

## STRATEGY FOR URBAN MISSION

(This is a shortened version of the address given by Patrick Sookhdeo to the Mainstream Conference last January - it was warmly received and is well worth re-reading).

Over the past few years the Lord has led my wife and me to start several churches, and we experiment. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. We are currently involved in our latest venture which we started about a year ago. If everyone came we would now have about 120 people, so I have to function very much as a local Church Pastor. I have to visit the flock. I have to dedicate the babies, and bury the people when they die. So I trust that you can see that what I am saying comes from what I am trying to do. I am going to try and give lessons that I have learned and ask: what is it that the local Church needs to function in the urban context?

I would suggest firstly - authoritative leadership. I start there because from my experience ordinary people want a leader who can speak for them, they want someone they can look

up to, and respect. They are not too happy with the sort of person who turns up with his jeans on and looks like a young drop-out. I am saying this deliberately because many of those interested in the inner city believe that they must come dressed as poor as possible, that they can be fairly loose because the people are poor and they do not have as much as they want. I do not believe that this is true. I have found these days that I have gone back to wearing a suit and I encourage the men in my congregation, particularly those who come from outside to dress properly, because the local congregation come in dressed properly and they want someone to look up to. I think, furthermore, that they are unhappy with discussion groups where everybody sits there and is expected to throw in his bit. They are not quite sure how to cope with that. They don't know what to throw in and they can't read properly, and so they stop coming, and so I have become fairly formal again after going through various phases. What people want is someone in whom they can see an aspect of God, someone who loves them, someone who will visit them, someone who will care for them, someone who will sit where they sit, someone who will respect them, and someone they can respect. On the other hand, I have decided not to call anybody a leader, a deacon or an elder, but to approach the whole area of leadership from a functional basis. If a person is doing a job, and doing it

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effectively, then that qualifies him to be a leader, but you don't have to give him a title because title involves status, status involves privilege and immediately people say they cannot do it, or if they can they misuse it.

Secondly - I would suggest simple but relevant worship. First, the need for order. Again, from my experience, our local people in East London like order. They like to know when a thing starts and when it ends. They like to know what is going to happen in the middle. I think it takes a very intellectual person or a person with a good mind to cope with a free-for-all and still survive, and so many of the groups that emphasise total spontaneity where you can do anything invariably are made up of fairly intellectual persons, often with academically qualified leaders who can cope with this sort of thing. If there is to be spontaneity (and certainly we practice it) then it has to be 'planned spontaneity'. Secondly, I believe that worship needs to be Christ-centred, vibrant and uplifting. People who come into my congregation if they are local often come in depressed, and they do not want to come in to a service which will depress them further. They want to come and then walk out a different person.

My third suggestion is incarnational witness. In other words, a church that is made up of people who care literally in love with each other, and whose aim is to look after each other. In our church we have a meal every Sunday, where people bring their own food, and have a longer time after the service, because people do not want to go back to their dreary homes. If you live 20 storeys up and have got two children, you don't want to go back there. If you come to Church, that is an escape - you want to stay. So they want to bring their food, and sit down and drink tea and have a bit of gossip, and that in itself becomes a ministry to each other and also to the secular community at large, so the church needs to be exceedingly conscious of its own people, because often the community needs are reflected in the needs of its people. Let me illustrate from my own community. What are its needs? I have broken it down under three headings: psychological, physical and spiritual. Under the psychological, appalling loneliness, a sense of utter hopelessness, futility and frustration. Physical needs include poverty, family breakdowns, inability to relate to people, unemployment. Spiritually people come from non-church backgrounds - they have never been to church. There are strong demonic influences, things that have crushed their lives so that they don't know God, and particularly they don't know God as Father. By beginning to define those needs you begin to discover how incarnational witness can take place within the church and within the context of the community. As a result, we are just setting up a counselling centre where a trained psychologist will operate a clinic. We hope to bring in an accountant and a lawyer, until we have a care centre that will begin to touch people at their points of need, but from within the context of the church, and not just the creation of another institution.

The fourth essential is dynamic spirituality - in other words, a firm belief in the power of God. I would suggest that the primary problems of urban areas are not sociological, but demonic. Satan is active in every facet of our society, particularly in our urban context, breeding violence and despair and hopelessness, but it is the duty of the Church there to wage war on Satan, so what do we do? We pray, we learn to fast, we just do not set up alternative social services institutions. I do not believe that you can produce Churches through setting up major sociological institutions. Churches must be created from within the community, as the power of God becomes active through changed lives, as men and women encounter Jesus, and the way that is done is with the old-fashioned methods - ones which I confess are the only ones that I really know - prayer, Bible study, discipling your converts, labouring over them in love until Christ is formed in them.

For all this to take place in a Baptist context, there needs to be certain changes of attitude. I want to take certain distinctive Baptist emphases and add another word to each of them. The first is independence, and to that I would like to add the term inter-dependence. The Moderator scheme might be extended to cover an area, so that the central church with the Moderator begins to minister to a

number of struggling churches - they are not robbed of their independence, they achieve a sense of mutuality, a true inter-dependence which can then produce independence at a later stage of development. I believe that one of the problems killing us is independence, and I am not sure whether we ought to sacrifice people to churches on the altar of independence. Then, there needs to be the sharing of resources, with churches that are struggling. Here, I would suggest the problem in the urban context is not suburban churches wanting help, but rather urban churches willing to receive help. Then my third area would be the area of corporate leadership. Supposing in an area where there are a number of Baptist churches which are weak, there could develop a form of corporate leadership spanning those churches which could work together, and plan and minister to the community because of the different gifts they have, and then when each church is fully developed to go over to a fuller independence. I believe that at the heart of all this is the recognition of a corporate responsibility, independence plus inter-dependence.

The second idea which is important for Baptists is the congregation, and to that I would like to add the community. I think it was Colin Marchant who once said that we all need three conversions - to Christ, the Church and to the Community. If we are converted to the community we begin to minister to the community from the basis of individuals within the Church. In other words, we the people of God go out and through our lives, through our service, we care for people, we engage in Christ-like love, in Christ-like ministry. For that I suggest we need parish boundaries. Do you know your parish boundary? The Anglicans have them - couldn't we? If we do not have a boundary to which we are responsible, how are we going to touch the people in those areas? We will have no sense of responsibility to them, because we are unsure where the boundaries start and where they end.

