

Editorial

BAPTISTS IN RENEWAL -

A NEW MAINSTREAM NETWORK?

Way back in the mists of time, when house churches burst upon the scene, a number of Baptists left the Union for these new pastures. More recently a significant number of Baptists have remained within the Union but have also become actively involved with one of the new networks.

Two questions naturally arise from this state of play. Firstly, what are the key benefits from such networking? I would identify the following:

1) A clear commitment to the authority of the Word and the power of the Spirit. The modern evangelical consensus is increasingly charismatic, and there is great encouragement and stimulus to be found from a group in which the fundamental convictions are evangelical and the common experience is charismatic. On the basis of shared convictions a common and adventurous vision can be built.

2) A positive commitment to evangelism, renewal, church growth and church planting. Tremendous motivation can be found in a group of church leaders who share these priorities. All involved can learn from one another's experience. All can benefit from the awareness of being part of a major advance of the Kingdom of God in this generation, as part of a movement much larger than any local church.

3) Mutual support. Every ministry knows times of success and times of hard slog. Support involves a readiness to honour and endorse one another's ministries, getting behind those who need help and also getting behind those whose ministries go beyond the local church. Support also involves prayer, encouragement and genuine, personal affirmation from those you know are deeply committed to you as brothers and friends in Christ.

Indeed, where a local church is struggling in the early stages of renewal, being part of a network would help a great deal. We could not only offer

reassurance and support for a minister who is being unfairly pressurised, but could equally provide wise counsel to caution a minister against unwise or precipitate action.

What's more churches can enter into deeper fellowship, developing opportunities to send ministry teams to one another. They could also help one another in the organisational transitions which result from growth, and also in recruitment when they need to add or replace staff.

4) Mutual accountability. Leading a local church is a position of great responsibility and trust. Those handling sacred things from day to day can run the risks of a calloused soul. Spiritual leaders can grow casual, lose vision, or find that the inner fire of spiritual zeal has burned low.

Many recognise deep within themselves the advantages to be gained from entering into voluntary mutual accountability with other leaders. Of course, such accountability should not be thought of as a kind of negative church police! On the contrary, mutual accountability should be seen as profoundly positive, giving opportunity to help one another grow in ministry and, still more important, grow in holiness.

I suggested two questions naturally arise. Here's the second. Is there any reason why we should not enjoy such benefits *within* the Baptist Union, among a network of evangelicals active in renewal?

Such commitment to one another transcends that of most official fraternalists. Some argue that the excesses of independency are lodged too deeply within us for us to work together to such an extent. But when the desire is so commonly voiced to be part of a network of live churches, can we not find it within ourselves to bring such a movement about? I hope we will be able to explore these strategic issues further at the January Mainstream conference.

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THROUGH THE CHURCH MEETING: PART TWO

DEFECTS OF GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE CHURCH MEETING

In the light of the discussion so far I suggest that the main defect of government through the church meeting is its unbiblical nature. Precisely because they were so rigorously biblical, neither is it a system of government adopted by Baptist pioneers. It appears to have taken hold in the last 50-100 years only and has erroneously come to be accepted almost universally as the way Baptists have always governed church life. The very fact that the government of Baptist churches in other cultures, say in Zaire or Brazil, is so radically different should cause us to question whether or not we have got things absolutely correct. Much of the current debate about problems in the church meeting deal with some of the presenting symptoms of this basic defect rather than its cause.

i) Impaired leadership

Democratic government through the church meeting impairs the function and development of proper leadership in the Church. According to the New Testament God gives authority to individuals to govern His church according to their gifts (Romans 12:8; 1 Timothy 5:17) and requires the members to submit to them (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:17). A system of church government which takes that authority away from leaders and places it in the hands of the congregation is working directly against the revealed will of God. Those with God-given leadership gifts are prevented from fulfilling their function in the body; their work becomes a burden, not a joy, to the detriment of the whole fellowship.

