

Editorial

2000 NEW CHURCHES:



AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK?

If Baptists are to plant 2000 new congregations this decade we will need a radically new approach. For a start, church planting will need to be seen as a priority for every church, appearing on every church meeting's agenda during the next year. This kind of massive advance is only possible if every single church and leadership team take the initiative to reach their area. There must be no evasion of responsibility.

But how can we afford it, when Home Mission is struggling to survive on present levels of development? For me, it seems inconceivable that the present methods of funding could expand quickly enough to reach such a level. The Home Mission office works heroically at what must sometimes seem a thankless task, but such dramatic expansion must surely require new approaches to finance.

Specifically, decentralised fund raising will be needed for association sponsored church planting initiatives; strong local churches will need to finance part or full time staff working in satellite congregations; and far more leaders will need tent-making employment on a part-time basis at least until their congregations are large enough to support them full time.

We won't just need new patterns of funding, but a new understanding of what is essential in the life of a local church. If we are to plant many new congregations, we need a slimmed down and more rapidly adaptable understanding of what the church is. Some of our national leaders have already warned that new Baptist congregations seek autonomy too fast. This diverts the precious energy of a new congregation from evangelism into writing its own constitution; not the most inviting environment for keen Christians or new converts!

Other changes are just as vital. We'll need many congregations that learn how to thrive without buying their own buildings. We'll simply have to take on many more congregational leaders who have not been trained to degree level at a theological college, and work at new methods of "on the job" training. We'll need more multi-congregational churches, where resources are pooled and the whole church meet from time to time for a celebration together.

What's more, we'll need many churches which don't simply plant once, but develop a church planting ethos, in which it becomes normal to expect new congregations on a regular basis. Reginaldo Kruklis told me that in Brazil a typical goal for a live church would be to plant at least one new

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Book Reviews

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.

congregation every year. And that's the Baptists - Brazilian Pentecostals are growing much faster.

We'll also need fresh strategic thinking. In some areas existing churches are simply too hidebound ever to be effective vehicles of the gospel to to-day's pagans. New churches can be culturally specific, targeting the people of an unreached community.

A strategy of saturation church planting necessarily goes beyond the local church or the individual denomination. If we really are to cover Britain with vibrant congregations, we'll need to work closely with other denominations and streams, agreeing who will plant where. If this begins to take off, the issues will inevitably spill over into a European context: already some of the new churches are poised to enter Europe with new evangelistic and churchplanting strategies.

One more crucial issue must be addressed. Some of the students in our colleges are natural pioneers and church planters. It can be a terrible waste of resources if the pioneers are placed in traditional churches that are reluctant to change and have little vision for mission; some of our good and patient pastors are well gifted to such vital and necessary work. But some pioneers get the stuffing knocked out of them, struggling to work as round pegs in square holes.

It is to be hoped that the colleges will have the courage to identify their evangelistic pioneers and encourage them to go out and break new ground. One thing is clear, if we are really to see 2000 new churches, we have an urgent need for many hundreds of pioneers with a passion to reach the lost.

2000 by 2000

Here is a diary of events that took place at the Challenge 2000 DAWN Congress as it particularly relates to our network of churches. The Congress demonstrated such energy and vision in a manner that I have never previously experienced with regard to a national strategic perspective. A number of us felt that we were at a gathering where history of the English church could well have been in the making. There were some very specific things that related to us as a denomination which I believe we need to note. Hopefully this diary will try to capture these things.

✧ DAY 1

The opening session got underway and included video clips of each denominational leader sharing their greetings and thoughts with participants. I felt confident of David Coffey's contribution because I knew church planting was on his heart. Sure enough, David came over in his usual decisive, precise and positive manner.....and he was pleased to announce that as Baptists we could expect to plant 200 churches. I was not sure that I was pleased to hear that. My mind had been turning over 600 plus as a gut feeling. I was certain that with a change of atmosphere, and a growing surge of interest in church planting amongst churches and leaders, we could be confident of a leap forward during the 90's.

I had been encouraged that we had planted about 120 churches and congregations in the 80's (results from Derek Tidball's helpful survey) plus 23 LEP's, plus 34 "resurrections" of dying causes. My fear was that 200 would limit our expectations and discussions. I went down to the prayer room and shared the need to pray that the 200 mentioned by David would not prove to be a limiting figure. I wrote on the board: "Baptist target: 200 +++++"

✧ DAY 2

When we met in our denominational streams on the Wednesday afternoon I shared my concern. Was this a fate target (i.e. given present trends we were bound to hit it), rather than a faith target? Rob Warner quipped: "We need to add a 0 to that figure." We laughed! Sarah was behind the tent flap again. 2000 may be impossible, but as Derek shared the figures and talked, it became clear that 1000 was not wholly unrealistic, given the way that the tide was moving in our churches. We saw what had become possible when leaders, churches, associations and superintendent caught the vision together in the Southern area. Bless them, for they were giving us a taste of what could be.