Thirdly, the Pastor. To that I would like to add the people. Not just a recognition of their existence, but rather the utilisation of their gifts and abilities. I mentioned that I am about to set up a counselling centre. We have a man who works in a civil engineering office, but his wife, we discovered, is a psychologist. They have just had a baby, so she has to be at home. We were praying with them about what they should do, and it came naturally. She's a psychologist, and our area had many psychological needs. Why not set up a counselling centre, whereby she can come in on two mornings a week and use those gifts. I believe that in our churches there are many skills and gifts going unused because we separate the spiritual from the social.

Fourthly, the principle of unity - to that I would like to add diversity. We see the Church very much from the basis of our Sunday morning/evening services. People come, sit there, and we've got a diaconate, and that's it. I believe in our day we think beyond that. The first Church I started, I worked on an integrated model - at the end of three and a half years, I had 120 people, with 80 nationalities. I think I failed, because I failed with the extremes. The wouldn't come, so with the Church I am now working on, I am working on both an integrated and a diverse model. There's the central church - the Mother Church as we call it, that is English-speaking. It has its leadership now, or is getting it, but then I've just started another congregation with other colleagues, who are taking the leadership of that. They speak a different language, but they are still responsible to the Mother Church, and integrated in its leadership. We hope to have four or five such congregations developing over the next year, so that they all speak different languages, and they evangelise in their own context, but then they can all come together on Sundays. The leadership is corporate, and one is not threatening another, or challenged by another. I think in our day we need much greater experimentation in terms of models of the Church.

Finally, I would like to suggest a much broader strategy. This will mean firstly the acceptance of Britain as a mission field. I do not believe that we have arrived at that point in attitude and conviction, but if Churches in urban areas cease to exist as they have in rural areas, then all that will be left are individual churches in suburban areas - and what of our land then? Secondly, the training of personnel suitable for ministries within the urban context. I do not

want to knock our theological colleges, but I feel that, in their training, they are not appropriate for urban ministry. They may train us to deal with reformation theology or to engage in a proper pastoral type of ministry, where you've got a large Church, but they don't teach you how to engage in Church planting, or how to survive in the inner city context. I think that the intrinsic weakness of our theological training is that it is divorced from reality, from actual situations where people now minister and work. Thirdly, I suggest a deployment of personnel in certain key areas in the urban context, not just one person, one couple, but maybe two or three couples each with different gifts to create new things. Fourthly, the ploughing in of resources into the urban areas. It does need funding. Fifthly, I would suggest the creation or development of a viable Church planting ministry. I personally believe this is one of the keys to our future, and we could spend a lot of time trying to resurrect causes that would be best left alone. What I do know is, it is not difficult to start new Churches, and my wife and I are now working on a much faster growth rate. Our first one took three and a half years. I believe this one we are expecting to take one and a half years, and we are helping in starting two others. I am not exceptional, nor is my wife. I do not believe in exceptional methods. I just believe in the old-fashioned methods of caring for people, and visiting them, and bringing them in, and believing that God will work. If God can do it through us, I believe He can do it through anybody.

## HALF THE DENOMINATION

—Statistics may change British Baptist thinking.

Of all English Baptist churches, 48 per cent or nearly half have less than 51 members. This key fact leaps from the still unpublished, still to be finally revised and B.U. Council - approved, pages of the Department of Ministry's forthcoming report on THE CARE OF SMALLER CHURCHES.

The report was previewed, not to say leaked, by the department in its Wednesday afternoon meeting at the Nottingham assembly this April. Long preparation has involved headquarters staff and many associates in the field. The compilers are a strong team, represented at Nottingham by Eastern Area Superintendent David Harper, Gwynne Edwards who wrote Rural Mission in 1980, and Philip Webb the Southampton Row statistician and cartoonist, secretary to the Lay Preachers' Federation and the Christian Training Programme.

THE CARE OF SMALLER CHURCHES gains in importance if it is talking about the care of half the Baptist churches in England. Or more, for in measuring church memberships, where does smallness begin? The report's statistics go on to show that a further 27 per cent of churches have between 51 and 100 members; which adds up to precisely 75 per cent, three-quarters, with less than 101, and 100 members can hardly be called big! Amongst English Baptist churches small is normal.

This point was taken up in the Nottingham presentation - which, by the way took the title which heads this article, 'HALF THE DENOMINATION' - in two very positive ways. At the outset Roger Hayden preached a mini-sermon pointing out that the smallest church, with Christ at its centre, is heir to 'all the possibilities of Resurrection and Pentecost'. Later came five different success stories, so to call them, showing that in the small-church situation there can be vigorous life and shining witness. (Mike Hearn, minister at New Town, Stratford in East London, reminded us that the small-church situation occurs in town as well as country, and a willingness to change can bring big life to a small group of people. David Wilson, lay pastor at Sindlesham near Reading, described a 66-year story of church growth from 3 members to 60. Colin Marchant, warden of Lawrence Hall, East London, told of the growth which comes of willingness to learn from others in our multi-cultural society. Gwynne Edwards spoke of the strength which comes in a group of churches like the Salisbury fellowship as they discover 'that we belong to one another'. Patrick Goodland showed all these factors at work in the life of the church at Gorsley, Ross-on-Wye).

So **THE CARE OF SMALLER CHURCHES** cannot be a patronising study of a problem all we big churches have with looking after a few small ones. It is a report about the total ministry of the whole denomination, and it must change the way we think about ourselves. The Nottingham meeting included a charade put together out of many overheard remarks which show how the ground for new thinking has been tilled by many Baptists who do not even know they are tilling it.

One of the charade character burst out with: 'We are SMALL... dozens and dozens of small churches. All different except in not having enough people,.... enough money.... just not big enough to be PROPER Baptist churches, as you might say.'

'No good expecting lots of deacons, all with separate jobs, and each with special qualifications for doing it.... We simply can't have all the things and organizations.... all the proper meetings. Yet there turn out to more of us small churches than there are big ones. So what is a proper Baptist church?'

The rest of the statistics (in Philip Webbs pie-chart shown below) fill out the case for reassessing our denominational self-image, and much else.

