



21 - and Still GOING STRONG

My predecessor very kindly passed on to me a definition of what I should be doing. Apparently, Adlai Stevenson once said, "An editor is someone who sifts the wheat from the chaff and then prints the chaff". I hope that I shall have the luxury of being able to make the choice. As the proud possessor of all twenty issues of the Mainstream Newsletter, I will not deny that there is some chaff. However, I am bound to say that for the most part I have found this publication to be wholesome wheat. Without that conviction my subscription would have ceased long ago, and I would not have accepted the responsibility of doing the sifting. So, from now on, the editor's chair will bear a new imprint. I also hope that you will allow him to find his feet under the editor's desk.

From time to time the Mainstream Executive and Advisory Council evaluate the role of Mainstream and reassess its aims. A Statement is included in this newsletter to help answer any questions about what is on Mainstream's agenda. One of the means by which Mainstream hopes to fulfil these aims is the Newsletter.

Two things need to be said about the Newsletter. Firstly, it makes no pretensions to being a learned journal. It is essentially a practical and personal 'newsletter'. Secondly, it is not exclusively designed to be read by professional leaders. All who are involved in the leadership of our churches are in mind - ministers, elders, deacons and homegroup leaders. So the content of the Newsletter will be shaped by the needs and concerns of all those who carry some leadership responsibility in our churches. It is hoped that each edition will have this wide-ranging appeal.

FROM THE EDITOR

My concern as editor will be to encourage and ensure that:

- (i) Where there is reference to and explanation of scripture, that it is substantial and not ephemeral;
- (ii) Where issues are raised, that it is done in such a way as to stimulate enquiry and not to provoke a reactionary defensiveness;

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'Mainstream' Newsletter is designed to encourage life and growth within the Baptist Union. On the assumption that contributors are in sympathy with this aim, they have full liberty of expression. Views expressed in the newsletter are strictly those of individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Editor, or of the Mainstream Executive and Advisory Council.

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(iii) Where experience is shared, that it is honest and relevant to the overall aim of strengthening congregational and association life.

This newsletter will continue to be published as long as there is a suitable supply of material (for which, Reader, you must share some responsibility), and as long as there is a sufficient demand within the denomination for the special diet which it provides (for which, Readers, you must be the judge).

Now, where is my winnowing fork?

Editor.



The Aims of Mainstream

Mainstream came into being to foster life and growth within the Baptist Union. Encouraged by the many signs of God's blessing on our life together, we remain committed to this primary objective.

Within this framework we believe God is calling us to the following:

1. To encourage responsible participation at every level of denominational life, so that at District, Association and Council level the life within our Churches is creatively expressed.
2. To encourage Churches to keep mission, both evangelistic and social, as a high priority. We believe this requires a courageous and sacrificial obedience to all the demands of the Gospel in every area of our society.
3. To strengthen unity among various groups of evangelicals within our denomination. Recognising the diversity among us we believe Mainstream provides a forum and meeting point where we can learn from one another.
4. To be open to God's activity throughout the whole Church. We affirm the need for our links with the Historic Churches but also call our fellow Baptists to a broader ecumenism and to build bridges with other established and emerging evangelical Churches of today.
5. To enable the Churches and their leadership in their ministry through:
 - the annual conference acting as a platform for teaching, dialogue and encouragement.
 - the regular newsletter with its personal, biblical and practical dimensions.
 - occasional study conferences tackling contemporary theological, pastoral and social issues with a view to providing practical input to the life of our Churches.

Mainstream Executive and Advisory Council

Reflections on Reverting to Type

It is just twelve weeks since I returned to the ministry after eight years of teaching at the London Bible College. So you will readily understand that as yet I have no mature reflection to offer! Yet first impressions can be important and you can soon lose the objectivity of those early days as it gets suffocated by the desire not to offend those with whom you have built up a relationship. So where angels fear to tread, I am rushing in.

I am enjoying my honeymoon and I hope it lasts for a long time. Some aspects of it certainly will. The warmth of the relationship between a pastor and a settled congregation far surpasses even the best and closest of relationships which I enjoyed with students. The relationship is a far more natural one and is concerned with the whole person rather than being centred on the more narrow concerns of academic or training establishments. And then there is the joy of being on the front line again for God! We were not exactly cut off in a monastic-like institution but even so we had to draw back a bit from everyday evangelism and pastoring. It was great being behind the lines and a tremendous privilege to be training the troops. Indirectly the influence was enormous, at least in potential. But it is great to influence a few directly too!

Then there is the joy of preaching to the same group of people week in and week out (assuming they come back of course) instead of travelling the country and facing a different congregation each Sunday. I well remember it dawning on me half way through the morning service on my second Sunday at Mutley that I had met this congregation the previous week and I was not going to have to drive back to London as soon as the benediction was pronounced that evening. Added to this there is the openness of the people and their hunger to go on with God as a church. William Barclay once said that you can't teach theological students anything because they already know the answers. Well, I can't speak for his students but that's grossly unfair to the ones I taught. Even so, relatively speaking the congregation seems to be more open than the class room.

I could go on romanticising. We could not have had a better welcome or more encouraging start to our ministry and the deacons (in case they get sent a copy of this article) have been a delight. Their friendship and fellowship already counts for much. But, yes, you've guessed it. There is the odd point that I have noted which perhaps needs attention.

