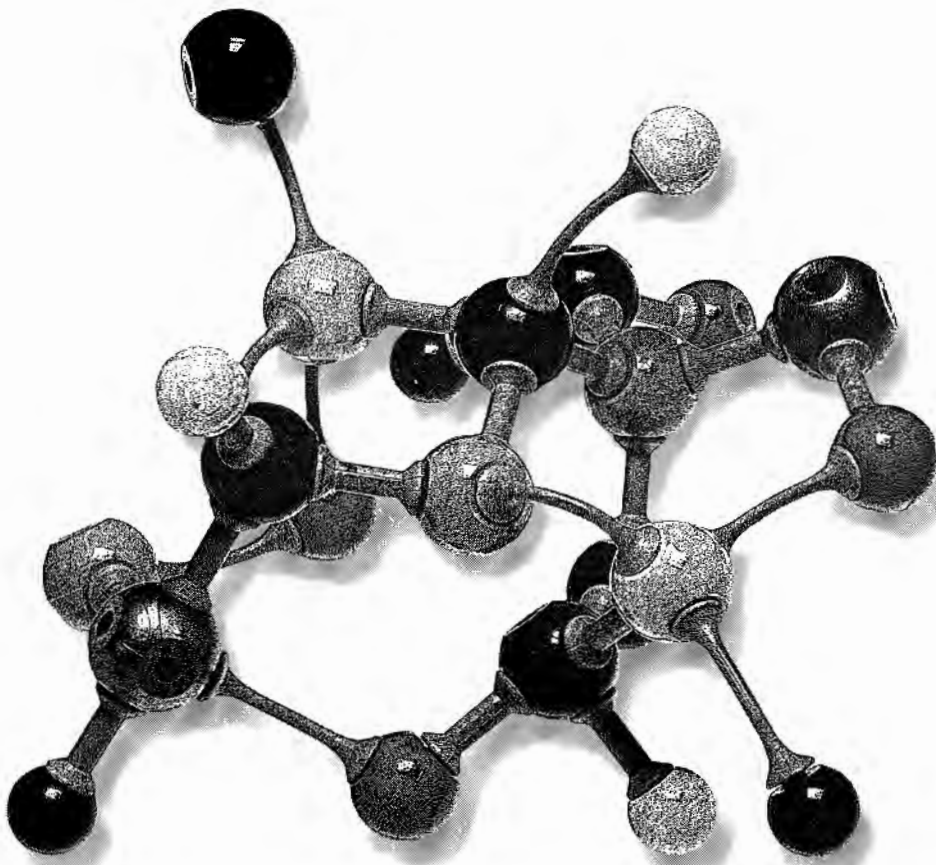


# TALK

*The Mainstream Magazine*

Autumn 2004



## **'Leadership for a change'**

Patrick Dixon  
John Drane  
Chris Erskine  
Derek Hills  
Roger Sutton  
Stuart Green  
Stephen Rand  
Nigel Wright  
Rob White  
and more...

*Connecting leaders*

**Mainstream  
is committed to:**  
Get passionate about knowing God.  
Get real in relationships.  
Get stuck into God's mission.

# The Leading Question

I'm attempting a tricky manoeuvre in this edition of *Talk!* It's our pre-conference edition, a must-read to prepare for our Swanwick gathering in January. And there's plenty here to wet your appetite. A strong and thought-provoking interview with Christian futurologist, Patrick Dixon. And our main speaker, John Drane sets up some searching questions. There's also a perspective from someone living with church leaders – surely something we want to take much more seriously as a Mainstream network. We're not just to be interested in 'The Professionals' – ours is a relational network within which we want to support all leadership, those that lead and those that support leaders. And I've tried to set up a sense that when we talk of church leadership we should not primarily think of leadership in churches – a fundamentally parochial mindset – but the church taking a lead in community and society generally. There are stories and provocations that open up this wider vista and question the magnetic drag of the internal agenda of church life. Not least, pay serious attention to Stephen Rand's plea that we maximise the opportunity presented by the G8 summit in Birmingham in 2005, and the UK's presidency of the EU.



But along with this I'm trying to weave in a second strand which keeps alive the question of the future of the people of God we explored in the last edition, and more specifically the future of our life as a denomination. So we carry some comments provoked by our contributors last time. Since the last edition there's been a major conference on 'The Future of the People of God', with Tom Wright – the new Bishop of Durham – providing the main input. Chris Erskine, who led the team that organised the conference, provides a sharp critique of how organisations - churches and denominational structures included - tend to become the platform for the performance of certain interests, which easily dull us to our primary need for continual and on-going reform to meet the challenges of our time. His article, which introduced me and I suspect many readers, to a new conceptual world, is well worth study, reflection and then application to local church and denominational life, and to Mainstream. His insight concerning vested interests is I think particularly telling. What binds the two strands together is the question of leadership.

So the leading question is always before us and it is: what kind of leadership does God need for God's mission in the world? The answering of that question is all important, ever present and if the contributions of this edition are correct, always to be answered anew in every generation. What kind of leadership is the church called to offer in humility to humanity?

**Stephen Ibbotson** is the Editor of *Talk*.

He is also a member of the pastoral staff of Altrincham Baptist Church, Altrincham, Cheshire.

## Contents

### main features

interview - future leadership <i>Patrick Dixon</i>	4
who wants a leader? <i>John Drane</i>	7
God's future and human interests <i>Chris Erskin</i>	18

### features

notes from a train-spotter <i>Roger Sutton</i>	9
living with leadership - walking the tightrope <i>Stuart Green</i>	11
leadership: change the world and transform the church <i>Stephen Rand</i>	12

### response

talkback <i>Andy Caldwell, Dianne Tidball Derek Allen, Stephen Ibbotson</i>	14
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### regular columns

the X files Tom Wright: only human <i>Simon Hall</i>	10
baptist speak on shepherds and fishermen <i>Derek Hills</i>	13
newsdesk <i>Craig Millward</i>	16
the whitewash independence? indefensible <i>Rob White</i>	20
surfer's guide leadership - doing better things <i>Simon Jones</i>	21
network news <i>Peter Nodding</i>	22
off the shelf <i>Daniel Pritchard</i>	25
the wright stuff looking for a right wing <i>Nigel G Wright</i>	27

**TALK The Mainstream Magazine** Volume 4 Issue 2

**Editor:** Stephen Ibbotson **Production Editor Layout and Design:** Moorley's **Editorial Assistant:** Jean Morgan **News:** Craig Millward **Network News:** Peter Nodding **Reviews:** Daniel Pritchard **Front Cover:** Wingfinger Graphics, Leeds **Printed and despatched** by Moorley's Print & Publishing Ltd, Ilkeston, Derbys.



# Future leadership

## Patrick Dixon

**Dr Patrick Dixon** lectures to multi-nationals on global trends and is ranked as one of the fifty most influential business thinkers alive today. He is known in the Christian community as the founder of the AIDS agency ACET. He is author of twelve books, including *Signs of Revival* and *Futurewise*, and has led a church-planting team in west London.

*You have become a major voice in the analysis of possible futures we face in society. For readers unfamiliar with your basic analysis, can you briefly describe what you see as the shape of the future?*

Let's take the letters in the word 'future':

**Fast:** The world is changing faster than organisations can think, so survival means scenario planning as far as possible before events happen. It also means people appreciate things which are unchanging, and spirituality is an important part of that. Churches need to adapt, yet be confident about the value of tradition at the same time.

**Urban:** Big demographic and social lifestyle shifts will impact us all in this new decade, century and millennium: including the huge untapped challenge of mega-cities in emerging economies. This is a major challenge to the Church, whose mission has often been to the poorest rural areas rather than urban slums. The growing contrasts between wealthy and poor are the greatest moral challenge facing our world today.

**Tribal:** The most powerful human force on earth, when a group of people identify only with each other, and is the root of all wars, as well as terrorist movements. Yet tribalism is also a huge positive force: the basis of every family and neighbourhood. It's one reason why Alpha is so successful and why home groups are so important.

**Universal:** The opposite of Tribal globalisation, the emergence of a

global lifestyle, global brands. We see a desire to be part of the wider universal Church amongst local congregations: just look at the 250,000 who attend national Bible weeks each year in the UK, or the 13,000 young people who came to London for Soul in the City.

**Radical:** With the death of left/right politics and weakening of 'big' government, our society is

the ship to random forces. We need confident, consistent leadership at every level. The number one issue today is trust, and trust has to be earned over time, yet can be rapidly lost. The strongest leaders in history have always pointed to a better world, and that continues to be the rallying cry of every politician, every advertiser, every business leader. Better for all, not just a few. This is the moral ground on which

**Number one issue today is trust, and trust has to be earned over time, yet can be rapidly lost**

increasingly vulnerable to single-issue activist groups who are gaining publicity and power. This is good news for Christian groups who are passionate about single issues, and need to be well focused and energetic in campaigning for change, in ways that draw support from the wider community.

**Ethical:** What kind of world do you want to live in anyway? And what about your children or grandchildren? Whenever I talk to CEOs about the future, they end up talking about the personal concerns they have, their values, priorities, ethics, motivation and spirituality. Our world is hungry for values, and searching for purpose. That's why over a million people in the UK have been through Alpha.

*What's the knock-on effect of such analysis on leadership in society generally?*

Our world is too dangerous and chaotic to abandon the helm of

every issue is being decided today. Leadership is fundamental to our future. The Bible tells us that 'without vision the people perish', and also shows us time and again, that without quality leadership we rapidly lose our way. There is nothing wrong with high-profile leadership. The Bible is full of leaders who were celebrities in their own time: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Apollos, Paul or Jesus. And we see enduring moral leadership today in high-profile people like Nelson Mandela by virtue of who they are, rather than the title or office they hold.

*In what ways does leadership operate effectively in a post-institutional society, where 'personal choice' seems to be the major mantra?*

Well, the reality is that despite all the noise about personal choice and rejection of leadership, most people remain conformists from cradle to grave. It is built into us

as a social instinct. Just look how children copy parents. We spend our lives following fashions and fads, in the way we dress, how we decorate our homes, the language we use, the stories we tell and a few individuals have a

*Church tradition was shaped by democratic patterns of governance in the last 200 years. Now the model is management- and personality-based. What dangers lurk here?*

## **In this country we suffer from an affliction of cynicism, which is destructive and provides no answers**

large influence on these things because they are tribal leaders. David Beckham is a good example. We urgently need more Mandela-type leaders on the world stage to challenge humanity, and 'celebrity' leaders who model an example worth following. We are commanded to pray for those in authority: we should pray for all those in the media spotlight, including those in government, especially our Prime Minister and those around him, including his family.

*In what respect do such general trends in society impact how we understand or should understand leadership in the Church?*

We should pray also for national figureheads who are able to represent the wider Christian community. The Archbishop of Canterbury has a key role here. At present, he has a Jeremiah-like platform: whatever he says publicly or privately, whether expressed simply or in a complex way, is debated across our entire nation and far beyond. Our world is hungry for authentic leadership, with integrity, passion and moral conviction as well as humility. And that is also true in our churches, where disappointment can sometimes lead to cynicism. But we must ensure we are not swept up in this dangerous pastime of armchair criticism. National leadership is often lonely, tough, painful, costly and can be hazardous to reputation, as well as destructive of personal relationships.