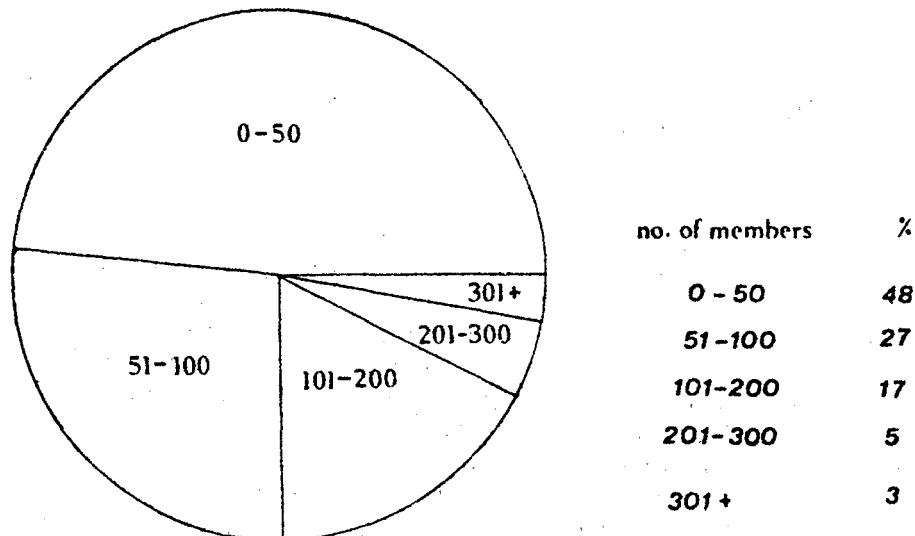
For the proper Baptist churches, the ones which so many small causes envy, imitate, or just despair of ever being, are in the remaining quarter; and the segment of really strong, healthy, good (by our hitherto habitual ways of looking at ourselves) churches is even smaller. Churches with memberships between 101 and 200 account for 17 per cent, and those with memberships of more than 200 only 8 per cent - less than one in twelve.

Bring the two crucial statistics together. Half our churches have 50 members or less; fewer than one in 12 has more than 200. Between the two flies a spark capable of igniting radical thought.

Radical does not necessarily mean controversial. No one will argue against upgrading our estimation of lay pastors, of lay preachers, and of all those concerned with their formation, encouragement and continuing education. The realization that on these people depends the ministry of half or more of our churches, will continue a trend which is blessedly present already.

Nor can there be a quarrel with a renewed concern for inter-church co-operation: not just bigger churches helping smaller ones de haut en bas, but a real two-way traffic of appreciation, assistance and shared vision. All this was well stressed by David Harper in his contribution to the Nottingham meeting.

But in the conversations which I have overheard since Nottingham, amongst those who were there - it was a full house that afternoon - and those who have heard about it, sharper questions are beginning to be asked also. They stem from Philip Webb's pie chart which he made into large polystyrene slices, to play a sort of "rich world - poor world" game amongst the audience. He showed that the tiny one-in-twelve segment of churches with 200 or more members is frighteningly magnetic to resources and to ministerial personnel. To him that hath it is jolly well given.



'Training for the ministry', for instance - despite valiant efforts by the colleges and the Christian Training Programme - is still largely the training of men and women for full-time salaried service in the privileged quarter of the denomination's churches which can afford to pay them. Home Mission extends the possibility of full-time pastoral cover to a number of churches in the 27 per cent segment of churches with 51 to 100 members; but take away the number we first thought of, the 48 per cent of our churches which can never realistically hope to receive 'a proper minister', never. Think on.

Philip Webb is eloquent on this, and voices the thought of many others. 'A young Baptist minister reckons he has professionally arrived when he is called to a church with a membership in three figures'. Ministers, called by the Lord to serve his people, do not spend too much time worrying about career-structure; but when they do, is not 'progress in the ministry' very often a matter of being called to successively bigger and bigger churches? - Oh the calls are prayerfully issued and conscientiously accepted, but the traditional system of free call by which our professional ministry is deployed tends to increase the gravitational pull of the privileged sector.

No need for cynicism here: pastors do accept calls to poorer churches, and the call to a rich one is often a call to gruelling work. No need to scrap a system through which God does call and his Spirit has worked. But why not, alongside it, adopt an alternative system, institutionalising that measure of direction which we have always had informally - the sanctified wangling by which in God's grace a firm word from an area superintendent to a diaconate, a hint from a senior friend to a junior colleague, has put the right minister in the right church?

Suppose all newly ordained ministers were appointed to their first pastorate: cannot God's call come through the superintendents and college principals operating as a ministerial strategy committee? Or if that sounds to Methodist, might there not be in the home field a system of placement analogous to what happens in overseas missionary service or chaplaincy to the forces: a go-anywhere list for which a minister might volunteer at any stage in his or her pastoral experience? Who has not sometimes felt 'O wouldn't it be nice next time I move, not to have to go and be tried out, stared at, quizzed about my wife, and finally voted on'? This go-anywhere list would have an advantage over first-charge direction, in that it would place at the denomination's strategic disposal men and women of seniority and experience alongside the young blood.

This is the kind of questioning which is beginning to be provoked by a report which isn't even out yet. What shall we see when it is?

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## Editorial: MORE SHARPE QUESTIONS

This edition of Mainstream has accidentally acquired an urban flavour! This is not because your Editor has sought to atone for his sins with a spot of realism or balance. Patrick Sookhdeo's article chose itself, so to speak, and other things just came to hand. But the article on smaller churches by Jamie Wallace was commissioned following a conversation over the garden fence between author and editor, again, not to appease, but because, taken together with the article on urban mission, it seems to me to beg yet sharper questions than any Jamie mentions. Any issue taken in what follows is taken not with Jamie, but with those whose thinking he reports so stimulatingly.

The first question concerns the right to exist. The analogy is expressly drawn between poor nations and small churches. People have a right to live and to share

equitably in the earth's resources, ergo churches, too, have a right to exist and share equitably in the denominations's resources. Is this really so? Churches do not have immortal souls. They are 'plant' for a purpose. When they cease to fulfil that purpose, when they impede the Kingdom rather than advance it, by what right do they claim to be supported? Both articles speak of directing resources to where they are needed, and both challenge the independence of the local church. But what a difference in outlook. The one seemingly assumes a commitment to what is. The other would leave the dead to bury their dead and press on to plant new churches. Deadness and life, of course, have nothing to do with size of membership. It is a question of what God is doing, but small is not necessarily beautiful or deserving. Smallness may be due to faithfulness in a tough situation, or perhaps to lack of concern by the well-off, but it may just be due to a refusal to listen to all God has been saying about life and growth these many years.

