

Editorial

THE CROSS AND RACISM

Central to the New Testament is the liberation of the enemies of God, bought out of captivity to Satan by the power of the sacrifice of Christ. Out of this central liberation grows a threefold liberation between humans beings. A sexual liberation, so that women are no longer to be despised or exploited. An economic liberation, in which all come to Christ on an equal footing. And a racial liberation, in which any ideas of ethnic superiority have no place.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
Gal. 3:28.

It is a plain fact that churches can easily fly in the face of the New Testament and ignore this radical liberation. In our own church, 1991 was a year when we brought into the open the racial dimension. We are based on the borders of the inner city, and in our morning congregation are found over 30 nationalities and some 25 denominational backgrounds.

It would be foolish to imagine that becoming multicultural has always been every member's idea of heaven. Some years ago a Nigerian lady arrived one Sunday morning in a resplendent crimson costume only to be told, "We don't dress like that here you know." Other blacks kept coming to the church through years of discrimination in which some would ignore them during the week and others would avoid sitting next to them on Sundays.



Through difficult times we had arrived at a much better sense of belonging together, but we wanted to declare a positive commitment to being a church for all peoples. A small group teaching and training programme was already under way, and it was natural to include a group looking at racial awareness. This group was led by those with race awareness responsibilities at work, in a hospital and in a local education authority.

If we simply offered the group, we could appear to be suggesting that race awareness was an appropriate Christian interest, but only for a minority. Therefore we also ran a sermon series for a month on issues of race. What's more, we gave an hour within a members' meeting to an introductory presentation on race awareness, in order that those who didn't join the small group could not avoid being exposed to these issues.

We wanted to spell out some simple truths:

1. All people are made in God's image, and there is absolutely no place in the Christian church for racist attitudes.
2. In society, there is not only overt and naked racism, but far more widely a problem of institutional racism. Non-whites are regularly the victims of personal prejudice, educational and social disadvantage, higher unemployment and higher incidence of being stopped by the police. As Christians, if we are complacent about the status quo we allow such racism to go unchecked.

NEWSLETTER No. 43 - JANUARY 1992

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Editor: Rob Warner,
Herne Hill Baptist Church,
Half Moon Lane, Herne Hill,
London. SE24.

Subscriptions: Steven Hembery,
27 Crabtree Rd., West Green,
Crawley, Sussex. RH11 7HL.

The Mainstream Newsletter is designed to encourage life and growth among churches within the Baptist Union. On the understanding that contributors are in sympathy with this aim, they have full liberty of expression. Views contained in the newsletter are those of individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Mainstream executive.

3. Each of us is shaped by our upbringing to harbour all manner of prejudice. Therefore, not only do we take our stand against explicit racism, but we are also prepared to examine ourselves humbly, ready to discover and uproot the unconscious prejudice of many years. This is a vital part of growing into holiness.

For our church, uprooting racial prejudice is part of becoming an alternative community for all people, within a city where relationships are becoming over

more fragmented. But exploring issues of race really does matter throughout Britain. Sadly, we have all too often left such reflection to non-Christian groups.

Shouldn't your church grasp this nettle and face up to exploring these issues? Let's have an end not only to overt racism, but also to the comfortable harbouring of deeply unchristian prejudices. In Christ, the dividing wall has been broken down. Let's declare and demonstrate that liberation to multi-racial Britain today!

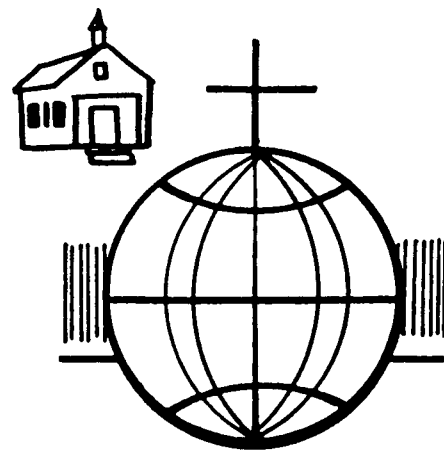
WILLOW CREEK COMMUNITY CHURCH - THE CHURCH FOR THE UNCHURCHED

It is my belief that God raises up particular church leaders and churches to encourage the Church to broaden its vision. For example, David Watson and St. Michaels, Roger Forster and Ichthus, Terry Virgo and Coastlands, John Wimber and Vineyard and so on. A new name is now emerging from across the Atlantic which will, I believe, have a profound effect on the thinking of many churches. This will impact not only the evangelism strategy of the church but could have a lasting influence on the style and content of church services.

