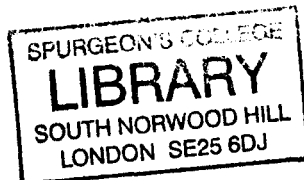


Preaching or Teaching?

Dear Congregation,



Sunday by Sunday I preach, and Sunday by Sunday you listen. You know the time that I spend preaching is important to me, and your comments suggest that it is important to some of you also. I want to tell you what I think I am doing, and why I think it is important to do it this way. I want to contrast this activity and method with others you may have come across, which may even seem to you to be better tasting, or easier to digest, but which I think are less nourishing.

You may think it too obvious to point out, but when I preach I invariably expound a passage of the Bible. I don't merely begin from a passage as a starting point for an essay of my own, nor do I cite scripture from time to time to support things I have decided to say. My purpose is to open up a passage of the Word, so that you are able to see into it, see the whole of it and perhaps see it and your life in the light of it, in ways you haven't before. If that sound presumptuous, I would want to say that the experience of discovery I expect for you is nothing less than the experience I have had myself in preparing to preach. Most time I have studied and thought and prayed over the passage and it has come alive for me, and I have seen something clearly, in a way I hadn't before, and I am simply believing that if you will give your mind to it as I preach, God will give you the same sense of excitement that He has given me.

Behind what I am saying are certain convictions which you will need to understand and go along with. First, a conviction that it is through the Word that the Holy Spirit loves to speak. No personal revelation or experience of corporate worship are a substitute for this. Second, I have a commitment to finding out what this passage of scripture really says, what the author really meant, because that alone is what God is saying. Third, I believe we must be willing to stay with this passage alone and hear it for itself. You may have noticed that I do not usually have you leaf through the Bible verifying dozens of verses, and I have learned not to say 'you will remember that Paul says in Ephesians', partly because my optimism is usually misplaced (you don't remember!) but more seriously because it is important to hear the chosen passage itself. This is the heart of the matter. Too many preachers supplement the deficiencies of their text with verses from all over the Bible. The result is

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that the distinctive message is lost in the resultant harmony, and the preacher, in the end, becomes stale and boring, because he ends up saying the same thing every week, or the same thing every time he speaks on a given topic.

So much for what I am trying to do. Sometimes I sense that some of you would like something else. You hanker after 'Teaching', whose starting point is a chosen topic and in which several passages are cited in support of what is said. This reflects a serious desire to have a systematic grasp of Christian doctrine and practice, and many of you read books and listen to tapes for the same purpose. This is good, but it has serious dangers if such desire for teaching is at the expense of Biblical exposition. At its worst, such teaching may be only faintly related to scripture - verses adorning the teaching like cherries on a cake. Texts can be taken out of context and made to say things their original authors would be amazed to hear. Such teaching can become an orthodoxy of its own - party line to which all scripture must in the end be subjected. This is the method of the cults, and many people's understanding of 'the abundant life', or healing, or the Last Things owes more to such systems than to the text of scripture responsibly interpreted. Even at its best, such teaching can become bland, dull and repetitive, leading, in fact, to an end to growth because we no longer hear anything that challenges us in belief or behaviour. We have our understanding. We expect our preacher to stay within it, and the double-edged sword of the Word is conveniently sheathed. The result of teaching can be the end of learning.

Behind these two models of preaching are two approaches to knowledge. There is the knowledge of the subject, such as an intelligent person can acquire quickly by reading a few books and by taking notes. This knowledge is much in demand as every Christian bookshop shows us. It can puff up preacher and hearers alike. Then there is the knowledge of a Person acquired from spending a long time in his company, being open to him as he chooses to be known, open to surprise. However much we learn we never master this Subject. Preaching seeks to contribute under the power of the Holy Spirit to this second kind of knowledge, and its goal is a person whose fear of God is not 'a commandment of men learned by rote' (Isaiah 29 : 13).

Seeking to be most truly your friend and Pastor.

Qoheleth.

This letter which has fallen into our hands obviously owes a great deal to the Mainstream Preaching Conference, held at Gorsley last September, and we are glad it had been of use to somebody. We print it here in the hope that it may be of use to yet more.

The Editor

Building Bridges for the Gospel

Robert Scott Cook

It has often been pointed out that, in response to the Great Commission, Christians have built 'come-structures' rather than 'go-structures'. Our evangelism has often been tied to our church buildings. In his second article on church planting, Robert Scott Cook draws on his experience on

large housing estates in Bristol to show what can be done to bring the gospel to the people.