Firstly, the church seems to be facing in the wrong direction. It seems constantly to be looking to the past rather than the present and even less to the future. Now don't get me wrong. The people of God have a tradition which they neglect at their peril. The book of Deuteronomy labours that point - look at chapter 8 for a start. I believe in the value of knowing our history. I ought to, since I spent five years researching into the nineteenth century because I was sure it held some clues to understanding where we were today. But surely tradition doesn't include the inherited junk of yesterday does it?

My arrival provided the church with an opportunity to throw out three and a half skips full of broken chairs, left-over visual aids, musty hymn books and old rubbish, all of which had been stored because it might come in useful one day. If I had been in on the act I think I could have made it five skips full - but it was certainly a start. Nehemiah 4:10, and there was much rubbish, seemed to be a suitable text for my opening Sunday, but I resisted the temptation.

Of course, that's only superficial but it is symptomatic of deeper attitudes - both the cluttering up of the place and the willingness to

engage in spring-cleaning. Moving in the present is sometimes difficult because of the inherited legacy of the past. Virtually everything in the church seems to have been given in memory of someone or other. So you can't move it or replace it because someone would be offended. The policy of encouraging such gifts looks charitable but actually builds in a drag anchor which slows the church down. Occasionally I wondered if I have misread the job description. Had I come to be the curator of a museum, complete with daggers and snake-skins from Congo (where?) in the 1950's, or was I to be the pastor of a living church? Fear of offending the memory of the past seemed to be a greater motive than fear of offending the generations of today and tomorrow, with the consequence that we unconsciously discouraged them from joining us. The feel, the culture, the attitudes spoke of the 1950's whereas I had been used to living in a college setting in the 1980's.

Secondly, it was amazing how much of our thinking is directed to the inner constituency rather than to the outer fringe. Well established members of the family would understand what was going on and why things were done in the way they were but it was often a mystery to me, and I was the minister! It would completely baffle the newcomer. We'd use initials without explaining them. We'd invite people to come along to 'Focus' without saying whether that was a geriatric club, a mums and toddlers group or a roaring debating forum. Never mind, we'd still expect them to come. We'd happily confuse people by having several editions or versions of the Bible sitting in the pews so that when we read from one, announcing its page number, for the sake of those who don't know their Habakkuk from their Thessalonians, they would not know what we were on about. We'd chop and change our house groups around so that it would take a Christian with the skills of Sherlock Holmes to actually track one down. Oh, and to help the newcomer we have a good system with Junior Church as well. The Spurgeon department meets in the Bunyan room while the Bunyan department meets in the Hurrell room and no one uses the Spurgeon Room at all, and so on.

All this is fine if you are one big happy family and want to stay that way. But if you want to grow, then the obstacle course we put in people's way must be removed. Unless that is that we only want people to join us if they are suitable contestants for the spiritual Krypton factor.

Thirdly, there is the lack of strategy. I have always felt Mark 1:35-39 (yes, do look it up!) was saying something important about ministry. Jesus is clearly working to a strategy which has been worked out with this father. In other words, he's providing leadership. But he does so without much help from his friends who have different ideas as to how he should be spending his time. Their well-meaning intentions would have just wide-tracked him. And note how he pursues that strategy in spite of the immense human need with which he was surrounded. He does not stop to respond to every expression of human need but turns his back on the ills some suffered in order to accomplish God's plan.

The ministry suffers from the well-meaning intentions of friends and is in danger of being drowned in a morass of human need. "Support this cause", "Advertise this event", "Attend this meeting", "Drop into this coffee morning", "Sort out that administrative problem"! But we can't do it all. We have limited time, energy and resources so we have got to make choices and that is where strategic thinking must come in. I was expected to give answers before I even knew what the questions were. How different from Nehemiah's approach. People wanted a response to every issue, whether it was a wise priority for the minister or not. Time for listening to God and preparing his word, the fountain of all ministry, easily got squeezed out by a surfeit of worthy activity. Just to take one example. I spent more time, in my early weeks, trying to find a representative on a local inter-church group, which in all honesty probably fulfilled its most useful function twenty years ago, than I did dealing with the pastoral needs of several families whose marriages were on the rocks. Could I really justify that? Of

course, all people and their concerns matter and there were certainly useful spin-offs in that I was able to get to know some people. But is that really how I will build the people of God? Keep the show going, without stopping to ask whether it is worthwhile. That seems to be the motto. I could happily fill my diary full of committees, meetings, conferences, fraternals, ecumenical sessions etc. - and never have time to meet either with God or the members of my church! 'No' is a difficult word to learn - but a vital one if we are to achieve anything.

The local churches relate well to each other and have much in common. But even there I found a total lack of strategic thinking and an organisation that needed pruning if healthy life was to develop. We have a local Council of Churches with the usual round of meetings, election of officers, bank account and so on. As far as I could discover their principal activity last year was to organise an inter-church picnic which a total of eight people attended from the five churches - four of who went to one location and four of whom went to another! Now quite apart from the needs, if we are thinking strategically, for my own congregation to get to know each other through picnics together, am I really expected to devote precious evenings to sitting in meetings to arrange such non-events? We closed the Council of Churches, and continue to have fellowship as ministers, without the superstructure. Oh, and we are getting things done much more easily and much more productively.