✧ DAY 3

So by Thursday lunch-time, an hour before our stream was to meet again to decide on a faith target, my own faith was growing. That faith target was to be computed with the other streams' targets, to make an overall Congress faith target. It was up to us to see ways in which we could encourage our denomination to adopt our particular target.

So over lunch, feeling quite relaxed and biting through a tuna sandwich, I casually asked the leader of the Anglican stream how they were getting on, and what kind of figure were they looking at. I nearly choked on the tuna! It was phenomenall! Impossible! They're declining at present! How could they entertain a figure of that magnitude. I was speechless!

Enter the idea of "planting stock" i.e. churches that have the ethos of church planting, either because they've planted a church or because they've been planted. Add to "planting stock" the concept of an on-going church planting policy rather than a one-

off approach, and challenge people to set a goal of planting by different points in the decade, and then you can increase your planting stock dramatically by the end of the decade. I floated these concepts past my own experience in Peterborough. There in one very ordinary, rather traditional and moderately sized church we had managed to plant in 1982, and then again in 1987, 1989 and 1991. Now in Peterborough area we have 4 churches/congregations with a church planting ethos and commitment, with another on the way.

So then, calculate from your planting stock the number of churches you could plant from that stock, not just once, but again and yet again at intervals throughout the decade. Then add a figure for the number of churches which are growing significantly and are over 100/120 members. Get them to plant once or twice in the decade. It adds up.

My mind was reeling. I sought the nearest set of people that looked like Baptists! Maybe the Anglican figures were based on optimistic assumptions, but the fundamental principles had been proved in my own experience. They were valid. I was excited. The trouble was that there were only 15 minutes before I had to go to where our meeting was taking place. "David (David Newton was the fall guy and the tone excessively casual), could you just jot down some figures on the back of an envelope, whilst I let it down to start our stream meeting? You can present them a bit later after I've introduced the ideas." "Sure" he answered without a moment's hesitation, as he exercised instantaneous forgiveness. Anyway maths never was my strong point. "Scale down the figures," were my final words to David.

Half an hour into our stream meeting David sidles up and shows me the figures he's calculated. They were quite a bit more cautious than the Anglicans', but even he is staggered! So from our base planting stock and increasing that base throughout the decade the figure was an amazing 2001. His slogan as he presented was obviously, "2001 by 2001".

Debate, questions, discussion, prayer. Groups returned faith targets as follows: 2000 x 3; 1500 x 3; 1000 x 3. We decided that 1000 was realistic and achievable (stretching some), but 1500 was adding a real faith element. 2000 was rather adventurous; too faith stretching for too many of us. 1500 it was. We made our returns to Congress by 6.30p.m. over a ham and spicy chicken pizza.

The evening celebration opened with the first leader of a mainline denomination speaking to Congress; our own David Coffey. His input was good and it was much appreciated that a leader of one of the historic denominations spoke so positively about the church planting vision and so honestly about the pressures of ministering within such a setting. The

second speaker for the evening, Gerald Coates, spoke briefly before sharing two prophetic words. The first was directed towards the Salvation Army. God valued them for their humility and courage, and that they were no longer to be treated as strange, but they were to be respected and honoured. It was gripping and moving. Then a word for David and the Baptists. After some personal words of encouragement, and a warning to beware of Baptist pride, his role as a denominational leader was affirmed. Then came the challenge. In the decade we were to set our sights on planting 2000 churches! Suddenly the afternoon session seemed to be clearing the way. We saw that Christ was inviting us, beckoning us, goading us to thinking that broke the mould of caution, realism and unbelief; thinking that merely projected forward a trend on the basis of present experience. We were being asked to dream dreams, see visions and enter into possibility thinking. God was standing before us and showing what could be if we can rouse sufficient leaders to capture the vision and go forward in faithful, costly and dependent obedience. Even 500 to 600 churches would mean that it was an issue for other churches. 1500 to 2000 means that it's an issue for my church.

After the vibrant evening containing many elements, notably the sense of unity and affirmations of one another's streams and ministries, someone told me about what had been going on the prayer group that evening. They had been praying for us as a denomination. They were praying about the 200 figure. They could not believe it to be 200, and so they thought there was a mistake and that a zero had been omitted. So they were praying for the Baptist's 2000 target! There seemed to be no escaping 2000.