VISITATION WORK

Encourage a Sense of Responsibility

It is vital to encourage the whole fellowship to feel responsibility for reaching the surrounding district. This infectious interest should mark both times of prayer and the casual conversation and activity of the local church. This challenge should first come through the teaching and mini-

stry of the Word of God among young and old. Secondly, the local church can be identified with the community in such practical ways as a survey of the area, and the displaying of a large scale street map of the locality.

A simple survey involving the local church can have enormous benefits. It can give an idea of the number of church-goers, or people interested in the Bible. It can be a good guide as to the number of younger families — children for children's work or young people for youth work. It can help locate older folk and situations of need. It will take some members into the smaller roads previously unknown. Above all, it can be a starter in bringing the local church into contact with the community.

A large scale map on display will be a constant reminder of our responsibility to the surrounding homes. We marked clearly on our map an inner and an outer area of outreach. The inner area was the immediate neighbourhood of 750 homes; the outer area was the whole community of 5,000 homes. We concentrated our children's work within the neighbourhood area so that its natural boundaries were the surrounding main roads. Usually such a neighbourhood contains its own group of shops, and a junior school. The outer area often has its own community boundaries set by the local authority, but when marking our area of responsibility it may be important to avoid overlap with neighbouring churches. It is important to present to the fellowship the specific challenge to visit every home in the neighbourhood area and to make some contact (e.g. distributed literature) with the whole community during the first twelve months.

Training for Visitation Work

It is important to train the fellowship for the task of visitation. Such a programme must include on-the-job training, and must cover practical subjects such as 'Leading a conversation'. This training may take up a month or three months of the normal weekly ministry meetings, or may be run separately as a special school of evangelism. There are also courses for such training.

Making Contact

Church attendance is much lower in council housing areas compared with other private housing areas. The following table is from *Christian Unity in Sheffield*, Martin Reardon. 1967

	Church Attendance %
Best Private Houses	8.4
Good Private Houses	6.3
Older Private Houses	4.9
Council Houses	2.0
Poorest Housing	7.2
All	4.9

For the working class man there is a great cultural barrier to entering a church. This means that the church must go out to visit people where they are. The church is seen as irrelevant but there is a great superstitious feeling about God. As the body of Christ, our evangelism needs to give a face to this unknown God in Jesus Christ (*Acts 17:23, II Cor. 4:6*).

It may be helpful to view visiting in three different stages and to note particular insights to reaching people on corporation estates through pioneer visiting, contact visiting and in depth visiting.

Pioneer Visiting. Initial door to door visiting with an introductory slip posted in beforehand explaining the purpose of the visit (e.g. community survey, special events or regular neighbourhood concern of the local church). There is a great deal of good will and open hearted welcome which should be encouraged when pioneer visiting on an estate. Enthusiasm and humour help people to be relaxed. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

Contact Visiting. Building a relationship in which we share the love of Christ through regular contact and care with interested homes from pioneer visiting or other activities such as children's work, women's meetings, Young Wives and youth work, or other links such as relatives, friends or neighbours (*Acts 18:7-8*). After the initial welcome it is more difficult to see a sustained response on the estate. Some will show initial interest, not wanting to refuse, but will find it difficult to follow through to be 'fruit that will last' (*John 15:16*). This makes contact visiting all the more important but often discouraging. It may mean remembering a birthday, making a hospital visit or sending a card from holiday. It demands a great deal of time, patience and care and needs to involve as many members of the local church as possible as well as supportive projects, e.g. Family Day Centre, schemes among unemployed, schools work and elderly people support. An open home programme inviting neighbours to see a suitable video has been another means of making contact. The provision of facilities must never replace the nurture of personal, caring relationships. Finally, local situations of crisis or change may provide an opportunity to show real love and concern, which is the foundation of any lasting relationship. These situations may include bereavement, sickness, or moving to a new house in the neighbourhood.

In Depth Visiting. Prayerfully recognizing people from the circle of contacts with whom we can share an in depth, arranged visit or series of visits to introduce the gospel of Christ (e.g. *Evangelism Explosion* visiting, *Good News Down Your Street* — introductory course to the Christian faith. Nurture/Basics/Discovery groups). Often

the local church can develop a turnover of interested contacts but not bring in depth the challenge of commitment. In depth visiting must include a strong element of apprenticeship, on the job training (*II Tim. 2:2*). Communication of the gospel must be in simple and clear language which is well illustrated. Faith must be 'caught' as well as taught. Keeping to arranged visits is not so easy where diaries and appointments are less familiar. Where possible include as many of the adults in the household as possible. Discover where each person is in their spiritual understanding and seek to lead them step by step to Christ. It is vital to cover such outreach with specific prayer partnership.

For the working class man there is a great cultural barrier to entering a church. This means that the church must go out to visit people where they are.