Conversely, democratic government through the church meeting can tend to develop and perpetuate leadership patterns which are unbiblical. Deacons or elders (even Pastors?) can be appointed because of their secular gifts or because of the job they do within the church, so that the leadership works rather like a company board of directors. A 'representative', from each organisation/department tends to become one of the overall leadership and is tempted to 'pitch for his or her end of the business' in leadership or church meetings. This bears little relationship to the New Testament emphasis upon leaders being selected on the basis of character and gift alone (Acts 13:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:2-12; etc.), then functioning together to prepare the whole people of God for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16), thus carrying an oversight responsibility for the whole of church life and witness.

ii) Democracy and rights

At heart, democracy is a system of government which is opposed to certain biblical values. It

enshrines individual rights and freedoms above all else and suggests that every opinion is valid and is to be given equal weight. However, in order to become influential within a democratic system individuals have to join together in pressure groups to pursue their rights and freedoms. Such a manner of thought and action is fundamentally unbiblical. The New Testament presents Christ as our example, the One who gave up His rights for our sake and whose attitude in this is presented to us as an example to follow (Philippians 2:1-11). Our Christian life is to be lived not in an attitude of pursuing our rights, but in one of Christ-like submission - submission to God (James 4:7); submission to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21); and submission to our leaders in the church (Hebrews 13:17).

iii) Church politics

Following on from the above, democratic government provides a crucible for church politics. Lobbying behind the scenes to gain sufficient support for a particular proposal is, in my experience, not unusual. Thus we arrive at the church meeting with our minds made up, with our loyalties decided. This is only a small step from the development of faction and parties within a diaconate or fellowship, providing a seed bed in which the worst aspects of our sinful nature can thrive. Honesty would force us to admit that hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions often display themselves more obviously at church meetings than the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Even if we act in an outwardly civilised and courteous manner but still work the political system we merely add hypocrisy to the list! Paul's response to such incidences at Corinth is crystal clear: it is worldly, not spiritual and is behaviour that ultimately destroys God's temple and reaps destruction for those who practise it (1 Corinthians 3:1,3-4, 16-17). Could it be that such attitudes find root so easily because they are planted and flourish in unbiblical soil?

iv) It is ultimately unworkable

This is a particular problem for a large church, for group dynamics dictate that democratic government through the church meeting becomes more and more difficult as numbers increase, and eventually becomes completely unworkable. As Fred Bacon notes, 'Democratic government has always had to wrestle with the problem of numbers. At a certain point a meeting gets too large to be able to provide full democratic participation for its members.'⁽¹⁹⁾ However, his suggested remedy of securing 'informal, yet informed and wisely guided discussion of church business by its members before ever matters are brought to the Church Meeting'⁽²⁰⁾

surely creates as many problems as it solves. At best it can only result in the church meeting becoming a rubber-stamping exercise rather than the means through which the church is governed under the Holy Spirit's direction, at worst it seems almost to produce an alternative system of government than the one which is being defended.

EFFECTING A REMEDY

Most suggestions for remedying difficulties ignore the basic defect that democratic government through the church meeting is unbiblical. They tinker with procedures and methods, they seek to bring Christ-like behaviour into the environment, but they fail to lay the axe to the root. The only remedy is to reject the concept of democratic government through the church meeting and seek a more biblical model.

For me the fundamental pillars of this would include an acknowledgement that the principles for church policy and practice are revealed in Scripture; that government is the responsibility of leadership; that the whole church is the final authority in matters of discipline and the appointment of those with ministry gifts; that news of the work of God is important enough to call a meeting of the whole church; and that serious questions relating to doctrine and practice, although for the leadership to decide upon, should be raised openly before the whole church.

Another foundation principle to foster would be an attitude of openness in church government. To properly limit the decision making authority of the church meeting is one thing, doing away with it completely is quite another and emphatically not one which I would advocate. I believe there is still a vital role for the church meeting as a place for sharing and sharpening vision, openly talking through difficulties in church life, and seeking appropriate ways to extend God's kingdom together in an atmosphere of worship and prayer. There is no mandate I can find in the New Testament for running churches like secret societies. Rather the church meeting should be the place where our submission to God, to one another and to our church leaders should be exercised.

In moving towards such a change, integrity would demand that it should be achieved through the current model of government in the local church. The precise steps necessary would depend upon the theological understanding, commitment to being rigorously biblical and openness to change in the minister(s), leaders and members of a local church. I suspect that in many some clear teaching about the nature and role of the church meeting and related matters such as leadership, authority, submission and body ministry would need to be both given and accepted. This would provide a foundation upon which they could move together towards a more biblical form of government. Adopting a biblical form of church government will not solve a church's problems overnight, initially it may well

create more problems as it did for our forefathers. But a fellowship committed to the Lord, committed to the authority of Scripture and committed to one another in love would also be committed to working out the problems together.