✧ Day 4

That night, whether it was my Pentecostal room companion's gift of glossolalic snoring, or just an excited mind, I awoke in the early hours. My mind turned over the events of the previous evening. As I prayed the Lord underlined to me the significance of those two prophetic words. If the word to the Salvation Army was an expression of God's heart for the marginalised of His church, the word directed to us was an expression of God's strategic mind. Baptists, of all the mainline historic denominations, are poised for what could be significant growth. If such growth could take place amongst ourselves, then the other mainline denominations as institutions would have to take note, especially the Anglican church, upon whom an effective national mission in England depends. Whilst individual leaders and churches in all the denominations are totally on board, as a whole institution they are not. If Baptist churches would grow significantly, then they would have to take note. In those two prophetic words I believe that we are hearing two spear-heading

words to break through the decline and staticness of God's church in England. God's embracing heart and his strategic mind were being given expression. I was able to share these reflections with Congress during the final morning session

So it ended with a shared corporate goal that as leaders we would encourage our streams to plant 20,000 churches in the decade. Faith, unity and co-operation were being expressed in a strategically shared vision of mission to our nation. It had been a heady week, the like of which I have not experienced before, certainly where these matters were the agenda.

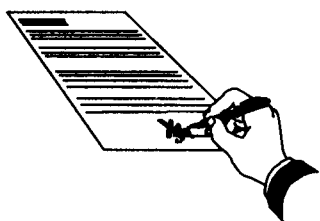
So 2000 by 2000 - is it possible or feasible? I believe it could be. But some amazing changes need to take place.

- * church planting as a mission philosophy would need to be acknowledged by leaders as absolutely central.
- * we need to identify churches that believe and practice this now and have it in their bloodstream.
- * we will need to challenge both these churches and also those that are growing but have not seen their own crucial role to plant churches.
- * church planting is not just an issue for the church up the road but for my church as well, even if I cannot be involved directly at this stage.

In plain words: the 1990's must be the decade when church planting comes to be the norm for our churches, not just one of the options on the menu. Possible and feasible? Yes! I will tell you in two or three years time whether it is probable.

Stephen Ibbotson

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP



Membership of the local church is much misunderstood and often maligned. It is a common perception among today's renewed Christians that they are part of the Body of Christ and

that's all that matters. In the past twenty years those same Christians have become used to crossing (and re-crossing!) denominational boundaries. I am heartily glad that the former barriers preventing Christians in different parts of the historic church from having fellowship have been demolished. However, a rather distressing consequence of this has been to undermine the value of the committed membership of the local Church and personal loyalty to it.

This is an important factor in the life of the Church. What is the purpose and value of a covenanted membership both biblically and practically? And how can we encourage a more Biblical practice of the Biblical statements that we are all "members of one another" and each one "belongs to all the others" (Romans 12:5)?

Reasons for Membership

Since the beginnings of Baptist life in Britain, covenanted membership (we will explain the term presently) has been a consistent feature of our local churches. In itself, that is not an argument for continuing the practice, merely a statement of fact.

However, latterly, as interdenominational barriers have been demolished, many have lost the sense of value in membership. The argument sounds very persuasive both from a leadership viewpoint and from the person in the pew. It is this: people will go where God is at work and seen to be at work. If God is not at work, then the people will vote with their feet and leave and the local Church will die. For the following reasons I believe this style of churchmanship has so many deficiencies as to render it untenable.

The people of the church would not have a sense of "belonging" and certainly would not understand Paul's statement in Romans 12:5 about Christians in the local church "belonging to all the others". This may create uncertainty leading to people finding it hard to have fellowship.

Some leaders are unduly threatened and pressurised by such a view of the local church. If a few services should unfortunately not produce the goods, there is a danger of wholesale walkout. An unhealthy insecurity in leadership might be the result.

Other leaders, because they are not accountable to the whole church, may move away from the whole truth of God's word and into unhelpful, sometimes unhealthy and occasionally sinful modes of leading and living. Authority, however beneficent may be its beginnings,

without accountability is dangerous both for the leader and the led.

There is no mechanism for corporately discovering the will of God. Either, and this is the most usual case, discovering the will of God is left to a small group of elders or else in the hands of one individual. In either case I am not convinced that the system is intrinsically better at discovering the will of God. They are all valid models and have biblical background, but then so does the model for congregational government involving the Church Meeting.

Nor is there any corporate accountability for individual lifestyle. Today, one of the most significant and necessary aspects of congregational government is that it provides a system for church discipline. The Apostle Paul considered that the final sanction in church discipline was to "expel the wicked man from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:13 quoting Deuteronomic Law). You cannot put people out of what they are not in!

When a system goes wrong or has become stultified and does not seem to be effective, the tendency is to get rid of everything to do with that system and start with a clean sheet of paper. The Restoration churches tend to have this as the basis for their establishment. But this is not always wise. Many movements of God's Spirit have founded on the rocks of modernity for its own sake. As the man says, "Change is here to stay"! If we change everything merely for the sake of change we are in danger of losing things that play a significant part in the health and stability of the church.