Continuing to Care

It is far better to have a few homes which you prayerfully and carefully continue to visit, than to touch many homes with a shallow contact that does not last. The early visits may be spent in breaking down barriers, inviting to a special service, and presenting the Gospel. By the fourth or fifth visit in many cases we found it valuable to introduce the individual to personal Bible study. This represented a critical stage in many contacts and a real gauge of the depth of interest. Some of the ways we presented this opportunity were by carefully asking such questions as 'Would you like to know more about the Bible?'; or, 'When I next visit you, could we spend a few minutes looking at some interesting things in the Bible?' It is vital to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit at each stage in the growing contact. Part of the visitor's initial training programme should cover 'How to lead a seeker's Bible study'.

For every twenty-five houses we held an open home.

Finding Time

One of the most difficult things to find in visitation work is not the opening words of conversation, not the right attitude or the right answers, but *time!* With the growing pressures of twentieth century life, time is a rare commodity, and visitation takes time — a lot of time. There is no short cut for spending time with people. Most of our regular church activities are scheduled meetings, and we have set those times aside. Visitation tends to be a spare-time extra activity which never gets done. The answer is to set

aside a specific time for it each week or fortnight. A good time is 6.30-8.30 p.m. summer evenings, and Saturday mornings between 10.30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. For contact visiting it is far better to arrange a suitable time to go and then to set that evening aside for visiting. Time is the raw material which the Lord requires in order to shape an effective visitation work.

THROUGH LOCAL HOMES

The relaxed atmosphere of a neighbour's home can be greatly used in breaking down the barriers and prejudices which so often hinder the Gospel.

Home Film and Video Evenings

Britain has become a nation of viewers. The average person receives a major part of his information concerning the world around him, through a screen in his sitting-room. It was this factor, together with the powerful attraction of a personal invitation to a neighbour's home, that caused us to consider prayerfully an open home programme of film and video evenings for the whole of the surrounding area.

We began these evenings with the vision of opening two new homes each week over a period of three months, while we had the darker evenings. This was a wonderful experience of the Spirit of God penetrating lives and families who were previously untouched by the Gospel. We were able to link these evenings with our visitation work, which is limited during the darker nights. Beginning with the nearest road, we moved out into all the immediate roads, streets, closes, crescents and drives. For every twenty-five houses we held an open home. We used the homes of committed Christians, Sunday School parents, ladies from the Ladies' Fellowship or anyone who was willing to allow us the use of their sitting-room. Usually a host or hostess would come to a film evening first to see the form of things. Often we found the home of an uncommitted person would draw more people, because there was less feeling of being 'got at'. Each of the immediately neighbouring homes (usually six either side of the open home and twelve across the road) received a personal invitation. This was sent or given on Christian name terms, e.g. 'To Jack and Joan' 'From David and Mabel', wherever possible. These went out a week or fortnight before, depending on the area, and enclosed was a return postcard or slip, with the following request:

In order to help with catering arrangements, would you kindly pop the enclosed card through our door.

The card said:

We will/will not be able to join you on Friday evening.
Yours thankfully,
.....

On average we had twelve to fifteen people at each of the evenings. It literally crossed all boundaries, and we saw atheists, agnostics, a Jehovah's Witness, a Spiritualist, a Christian Scientist, communists and every other shade of persuasion. The evenings normally began at 8.00 p.m. with a few words of welcome and introduction, and then the film. At first we used Fact and Faith films, but now we have increasingly used video films such as 'Chariots of Fire', 'Jesus of Nazareth', and 'The Cross and The Switchblade'. We hope to use 'Jesus' and some of the newer videos from Trinity Video and the Christian Television Association. The film is followed by a brief, simple comment, which would stimulate further conversation as the lights came back on. Then the quietness was broken by the question, 'Now, how many for tea and how many for coffee?' The rest of the evening was spent in informal conversation on the film. This was a tremendous opportunity of reaching out through local homes. It needed much prayer and much preparation for each evening. Often we helped with extra crockery and folding chairs. No sitting-room was too small. Many who would have fidgeted with embarrassment at a pulpit preacher only six feet away, listened with real interest as the Gospel was proclaimed through a screen in the sitting-room.

Home Book-ins

This involved reaching over 5,000 homes with a copy of one of the Gospels. Every public meeting point in the community was covered with Christian literature. All the schools — primary, junior and comprehensive, had large exhibitions of relevant Christian books. Special book stands with Christian paperbacks on sale were placed in a shop in each of the eight shopping precincts of the area. These included a newsagent, two Post Offices, two general stores, a hardware shop, a sweet shop and a fish and chip shop. Stands were also arranged for the youth club, old people's home, doctor's and dentist's waiting rooms, all the churches, the local public house and the new library. A converted double decker bus acted as a mobile bookstall visiting each neighbourhood. All this gave a wonderful backing to the main thrust of the literature crusade, which was the programme of home Book-ins.

