

TO BELONG OR NOT TO BELONG?

That is the question which exercises many pastors and leaders when they think of the Baptist Union. I am not referring to the formal decision of actual membership, but to the actual priorities accorded to meaningful participation in local, association and denominational life. The hard facts are that most of our energies are necessarily absorbed in the life and witness of the local church, and also perhaps by involvement with other churches in our vicinity. This is all well and good - but what concern should we have for other congregations of the same faith and order that lie beyond our rather tight-knit worlds?

We have all found ourselves counselling others that they can only expect to receive to the extent that they are prepared to give. We have all observed the phenomenon that the further someone withdraws from the centre of fellowship, the more negatively critical they become. If these principles work at the micro-level, they also pertain to the macro-level. We leaders need to examine ourselves on this point.

I am writing my last editorial upon my return from my first meeting of the Baptist Union Council. I was struck by the warmth of its fellowship, the evident concern for the progress of the Gospel, the breadth of its concerns, and the efficiency and courtesy with which most of the complex matters before the Council for report, decision and discussion, were handled. I am not suggesting that there are no vast areas for improvement within the Union. But all too easily we accept the caricatures that our defence mechanisms are eager to present to us, and so we opt out to the detriment of all concerned. It is incumbent upon us, if we belong to the Union, to 'own' it, and to participate responsibly in its structures. Mainstream has stood for this principle, and where it has done so credibly and creditably, it has been heard gladly and its contribution to the life of the denomination welcomed.

However, there is a boot on the other foot. The Union (as materialised in its Executive, Council and Associations) cannot presume upon the mere loyalty of its member churches. There must needs be a deservedness of the commitment and support of its member churches, which entails the difficult process of self-examination, and the willingness to listen to what the Spirit is saying through the churches. There is a need for a thorough-going reappraisal and reform of the Union, and this issue of the Newsletter attempts to address the matter.

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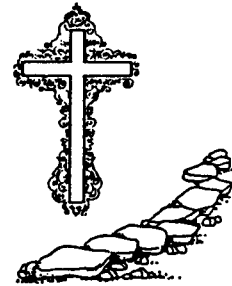
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These are days of opportunity for the Gospel in our land. We, as Baptists, have a significant contribution to make to the spiritual awakening of our country. There is a sufficient common identity and purpose among us, to make our Association and Union life an example of spiritual vitality to other Christians and the watching world. We have a long way to go in this, but I believe it is within our reach, if only we can embrace the true meaning and sacrifice of 'belonging'.

Terry Griffith.

AN AGENDA FOR BAPTIST CHRISTIANS



The coming decade is going to be a season when we are all conscious of the fact that time is an unrenowable resource which is passing away. We reach not only the end of the century but of the millennium and turn a corner into an unknown future that makes me nervous when I think about it. I have not yet heard it commented upon at any length that the coming decade will also witness the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus. It seems most likely that Jesus was born in 6BCE and therefore the anniversary is almost upon us. I hope that Christians will exploit the opportunity for all its worth and that the turning point of human history will be celebrated by a myriad turning point in the lives of ordinary folk.

The decade to come is going to be one of great opportunity. It seems to me that it could also represent an opportunity for Baptists to turn a corner in their experience of denominational life. The move to Didcot should be heralded as a prophetic and symbolic outward occasion which needs to be accompanied by an inward and spiritual change of the highest order. I could develop this thought in terms of the spiritual condition of the churches, but as space is limited refer it for the moment to the denominational life of the Baptist Union. The language of reform needs to be heard among us in order to create an upward pressure which leads to the reform of our denominational life. There is no reason why we should not contemplate extensive change in the largely Edwardian structures of the Union. A model for this might be the experience of the Bible Society, founded at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which within a short time has moved from being a stolid but unadventurous organisation to being in the forefront of innovative ways of communicating the gospel. Why could not the same happen to the Baptist Union? Why must we feel ourselves confined to the same patterns that have prevailed for decades? The opportunity to change things is greater now than it has been for many years and it needs to be taken. What should the agenda be? Here are some suggestions:

1. **The Union needs to see itself unambiguously and self-consciously as an evangelical and evangelistic organisation.** The debates on Baptist identity of recent years lead us inescapably to a debate on evangelical identity since being evangelical is of the essence of being Baptist. It is not a word to be shy of, therefore, but to be rejoiced in. The Reformation distinctives of scripture alone, faith alone and grace alone need to be distinctive of Baptist Christians and embraced with assurance and joy. Within the evangelical spectrum there is plenty of room for the free debate and disagreement that have also come to be important to us. But the health of the Union is tied up with its evangelical faith.
2. **The Union needs to cultivate a new spirit of warmth and of personal affirmation.** This is not to say that these are currently absent but that in these human skills we have a long way to go. The Union sometimes resembles an old nationalised industry which has become bureaucratic and unresponsive to the consumers it serves (to borrow Thatcherite language

for a change!) One of the things I notice most about the renewal movement is that in worship, friendship and general mood it achieves spontaneously a degree of warm heartedness and openness which the Union seems to find it difficult to contemplate either in its assemblies or in its ordinary dealings with ordinary mortals. Where it is to be found it is greatly appreciated. Perhaps Didcot holds open an era of new warmth.