The name of Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Community Church are household names across evangelical America. I first heard of his ministry over six years ago and as I have been studying in Chicago over the last two years, I have taken the opportunity to attend seminars conducted by Bill Hybels and attend many of their Sunday and mid-week Services.

The story of Willow Creek began in 1975 when a young pastor started a church plant out of a traditional evangelical church. The work began in a rented cinema with a group of twenty five. Bill Hybels is a dynamic entrepreneur who had a burden to build a church for the unchurched. Numerically the church mushroomed almost immediately as many unchurched people were drawn to its services. It is the classic church success story. Its four weekend services attract a congregation of some 15,000 people, over a third of whom are non-Christians or "seekers".

Bill Hybels is consumed by the burden that "lost people matter to God" and this has led him to pioneer what he calls Seeker Services. These services are unlike most evangelical church services - the music is highly contemporary led by a band of musicians on the stage, there is drama, the messages are biblical but life-related rather than expository in nature. At these Seeker Services there are no traditional hymns or modern choruses sung, there is very little prayer and never communion,



these traditional elements are reserved for their mid-week Believers' Services. The reasoning being that Hybels is trying to construct a service in which an unbeliever, or Seeker, would feel at home. The Sunday services are aimed primarily at the non-Christian, not the Christian, and so most of the trappings of a traditional church service are deliberately avoided.

He maintains that too many unchurched people are put off God by the apparent irrelevance and boredom of most church services. He points out that a non-Christian and Christian are fundamentally different. So when you are able to persuade a non-Christian to attend a traditional church service, which is aimed at the Christian, it is not surprising that the majority of non-Christians are left unmoved and so unsaved, and so do not return. He maintains that although the packaging may be different at Willow Creek, the underlying message and values are unchanged, the only difference is that it is relevant and understandable to the unchurched.

There are two mid-week services, called New Community, which almost 6,000 people attend. These are geared primarily for Christians. So it is here that the Bible is preached expostionally, worship songs

are sung, prayers are said, communion is shared. In fact everything you would expect to find in a Sunday service takes place on a Wednesday or Thursday evening!

The church has a Seven-Step Philosophy which aims to transform the non-christian to become a disciple of Jesus:

1. To build bridges of friendship and relationships with unchurched non-christians.
2. To train every church members in how to bring a spiritual dimension into their friendships and so to share their faith and influence their friends.
3. Seekers' Services.
Members can then bring their friends to a "safe" relevant service in which over a period of time they recognize the relevance of Christianity and so commit themselves to Christ.
4. Believers' Services.
The place where christians can be fed and grow around the word and worship.
5. Small Groups.
The place where strategic discipleship takes place in groups of 6-8 people.
6. Spiritual Gifts.
The opportunity to discover a place of service and ministry within the church.
7. Financial Stewardship.
Regular teaching is given on tithing so that the ministry can expand.

Willow Creek is a church which has come into the spotlight in evangelical America but what can we learn here in Britain from them?

Firstly, we must not imitate them. This has often been the classic mistake of trying to transplant another successful church model lock, stock and barrel into our own backyard. God does not work that way. Bill Hybels is a uniquely gifted man. The suburb of Barrington, Chicago is a unique location. The church is geared at reaching a clear target group (the male Baby-Boomer of middle-class America) which they are reaching extremely successfully.

Secondly, we must learn from them. Far too often our church growth in many areas is no more than the recycling of the saints, rather than reaching the sinners! We must look hard and critically at what we do in our services and ask, "What are we doing. Why are we doing it? Who are we trying to reach? Who are we actually reaching?"