Oh for a sense of the importance of strategy so that our limited time and resources can be used wisely. No college could possibly function as the church does. If it tried to meander through its work with such aimlessness, responding to every need which is thrown at it, it would soon close. Colleges have to have clear aims, established priorities, account for their resources, explain what they are doing and assess their effectiveness or else they do not get the recognition that they need. I know it is not quite the same in the church - but I still think we have something to learn from them.

There are other things we could mention. The thinking seems much more short-term, much more legalistic, much more tied up with protecting vested interests. Perhaps the college atmosphere is bound to be more free but we seemed to thrive without the dire warnings which lurk in the legalistic thinking of many. Then after eight years out of ministry I have noted a marked deterioration of family life in the church, and people are much more damaged than they were and pastoral work has got to go much deeper and take more time than it used to. The tradition of superficial visits simply won't hold.

Other people's reflections would be different. It would be interesting to hear them. But that's mine and perhaps I ought to finish treading like an elephant on people's toes. Let me explain that I have the nerve to write all this because we already have a close and valued love relationship with the church and its people. I hope it survives a Mainstream article! Glad to be back? I would say a resounding yes! I wouldn't miss it for the world. The ripe fruit is amazing - but pruning is necessary if there is to be fruit next season as well. Too often we go for the soft option and don't use the scateurs but that just could be the kindness that kills.

Dr. Derek J. Tidball - Plymouth.



The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians

The debate about the gift of prophecy continues unresolved. Consider these quotations from recently published books:

"Prophecy has been and remains a reality whenever and wherever Bible truth is genuinely preached - that is, spelled out and applied, whether from a pulpit or more informally. Preaching is teaching God's revealed truth with application; such teaching with application is prophecy, always was and always will be."

J.I. Packer - Keep in Step with the Spirit - IVP P.217.

"An important principle to follow is sketched by Paul himself when he both stresses the special value of prophecy and wants every Christian at Corinth to use it. In other words we must look for (and expect to find) an understanding of the New Testament gift of prophecy which is neither banal nor esoteric. It is presumably a gift which, at the same time, uniquely strengthens the Church and is accessible to any member. We must not trivialise it in our attempts to understand it, nor must we make it so specialised that it lies beyond the reach of most Christians. To equate it with expository preaching is to fall into the latter danger. A Church in which everybody is an expository preacher (or any kind of preacher, for that matter) would be a nightmare and is manifestly not what Paul wants for the Corinthians."

D. Prior - The Message of I Corinthians - IVP - p.236.

So is prophecy preaching? Or not? If not, what is it? Why does Paul rate it so highly? Is it available today? The purpose of this article is not to contribute any fresh personal discoveries that might help to answer these questions, but to draw the attention of Mainstream readers to a book which is not likely to be found on the Church Bookstall.

"The Gift of Prophecy in I Corinthians" by Wayne A Grudem is published by University Press of America at \$16.95, and looks like what it is - a doctoral thesis. Despite these drawbacks, the book is worth reading, being both easy to read and genuinely illuminating in its examination of what Paul actually says about this gift. I shall summarise Dr. Grudem's main findings and then add a few conclusions of my own.

In his first Chapter on the authority of prophecy, Dr. Grudem first shows that Paul would have been familiar from his background both with a divine authority attributed to the very words of the prophets, and a divine authority attributed merely to the general content of, for example, a Rabbi's utterances. The Old Testament prophets were held to be speaking the very words of God; not so the Rabis, who might, nevertheless, speak by revelation. So there is, 'Prophecy' and 'prophecy'. The former is beyond challenge or question, but not necessarily the latter. Seen in this light it is plain that Paul thought of Corinthian prophecy as less than the very word of God. A prophet could be interrupted, his utterances could be critically weighed by all, their authority is subject to that of the apostle himself. From Acts 21, we see that Paul felt himself free to ignore a prophecy or to draw different implications from it than the prophet himself and his other friends. On the other hand, those who for the New Testament Church correspond to the Old Testament prophets in speaking the very words of God are the apostles, whose witness gives the knowledge of the Son of God, on which the Church is founded. The apostles and prophets of Ephesians 2, 20 are, on this reading, the same people. It would follow from this that we, too, could recognise a message as being given by the Holy Spirit in whole or in part, without thereby according to it the status of Holy Scripture. God's

Word, written, is one of the chief yardsticks by which a purporting prophecy would be judged. Yet, because God has not withdrawn his Spirit from the Church, the possibility of a person speaking with more than human wisdom would not be discounted.

Dr. Grudem then turns to considering the psychological state of the prophet and the source of his message. Were the prophets ecstatic? He shows, especially from I Corinthians 14, 30 that the essence of prophecy is revelation: God reveals something to the mind or spirit of a person, and he then speaks it out for the benefit of all. Whereas what is received from teaching is knowledge, what is received from prophecy is revelation, (I Corinthians 14, 6.) But since the prophet can be told to wait to speak, and to control himself in the interests of decency and order, it is plain that Paul was not talking about something ecstatic. Chapter 13, as well as showing that a prophet must be controlled by love in the way he brings his gift of revelation, also seems to imply that the message itself may well be "in part" or "through a glass darkly", presumably because the prophet himself is but a partial transmitter of the divine will. So, once again, we are not robbed of responsibility, either in giving or receiving a prophecy. The Spirit of God subjects himself to his human spokesman. He does not violate them, nor rob them of the possibility and necessity of personal decision.

