

Doing The Stuff

The ripples are spreading. Whatever your own estimate (and some observers would see the Westminster meetings last October as of considerably more significance than Mission England) there is no doubt that Third Wave '84 had a profound impact on those who were there (two of them have contributed to this Newsletter) and has created widespread interest.

So what is 'Third Wave '84?' The expression 'Third Wave' originates, I believe, with the Church growth expert, Peter Wagner, who sees a fresh wave of the Holy Spirit's power coming on the Church world-wide. The Pentecostal revival at the start of the century and the Charismatic renewal in the historic Churches were the first two waves. Now, he says, God is doing a new thing, characterised by signs and wonders, and John Wimber, a Pastor and theological lecturer from California, is part of it. 'Third Wave '84' was the name chosen for the week of teaching meetings organised at Westminster Central Hall for John Wimber by Douglas McBain and Manna Ministries.

But waves are, of their nature, passing things. Ripples die as well as spread. It is now after all 1985. Many who were deeply stirred by John Wimber's teaching and by all they themselves witnessed at Westminster have not found, after a few immediate healings that the promised power is, so to speak, on tap. Some have not found it at all, and none, so far as I know, is experiencing quite what John Wimber records of his own ministry. It is time to ask - why not?

The answer lies, I believe, in our neglect of the obvious: signs and wonders are for unbelievers. The whole point of Jesus' miracles was that they preached the gospel of the Kingdom. Paul consistently talks of signs and wonders in connection with establishing new Churches. In other words "healing" so far from being like a Sacrament generally reserved for the 'insider', to be experienced in the meeting for worship, is the confirmation by God of the message of his servant who is working beyond the frontiers of the people of God, in the street, the market place, the cafe. God heals there and there evangelism becomes the explanation in terms of Jesus of the undeniable healing event.

It is not enough that we trust God for miracles of convenience. We have to trust Him enough to go out preaching the Kingdom where Christ is not named, without benefit of high publicity evangelists. We have to dare more, not just daring to believe, but daring to go out. Above all, we have to care more;

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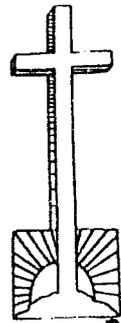
care that people are dying in body and spirit way beyond the sound of the gospel. As of now, the signs are that those who care do not dare to believe, and those who believe do not care enough to go.

"Signs and wonders" is likely to follow words like "charismatic" into becoming a cheap swear word, a quick label for dismissing what we do not care to get into. That would be tragic. For one thing, the phrase is a genuine Biblical phrase with a specific meaning. For another, it would be quite unfair to John Wimber. He is not a pedlar of sensational cures; his emphasis is on "doing the stuff", not just talking about it, or learning about it. That doesn't just mean laying hands on the sick, it means talking to the lost. To use another Wimberism, "the meat is in the street".

The Editor.

Signs, Wonders, Cross

(This article by Tom Smail, Vice-Principal of St. John's College, Nottingham is taken from the St. John's Newsletter, and is used with permission).



Sometimes nowadays there seem to be two gospels. One is about a Jesus who deals with the ills, sins and sicknesses of humanity by a series of signs and wonders that defeat them all by acts of sovereign divine power. Such a Jesus, we are told, is still very much alive among us and waiting for people to turn to him in faith for the signs and wonders to continue. The other gospel is about a Jesus who dealt with ills, sins and sicknesses not by sovereign power but by identifying love, who made himself one with the victims of these things, entering into their sorrows and desolation that by his presence with them, and offering for them, they might be set free.

Both of these articulate very different theologies of salvation and lead to very different pastoral priorities and expectations, and I suspect that many people jump from one to the other without being very aware of what they are doing. The trouble is that both have starting points in the New Testament, the one in the healing and delivering ministry of Jesus and the other in the story of the cross, so that we can dismiss neither and yet cannot allow them to stand in unrelated juxtaposition to each other.

The gospel of signs and wonders undoubtedly represents an element in the promise of Jesus that we ignore to our great loss; it underlines that our gospel is about the contemporary eventfulness of the living God who is at work among us by his Spirit. But, taken by itself, such a message easily becomes theologically superficial in its understanding of God's ways with his world in terms of the exercise of sovereign power and pastorally unsatisfactory because the signs and wonders do not happen to order even when they are expected with fervent faith, and, although we may have good news about healing for some, we have no good news about continued and chronic suffering for many, and nothing to say to the starving masses of the homeless and the hungry.

The message about miracles needs to find its depth and its root in the gospel of the cross; concentration on the charismatic becomes unreal and superficial when it becomes a substitute for concentration on Calvary. But how can the two be held together? Perhaps there is a clue in Matthew 8.17, which sees Jesus' activity as healer of the multitudes in terms of his fulfilment of the role of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. The acts of

healing that he performs are possible only for the one who has been baptized unto solidarity with men in their bondage to sin and suffering, who at great cost is identifying himself with the people he is healing so that in some sense their sicknesses become his, and they can go free because in love he has felt himself into what was wrong with them and made it his own, which he carries to the place where it can be finally dealt with. He enters into the deepest empathy with their condition and it is that sharing love that is the secret of his power to deal with it. It is as he plumbs the depths and desolation of the human condition that real help comes.