Thirdly, we must apply their principles into our church life. How can we reach the unchurched in our area / communities? Are we expecting the unchurched, who constitute most of the population, to come into a service which for them is totally unfamiliar, perhaps threatening, apparently irrelevant and not contemporary? We need to look seriously at creating

space to provide a regular pre-evangelism Seekers' Service into the life of our churches if we are to have a real impact on the unchurched in our communities.

Is this where Church Planting could make a unique impact? Instead of the Daughter Church being a replica of the Mother Church, perhaps it could be a Church for the Unchurched. Reaching out to the Unreached in the community and drawing in others who would not come to the Mother Church.

Willow Creek's Church Leadership Conferences have become life-changing events for many Christian Leaders in America. I personally have been greatly helped and inspired by my own contact with their leaders and would strongly recommend their first UK Church Conference in June 1992 in Birmingham. Willow Creek is not without its critics, but I believe that God has indeed raised up this church, I sense His hand on the leaders, they have much to share with us. We, in Britain need to learn how to be churches that significantly reach the unreached. Our Church Growth must not simply be a question of filling churches with more christians, but of genuinely increasing the Kingdom of God through conversion to Christ.

Justin Dennison



AN EXPERIMENT IN ASSOCIATIONAL MISSION

Following some of the pessimistic reflections on Association life in a recent issue of Mainstream Newsletter, I would like to share something positive which has recently occurred in the North East!

Like many Associations, the Northern Baptist Association is experiencing changes reflecting the changing life of our churches. Mission is very much on our agenda. Last year a group of the ministers shared together over five months in a study on the importance of mission as a priority in the life of the minister and the church. This year, we decided it would be good to mission together. The idea of an internal 'partnership mission' was developed in which ministers from various churches would give some time during one week to share in Mission in one of the churches.

DECIDING WHERE

In what we believe to be God's wisdom, we approached the Baptist Church in North Shields to see if they would welcome such a mission. Their minister was one of the group sharing in the previous study. It was a town centre church with signs of new growth, experimenting already with ways of outreach into the community. Nobody knew at that early stage of the riots to come, which would create a different social climate in which we could share our faith.

The church responded very positively to the idea and set up an imaginative working group to co-ordinate at the local end. Initially, the NBA Missioner co-ordinated the ministerial side, but as plans matured the 'team' became more involved. It was possible to set up two team meetings only, early on and just before the mission - and on neither occasion was everybody present! However, in part this was offset because of our regular contact at fraternals and the fact that several have worked together before.

DECIDING WHAT

From the beginning, the decision was taken to avoid using church premises as much as possible! We needed to be where the people are.

The church building is situated two blocks from the central shopping area, a pedestrian precinct. We planned to be there every lunchtime in open air witness, with drama, singing and simply talking with folk. This culminated with a two hour witness on the Saturday morning, with a much larger group.

In the afternoons, some door to door visitation. Hard graft, many 'absentees', but some useful contacts made. We did wonder whether we would have been better remaining in the shopping area where many wished to talk.

Home meetings were held, mostly mornings, some evenings. A nearby senior citizens residential home received us.

Several schools gave us opportunities, for assemblies, lessons and CU meetings. Opportunity was taken to invite everyone to a special youth night, a type of video-express, held in the YMCA.

Wednesday was a buffet meal and music in a local hotel. Both this and the youth event were more than sell-outs! Two meetings, only, were held in the church, an opening dedication and communion service and a final evangelistic 'celebration'. One of the team stayed through for the Sunday Services and had the joy of reaping some of the harvest.

USING THE GIFTS

Ten of the association ministers were involved in some way, though none was involved in everything. Those with special musical talents (including the church 'pop' group) helped in this area. Some went to schools or shared in the open air work and visitation. One or two wives were involved in coffee mornings. Some brought members from their church to help in various ways. In the daily open airs we had excellent help from one of the OASIS teams to do the drama.

This meant quite a bit of coming and going, but those involved in daytime activities met for prayer before the lunchtime open air spots and then shared in lunch afterwards. Members of the church shared as available in these activities, so there was a real sense of continuity in all that happened.

ASSESSING THE RESULTS

First impressions are:

The Church clearly found the whole experience invigorating. A lot of work but not too much! A new awareness of and commitment to mission. "This is what being church is meant to be!" God touched the lives of many of the members in different ways. An appreciation of what association support can mean, as ministers and members of other churches got alongside in prayer and witness. "Count on us next time.....!"