Chapter 3 deals with the function, content and form of prophecy. The function of prophecy is "up-building, encouraging and consolation" (I Corinthians 14, 3), functions which prophecy shares with all gifts legitimately in use in the worship meeting. Thus, it is not in function but in source that prophecy is distinctive, since it comes by revelation. As to content, prophecy will not properly contain any claim to be the very words of God (e.g. by being prefaced with "Thus saith the Lord") but it will "consist of claims to speak facts that could not be known by ordinary means. It may include prediction of the future (Acts 11, 27-30), the disclosure of secret sins or anxieties or problems hidden in a man's heart (I Corinthians 14, 24-25) or the disclosure of certain gifts for ministry possessed by someone in the congregation (I Timothy 1, 18, and 4, 14). But very often we can suppose that the prophecy would also include not such spectacular revelations, but perhaps the statement of a known fact or verse of scripture which needed to be called to the attention of the congregation at that particular moment. So, perhaps someone would stand and say 'God has brought to my mind a verse of Scripture, and I feel I must say it - Honour your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord, your God gives you.' Then someone else may stand and admit that the prophecy called to his mind a scriptural principle which he had not thought about in relation to his particular situation, but that upon hearing it again, he was encouraged to make a particular decision with regard to his own life which he might not otherwise have made. Or again, someone might stand and say, - 'the Lord has put on my mind a tremendous concern for Christians in Rome, I think we should pray for them now'. Then, later it might be learned that, that day a new onslaught of persecution had begun in Rome.

"In both these cases, the information contained in the prophecy was not hidden information which could only have been known by revelation. The members of the congregation, if they had been asked, would have agreed that it was good to honour one's father and mother and to pray for Christians in other cities. In these cases, the revelation to the prophet was indispensable because it allowed those particular items of information (rather than some others) to be called to the attention of the congregation at those particular times (rather than at some other times). And the fact that these thoughts came spontaneously and forcefully to mind caused the prophet to think that they came from God, and were not the product of his own reflection on, and evaluation of, the situation at hand (in which case it would have been a teaching or exhortation)." Grudem, p120.

Consistent with this, there will be no specific or peculiar formulae for prophecy. The only requirement is that prophecy is intelligible, and the better the prophet, the more readily intelligible he will be. Finally, "the common idea that prophets contributed to the gospel tradition has not yet been adequately substantiated by the New Testament data, nor does there seem to be convincing evidence that prophets, as prophets, had regular leadership roles in the New Testament Church." Grudem, p 130.

So who may legitimately be called a prophet in the Corinthian sense? Plainly the term describes no more than someone who does, in fact, prophesy. Can all believers prophesy? All are permitted to do so, and even encouraged to do so, but not all in fact do prophesy with any regularity (I Corinthians 12, 29), and no-one can prophesy at will, but only when God moves him and gives him something by way of revelation. Could women prophesy? Plainly, yes, according to I Corinthians 11,5. What then of the apparent injunction to silence in I Corinthians 14, 33-35? Grudem resolves this notorious problem by arguing (I think convincingly) that this refers quite specifically to the public weighing of prophecy; this, being a function of authority, is denied to women, who are, nevertheless, free to minister in any other way. Since God is free to give revelation by anyone He will, all may seek the gift by prayer and in a spirit of loving concern for others.

All this makes good sense to me, both as an interpretation of Scripture and as an account of the place of prophecy in the contemporary Church, and I hope that the author feels that his conclusions have been fairly summarised. Would that all those who essay to prophesy were as humble as Grudem (and Paul) insist that they should be. Indeed, would that all God's people were prophets, for this is a gift we need, but even in charismatic circles it is far more talked about than experienced. Genuinely revealing prophecies are few and far between - too often 'prophecies' are pretentious in their claims, vacuous in their content or attention-seeking in motivation. How can we encourage mature believers to be open to the very possibility that they can receive the promptings of God's Spirit to speak out in faith words that will cause God's will to be seen and done on earth as in heaven? For me, there are, as yet, no answers to that question, but I believe Dr. Grudem has shown us the right questions to ask, and given us tools to evaluate the answers offered.

Alastair Campbell - Northampton.

The Musician in the Believers' Church



What are the functions of the Musician in the Believers' Church? The first is to bring glory to GOD through music. This means that when you are a church musician, self-conceit has had its day, and our dreams and aspirations must become subservient. So, Goodbye to Showbiz (though not necessarily showmanship!) Our standard of performance, however high, must be an offering to GOD. He has given us the gift of music and of musicianship. We offer it back as a thanksgiving to Him; as a tribute to His greatness.

The second function of the musician is to serve the people through music. The people are best served by re-assessment. We have long traditions of music in our churches, and the time has come when we need to re-appraise them and ask whether they are still the right way to worship GOD today. Music and worship go closest together at the level at which people can worship most meaningfully. This may well cause musicians some hardship, because it may mean that we have to start looking for a Lowest Common Denominator.