I would want to see the sharing by the church in the healing power of Jesus in the same terms, not as a costless tapping of supernatural energy, but as an exercise of self-giving love that in its union with the self-giving love of Christ becomes the channel of resurrection and new life. In other words healing is through the cross and never without the cross, let alone instead of the cross. I have a feeling that if one followed that sort of clue one would be able to hold together the liberating ministry and the saving cross, and be led to a pastoral practice that is very unlike the one being recommended to us at the moment, for it would include being positive about suffering as well as being positive about its removal.

Riding along on the crest of Third Wave?!



Did you hear the one about the Baptist minister who went to a conference on healing and came back every day with a headache? The minister was me and the conference was Third Wave '84. The headache? That was harder to explain, but it certainly wasn't due simply to becoming a commuter for a week. Nor was it just the result of trying to absorb vast quantities of teaching from John Wimber and others on the theme of "Signs and Wonders". But God was trying to say something to me which I found very hard to hear and so it was not the kind of conference to come away from all nicely "blessed-up" - there were (and still are) more questions than answers. Yet four months later the effect of that week continues to be felt personally - without the headache!

The subject of healing has interested me for a long time. The context has varied - teenage enthusiasm at the discovery of charismatic renewal, personal experience soon after marriage of my wife having cancer, serious research for my degree dissertation, and several occasions in church life where healing has come in answer to specific prayer with the anointing of oil. I was well prepared to sit at the feet of an expert and increase my knowledge. But Third Wave was not like that. From the outset it was clear that here was something more than theory which had occasional application. John Wimber's personal spiritual pilgrimage launched the conference in a way and with a content that rang chords in many hearts, but even more striking was the easy-going way it led into a demonstration of the way God gives words of knowledge relevant to healing needs. "There's someone here with an eyelid that won't close.... No, it's not you, it's the other eye..... O.K. Now watch how we pray for her." And while team member Blaine Cook ministered to her, Wimber commented, explaining at the same time that this kind of public prayer was not their usual practice with the sick, except in 'clinics' such as this where people had come to learn. Fascinating, to say the least! Even more impressive later in the week was a teaching seminar on healing led by Blaine Cook which concluded with "How many of you have never had words of knowledge?.... We're going to ask God to give them today through you, so that you can see how readily available they are." That was precisely what happened - many individuals in turn called out the

impressions they were receiving of ailments suffered by others there. Some sounded unlikely and obscure, some were composite and only recognised when a further word was added by someone else, but there was a remarkable correspondence of "words" with "ailments". The disturbing thing was that this was through people who hadn't previously functioned in this way. I could well believe that God gave gifts and ministries like this to certain individuals and that (human nature being what it is) such people would probably conclude that their experience ought to be shared by everyone - that didn't trouble me. But for people to say our experience is meant to be yours too and here's the demonstration of it, well, that's certainly enough to disturb the equilibrium! Underlying all this was comprehensive teaching from Wimber that consistently exposed inadequate presuppositions and at the same time presented a Biblical picture which my own cautious theology could do no other than cheerfully agree with. The sense was one of being very much a part of what was going on - and at the same time a stranger to it. This tension was intensified by uncertainty over some of the unusual phenomena accompanying the ministry. "Are they really of you, Lord? It's all very well, but are these people actually being helped?" Reassurance came in one ministry session when a fellow Baptist minister immediately in front of me felt prompted to lay hands on the lady next to him. When he did, she promptly collapsed "in the Spirit" - to his amazement and consternation! Several joined in to pray for her, some tentative ideas voiced by others pointed in the right direction, and in due course a definite release came concerning a particular emotional need. I myself had ignored the same prompting to lay hands on this lady - but it certainly felt as if the Lord was saying literally under my nose, "Now does that answer your question?"!