3. **The Union needs to reform its structures and engage in a sustained period of decentralisation.** The associations are historically and theologically the focal point of Baptist denominational life and have been overshadowed and eclipsed for too long by the Union which by comparison is both far younger and based on a far more insecure foundation in Baptist theological terms. What is needed is a centrifugal shift of power back to the associations and it can be initiated in two ways. Firstly, the associations could be given direct responsibility for the gathering, distribution and management of home mission finance with the Union being funded through a proportion of this money. Secondly, the associations could be given (either singly or in coalition) the power to appoint directly their superintendent ministers in place of the present system which puts the appointment in the hands of the Union albeit after consultation with associations. The effect of both these measures would be to assist and revitalise association life by making participation count for something. This in turn would help sharpen the accountability of denominational structures to the local churches.
4. **The Union needs to reappraise the theology which undergirds it and to see itself more clearly as a resource agency established to enhance the life of the churches and the associations.** I reflect in this the conviction that the development of the Union since the inception of the twentieth century has been in a centralising direction which runs counter to the spirit of the Baptist approach to the church. There is certainly place for a central agency of some kind but only if it functions as a resource agency for the whole and is not in the business of control. A happy comparison might be drawn here with the role of the BMS which exists to make available to churches sending missionaries overseas expertise and experience which are beyond them taken on their own. The resourcing of the life of the churches is the crucial factor and gives a great deal of scope for creative action.
5. **The Union should concern itself with the production of high quality publications which express the principles and values for which we stand.** There is a huge hole in our resources at this point which it is hard to explain when we consider that other, smaller bodies are able to produce excellent publications and news magazines which are far superior to our own. The move to Didcot needs to be paralleled by a marked upgrading in our present expectations and standards. The question of Baptist identity is directly linked to the things we publish since these are the lifeblood of its communication. The ignorance which prevails over one is in large part the result of poverty in the other.

Reform is inevitably a process which embraces large issues of principle and small issues of practice. It is essential to give attention to both. The editorial in the last edition of *Mainstream* drew attention to the kind of image which the Baptist Times communicates to outsiders and insiders alike of what it means to be a Baptist. It is not particularly appetizing and is certainly not calculated to attract into fellowship those currently outside it. Yet the problem that the BT symbolises is much bigger than itself. The BT expresses the spirit of a movement which, whatever the signs of life on the individual level, still needs to recapture its spirit of self-confidence and purposeful mission. When denominations and church groupings which are far smaller than our own manage to produce material which is far more attractive, we should ask searching questions about our lack of imagination in what we currently doing. Imaginative and creative change is the order of the day. Now that the move to Didcot has been

accomplished and the 1990's are upon us, it is time to take a further step.

6. **The Union should set up an agency to enquire into how the whole life of the denomination may be reformed and reshaped to meet the challenge of the new millennium.** Such an agency should be concerned, (1) to recapture the fundamental principles of the Baptist understanding of the church and to restate them in a form which is relevant for today, (2) to express the theological principles on which the corporate life of Baptist churches may be based, (3) to work out a detailed plan as to how a new way of being the church together in mission may be discovered among us, (4) to devise ways in which that plan could be implemented by the year 2000.

I know that this may seem like a long-term plan, but we need to invest now for the sake of the future and as a climate which makes for change develops among us, the changes can begin now.

Nigel Wright,
Spurgeon's College, London.



LETTER FROM NEW ZEALAND

For the past five months I have had the opportunity to observe churches in the United Kingdom that are involved in renewal and evangelism. As some of these churches were Baptist churches, I have been able to reflect on what is happening here in the light of our experiences within the Baptist Union of New Zealand.

A quiet revolution has taken place in New Zealand Baptist churches in the last fifteen years.

Like most revolutions, this one began at the grass roots. In the early 1970's charismatic renewal began to touch many of our churches. Although this new move of the Holy Spirit created some tension, the churches of the Union managed to accommodate those who were experiencing a new spiritual vitality. The predictions and fears of some, that the Union would be split apart, have proved to have been wrong.

As more and more people in our churches began to be touched by the Spirit, so more Pastors began to identify themselves as being Charismatic/Evangelical in their theological outlook. A 1984 survey of our ten fastest growing churches, showed that nine of the ten were led by Pastors who firmly identified themselves with the renewal movement. The people in the pews were not slow to make the correlation between growing, live churches and the theological persuasion of their Pastors.

During those early years the Baptist Union "hierarchy" was perceived to have an attitude of benign, if not condescending, tolerance to this new found fervour. One leader commented to a group of Pastors that it was "just a passing fad, like all the other passing fads". Other Union leaders were far sighted enough to encourage contribution from those recognised as leaders of Baptist renewal within New Zealand. A few of these leaders were elected to the Union Council and one to the Executive of the Council.

Within the churches the renewal movement was really taking hold. The imbalance of representation of the renewal movement within the "corridors of power" in the Union leadership became more apparent. Efforts began to redress the balance. At successive Assemblies, those involved in renewal, were nominated for key positions on boards, committees and councils. As the renewal movement grew in strength in the churches, so more and more of its people began to occupy positions of influence within the denomination.

At the time I write this article, it would be fair to say, that most of those occupying key positions within the denomination, including the appointed staff, would either regard themselves as being part of the renewal stream or sympathetic to it.

An indicator of the changes that have taken place within the denomination, was the Baptist presence at the second visit of John Wimber to Auckland in 1987. The majority of the three thousand delegates were Baptists and some seventy percent of all Baptist Pastors in pastoral charge of churches attended, many with their church leaders.