If we impose music on the Believers, by virtue of our musicianship, then really, even though we may think that the music is of good quality, it could have very little use as a means of worship; as a means of transporting people into that Heavenly Realm which worship is all about. Popular taste has never been very high-brow, but yet I believe that music must come 'from the people'. If we need some high-brow music, we can always go home and put some records on, or listen to Radio 3, or even indulge in concert music during our practice time.

As responsible musicians within the Believers' Church it is not up to us to follow tradition. Traditions vary, fashions change; but what remains constant is the need to meet the people where they are - even if that takes a bit of research on our part, I believe it to be very necessary. This is our starting point. There is definitely something wrong if we find that we are inflicting our own taste, or the taste of a minority group, upon GOD's People.

The Establishment in general may well consider that certain music is of better quality than certain other music. When you come down to the practicality of things, such a judgement has very little relevance to praising GOD. The standards which we may set to differentiate between good and bad music are not known to be the same standards which GOD sets. He may not differentiate at all between the quality of our music, but may concern Himself solely with the quality of the offering of ourselves. Therefore I believe that the most suitable music for praise and for worship is that with which the people, as a whole, are most comfortable. Though this will vary from fellowship to fellowship, I think it is a safe guess that in general it would be fairly low-brow music.

I see also that it is a function of the musician in the Believers' Church to be a catalyst. Those of us who did even a modicum of science at school will probably remember that a catalyst is a substance which speeds up a reaction between other substances. By being a catalyst the musician can make possible a freer and easier musical response from the people.

The early Methodist, I understand, prohibited all musical instruments from their meetings, with the exception of the bass viol. It was their contention that all singing should be congregational (that is to say, everyone joining in) and that, good congregational singing needed no accompaniment.

Looked at in these terms, it would seem that the Church Musician still needs to justify his existence today if the music of the church can be

carried on without him. He must, therefore, ask himself whether he adds anything to worship, or is he merely cosmetic. This brings us back to his role as a catalyst. It is an important role; an interpretative function. The Americans have a good name for him, they call him 'Minister of Music'.

In the Believers' Church, the Organist or other musician is a sensitive person. He is sensitive in that he reads the atmosphere of the service, and hopefully he also reads the mind of the Minister. This doesn't mean that he gets the sermon in advance, but it does mean that he has a fairly good idea of the flow of worship. One very obvious result of this sensitivity is that he doesn't play "Nearer my GOD to Thee" as if it were "Onward Christian Soldiers"!

The musician is playing a supportive role to both priest and people. His objective, as a musician, is to bring both priest and people nearer to the Risen Christ through his music. I believe that this is his only justification. Everything else is just entertainment!

As a boy, I was always taught that such a function was best achieved by playing softly and reverently. Later experience in the Believers' Church tells me that while there is a place for this, there is also a place for something rather more brash. When we sing such songs as "Therefore the Redeemed of the Lord Shall Return", we usually have a fairly noisy time. Now, if I am to play softly and reverently, I might as well stop for five minutes.

There are many times in worship when tensions have to be eased, and music, even hearty music - sometimes even music with overtones of comedy - can ease tension (just as speech of a similar type can fulfil the same function - there's nothing like a good laugh to take away tension). The musician who is touch with some of the popular styles of the day, as well as with his Buxtehude and Karg Elert, will have more ability to bring relaxation to GOD's people as they worship.

When we talked about a catalyst, I left out one part of the definition. I understand that, in chemistry, a catalyst, whilst speeding up reactions between other substances, remains completely unchanged at the end of the reaction. This highlights the biggest problem of the musician. The musician in the Believers' Church must take very great care NOT to remain unchanged whilst others are reacting all around him.

One of the disadvantages of being a musician in the church is that you don't have the same opportunity to sing - especially if you are playing a wind instrument. Therefore the musician must play his praises.

Because the musician may not always find it terribly convenient to read words as well as music notation, there is a very real danger that he may become 'lost' in the music and, as a result, remain impassive when others are being Transported; even though he, himself, is helping in that heightening of sensation in those around him.

It is a problem which faces us all and against which we must guard. You see, music is such a wonderful thing, and it is so easy to become immersed in some new arrangement, or in some particular extemporisation which is demanding everything from you at a given moment. Sometimes you find that music is taking over from the words, and while everyone else is enjoying the words, and really praising with the words, all you can do is make sounds on your instrument, whichever it is, and get lost in those sounds.

I think the solution to this problem is in receiving 'feedback' from those who are singing as you play. If you perform well, the congregation sings better and gives better feedback. It is up to the musician to let that

feedback roll over him and infiltrate his mind, just in the same way that you let The Holy Spirit roll over you and you drink Him in.

If the musician is not able to receive this feedback; if he is blocking it off, or is impervious to it for any other reason, then however sensitive he is to everything else which is going on, he is very much in danger of reverting to the status of Entertainer. This means that while the congregation is singing: "Jesus, your love has melted my heart", the musician, in his subconscious, is still playing "There's No Business like Show Business"! and the Believers' Church might just pass him by completely!

Keith Hodson, Heywood.

(From 'The Believers' Church' published by Heywood Bible College Publications, The Baptist Chapel, Heywood, Lancs. OL10 1LG. The editor is grateful to make use of the copyright waiver clause which prefaces this booklet).