The Book-ins came from the idea of the S.U. book parties, with added emphasis on a concentrated local outreach. They strategically covered the whole area every weekday of the month, morning, afternoon and evening. The form of these evenings was much the same as with the films. A personal invitation card went out to each home. Several of the local Christians trained as demonstrators with a standard book pack which had been prayerfully prepared. Neighbours were invited into local homes for coffee and

to see a display of Christian books for all the family, with a demonstrator emphasizing some of the titles. Numbers varied from three to twenty-three. Often there were as many as five Book-ins in one day! One of the last did not finish until just before midnight, where interested folk kept asking questions. We were able to develop many of the home film evening contacts from the previous year. Over 2,000 Christian books were sold, and a permanent witness left in so many homes on the estate.

The film evenings and the Book-ins are two examples of the use of local homes as a base for evangelism. We also arranged series of home Bible study groups throughout the area, which brought real fruit from among the nominal Christians of the community. May the Lord continue to direct us that we may by all means save some.

The Timotheus Ministry

Paul's commendation of Timothy as he sends him to Philippi is that 'I have no man like minded who will naturally care for your state'. If there were only a few 'naturally caring' men in the early church, there is certainly a shortage of them today. The world is crying out for care; not just the professional care of the social services or health department, not only the organized care of charitable societies, but natural care, which is produced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In consolidating our outreach and in the life of the fellowship, we desperately need those who will naturally care for the state of others.

The local church is more than a first aid post or emergency ward with a turnover of patients. It is the extended family of God in which long term wholeness is realized.

In outreach this may involve us with broken homes and problem families, needing a great deal of patience, and we may spend a lot of time and see little fruit. It will also bring us into contact with normal homes where perhaps sickness, bereavement or tragedy have brought a situation of need and we can give comfort and help. There will also be other contacts where there is no crying domestic need or crisis, rather the opposite; a sense of self-sufficiency. These are often the most difficult to care for because there is no outstretched hand for help, yet inwardly there are many needs for which Christ alone is the answer. We must somehow reach into and touch that point of need if we are to win the average man of our community, who neither attends regular meetings or special crusades, but who may be contacted through his children at Sunday School or through visitation, or through the open home, or

through casual encounters. It is here that the consistent, continuing witness of a Christ-centred life in the power of the Spirit bears lasting fruit. Such a ministry can only be fulfilled if you are involved in the area over an extended period.

There are also some opportunities of outreach into the local community which only the full-time worker may be free to develop. A growing example of this is ministry in schools. Several large comprehensive schools on housing estates have been opening up to the Gospel with invitations to speak at the morning assemblies. This can become a regular opening, reaching all the secondary school children in the locality with the Gospel several times during a year. We had the joy of taking the main assemblies in the comprehensive school on our estate, and this has now become a regular feature each term.

Within the fellowship the natural care will involve us again in spending time sick-visiting, comforting bereaved and lonely (*James 1:27* — 'Visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction'), counselling courting couples, helping young converts with 'teething troubles', understanding young people's problems and relationships, delicately discerning marriage difficulties and family frictions, winning rebellious children, giving direction on questions of vocation and career, and helping with problems of depression and personal complexes. These and many other areas of personal counselling cannot be dealt with fully from the pulpit, but require that close Timothy ministry of naturally caring for the state of others. Such counselling requires deep relationships where you know and understand people, and these cannot be cultivated through a single visit.

The Quality of Fellowship Life

Fellowship life must be a visible expression of love, joy and peace in the fullness of the Spirit. Jesus said 'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven' (*Matt. 5:16* NIV). In a community where actions speak louder than words, worship and witness should involve lively participation and should be less cerebral. Many have family breakdowns, deep hurts and resentments and feelings of rejection and some find it difficult to cope with life. The local church is more than a first aid post or emergency ward with a turnover of patients. It is the extended family of God in which long term wholeness is realized.

A "Prudential Means"

Surprising as it may seem from looking at the present structure of church life, "small groups" are not demanded by the New Testament. Although not explicitly found in Scripture, they were described by John Wesley as a "Prudential Means of Grace". He believed that it was the task of the Church not only to maintain the received institutions but also to construct other means suited to the particular age and customs. Snyder says: "The Bible is largely silent as to specific structures for the church. We are free to create those structures which are most conducive to the mission and need of the Church in our time."

Many reading this article will be working with small groups because of their self evident value in terms of developing personality growth and growth in our relationships with others. From experience it will also be self evident, that just because we put people into small groups, spiritual growth is not the necessary consequence. In actual fact, for the majority of people, growth and change is a difficult and painful process. Group life produces a vehicle for the Spirit to challenge people to move from the security of what is known to what is unknown. The tension between security and change is often expressed in fear. Fear can create blockages which stifle and stunt personal growth and prevent group work being the "Prudential Means" it could be.