However, my hunch is that the crucial first step in many of our churches lies in taking a much more serious view of the biblical qualifications for those we place in leadership positions. It is better to have a small leadership team than wrong leadership. It should not surprise us if church members find the concept of submission difficult if the leadership they experience falls short of biblical standards; neither should we expect such leadership to have the ability or anointing to fulfil the task of biblical leadership. In this respect the authority for appointing leaders in most Baptist churches still properly resides in the whole membership through the church meeting. This being the case, it must be true that every Baptist church gets the leadership it deserves.

CONCLUSION

Establishing more a biblical model of church government must be beneficial. Apart from being more securely built upon a biblical foundation, it would also be more truly Baptist! Its leaders would be free to exercise their God-given gifts so that the whole body could move towards maturity. Members would be freed from responsibilities which God never intended them to bear and released into their own gifts and ministries. The church meeting would be freed from assuming unbiblical authority, but would be released to give proper, prayerful consideration to matters which do lie within its remit, and would become a place where the members submit to leaders and the leaders submit to the body in sharing vision and seeking direction from the Lord.

Ron Viner.

References

- (1) David Hill; *The New Century Bible Commentary - The Gospel of Matthew*, p.276/7.
- (2) F. F. Bruce; *NICOT - The Book of Acts*, p.261.
- (3) Douglas Sparkes; *Church Meeting and Renewal*, *Mainstream Newsletter* No. 16, April 1984, p.9.
- (4) David Watson; *I Believe in the Church*, p.269.
- (5) Richard Hanson; *Christian Priesthood Examined*, p.26.
- (6) W. L. Lumpkin; *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p.212.
- (7) Lumpkin; p.229.
- (8) See, for example: *A True Confession of 1596*, Article 19 (Lumpkin p.88); *The London Confession of 1644*, Articles 36 and 44 (Lumpkin p.166 and 168); *The Orthodox Creed of 1678*, Articles 30, 31 and 34 (Lumpkin p.318-323).
- (9) See, for example: *A True Confession of 1596*, Articles 23 and 24 (Lumpkin p.89); *The London Confession of 1644*, Articles 36, 42, 44 and 45 (Lumpkin p.166 and 168); *The Somerset Confession of 1656*, Article 34 (Lumpkin p.212-3); *The Standard Confession of 1660*, Articles 5 and 15 (Lumpkin p.226 and 229/30); *The Orthodox Creed of 1678*, Articles 30, 31 and 34 (Lumpkin p.318-321 and 322/3)

- (10) Lumpkin; p.358.
 (11) Lumpkin; Article 13, p.388.
 (12) Baptist Union Documents 1948-77, p.7.
 (13) Lumpkin; p.399.
 (14) W.M.S. West; Baptist Principles, p.13/14.
 (15) Baptist Principles, p.14
 (16) Fred Bacon; Church Administration, p.32; see also question 3.1 of Appendix A, p.32 of Making the most of the Church Meeting by the same author.
 (17) H. Wheeler Robinson; The Life and Faith of the Baptists, p.104.
 (18) Dr. Wheeler Robinson seems to conclude that such a modification was inevitable because our Baptist forefathers were divorced from the realities of the world. I suspect that enduring persecution for their beliefs suggests they were only too aware of the harsh realities of the world. Perhaps they really believed Romans 12:2 and sought to live out their transformation.
 (19) Fred Bacon; Making the most of the Church Meeting, p.8.
 (20) Making the most of the Church Meeting, p.8.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH MEETING IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH

THE SPECTRUM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

There is a whole spectrum of types of church government. One of the main reasons for schism in the church surrounds church government. For the purposes of this article it will be useful to polarise the types of government into three; two extremes and one which embraces both extremes, yet has its own ground.

- (A) Directed: the leadership makes all the decisions with virtually no reference to the body of the church e.g. Roman Catholics, some 'Charismatic' fellowships.
- (B) Democratic: the whole church meets regularly, makes decision and the leaders follow the decisions made e.g. some young Churches, some Missions.
- (C) Shepherded: Can operate in either (A) or (B) mode, but usually operates through the leadership informally canvassing the views of the Church, then bringing to the Church proposals which reflect the original vision, amended where necessary to respect Godly fears expressed by members. The Church ratifies the proposals.

