy and by a small music group started the day off with a focus on Jesus. Derek Tidball kindly broke his first term's rule at LBC and agreed to be the speaker for this occasion. As always this guaranteed a thoroughly worthwhile morning as Derek drew on the familiar texts of Johns' gospel to comment on some of the claims of post-modernism. The themes he developed were those of mystery, spirituality, discovery, metaphor, incarnation, eternal life, Spirit and disjointedness. After discussion and questions, he then went on to explore the themes of dependence, truth, knowledge, universalism, evil, hope and relativism. He was thanked warmly for the gifts both of his time and of his teaching.

After a splendid lunch catered for by church members, we worshipped again. Then the afternoon explored further the challenges of outreach in and to late 1990s cultures. This was followed by one of those times of prayer and sharing which have made the Word and Spirit days so helpful all over the country. Some often deep needs and problems were shared in ways not always possible at more traditional 'fraternals'. After the statutory parting cup of tea we left glad to have been part of a worthwhile day out with the Lord just before Advent began. Further such days are being planned for 1996.

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## News from the Executive.

The urgent need for the right person to be appointed by our Union as Evangelism Adviser was noted by the Executive.

The 1996 Conference bookings have vindicated the decision to return to Swanwick this time. Baptist Leader and Seccheck publicity helped us in this ... for which we were very grateful. The 1997 Conference is already being planned. Watch this space.

The Council of Reference is growing apace. We are looking forward to the inaugural meeting at 11am in Swanwick immediately prior to the 1996 Conference. Agenda topics for this include: Where are we now? Where are we heading? Regionalisation and What is going down for Baptists? *Baptismal candidates in water I hope!*

The Human Sexuality Consultation has again had to be deferred. It is important that we get this right! It will now be held at Regent's Park College, Oxford 17-18 Sept 1996 with, we hope, David Cook and Margaret Gill as the principal speakers.

The Regional Word and Spirit networks are developing, though there remain several weak spots. The Northern group goes from strength to strength. The South Central group had a well supported day event in October. In part of the Central Area a network has just been launched - see separate article. Rob Warner is exploring the possibilities of some kind of Metropolitan network. Ian Coffey remains very open to such a development in the South West but needs vision from the rest of us. *Not surprising really!*

Leading Edge. 3rd to 10th August 1996. Bridges are being built with Ron Overton and his team after our disappointment that Mainstream were not incorporated in the initial vision for this week. The target attendance for the event is 2000 people. Mainstream Executive member Rob White has accepted an invitation to join the Executive of Leading Edge which should further consolidate the bridge-building needed for the future.

Rob Warner and Glen Marshall represented Mainstream at a recent European Charismatic Baptist consultation. One of the issues on the agenda was the possibility of a European Mainstream Conference in the late 1990s.

**Michael I Bochenski, Editor**

The Mainstream Executive as at December 1995 are:

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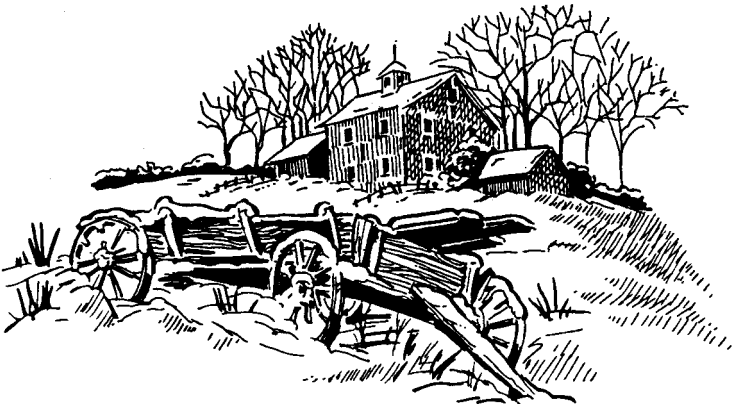
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| Jane Thorington-Hassell | - | Bow, London.                   |
| David Slater            | - | Kingsbridge, Devon.            |
| Roger Sutton            | - | Altrincham, Cheshire.          |
| John Weaver             | - | Regent's Park College, Oxford. |
| Rob White               | - | Poynton, Cheshire.             |
| Nigel Wright            | - | Altrincham, Cheshire.          |



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