Walkdon Howard, editor of Faith at Work magazine, has identified six spheres that are common in groups. Much of what follows is drawn from his article.

1) The Fear of being Known

Most of us spend a good deal of time building a wall around ourselves. This is to protect ourselves from being hurt, misunderstood, rejected and our weaknesses discovered. The thought that this wall might be taken down and that others would see us as we see ourselves is frightening to most and very threatening to some. We are afraid that we will look foolish or ignorant. "I don't want to show how little I know about the Bible." "My faith is a personal thing, I find it difficult to talk about it". Few of us like ourselves as we are, and we think that if others knew us they won't like us either.

This fear can be reduced to some extent by putting people at ease, creating a climate of acceptance. Leaders need to create a sense that it is understood no one has to participate. While we encourage folk to share, we should allow them the privilege of listening quietly until they feel themselves ready to take down a few bricks in the wall and let others in. When the timid or fearful do speak we must be ready to listen to them respectfully. The newcomer must know that no one is going to stamp on him because he might not say the correct thing. It is as a person experiences love and acceptance that he is able to love others and even himself.

2) Fear of Exploitation

People may be reluctant to talk if they feel that what is said could become a matter of common gossip or used against them. If people are to be encouraged to share their needs, hopes and dreams with each other then they need to feel safe. A story related in confidence about a personal need can become distorted if re-told to someone else out of the context of the fellowship of the group. This kind of gossip can result in damaged relationships and a sense of betrayal that will seriously affect the life of the group. The group needs to share a common commitment to confidentiality. A church member once asked if she could make a cassette tape of a group meeting for her husband, a regular attender who was ill. I used this to provoke a discussion about trust and confidentiality. No matter how well intentioned, it would be possible for the tape to be handed on. A very animated discussion followed. The group decided "no" to the tape. It was interesting to note that the group reached a level of sharing that in other situations would have taken several weeks, if not months, to achieve.

However we need to recognise that if we share a secret openly then we have to trust the group with it and will respect whatever they choose to do with it. Having shared our secret we can no long control what happens to it.

3) The Fear of Disappointment

This expresses itself in the question "are these people going to be able to help me with my problem?" If the answer to that is "no" then the person is unlikely to share his problem. If he does decide to reveal a deep need in his life and is not taken seriously either by being given answers that are too quick, too pat, before he has been heard, or by having the subject changed because it gets too close to the group's own unresolved problems, then the chances are he will clam up.

We may not always know how God works, or how he wants us to work, but we know how he has worked with us. This common experience is a resource that any group can bring to bear on a problem, and it can go further than we realise in solving deep human needs.

4) The Fear of New Experiences

As people come together week by week to study and discuss the faith, a gradual shift should take place. Under the leading of the Holy Spirit the emphasis becomes more than the acquisition of knowledge; rather, the things talked about become a means for inner exploration. Personal action and decision is called for.

If the communication in the group is serious and honest the newcomer will quickly reach the stage where he knows that changes are required of him. Other members begin to use the group as a sounding board, asking question, making comments that reveal the real person inside the wall. If these tentative moves are not rejected or considered foolish then there is the possibility for very real change. Most of us are resistant to change, especially if it means that we have to initiate and carry through courageous new plans of action. As Waldon says: "Self discovery may reveal areas where 'soul surgery' is demanded - and who enjoys undergoing surgery of any kind?"

Hence the encouragement of those who have gone through new experiences can be of support and help. There can be no growth without pain. But the response of the group in terms of love and care can help to bring about the new creation that God desires.

5) The Fear of Failure

This is linked to the fear of change. It is the fear of falling flat on our face. That, having stepped out, we may not be able to continue and our failure will be in plain view of the group. Discipleship becomes paralysed through fear of failure.

Here the group may be able to help by sharing the resources made available through the Spirit. This, together with a recognition that "The man who didn't make a mistake didn't make anything" can help people to realise that although we may want to hide from people in our defeat and failure, this is precisely the time when we need others most.

There are dangers in this area. Robert Edgar suggests that it is possible for groups to become too supportive. "Group members grow to like each other so well that they often become overly supportive of each other when someone wants to face himself as he really is. Group members minimise his feelings to evade the pain he feels, and the hurt it gives them to face it with him."

We must strive for a balance between love, acceptance, and support, and holding before others the demands of discipleship.