*The Church always seems to adopt the dominant pattern of collective governance. Free*

We need all these things: inspired, passionate, visionary leadership which is sensitive to the congregation, and accountable to others, open to reason, yet confident, courageous and encouraging, releasing and equipping of others, holding its own position lightly, delighting in giving responsibility away to others in the team.

*High value is placed in the Old Testament on true leadership having regard for the 'widow, orphan and alien'. Should this ancient voice shape Christian leadership?*

Self-serving leadership quickly fails. The only leadership that stands the test of time is sacrificial, servant leadership that cares about the community as a whole, particularly its most vulnerable members.

*So what is distinctive about Christian spiritual leadership, and are there limits to what we learn from good secular leadership?*

Actually it is the other way round. Most management courses today are built on Christian principles, of

## **Our world is hungry for authentic leadership with integrity, passion and moral conviction as well as humility**

which the most basic is treating others as you would like to be treated. You can go on a hundred leadership or management courses, but it will not make you a great leader. Leadership is something that comes from within, and is defined by those who follow. People have to believe that you know where you

are going, be convinced that you know how to get there and want to get there too. In a church context, people are looking not for project leadership, but for spiritual leadership. That means people need to be convinced about the spirituality of the church leader as well as their compassion and organisational ability.

*There is part of our tradition perhaps going back to Samuel's reaction to Israel's desire for a king that is highly suspicious of leadership. Such suspicion can freeze the function of leadership. How do we both release and keep leadership in its place?*

Leadership, along with government, are institutions created by God, and the desire to be led is also God-given, written deep into our own genetic code. In this country, we suffer from an affliction of cynicism, which is destructive and provides no answers. But despite this British tendency, people here still follow leaders whether children following the lead of a dominant child in the play-ground, or a confident boss at work, or the clear voice of reason and quiet authority in a confused committee meeting.

*Our theme is 'Leadership for a change'. Can Christian leadership make a difference? If so, point us to some examples.*

Connect with all the passions of the human heart and people will follow to the ends of the earth.

That is the lesson of history: it's what Jesus did and what we are called to do. I can think of hundreds of examples where ordinary men and women have been gripped by a cause, with a strong sense of God's calling, and have been faithful to it. As they have done so, their faith and enthusiasm have infected others

with similar passion and whole movements have started. I have seen this personally many times in the work of ACET International Alliance to save lives and care for those affected by AIDS.

*Our strap-line, 'Embracing unchanging values in changing times', reminds us that our core purpose is making disciples. From your vantage-point, how can Christian leadership help that process?*

enabling them to fulfil God's call in their own lives, and see others find faith for themselves.

*Finally, Patrick, what resources do you offer and what other voices do you think Christian leaders should be noting at the moment with regard to future, change and leadership?*

I think we have a lot to learn from people like Nelson Mandela and Kofi Anan. Within the Christian community, excellent work is

for free by 5 million different visitors so far. The [www.acet-international.org](http://www.acet-international.org) site also has a huge amount of information about AIDS and how Christians can respond to the unfolding crisis. The disaster we have seen in eastern and southern Africa is now being repeated in places like Nigeria, India and Russia (fastest rate of HIV increase in the world). With 85 million infections worldwide, we are still only at the beginning of one of the worst health threats ever known. The good news is that Christians are at the forefront of prevention and care in many of the poorest nations, and we have been able to reverse the tide in places like Uganda.

**Connect with all the passions of the human heart and people will follow to the ends of the earth**

Spurgeon once said the best sermons were those preached with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in another. Our message only has meaning when timeless truths are applied in radical, relevant, practical ways to people's changing circumstances,

being done by the Tomorrow Project (Michael Moy-nagh) and others like Tom Sine.

Resources? My own website; [www.globalchange.com](http://www.globalchange.com) has 30,000 pages, fifty videos and the entire text of six books enjoyed

*Patrick, thanks for your answers and your own inspirational leadership.*

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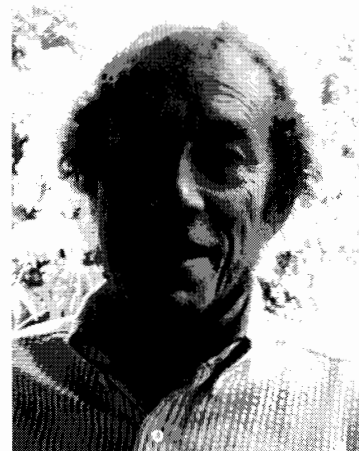
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# Who wants a leader?

John Drane



**W**e are ambivalent about leaders today. On the one hand, we admire 'experts' who are well informed, knowledgeable, and know what they are doing. On the other, we constantly doubt their judgment – whether in politics (think of all the arguments over the war in Iraq), or healthcare (large numbers of people disbelieve what doctors tell them about childhood vaccinations), and increasingly, it seems, in the church. All the talk about leadership styles conceals a much bigger question: do we really want leaders at all today? Perhaps it is a reaction against the class system which elevated our predecessors in ministry 'six feet above contradiction' and was all too eager to view their ability to speak in convoluted ways as a sign of superior intelligence.

## leadership is no longer the preserve of those who are supposed to be somebody

Whatever the explanation, today's leaders cannot expect to be taken for granted, not least because the growth of the worldwide web has made everyone into an expert, knowing that any opinion posted on a website is going to be read – and appreciated – by thousands, if not millions of others. Knowledge has been democratised, and leadership is no longer the preserve of those who are supposed to be somebody. Tomorrow's big idea is as likely to come from a schoolgirl on a deprived housing estate as from the chattering classes. Christian leadership is no different.

### Leaders and followers

No one is a leader just because a job description says they are. You only become a leader when other people follow you. Denial of that simple fact causes more strife than almost anything else in church life, as those who are leaders 'by appointment' find that people follow other – often more 'marginal' – individuals. The clash of personalities and cultures that usually follows is not a pretty sight, and all too often leads to people who could make a significant contribution to church life being marginalised, and then leaving. Re-reading Alan Jamieson's book, *A Churchless Faith*, I was again struck by the depressing regularity with which that scenario crops up as the fundamental reason for so many committed people giving up on the church.

It also affects leaders themselves, who become so oppressed by structures and systems that they have no time to reflect on how they are doing, or why they do what they do, and find themselves questioning not only their calling but also their faith. Even those who are aware of all this rarely find models that will help them to move on, because there is an inbuilt conservatism in most churches that confuses certainty about God with intransigence about cultural change. Our main calling, however, is to contextualise the gospel in whatever cultural circumstance we find ourselves, taking the social matrix as a given and asking, 'What

does it mean to follow Jesus in this situation?' There will be different answers to that in different countries, quite possibly in different parts of the same country – and all that challenges traditional understandings inherited from a time when church leaders looked like peas in a pod, even down to the clothes they wore.

Eddie Gibbs in *Church Next* suggests that today's ministers need to move from thinking of themselves as 'celebrities' to being 'saints', and while I agree with just about everything he says, I would prefer to echo Bonhoeffer, who somewhere exhorted that 'We should give up the foolish task of trying to be saints, and get on with the more important task of trying to be human ...' We need to encourage one another by creating safe spaces where we can reconnect with our humanity. I struggle to understand why we're so obsessed with formally structured meetings where we kid each other that we know what we're talking about, when actually we're just needing some space to be ourselves.

What are some key characteristics of church leaders who will make a difference in tomorrow's world? I say 'tomorrow's world'

## We should get on with the more important task of trying to be human

intentionally, because effective leaders don't just react to today, but help shape the future. The following things are somewhat random, but I expect all of them to surface at the conference.

John is known for his many books including *The McDonaldization of the Church*. He has many years experience in teaching and training ministers and Christian leaders. He is married to Olive with whom he shares a far-reaching ministry. He is our main speaker at this year's conference.

### **The vision**

Leaders without vision are a sad sight indeed. Many different visions clamour for our attention, some of them promoted by good people who have discovered what works for them and assume it will automatically work for others. In a consumerist society, Christian leaders readily accept the notion that there is a quick-fix for everything, and if you can find the right prog-

children'. He prioritised people, their hopes and fears as children of God – and the rest is history.

### **Taking risks**

The most effective leaders have always been risk-takers – people who not only think outside the box but are prepared to step outside it as well. I recently resigned from teaching practical theology at the University of

and men in ministry. There is a desperate need for relational leaders (I would argue this is what Jesus was), and those who cannot form wholesome relationships within the church will make little difference in the wider world. Most churches will 'tick the boxes' affirming the importance of such partnerships, but react differently when it looks as if they might need to do something about it.

## **The most effective leaders are prepared not just to think outside the box but to step outside it as well**

ramme, or course, or structure, all will be well: your church will grow, and you will join that merry band of 'experts' who spend their lives speaking at inspirational conferences. All too often, churches invest much nervous energy, not to mention person hours and large sums of money, in pursuit of the latest trendy idea – only to discover that none of it has made much significant difference at all. Evangelical Christians seem more prone than others to adopting this market-driven consumerist mind-set. The authentic Christian vision is not focused on programmes, but on God, as we discern what God is doing in the world, and then get alongside that in ways that will open up new spaces in which God can work.

### **Respecting people**

It's on the first page of the Bible people are 'made in God's image' (Genesis 1:27-28) and has profound implications for leadership. It means that in one way or another I can expect to encounter God in my meetings with other people. And it means that I am called to value people as expressions of God. When Martin Luther King wanted to challenge racial prejudice, he didn't speak in abstractions about social justice: he told the story of Rosa Parkes, an old woman denied a seat on the bus. In his greatest speech of all, he spoke not of racial prejudice, but his aspirations for his own 'little

Aberdeen, in the first place to write a book, then to move into whatever ministry opens up. Some people think it's crazy to leave a well-paid job with such a vague notion of what comes next, while I tell myself that no one ever achieved anything without taking risks. Of course, the flip side of the coin of risk-taking is vulnerability, and this is probably one of the key differences between managers and leaders. Churches tend to prefer managers over leaders, but this is not the time for churches to be managed by 'safe' people who will just keep the machinery ticking. The machinery is largely obsolete anyway, and the only way to redesign it will be through informed experimentation – calculated risk-taking by those who are not afraid to make their actions match their words.

### **Forming partnerships**

We need not be alone. In his ground-breaking book, *The Isaiah Vision*, Baptist evangelist Raymond Fung proposed a model of evangelism based on partnerships between people who could affirm a biblical agenda even if they were not Christians. Leaders who have worked with that model can tell countless stories of how the most unlikely partnerships have brought people to faith in Christ and promoted biblical values. But other partnerships are just as vital for tomorrow's leaders, especially that between women

In looking to our own future, my wife Olive and I included in our aspirations the possibility of working together – something that we already do most of the time anyway, and which people all around the world tell us is modelling something they would like to do but don't know how. While some churches would clearly welcome me as their senior pastor and Olive in some kind of auxiliary role, few would be willing to give us equal status (despite the fact that Olive has a Master's degree in ministry and mission, which in our qualifications-mad society means that on paper she is better equipped than I am!). This issue will not go away: relational leaders connect with others in life-giving ways and do not form opinions on the basis of another person's gender, race, or whatever.