The Association involved, at least in a representative way, in mission together. There was space for more participation - some catch on more slowly than others! We hope that this pilot scheme will lead to other joint ventures. The re-discovery that the sharing of resources achieves positive results and that the sharing together in mission unites us as nothing else does. We enjoyed being together! And the expense was minimal!

The Community of North Shields? A few born into God's family - a number of others open to hear more - others who need serving in special ways in Christ's name. Many conversations with all ages. In the event, the presence of a sympathetic ear gave many shoppers the opportunity to express their fears and frustrations at recent events in the town. The visual declaration of a christian presence affirming God loves and cares for you!

The theme of the mission, again decided before the riots, was "Making sense of it all". The people of North Shields are struggling to do just that at this time. The members of the local Baptist church have become newly aware that to their society the mission has just begun!

Eric Westwood

THE BU AND CHURCH PLANTING

Everybody's talking about Church Planting. What is the union doing about it?

Before setting goals it was considered important to know what the situation actually was. So, during autumn 1991 the Mission Office wrote to all Superintendents, appealed through BACUP Newsletter and followed-up any other leads it was given, to try to establish what church planting Baptists had been engaged in since 1980. This was not only concerned to discover what Baptist Churches had been founded and joined the Union in that time but what other churches, baptistic in nature, we have been instrumental in founding, what daughter congregations and other variations of church planting had taken place. We also asked what failures there had been.

As I write most of that information is to hand. It will now be analyzed. From that we shall not only have a basis for projecting into the future, one ingredient of goal-setting, but also be able to table questions, raise issues and draw some preliminary conclusions.

The results will be an encouragement. Church Planting is already under way. This will give added impetus to what is happening among us. It will enable us to set visionary but achievable goals.

The results will be shared publicly for the first time at the Dawn 2000 Congress in Birmingham in February. Further consideration will be given to them at the Baptist International Conference on Establishing Churches in March at Swanwick. Details of both these conferences are available from me.

They will also be used internally to inform the discussions of our BU evangelism committee and mission main committee. The General Secretaries will be laying before the March Council their vision for the future, drawn up as a result of the Listening Day process they undertook. Church Planting will have a significant part in that, as will mission generally.

Harry Weatherly has written a Church Planting Manual for the Christian Training Programme which will be published shortly. It bridges the gap between the theoretical and the anecdotal and will meet a real need.

Be encouraged. Much is happening.

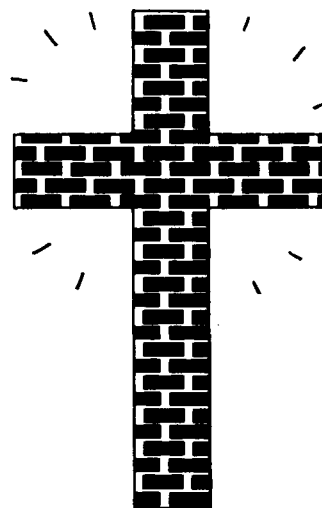
Derek J. Tidball
Mission Office
Baptist Union

A DREAM FOR THE YEAR 2000 AD

Stephen Ibotson in his excellent article on association life, asked us to start the process of building something new by beginning to dream about the future. This is good advice for the whole of our Union's affairs not just one aspect. So for what it's worth this is my dream. It's personal as all dreams are and to some it may seem more like a nightmare! But at least it's a start at trying to visualise what kind of Union I'd like to be part of in the year 2000A.D. Perhaps if we all could begin to dream a little, we may find some similarities. Those similarities may in turn be the contents of the one major dream we are looking for; God's dream for our Union.

In my dream, I saw a rather ageing David Coffee at the helm of a growing, caring, visionary Union. He was well respected for single minded leadership he had given, in causing the Union to become a major mission station based in the U.K.

The Union as a whole was in a good state of morale, we were believing in our selves and more important in the power of God to change this country. Targets



for the year had been reached and surpassed, each association had planted 7 churches during the year. This was on top of the 100 planted by local churches. The annual conference was given over to a time listening to God and intercession for this country and for goal setting for the next 10 years in mission and social justice.