The second unasked question concerns the ministry. There's the rub. Poor churches are poor in terms of 'ordained' ministry. We need to question both the concept of an ordained ministry, and the pattern of church life that really only 'works' if you have one. We are Baptists; we do not have a priesthood. Ordination in the sense of trust is well and good. A person may be trusted by his local church, or he may enjoy a wider trust. Appropriate training, and, pay may accompany that trust, but that is all we should be thinking of. Talk of the 'ordained' or 'separated' ministry leads us away from the multiple leadership of the New Testament based on gift. Four pressures push us towards a titled ministry: worldly expectations, congregational ambition to be like all the rest, denominational desire to compete, and the minister's own desire for status. The price we pay is the impotence of churches that don't have it. Instead of finding the gifts they do have, they speak of being a pastorless church. First they insist on a pattern of life and worship that it takes a certain kind of trained man to lead, and then they complain that they will never have such a man - which is true, because the traditional pattern without a trained man is not often likely to bear sufficient fruit to make a paid ministry possible. Lay preachers, God bless them, unintentionally reinforce the point. They maintain the inappropriate pattern, and they do not so much make up for a 'proper' minister as embody his absence.

By all means, let us consider how to make better use of denominational resources, but it might be more fruitful to rethink the pattern of church life we expect in the light of the gifts God has given, and to shift the emphasis away from church maintenance, or even church growth, towards church planting.

## SCRATCHING THE SURFACE?

- Philip Gathercole replies:

Bernard Green was absolutely right to describe your strictures on the Baptist Union Assembly Programme (Editorial - Newsletter No. 13) as 'neither fair nor true.' (**Baptist Times 12.5.83**) I, too, was saddened that while writing off an Assembly before it had happened, in one brief paragraph, you could offer a contributor over four pages for a full-scale apologia for the Charismatic Dales Bible Week. Where is your sense of journalistic balance and whatever happened to the Mainstream Executive Statement (Newsletter No. 10) which brought so much encouragement to those of us who thought that Mainstream was tending to be a platform only for those of 'The Renewal'? The paragraph I refer to says 'Is Mainstream truly Baptist? Emphatically yes. We are loyal to the family of Baptist Churches affiliated to the Union and committed to staying within it and working for life and growth in the denomination at all levels.'

Yes, a pity you predicted the Nottingham Assembly as a spiritual drought area. Gerhard Claas and Carol McGarthy, to name but two, might have convinced you otherwise. And there were the early morning prayer meetings. Surely you would have approved of those? You talk about 'a thirst for reality'. Hasn't nuclear war, the Hospice movement for cancer patients, missionaries being valedicted to India and Africa got something to do with reality? What concerns me is that, alongside the welcome thirst for God in the eighties, there is also the problem of those who have an addiction for new wine and who fail to see that God's Spirit is flowing through many different channels.



It is not my main purpose to defend the Nottingham Assembly, but I hope that there will be a report - preferably by someone who was there!

My concern now is this tendency to knock tradition and embrace anything new. In the same Editorial (No. 13) you took a four word swipe at Baptist fraternalists. Concerning challenge to personal and practical holiness at 'your local fraternity', you dismiss it with 'You must be joking!' For over twenty five years, I have gone eagerly to local fraternalists and only occasionally been disappointed. And perhaps that had something to do with my attitudes rather than my brethren. We have always had prayer, Bible reading, a time of sharing about brethren and their families in need, problems and opportunities in our churches and usually some stimulating discussion about some aspect of our ministry. Most of us, I imagine, find our way to personal sharing on a deeper level, and Mike Beaumont's account of Covenant Relationships is one such, and I am delighted it has been such a blessing. I don't imagine it would suit us all. But if we are concerned about Fraternalists, it is not surely a matter for cheap sarcasm, but for constructive criticism.

I wonder, however, if this search for perfection and ideal relationships is not itself unbiblical? If Jesus could live with the disciples for three years, with the characters and faults, disclosed to us in the Gospels, then perhaps there is something for us to learn from those who differ from us theologically and who, spiritually, are moving on a different tack, but still towards the Lord.

Next, may I express both my interest and disquiet that Mike Beaumont can say he looks to another brother for 'apostolic input' and again 'The Covenant Group has led me to an apostle.' Now, my understanding of the New Testament is that an apostle is one who is a witness of Christ's resurrection (Acts 1.22). The word refers to The Twelve plus Paul, and only in a qualified way to other men. The Apostles carry the authority of being the closest men to Christ.

Though I am sure we all speak hopefully of apostolic preachers and apostolic churches, I think that, wisely, according to my knowledge, Baptists have avoided the use of the word Apostle for individuals with the suggestion of an authority none of us have outside the apostolic age. We are preferred to more modest, but Biblical, titles Superintendent (overseer), Messengers, Minister, Elders and Deacons. If this modern-day Apostleship is some new development of ministry, may we have, for our edification, some clarification of this ministry to see where it dovetails in with (dare I use the word!) traditional Baptist policy.

Finally, I ask if Baptist life and growth has reference only to what God is doing in local Churches? Because that is the strong impression that Mainstream gives. Teenagers are buying video nasties on our streets, thousands of babies are aborted every year in our country, unemployment is over three million, millions are starving in the Third World, we may be the last generation alive on this earth, but Mainstream seems not to care about the ocean of human need. Shouldn't life and growth have wider connections for Biblical people? Mainstream needs more passion - not just about Spirit-filled churches, but a Spirit-filled world.

#### **A brief response:**

The Editor is always happy to take your punches on the chin, and would simply make two points in reply: Commenting on the Assembly programme seems fair enough - the Programme was published and what is published can fairly be criticised. However, the Editorial was not primarily about the Assembly - it was about the choices open to us as Christians today. Is the Kingdom of God a matter of talk, or power?