6) The Fear of Sacrifice

If group life is to be more than the sharing of knowledge, if it is to issue in changed lives, then there is a cost. Joining a group that is seeking personal growth is like marriages, "something not to be entered into lightly". Getting involved with other people, disclosing our problems, hearing theirs, brings a responsibility. This is a cost that needs to be carefully weighed before the commitment is undertaken. Am I willing to invest the time and the effort it will take to "bear one another's burdens"? Life in such a group has its price. There is the work of study, praying, meeting the cost of giving up old centres of interest, the cost of learning to accept them, to forgive, then to love other members and other people in every circumstance. Most of all there is the cost of moving the centre of life from self to God.

If in our group life we are faced with any of these fears, there are three courses of action open to us.

We can play the Lone Ranger, that is withdraw behind our walls and go it alone. Not let anyone in on our struggles, try to convince ourselves that we have no need for others.

Second, we can settle for the superficial and comfortable - here there are no real challenges. We just drift along, one of the group. John Bateman in 1866 said of the Methodist group meeting, the class, "Are there not hundreds of class meetings which, to speak figuratively, are in their location bordering on the arctic regions? They are cold, fruitless, comfortless, helpless means to the Church."

If a small group work is to become that "prudential means of Grace" that Wesley experienced and many testify to in our own day, then we need to do all we can to create openness and honesty, an interdependence which is our third alternative.

Healthy group life does not depend upon exceptional abilities or strong personalities either to get started or to continue and grow. It depends upon committed men and women who, in giving themselves to one another, discover that "perfect love casts out fear".

Frank Rinaldi,
Melton Mowbray.

Getting to Grips with a New Pastorate

As I look forward to changing to my fourth pastorate in the next few months, the prospect of learning as much as possible about a new group of people - not to mention all their names - looms large. When I moved to my present pastorate, five years ago, I tried a new idea which, with some minor modifications, I plan to use again.

Before my arrival I sent for distribution copies of a questionnaire (outlined below). This was circulated to all members of the church and congregation of 15 years of age and over (an arbitrary choice), together with an explanatory letter. Inevitably some people never received them, and some lost them! About 14% did not complete them. Thus this time I propose to take the questionnaire on my first visit and complete it with each person individually.

The accompanying letter, which will not be needed this time explained that the questionnaire had been designed:

- to enable the Pastor to get to know the congregation at a deep level as quickly as possible;
- To ascertain the spiritual gifts available - and thus the ministry of the church in its locality;
- to facilitate a Bible-centred and people-orientated preaching and teaching ministry;
- to help the Pastor pray meaningfully for his flock as individuals.

The letter also assured confidentiality.

The 'questions' are framed as positive statements so that they avoid the sense that people are being interrogated.

They are not numbered and are broad in their subject matter.

The questionnaire 'worked'! It enabled me to feel the pulse of the Church accurately and quickly. It enabled the pin-pointing of areas of potential and also areas of problems. It also provided two foolscap sheets of subjects on which people wanted to hear sermons. (Prophecy and the Second Coming topped the list by a long way!) Above all, it enabled a 'deep' relationship to develop quickly between Pastor and people, and provided relevant material for follow-up visits.

There were some interesting things that emerged. Often the subjects that people suggested for sermons bore no resemblance to the difficult areas they faced in their Christian lives, nor to the burden they had. Often the spiritual gifts identified had little to do with their areas of service, either within or outside the fellowship. Some square pegs were removed from round holes and placed in square ones. Round pegs were found to fill the vacancies! A helpful by-product was the correcting of the church directory on name spelling, addresses and telephone numbers.

The questions are inevitably subjective in their choice and can easily be adapted for any situation, or addressed to any pastoral emphasis. If the questionnaire is completed by the Pastor on a visit he can change the order of the questions to suit the occasion, e.g. starting with favourite TV programmes and getting to more spiritual matters later, irrelevant questions can be omitted.

It was a profitable exercise - I am looking forward to doing it again.

Sample Questionnaire:

Newstead Baptist Church - Pastor's Questionnaire

Name:..... Address:.....

Telephone No.:.....

Occupation:.....

Briefly, this is how I became a Christian:

I have been a Christian for.....years

I was baptised at.....on.....date

I am/am not a member of Newstead Baptist Church

I find great difficulty with the following areas of my Christian life:

I regularly read the Bible systematically with the help of:

I have the following spiritual gifts:

I serve my Lord through the Church as:

I would like to serve my Lord through the Church as:

I have the following spheres of Christian service/witness outside the Church:

As a Christian I have a burden about:

We have/do not have a regular time of family devotions.

Our Children's names are:

My hobbies/interests are:

I belong to the following clubs/groups:

My reading tastes are:

My music tastes are:

I play the(musical instrument(s))

My two favourite TV programmes are:

I would like to hear sermons on the following two subjects:

In love, I think there is room for improvement in the life of Newstead Baptist Church in the following way(s):

Keith Applegate,
Lauceston, Tasmania.