Our links now with the other denominations and in particular the house Churches, were strong and vibrant, resulting in a clear voice into the arena of social justice and politics, and a joint plan of operation for the planting of new churches.

The Area Apostles (Superintendents) now led by Gerald Coates were providing two major roles; the envisioning of the associations in Evangelism, Church Planting & Social Care, and providing spiritual direction and care to the ministers of the area. These were well respected women and men of God.

They linked up to associations which are now mission enablers in their (smaller) areas. The associations meet regularly to pray and seek the mind of God as to where to plant next, where to give financial help and assistance, and look at what local issue of social justice to tackle next. New finance has been raised by each association to take on the new projects, now that the funds are decentralised. Under the care of the districts much more has been raised because vision has been earthed in the local areas.

Everybody reads the monthly glossy "*Baptists on the Move*", and people tune into the Christian T.V. satellite station for news from the "*Give me Britain or I die*" team (Home Mission). We are always short of cash, but the giving is now sacrificial from Baptist members who have a goal to reach and a vision to attain. There is talk now of sending over church Planting Teams into every country in Europe by the "*Give me the world or I die*" team (B.M.S.)

The Ministry has changed, team work is the norm of the day, but not based on the hierarchical structures of the past but on the understanding of gifting and calling. Pastors, evangelists, teachers, church planters and prophets are released in the team context to do what they are good at. Financially things are better, more guidance is given by the Union in to pay and its structuring. The minimum has been increased by 30% in real terms, there is also a higher suggested rate for Churches to aim for.

Ministers are now along side the salary rates of those in the caring professions. There is at last a London weighting and a special weighting for those in inner city work. Special contributions are made to this by the suburban Churches. Of course some ministers give it away, but at least the choice is their's.

Ministers now belong to their own professional body which acts as a voice into the union and is there to advise and support ministers in particular difficulty. There is a developing loose career structure for ministers. A British Doctor of Ministry course is available and a scheme of incremental pay rises depending on years of service, experience and responsibility. There is in turn a structure for ministerial reviews which are carried out by outside teams every 3

years. These seek to increase ministry effectiveness, help with any personal pressures and pin point any unnecessary tensions between the elders and ministers.

All in all the Union is poised to spearhead a major revival, morale is high, spirituality fervent, love is evident and ministers are ready.

As I wake from my enjoyable sleep I find things aren't too far away from my dream anyway. Certainly the potential is there. These things could happen, but much will depend on our ability and will to change, to grow in grace, to have a heart for this country, and sacrifice what is familiar, for a new dream.

Should I simply wake up and face a reality that it may never happen, to be part of a union that nearly made it! No I think I'm going to continue to dream, and pray, and act, to try and make my dream in to some kind of reality. So if you see me in a dream world for the next few years, please don't wake me up.

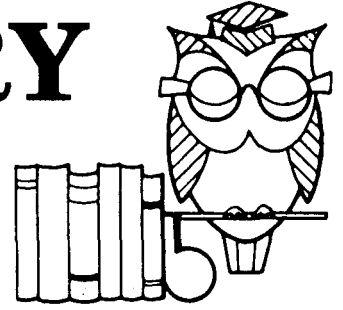
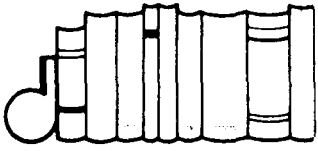
P.S. Perhaps our next annual conference could be called:

"Dreaming"
Do
Not
Disturb

Roger Sutton



STILL HUNGRY FOR BOOKS



by Rob & Ada Hiley
The book famine has not gone away.

They are still there, waiting, wondering... always wondering why somebody doesn't do something. The "book famine" areas of the world are no different from areas where there is ongoing hunger of a different kind. They receive a lot of interest and support when something startling occurs, but fade into the world's background as other emergencies hit the headlines. Yet the nagging hunger remains.

We think of a book famine area as one where a numerically-strong Christian church is being starved of the spiritual nourishment which comes from reading the Word of God and books which help people to grow in the Christian life.