So what are the arguments in favour of COVENANTED MEMBERSHIP and CONGREGATIONAL GOVERNMENT? I believe they are these:

The Bible describes a congregational decision taken on a number of occasions in the Acts (Acts 1:23-26; 6:5; 11:29; 13:2). There is clear biblical authority for the system.

Congregational government is positively putting into practice the Pauline instruction "submit yourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). Submission means being open to the ministry of others. It is also putting into practice the Biblical principle of every believer being a "priest" (1 Peter 2:9). We believe, through congregational government, that every believer is as capable of hearing the voice of God and discerning His will as anyone else.

Obtaining the approval and support of the whole group of believers for a course of action

is intrinsically powerful. When everyone believes it is God's will, they will act together to bring it about. Witness what happened in Acts when the disciples acted together (Acts 2:42-47; 4:23-35; 6:7). It may take us some while to get our act together, but watch what happens when we do!

Baptist churches can ONLY operate legally (and by that we mean according to the laws of this land which govern the functioning of charities) by having a properly constituted and recognised membership which has an executive meeting for the purpose of making decisions affecting the way the society works. The membership must appoint officers to whom they may delegate a certain amount of responsibility. We are to obey the laws of the nation unless they contradict God's laws.

Congregational Government demands Covenanted Membership. There are many occasions when God's people made and renewed their covenant with their God. On the day of Pentecost we see the new Christians becoming committed to all the others following their conversion and Baptism (Acts 2:38-47). It is singularly unfortunate that in the NIV Bible there is not only a new sentence after 2:41, but a new paragraph with a title. The original language merely has a colon after "were added to their number". It should read, "and about three thousand were added to their number that day: and they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching.....". It becomes much clearer that membership of the Body of Christ includes commitment to the other Christians in the locality.

For their own safety and the welfare of the congregation, leaders must be accountable. What better accountability than to the whole gathered community of saints? No leader worthy of that name would wish to be outside the safety net of accountability not only to God but the people of God.

Members must also be accountable. It is clear from the Bible and from church history that many Christians went off the "straight and narrow" because they were not accountable to anyone. It is interesting to note that all the modern quasi-Christian cults (JW, Mormons, Christian Science, etc.) were begun by people who became disillusioned by their local churches and went off on their own with a Bible!

Being covenanted with other Christians in the locality was the greatest privilege for the early Christians. The severest penalty for an ungodly

lifestyle was being "put out of your fellowship" (1 Corinthians 5:2).

In itself this raises two issues: the first is the danger in which those who deliberately shy away from covenanted membership place themselves. What was for the early Christians the ultimate penalty and disgrace has become wilful common practice for today's "renewed" Christians!

The second is that of church discipline. If we do not have a covenanted membership, then neither do we have any ultimate means of discipline to encourage godly living.

There is clear Biblical evidence for "covenanting" together. God made (the Hebrew word means "cut", as in cutting the letters into the stone tablets for the Ten Commandments) a covenant with his people Israel. They made a covenant with Him. This was made and renewed with various people throughout the history of Israel (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David to mention only a few). Ultimately, it was made in the blood of Jesus, which New Covenant we celebrate in Communion.

I believe, therefore, that a "covenanted membership" is a positive attribute and not a hinderance to the working of a local church. It is not the system or the method that is at fault, but the operation of that system and method.

Covenanted membership means that every Christian commits him/herself to all the others because of their love for Jesus Christ to fulfill the aims of Christian fellowship. In fact, we celebrate that covenanted relationship with Jesus and one another every time we meet at the Lord's Table and drink together "the Cup of the New Covenant" in the blood of Christ. To put it simply, if you know the Head, you will be inextricably and passionately committed to and concerned about the Body.

In the light of this and the very obvious problem that many have with the concept of the whole-church, many Baptist churches would do well to debate this aspect of "local church". Perhaps a Church Meeting might be the right setting for this. If a local church is to grow further, its concept of itself must be definite and known by everyone. Without this fundamental process, there can be no vision and forward movement.

Responsible Membership

Part of the responsibility for the effectiveness of a church's mission lies with the members of that church. Many churchgoers complain that "the church isn't doing this" or, "we want the church to do that". Such statements betray a lack of under-

standing about the nature and constitution of the church and its leadership. Often, it is the latter, the "church" being synonymous with "the Leadership". (In severe cases of this disease, "church" is synonymous with "Pastor"!)

Of all denominations, because of our congregational government and our strong belief in "the priesthood of ALL believers", Baptists should be able to appreciate the principle that we are individually part of the Body and that the Body is the sum of those individuals. Wherever a member goes and whatever they do, they go and do as the church. The church's ministry is the sum of its constituent members and only as "each part does its work" (Ephesians 5:16) do we fulfil our ministry to one another and the world. What is required, therefore, is that every member realises his/her significance within and responsibility to all the other members of the fellowship. Having realised this, a new commitment to fulfilling a ministry to and through the church should be given and practised. Responsible members do not consider primarily what they get out of the church but what they can put into God's work through the church.