MISSION TO LONDON REGIONAL CRUSADES

Condensed from a Report from Christian statistician,
Peter Brierley, "Mission to London. Phase 1. Who Responded?"

THE FACTS

1. Crusades were held in nine regions of London and two central points in Autumn 1983. Each was locally organised. (This excludes the 1984 month-long Crusade at the Q.P.R. Stadium).
2. Nearly 200,000 people attended and over 7,000 came forward in response to the appeals.
3. The 3.9% (one in every 26) response rate from those attending is similar to that of other mass Crusades.
4. People came forward to accept Christ (55%), to rededicate themselves (25%), to receive assurance (10%), and other or no reasons (10%).
5. About 24% of those coming forward were under 14 years of age, 34% were between 14 and 18, 15% between 19 and 25 and 27% over 25.
6. The response rate and figures differ to some extent regionally from 3.5% in inner London to 4.3% in East London. Attendances and the response rate of teenagers were lowest in the East End (inner London).
7. The greatest proportion in every age group came forward to accept Christ but the older the age group the greater the proportion for rededication and assurance.
8. About 40% of those responding were men, 60% women. Roughly, out of every 5 enquirers 2 were men, 2 were single women (this includes children) and 1 a married woman.
9. The large majority of those going forward claimed some existing Church connection. About 40% of these were Anglican, about 23% Baptists, 7% Roman Catholic and others less.
10. About 86% of those responding were brought to the meetings by a friend, a group or a Church. Older people were more likely to come on their own than younger ones.
11. Of the young people responding there was a high proportion in Covenanters, Crusaders, Pathfinders and Young People's Fellowships.

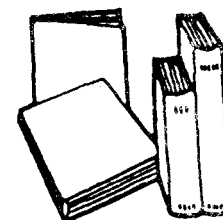
SOME CONCLUSIONS:

1. **Solid nurture needed** The older the age group the greater the proportion for rededication or assurance. Peter Brierley comments that this suggests much prior commitment but lack of follow-through in daily living - a weakness in Christian nurture and teaching and a failure to build up people's faith and deal with everyday issues.
2. **Importance of personal work** 86% of those going forward were brought to the meetings by personal invitation. Personal befriending, caring and witness, with genuine love and prayer, is and always has been top in bringing people to Christ.

3. **Harvest among young people** The large proportion of enquirers between 14 and 18 years of age (34% of all enquirers, although only 8% of the population) shows that there are far more of this age interested in committing themselves than there are of middle-aged or older people. This is especially so for young people in Covenanters, Crusaders or Young People's Fellowships, although the name of the organisation is always of less importance than the quality, the love and the spiritual stature of the leaders.
4. **The inner city** The relative dearth of teenage converts in the inner city requires more thought. Did fewer teenagers attend there? Is it because of peer group pressures? Does it reflect a disillusionment with life in the inner city? Or what?
5. **Localised missions** The idea of many localised missions is shown to have worked well (most response came from the locality) and is especially worthwhile in inner city areas.
6. **Denominational background** That more enquirers were from Anglican and Baptist churches merely reflects the fact that those churches supported the Mission to London more than others and created the background that made decision for Christ possible, although more Anglican connections than others would probably be purely formal ones.
7. **Stimulus to churches** The stimulus, encouragement, expectation, activity, courses, and now new converts and nurture groups have been of tremendous value to the churches taking part. We pray that it will not be the end but the beginning of new life, nurture and outreach.

L.R.M.
15.6.84.

Book Reviews



The Sermon Under Attack by Klaas-Runia, Paternoster £3.20, 108pp.

The Sermon Under Attack is basically a compilation of lectures given by a retired Dutch Professor of Practical Theology to the Moore Theological College in New South Wales - with the addition of a brief appendix in which he deals with the question "Women in the Pulpit?" I would love to know how his Australian students reacted. Frankly I found it a somewhat disappointing read, and this all because of the first chapter. The first chapter apart, it makes for an interesting introduction to the whole subject of preaching. A 'must' for all theological students, it is thoughtful, well grounded theologically, and say all sorts of good and useful things. And yet I found the book as a whole disappointing. Why? Basically because Runia failed to answer the initial problems he raised. In the first chapter he deals with contemporary criticisms of the sermon - criticisms raised by the social scientists, by communications experts, by theologians, and by the people in the pew. With a whole series of excellent quotations he showed so very clearly how the sermon is under attack - as one critic so delightfully put it: "a monstrous monologue by a moron to mutes"! I confess that at this stage my appetite was really whetted. For the fact of the matter is that many of the criticisms raised are real - many traditional sermons do fail to communicate. Alas these very real criticisms were left unanswered. I was still left with my questions.