The enormity of the demand and the scarcity of supply in some world areas constitutes a need of famine proportions. Most African countries, some West Indian islands, the Spanish-speaking countries of Central and South America, India and the newly-freed countries of Eastern Europe all come within this category and there are probably others you would include.

Great strides were made with Christian literature earlier this century. First the denominational missions - Baptists, Anglicans, Methodists, plus the Bible Societies and USCL (United Society for Christian Literature) and others - established printing presses, publishing houses and distribution outlets in an amazing number of difficult places.

The next wave of progress came from interdenominational and "faith" missions who made, on the whole, smaller but exciting advances into new areas. Groups such as the American ELO (*Evangelical Literature Overseas*) and the British "Feed the Minds" provided funds and encouraged the training of nationals and missionaries.

Local literature committees were formed in many countries, many of which still function, such as ELFI (*India*) and CLAIM (*Malawi*). During the sixties the outlook was bright but the momentum was not maintained. Indeed, in several major areas things have deteriorated rather than improved.

How did this situation come about? There is no easy answer, but the following must be contributory factors:

- * **The emerging nations and national churches.** Most of the countries already mentioned achieved independence during the past twenty or thirty years (*India 1947*). The consequent thrust of "nationalisation" of missionary work meant that the responsibility for local literature programmes was passed to the overseas church. Newly-trained nationals took over from missionaries and a result of this was that access to foreign monies was greatly reduced.
- * **The disarray of the world's economies** created huge problems for Christian booksellers. Apart from price increases - sometimes as much as four-fold overnight - the difficulty of obtaining foreign currencies to pay overseas publishers resulted in the nightmare of empty shelves with no prospect of refilling them. Printers and publishers, likewise unable to buy paper, ink and new machinery, were brought to a standstill.
- * **Internal conflict.** Most of the needy areas were suffering from disrupted communications and extreme poverty. Money was needed to put food into hungry stomachs, not to buy or produce books!
- * **We in the West were slow to respond.** Somehow our interest in overseas literature programmes waned and problems mounted over many years before we really took notice, by which time the difficulties were compounded.

Letters began to reach us during the mid-80's which we could not ignore:

"Our need for books is so desperate that if we do not get help immediately we will have to close about fifteen of our bookshops, that is 45 per cent of our operation... our bookshops are now ghosts of what they used to be. To make matters worse, people's hunger for Christian literature is increasing... We are in a serious dilemma. Won't somebody do something for us?"

This, and many other appeals for help, pressed us into action with our relief operation **BOOK AID**. To date, twenty container-loads of Christian books (new and second-hand) have been shipped to needy areas. In an attempt to make some kind of development gesture, we arranged for receiving

bookshops to make a small repayment into a fund within their country to be used to finance local literature projects. Some books have already been produced locally and other money allocated for training purposes.

The Way Ahead

A big effort should now be made to find ways of rebuilding local literature programmes.

- * **British publishers** who came up with co-editions and cheap editions to help these very areas are encouraged to develop these ideas further and to think of new ones. Donations of stock for **BOOK AID** containers have been a great help, but more are needed. Overseas publishers would greatly benefit from some training in the UK.
- * **British printers** might be able to help with the paper, inks and machinery which is so badly needed overseas. The provision of these would start some presses running again - generating employment and producing some local editions of books. Overseas printers also need training and would benefit from spending some time in a UK printshop.

* **British booksellers** could also provide much support and encouragement to overseas shops. How about "twinning" with a particular shop or becoming a collecting point for donations of books to **BOOK AID** in your area? Overseas booksellers would greatly benefit from some training/-experience in a British bookshop.

* **You - Mainstream readers - what can you do?**
PUT Christian literature programmes high on your agenda.

PRAY for all involved in them.

CONSIDER whether God might want you to serve Him in a literature mission.

CONTINUE to send your books to **BOOK AID**.

We still have so much... they still have so little. "Your abundance at the present time should supply their want" (2 Corinthians 8.14).