Church Meetings

Of great significance in the life of a Baptist church is the Church Meeting. Originally, these meetings were held on Sunday as part of the day of worship. They were never referred to as "business meetings". The change to midweek and business came during last century. So what is the Church Meeting and why do we have them?

Legally, the Church Meeting is the Executive Body of the church. As such, decisions affecting the church are taken during its gatherings.

Spiritually, the Church Meeting is the place where the gathered community of covenanted members of the local church discover God's will for that fellowship (Acts 6:1f; Acts 13:1f). It is NOT the place where Members "have their say", a "rubber stamp" for Leaders' decisions or an opportunity for a "gripe session". Nor is it "democratic" - apparently, the groundwork of democracy was laid in the Church Meetings of the Dissenters.

This means that the Church Meeting is "forward looking", not reviewing the past unless it is relevant to forward movement.

Church Meetings should not be frightened of healthy debate. Sometimes, that may even be heated debate! There are issues that should raise our blood pressure. There is a place for "Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition", which helps us all centre on the important issues and consider all the angles. The accent is on "Loyal".

The matters raised at Church Meetings are confidential.

All discussion on the topic should take place in the Church Meeting. Members must avoid debating the issues again after the Meeting has finished. Certainly, they must avoid complaining about the decisions taken (a) if they have not been at the Church Meeting and (b) if they did not have the courage to say what was in their heart.

Members must be as fully informed as possible about the topics for discussion BEFORE the meeting takes place. This means that leaders have to spend time preparing discussion documents for each Meeting and allow Members time to pray about and consider the matters beforehand.

The Church Meeting is the ultimate disciplinary body of the church. In today's world it is vital that this aspect of Biblical fellowship be recovered. The object of loving discipline is ALWAYS restoration, NEVER punishment (Gal. 6:1f).

The Church Meeting is the place where decisions about Baptisms and receiving Members into fellowship are taken. If Church Meetings are held bimonthly, this means thinking ahead.

Church Meetings are the ONLY appropriate place for making decisions about the leadership of the church. This is not only for the Pastor, but for other leaders, Deacons, House Group Leaders, Organisation Leaders, Sunday School Teachers etc.

The Church Meeting is responsible for stewarding the financial resources of the fellowship.

The Church Meeting should take note of the recommendations of its leaders in making decisions. It is nonsense to appoint leaders and then give them no authority and not listen to their advice. Equally, leaders must beware "lording it over" the Church Meeting.

What effect does this have on the way we run Church Meetings? Most Baptist churches probably need to re-examine what they do and how they do it. I suggest the following might be considered.

The spirituality of Church Meetings must be emphasised. This means having a time of worship (not merely singing a hymn and having a prayer at the beginning), and a time for fellowship, sharing, caring and praying for one another. Some churches use the Church Meeting for receiving new Members and hearing the

testimonies of candidates for Baptism. Frequent pauses for prayer as items on the agenda are discussed and decided should be added.

The AGENDA for the Church Meeting should be rigorously examined every time. Items for information might be given in written form. Major items for decision should be limited to ONE or TWO at the most. This will allow plenty of time for discussion.

The ONE or TWO major items for decision should concern the general principles and direction in which the church is moving. If, as has been suggested, notes outlining the issue(s) are given prior to the Church Meeting, care should be taken not to preempt or prejudice the subsequent discussion by them.

Leaders should not be afraid of consulting the Church Meeting before they have had the opportunity to discuss a topic fully themselves. Often this has been a cause of members thinking they are there only to "rubber stamp" the decisions of the leadership. We have held a number of Church Meetings where a major part of the agenda was devoted to prayer and asking God for direction over a matter not previously discussed by Pastor and Deacons. It was extraordinarily helpful.

Churches should not be afraid to take their time over important decisions. If discussion and decision takes two Church Meetings, so be it. God is never in a hurry.

It is important to raise the profile of Church Meetings in the minds of Members. In general, older Members already place a high value on Church Meetings. Others may need some help. Perhaps apologies in writing might be considered. Some instruction about Church Meetings for those who come through conversion and Baptism and for those who come from other churches by transfer is necessary to help new Members understand how important they are.

Baptism and Church Membership

The relationship of Baptism to Church Membership has become blurred in many Baptist churches in a way that few churches practising paedobaptism have experienced. Once an infant is baptised, it's in the church whether or not it likes it! For Baptist churches the issue is not so clear. For one thing, we are baptising many who come to us from other denominational backgrounds. These are in fact transfers of membership, not conversions and need to be recognised as such. Otherwise growth becomes masked by transfer.