Paul Beasley-Murray.

Believers Baptism for Children of the Church by Marlin Jeschke, Herald Press, Ontario, 1983 (Available from Metanoia Book Service, 14 Shepherd Hill, Highgate, London N6 5A9).

I recall feeling uncomfortable as a teenager when I overheard a conversation between a minister and a fifteen-year-old member of the youth group: "Isn't it about time you thought about being baptised?" A leading question. The response was an embarrassed evasion of the eyes and although young myself I couldn't help feeling that I had eavesdropped on a very unworthy approach to a subject of such eternal importance.

Marlin Jeschke is a North American Mennonite. In this book he seeks to provide foundations for more realistic theologies of both childhood and baptism. The two themes are inevitably interwoven. Jeschke writes from the perspective of 'The believers church'. This title, much used in Mennonite circles, has become fairly common in recent years. The phrase contains no apostrophe 'to indicate a possessive'. As he says himself in the preface to this study, "Like the terms 'Reformed' and 'Orthodox', it designates a distinct type of church with a distinct type of baptism within the larger family of Christian churches."

The book consists of scholarly and helpfully presented appraisals of both paedobaptist and believer baptist thinking. There is no judgementalism present because Jeschke is aware that all the main traditions of the faith, including his own, have been forced somewhere along the line to compromise with the New Testament picture of Christian initiation when it comes to accepting children and youth.

Starting with the images which lie behind baptism as seen in the New Testament, this writer seeks to show how both paedobaptist and believer baptist thinking have distorted the biblical principles: "According to the New Testament, the proper subjects of baptism are those whom God calls, forgives, unites with Christ, grants his Holy Spirit, those whom he regenerates, ethically renews and incorporates into his church".

Clearly "the children of the church" are in a special position. Scripture knows no distinction between paedobaptist and adult baptism, but, says Jeschke, "when all is said and done, proponents of believers baptism are convinced that if the New Testament pattern of the baptism of adult converts is to be adapted to descendants of the believing community, there is less distortion of the New Testament meaning of baptism and there are fewer problems when baptism is applied to signify the act of owning the faith (usually in adolescence) than when it is used to signify natural birth into the community".

Perhaps the main aim of this book is to encourage Christian adults "to structure responses appropriate to children and not explicitly or implicitly try to elicit adult responses prematurely". Jeschke spends time considering the age of accountability - that age for any given individual when really meaningful believers baptism can be given. He says "In a society in which youth are kept in school by law until the age of sixteen, cannot hold a job or get a driver's licence until sixteen, cannot vote until eighteen..... we are deluding ourselves if we ask them to make authentic decisions with respect to personal faith at a much earlier age".

The New Testament church understood baptism in momentous terms which cannot easily be applied when children and young adolescents are baptised today. Jeschke stresses the ancient view in a quotation by S.J. England: "The feet could never again be engaged on errands of hurt (or)..... mischief; the sexual organs could never again be devoted to lustful..... purposes, in fornication and adultery - they also had been baptized; the hands could never again minister hurt to any of God's creatures; the mouth could never again lend itself to false speech, whether lascivious, covetous, or

malicious; the eyes could never again look upon evil with pleasure; the ears could never again listen to slander and false evidence and take pleasure in it; and the brain could never again devise schemes of craftiness and terror."

Baptism is indeed momentous. This book serves to underline that. Jeschke's study also serves to stress the need for a considered nurturing of children who come under the care of the local Christian community. His conclusions are completely in line with historical Baptist thinking and he closes the book with a useful list of practical do's and don'ts which I found personally helpful. He is opposed to all perfunctoriness in our treatment of children and he has sought insights from the paedobaptist traditions as well as those traditions more in line with his own. The result has been to produce a valuable foundation study which goes a long way towards helping readers to find what Marlin Jeschke calls 'The more excellent way'.

Easter Enigma - John Wenham pp.162 £2.95 Paternoster.

This book will be an anathema to those who share the presuppositions and methods of current New Testament theology. In the tradition of 'Who Moved the Stone', John Wenham takes the gospel records seriously as history, or at least as the raw material of history, and attempts to show that so far from contradicting one another, they can be made to yield a coherent and convincing account of the events of that far off morning. Wenham's reconstruction is based on a close study of the layout of ancient Jerusalem and of the likely whereabouts of the dramatis personae. The result is fresh, readable, believable and challenging. I tested his theory out in Church on Easter Sunday in the form of a dramatic reconstruction and convinced myself and many others. Wenham reminds us the resurrection of Jesus was witnessed by a number of people. We know their names. We can account for their movements. We can piece together their stories. Read it before next Easter!

Alastair Campbell

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