The Mustard Seed Project



Encouraging signs of an upturn of interest in the Gospel among people without any church commitment are now arising from a variety of sources. Larger numbers of people are turning to Christ than has been the case for the last 30 years. Many churches are growing fast. Though we have been so familiar with a general pattern of church decline, there are now many more new churches being planted than those that are ceasing to operate. Some of the new churches are committed to views of church government and of their own exclusive worth which we reject. It is a return of an authoritarianism and sectarianism from the past which is not helpful today. But many of our Baptist churches are also sharing in church planting developments with great success. There are also increasing numbers of Christians of all ages who are keen to get personally involved in Mission for Christ. The time is ripe for fresh initiative. The Mustard Seed Project is designed to offer a new approach which will harness and direct the skills of large numbers to this great purpose.

The distinctive qualities of the Mustard Seed project are those of team ministry and also power evangelism. We shall be offering trained teams under good leadership for a period of three week's mission to churches which will be participating. First their programme will be one of Area Penetration through visits to schools, clubs, pubs and other places where large numbers of people congregate. Second they will be going for Gospel Proclamation through services with a celebratory setting. They will combine clear gospel preaching with specific prayer ministry, not only for the conversion of the sinners, but also for the healing of the sick. In this second phase we will be drawing together several teams and churches to one main centre in order to increase the impact of the meetings.

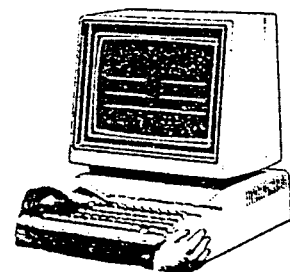
This major project will be spaced over two years. Beginning next summer, we are planning a pilot scheme which will be located in an area of desperate need - Inner London. In this area there are over 2,000 churches of various persuasions, and wonderful missions are already going on in many of them week by week. Our own Inner London churches are engaging in a valiant and often amazingly successful work for Christ. It is led by pastors with a pioneering spirit who are happy to be where the action is and away from the ease of the more affluent suburbs. We will offer them the support of our teams. Personally my pledge is that I will do my utmost not just to send in teams,, but also to encourage many team members to opt in permanently. This offer is going out to Anglicans, Baptists, Catholics, Methodists, Pentecostals, Black Churches, New Churches, City Missions, Shaftesbury

Missions and any others of whom you can think or we can make contact with, located in the inner city; but it will be a learning exercise. Those who participate will need to agree to receive teaching and to share their experiences so that all of us may learn more.

In 1987 the next phase will open up throughout the whole of the London area and nationwide, with hundreds of churches and thousands of team evangelists sharing in it. The goal will be a revolutionary up-surge in mission for Christ across the whole nation, leading to many conversions to Christ. It will be spearheaded by teams composed of Christians, who on the face of it may appear to be insignificant, but they will be people who are aware of the spiritual dynamics that are available and fluent in their use.

In the U.K. today we have a great opportunity for new approaches to cross-cultural evangelism. There must be many different ways of tackling the task and ours is only one. In Manna Ministries we need much prayer and support to implement our vision. If others have an alternative vision then that is all to the good. Let us just make sure that by all means the job which is before us, in our time, gets done.

Douglas G.T. McBain,
Director, Manna Ministries Trust.



Secretary's Scratchpad

This is a new venture for me, and for you. In each of the succeeding Newsletters I shall be writing a column of miscellany which I hope you will find interesting and helpful. So here goes with number one!

The first thing to come to my attention is a recent scheme instituted by a new organisation called "THE CHRISTIAN MUSIC PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION". Perhaps you have been using songs and music in Church on overhead projector or for special services in duplicated form. You have been concerned about the copyright laws and the enormous expense of having the whole process absolutely legal. You are also bothered by the fact that some of the songs which you and your congregation like and sing for some time, eventually cease to be used. If you have purchased the copyright for them, then you will want to go on using them or waste the money of the Church.

Help is at hand. The Christian music publishers have got together and instituted a new system. A Church can pay a standard sum, depending on the size of the normal weekly congregation, and obtain blanket copyright for material in all the song books under the scheme. It includes copyright for recording the services, music and all. You can even photocopy the sheet music for your choirs and small groups. I believe the scheme will give much greater freedom in worship for the simple reason that many will now have a clear conscience about putting songs on the overhead projector.

Application forms for the facility may be obtained from:
The Christian Music Publishers Association,
P.O. Box 75, Eastbourne, East Sussex. BN23 6NW.

I have recently acquired on semi-permanent loan from my parents a desk-top computer with a word processing capability. That is partly the reason for the heading of this column. In the software which I use you can set up an electronic file where you can store miscellaneous bits of information whilst in the process of writing a document. This is called the "SCRATCHPAD".

I am discovering the benefit of a word processor for all kinds of things. Church records of names and addresses can be easily stored, up-dated and printed out in a matter of minutes. You can set up those records in various sections - members, attenders, occasion attenders, fringers, parents of Sunday School pupils etc. and have them all at your finger tips without the need for reams of paper.

I now write most of my sermons on the machine and find it helps me get better organised - personally, it helps to make me disciplined into much more careful preparation. I put all my orders of service on the word processor and am able to get any number of copies depending on how many people are taking part in the service that day.