Baptist churches and Pastors have to be careful not to demean baptism by being over-enthusiastic to

baptise those baptised as infants. By that I am not suggesting we alter our mode of baptism. Rather that we are careful to baptise those who have become believers by full immersion and that we never re-baptise people.

We also need to be careful to present the relationship between baptism and Church Membership in a healthy way. Some Baptist churches automatically receive Baptismal candidates into membership after their baptism. I fully uphold that there is a close relationship between the two things from Acts 2:38f among other New Testament passages. But I would wish to place the emphasis differently. I question whether people are ready for Baptism and the commitment to Jesus Christ it implies if they are not also willing to commit themselves in covenanted relationship to the Body of Christ.

Church Membership and Communion

Another key feature of our commitment to covenanted membership is in terms of the celebration of communion. Our approach to communion may need revising in the light of renewal. When I was growing up, church Members were sometimes given books of Communion Tickets. At each Communion service they would place their dated ticket in the Offering plate to indicate to the minister their attendance.

Apparently, one of our Ministers, Henton Davies, used to take communion so seriously he demanded the attendance of every church Member at every Communion. Because of this he would also travel home from holiday on the Sunday for a communion! Some churches have to come to terms with their trust deeds. Some that have a closed membership are not allowed to serve communion except to those who are baptised (by total immersion subsequent to faith) members. Others are grappling with how to include children in the communion, if at all. It is as well to be clear, therefore, about the way we operate and serve communion in the local church.

But such a concern for being at the Lord's Table with other Christians does not seem to be the case today. If this is a consequence of renewal we had better think again. Communion helps us keep in fellowship. We ought not to come to the Table unless we are living in good fellowship with other Christians. There is a wonderful exposition of this in the preface to the Communion service in the Book of Common Prayer (1662). For that reason alone, Communion should be celebrated on a weekly basis. Some "renewed" fellowships hardly ever break bread together.

Communion also helps us renew our covenant with each other as we renew our covenant with Jesus in bread and wine. We are pledging ourselves to one another in the unity of the Spirit every week. Some

churches express this in giving the peace to one another during the preparation for taking bread and wine. As we meet at the Lord's Table, the presence of Jesus is particularly obvious. It is one of the few elements of worship specifically commanded by the Lord himself. Obedience always brings blessing.

Communion reminds us of the central tenets of our faith - the death, substitutionary atonement and resurrection of Jesus. It reminds us of our future hope, the coming again of Jesus to His world.

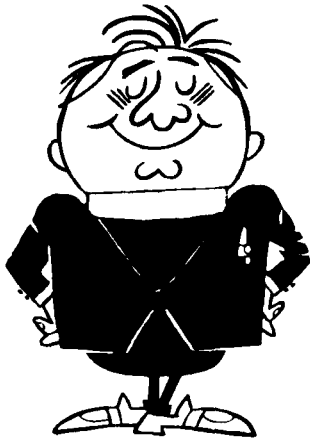
Preparing for Church Membership

If people place a low value on covenanted Membership of the local church, then we have to raise the profile by patient teaching. One way to do this is to take everyone who wishes to come into membership through a short "Introductory" course. Ideally, this would include basic teaching from the Bible about the value of covenanted membership, and then the practical responsibilities and privileges of such membership. It might also include sections about the structures of the church and the way those structures function. One evening might be given over to meeting the deacons, talking about church finances and the responsibility of giving to the local church. Part of it might also be designed to discover the spiritual and practical gifts in each person.

One thing is certain: there is such diversity of practice in our Baptist churches, that such an introduction is almost obligatory so that those committing themselves to local Church Membership do so with their eyes open, knowing the duties and responsibilities rather than finding out after they have committed themselves. To encourage Christians to a clear and consistent discipleship within the covenanted membership of a local church is a means of God's grace and would further the church's mission greatly as members reflect the covenant God has made with us in Christ. Baptists ought to have a strongly developed sense of commitment to the local church and perhaps we need to recover this in order that the growth God is giving may be continued with strong foundations.

DAVID SLATER
Kingsbridge





ENDANGERED SPECIES?

That curious item of clothing, the reversed collar, has almost died among Baptists. Why anyone should cherish such an anachronistic and uncomfortable-looking badge of office is strange indeed. It is to be hoped that its final departure will not be lingering but swift.

When strange clothing departs, can strange titles be far behind? Is it too much to hope, in an age of recovery of biblical nerve and principle, that the most unfortunate title "Rev" will fall into disuse?

Jesus Christ, the only head of the church, is the only one to whom reverence is due. The use of "reverend" seems to be misplaced, seeking after respect, credibility and status according to the ministerial patterns of the other historic denominations.

The spirit of Jesus' ban on conventional religious titles of respect (Matt. 23:5-12) surely must cover this intrusive and priestly term. Jesus' teaching calls the Apostles, and us with them, to shrink from any title which distracts in any measure from the splendour of the glory of Christ alone.