Congregating Baptists tend to believe that if they have talked about something, passed resolutions etc. they have done something. They manifest a self-conscious desire to be seen to be concerned with all the burdens of mankind. Mainstream, by contrast, is not a journal about everything - it will continue to focus on the local church because that is its brief, and that, for most of us, is where the action is.

R.A.C.



# MINISTRY IN COWLEY, OXFORD

Who lives here? Defying all my social training, I'll use as my sample the road where the Manse is situated. A quick glance through the curtains reveals: a number of retired couples, a widow, a widower; several families with children from babies upto teenagers; a black family; an Asian one with another seen to move in; a single mother. It's quite a "holy" street too with a (perhaps) above average mixture of Church goers: Church of England, United Reformed Church, Roman Catholic and several Baptists. The 1981 census details are difficult to break down since Cowley is incorporated within the Oxford city figures. I would sense - though - that in terms of people living here, Liddell Road is a pretty good microcosm. Widows and retired couples constitute - though - a more significant proportion of Cowley's residents in the 1980's, than this road might suggest.

What is it like? Again defying the social science rules: largely working class and lower middle class. Forgive stereotyping. The majority of houses date back to the 30's or thereabouts and have stood the decades well. There is a mixture of council, and privately owned houses - often identical in appearance. There are flats, a few bungalows and one of "those" tower block dwellings. More recently a few "luxury" dwellings have appeared. 'I'll have two' is the usual comment when learning their price! You keep coming across parts of British Leyland or - in the latest name change! Austin Rover wherever you walk. The Body plant .... the paint shop .... the offices .... Pressed Steel .... Unipart House .... the Service Garage etc.. But Cowley is greater than its most famous part. Grove Cranes in another local firm with a long history. The Cowley Centre is an excellent shopping precinct marred only by the absence of a good book shop. Other shops and small businesses, including corner shops, can soon be found. There are several underused car parks, one of which blocks John Bunyan Baptist Church from public view. We have often been tempted to re-enact the battle of Jericho! There is a park: Florence Park. A library. A swimming pool - soon? to be redeveloped. A number of pubs. Hairdressers. Some modern offices, newly built. A working mens' club. A Conservative club - for the deferentials! The lovely village of Iffley is close. So is Blackbird Leys - Oxford's only council housing estate. So - too - is Littlemore long since bereft of Newman's hair shirts. Figures are hard to determine. Perhaps as many as 18,000 can be said to be in the "catchment" area.

As for Churches? Three Anglican churches within a mile of each other - though there has been a determined attempt recently to focus on the two ends of the parish, as it were, even if this means the death of one of the three churches. All three have an Anglo-Catholic tradition. This is the Cowley Father's territory remember. A United Reformed Church in Temple Cowley with happy memories of a full church in the past, alas no longer true - many lovely Christians worship there. A packed Roman Catholic Church which forayed out and mixed for the Pope's visit and just as determinedly forayed in again afterwards! A Spiritualist Church. Fairly near, a Kingdom Hall and Seventh Day Adventist Hall. No house-churches to my knowledge. And a Black Christian Church - the Church of God of Prophecy - with whom we have very good relations. We gladly share our premises with them. And John Bunyan Baptist Church? More anon.

**Now British Leyland** There was a fascinating Channel 4 series recently - what a breath of fresh air some of these programmes have been. It was called 'People to People - Making Cars.' It was recorded in Cowley and featured - largely - Cowley workers past and present in interview. Most interesting of all - to me - were the shots from inside the works. At least some outsiders are let in it seems! The noise, the fast and furious pace, the machines and new technology overhead and all around you. Fascinating - and at times frightening. The final programme was especially revealing - earlier ones had traced the development of the works up to the present day. An interesting picture of Austin Rover today emerged. Separate toilets, car parks and cafeterias for management..... the breaking down of stereotypes with car workers drawn from many sections of society.... the sheer speed and pace of measured day work.... victimisation of strong unionists - Alan Thornett most recently.... most managers afraid (?) to be interviewed.... the overall impact on Oxford.... anger at the disappearance of the family name 'Morris'.... appalling class deferentials e.g. pension, illness and holiday arrangements: a 16 year old daughter in the offices may have more privileges than her dad who has worked there 30 years.... the 7.15a.m. start.... claims of the unprofessionalism and inefficiency of management.... middle management hamstrung

from above.... the spectre of redundancies and unemployment always lingering.... 'We owe no loyalty, it's a fight from beginning to end.... we've been exploited for 50 years'.... the failure of the unions to communicate Edward's strategy.... the fact that WE the public own the factory and yet the unaccountability. Fascinating.

Just listening during the recent cleaning-up time strike was illuminating. Thankfully the better parts of the Media did capture some of it. Management talking of their authority to determine working conditions, to fire; of shop-stewards' power and anger over the lost right of veto; insisting that the unions were misleading many workers. Union Officials insisting that the cleaning-up time was but a symptom of a deeper problem: poor relationships and the style of management; feeling blackmailed; arguing for the proposals to be shelved - not abandoned - to allow discussion and cooling off; denying there ever was the power of veto. Workers frightened for their jobs; worried about bills, rent and mortgages; insisting that - in a previous agreement - they had earned the washing-up time because the line had been speeded up to deserve this; slip-men (relief for e.g. sickness, accidents, the dentist) removed and not replaced (Tony Williamson tells of a man at first penalised for leaving the line with diarrhoea); feeling that management hadn't specified clearly the compensating bonus arrangements; speculating about a high-level policy battle to favour Longbridge rather than Cowley for future investment - hence this "engineered" strike in Andy Barr's absence; seeing the unions' power dwindling; 5-6 year's tension bubbling up into what they called 'the big one'; feeling it was now or never to regain dignity, teach the management a lesson, win....

It is not only Christians who have lost the art of listening. Consider parts of the Media - for example - and see how much listening, how much accuracy they can be credited with.

And John Bunyan Baptist Church? Where do we fit into all this? A good question. Perhaps a third of our membership have - in the present or the past - direct links with the company i.e. themselves or a close relative working there. Cowley is bigger than BL - of course - much bigger. Some of our congregation work in Oxford - university, shops, offices, hospitals etc; some work in the Cowley Centre or at Grove Cranes; many are now retired. Many have NO connection with the works at all.