At the same time the peculiar sense of not fitting in for no obvious reason continued. With many other pastors I too sought prayer for a new release of the Spirit in my life. Some were overcome dramatically, while I (and others) remained untouched and unmoved. This, of course, only added to the tension, uncertainty and insecurity of the whole experience, but the only thing to do was to come to the Lord and let him unravel the inner confusion. More than any experience, far more than I realised, that was the very thing I needed. As I did, I began to understand that what was disturbing me so much was that here were people who expected God to act, who not only believed he was alive as a statement of fact, but also as a matter of fact. Of course as a Christian I believed that too.... or did I? It is easy to say we are wholeheartedly following the Lord, when in practice what we mean is that we are wholeheartedly following Christian faith and practice. The call is to follow Jesus, not to follow Christianity, and I began to see that subtly and without realisation, over the years and with the pressures of leadership, I had gradually been substituting a faith-system for the Lord himself. The faith-system was thoroughly Biblical of course, often therefore it was powerful and effective, and I was totally convinced of the truth of it. As such it was quite inseparable from faith in God. Certainly in itself it was not wrong. But effectively it was taking over from God Himself. Ask me what I trusted in my answer would have been, "God, of course" but in practice the trust was really in the rationale of Christianity, in the Biblical principles that I could apply to the situation. To sum it up, my faith was in my faith rather than in the God that my faith proclaimed. Because the content of faith was true this certainly provided a secure basis both for living and for ministry, but gradually the gap had widened between the conviction itself and the reality of appreciation of it. In some ways if God himself wasn't there it almost wouldn't matter as my faith would still prescribe the same answer. I began to understand why on previous occasions I had experienced worrying doubts, as my subconscious mind struggled with this inner contradiction. Even more I understood that this was the tension that I'd been struggling with all week at Third Wave. I was looking for modifications and revisions to my faith-system, so that signs and wonders would then follow. But because it was God who was being consciously looked to, rather than some system about Him, there was no point of connection for me to latch on to. Though quite

compatible with my beliefs, Third Wave defied being reduced and incorporated into my faith-system, and thus unceremoniously and without argument it exposed the fundamental inadequacy of it. The inadequacy was not due to any particular fault in its content - certainly not due to any lack of signs or wonders or other manifestations - but that my reliance was in it, that it left me firmly in the driving seat (without realising it) and that God himself was steadily being squeezed out. However worthy an object may be, if it takes the place of God there is only one word to describe it. "The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be, Help me tear it from Thy throne, And worship only Thee".

If you approached this article expecting either an appraisal of the Wimber theology or an account of subsequent manifestations of the Spirit in a local Baptist church, you may well be disappointed. After all, what I am describing is neither new nor profound but the basic starting point of Christianity, which is always intended to be a living faith in a living God. All the more reason then for me to rejoice in the fresh discovery of that through Third Wave. How the powerful ministry of the Spirit demonstrated by Wimber and his team continues to develop both in my own life and church is another story altogether, and one which has as yet scarcely begun, but two features are emerging in the prologue:

(i) Looking for God to work

The church is God's, not only in name but in reality. Not only can we therefore count on him to be at work, but we look for him to do so, consciously inviting him and calling on him in prayer. It is not a question ultimately either of insisting on (or rejecting) particular spiritual manifestations, or of deciding (or not) to "go charismatic", for that would be to function as if it were merely a (new! improved!!) faith-system of which we are in control. We are God's people, for him to do with as he will, but we must let him do! As we look to be led by the Spirit as the sons of God, both prayer and the Word are of vital importance. Prayer is not something-that-has-to-be-done-if-a-church-is-going-to-be-blessed (i.e. according to the faith-system) but an expression of our dependence and reliance on our God. Perhaps more than anything else the existence of such prayer in our lives (rather than any kind of success) is the most effective test of whether we are really following God or a faith-system. At the same time, the Spirit is not divorced from its objective partner, the Word. It is easy to believe that Word and Spirit are co-essentials, while in practice honouring one above the other. Because our emphasis on the Word includes a full theology of the Spirit, or because our emphasis on the Spirit makes frequent appeal to Scripture, we may conclude that we are balanced in this regard. It is God himself that we trust and look to - not our faith or our experience - and therefore we can rely totally on God's Word and God's Spirit.

(ii) Recognising that the glory is God's

If our faith is in our faith rather than in God, we cannot avoid feeling that any fruit that comes of it is somehow our doing. Whether it's the way we communicate the truth of the faith, or the way that we show practical care and love as our faith directs, or the zeal and sincerity that drives us on, or the management abilities that enable the church to grow, whatever it is, it is the result of our own dedication. We can cheerfully and willingly give all the glory of that to God, recognising that he deserves it, but even in doing so, we are effectively declaring that it is ours to give, and that it would not be available to pass on to him if it weren't for us. And in that attitude we still hold on to the real glory, for honour is given to the creator not to the beneficiary. In contrast when we know that it is God we depend on, who alone does the work, and without whom all our gifts - however much given by him and dedicated to him - can accomplish nothing, then there is no robbing God of the glory. When we are congratulated for our achievement, our retort of "Praise God for that" is total and sincere, and not a respectable way of accepting praise to ourselves which really belongs

to Him. We will rejoice at the privilege of being faithful servants of Him, but we will not take the glory which rightfully is his alone. Perhaps this is the most essential reason why our faith must be firmly rooted in God rather than in our own faith-system, for only then can the Spirit move in power among us, knowing that the One he represents will receive his due praise. "I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols". (Isaiah 42:8)

Geoff Bland. (Frimley)