### **Understanding ourselves**

If you've got this far, you will already have started to reflect on yourself: who you are, who you would like to be. I have deliberately highlighted some provocative issues, and I expect you'll either love or hate what I've said – or a mixture of the two. I have no problem with all those reactions, because one of the other things leaders need to learn is to listen to other people as well as to themselves. If we can do that, we're well on the way to being omega leaders like Jesus. And if you want to know more about the omega style, you'll need to be at the conference!



# Notes from a train-spotter

Roger Sutton

It's official: I am a train-spotting anorak. I sit in my canvas chair with my little notebook and thermos flask, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the 12.05 from Manchester. I am the chairperson of the Friends of Altrincham Railway Interchange. My children have disowned me, my wife is sympathetic but worried. My church just laugh. Most male midlife crises involve motorbikes and face-lifts – so why trains? I blame this whole sorry episode on the Almighty Stationmaster in the sky. I was set up. Just quietly minding my own mission business, trying to integrate the gospel into the community, and suddenly I am voted into train-spotting obscurity.

## I blame this whole sorry episode on the Almighty Stationmaster in the sky

It all began a few years ago, with this deep unease about the gap between church and culture. The seeker movement helped to make church culture a bit more acceptable, but it was still 'them', on our territory, listening to our agendas, at our times. Surely there had to be more, a further step to take beyond making internal changes? We had to place ourselves in culture amongst people.

The journey began well with some sexy ministry stuff, involving TV programmes and night clubs and trips to Africa with Trafford's mayor, but recently it's all gone a bit pear-shaped. The trouble is that when you start to respond to the felt needs of your community, you can't always pick and choose. So when we contacted the local authority and asked if we could do anything kind for them, they said, 'Yes please', and sent us off litter-picking, planting meadows and helping to restore a local pond. When we asked local

## I find myself banging heads together in the wonderful, idiotic world of rail privatisation

people, 'What's the worst grot-spot of the area?', they all said, 'The train station!' So here I am, playing my part as a local community leader, arranging for pillars on platforms to be painted, ticket areas cleaned, roofs refurbished and heads to be banged together in the wonderful, idiotic world of rail privatisation.

These are my faltering steps as a spiritual leader in our local community. This is different from the traditional clergy roles of chaplain or the ceremonial institutional support of the state church; it involves a more activist, perhaps even political role, where the needs of the local community can be addressed and in prayer responded to with kindness.

Through these modest explorations I have already learnt so much. I've come to realise that there is an open door for church leaders to begin to play their part as community leaders. All the council officials and local community groups I have met so far

## There is an open door for church leaders to begin to play their part as community leaders

have been welcoming, thankful and supportive. Most community minded people are good-hearted and compassionate, sharing much of the same vision to see a local community much more unified, integrated and peaceful. Partnerships with local area services produce far fewer conflicts of theology and ethics than I had imagined they would. Once any images of rabid Bible-bashers have been negated by simply being normal, professional and caring, there is in my experience a respect of faith groups.

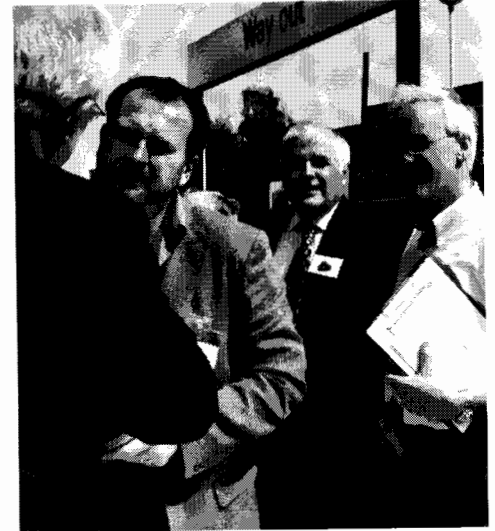
Leading a church into the community and helping lead that local community is a deeply spiritual activity. When the Church enters society, it finds

Christ already there, waiting eagerly to show us around. We spent a week engaging in acts of kindness at the railway station not preaching but serving, and a lot of people surprisingly just wanted to talk about God. The process of incarnational action within the community is about death as much as it is about life: death to our own agendas and habits of ministry. It is to serve and to love, listening to their agendas, their needs and their priorities while at the same time listening to Christ. From this dying to self, a resurrection of the reputation of the Church in the local community occurs. These simple acts of kindness have produced a harvest of goodwill and respect for the name of Christ. As one woman at the railway station put it, 'It's good to see the church out and about.'

I believe it is time for new Luther Kings to arise and take their God-inspired roles in society. Some of you will end up pioneering sexy ministry and others, like myself, will be a little embarrassed when your photo ends up in *Train Times Monthly*. It's time to get out and about, doing good, loving people, restoring the environment, working for justice. It's time to take up our God-given roles in society as leaders for social change and kingdom activity.

## When the Church enters society, it finds Christ already there, waiting eagerly to show us around

Must go. The 11.45 from Chester is about to arrive!



Roger at Altrincham Station

Roger is Senior Pastor of Altrincham Baptist Church, where he also holds the mission brief. He chairs Reaching the Unchurched Network (RUN) and has been instrumental in developing links between Trafford Borough Council and Jinja Council in Uganda. He will lead a seminar on Spiritual Leadership in the Community at conference. Anoraks required dress code!



# Tom Wright: Only human

Simon Hall

Simon is pastor of revive, a young-generation church within the extensive youth culture of Leeds. He is also tutor on the Oasis youth ministry course based in Leeds, and has become known as a writer and thinker about church, mission and youth culture.

**T**he *Future of the People of God* conference reviewed on page 18 of this edition was another of those moments in which you are reminded of your own need of a saviour. Tom Wright: the saviour of orthodoxy! Well, as might be expected, Tom's salvation turned out to be insufficient for a crowd of young/young-at-heart Christians who had come to see how Tom himself did what many of us have been doing for a while: extrapolating an ecclesiological trajectory from his Christo-centric writing.

It didn't happen as we expected it to. In fact, it didn't happen at all. Tom opened his key third session with the words, 'I'm not going to try to give you an exposition of the New Testament doctrine of the church... we could come to the same passages and we might draw different conclusions here and there...' words which implied to me that, in Tom's mind, ecclesiology is the study of certain texts in the New Testament concerned with church, church structures, church leadership, etc.

OK, maybe that's what it had been until the post-war period, when people started deliberately planting churches around the world that took as much notice of sociology and anthropology as they did of the 'key' texts. In the 1970s, when Charles Kraft's *Christianity in Culture* proposed his theory that churches should be the dynamic equivalent of the first-century church in their own cultural context, rather than a copy of the first-century church, or of the 'mother' church, he was building on strong missiological foundations. Yet such thinking seemed alien to Wright as, after declining to speak to the first-century church, he mounted a spirited defence of the church as

is.

This might not be too much of a surprise from an Anglican bishop, but the material is there in Wright's work: the now-and-not-yet kingdom breaking in; the new Israel; a reappraisal of soteriology... all these are impacting the way I see church. In one of his talks, Wright proposed that as kingdom people we should live in ways that display what the fulfilled kingdom will look like. When I commented that the new city in Revelation has no temple, so surely we should be looking to dismantle the institution of the church as a sign of the kingdom (21:22), Wright retreated into saying that the church is a necessary intermediate institution as we wait for the kingdom. Why? And why *this* church? Why *this* cultural construct, which has so much of the abuse of power about it?

Wright spoke about the need for

## **That the new city in Revelation has no temple implies we should be looking to dismantle the institution of the church as a sign of the kingdom**

sacred space and architecture, about all the stuff that makes Anglicanism great, but I couldn't help but imagine him using exactly the same words to defend the Temple in Jerusalem from its detractors. Jesus' 'counter-Temple movement' was launched because the Temple by then was actually keeping God from the people. God relocated himself in the community of those excluded from the religious institutions. Surely this is at the heart of what 'emerging church' is about, or should be about. Wright defended his position in the House of Lords by pointing out all the good he could do for the nation: isn't that what the Herodians and high priests would

have said about their collusion with Rome? Wright seemed strangely blind to the connections between his NT work and the church today.

What was frustrating was that Wright's work is so fruitful in this debate. I am still looking forward to his further work, and hopefully this conference will have broadened his horizons a bit. At least there are finally some theological works coming out of the British emerging church scene. Pete Ward's *Liquid Church* (Paternoster) offered far meatier fare than some readers might have been expecting. And Kester Brewin's *The Complex Christ* (SPCK) is the first book in the present glut of 'new ecclesiologies' that might stand reading when all the fuss has died down. I hope one day Tom Wright might also incorporate a broader body of scripture and scriptural imagery into a new, dynamic vision of what it means

to be the people of God today. Ward's corporate understanding of what it means to be 'in Christ' and Brewin's chapter on dirt (a meditation on how Jesus transformed notions of clean and unclean) are steps into new and invigorating territory.

At the end of the conference I left a far more convinced (Ana)Baptist than when I arrived. While the conference was promoting deconstruction of many kinds, I realised that in many ways I am happy with where I am. Not in an institutional way, you understand...

# Living with leadership

## – Walking the tightrope

Stuart Green



It has been my experience over the last ten years or so that 'living with leadership' is probably about as challenging, as frustrating, as complex, as demanding and as rewarding as being a leader. Or at least I feel that we're certainly in the same ball park, even if I am spared the

### I have a calling that is interdependent with hers, but distinct from it

worst excesses, miss out on some of the greatest moments and get much of the rest slightly second-hand! Reflecting on this, I've been drawn to many images: the plate-spinner, the juggler and so on. But I think these pictures describe many multi-tasking situations and don't really address the particular issues of 'ministerial spouse-ness'. My conclusion is that it's more about walking the tightrope – or actually, continually walking multiple tightropes.

Let me explain with a few examples. For me, there is the fundamental question: whose ministry is it anyway? After we've all dutifully (and rightly) chorused 'the Lord's', let's examine whether we are sharing in our partner's ministry, whether we also have a ministry of our own or whether we are fulfilling our own calling, a key component of which is our involvement in and support for our partner's ministry. For myself, I can point to a clear time that God called me to the role of minister's partner, some two years after He confirmed Lynn's calling to the ministry. That gives me a particular understanding of my role – that I have a calling that is interdependent with hers, but distinct from it. My life is not

solely devoted to helping her in her ministry (which given my score for the gift of 'helps' is just as well), but I am called to live it out within that framework. Having been made redundant, I'm currently looking for work, and I am amazed at the number of folk that have said that they hope it

won't mean us moving away, because they assume that my work would take precedence over Lynn's call to Wokingham. But for me, that simply isn't an option, unless God speaks up loud and soon!

Living with ministry is a privileged yet restricted position. I am party to many things that others do not know about and do not experience, but must often say nothing of what I know, sometimes feign ignorance, and occasionally deny all knowledge! It can undoubtedly be an influential position – no one else has the ear of the

the tightrope between feelings of power and powerlessness – equally destructive if we fall off the rope on either side.