The factors which I believe have allowed such changes to take place are:

1. A desire by the leaders of the renewal stream to stay within the denominational framework, rather than separate from it, and a desire by more traditional Baptists to maintain unity.
2. The "family" nature of New Zealand Baptists. With about 190 churches and a Sunday morning attendance of about 35,000, we still have a cohesiveness that has been an asset in times of tension.
3. A recognition by some denominational leaders of the early 1970's that the renewal movement could not be ignored. The wisdom of Gamaliel.... "If this be of God..." has proved to be a blessing to us all.
4. The "modelling" of dynamic ministries by some of our renewal churches. One of these has actually been involved in church planting, evangelism and overseas mission, and is now pioneering in issues of social justice and concern for the poor. The Pastor of this church was chosen by a national magazine as one of the "100 Leaders of New Zealand in the 21st Century". These credible models have given confidence for others to follow.

This revolution has not diminished the great diversity within the Baptist family. The process of change has not been without its pain. However, the new wineskin that is being created is accommodating the new wine.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS ARTICLE

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CONFESSIONS OF A FAILED EVANGELIST



It was a long dark motorway on which I drove home. Tired after doing an evangelistic Carol Service at Nottingham University. I was also depressed. Out of hundreds of students, no-one had made a response. All sorts of questions were buzzing through my mind. Had I not prepared well enough? Was I too old, at 31, to communicate with the students of today? As my thinking meandered around the subject of evangelism it led to the train of thought which you are now about to share in expanded form.

OBSTACLES FOR MISSION

It is always a struggle to get more than a few church members enthusiastic about evangelism. However there are obstacles that we face in this task that we do not always take seriously enough and that we need to overcome creatively.

1. CLASS is not a fashionable word to use nowadays, but it is still a vital feature of British society. My first home was in a tenement in Glasgow, we progressed to a new council estate in rural Mid-Lothian and crossed new frontiers when as a family we moved to England, to a street in Bristol, not unlike Coronation Street. In each of these situation my parents/family had plenty of contacts and friends simply by the proximity of where we lived. The big social step that marked a permanent move up the social and class scale was joining the suburban semi-detached fraternal in Yeovil. At that point the "natural" community contacts ceased. It was an isolated world where life revolved around school, work, home and church.

This "middle-class" atmosphere is the background to many churches, which has become a hermetic seal that evangelism needs to break.

2. CULTURE also becomes a barrier. We are told of the Great British Reserve and in part it does exist. During a meal with a small number of academics, when one of them said he was a Christian the question was asked, "Would you talk to other people about Jesus". In horrified tones he replied, "Oh no, I wouldn't do anything like that". I believe it to be over-rated as an excuse for not getting involved in evangelism. Most people getting a new car, especially on August 1st can find quite a number of people to share the news with.
3. Our lack of CONFIDENCE is problematic. Remember plucking up the courage to ask out your first date, dreading she would say "no"? I do and she did which did not do wonders for my self-confidence. But I keep on trying! Many Christian's have little confidence in evangelism because outside a Billy Graham meeting, very few have actually led anyone to the Lord. As a consequence it seems a huge task, best left to others. However once we have had the privilege our evangelistic thinking can change from the "almost impossible" to the "actually enjoyable". The next problem is a misplaced confidence. Our confidence is put in the evangelist rather than the gospel message they share.
4. The CONSUMER mentality, heightened in the 1980's, also effects our evangelism. As Roy McCloughry's comments, "So we have had a decade of Mrs. Thatcher and there have been many changes. Some of them have undoubtedly been good. But the direction of change in our society has been to more individualism, more self-interest and self-gratification". Church attenders have become a great deal more choosy, shop around for the best deal and are much more likely to swap brand loyalty for new, glossy packaging, skilfully marketed. There appears to be a greater emphasis on "What can this church give?" me rather than "What can I give this church?" This take, take, take attitude has a knock on effect on what a church does. "Let's have a Celebration evening" 100 people attend. "Let's have a Tear Fund lunch" 50 people attend. "Let's have a prayer meeting" 30 people attend. "Let's do some evangelism", 10 people attend. Evangelism is one of the least favoured items on a church's shelf. It is a bit like eating liver, you know it is good for you but you don't always enjoy the experience.
5. There is increasing CONFUSION about what it means to be spiritual. We want to tell people of their need of a spiritual relationship with God as the only means of salvation and wholeness. However the term "wholeness" has been hi-jacked by the growing movement of holistic medicine, some of which is of real benefit and some of which is cashing in on a trend, to sell all sorts of self-help psychology, mystical and eastern religion and occult activity. This trend is accelerating with the "New Age Movement" and the end of the century being seen as the Age of Aquarius, whatever that means! It is a label that covers over much that we as Christians would want to stand against and are having to overcome when we talk to people about their relationship with God.

In Nigel Lee's opinion (an evangelist doing many student missions and working with Operation Mobilisation), "This 'movement', which some have called 'the most rapid cultural re-alignment in history' is already under way at the level of popular culture.... It offers a spiritual way of thinking without worrying about objective truth or repentance before our Creator.... it.... will be accompanied by a growing hostility to Biblical Christianity".

Enough of the problems what do we do about them?

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MODELS OF MISSION

I would suggest that there are four models of evangelism that if we are to reach as wide a cross-section of people as possible, we could profit from.

i. A Celebration Model

A recently baptised couple were dropping their teenagers off at Spring Harvest and were persuaded to stay for the opening Celebration. In David's words "As I saw those people worshipping I thought 10,000 people cannot be wrong". The immediate sense of God's presence communicates to non-Christians. As men and women were created to worship God as a central part of their being, then occasions of worship provide many evangelistic opportunities.