As an easy example how each would operate, take an issue like changing a hymn book:

(A) The church would be confronted one Sunday morning with a new hymn book, the leadership having decided on the necessity, studied the alternatives, planned and introduced the change.

(B) The Church meeting would discuss the matter, suggest possible alternatives and authorise the leadership to purchase a few samples. The Church would then discuss the pros and cons and eventually authorise the leadership to purchase the agreed edition.

(C) The leadership would detect the need for a new book (sometimes arising from a Membership suggestion). The leadership would discuss, seek some alternatives and informally discuss the proposal and the suggestions with members. Eventually a recommendation would be made to the church. By this time there would be no 'surprise' and the church would ratify the decision.

WHAT SAYS THE SCRIPTURE?

In the first place there is no single Scripture which describes a universal pattern for leadership. We cannot go to chapter and verse and say, "*that is exactly how it is to be done*".

Some might be tempted to say that this is a great omission, and the Holy Spirit has failed the church through not providing us with a cut-and-dried solution. But God get's nothing wrong. There is good reason for the omission; for if some apostolic letter or some teaching of our Lord had prescribed that a church must have a Board, an Executive, audited accounts, a 5-year plan, or an Archbishop, Bishop, Vicar, Curate etc., then many saints throughout the ages would not have belonged to a 'Church', because their situations could not support such structures (e.g. those in labour camps and prisons).

What the New Testament has is some general principles which each group of believers who meet together for Communion (a local church) can feed into the local situation and develop that which is

best for the number meeting together, the stage of development or maturity of those meeting, the stability, the growth-rate, and the culture. These principles are as follows:

- Leaders must be servants
(Appendix 1 for references and quotations)
- There must be no titles
(Appendix 2 for references and quotations)
- The church decides
(Appendix 3 for references and quotations)
- The church is consulted
(Appendix 4 for references and quotations)
- Leaders have authority
(Appendix 5 for references and quotations)
- Leaders discuss and decide
(Appendix 6 for references and quotations)
- Leaders are to be obeyed
(Appendix 7 for references and quotations)
- Leaders are overseers and shepherds
(Appendix 8 for references and quotations)

WHICH VIEW DOES SCRIPTURE SUPPORT?

Scripture can be made to support each and every one of these three views, namely Directed, Democratic or Shepherded. It therefore seems appropriate that during any one period of Church life any one of the systems could prevail. That is, at one time the church will be in Directed Mode; at another it will be in Democratic Mode. And the only pattern of leadership which will cope with those alternating situations is the Shepherded pattern, which can embrace both extremes.

It seems that the Shepherded Mode represents God's best for the Church, but as the church loses her first love, loses her zeal for the One who gave Himself for her, then she polarises to one of the two extremes, Directed or Democratic. As the Church loses her first love she either becomes legalistic or worldly. (Compare with the Pharisees and Sadducees in New Testament times - there is nothing new under the sun!) Those churches who become legalistic become Directed; those who adopt the world become Democratic. These patterns can be observed in some parts of the house church movement of this century (Directed) and certain liberal churches (Democratic).

MAINTAINING OR REGAINING THE SHEPHERDED MODE OF GOVERNMENT

The Shepherded Mode is the most difficult to maintain, for it embraces both extremes. In most cases there will be that dialogue within the Body (leadership and led) which will result in a 'no surprises' set of action and decisions. However, sometimes there will be occasions when the leadership has to direct.

Equally well there will be occasions when the church takes the initiative.

The Shepherded Mode is lost when the church loses her first love. That first love for her Lord who gave Himself for her. 'Repent', cries the scripture, 'and do the things you did at first'. And each of us can remember 'the things we did at first'; how full of our Lord we were when we first believed. How we wanted to glorify Him and please Him in every thought, word and deed.