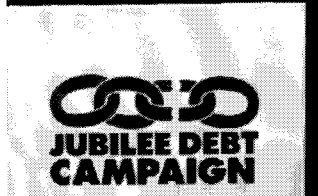
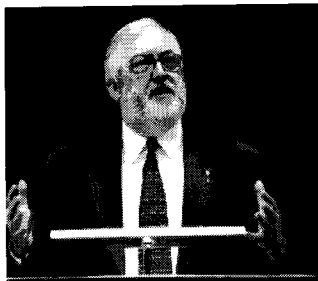
There's the dichotomy of being 'in the know' and needing to be immensely confidential, and yet in some ways knowing no more than any other church member. I've just about trained our congregation not to mistake me for someone who 'has a clue' in regard to meetings, events and most particularly Lynn's diary, but it has been a tough job. There is the pain and misery of ministry, and the pleasure and fulfilment, and there is the key priority to be your partner's (a) most loyal supporter and (b) wisest critic. And this last example, for me, brings out the nub of the issue. I'm not seeking to work out whether I should be the supporter or the critic, to feel powerful or powerless, privileged or restricted. I'm trying to hold those two things in dynamic tension – I'm trying to reject the tyranny of choosing (a) *or* (b), and I'm trying to embrace the goal of seeking (a)

### Living with ministry is a privileged yet restricted position

minister as I do – but I must also be very careful in expressing my opinions, for fear they are interpreted as Lynn's (and very often they are not!), or given undue weight because it is me who airs them. This brings frustrations, for I am not by nature backward in coming forward, yet it is an area that must be very carefully handled, especially if there is any disagreement or conflict in the air. And if there is, we're walking

*and* (b). It needs a divinely enabled sense of balance; it needs the guts to keep climbing back onto the rope and it needs a heart-full of God's love. In short, it needs a calling.

Stuart is married to Lynn Green, Minister and Team Leader at Wokingham Baptist Church, Berkshire. They have two young children and Stuart works as Head of Audit for a national retailer. His passion is to see people following God's call in their families, at work and through the local church. He will lead a seminar with Marion White about *Living with Leadership*. She comments: 'I agree with Stuart's sentiments, although I do think that there are some pressures and strains that are more pertinent to us women than the men.' So if you are in the delightful role of being the spouse of a leader, this seminar at the conference is for you.



Stephen shares his time between Kairos Church, Wimbledon, and the Jubilee Debt Campaign, having worked for Tearfund for 25 years.

[stephen@jubileedebt.org.uk](mailto:stephen@jubileedebt.org.uk)  
[campaign.org.uk](http://campaign.org.uk)

# Leadership: change the world and transform the church

Stephen Rand

Interesting title? Or should it be 'Transform the church and change the world'? Or even 'Change the church and transform the world'? Isn't it good to start with an exegetical challenge?! 2005 has been marked as a year for global change. In April there will be a global week of action for trade justice. Sir Bob Geldof, twenty years after Live Aid, will no doubt be vocal as part of Tony Blair's Commission for Africa, due to report in April. In May and June, the top priority issue will be debt cancellation – seven years after the Jubilee movement burst into action in Birmingham.

And on July 6th the G8 return: the leaders of the world's richest nations will be hosted by the Prime Minister at Gleneagles. Their meeting will be the focal point for a unique mobilisation of churches, trade unions, aid agencies and campaign groups working together to make poverty history. **MAKEPOVERTY HISTORY** is partly the brainchild of Richard Curtis: *The Vicar of Dibley* goes global. In 2000, world leaders agreed to halve the proportion of the world's people living on less than a dollar a day – they signed up to eight detailed Millennium Development Goals which expanded this basic commitment. Now the calculation is that without decisive action, backed by an additional \$50 billion a year, these goals will simply become a measure of failure, mocking the aspirations that wanted to change a world in which every day 30,000 people die as a result of poverty.

Scotland? The talk in Parliament is of a May election: the assumption is that Blair will win with a reduced majority. What particularly interests me is that already there is a widespread assumption that international poverty just won't be able to make it as an election issue – apparently we will be all too preoccupied with our own personal hopes and fears, particularly for our own prosperity.

And yet.... The church potentially has a key role in all of this. When elections come, virtually the only meetings the candidates address are held in churches. And at the last election, nearly all those meetings saw someone asking about debt. The result? Politicians are convinced churchgoers care about politics, and they're convinced that one of their key issues is international

back: evangelicals showed up as less likely than liberals to preach about poverty, even though they believed the Bible had a lot to say about it.

Jubilee 2000 was partly the result of a God-given vision of an evangelical Christian; but it was the Catholic Church that took it round the world. It was largely non-evangelical churches that were at the heart of an unprecedented effort that has seen \$40 billion released for the health and education of the poorest people of the world. At the 2000 World Evangelical Alliance Assembly in Kuala Lumpur, Joel Edwards worked tirelessly to see my motion on debt given time to be proposed and passed. Many of the African delegates were surprised and delighted that a key economic issue, one deeply affecting their congregations, had made it to be mainstream business for the

## Changing the world doesn't always come high up the evangelical-charismatic agenda

poverty. My own view is that this is an inheritance to build on, not throw away.

But here's the challenge. **HOW SERIOUSLY DO WE TAKE THE HOLY SPIRIT?** If you are wondering why that sentence is in bold capitals, it's because I think it might be the only way to persuade some readers to even look at this article. Changing the world doesn't always come high up the evangelical/charismatic agenda. In this area we are scarcely followers, let alone leaders. When Jesus announced that the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, it was because he was anointed to bring good news to the poor. So what's happened to the poor under the 21st-century anointing of the Spirit? I did a survey of ministers a few years

Church. This was the root of what has become the Micah Challenge.

Go to the website and explore. Just how ready are you and your church to heed the Micah call to live biblically? 'To love mercy, to act justly and to walk humbly with our God': three dimensions of one calling. **MAKEPOVERTY HISTORY** will be coming to a TV and newspaper near you. But then you could be bringing it right into your church. Perhaps in our non-conformity we should take the Lord's Prayer that bit more seriously and help our congregations begin to think about what it means to say 'Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth...'

Key websites for action on global poverty in 2005  
[www.makepovertyhistory.org](http://www.makepovertyhistory.org)  
[www.tjm.org.uk](http://www.tjm.org.uk)  
[www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk](http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk)  
[www.micahchallenge.org](http://www.micahchallenge.org)

But just who will be the Prime Minister who welcomes the fellow-powerful to

# On shepherds and fishermen

Derek Hills



**M**any years ago I read something that has intrigued me for years. Although the shepherd was highly thought of in Old Testament times – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and Amos were all shepherds, as was God himself (Psalms 23 & 80) – when Jesus came to select his disciples, he chose fishermen.

## Solitude is helpful, but Jesus was looking for those who knew and mixed with their fellows

Then I got to thinking about custodian versus catcher: the shepherd was a caretaker, a pastor, if you like, and his caring, providing, protecting qualities were important, but not what Jesus was looking for then. The fisherman was a hunter. He may have caught 153 fish yesterday, but it was today that mattered.

I thought about solitude versus society: the shepherd's life was one of solitude, while the fisherman mixed with boat-builders, net-makers, shop-keepers, competitors, customers. I well remember seeing the fishing fleet unloading their catch in Polperro in Cornwall. Crowds of people. Solitude is helpful, but Jesus was looking for those who knew and mixed with their fellows.

I thought about individualism versus pluralism: David composed his psalms while shepherding alone, but Peter, Andrew, James and John went to sea together. The minister who's worked alone usually finds team hard work. The new Chelsea manager has a plethora of stars, but can he

weld them into a team?

And I thought about permanence versus potential: 'Follow me', said Jesus to the Big Fisherman, 'and I will make you a fisher for men and women.' But he didn't repeat that, and at the end of his ministry, said to Peter, 'Tend my lambs, feed my sheep', suggesting that Peter could add

the wonderful qualities of a pastor to his skills as a fisherman. A shepherd's instincts were permanent, but a fisherman had potential! Most writers of virus-protection software are former virus-writers. The best gamekeeper is the ex-poacher.

## May God's Holy Spirit put a fisherman's heart into every one of us

I think Jesus was looking for men and women with fishermen's hearts. He could then teach them to be excellent pastors. As I look at the Church in Britain today, that's the need that I see: Christian leaders with fishermen's hearts. Men and women who are willing to go where the fish are. Many years ago, a book was written about the Grimsby fishermen and how they go up inside the Arctic Circle where they have to hack the ice away from the boat's superstructure or sink! Why go up there? Why not fish off the coast? Because that's where the fish are.

Mark Greene, in his book *Thank God it's Monday*, reminds us that

for many of our congregation the most likely place to catch fish is at work. That's where most of their time is spent, where they face their greatest challenges and where their local church's teaching is least helpful. I'm learning how to fish there by work-shadowing members of my congregation. (I recently spent a day with a member of my congregation who runs the largest sperm bank in Britain!) If I don't know what's involved in their work situations, I can't minister to them.

If we are to fish, we must use the right bait. Post-modernity presents us with a society where the visual is dominant. The visual has an immense capacity to assault the imagination, and using visual bait requires great care, but we must use it or we

won't catch fish. One in the eye is now worth one and a half in the ear. Little attention is paid to a disembodied gospel. My prayer for our present generation of Christian leaders is that God's Holy Spirit will put a fisherman's heart into every one of us.

**Editor's note:** *With this reflection Derek introduces us to the next edition of Talk as we devote it to considering whole-life discipleship and issues of Monday to Saturday life. We hope to have contact with the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, as well as contributions from those actually doing a 'real job'.*

Derek is currently Senior Pastor at Tonbridge in Kent the home of our latest double gold athlete and also leads a Mainstream cluster of pastors. He has had previous pastorates in Woodmansterne and New Malden.

# Talkback

## The future of God's Baptist people

The last edition was given over to those leading us from Didcot. I asked for responses on the future direction and emphasis of our denomination. Here they are.

Dear Stephen,

In your editorial you asked for responses on what emphasis and initiatives and leadership your leaders would value in the year ahead. I enjoyed Paul Goodliff's game of fantasy pastor, although I'm not relishing the challenge to live up to his fantasy of a bi-vocational 60-hour a week jack-of-all-trades. However, every good idea is worth stealing so here is my "fantasy denomination".

It would be a denomination that is defined by passion. A passion for God, and a passion for people. It would be a denomination that is 'wide-eyed and radical' (to quote from Mike Yaconelli's book *Dangerous Wonder*). A denomination that is about equipping leaders not to be safe, grey men and women, with brains the size of Mars and the social skills and passions of a tepid flannel, called, it seems, to merely preside over the death of Christianity in the west. But, strong, fearless, wild and even "dangerous" individuals who believe in the power of God. Who are stunned by his goodness and the power of his Gospel. Who love Jesus to the point of death and die daily for him in the fearless way they lead their churches from clubs determined to maintain what they've got, to dangerous, subversive, God intoxicated, God passionate, missionary beachheads into secular space. My fantasy denomination (to quote Yaconelli again) is "dangerous" to a dull and boring religion and is considered "dangerous" by our dull and monotonous culture.