Whatever celebrations we do, and few would be on the scale of Spring Harvest, also need some way of following up that initial impact. There needs to be friends that ask the new people what they thought. There needs to be relevant discipleship or agnostic anonymous groups that can speedily follow up such people, preferably by a couple for whom this is their specific task. Speaking personally, if this task is left to the minister then it is likely to be disastrous. The danger is celebration for celebrations sake.

ii. A Power Model

In our rationalistic and skeptical world, the clear evidence of the supernatural is important. In a recent service where a variety of spiritual gifts were being used, one teenager who had never been to our Church before described me as "scary". I put that down not to my looks but to the spiritual reality of the service. This model has been re-introduced this decade by John Wimber, though others such as Smith Wigglesworth have been around since the 1920's. The evidence of the supernatural through healing, deliverance and the use of a variety of spiritual gifts proves for some that without doubt, God exists. This is not enough as there needs to be some explanation of the phenomena and a clear pointing to Jesus as Saviour. In John Gunstone's recent assessment of John Wimber, he concludes many churches that are growing are those that embrace this model. One reason he gives is the increased expectation and the faith that this model can produce.

iii. A Friendship Model

Most people coming to faith do so as the result of a specific friendship. In a friendship the gospel is seen in what we say, what we do, what our attitudes are and whether we gossip or fiddle the expenses like everyone else. Living out a Christian lifestyle provides a shop window where people can see the goods. But someone has still got to get the person into the shop. Christianity is seen at its best and worst in you and me.

The size of a church can affect the outcome of this model. The larger the church the easier it is to go unnoticed. If you have a leadership capacity in your church then answer this question, "How many new people were in your church last Sunday? What have you done about those who were there for the first time? People still come to church for help and turn up uninvited. What happens next is often tragic. After a brief handshake and proffered hymnbook at the door that can be the last human contact until that person

leaves. One delusional (a false, unshakeable belief) aspect of many churches thinking is that they believe themselves to be friendly.

When a church majors on a friendship model it generally needs to start at the utterly basic level of getting Christians to learn how to relate to people not in the church, how simply to be warm, friendly people. Many church members have few friends. In a survey of those interested in evangelism in my church we found that the average number of friends that people felt they could talk to or invite to a special meeting was two. Another problem is that when members get more involved and end up going to more meetings even these contacts can fade into the background. A closer examination of this model often reveals the limited links that many churches have with the community. In what should be the most natural place for friendship to be expressed we are sadly lacking.

As part of our development of church members we need to be encouraging this as a vital ministry. One practical way of developing more time for these friends is to have one service on a Sunday morning and use the time on Sunday evenings for training, prayer, home groups etc. and so releasing time in the midweek for a specific activity that gives us time for friends. Time spent in friendship is never wasted but neither does it automatically provide conversion. At least it allows the seed of the word of God to be planted into soil that has been ploughed rather than scattered aimlessly on the surface.

iv. A Preaching Model

This is the most common evangelistic model in use in many churches. Rightly so. The gospel still is "we preach Christ crucified" and over the years no matter what gimmicks have been tried it is always the gospel that any evangelical church comes back to. What concerns me in particular is that the very familiarity of this model hinders any critical examination of its effectiveness. These concerns are fourfold:

a. One sometimes gets the feeling that church members don't mind if people don't become Christians as long as the gospel has been preached. There is little sense of expectancy, little pleading with God in prayer for conversions. We let such a situation come about because it reduces our guilt.

b. There is a stereotyping of the gospel message. I have been criticized for not preaching the gospel and on such occasions have sat down with the person and gone through what it was they have expected. Usually they discover that all the "components" they think important are there, but not in the way they are used to or in terminology that is traditional. A contemporary presentation of the gospel does not always sit comfortably in a church service.

c. Having a captive congregation each week does not help ministers or those preaching to develop communication skills that hold the attention of someone unused to such a meeting. In presenting the gospel an evangelist needs that ability to keep the audience with him or all the hard work, organisation and prayer is minimized.

d. There is no alternative for learning to preach evangelistically than to do a great deal of evangelistic preaching preferably to non-Christians, as opposed to church congregations, for the reason outlined above. Being the pastor of a church does not always encourage this development.

Enough of the models what do we do with them?

FOUNDATIONS FOR MISSION

I would want any church to adopt all four models of mission as the most effective way of reaching as large a cross section of people as possible but

these models need to build on some solid foundations which I want to explore briefly.

1. Analysis.

Every church is different with strengths and weaknesses and the most effective evangelism is that which majors on our strengths and minimizes our weakness. What we think we are is not always a true perception of ourselves. A resource such as the B.U. Action In Mission is a helpful initiative and allows us to see how others see us. It is also good to "target" specific groups for outreach rather than adopt the general "shotgun" approach.

2. Involvement.

Evangelism is not something a church leader can do on his or her own. In a church where my particular responsibility was evangelism I discovered that in some people's eyes their responsibility ended the day I walked through the church door. If the process of analysis can involve as wide a range of people as possible it significantly increases the number that can be drawn upon. In a Baptist church the elders and/or deacon's can set an exciting example by leading from the front and showing that evangelism is their number one priority. I would long to see deacons like Stephen in Acts 6 "Full of God's grace and power (who) did great wonders and miraculous signs". Mind you they probably want a pastor like Peter that can preach and see 3,000 coming to faith!