The Diaconate? A printer, a tool-maker, a clerk, a white-collar worker, a teacher, a local government officer, a lecturer, a self-employed electrician, a housewife, a recently retired lady, a former carpenter and joiner, a retired BL worker. The teacher and local government worker are recent appointments. It is a refreshingly practical diaconate!

OR consider those I have had the privilege of baptising in the past 3 years: an operating theatre nurse; a night nurse; a young wife; a local government secretary; a shop assistant, wife of a Labour councillor and J.P.; the wife of a BL quality inspector who now worships with us regularly; a lorry driver; a 70 year old; a mother; a student; the wife of a BL employee; a girl in her 20's.

OR the current baptismal and Church membership class. An ex-R.A.F. couple; a painter and decorator and his wife; a nurse; a body plant worker; the daughter of a skilled toolmaker; a retired BL worker; a teacher; the quality inspector!

If you'll excuse a little self-indulgence - there is a point to it! - the past three years have been encouraging ones. 30 or so new members. Adults at morning Worship increasing from 50 to 80 or 90; children and young peoples groups growing slowly but surely; Evening Worship increasing from 30 to 60; the weekly offering trebled thus freeing us from Home Mission Fund support even though 50% of our membership are pensioners; a youth group, drama group, bookstall, cassette library begun; new families; a developing Pastoral Care Group; a fine Womens' Fellowship; increasing contacts throughout the community; re-decorated, renovated premises: degrees don't help here, conversions, a sense of direction, growth in numbers and maturity.

Don't get me wrong. We badly need a break through to win more men into the Christian life and Church membership - though more worship with us these days; 60% of our membership - if not our congregations - are over 50 and shame many a younger member by their commitment! We have only a small young peoples' group and not many in their 20's. We have many warts - but, praise God, we ARE growing. And this in an area which many would agree to be a "tough" one.

Ministry in Cowley, Oxford then. Who said the political left and the theological "right" can't mix?

Rev. Michael I. Bochenski.

# A FESTIVAL FOR BRUNSWICK

PETER HOBSON is Curate at Brunswick Parish Church, near the centre of Manchester.

## 1. THE BACKCLOTH

- 1.1. **The Parish** Take a typical inner-city parish (is there such an animal?), in the heart of Manchester, on a housing estate known to some by its council, -given new name of 'Brunswick'. The housing is between 15 and 5 years old, but already much of it is showing the effect of poor workmanship and materials; it's flanked by two arterial routes into the city centre, and with one row of shops, next to no industry and four high-rise blocks full of the forgotten elderly, is 'typical,' inasmuch as it presents all the familiar problems of crime and fear, powerlessness and apathy, hopelessness and anomie!
- 1.2. **The Church** In this parish of some 5,000, imagine a new (opened 1974) church building, known locally as "Brunswick Parish Church" - that is when it's not mistaken for the Health Centre behind it! Picture a congregation grown from 20 to over 200 since the mid-sixties - but one made artificially large by numbers of students from the very close University and Poly. But picture also the numbers of local Christians, all 'new converts' out of the pagan urban culture making up easily 50% of the church - short, as ever, on men and teenagers, but wanting to learn, to grow, and to reach out into their parish, to share Jesus with their neighbours.
- 1.3. **The Strategy** How would you go forward? The growth of the church to date has been based on principles of 'mission before maintenance', and straight-forward preaching 'in a language understood by the people', both in and out of church. As the church has grown, so it has proved more able to tackle the larger social issues of the area - through a team of voluntary visitors to the elderly, for example, or through involvement in the local Inner-city Partnership scheme and other local issues. But in what direction does a church that is full to the doors every Sunday look for growth? Of the many possible answers, which would you choose?

## 2. PLANNING THE PRODUCTION

- 2.1. **Why a Community Festival?** Three reasons came together in our minds at Brunswick church as we looked for God's way forward in this situation:
  - (a) We were concerned to make more effort to meet some of the very real, but less 'spiritual' needs of the community - i.e. to be salt as well as light!
  - (b) We felt we had 'fished out the pool' of those who were interested in the gospel, and existing contacts were either now converted, or at this stage decidedly not interested. So, how to break new ground into the genuinely non-Christian world beyond?
  - (c) We were offered the chance of a children's mission in Easter '81, but the P.C.C. felt this was too partial a response to the needs, and so, slowly, the idea of some sort of 'family-based' event took shape - we decided to call it a 'Festival for Brunswick'.
- 2.2. **What are our aims?** We settled on four:
  - (a) To make a start on rebuilding a hitherto non-existent community spirit.
  - (b) To build bridges into the non-Christian and hitherto unreached parts of the community, as a church.
  - (c) To share as much of the gospel as they were ready to hear at that stage.
  - (d) To build fresh foundations for long-term outreach.
- 2.3. **How did we plan?** The idea began to take shape in the Autumn of '80, and initially was explored in a small group of the two clergy, Martin Gooder and Peter Hobson, together with Peter Lee of Scripture Union, who became our 'outside expert' in what developed into a venture none of us had every quite known anything like it before! By March '81 a working committee had been commissioned, with members all responsible for specific areas of the Festival,

What took shape was a week of events for all age-groups, culminating in a Carnival Day on the final Saturday, with special church services on the two Sundays, giving a 'feed-in' point for any who wanted to move on from 'secular' to 'spiritual' fun and games. We tried hard to involve any community groups in the initial planning, and circulated the whole area with early details from as early as January - but the response was minimal, for three reasons, we suspect:

- the general apathy of the neighbourhood to anything 'organised', religious or otherwise.

- borne out by the near total absence of any local voluntary groups to contact! Even the Labour Party Activists can be numbered on the fingers of one hand.

- the reluctance of the statutory groups around to commit themselves to involvement outside their own immediate sphere of interest.

The eventual team that ran the Festival was almost entirely church members, including up to 20 student members, who gave up a week of their holidays to come back and work alongside the rest of us.

Financially, we resolved to make everything as cheap as possible - even free - and if necessary find all the money through church members. In the event the total budget of just over £2,000 was met about 50/50 from the church and from a grant from the Cultural Services Department of Manchester City Council.