And if I can turn the tables on Paul Goodliff for just a moment my fantasy denominational leader would be passionate about making this happen, in the lives of its pastors and its structures.

Is it fair to expect my fantasy denomination from such a broad union of churches? Probably not, but all my recent experience of BUGB has been great. I have felt nurtured, supported and strengthened by Didcot and after reading their responses I'm excited. I want to encourage them,

Dear Stephen

After the last edition of Talk, as I have thought about my future in ministry I realise that the one thing I would like to change in ministry more than anything else is myself. I am aware of the privilege of ministry and so dismayed at my ability to lose sight of the greatness of God and to become small minded and petty.

A good musician is not only technically excellent and an accomplished practitioner but also has an ear to play, interpret and present music that moves and inspires. In ministry it may be that there are many of us who are technically brilliant; we have read and understood everything from N T Wright to Julian of Norwich to Rick Warren and Brian McClaren. But do we have an ear to God? One of my priorities for myself in ministry is that I take the time and self-discipline to tune my ear into the music of heaven so what I am playing here on earth is not just technically good and relevant but filled with the depth and inspiration of God.

When I think of the present and future needs of ministry I think of the need for character. Jesus came amongst us 'full of grace and truth' John 1:12; he ministered in humility and graciousness. I fear at times that in an attempt to be confident in our faith and give an assured lead to others we come across as anything but humble. Our certainty appears as smugness, our success comes across as pride and our energy and vision seems aggressive and impatient. Humility in ministry means valuing spiritual truth and vision in all its diversity. Humility means accepting broken and fallen humanity in all its pain and sadness. Graciousness means not having to be right or putting others right. Graciousness means accepting failures with love and patience and kindness, seventy times seven.

The emerging church movement along with other thinking is making us consider the future of ministry, its relevance and cultural implications. However if we do not have an ear for the Maker's tune and the character of Christ himself then our strategies and schemes will only ever be shallow and short term and of course all of us ache for ministry that is deep, profound and has fruit for eternity.

Dianna Mitchell

keep going!

Andy Caldwell

Dianne Tidball

Dear Stephen

*Nigel Wright's article, Power to Change, got me thinking - hardly surprising as it called on the Mission Department to look again at the lead it gives in evangelism. There is a limit to what BUGB can do in this area, as in so many, but maybe we are not pushing the limit hard enough. I have invited Nigel to dialogue with the Mission Leaders' Network (association staff) and Mission Executive, and am hoping also to get Jane Holloway along. Jane is the Prayer & Evangelism Co-ordinator at the EA, and has just completed an exhaustive enquiry among members into their approach to and practice in evangelism.*

*Some of the department's work is aimed at creating a culture of faith-sharing in the longer term:*

- publication of Evangelism for a Gospel People (see BUGB Resources Catalogue)*
- development of Consultancy, to focus churches on God's calling to them to be and bring the Good News to their community*
- a major Consultation on church planting (November 2004), to discover what is happening, and to ask how BUGB can help in the emergence of missional church plants*
- the Small Churches Project, designed to encourage, envision and support our smaller churches in mission and ministry*

*Perhaps most exciting of all is the coalition forming around the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity and the EA, asking the question: "What would it take to evangelise Britain?" I am convinced that the UK church already has the personnel, the plant and the resources. The Holy Spirit seems to be multiplying Prayer Networks at a staggering rate (see [www.eauk.org/prayer](http://www.eauk.org/prayer)). It may be that the vision and the will for this huge task are emerging, along with the crucial commitment to Kingdom partnership. Watch this space!*

Derek Allen

Dear Stephen or a letter to myself

I've been reflecting that we are to think big and to act small. 'You are the light of world', spoken to a bunch of Galilean artisans is pretty big! But then, 'When you're at the altar and remember your brother has something against you, go...', seems pretty trivial compared to them being the world's luminescence.

And then I found myself thinking, I find myself invariably thinking small and trying to act big some great project to save the world tomorrow. The gospel seems increasingly pygmyed by our excessive personalisation and internalisation of what was meant to be the dawn of the new creation. At the same time I neglect those personal habits and character traits that Dianne writes of in her letter. I suppose in our national leaders I'm looking for those who can articulate the 'think big' aspect of the Christian gospel and shared calling, while I need to attend to the small acts and unexpected happenings of God's Kingdom in my own corner and networks. Modelling how we need to articulate the gospel today and defining our now-place in God's mission in the world, is what I look for above all else in our leaders.

Generally the agenda offered by our denomination does not fire me, although I always find our denominational leaders inspiring. But we still have some way to go in understanding what a missionary denomination rather than a regulatory denomination looks like. HomeMission, for all its wonderful work, has to engage all churches in a sense of common vision and task. We have to somehow overcome that 'them and us' feel of Derek's statement in his letter about the limited scope of BUGB. True enough, but I think most church leaders want to be engaged in a common mission. The knack is finding the right way of doing this: providing a sense of where we are on the map of Western society in late modernity, guidance on various routes ahead and offering a steer to help us on the way.

From one desiring the trumpet to sound a clearer call.  
Stephen Ibbotson



**Craig Millward** brings us information from the Christian world. Pastor at Ormsby in Norfolk, Craig is a member of the Mainstream leadership team.

## Youthwork: the conference

This weekend event is designed to offer vital support, encouragement, ideas and resources to busy volunteer and salaried youthworkers. The conference provides an opportunity to worship and meet with God, benefit from practical seminars lead by specialists, and also gives networking opportunities and access to youthwork agencies. Youthwork is supported by Oasis, Youth for Christ, Youthwork, the Salvation Army and others.

**Venue:** Southport Theatre and Floral Hall Complex, Southport.

**Dates:** 12-14 November 2004

For more information or to book call 0870 060 3327,

info@youthworkconference.co.uk or visit [www.youthwork.co.uk/conference](http://www.youthwork.co.uk/conference)

## Introduction to Biblical pastoral care and counselling

Crusade for World Revival are hosting a five-day course giving insight into how problems develop, the biblical basis for pastoral care/counselling and basic skills to help people move forward.

**Venue:** Waverley Abbey House,  
Farnham, Surrey.

**Dates:** 15-19 November 2004

For more information or to book  
call 01252 784700,

email [training@cwr.org.uk](mailto:training@cwr.org.uk)

or visit  
[www.waverley.org.uk/pages/care\\_  
and\\_counselling](http://www.waverley.org.uk/pages/care_and_counselling)

## Freedom in Christ Update

Earlier this year Steve Goss wrote an article on Discipleship in this magazine and he mentioned a forthcoming discipleship course that aimed to equip every Christian to reach their full potential in Christ.

The latest news is that the 13 week course is now available either as a manual with leaders guide or via specially filmed presentations on DVD. It has been created specifically for the UK Church (it follows the same format as the Alpha Course) and will help every Christian take hold of the truth of who they are in Christ, resolve personal and spiritual conflicts and become a fruitful disciple.

The material has been available for many years in Neil Anderson's multi-million selling books *Victory Over The Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker*. This approach is currently finding great favour in the UK and the Discipleship Course is designed to help non-readers or fellowship groups get to grips with Jesus' call to become wholehearted disciple.

For more information about the Discipleship Course go to [www.ficm.org.uk](http://www.ficm.org.uk) where you can see an overview of the course and even download a sample session.

## Willow Creek Update

Many of us would agree with Lynn Green's recently-stated maxim that "if it comes from Willow Creek it is bound to be good". With that in mind I took a look at the WCA UK website and caught details of forthcoming conferences on Walking the Small Group Tightrope (5-11th November), Network – the Willow Creek approach to discovering Spiritual Gifts (November 18th). Check out the WCA website for more details as they are available: [www.willowcreek.org.uk](http://www.willowcreek.org.uk)



## Merseyfest

In the last issue I featured Soul in the City – and my son was so excited he went and got involved in the greatest servant-evangelistic event London has ever seen. Tens of thousands of youth and young adults from across the globe hit the streets of London to demonstrate God's love through acts of kindness. And, as with Manchester the previous year, Soul in the City had a huge impact on the communities they have served – with many rebuilt, renovated and renewed facilities now standing as living testimony to God's loving grace.

From the 14th – 21st August 2005 Liverpool and Merseyside will host this great army of compassion under the Merseyfest banner. It all seems a long way off right now but if you have a youth group in your church that might be interested in joining in you can register your details right now on the website: [www.merseyfest.com](http://www.merseyfest.com)

## Supporting Offenders Safely

### The supervision and pastoral care of offenders

The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service are organising a 'must' for ministers and leaders who wish their churches to be a safe place for all who come through its doors. It aims to equip church leaders in the care and supervision of offenders and will include sessions on the nature of sexual offending, confidentiality and safety.

**Venue:** Harrogate Mote House Hotel & Conference Centre.

**Dates:** December 2004

For more information or to book call 0845 120 4550 or e-mail [info@ccpas.co.uk](mailto:info@ccpas.co.uk)

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# God's future and human interests

**Chris Erskine**

Chris is Director of Development and Regeneration at the Shaftesbury Society, which works in some of the most deprived areas, supporting local congregations to rethink their relationship with local communities, developing community initiatives, conducting city-wide mapping exercises, and exploring new ways of being church. He previously worked in the Local Government Policy Unit, involved in disability rights campaigns and advocacy movement. [cerskine@shaftesbury.soc.org.uk](mailto:cerskine@shaftesbury.soc.org.uk)

The Future of the People of God (FOTPOG) Conference took place on 14-16 July 2004 at Hothorpe Hall, Leicestershire. The concept of the conference was developed around the view that many people exploring what it means to be church in the twenty-first century are engaging with the theology of Bishop Tom (NT) Wright. The conference, therefore, created a space through which people could explore the theology of Wright (in person), and share thoughts, reflections and learning concerning contemporary church. In keeping with the fluid nature of the 'emerging church', the conference was co-ordinated by an ad hoc working group of representatives from the Building Together network, Open Source Theology, Emergent network, Revive network, and Shaftesbury Society.

This fluidity also carried over to the eclectic nature of the 130 conference participants – traditional and new congregation leaders,

- What is the gospel? – understanding and implementing Jesus' message in the present

was going to struggle. Regardless of having created the space, Wright seemed unable to offer a form of church that was

***The 'earthing of heaven', the collapsing of the secular-sacred division and the hearing of the gospel with first-century ears opens huge vistas of opportunity to rethink and re-orientate our lifestyle.***

- What is the church? – re-imagining our mission as God's agents of the new creation in the world
- There were also seminars given by Jason Clarke (Emergent Spirituality), James Thwaites (Leadership in the New Landscape); Mike Love & Martin Scott (Church in the City), Stuart Murray Williams (Post-Christendom), Andrew Perriman (Theology in the Emerging Church) and Chris Erskine (Mission from the Margins).

much different from the Anglican system that has served him so well. He also showed that, other than the material in the *Mission Shaped Church* book, he had very little knowledge and understanding of 'emerging church'.

Going from this session into the workshops disorientated many of the delegates. With hindsight, it may have been better to have created space to unpack the differences that had surfaced from session three. Instead, the workshops developed further demarcation of people's views, as traditional, emerging, de-constructing and post-denominational praxis collided and disputed each other's validity.