3. Prayer.

If you want a book on mission then read "Ten Praying Churches" (Ed. D. English, Monarch Publications, £2.99). It seems that whenever churches pray then one of the outcomes is evangelism, they don't seem to be able to stop themselves, it just happens. So much can be said about prayer but the most important thing to recognise is how bad we are at it, individually and as a church. If you want to decimate the number who come to your mid-week bible study then turn it solely into a prayer meeting. Yet it is a vital foundation for any mission and prayer forms a secure base which must be found in our life as a church if we are to develop any model of mission in a significant way.

4. Spiritual Warfare.

This is the current Christian fad but don't be put off by some of the more eccentric expressions. It usually grows out of prayer and is still neglected by the church as a whole. For far too long it has been the province of a few "keenies" rather than something embraced as a foundation of church life. There are battles we all face and the better equipped and alert we are the more able we become in defeating our enemy.

We have now assessed and hopefully overcome our obstacles. We have examined and built our models. We have made sure there are good foundations, can we now go and do some evangelism? The jigsaw is not quite complete. Evangelism needs something or someone to "rocket" the whole structure into life.

CATALYSTS FOR MISSION



There are five specific factors that I have observed that can put evangelism into orbit.

1. Church Planting.

When a church plants another church it can be a reminder to the older church of what its basic task should really be. Getting back to basics does everyone good. This in itself can be an uncomfortable experience but the benefits are enormous.

2. A New Building.

New buildings are expensive and have often required sacrificial giving and frequently urgent prayer as financial deadlines approach! But it gets everyone involved and there is a sense of pride at what has been accomplished

and it is easier to invite people to a warm, well lit, comfortable church instead of apologising for the rock hard pews, dim lighting, peeling paintwork and fraying carpet of many of our Victorian buildings.

3. A Powerful Preacher.

Most preachers are average, a few poor and a few very good. We all have occasional inspired days and some we would rather forget. Generally we are not as interesting as we think and people do not flock to come and hear us. In footballing terms I am more likely to play for Tranmere Rovers rather than Liverpool or Everton. Yet there are a few Barnes, Beardsley's and Rush's about. Their impact can set others aflame and one of the strengths of Spring Harvest is that it allows a much greater cross-section of people hear and be enthused by good speakers.

4. New Converts.

New converts can revolutionize church life, if we will let them. Their enthusiasm is great and they want to share this new life. They say and do things that we once had the nerve to do. A University acquaintance of mine came to see me once and said "I just wanted to see if you were as fiery as ever now that you have become respectable (i.e. become a minister)"

5. The Sovereign Spirit.

God in his goodness and mercy simply sends His Spirit that enthuses tired Christians, that breaks through no-go areas and that changes hardened sinners. Sometimes this is just for a "season" but the opportunity needs to be grabbed while we can as the Sovereign Spirit blows where He wills. Revival is too strong a word, but these occasions give us a glimpse of what revival might be and gives us the hunger to pray for the real thing.

This is hardly the final word on mission but I hope that there has been enough to stimulate you to start thinking again about the vital evangelistic calling of the church.

Alistair Ross.
Bexleyheath, London.



LETTERS

Dear Sir,

I was rather amused at the contrast of argument between the writer of Not The Baptist Times and the writer of What's Happening to Sunday Evening as they appeared in the same October edition of Mainstream.

The former argues that there is not enough newsworthy material to warrant a weekly edition of the Baptist Times - notwithstanding 16,000 subscribers every week may wish to argue with that - and that the result of a weekly publication is that an unwarranted amount of chaff is published. The latter argues that not only can he find enough worship material for one Service of Worship on a Sunday, but that two services are necessary and in his view should be made compulsory. Is quality not more important than quantity?

The former argues that much religious news need not be published immediately but in many instances would benefit from thoughtful reflection. The latter seems to think that thoughtful reflection is of little importance, what matters is that people are in church where they belong. Is not all the world God's, and can God not speak to his people in any other way on a Sunday evening than through attendance at church?

The former argues that an increasing number of Baptist leaders get their theological input from Specific magazines cited (circulation not cited) and that a Baptist magazine should be added to this reading list. In other words the Christian Church should spread its resources rather than consolidate them. But with such an array of material available as quoted would it really be necessary to add to this - or is it just the Baptist Times that the writer wants to have a go at? The latter seems to think that Worship is most meaningful when sat in a circle gazing at one another's navels - or eyeballs - or whatever! And that by worshipping in this way it is possible to enjoy lively worship. Not all of us would see 'lively' as being the chief criteria when conducting worship however. No doubt the latter has been reading too many of these magazines enumerated by the former.

Finally can I point out, the writer of the article Not The Baptist Times argues that too frequent publication results in an excess of chaff, but that applies equally as much to mainstream, and the fact that he felt obliged to publish the article on Sunday evening worship, which in my view is ill thought out, unconvincing, and lacking in everything but loyalty to Victorian attitudes, suggests that Mainstream, not the Baptist Times, should be published less frequently. If Mainstream could set as their standard for quality Barrie White's - Worship Among English Baptists Today (July 89), they would not go far wrong.

Yours faithfully,
A. Berry.

Dear Editor,

Having written to you after the last issue of 'Mainstream'. I felt a little reluctant to write after yet another 'Editorial' comment of very biased and narrow framework.

To use your reference points can I say: first, news would depend on your view of what news is, what and how wide our reference points should be, and who and what are your readers and their needs.