If any church leader wants a title other than "Mr" or "Ms" the New Testament offers the following choice: "brother", "sister", or "your servant in the gospel". Let's see the "Rev" disappear as soon as possible from church notice boards, letter heads and all Baptist publications!

THE BATTLE FOR CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia has been a center of conquest and invasion for 3000 years. The armies of Alexander the Great, the Turks, the Persians, the Mongols, the Arabs and finally those of Czarist Russia have subdued and controlled this region for centuries. But this is the tip of the iceberg compared to the unseen spiritual battle that has been raging.

Fresh new winds of religious and political freedom have begun to blow across the spiritually barren lands of the former Soviet Union. For the first time in centuries, we have a new freedom and wonderful opportunity to take the Gospel to the unreached Muslims of Central Asia.

But the war in the heavenlies rages on. The Islamic countries of Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia are doing their utmost to establish their sphere of religious and geopolitical influence on these peoples. This has caused one expert analyst on the Middle East to say, 'There is a great struggle going on for the soul of Central Asia.'

OM has been working in church planting among these Turkish and Persian peoples of Central Asia for more than 30 years. We have also quietly been training and placing people in Soviet Central Asia for the past few years.

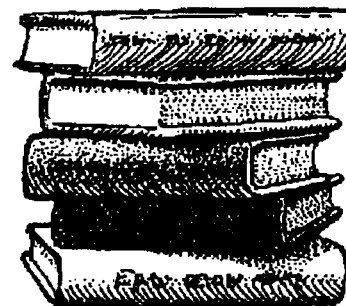
We are now urgently seeking churches to partner with us and the right people to join us on the field to

go into every unreached Muslim people group in Central Asia. We are sending people in as tent-makers in the role of students, tourists, TEFL teachers, doctors, import/export business and in other areas of education, industry, agriculture, engineering, health and business. Our vision is to plant dynamic indigenous churches by demonstrating the reality of the kingdom of God through evangelism and social service.

Teams are already forming and beginning work in most of these unreached people groups. We are co-operating with other agencies there to complement and maximize each other's efforts. We must not delay in the release of the resources, prayer and people needed to take advantage of this new opportunity. Don't miss what God is doing. Join us in taking this long prayed for opportunity to plant the church in this final frontier for world evangelization.

For further information contact:

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BOOK REVIEWS**'OUT OF EGYPT'**

Jeanette Howard 1991 Monarch 280pp £7.99.

This book is sub-titled "Leaving Lesbianism Behind", and is described as "*real help for those who struggle with lesbianism and those who counsel them.*"

Jeanette Howard successfully combines her own pilgrimage with the experiences of those she has sought to counsel, and underpins all that she says with a biblical understanding of the nature of God, the way that people react to Him, and the compassion that He has for them. This is a book that deals with the wholeness of our humanity: our vulnerability, temptation, life experience, our need to be loved and valued, our need of self-acceptance, and our need to discover our true sexuality. The author deals with human brokenness and potential before God - dealing with emotions, the mind, the will, growth toward wholeness, and living in relationships. She also deals with human development - self awareness, self-acceptance, choices, and action. All of this is done through telling her own story and the stories of women she has counselled; it is this that makes the book most readable.

The book is divided into four sections following the theme of the Exodus: 1) Jehovah, Our Deliverer; 2) Slavery, and Release from Bondage; 3) Learning in the Wilderness; 4) Moving toward the Land of Promise. Under these headings Jeanette Howard deals with the redeeming love and restoring power of God; the influences and experiences that affect our lives; the reality of repentance and the difficulties of changing our lifestyle (especially where sexual relationships are involved); and hope for a future life directed and empowered by God.

For the counsellor this book stands as an example of supportive counselling: sharing the pain, recognising our shared humanity, and knowing that we are on a pilgrimage together. Whatever our own sexual experience we will find this book a great help in counselling.

When the secular world will take a behavioural approach, suggesting that we are merely a bundle of reactions to life's experiences, or when unconditional acceptance of people whatever they do or say is seen as a means of helping, with all the sense of unchangeable hopelessness that is thus created; this book encourages us to see the fundamental worth of each person in the image of God. We are shown that each human being is in the image of God; that every person is redeemable by Christ; and that the people we counsel are related to us because we too are human.

This book will be most valuable to everyone involved in a counselling ministry.

John Weaver

'ADULT CHILDREN OF LEGAL OR EMOTIONAL DIVORCE'

Jim Conway 1991 Monarch 256pp. £7.99.