Tom Wright's first two sessions stimulated and excited the whole audience. His radical agenda of: the 'earthing of heaven'; the collapsing of the secular-sacred

## ***Personal biographies can start to conflict with the narrative of Jesus***

representatives from various Christian agencies, post-denominational, academic theologians and overseas missionaries.

Wright gave three key talks (available on [www.opensourcetheology.net](http://www.opensourcetheology.net)):

- The historical Jesus – God's future has arrived now in the person of Jesus

division; the hearing of the gospel with first-century ears opened a huge vista of opportunity to rethink, rewrite and most importantly re-orientate our lifestyle.

The third session – What is church? – did not meet with such universal acceptance. Any ecclesiology placed within the context that Wright had created, through the previous sessions,

The day ended with a panel discussion – Martin Scott, Tom Wright, Stuart Murray Williams and Rachel Dutton – which sought to explore some of these growing issues. However, by the end of the day, some were clearly carrying bruises and confusion which they may not have expected.

On day three, Tom Wright was given the floor again to reflect back impressions of the seminars

and conversation that had occurred during the conference. Although there was still a strong presence of his ecclesiological position, Wright was showing signs that he had understood more the 'voices of emerging church'. Calling upon some of the thoughts that he had established in day one, some

organisations can acknowledge their need to change, or they can close themselves off from any further external contact, or can develop the potential to suppress what they once liberated or found liberating.

Personal and social biographies are

***Re-imagining our mission  
as God's agents of new creation  
cannot be done without pain***

sense of common purpose was attained. Nonetheless, it should be said that this was not true for all.

### **Personal reflections**

In attempting to bring some understanding to this gathering, I have found it helpful to consider some ideas from social movement studies. Social movements are constituted by the stories people tell to themselves and to one another. They reflect the deepest ways in which people understand who they are and to whom are they are connected. Whatever the cause or focus, they are constructed from the interweaving of personal and social biographies – from the narratives people rehearse to themselves about the nature of their lives. Stories situate people, provide them with a context. Collective action is inseparable from the construction of personal biography from the ways, that is, that we experience the fusion of our individual and social selves.

So what has this got to do with a conference in Leicestershire? The FOTPOG was a gathering of stories. At points these stories converged and displayed a strong sense of unity, and at others they fragmented into isolation and rivalry. The narrative of Jesus ran through the personal and social biographies of all who were there. However, these same personal and social biographies also produced internal and group conflict.

### **The problem of vested interests**

I would suggest this problem is one reason for this divergence. Studies (Melucci 1980, 1995; Kling 1995) show that when questions are raised concerning the relevance to everyday life of dominant organisations, a number of responses can take place. In particular,

shaped by their relationships to dominant organisations. – The structural advantage of these organisations' access and distribution of resources and ability to form rules and roles – affect people's development and possibilities for the future. The ability to embrace new ideas and change is influenced by the social positions each of us hold, e.g. the idea of a republic may not be well received by the Queen! Our personal and social biographies act as filters to our decision-making.

Could this not also be true for the Church? Questions concerning the nature and purpose of church bring to the surface current investments and advantages. Alignments with the narrative of Jesus are always going to be filtered through personal and social realities. 'Go and sell all that you have' is a hard message to the rich young ruler but good news to the poor!

The alignment of God's prophetic heart (his will, purpose and intention) into the

erode, or be called into question. I believe that this is what happened at this conference. The agreement achieved in the first two sessions was disrupted when applied into the delegates' biographies of church. Application brought fragmentation. Traditional, new and post-church positions all heard and responded in different ways. Misunderstanding and misrepresentation grew as the time went on. Entry into the doctrinal maze of smoke and mirrors happened very quickly!

As stated earlier, stories situate people, provide them with a context. Many who attended this conference were clearly not satisfied with their current circumstance. The work of Wright concerning Jesus and the gospel offered a whole new set of possibilities. Nonetheless, how this shaped the 'language paths and sight lines' (Thwaites 1992), of their biographies (Wright included) depended on current investments.

### **Challenge for the future**

So what is the challenge for the future? My simple answer to this question is to live the life of the age to come now – the narrative of Jesus: the life that does not try to keep itself but is laid down for the love of its brothers and sisters.

The challenge of this life is just as radical as it always has been. We need to scrutinise just how much our personal and ecclesiological biographies filter decision-making. We will need cultures

***We cannot co-modify the prophetic heart  
of God into our current structures***

current organisational landscape is always going to bring challenges. It is within the processes of alignment that the responses set out above can come into play.

Christians and congregations facing a prophetic message that refuses to be co-opted by the current structures may be tempted to suppress what they had once liberated or found liberating. For example, new challenges can conflict with current organisational patterns; personal biographies (e.g. job dependency, denominational traditions, para-church structures) can start to conflict with the narrative of Jesus; agreements and cohesion can start to

in which we are willing to reflect upon current structural advantage and give away its power if required. Re-imagining our mission as God's agents of new creation in this world cannot be done without pain and sacrifice; there is simply no other way. I believe that we cannot co-modify the prophetic heart of God into our current structures. The gospel calls us together, tells us that we are in deep need of each other. It will cost us our personal and corporate lives. Or am I just talking from the position of my personal biography?

# Independence? Indefensible!

Rob White



Where does all this talk of Baptist independence (historical and, in some places, present) come from? What are its roots? Oh yes, I know Baptist studies will fill in some detail, but what concerns me is how biblical Christians can have espoused such a philosophy. Does it speak of a seriously-held view of what scripture says about ecclesiology, or more of that flawed part of humanity that is fearful of individual space being invaded? In other words, less to do with scripture, more to do with self.

I find it indefensible – from both a scriptural and practical point of view. From scripture I find that the early churches shared almost everything. They shared leaders, apostles, epistles, instructions as to how to conduct themselves, mission to Jews and Gentiles, and money. Paul's letters ring with a tone of togetherness, unity, co-operation and interdependence. Most of all, these churches shared the same God, the same Lord, the same Holy Spirit.

From a sheer practical, common-sense point of view, independence is indefensible. Are we not urgently seeking effective ways to do mission; to engage with our communities; to bring healing to bodies individual & corporate? Have we got all the answers? No! So, at the most basic level, we need to be together in order to share mission methods.

At a more important level, we witness an ever-greater fragmentation of society: individualism rules OK and the deconstruction of the self renders any meaningful interconnect-edness almost impossible. We are very good, in the church, at imbibing the world's values and

social movements – for heaven's sake, let us stand against this one and live the opposite. Let's restore God's view of the value of self, but in the context of community. Let's then ensure that our local church communities relate to one another in purposeful ways – at local, regional and national levels.

At yet another level, we need to stand together against a common enemy. It seems that the powers of darkness can put up a seemingly united front when it comes to attacks on the Church. Don't we need a strong expression of unity to combat this, as well as to bring support to those in the line of fire? As Christians we are called to live in the opposite spirit. And the opposite of fragmentation, alienation, isolation and independence is unity, relating, togetherness and interdependence.

One of the problems about working together lies with some large/larger churches and their leaders: because things seem to

by someone whom you considered cared about you? Perhaps there was an initial show of concern and friendship, and then nothing more. I think that's almost worse than not having made the link in the first place. All over the place people, and leaders in particular, are crying out for someone to care about them and their situation. And the only way that that kind of care can be shown is by the long process of getting to know the person and hanging in there long-term.

All this raises the question of time. With a busy enough church life locally, how can I be expected to take time to relate on a wider basis? My response is that if unity and interdependence are as important as I have suggested, time given to it is a priority. My experience has been that the more I give myself to relating more widely, the richer I become as a person and church leader. Some will say that it is a

## The more I give myself to relating more widely the richer I become as a person

be going so well and life is so busy, they don't feel the need for relating much more widely; there are enough good relationships amongst the leadership/staff team. Put simply, that is selfishness. Larger churches have a responsibility to share with those that are smaller, as well as to learn from them – genuine partnership.

The opposite to not relating is doing so much networking that we don't give ourselves to any kind of committed relationships. Have you not ever felt let down

choice between the local interdenominational gathering and the wider Mainstream one. My own response is that both are important. You bring to the interdenominational arena the encouragement, strength and shared vision of the Mainstream arena.

Let's continue to put interdependence out of fashion and out of business, and build a movement of unity and interdependence that will speed up the coming of the kingdom.

Rob is our Mainstream apostle, encouraging churches and leadership teams in the work of mission. Marion works closely with him. We are grateful to them both. Please pray for them. You can contact him on [rob@pbcmanse.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:rob@pbcmanse.freeserve.co.uk)



**Simon Jones** is team leader at Bromley Baptist Church and author of *Why Bother with Church?* (IVP, 2001). Previously he was BMS World Mission Co-ordinator for London and the South-East.

# Leadership – Doing better things

**Simon Jones**

Leadership, according to a business guru I heard on the radio once, is not about doing things better, it's about doing better things. This could well lie at the heart of issues facing our churches: are we just interested in doing what we do now, only better, more professionally? Or do we want to do better things – things that will actually help our congregations live and communicate the good news of Jesus.

The web is awash with stuff on leadership and change management, strategic planning and fresh mission thinking – some of it very helpful. But before launching ourselves into cyberspace, maybe we need to ask ourselves one simple question: what will help me offer leadership in this key area better?

It seems to me that I need help in three areas: my spiritual life, my ability to generate and impart vision, and some practical information. So, what follows is inevitably eclectic but hopefully there'll be something for all of us.

Essential for my spiritual well-being is intellectual stimulation. So my current homepage is [www.ntgateway.com](http://www.ntgateway.com), a fantastic New Testament studies portal maintained by Mark Goodacre of Birmingham University. It opens a world of fascinating resources. A close second is [www.ntwrightpage.com](http://www.ntwrightpage.com), the unofficial website collecting all Tom Wright's available papers and lectures in both print and audio form. Wonderful.

[www.teal.org.uk](http://www.teal.org.uk) is the site for Christian Leadership World. It's very well laid out, easy to navigate and contains tons of material about the leader's

character and formation, as well as stuff about how to do the job. It's a very broad site, seeking to equip people to be Christian leaders in all walks of life, not just church ministry. For that reason, it's a good resource for us both for our own development and for our role in developing leadership qualities in our congregations.

A similar site is [www.formationglobal.com](http://www.formationglobal.com), run by former OM leader Viv Thomas. The site contains information about what he is offering to churches, plus links to other helpful organisations. Viv is the author of some very useful books – and surfers ought to read books as well as websites!

[www.vintagefaith.com](http://www.vintagefaith.com) is an emerging-church site that is packed full of excellent resources for those of who want to do church in a new way but want to stay true to the historic roots of our faith. Linked to Dan Kimball's book, *The Emerging Church*, it contains articles and papers, liturgical material and has a community where you can share information, insights and ideas. Similar is [www.allelon.org](http://www.allelon.org). Again, lots of information but more importantly a community where ideas can be shared and debated. One recent article deals with Raymond Fung's *The Isaiah Vision*, one of the key mission texts that over the years has informed the way I do church. You need to sign up as a community member to access the articles – but that's free and enables you to post contributions, should you feel so inclined.