Second, is our prayer life, let alone our knowledge, to be based solely on the 'old', or like some of our churches should we take relevant religious news and other news as it happens from religious sources, rather than our daily newspapers, no matter how 'independent' they may be?

Third, monthly magazines must therefore be even less newsworthy. They too tend to be very biased and narrow in their framework and sources.

As to your questions over published Baptist ministers, I can only reply as Gavin Reid replied to me: "Christian publishing in this country is only a revelation of what people want, and what the publishers know they can sell."

We are surely about giving the people what they need, as Christ did, and not what they want. Yes, there may be a place for a 'Baptist' monthly magazine, but please don't let us seek to replace what is our own, even in its weakness, with something that is yet another import of narrowness. For what we should be placing in the hands of a prospective church member is a reading that is relevant to their lives today, and to the wideness of God's Grace and Mercy in and through Jesus Christ. Now I am not saying the Baptist Times achieves that, but at least it doesn't list all the arguments why that prospect is rejected by the narrow family before he even starts. Our purpose surely is to encourage 'Life' and 'Growth' within the Baptist 'Union' - but of course you would know that!

Yours sincerely,
Ken Paskin.

PEOPLE GROUP EVANGELISM



Internationally known strategist John Robb takes his first 'People Group Evangelism' seminar in the UK next March.

With a background as a pastor and lecturer in Malaysia, John Robb now travels the world helping Christians devise ways of reaching unreached people groups.

He is coming to London to teach techniques that are the same whether the people groups in question are Kazakhs in Mongolia, Albanians in Yugoslavia, Uzbeks in China.... or bikers in Barkingside, Essex.

In an intensive one-day workshop, John Robb will help Christians who are concerned with evangelism to think through the situation and needs of particular groups of people in their local area, whether middle class commuters or immigrants, then devise ways the church could reach them with the Gospel.

Called 'People Group Evangelism - How to reach the people you think you can't', the one-day seminar takes place at Partnership House, London, on 8th March 1990. Other participants will be Peter Brierley of MARC Europe, Patrick Johnstone of WEC International, and contributors of 'real-life' examples from London City Mission and a suburban Free Church.

John Robb works for MARC International and is the author of 'Focus - The Power of People Group Thinking'. The seminar is organised by MARC Europe.

For further information, contact Heather Vallat, Conference Administrator, MARC Europe, 01-460 3999.

Paul S. Fiddes Past Event and Present Salvation: The Christian Idea of Atonement (Darton Longman and Todd 1989) £10.95.

In an age when British Baptists are not desperately well known for their theological ability here is a book that may well help to turn the tide. Dr. Paul Fiddes has recently succeeded Mainstream Executive member Dr. Barrie White as Principal of Regent's Park College, Oxford. We should be grateful that he had opportunity to publish at least two significant works of theology before doing so - time for such writing may not be so easily achieved in the future. This work is the latest of these and marks Paul out not only as an accomplished theologian but as a highly literate one, who is able to write for a broader audience than those in the academic world.

This book could well serve as a textbook on understanding the atonement. It expounds the main historical interpretations of the work of Christ fairly while at the same time showing the difficulties with each approach. It is particularly strong in developing the implications of a theology of the cross for our understanding of God and in this reflects the previous research and writing of the author.

As one who teaches a course on the atonement I was continually given cause to be grateful for the illuminating shafts of light that were shed on one issue and another. This was particularly the case in relation to the theology of Abelard (usually credited as originator of the subjective or moral influence theory) whom the author seeks to rescue from centuries of distortion and to restore to an honoured place in the discussion. The importance of Abelard is not least in his attempt to give an account of how a past event may be held to achieve a present salvation, a key issue in the debate. Equally valuable were the reflections, inspired by H.R. MacKintosh, on the "journey of forgiveness" travelled by God in the work of salvation; the insistence that evangelical descriptions of the seriousness of sin are inadequate because they see sin more in terms of an immense debt (after Anselm) than a profound

internal disorder; the exposing of the difficulties of the penal substitution theory (as stated by Calvin) because of its failure to give a convincing account of the dualism of love and wrath which it posits in God; and the proposed line of thought which may lead through this particular problem. This is a book which both expounds the theological past and offers constructive possibilities for positive theology today. It could go without saying that not all the conclusions will satisfy everybody. At some points there are leaps of theology which may not always be regarded as justified, but it is a pleasing feature of the book that it is not afraid to venture penetrating and creative judgements - in other words, it is committed.

Add to this the elegant style of its writing and the excellent use of literature by way of elucidation and you have a book which is worth buying, reading and rereading. As a textbook on atonement for theological students it should go to near the top of the league as an indispensable tool. But its worth would not be fully realised were it not widely used by those whose task it is to preach a magnificent theme to which few of us ever do justice and to which some of us do injustice.

Nigel Wright
Spurgeons College, London.

Get Your Act Together, Cinderella! Michael Griffiths, I.V.P./S.T.L.
Price unknown.

This book offers a popular introduction to the doctrine of the Church and related issues. It goes beyond academic instruction to include constant application of biblical principles. Its title indicates a relationship to the author's "Cinderella with Amnesia", but is in no way a mere vision of the earlier work. Rather, it is a fresh look at the Church as it faces the 1990's. Griffiths' wide experience of Church life means that he is well placed to analyze the current situation and to point the way forward.