Publicity for the Festival was a major expense (around £500) but we felt it well worth it, to stir people out of their apathy and into the spirit of the occasion. A significant part of this was spent on a banner across the A6, adjoining the parish, where city-wide events are often publicised - thereby putting the Festival firmly 'on the map' as far as local people were concerned. Other items included the printed brochures delivered to every home, duplicated folders, and Festival badges, stickers and T-shirts, printed with the unifying Festival motif.

### 3. THE SHOW GOES ON THE ROAD

How to describe the many activities, the atmosphere, the people drawn in - that is the question? Let's settle for a bare description of the ingredients, remembering that the sum is greater than the parts!

- 3.1. Something for everyone This was the aim in providing separate programmes for just about every age group, namely:
- KIDS KLUB - met for Infants (3-7) at church in the mornings, and for Juniors (7-11) all afternoon. It was activity and game centred, including a trip out for one day, and with a short 'story time' mid event, based on the Luke St. filmstrips. The optional follow-up sessions to this the following mornings were well-attended, and actually saw inner city pagan kids enjoying talking and writing about Jesus in close rapport with the helpers!
  - TEEN SCENE met afternoons for the 11-15's and evenings for the 15 plus (nominally) in a local Scout hut (loaned by the Catholics!) Our initial apprehensions as to whether there'd be a hut left by the end of the week turned to real joy to see the kids come along, cause no real problems, get to know the helpers, and by the end, clamour for more of the same long-term. "I've not got into no trouble at all this week", commented one, with real surprise.
  - ADULTS were catered for through three evening events; a showing of the film 'The Hiding Place' at church, at a subsidised rate; a 'Cabaret' night at a local men's club, featuring 'The Predators' (of whom more below) and a home-grown 'A Question of Brunswick' quiz game; and a Friday night show by 'Footprints' drama group, which was preceded by a meat and potato pie meal. All three events attracted some interest, especially the last (the meal usually seems to pull them in!) - albeit the adult work was the hardest to get much response in, as we had, of course, anticipated.
  - FESTIVAL FRINGE consisted of getting two local pubs to book in 'The Predators' for a night each. This group are into what they call 'heavy wave' music, are all Christians, but prefer to play pubs and clubs than nice Christian venues - which was just what we wanted. They deliberately chose to come to us rather than Greenbelt for two days, and left a lasting impact wherever they played. One pub invited them back straight away, the other recommended them to a mate....

3.2. **Its Carnival Time** 2.00 - 5.00p.m. on the final Saturday, 5th September. Events revolved around a central arena, with a continuous programme of items, including an 'It's a Knockout' style competition based on teams from the Kids Klub. Around the main arena were various sidestalls, some from local community groups, who were invited to run a stall free, and keep any profits they might make, fun items such as Punch and Judy Show, and a 'bouncing castle', and two major competitions that really succeeded in drawing in the local men - welly throwing, and a tug-of-war between three teams raised by local pubs, plus a church team - who surprised themselves by coming only second last! Up to 1000 people passed through the field on the day, in glorious late summer sunshine, revelling in the Carnival atmosphere which was something unparalleled in Brunswick's 15 year history! Even the local M.P. Gerald Kauffman, commented on it as he opened the day, and later presented prizes.

3.3. **The God Slot** Although this was a Festival, not a Mission (and we spent a fair bit of energy explaining the difference to the church in early days!), our third aim (see 2.2 c) meant we were on the lookout for opportunities to inject some more explicitly Christian content into it. This was done partly through the involvement of groups such as The Predators, Footprints, and Street Level, a locally based full-time Christian schools music team, and partly through the special church services on the two Sundays of the week. A highlight was the second Sunday evening, when a programme including Footprints, The Predators and Peter Lee, a last minute sound-strip, and a lot of previous prayer, attracted a large number of local teenagers who'd never been into the church before, and held them. As Peter Lee put it: "This week some of you who thought Jesus was just a religious nonsense have suddenly seen him around - in the people who've brought you this Festival..." And you could see it made sense.

#### 4. **THE REVIEWS**

4.1. **Did we fulfil our aims?** Yes. Let's look at them again:-

(a) **Community Spirit** - people were encouraged into involvement in an event they'd previously shown no interest in, and they enjoyed it! Set against the backcloth of July riots (Moss Side only a mile away) this was doubly rewarding to see, and a pointer to the whole estate that it can be otherwise!

(b) **Bridge-building** - a lot of new contacts were made, as much in the planning stages as the week itself. What we make of these is yet to be seen - but they're there.

(c) **Proclamation** - it went on, in various low-key ways, and two or three new Christians were born in and around the week!

(d) **Long-term foundations** - the church is now viewed in a new light across the estate, as both the prior and follow-up visiting has proved. We have crossed a credibility gap in many peoples eyes, and believe we will now be much more readily listened to when we speak of "things spiritual", because we have first proved we care also about "thing temporal".

4.2. **What have we learned?** The personal value of simply taking part in the whole venture for all those who were involved is something both too immense to ignore and too intangible to quantify. And, as in any shared work of ministry, it drew the church together yet more closely. But there are certain general points we can also pick out:

- it proved that inner-city people can and will respond to the right event, planned and presented in the right way.
- it showed, nonetheless, that the overall spirit of apathy, especially amongst adults, is very hard to crack. It took a sunny day and a Carnival to do it.
- it highlighted the need for caring work amongst the local teenagers, and that this can be done, even by students, if they are sufficiently grounded in the local church scene already!
- it underlined the need to go to where the people are, if we expect to meet them, not expect them to come to us. The best contacts were in the pubs, and on the doorsteps.

it proved yet again that when God says to do something, He provides the ability to do it, and shows the reason why. We doubt we could manage at times - and we doubt its effectiveness up to the last minute. Both were shown to be groundless. Next time perhaps we'll be that much readier to obey. Perhaps!!!

4.3. **What next?** Is the obvious question. The whole strategy of mission in the parish is likely to be affected, but already we can point to three specific spin-offs from the Festival for Brunswick

- (a) The start of a regular open youth work, under the title Project 82, with all sorts of exciting possibilities, and the backing of the local authority.
- (b) The launching of a regular lunch-time meeting for the various caring agencies working in Brunswick - mostly statutory, but centred on the initiative taken by the church in the Festival.
- (c) Plans for another Festival next year - but at present these are split between a local school's initiative next Easter, and a desire to repeat at least the Carnival next summer.