WIMBER at WESTMINSTER



A personal reflection by Brian Butcher of Banbury

"Third Wave" - the title intrigued me. I knew what it meant and I wanted to know more about the moving of God in the world today. I understood that the trust of the challenge was God breaking in on His Church and our world today, with a fresh affirmation of His power and glory. I have been both a witness of and a participant in expressions of renewal in the Church. The rediscovery of the gifts and ministries of the Holy Spirit today has answered to a real need in my life and ministry for some years, and as we have responded to what God has revealed, we have seen new life touching individual believers and the whole congregation amongst whom we minister. I am rejoiced at the fresh things God has done in renewing His people in worship, Church structure and leadership, and in the gifts of the Spirit. But for all that thrilled me, I still felt deeply challenged by the seeming lack of power in so much of our Church life - even renewal did not seem to have brought us into the dimension of New Testament faith where God was demonstrably alive and active to change people and meet their needs. Like many a leader, I was blessed by what had happened, but still frustrated by what remained to be done. "Third Wave" struck a chord in my heart. I knew instinctively that I wanted to see the dimension of power in evangelism that could enable us to see the Kingdom of God established in our communities. I wanted everything that God has for His people, but the real question to be faced was: would I be ready to pay the price? Having booked to attend at Westminster, I then found myself wondering: what on earth made me do it? I know the answer now. Nothing on earth made me do it. It was planned in heaven.

What knocked me out was the sheer immediacy of the presence of God. Would that we knew that each week in our Church. It wasn't the music. It was not the natural charisma of a good communicator. Neither was it the sheer volume of people who filled the Hall with the sound of His praises. No - it was just that the faith expressed among the Wimber team released the power of God among us. They believed that God was there, and that He could demonstrate himself in His power, and that is exactly what happened. I was blessed. John Wimber is worth listening to. His easy style his well-presented material made for intellectual satisfaction. But beyond all that, there was the awareness that the keys of the kingdom were unlocking the truth of God for me now. God was demonstrating His power, manifesting His holiness, revealing His glory, and as we ascended the hill of the Lord together, I found myself asking with the psalmist: who can stand in His holy place? My hands were unclean, my ministry, like my life, was marked by failure. Any success that I could gather to myself palled into insignificance of what had not been accomplished. I was nothing. It was humbling, it was searching, it was painful, and in the end it was utterly beautiful. When I was at the end of myself, there was only the glory of God

left, and I entered into the sense of His power, His joy, His grace, His glory - use what expression you will - I was totally overwhelmed with the glory and beauty of our God. I had never known such a sense of joy. It literally welled up from deep within me. It was like a spring of joy that just kept flowing. I understand what it means to have a river of living water flowing out from my inner self. The joy knew no bounds. The fact that I shouted and laughed and jumped for joy astounded me, as much as it surprised my wife and my friends. I knew that God had touched me and blessed me.

So what had I really learned? That God really does desire to fill us with all of Himself. That when we open our lives to Him, He does come in in blessing. "Look for the signs of the Spirit of God on People" Wimber had said. I now understood, could see it, and had indeed experienced it at first hand. It made a difference the following Sunday in our Church. Of course, we shared what had happened. My wife and I both had testimony to pass on to our congregation, and at the end I knew that I had to invite God to come on those who sought Him, and as people did that, I saw the signs of His coming. It was not emotional, though emotion was touched. It was beautiful because it was divine initiative and not human manipulation. I saw God move across a congregation. I prayed the prayer of the Welsh revival: "Bend the Church, Lord", and He did just that. We had not had an occasion like it before, but I know that what God did that Sunday in our Church in Banbury and what He had done for my wife and me in the week at Westminster, is what He longs to do in His church all the time. He manifests Himself, and I can never be satisfied with ordinary services, whatever structure they may have, traditional or renewed. What I want when I come to Church now is to meet with the living God. My expectations have never been higher and I know that God will not fail. When he gives a longing, it is because he purposes to meet that longing. My faith quickens at the expectation of all that He plans to do in my life and in His Church. Yes - His Church - not our Church. I have taken my hands off the Church, and have given it to Him. I no longer have to answer for all that happens. What I initiate I will answer for. What God does, He will answer for Himself. "To Him be glory in the Church, by Christ Jesus".

House Fellowships



Maurice Markham shares his experience of a growing Church in Coventry.

Four and a half years ago, we reorganised the House Groups in our Church, doubling their number, and placing a greater stress on their importance in the life of the Church. We were familiar with the theory behind small groups, that is to say, that all Christians, and especially those in a growing Church with a membership approaching 200, need a place to belong, be cared for, learn, minister to each other, discover and develop their spiritual gifts, serve, relax together and from which to reach out. God was telling us that the time was now, and so we stepped out in faith.