Griffiths perceives that the various parts of the Church lack co-ordination, and he seeks to remedy this through a combination of argument, exhortation and illustration. Individual chapters deal with the Church's nature, divinity, humanity, unity, growth, practice, mission, leadership, restoration and destiny, as well as the questions raised by para-church movements and the relationship of the Church to the Kingdom. Sometimes the material is repetitive (e.g. the discussion of separation, especially with reference to Corinth, on pp.30, 81, 191 & 197), but it is a clearly written book with plenty of quotable one-liners.

This book would make profitable reading for interested lay-people. Ministers who are looking to deepen their understanding will probably need a more substantial treatment of the subject. Nevertheless, if read quickly, Griffiths would furnish ministers with a useful reminder of the breadth of this doctrine, as well as challenging some of our contemporary practice.

Eddie Larkman.

Kingdom Suffering, Kingdom Fellowship, Kingdom Come and Kingdom Evangelism:
Four booklets by John Wimber, Hodder and Stoughton, each £0.95.

These booklets fall into the "short words of encouragement/instruction" category. Their style is popular in the extreme: main points boldly stated, a brief look at the biblical evidence, plenty of illustrations. There is some overlapping material.

In **Kingdom Suffering** Wimber recognizes that God may allow faithful Christians to suffer in various ways, including sickness. He encourages us to see in our sufferings a pathway to conformity to Christ. **Kingdom Fellowship** highlights the quality of fellowship we should be aiming at, and challenges the individualism of much church life. Both of these booklets might be helpful to

someone who doesn't read much; ministers really need to invest their precious reading time (and money) in something meatier.

I am less happy about Kingdom Come and Kingdom Evangelism. Both of these, especially the latter, expound the "Signs and Wonders" teaching for which Wimber is famous. My concern is that the issues raised require careful analysis and detailed biblical exegesis, and within the format of these booklets that is an impossibility. What we have here is a shaky edifice of half-baked ideas, built on questionable assumptions and shored up by anecdotes. It may be received enthusiastically by the naive, but that does nothing for the health of the Church. Equally, because of the importance of the "Signs and Wonders" issue, it would be a great pity if Wimber's teachings were gleefully dismissed by the sceptical on the basis of the present inadequate treatment. Those who wish to consider the matter more carefully should read Wimber's "Power Evangelism" and "Power Healing" (both published by Hodder and Stoughton) and, for an intelligent critique, read "Signs & Wonders and Evangelicals" (edited by Robert Doyle, published by Fabel).

Eddie Larkman,
Harlesden and Kensal Rise, London.

Truth and Social Reform, Vishal Mangalwadi, Spire, £3.95, 136pp.

A vigorous rather than a logical approach to the subject. But that is as it should be given that this is a genuinely 'two-thirds' world approach arising from intensely local and practical situations. The way in which the scriptures are handled to provide insight into poverty and suffering is very striking - see especially his exposition of the ten commandments and Jesus' miracles in John's Gospel. The author draws some interesting parallels between first-century socio-political conditions and those that pertain in India today. He stresses that Jesus was aiming to build up a mass movement and that it was this historical reason that led to his judicial murder. Thus sin put Jesus on the cross, and the cross dealt with sin - the historical and theological reasons for Christ's death cohere.

The author is very strong on pentecostal themes and has some sane observations to make about the purpose of spiritual gifts. He is also strong on church planting as the means to overthrow unjust political alliances in caste-ridden India. The way forward is to build up a mass movement of Christians by Gospel preaching and political re-organisation of villages. Persecution will inevitably follow and some harrowing examples are given. The book ends with an invitation to make a sound and helpful financial investment in the rural development work which the author has helped to set up. There are few points of reference for our situation in a liberal democratic society, but it is challenging stuff nonetheless.

Pastor's Under Pressure, Paul Beasley-Murray, Kingsway, £1.99, 84pp.

The first in a series of booklets by different authors from Spurgeon's College (past and present). It augurs well as it is not a difficult read and yet raises the issues in a helpful way, with a comprehensive bibliography for those who want to pursue matters in detail. This booklet if given to church leaders stands a good chance of being read and bringing about productive change in restructuring the factors that give rise to stress among pastors.

It is good to see a stress (!) on the sovereignty of God and the importance of one's relationship with God. Also to see the privileges of the pastoral ministry extolled and the value of longer pastorates recommended. Also the importance of support groups rather than fraternals for one's spiritual well-being is mentioned. These are good points well made. So what's new you might ask?

This booklet provides the basic information for pastors to identify the sources of stress and to decide which kinds of stress are helpful and which are not. It also helps pastors to examine themselves. It is a simple and

practical booklet on a very pertinent theme, ideal for discussion and action. However, I feel that the redefinition of ministry that is recommended (shared/specialist/equippier/leader) will increase stress levels in the short-term in their implementation!

Terry Griffith.

Divorce - the forgivable sin? Ken Crispin, Hodder.

I welcome this excellent and perceptive book - though many will not. The issue is crucial, the stakes are high. Ken Crispin writes as an experienced barrister who has also considerable pastoral, biblical, theological and ethical understanding. His thesis here is 'unorthodox' and many evangelicals will disagree with his conclusions - but hopefully they will hear his arguments.

Beginning with a clear understanding of the nature of marriage he proceeds to look at what contributes to and what constitutes breakdown. His chapter on 'to stay or to go' is crucial. He writes with a deep understanding of the aftermath of breakdown and deals with the problems of being alone and those of meeting 'another'. Faith, conviction, practical and legal matters are given thorough attention. Issues of custody and access are discussed.