4.4. **Conclusion** It was a great event to us, but we'd not want to pretend it was the solution to everybody's inner-city problems - or even ours! Just another step on the road of working out what it means for a church in the city to hold on firmly to Jesus' two vital commands: to love your neighbour as yourself, and to preach the gospel to every nation. We think both are equally binding on us, and maybe the Festival helped us discover a bit more about how to pursue the two together, in a God-directed balance. If so, it can't have been all that bad! Meanwhile the show goes on....

4.5. **Postscript - seven months later.** The above was written only a few weeks after the Festival; how does it all seem the following Easter? Perhaps it's best to comment on the plans and ideas outlined above in 4.3. 'What next?'

**Strategy of mission** - Is harder to effect than we might hope for! The church has had a mind for internal consolidation recently, rather than external outreach, of any sort. Maybe it's inevitable that church life goes in phases like this, but it reminds us that it's an easy option to slip out of engagement with the world around, and a lot harder to maintain a spirituality in the teeth of involvement!

**Open Youth Work** - is happening, but slowly and without local authority backing ever amounting to much. Our application to convert a disused laundry-house into a teens drop-in centre has taken from last November until now to look like reaching the Housing committee's agenda - another example of the frustrations of inner-city work, and the struggle with administrative structures that are themselves the victims of sin and oppression.

**Community Agencies Lunch** - started in January, and has met twice since. We're encouraged by the response - police, housing, social workers, teachers, probation workers etc. all come and chat. It is a sign of hope for the area that we are learning to share our different concerns and hopes, across the professional barriers that usually prevent this.

**Another Festival?** - I write the week after the local school's festival for the area. Seemingly on a much more ambitious scale than ours, it was conspicuous by its almost total failure to involve local adults in the events and activities laid on. It may be cold comfort to them, but at least the organisers have proved for us that it is not simply churches that meet with apathy, and not just enmity to the gospel that prevents a greater Christian response in the inner-city. Here at least, it's a depth of depression that precludes response to anything much at all! Which suggests one final thought: if our motivation for adding a real social dimension to our mission is simply that evangelism alone evokes no response, then we will be sadly misled. A genuine social concern, just as a genuine evangelistic concern, must, for the Christian, spring solely from a response to God's love and commands to us. The level of success expected, in either case, ought not to enter into motivation at all.



## BOOK REVIEWS

URBAN HARVEST by Roy Joslin : Evangelical Press : 320 pp : £4.95

One of the problems of inner city mission is that the people who best know and feel its ethos are those least able either to assess or articulate it. This is not true of Roy Joslin. He has lived and pastored in the Walworth Road area of London for 20 years as Baptist Minister there. He knows, and is part of, Walworth and its people and is able to evaluate, analyse and present to us the inner city situation with its needs and opportunities.

He writes from a Reformed position and that in some writers would mean selective handling of material and plenty of sound, slogan-type words and phrases. Not so with Roy.

Here is deep thought and wise insight. His range is broad and covers preaching, evangelism, relevance, communication and small groups.

Urban Harvest is highly recommended to all, not only those in the inner city.

(Roy Joslin has recently had to resign the pastorate because of the advance of Parkinson's Disease. Mainstream readers are asked to remember him lovingly in prayer).

RISE UP AND BUILD by Nick Cuthbert : Kingsway : 110 pp : £1.35

Nick Cuthbert also writes from the city, but this time from Birmingham. His book comes from the House Church fold and for those who do not know this movement it will be informative. Most of us will feel with Nick in his comments on our endless committees, agendas, hierarchies and structures but will part company with him when he says that "renewal" is out and "restoration" (a complete new start) is the only way forward.

The Church, he says, "must be free of denominational restrictions and must be released from clergy-dominated leadership". And we who watch the house Church groups (and believe we have much to learn from them) see them steadily becoming new denominations and some with an authoritative and dominating leadership that shocks most clergy!

BIAS TO THE POOR by David Sheppard : Hodder : 250 pp £5.95

This book lacks the clarity and sharpness of Michael Paget-Wilkes (Poverty, Revolution and the Church). That came red-hot out of New Cross in London. They then moved Michael to Rugby.

David Sheppard's book is more an arm-chair talk in which he roams through his wealth of experience, thinking and learning in London and Liverpool. I wonder which pleasant part he will now be moved to?

One of our basic problems is that if a Minister does well and shows evidence of great gifts, he will be invited not to where the need is greatest, and where his gifts might really be stretched, but to a "successful Church" in the suburbs which is already full of resources.

There is something basically wrong about this - as there is about Ministers and Churches being valued by the size of their congregations. Where the need is greatest we are most absent.

David Sheppard's book avoids the trap of idealising the poor or of assuming that God loves poor people more than rich people. However where there is disadvantage, he suggests that we should (and God does) show bias and offer extra advantage to bring things to balance. He pleads for Christian presence in poor areas as well as wise thought and responsible action.

He has some outstanding chapters, including the one on unemployment, and we will look forward to outstanding action and leadership arising from these issues. We live at a crisis point in the history of our country and of the world. It calls for men who will stamp upon the situation the Mind and Spirit of Christ.

L.R.M.



**THAT CONFERENCE ON AUTHORITY**

The talks on authority in the church by Derek Tidball, Nigel Wright and Barry White have been summarised from the tapes into 14 pages of notes by Tim Whitney. Anyone interested in having these notes should write, sending a 12 1/2p. stamp to: Dr. J.T. Whitney, 75 Church Road, Hadleigh, Benfleet, Essex. SS7 2DR. Thank you, Tim! The tapes themselves are, of course, also available from Mr. Neil Pimm, 71 Waverley Avenue, Kidlington, Oxford.

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January 16th - 18th at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

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Speakers: Stanley Voke (Walton-on-Thames) - Personal Holiness  
Bob Roxburgh (Milmead Centre-Guildford) - Corporate Holiness  
Alan Kreider (Menonite Centre - London) Social Holiness

Bible Readings: Romans 12-14 - Michael Caddick (Moortown, Leeds).  
Late night Extra and Communion Service - Clive Calver - (Evangelical Alliance.)

The cost is £25 each and places can be booked by sending a £5 none returnable deposit for each person to:

The Rev'd. Jack Ramsbottom,  
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