Don't forget Leadership Journal's website, [www.Christianitytoday.com/leaders](http://www.Christianitytoday.com/leaders).

Lots of archive material and a free weekly newsletter to keep you abreast of what's happening. A new CARE-linked initiative, [www.counterculture.org.uk](http://www.counterculture.org.uk) is good for articles on cultural, ethical and political issues. And [www.licc.org.uk](http://www.licc.org.uk) is essential for keeping up with pop culture – they also do a free weekly email which is worth its weight in gold.

[www.leaderu.com](http://www.leaderu.com) is the leadership university site. Very American especially in its politics it nevertheless boasts good biblical and theological material. Another American outfit is [www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org). This provides resources for congregations mainly in the form of books that aren't generally available over here. They are particularly good on helping pastors think through difficult organisational issues such as size transitions or developing new programmes alongside existing ones. A linked site, [www.congregationalresources.org](http://www.congregationalresources.org), does exactly what it says on the tin!

Finally, have I mentioned [www.emergingchurch.info](http://www.emergingchurch.info)? Well worth checking out, it's a British site with articles and art, blogs and posts from people exploring doing church in new ways in our green and pleasant land. It's great fun and pretty thought-provoking at times. Sadly [www.phuture.org](http://www.phuture.org), an Australian site exploring the same issues has disappeared hopefully only temporarily.



**Peter Nodding** brings us news of the Mainstream network and other connections. Peter chairs the Mainstream Leadership team and is the Senior Pastor at Purley Baptist Church, Surrey.  
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## Meet the team – Graham Jefferson

**G**raham is Senior Pastor of the New Life Church in Worthing on the south coast. He and his wife, Rosemary, have been part of the church since 1981.

Raised in a Christian family, I committed my life to Christ at the tender age of seven. Teenage years, however, were spent rebelliously and it wasn't until my twenties, when I was working as a medical scientist, that my life began to take on some meaning. I joined an evangelistic youth team which ran an outreach coffee bar and children's clubs, did door-to-door and street work, and helped struggling churches. It was a good apprenticeship. About this time, Rosemary applied to join the team and, as she had a beautiful voice (and nice legs), I decided to keep her on when the team disbanded.

In 1972, I went to London Bible College, assuring Rosemary (now my fiancée) that I would 'never become a Baptist minister!' After graduation, my stunning theology degree landed me a job as assistant pastor of a mission on the point of closure in Deptford – in London's dockland. After a year, we'd had enough and tried to leave, but no one wanted us, so we stayed another four and a half years. During that time our two sons, Jamie and Jon, were born, and Rosemary battled with depression. But we saw God work, the church began to grow and we realised that with God there are no impossible situations.

Towards the end of our time in Deptford, I began originating evangelistic material for the Christian Publicity Organisation (CPO) in Worthing, and this led to my being offered a two-year contract to devise tracts and Bible studies suitable for inner-city areas. I am thrilled that some of that material is still being used some twenty years later.

Thus we came to Worthing and joined New Life in 1981. Very soon afterwards, I prayed a secret prayer: 'Lord, if there's a way I could work full-time in this church, I'd really love it.' In July 1983, the prayer was answered and I left CPO to become assistant pastor, taking on the overall leadership two to three years later.

New Life's perennial problem has been a building that's far too small, and over the years, we've tried to address this by planting out four daughter churches, each of which quickly became totally independent. Currently, we're looking at building a larger facility on our existing site. We have a strong missions emphasis with links in many countries; we also run an English language school for young missionaries from around the world. We believe God has called us to be a House of Prayer for All Nations (237 at the last count), and each week we pray for a different country of the world.

Having been in ministry for over thirty years (and having the grey hairs to prove it), many younger leaders look to me for fatherly guidance. Early on Tuesday mornings, I meet with half a dozen pastors in a discipleship group; I also co-lead our evangelical fraternal and host regional events from time to time under the Mainstream banner. It's a privilege to be part of the Mainstream national leadership team.

***At this stage in my ministry, I believe God has called me to invest my life in younger leaders.***





## Days of refreshing in the Cotswolds

Philip Deller

I have been really inspired and challenged by the series of 'Transformation' videos, which I first saw about five years ago. One of the many things that made an impact was the power of prayer when God's people came together in love and unity. The different church leaders of Cali in Colombia initially came together in desperate prayer for their crime-ridden city. From this, thousands of Christians from all the churches across the city began interceding, and then God moved! I remember thinking to myself, if only someone would initiate a meeting of ministers in our area to pray, I would support it wholeheartedly.

Sometime later, I wrote to about twenty or so local ministers who I knew personally and invited them to come together to pray. Six came and we started to meet regularly. At about the same time, two ladies who run a Christian outreach and retreat centre locally said that the Lord had laid it on their hearts to bless local clergy and their spouses by hosting a 'Day of Refreshing' at their centre a day to fellowship together, to relax, pray, fast (sometimes), eat (nearly always) and worship together. We pooled resources and address lists and began. We invited Revd Bob Dunnett (former Vice-Principal of Birmingham Bible Institute) and his wife, Di, to host and facilitate the day. So we have continued, and currently meet four times a year, growing by word of mouth and e-mail. Sometimes there are over thirty of us, sometimes just a dozen, but they are always times of blessing, with helpful teaching and times of ministry to share and pray for each other. There is deepening trust amongst us and a greater longing for God to move in our nation.



## Rob and Marion at New Life

July 16th this summer saw Rob and Marion White venturing as far south as they could to Worthing, West Sussex, where Graham Jefferson had invited them to lead a Leadership Day at New Life, Durrington. The day was an important link for the growing network of leaders along the south coast, and contributed both good fellowship and valuable insights into how we can 'do leadership better'.

Rob and Marion took Psalm 23 as a template for how God shepherds the shepherds, and they shared in presenting insights that were theologically satisfying, practical and, for many, very timely.

Key understanding: the Lord really *is* my shepherd. We need to register that at a deep level to avoid being shunted around by the demands of others people, ideas, systems or even worldly activities. He truly meets my needs, but that may not always be obvious.

After lunch, Rob and Marion majored on 'soul restoration', the re-integrating of our whole selves that often gets too little time because we recognise our need for it too late. They reminded us of the need for continuous infilling by the Holy Spirit; for a full not skimmed devotional time; for prayer times that give God the opportunity to ask us into *His* life to serve *His* purposes and for times of shared prayer with other saints prepared to 'go for it'.

There was more much more but as a final point, Rob emphasised that we, as leaders, have an anointing that, just like a brimming cup, needs to spill over in the midst of the many pressing circumstances of our church life. The whole day had a richness that demonstrated this quality: both Rob and Marion gave unreservedly of themselves and we went away built up and encouraged.



## Partnership Potential



### Some critical reflections on partnership and inner-city mission

**Mike Pears**

**H**OPE 2004 was a ten-day event at City Road Baptist Church in Bristol's St Paul's area. Our main aim was to do some relevant and effective evangelism in the inner city and at the same time to train and envision young people towards inner-city ministry. The key elements of the event were:

- Networks: the main organising group was the local Baptist cluster (particularly two churches within the cluster), with Mainstream and the West of England Baptist Association providing umbrella networks.
- Partnership: HOPE 2004 was not an event in isolation but an initiative which gave momentum and focus to a two-year-old working partnership between cluster churches and City Road Baptist. This long view was a critical part in our planning the short-term experience and impact is always exciting, but perhaps the true value is that it happens within long-term relationships.
- Listening and learning: we wanted to come to the inner city as learners rather than as providers of answers. With this in mind, the week was organised around a number of 'listening to the community' events.
- Training: our aim was to attract a team of (primarily student-age) people who would be envisioned and get some experience of a world which for all of them was completely new, even though most had lived within walking distance of an inner-city neighbourhood.

#### So, how did it go?

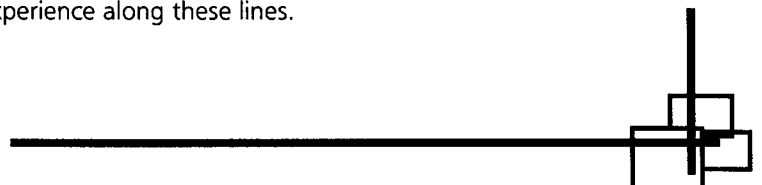
As a local event HOPE 2004 was a great success. A team of twenty-five people worked and trained very hard for ten days and all were thoroughly inspired by what we experienced and learned. Over 200 people from our local churches were involved with particular initiatives (community choir, listening to the community events, kids' club, prayer celebration, carnival, joint services). Leaders went back to their own communities with fresh ideas and vision about partnership and mission. Our own cluster churches grew in their understanding and vision for our own inner-city area. City Road Baptist gained a stronger profile in St Paul's; a number of people made commitments to the Lord; contacts were made with about forty kids who came to the club; new people attended services and events.

Apart from the event itself, however, we have been inspired to think about the bigger picture. There is the sense of unrealised potential within our existing networks for mission and training. Further development of working partnership between the cluster, the local association and Mainstream, together with local church networks (such as those in St Paul's) could open up all kinds of exciting opportunities for the gospel.

Perhaps the next step is to ask some searching questions:

- Can we think and act more strategically as Baptist churches at a city or regional level?
- Can partnerships between churches be more effective in turning around struggling churches?
- How can our clusters work more effectively in this type of mission?
- Can networks like Mainstream and our Baptist Associations contribute more effectively in local and regional mission?

Finally, on a personal note, I'm keen to go on exploring how this kind of partnership in mission could develop. It would be great to hear from others who have any thoughts or experience along these lines.





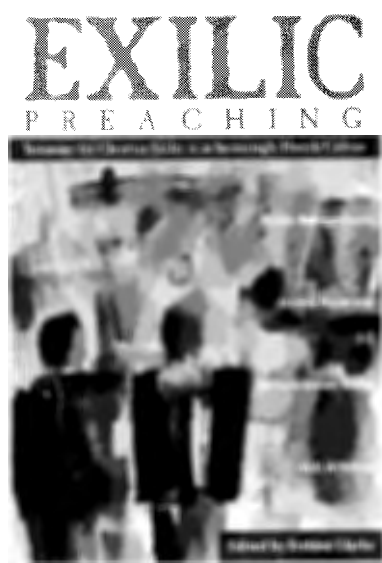
# off the shelf

compiled by Daniel Pritchard



**Erskine Clarke (ed.),  
Exilic Preaching: Testimony  
for Christian Exiles in an  
Increasingly Hostile  
Culture,**

(Trinity Press International, 1998,  
ISBN 1 56338 246 6)



This is a collection of articles that originally appeared in *The Journal For Preachers*. Only the contributions from Walter Brueggemann really sit comfortably with the title. His thesis is that with the advent of post-modernity and the increasing marginalisation of Christianity, (American) Christians are experiencing life as exile. This state of affairs should be named and embraced, and preaching should adapt accordingly, rather than behaving as if Christianity still held sway as the dominant shaper of cultural values. He finds resources for such a task in the exilic writings of the Old Testament. As always, he treats the biblical text with utmost seriousness, penetrating insight and great imagination.

Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, ethicist and preacher

respectively, are good friends and particularly forthright co-belligerents. While they share Brueggemann's conviction that 'things ain't what they used to be', they don't work in quite the same way with the metaphor of exile. Their approach is refreshingly combative, but for my taste a bit too Barthian: an over-reaction to modernist reliance on technique and the skill of the preacher. The preacher's job is to be faithful to the text, to live a distinctively Christian life, to speak with an authentically Christian voice and then to leave the question of whether or not this will communicate entirely up to God.

For me the real gems of this collection are provided by Barbara Brown Taylor. What a writer!

'We speak of God's love as if it were all soft pillows when it is more like bone-melting thunder.'

'The good news of God in Christ is heard best by those who stand on the far side of their own fresh graves.'

Apart from her artistry with words, her real contribution is the seriousness and honesty with which she treats the Bible and the God of the Bible. She allows the text to say what it says rather than smoothing its rough edges and re-dressing the God it presents in neat, tidy and conventional doctrinal clothing. You get the impression that she believes in God and believes in his word in a way that we evangelicals only pretend to. She allows God to be genuinely terrifying, perplexing and deeply inconvenient. She insists that the word isn't homogenised and pasteurised, but serves it up in all

its creamy richness, swimming with goodness knows how many dangerous organisms that are likely to infect us and seriously upset our equilibrium.

Take my advice and do two things. First, buy and read this book. Ultimately I couldn't get on with Hauerwas or Willimon, but Brueggemann is his usual, brilliant, refreshing self, and Brown Taylor is a revelation. Which is why my second piece of advice is to surf on over to the Amazon search engine, stick in Barbara Brown Taylor and hit the 'Buy Now' button.

Glen Marshall,  
Northern Baptist College



**Switched On New songs  
for kids.** Written by Judy

MacKenzie Dunn. Produced, recorded and arranged by Paul Field and featuring the children of Purley Baptist Church.

Do you ever find it hard to find quality resources for children's worship? Would a fresh collection of twelve praise and worship songs help?

*Switched On* is a collection of praise songs for children, with great appeal for adults as well. Impeccably sung by the children of Purley Baptist Church, and produced by chart-topping writer and solo artist Paul Field, this is a high-quality album and welcome addition to anybody's CD collection.

What distinguishes *Switched On* from many kids' praise albums is the quality of the songs themselves. Written by singer-songwriter Judy MacKenzie Dunn, these songs achieve the rare distinction of speaking out

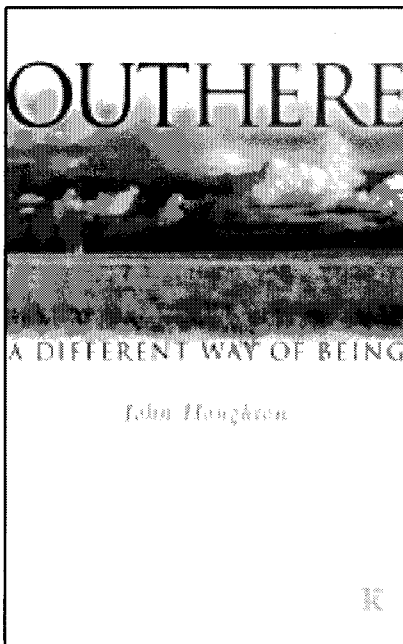
**Daniel Pritchard** is a member of the pastoral staff at Battle in Sussex. He has an interest in theological studies and compiles reviews in each edition. Reviews and suggestions for reviews can be submitted to: [daniel@thepritchards.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:daniel@thepritchards.freeserve.co.uk)

deep biblical truths in a simple and infectiously catchy way. From the toe-tapping title track, *Switched On*, which talks of our need to be ready to hear God's word to us daily, to the moving final track, *The Lord Bless You*, which is a beautiful version of the Aaronic blessing, this is a collection that has songs for many different moods and occasions. The musicianship overall is splendid and the singing of the children in particular is a revelation, with outstanding solo performances ranging from the delightful *Rain Dance* to the deeply affecting *All I know* and *Lord, I'm asking you*.

Already tested and adopted within the context of a local congregation, *Switched On* is an initiative of Purley Baptist Church with the aim of making these songs available as a resource for use by the wider Church. To this end, each CD comes complete with full lyrics and chord charts. *Switched On* is available direct from Purley Baptist, price £10, and soon in bookshops nationwide. For enquiries and orders, email [office@purleybaptist.org](mailto:office@purleybaptist.org) or call 020 8668 0422.



**John Houghton, *Out Here: A different way of being***, (Kingsway Communications, 2004, ISBN 1 84291 174 0)



Are you stuck for a Christmas present idea for members of your leadership team? Well, here is a suggestion...

In the last edition of *TALK*, I reviewed *Invading Secular Space* by Dwight Smith and Martin Robinson. They challenge the church to rediscover its mission purpose and boldly invade its world with the life, power and grace of the gospel. Within days I received three copies of John Houghton's latest release, *Out Here*, a book which tackles many of the same issues, with a similar heart, though in a rather different style.

What a refreshing and provocative book! John writes from long experience of ministry in several different churches and streams, and draws on this both to analyse the current situation and to offer profound insights into the way we might re-think church for the future. This is not so much a book about new models as an appeal for a different, or rather a renewed, understanding of the Church, its reason for existence, its nature and shape. Using the metaphor of the barn and the field, Houghton honestly assesses the plight of a church which concentrates its activities in the barn 'polishing the tractor', while the fields lie barren. Having thrown down the challenge, Houghton does not linger long on this negative state of affairs, but moves to an exploration of an alternative way of being church, which takes the field as its starting-point and sees the barn as a resource to the field-workers. Is our faith only played out in the barn of church life, or are we discovering the excitement of living out our faith in the field of everyday life?

John Houghton has not given up on church, but is passionately committed to seeing churches make the vital paradigm shift from 'institution' to 'incarnational missionary community'. The conviction that mission should be the heartbeat of the whole church and not the province of a few specialists calls for us to redefine our understanding of the church and the nature of ministry. The shift required is from an 'in here/out there' understanding of church (where the 'gathered church' occasionally ventures out to recruit new members in) to an 'out here/in there' one, 'a model for diffused, mobilised, twenty-four-hours-a-day, seven-day-a-week mission living'. The preferred understanding, Houghton argues, is a church which sees

its life and ministry as primarily 'out here' and, when necessary, gathers 'in here'.

You will find in *Out Here* some familiar themes and analogies, alongside some fresh and creative thinking. There is a message of hope and a vision of what might be, if we rise to the challenge. It is a workbook not just a reading book, and each chapter ends with practical action steps and questions to aid reflection and assist in bringing transformation.

If you are looking for a book that will tell you in a few easy steps how to transform your church, look elsewhere. If you are serious about wanting to make the paradigm shift, this is an excellent starting-point. Less theoretical and analytical than *Invading Secular Space*, this lively and readable book is one you can confidently pass on to friends and colleagues. Oh, and on that note, I have already given away my spare copies, sorry!



Photo: Jackie Sheppard

It used to be the case that Baptists were quite a fractious lot. Worthy members of the denomination would try and damp things down by talking about the two wings, on the

# Looking for a right wing

By Nigel G Wright

to take this cynical view, but I suspect it contains a glimmer of truth. We do not seem to me to be as doctrinally conscious as a previous generation was, and piety without doctrine tends to end up either in sentimentalism or atheism. You cannot get past the fact that ideas are the stuff of life, and doctrines are about ideas. If we lose our grasp on them, we descend into emptiness. I know that

But it would be a pity if Baptist centrism ended up just being another form of woolly liberalism, and, at its best, a right wing can ask the awkward questions. I respect those people who say, and do so sometimes to me when in full theological flight, 'But what about the Bible?' Of course, it may have to be pointed out that what they think is in the Bible may not actually be there at all; but if you believe that our calling is to live under the word of God, it's never a bad question.

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## Piety without doctrine tends to end up either in sentimentalism or atheism

right and the left, which we needed in order to fly if only they could get on. I never found it quite convincing. It sounded like making a virtue out of a regrettable necessity. Besides, I have never accepted that Baptists are quite as much a mixed denomination as some others. As far as I am concerned, we are evangelicals. We may embrace evangelicals of liberal, radical or conservative inclination (or, like me, some blend of all three), but we are inherently evangelicals, committed to scripture and to conversion.

The fact is though that we are now a relatively un-political Union, in that you have to scratch around to find any great evidence of cabals, cliques and conspiracies (not that I do go scratching around). One sign of this (very different from thirty years ago) is the genuine friendship enjoyed by all the college principals, of which I am one, despite some differences of approach and theology. It is a sign of a degree of generosity across the board.

Of course, another interpretation might be that we just don't care as much about certain things that were important to previous generations. Far be it from me

experience needs to go hand in hand with doctrine, but try experience without it and you will find what I mean.

Some people say that the denomination has moved to the right. If they mean that it has become more truly evangelical, then that's fine with me. But the truth is that it has moved to the

A declared Baptist value is inclusivity. I agree with it, of course, but it has always seemed to me problematic. Sometimes the word is used as a kind of code for those who embrace particular progressive social attitudes and so could be saying, 'If you agree with us, then you are in'. Inclusivity thus becomes exclusivity. For some, 'inclusive church' is appropriated as a synonym for 'gay-affirming' congregations. Genuine

## If our calling is to live under the word of God, it's good to ask, 'But what about the Bible?'

right and to the left simultaneously, ending up roughly in the centre. The wings have dropped off, with some on the left opting for other ecclesiastical pastures and some on the right going independent. We may still have right and left, but across a much-reduced spectrum.

In my opinion we need a new right wing. I hasten to add that I hope it would not be the type currently dominant among the leaders of the Southern Baptists, those who can't tell the difference between the kingdom of God and the Republican Party. Neither would I wish it to be of the nasty Right that crawls out from under a stone somewhere.

inclusivity however has something to do with the wolf lying down with the lamb, with the risky co-existence of those who have the potential to tear and rend, but choose for Christ's sake not to do so. Perhaps the current lack of political crunch among Baptists simply means that we have become too like each other and that we need to cast our net more widely. If this were to catch more people who take the Bible with extreme seriousness and believe in filling our piety with the content of good Christian doctrine, it wouldn't do us any harm.

## What's Mainstream all about?

**M**ainstream is an informal network, mainly comprising Baptist leaders and churches. We are absolutely convinced that the authority of God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit must always be brought together. It's only then that we can be fully under the Lord's control, direction and empowering and have any hope of doing properly the things he wants us to do.

- Local groups where leaders get together to talk, pray and encourage each other.
- Regional meetings where we encounter God and receive significant input to resource our ministries.
- A national leadership team drawn from those leading the local groups.
- A quality magazine that addresses the issues and concerns that matter to us.
- An annual conference for teaching, ministry, building relationships, and releasing gifts and ministries.

## What do we hope to achieve?

- A network of leaders and churches with authentic relationships, sharing their experience and resources and committed to working together for the advance of God's Kingdom.
- A visible difference in leader's spiritual lives and in God's work through the things we do together.
- Our churches throbbing with spiritual life in their worship, outreach and ministry to the poor in Jesus' name.
- The recognition, mentoring and release of emerging ministries.
- A prophetic voice within the Baptist community.