Statistics in U.S.A. reveal that adult males of divorced and separated parents had a 34.7% greater chance of themselves divorcing than males of intact homes. For females the figure rises to 59.3%. Jim Conway comments: "*These studies should forever shake us of the delusion that divorce has no long term impact in the adult life!*"

As the divorce rate in U.K. rises to a situation where 1 in 2 marriages are likely to end in divorce, we need to take the personal testimonies of this book seriously.

Increasingly we find ourselves picking up the pieces of broken relationships, but have we considered the long term impact of broken marriages on the children as they grow up? This book introduces us to one case study after another demonstrating the damage done to the child's development, even when the parents don't actually divorce, but simply live out separate lives under one roof.

Jim Conway's painful first-hand experience of being the child of such a family enables him to write with sympathy, understanding, and a great deal of honesty.

The book is divided into four parts.

Part One outlines the problems or symptoms of being the child of divorce - an innocent victim: "*At least with murder you kill the victim quickly!*"

Part Two deals with the major problems of life faced by the children of divorce, such as: damaged self-image, fear in relationships, inability to be a parent, over-achiever or drop-out, introvert or promiscuous, and always wounded.

Part Three considers spiritual answers, looking at: honest prayer, support groups, grief, reality of the past, forgiveness; and recognising that: "*You are always the adult child of divorce, you will never change your status, but your painful past does not need to continue to control the way you feel and act today.*"

Part Four is entitled "*Help the Helpers*" and is by far the weakest part of the book, being a mere 8 pages

out of 228 pages of text. We will recognise so many adult children of divorce, that we have met, in the personal experiences of the people that Jim Conway has counselled, but we need to hear far more about help for the helpers.

While we will have to turn to other books for guidance in counselling, Jim Conway's book remains an eye-opener to many of the broken lives we meet day by day, and will help us to understand the causes of their pain. Having recognised the cause we can then become instruments in beginning the healing process.

John Weaver

'THE UNFINISHED STORY - A STUDY GUIDE HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY'

Basill Amey 1991 Baptist Union 164pp. £7.00.

This book has been published as part of the Baptist Union Christian Training programme, with the intention that the material can be used as a module in the C.T.P. course.

It is also intended for a wider audience and can be used for personal study or for group study - each section of narrative is interspersed with questions that could provide discussion starters.

It is a wide ranging book, covering the 200 years of B.M.S. history, beginning with Carey and ending with the "28:19" action teams.

It is written in an easy to read style, lavishly illustrated, and containing a great deal of background history that is relevant to the history of the mission. For example, the East India Company's policies in India are related to the early work of B.M.S. there, and the struggle for emancipation from slavery is essential background to an understanding of the Society's work in the West Indies.

One weakness is the amount of space devoted to the different areas in which the B.M.S. is involved. We can recognise that 38 pages on the first 100 years in India can be justified, but why are there only 3 pages on Brazil, one of the largest areas of contemporary work? This compares with 6 pages on "doors that closed" such as Norway and the East Indies - surely there is an imbalance here?

The book does not claim to be comprehensive, it is a guide only and a useful bibliography is included for those who would wish to study an area more thoroughly.

At £7.00 it is a good buy for anyone with an interest in the history of mission in the last 200 years. It also challenges the reader to consider his/her own attitudes to the mission of the Church today.

Sheila Weaver

A TIME TO SPEAK - Perspectives on Black Christians in Britain. Eds. Paul Grant and Raj Patel, £4.50.

A fairly well balanced and positively critical appraisal of the state of being of the British Church, in the light of a key element of Jesus' high priestly prayer - *"That they may be one as we are one."*

May sometimes seem cumbersome or even depressing in content to the detached reader.....calls for conscientious reading with a view to challenging deep set attitudes and "acceptable" social behaviours that are a "gospel" in themselves in British society. Above all else the book calls for prayerful contemplation and divine grace, to be able to read it in the spirit it was intended to be understood.

The contributors effectively hammer home the core issue of any proposed racially integrated society in general or the church in particular: positive acceptance of one another does not come by condescension on the one hand, or mere "noble compensation" on the other. Unless mutual acceptance is characterized by carefully considered biblical injunctions, that allow people to be "different" and yet legitimate in their experience and expression of faith (as long as Scripture is not contradicted), a racially integrated British church will only remain a pious ideal. Attitudes and actions that caricature the slightest understanding of their make up or cultural background, at best display an unpardonable degree of ignorance and at worst is naively presumptuous.

Somewhat controversial in some aspects of a confrontational approach to a seemingly indifferent system of justice or the identified perpetrators of racial molestation. On the whole a brave attempt that has the unique advantage of not being written from the usual stereotyped or patronising perspective, which sad to say many "Christian writers" seem to prefer when dealing with these issues.

I recommend this book as a good read to anyone who is ready humbly to expose themselves to the search light of God, in challenging the status quo in society and the church, and in unmasking destructive attitudes on racial issues which are often taken for granted.

Mosu Lebby