I found the whole most stimulating, not to say provocative, and believe that it deserves not only a wide reading but attention as a Fraternal subject.

The title is its saddest thing... it suggests that divorce is per se sinful and, possibly, that this is the only sin that is forgivable.

Where have you gone God? Jennifer Rees Larcombe, Hodder.

This has been welcomed by so many, not least those who have gone through dark times. I rejoice that it has ministered to many, I question whether it will meet the need of those who are really in St. John of the Cross's 'Dark night of the Soul'.

More than a thousand people have contributed to the writing of the book and there are some remarkable testimonies included in it. However, I found that whilst it tried to get to grips with the darkest problems it too easily slipped into 'they lived happily ever after'. The desperate plight of such greats as Bunyan, Spurgeon and J.B. Phillips, for instance, need greater consideration than those for whom the night gave way to dawn. There are good things here but I fear hedonism has won the day.

Peter Manson,
Spurgeon's College, London.

Prophecy: Past and Present by Clifford Hill
(Highland Books 1989; £6.95)

The charismatic renewal has spawned a new interest in and experience of prophecy in many churches. At the same time - perhaps stimulated by what's happening in their congregations(?) - there has been a revival of scholarly interest in the charismata, especially prophecy. Clifford Hill's book is one such study: primarily biblical and academic, it is nonetheless born of deep experience of renewal and has a practical concern to see prophecy properly used in our churches.

This is a book crammed full of insight. As one would expect of Hill there is plenty of sociological analysis both of the biblical texts and of the contemporary scene. This means that prophecy is always being looked at against its immediate social and historical context. Hill's section on prophecy in the OT is full of fascinating historical/sociological detail which throws great shafts of light on the role and ministry of the prophets in Israel. The book is worth the price for this section alone.

There is also much exegetical insight. Not only does Hill's exegesis of both Old and New Testaments display a clear grasp of sound interpretative principles but he also warns against those whose use of scripture is not so careful. For instance he speaks of Hal Lindsey displaying "woeful ignorance of even the first principles of biblical exegesis" in his interpretation of prophecy. Hill comments: "The fact that Lindsey was believed by so many Christians is an indication of the lack of sound biblical preaching on the subject of prophecy in the churches." (p276). Reading and using this book would be a first step towards correcting this lamentable state of affairs.

After such a sparkling introduction to OT prophecy, the NT section appears a bit lame. There are one or two details of Hill's argument that this reviewer would want to quibble with - for instance the insistence that Romans 12: 3-8 is talking about natural abilities whereas 1 Cor. 12 is talking about spiritual gifts seems untenable since Paul describes both as charismata and links both to the operation of God's grace in the body of believers - but overall, it is a reasonable, if slightly pedestrian summary of NT teaching.

It is, however, unfortunate that Hill does not interact at all with the major work on prophecy published in the last ten years by evangelical NT scholars such as Wayne Grudem, E. Earle Ellis, David Hill and David Aune; I would have been fascinated to know what Clifford Hill made of Grudem's rigid distinction between prophecy and teaching and his suggestion that women could prophesy but not teach. Indeed Hill's bibliography is very weighted towards the Old Testament: 42 items against six NT and three others.

Still this book remains a must for anyone who wants to tackle the issue of prophecy in their churches both in terms of how we interpret biblical prophecy (Old and New Testament) and how we minister prophetically in today's world.

Simon Jones,
Peckham, London.



BOOKS RECEIVED

A Giant's Scrapbook, Stewart Henderson, Spire pbk. Greenbelt enthusiasts and others will welcome this further anthology from Henderson. His poems are contemporary and are described as 'unashamedly from the heart'. (PM).

Kingdoms In Conflict, Charles Colson, Hodder, £3.50, 400pp. Subtitled 'an insider's challenging view of politics, power and the pulpit'. Colson is always a refreshing and well researched read who avoids the pitfalls of becoming too technical and detailed for the non-specialist reader. He uses 'faction', historical sketches, personal accounts and the ideas of others (good to see that Colson has read his Jacques Ellul), to produce an interesting and powerfully cumulative read about the nature, realities and complexities of modern day political involvement. Christianity and Politics make an unlikely marriage - somehow Christians have got to frame the questions and get politicians to answer them, not vice-versa as is so often the case.

The Shame and the Sacrifice: The life and teaching of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Edwin Robertson, Hodder, £7.95, 288pp. This forms an excellent introduction to Bonhoeffer for those who cannot wade through Eberhard Bethge's monumental biography. Bonhoeffer was at the sharp end of one of the most catastrophic upheavals that civilisation has witnessed. He is a giant of a man who retains his ability to come alongside ordinary mortals, bonhoeffer lived his most creative years 'in extremis', What he would of made of post-war Europe and the Churches role in a nuclear world, had he survived the war, is one of the most intriguing 'ifs' of modern theology. Recommended serious biography.

How to Give Away Your Faith, Paul Little, IVP, £2.95, 220pp. A well revised second edition containing much helpful new material and study group notes. Slanted to the student scene but very useful for dealing with the usual

chestnuts and learning to take the initiative in witnessing. Your first edition should be worn out by now - replace it with this immediately!

Cliff: A Celebration, Hodder, £8.95, 142pp, large pbk, photos by Theresa Wassif (£12.95 hbk). Personality cults can almost be forgiven in the case of Cliff Richard. A must for the fans and the coffee table. This book won't convert anyone but could get the honest pagan thinking new thoughts.