Most importantly for me. I have put all the nurture group material onto floppy discs so that each person coming to the group will be able to have a copy of the material they are following. I don't have to mess about with dirty duplicator skins any more.

Just recently, we have instituted a system of sending a circular round to the Deacons. Elders and House Group Leaders every other week so that our channels of communication are always open. This is still in its infancy, but the word processor makes the physical action of producing a circular for 12 or 15 people very easy indeed. Modern technical innovations can be really useful for the work of God - I for one, am happy to use this facility to the benefit of the Kingdom.

Finally, I discovered recently that since Bernard Green was appointed as our General Secretary, two thirds of the Area Superintendents have been newly appointed. This year or next, we shall also see the appointment of three College Principals. We have also seen changes being made in appointments to Church House. The Departments of Evangelism and Ministry now have new leadership.

The reason I mention these facts, which are probably known to you anyway, is this. We are facing an exciting opportunity for the denomination to become a leader in the restoration of the Church in Britain. Our own denominational leaders are open to the input we may have. So let us do all in our power to become involved and to make a valuable contribution to the life of many Churches through our denominational structures. Most of all, these folks, new to their own jobs, need our support. I know I want and need the active support of the people in the Church here in Kingsbridge, and I expect you are the same. Let us make this organisation known for its support for denominational leaders as well as for its constructive critique.

I pray your Church is growing and bringing the life of Christ to everyone in your community.

Yours in His Work,
David Slater
Kingsbridge.

BOOK REVIEWS



TEN GROWING CHURCHES

(edited by Eddie Gibbs, published by Marc Europe) 1984 - £1.95

This is a good book! Ten churches from eight denominational backgrounds share their growth patterns over the last few years. There is an excellent introduction by Eddie Gibbs; the book is worth buying just for his superb summary of the main principles involved in church growth. This brief volume could easily be dismissed as yet another light weight contribution to the church growth scheme. That would be a mistake. There are at least four good reasons for this book being different from many others and well worth a read.

1. Banana Skins and Roses

In addition to the dishonest testimony books in our Christian Bookshops a whole new genre of dishonest Church growth books have appeared. We are regaled with church growth stories of the 'five to five thousand in six months' kind. In them we read the good bits, all the good bits and nothing but the good bits! Not so T.G.C. Each contributor manages a rare degree of honesty in assessing some of the failures of his particular church family. It is refreshing to read of projects begun that remain uncompleted to this day and of seemingly great ideas that never got past the first committee meeting. This unusual candour gives the book a depth many in the field lack. Even those most sceptical of the church growth scene will find this an easy, none threatening book to read. It is never preachy or patronizing but combines inspiration and common sense in healthy proportions.

2. Wide Angle Lens

Another strength of this book is that it draws from so many different kinds of denominational backgrounds. There are suburban churches here, inner city churches and rural situations. There are dynamic up-front leaders and retiring back seat drivers. Although all the churches could be called broadly evangelical there is little else in common apart from a numerical growth. Some are decidedly charismatic, some not. This breadth of approach helps the book to have something to say to people from all backgrounds and perhaps more important for us as Baptists gives us a glimpse into some of the structures of other denominational groups.

Many of the chapters give most revealing insights and by implication highlight some of the weaknesses in our Baptist tradition.

3.Reaches the parts other books cannot reach.....

Most of us have read a fair number of books about the principles of church growth or been to conferences where they have been explained. This book is brimming over, not so much with principles, but with practical ideas worked out in local situations. Far too many books and conference speakers have an art of stating the problem as if it were the solution. e.g. "What you need is some small group structure." And all the time you are thinking, "I know that but how do I set it up!" This book tells of the practical ways various churches went about things like house groups, membership, leadership, evangelism and worship. You have the security of knowing that in at least one other place this worked in practise and is not just some theorist's dream. A careful reading of this book could produce a number of important additional items on deacons' meeting agendas!

4. You know it makes sense

This volume is not about mega-churches with hundreds and hundreds of members but about small churches which have grown into medium sized and large

churches. Most readers will be able to see something of their church scene mirrored in the pages of this book. This book is inspirational precisely because many of these churches began from the small beginnings where we find so little that is superfluous. I found myself constantly identifying with the needs and the joys of the men who wrote these chapters.

This slim volume makes for excellent reading and is good value for money. Sell your Schofield to buy it!

Stephen Gaukroger.

Basic Principles of Biblical Counselling - £1.95

Effective Biblical Counselling by Lawrence Crabb (Marshalls) - £2.50

The counselling of troubled people is becoming an increasing need in society and a growing concern in the churches.

In the past we have had to choose our models either from secular counselling based on humanistic assumptions or from Christian counselling of the "hit them with a text" variety.

Lawrence Crabb goes to neither extreme. He is deeply based in Scripture and the Gospel but remains beautifully open and sensitive to people. I find his books moving and the best in the now wide market.

He sees Christian counselling on three levels within the congregation. The first is that of caring and encouragement which most of our people can give one to the other. The second is the ministry of some who know their Bibles and their Saviour well and have a gift for counselling and some simple training. The third level concerns deep problems and is for experts.

I am delighted that Lawrence Crabb's two basic books are now published in this country and warmly commend them to ministers and all concerned with Christian counselling.