Neighbourhood Principle

We felt that it was important to try to link people who lived in the same area, and so we put the entire membership into neighbourhood groups. These fell into place fairly easily, though there were a few loose ends. When we asked people to attend the group in their immediate area, they responded without problem, with an attendance of about 60% of the whole membership. Inevitably the neighbourhood principle has tended to break down over the years: some people have moved house just a short distance, and we have not felt it right in most cases to ask them to move group also: some have invited their friends to the group, usually people who were at that time unconverted, but subsequently came to faith, or people with a low level of commitment who grew through their attendance at the group. For one or two people the night that the group met was the deciding factor (our predominantly young membership suggested a desirability of meeting on different nights to facilitate baby-sitting). However, we do have a co-ordinator who tries to keep an eye on the overall size and balance of the groups, and to whom those who want to join a group are usually referred. We try to keep the right balance between overseeing the membership of the groups without coercing a person to join a group where he or she would feel very unhappy.

Activities

The groups engage in the kind of activities one might expect: Bible study, prayer, worship, some ministry to one another, occasional social events (when we feel it is important to include the children), practical help (such as hiring a van and helping a group member move house), and some evangelism. Sadly, not all the groups have caught the vision for the latter, though we have seen several conversions through evangelistic house groups. Each group has tended to develop a character of its own, but we have had no problem of a group wanting to 'declare U.D.I.' and form a Church fellowship of its own.

Leadership

We have tried to appoint married couples to the leadership of the groups, and to stress that this is a joint responsibility in which both have a part to play. Where possible, we would like the leader to have no other major responsibility in the Church. This is a goal towards which we are only slowly working. From the start we held meetings of all the leaders at quarterly intervals, but somehow these seemed to lack purpose and direction. In the last few months we have put each of our three Elders in charge of three or four groups and have encouraged the leaders and their wives in these smaller units to meet once every four to six weeks. Initial indications are that this system is working well, partly, no doubt, because the reduced numbers facilitate sharing. We realise that we shall need a full meeting of all the leaders together from time to time, so that the Elders can share with them what they believe God is saying to the Church and where He is wanting to lead us. It will also give an opportunity for the leaders

to bring feed-back to the Elders. Attention to this two-way communication becomes increasingly important as the Church grows in size and it becomes easier for people to feel that they are no longer 'in the know' as they used to be.

In all of this we view the leaders as assistants to the Elders. We have come to see that it is important to consult the relevant leader before we approach a person in his group about undertaking a major job in the Church, as he has the initial pastoral responsibility for that person, and is likely to know as much or more about him than anyone else. Similarly, when a person approaches one of the Elders or someone outside their group for counsel (which they are at liberty to do) we inform the group leader of this in general terms, being very careful not to betray any confidences. In this way we can work together and can be aware early on of a person who is simply going from one counsellor to another with no obvious desire to implement what is said.

Training

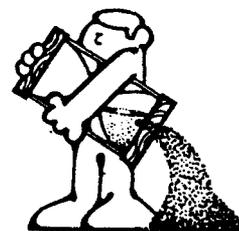
We have had 'stabs' at this during the last four years, but no organised regular programme. At several of our full meetings we have attempted some "do it yourself" training, and we have also taken advantage of one or two courses run in the City. We had an extremely helpful Saturday morning with an Elder from another Church who has the groups as his main responsibility. One interesting development just recently is that a couple who attended the 'Caring for New Christians' course organised by Mission England, found that the nurture group they were asked to run for six weeks following the meetings at Villa Park wanted to continue. As the Elders prayed about this, we saw that God had been using this as a gentle method of propelling the couple into full group leadership within the Church. We have now recognised their group as a permanent group within the Church, and can see the possibility of this happening to some but not necessarily all the future nurture groups.

Let me mention some helpful material which we have come across and either used or hope to use. "Grow through Groups" by Eddie Gibbs (Grove Booklets) contains a wealth of basic information in the compass of just 24 pages. It was a great help to us in our reorganisation 4½ years ago, and we gave every leader a copy at that time. "Caring for Growing Christians" - the course developed by Mission England in the Midlands, and published jointly by them and Scripture Union. It is designed to be taught in six sessions, either to Church leaders who will then teach group leaders in their own Churches, or direct to group leaders. Among other things, it has helpful material on different Bible study methods, on encouraging the group to pray aloud, and on different leadership styles. Two from our Church profited from its launch in Coventry in January and there are plans to teach it again. Further information about the course can be obtained from the Midlands Regional Office of Mission England, Cornerstone House, 5 Ethel Street, Birmingham. B2 4BG. "How to lead a house group" by Richard Haydon-Knowell is a training manual with a total of eleven sessions. Six are intended for leaders and potential leaders. They are required to do some home study and then come together with their Church leaders to go through the material. Subjects covered are: Goals and Aims, Teaching in the House Group, Worship and Spiritual Gifts, Members one of another, Dealing with special needs, and the leader and his wife. The book is published by Coastlands, 22/23 Clarendon Villas, Hove, E. Sussex. BN3 3RE. "Operation Matthew" - a manual on small group evangelism - is one of the latest publications from Mission England. Its 22 pages contain a wealth of practical suggestions. About 6 years ago, I was challenged to hear Eddie Gibbs saying that the greatest unexploited potential in the Church today is the evangelistic house group. This manual shows how to unlock that potential. It is available from any Mission England office - price 50p.