*If you have books to donate to **BOOK AID** please contact Bob Hiley and you will be put in touch with your nearest collection point. Do not send books by post to London as postal charges are so costly. Address: **BOOK AID**, c/o 271 Church Road, Upper Norwood, London SE19 2QQ. Tel: 081-857 7794 (office hours) or 081-653 6577 (evenings).*

MEN WOMEN AND GOD - AN EVENING OUT

DOUBLE VISION is the name of a new road-show set to tour Britain during the first half of 1992. Organised by Men, Women and God, it will be fronted by poet and Greenbelt director Steward Henderson and theatre and television consultant Carol Henderson. **DOUBLE VISION** will incorporate music, poetry, visuals and dialogue in an evening that explores the biblical concept of "neither male nor female" alongside the current conflict of male headship versus feminist theology.

Founded in 1985 by writer Kathy Keay, Men, Women and God was formed in response to what author and new director of Christian Impact Elaine Storkey recognised as "the feminists' case against the church". Since its first international gathering six years ago, MWG has attracted major support within the evangelical fold, including endorsements from Rev. Dr. John Stott, Ichthus Fellowship leader Faith Forster, and EA General Secretary Rev. Clive Calver, as it seeks to "bring about wholeness in the lives of women and men and a more biblical partnership within the church, home and society at large".

DOUBLE VISION's debut will be at **CHRISTIAN IMPACT** (Formerly London Institute for Contemporary Christianity), St. Peter's, Vere Street, London W1 on Friday 7th February 1992 at 8.00 p.m. with a visit to Frimley, Surrey the following evening, Saturday 8th February 1992 at 7.30 p.m.

Contributors to the tour will be drawn from MWG's leaders, including:

Marlene Cohen

Chair of MWG Trustees,
and Consultant

Phill Vickery

Social & Community work
advisor to the Church Army

David Cohen

General Director of
Scripture Union

Kathy Keay

Writer and speaker

Roy McCloughry

Kingdom Trust

Elaine Storkey

Director of Christian Impact

For further details please phone:

071 735 0971 or 081 390 1703

TIDBALL'S TOP TEN FOR 1991

In a year that has produced some good books Derek Tidball selects ten he has enjoyed reading, all published in 1991, and which he believes will have more than passing significance.

The Gospel Connection by Michael Marshall (Darton, Longman & Todd).

An excellent book on evangelism written by an high churchman who is shortly to team up with Michael Green to work as the Archbishop of Canterbury's due for the Decade of Evangelism.

Challenge to change by Nigel Wright (Kingsway)
This must be the book for Baptists. It set out the agenda we have to address.

'Christian' England by Peter Brierley (Marc).
An indispensable tool for understanding our present situation. A surprisingly good read for the report of a census!

Among God's Giants by J.I. Packer (Kingsway).
Jim Packer sets out the puritan vision for the Christian life as a challenge to the superficiality of our own. Tough-going in parts, hilarious in other parts, always worthwhile.

The Message of Thessalonians by John Stott (IVP).
The latest in the Bible Speaks Today Series and the usual masterly high standard of exposition from John Stott. Published in his 70th year. May God preserve him to keep him writing more yet!

The Persistence of Faith by Jonathan Sacks (Weidenfeld and Nicolson).

It does not sound gripping. The new chief rabbi has reduced his Reith Lectures on 'Religion Morality and Society in a Secular Age' to writing. But it is gripping - and has helpful insights into fundamental questions we need to address both as Christians and citizens.

All God's Children? (Church House Publishers).
A CofE report on deals with the evangelism of children and sets out the current bleak situation with some strategies for the future. A vital subject, well written and not the usual run of the mill for church reports. Baptists would benefit from it.

The Nonconformists by James Munson (SPCK)
An enjoyable guide to our history and the richness of the contribution we have made in the past which poses the question about our present 'lost culture' and our future role.

Planting New Churches ed Bob Hopkins (Eagle).
A collection of papers given at an Anglican Church Planting Conference which begins to provide the sort of church planting literature we need.

Evangelical Spirituality by James Gordon (SPCK)
Gordon poses the question what is evangelical spirituality and seeks to answer it by delving into the writings of some of the great evangelical heroes. He succeeds in showing it is more than 'having a quiet time' and unearths some enriching material. But it may not prove altogether definitive in answering the question.

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