Lewis Misselbrook

Woman in the Bible by Mary Evans - Paternoster £4.95

At the time I was racking my limited brains trying to find new ways to counter the (very chic) head-scarves appearing from handbags every time anyone said "Let us pray". Such outward submission, sadly, refused to be cowed by anything I said... Anyway, I gladly accepted a review copy of Mary Evans' book but it hasn't solved my difficulty - because although a very honest and carefully-executed book it does seem to assume that you can solve all problems by exegesis. Certainly the issue of women in the Church needs to have some meticulous study put into it and this study contains a rich collection of scholarly comments. Mary Evans is at pains to lead her readers away from traditional feminist blind alleys.

For example, she dismisses Old Testament imagery to do with God in little more than a page; "... imagery, whether masculine or feminine, remains imagery..... it cannot define or delimit God....". She sees the male-female relationship of Genesis 1 and 2 as having being spoiled by the Fall and she sees in the Old Testament (to use a phrase of P.D. Hanson's), "latent potentiality for liberation". The book points out that the restrictions on the worship of women and the introduction of a separate, lower court of the women can nowhere be found in the Old Testament. These things are but "an intertestamental and unbiblical innovation that developed out of corrupted judaism". The writer does not find that androcentricity is in any sense a God-ordained and inviolable concept.

Shifting her attention to the New Testament, Mary Evans sees the key to Jesus' attitude to women in Matthew 5.28, "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart": women are subjects, rather than objects. Jesus himself totally ignored the rabbinic injunction to 'talk not much with women' and there were many women among his friends and followers. Indeed, his approach was radical.

The book contains, as well, a delightfully balanced appraisal of Mary which I found concise and helpful.

Maybe it is in the epistles that the most thorny of pastoral problems to do with women seem to have their roots. Mary Evans certainly does take Paul by the horns with the familiar word studies of Kephale (head) & hupotasso (submission or subjection as well as some useful commentary on critical passages (such as 1 Cor 11.3/Eph. 5/Col. 3 18-19 to name but a few....). But I couldn't wait to get to 1 Tim 2: useful stuff for the already convinced but I fear that it would sound convoluted to those who are already convinced they know what it means - and who cares what the Greek says anyway? Well I do; and they should! Mary Evans has produced an interesting book which will be a useful source of study material as the spiky problems of this issue continue to present themselves in our churches. Well worth buying although I fear it is not likely to affect the sales of head-scarves to any great extent!

Mark Rudall

The Mustard Seed Conspiracy by Tom Sine, published by Marc Europe - £2.25., 312 pages.

This warm hearted and attractive book will, I hope, inspire many Christians to lead lives of sacrifice and loving concern and for that reason is to be welcomed, even if, as I think it falls short of being totally convincing.

The central belief of the book is that God wants to change the world and to do so through insignificant men and women who give Him their lives. The author's method is to ask, 'What are God's plans for the future of the world?' These are seen from the Old Testament and the ministry of Jesus to be for a future that is good, peaceful, plentiful, just and free. The Christian and the local Church are to co-operate with God in bringing it about; this calls for a lifestyle, a sense of vocation, and a church programme that are consciously geared to God's programme for a better world.

This central message is preceded by two chapters outlining the major global problems and the anticipated future of poverty, oppression and environmental disaster. This is described as the failure of the Western dream of affluence for all through economic growth, and is fairly familiar stuff. Christians commonly respond in one of three ways, all equally unsatisfactory; first there are those who say the world is doomed, and nothing can be done, as we await the Rapture or the Second Coming; second there are those who adopt a secular solution, Liberalism or Communism, and identify the church with it; and there are those who look to God to provide exactly what the Western Dream once offered; a gospel of personal private prosperity. By contrast Jesus is seen calling for vigorous action for a better world, involving active redistribution of possessions, in pursuit of economic justice, and work for and with the poor, both in the developed and the underdeveloped world. This call will best be answered by covenanted communities of Christians who lovingly defy the world's materialism, violence and obsession with bigness. Numerous examples of "Mustard Seed" worked of care, justice and counter-cultural living round out the book.

This makes an impressive case that rightly challenges our affluence and apathy. His indictment of the Western Church is shrewdly aimed. I have two reservations - First, that the perspective remains very American, and this is not really overcome by the valiant efforts to find British examples of the "Mustard Seeds" he is talking about. We urgently need a British writer of comparable flair to present the argument in terms that British Christians can relate to. It is no fault of the author that he has written an American book, but the indigenisation of the Christian faith in Britain is an increasingly urgent task.

The second reservation is theological. I don't feel the author has quite cracked the problem of relating the visions of the prophets and the signs of the kingdom to the future of the world and the task of the church. Does the life of the first century church quite summon us to this sort of programme? Did Paul really think that he and God were going to change the world? Is there not in all the New Testament authors a break between this age and the age to come? Are they not looking for God to do something cataclysmic and is not the redemption of creation something that, while foreshadowed here, lies essentially beyond? If the Bible never sanctions passivity or private salvation, neither does it suggest that the future is in our hands, or does it?

Alastair Campbell

APOLOGY

'Your Gift of Administration' by Ted. W. Engstrom, reviewed in the last issue, is published by MARC Europe. We apologise for omitting the publisher's name.

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