In Conclusion

We have seen many blessings and joys as a result of having groups in our Church. We can point not only to individuals who have grown considerably in Christian maturity but also to leaders whose gifts have been developed through having this responsibility. There are also a number of people who have received real care and support when passing through difficult times. However, we are also aware of areas of weakness. Not all members want to belong to a group. We have not always given some of these the pastoral care they ought to have had. Groups have a constant danger of becoming inward-looking, and not concerned enough about evangelism. They can also become problem-centred instead of Christ-centred, and the growing geographical spread of our Church and the breakdown of the neighbourhood principle for the reasons outlined above make it more difficult to have informal contacts and fellowship between meetings. However, we believe that the groups are of central importance in the life of our fellowship, and that they have been used to build the Church.

"If I were Starting Again"



"The topic I have in mind for you is...." Alastair Campbell said in his letter to me, "IF YOU WERE TO START AGAIN, referring not to being President of the Baptist Union but to your ministry, where would you place your emphasis knowing what you know now?"

My immediate response to this idea was predictable, "But we never get our time over again". So it's idle speculation of the 'if only' variety. Of course, I had realised that this was but a device to open up the subject of mostly painful personal confessions in the vain hope that it might be of some use to those who were starting out on their ministry. Yet the way the question hit me was, would I start again in the ministry? I find it so hard to recall how I felt in College a thousand years ago (well 1946-1950 actually) but I do recall that I entered the ministry by default. I got into College by a back door. I was 23, straight off a troop ship from India which had docked two days earlier. I had faced no M.R. Committee, no College Selection Board. I had no certificates from school except for swimming and a few football cups and I had never read a single book! I did know that I had to have an attempt to become some kind of full-time Christian worker, but a parson!..... a minister, a dog-collared, psalm-chanting, old-lady-visiting, jumble-sale-collecting, shockable, respectable, effeminate parson Ugh, No! That was the image of the ministry which all of us council-estate, chip-on-the shoulder bolshy lads had, and which I believe millions of our fellow countrymen have still.

But four years later when the grant ran out and I had to leave (no one told me about any possibility of going on to do further study), I found myself in the one situation I had dreaded, that is of being the pastor of a local Church : only we didn't use the word 'pastor' in those days. The word conveyed to us then a man who had done one, maybe two years, in a Bible College, emerging with a huge Bible, a statue of Calvin and a 2½ inch deep dog-collar created in material enabling wear even in the bath! Well, as a pastor, I found myself propping up the very institutions I had previously wanted to pull down.

Meetings, meetings and even more meetings where people never truly met but where the same old few turned up and went away exactly as they had come. Now, I am sorry if my blundering into the ministry in this way shocks you, but then my Christian education didn't end at College and I had only just started to learn some vital lessons (a process which is still continuing but all too slowly).

I went through my earth-shaking social-gospel period getting the poor bewildered folks of Bacup and Rossendale to read Sean Herron's 'British Weekly' to demonstrate against Central African Federation (ask your Grandad about that), for United Nations, against all social injustice and especially the closing of redundant factories. A proper little Arthur Scargill I was but please don't mention it, he might sue me. If I was starting over again, I would still want to be socially involved, but not like that. Most angry young Christians only succeed in making others angry; firebrand theology always creates more heat than light.

I often begin my prayers with the words, 'Lord, if I were You, I wouldn't talk to me!' Truly, I have existed as a minister by the one simple fortune of not being found out! It may seem corny, but if I were to start over again, my priority would be to know God better even at the possible expense of seeking to know more about Him. It would be the priority of practising what I preached and discarding the dearly held belief that having preached on something, I had therefore accomplished it. I would want to concentrate on what really matters in Christian worship and service and not on the overwhelmingly self-centred reasons for my infernal busyness, nor on trying to appear clever nor on trying to win approval. It is in this area that I would want to start over so that 'being risen with Christ' and 'being filled with the Spirit' (Scripture's description of the normal life of all baptised believers) would result in my loving people more and seeing self-centred ambition and self-justification as the curses on pastoral ministry. The Church from the earliest times has believed and taught that the sinfulness of its priests and ministers does not invalidate the sacraments which they administer. I accept that with grateful relief and rejoice that God can fight His battles even with broken swords but starting over, I would not want to trade so much on the forgiving, patient, graciousness of God.

Preaching the whole counsel of God has to me always been a privilege defying explanation. Starting over I would want to take the Bible far more seriously than I did in the early years of my ministry. That would not mean that I would worship the Bible in the place of God nor approach it mindlessly but at least I would stop apologising for it, explaining it away, attempting to push its revelation of God under a one-eyed deified scientific microscope and stop de-mythologising its revelation. Quite apart from all arguments about truth and error, it took years to learn that men cannot de-mythologise, they can only re-mythologise using appallingly inferior models. Gruenberg was right that, 'Some things are truer than the literal truth', but it is also true that to murder the media is to massacre the message.

Our job is to communicate the whole counsel of God and not to haggle over the cheer and boo words. Our place is in the Kingdom of God and not in a religious tribe with its taboos, totems and tribal wars.

I have always believed that prayer was the real power-house of effective ministry but my own prayer life was always a desert. It had been so in College and it got worse after I left. 'Lord; talking to you is like talking to a brick wall' is what I ought to have said so often because the sheer enjoyment of God, the mystical fascination and awesome lostness in Him is something which (apart from perhaps two occasions) has eluded me throughout the years. Now, there's a confession! Nevertheless, my dear

congregations, my imagine-respecting, role-blinded people would have been shattered if I had told them that sometimes I had gone for weeks without even having a quiet time!

Another thing in which I would want to make a fresh start would be in a deeper commitment to Christian partnership in marriage and a deeper appreciation of my wife, but that would take a book in itself.

Another thing (heavens, now I have got started more things keep occurring to me) which I would want to include in new beginnings would be new structures of ministry within a re-shaped local Church leadership. Summing this up briefly, I would want to try to re-organise the Church into small well-led discipleship groups for which my part would be to concentrate on training the Leaders. I would pray that within these groups Christians would develop spiritual muscles and would begin to discover or re-discover their spiritual gift-mixtures. Out of these would come the pastoral assistants who with me would exercise their gifts in caring for the flock. Out of these pastorally gifted people I believe would come pastoral counsellors, those with the gift of creative listening and Christ-like compassion willing to learn. Into the discipleship groups the unchurched might more easily come and find themselves more immediately at home than they do in a Church service. Thus I would want to see the structure of ministry growing more naturally into a plural leadership which might gradually add to its team other specialised ministries in such areas as administration, music and the development of overall growth. My list is growing but my word space has all but run out.

So I had better sum up by saying that starting over would begin with confession. That confession would be of almost total personal failure to be a faithful Christian and Church member and to underline that no Christian minister (well, certainly this minister) can ever afford to criticise a brother-minister, bearing in mind that but for the grace of God, down the drain go we all. Thus, if it were a sincere confession, it would create a greater commitment to my brethren in the district and the Union.

Having confessed that starting over would mean for me wanting to be a more Christian minister, I would want to go on to say that in short I would pray that my ministry would not be merely 'talking about the stuff' as John Wimber says, but 'doing the stuff', which takes us into the realm of signs following and as that is to be a significant element in our Mainstream Conference perhaps this theme can be continued there and beyond.

In short, for the new Baptist year beginning in April, my wish is not a spoonerism when I say to each of my fellows in ministry 'A HAPPY NEW MINISTER-YEAR'.

Book Reviews



"How to Plant Churches" edited by Monica Hill. 131 pages.
Published by Marc Europe. £4.50.

Opening a new Church is not the same as opening a new McDonald's! It is the well publicised boast of McDonald's that their produce, service and decor are alike world-wide. The contention of the eight contributors to this exciting book, is that it cannot be like that in the Church (although our assumption is that it can). Thus, Andrew Walls' conclusion after reviewing Christian history is: "There is no single final form of Christianity." Peter Cotterell, with experience of Ethiopia insists that we cannot predict what form the Church will take in another culture if we leave the new converts to respond to the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is a mistake for the preacher of the gospel to take a hand in forming the Church.

'Church planting' is much spoken of today, so it is healthy for us to realise that most Church planting, whether in this country or overseas involves bridging large culture gaps and calls for great efforts at identification with people different from ourselves, and great humility in recognising our own familiar ideas and methods to be neither universal nor final. Without this insight Church planting will become denominational imperialism.

This is a varied and stimulating book. In addition to the articles mentioned there are three chapters full of lessons gleaned from actual situations, whether in this country, Europe or Africa. Any one engaged in evangelism let alone Church planting, should read these chapters by Robert Scott-Cook (Bristol), Johann Lukasse (Belgium) and Monica Hill (Summarising various testimonies). Michael Griffiths has some thought-provoking things to say in conclusion, of which the following may well, alas, serve as an epitaph for the book. "Christian Churches seem to have an infinite capacity for absorbing criticism and adopting new ideas, without it making the slightest difference." May it not be so!

Alastair Campbell.

Love Your Local Missionary edited by Martin Goldsmith (STL £1.50) 116 pages.

Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, Korea, is well known for its amazing emphasis on, and experience of, church growth. Significantly it is a church committed to evangelism not only in its own city, or even in its own land, but abroad as well, with a great evangelistic commitment towards Japan and vision for China. In contrast, Western Christianity has largely lost its sense of responsibility for world-wide evangelism. As Elizabeth Goldsmith puts it in the first of 5 contributions to this very helpful little book, "We realise that those with an interest in missionary work are the exceptions rather than the normal". No doubt we would discount ourselves from this generalisation - but the fact is that in the recent Mainstream Conference with the battlecry "Mission still matters", the emphasis was almost exclusively on "Jerusalem" rather than "the ends of the earth".

"Love your Local Missionary" is the kind of book that challenges a myopic view of world-mission by correcting the unhelpful images that tend to cause it. It is light, easy-reading, amusingly illustrated, but there is nothing light-weight or easy-going about its practical and total support of those involved in missionary work. Both John Wallis's article on "The Missionary Abroad", and Anne Townsend's "The Missionary at Home", are very concerned both with practical aspects and with real issues. Anne Townsend for example writes about how to help the returning missionary adjust to changes that have come through renewal during his absence - and it is not

just missionaries who would benefit from the application of her sensitive advice!

The book's first concern is clearly to encourage and enable loving support for missionaries, but this can't be separated from a mutual understanding of why the missionary is doing this work. The last two articles therefore are by Stanley Davis, who in "Missionary Outreach Today" outlines the current needs and opportunities of world mission, and by Martin Goldsmith who provides a brief theological answer to the question "Why Mission?" The reason is simple: "For the whole church to be involved in the active support of their mission, all the members must see mission world-wide as an integral part of biblical faith." This is the kind of book that will help achieve that - providing, of course, that it is not passed over while we buy another book on church growth instead.

Geoff Bland.

Beyond the Churches -Facing a Task Unfinished Published by MARC Europe and the Evangelical Alliance at £4.95

I found this an interesting and intriguing, though ultimately disappointing publication. The introductory articles setting out the thinking which led to the idea of the book are good and worth reading for themselves, but the bulk of the book, a county by county survey of Church attendance in England and Wales, followed by the listing of unreached 'people groups' in the counties, provides us with little to really fire us to 'plan strategically for evangelism' which is the stated aim. It is interesting for example, to know that 93% of the population of West Yorkshire do not attend Church with any degree of regularity and amongst that number there are 20,000 people living in certain inner-city areas of Leeds where there is negligible Christian witness, but having stated the obvious, what do we do with the information? Perhaps this is where the challenge of the book lies. How do we reach them? The book is offered 'to encourage leadership to identify opportunities for outreach, to show how strategy and planning can be used in evangelism - and to call for urgent prayer.' I hope it succeeds in its aims, but I remain unconvinced.

Harry Weatherley.

"Creation and Covenant" - an Old Testament Covenantal theology by W.J. Dumbrell. Paternoster Press. £6.95.

The writer begins with the discussion of the word 'Covenant' in its first appearance in connection with Noah (Genesis, 6, 17-18). Particularly useful as the title suggests is the link between Creation and Covenant. Creation themes are traced into the Abrahamic, Sinai, Davidic and New Covenants. Eden recaptured is a theme that had escaped attention before now. Also stimulating were the discussions of rest (which has implications for how we view the Sabbath/Sunday problems). The book is not light reading, but it does deal helpfully with many important passages, giving a summary of the arguments at the end of each section. The discussions of new covenants (confined to the Old Testament) made me stop and think, as I had tended to think of it as completely fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus. A word of caution must be said for preachers! This book does not provide ready-made sermon material, but it does provide much that is thought-provoking, which should lead to sermons. I am pleased to have this now among my Old Testament books.

Stewart H. Cook.

"The Gospel in Revelation" by Graeme Goldsworthy. Paternoster Press. £3.95.

To choose a theme, select a book and produce a thesis seems a dangerous way of expounding scripture, especially if that book is Revelation.

Graeme Goldsworthy does not land in trouble because his theme is that Jesus Christ is the key to life, the gospel, indeed everything. He shows, to the reviewer's satisfaction at least, that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the central theme of Revelation, and that the book must be interpreted in this light.

Whilst taking a broadly cyclical view - Revelation consists of a series of visions each covering the gospel age - the author gives helpful descriptions and diagrams of the different millennial views and includes an appendix on the mark of the beast.

Goldsworthy's treatment is refreshing and helpful. You do not need to know a particular prophetic timetable to understand Revelation! He allows the scriptures to speak for themselves.

This book should prove useful for preachers, individual Christians and possibly small groups (if the leader has done his homework). Each will see that Revelation is an integral part of the New Testament witness to the gospel of Christ and not an obscure book for 'prophetic types' and sects.

The preacher will move on to a more detailed commentary such as 'I saw heaven opened' by Michael Wilcock (recommended by author and reviewer alike).

Enjoy yourself!

Iain Collins.

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