It is the prime responsibility of leadership in the church to 'feed the flock of God'. (Ezekiel 34 and Acts 20:28) In fact one might even say that it is the only responsibility. And if the leadership really devoted itself to feeding the flock, then it would not need to be involved in choosing musical instruments, deciding on what to do with cracks in walls and the other matters which press upon us and weigh us down so heavily. We would devote ourselves to 'prayer and ministry of the word' (1 Samuel 12:23 and Acts 6:4). The difficulties of deciding on a musical instrument or dealing with the crack in the wall are in no way belittled. They need devoted people to solve the problems they cause. But devoted people can only be so as they are fed on our Lord Jesus. And that is the role of leadership.

The Shepherded Mode of leadership, which represents God's best for His people can only be maintained or regained as his people remain close to Him. They can only do so in so far as their leadership remains (abides in Him). The leadership can only lead as far as it has gone itself. The Church is a reflection of the depth of love for our Lord that the leadership has.

'Oh give me grace to love Thee more!'

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH MEETING WITHIN SHEPHERDING MODE OF LEADERSHIP

The nearest secular parallel to the function of the Church meeting in the Shepherded Mode of government is the work and function of the House of Lords in relation to the House of Commons. The government of the day, through the Commons proposes legislation.

The Upper House reviews the proposal to ensure that it is within the framework of the constitution, that the government of the day has not ridden roughshod over whole sections of the community etc. etc. In short the Lords acts as means of removing any 'sharp edges' from the proposed legislation. Most times there are very minor changes. Sometimes the proposed law is thrown out to be re-drafted; on other occasions the Upper House will propose legislation. But in the final analysis it is the Lower House which moves the decision. So the Church Meeting is like the Upper House, and the leadership like the House of Commons.

APPENDIX 1 - Leaders must be servants

"You know that the leaders of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant....." Mt. 2025.
"The greatest among you will be your servant....." Mt. 2311.
"If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet....." Jn. 1314
"We were like a mother caring for you, like a mother caring for her children....." 1 Th. 207.

APPENDIX 2 - No titles

"But you are not to be called..... Teacher..... Father..... Master....." Mt 2308 (RSV). The NT writers supported this as they identified themselves with the function, not with a title e.g. 'Paul, an apostle by the will of God.....' Ep 101 etc; or James a servant Js 101; even John is 'The elder', not 'Elder John' (2 Jn); Peter refers to Paul as 'our dear brother Paul' (2 Pe 315).

APPENDIX 3 - The church will decide

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a sinner". Mt. 1817. (Note, this specifically refers to matters of disagreement and dispute).

APPENDIX 4 - The church is consulted

'So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ".....". This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose.....they presented.....the apostles prayed and laid hands on them'. Ac 6v02 etc.
'Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and to send them to Antioch.....' Act 15v22.

APPENDIX 5 - Leaders have authority

'Encourage and rebuke with all authority.....' TS 2v15
'Command and teach these things.....' 1 Ti 4v11
'.....to their authority.....' He 13v17
'.....who admonish you' 1 Th 5v12.

APPENDIX 6 - Leaders discuss and decide

'In the church..... were prophets and teachers..... while they were fasting and praying the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul....." So..... they placed their hands on them and sent them off'. Ac 13v01 etc.
'The apostles and elders met to discuss this question.....' Ac 15v06.

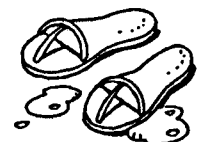
APPENDIX 7 - Leaders are to be obeyed

'Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord, and who admonish you. Hold them in highest regard.....' 1 Th.5v12 etc. '.....they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you brothers, to submit to such as these.....' 1 Co 16v15.
'The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour.....' 1 Ti 5v17.
'Obey your leaders and submit to their authority..... Obey them, so that their work will be a joy, and not a burden.....' He 13v17.

APPENDIX 8 - Leaders are overseers and shepherds

"Guard yourselves and the flock of God over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God....." Ac 20v28.
'Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care..... eager to serve..... not lording it over.....' 1 Pe 5v02.

Rod Ruston.



SUPERINTENDENTS REVISITED

With the, I understand, re-appointment of four serving Superintendents this year and two others due in 1993, together with the renewed emphasis on Baptist identity and five-year plan, the question as to the role and appointment procedures of General Superintendents is still very much on the Baptist agenda.

Who is it that aspires to such a task and who, to quote Paul completely out of context, is sufficient for these things? I suspect that in their more honest moments amid the no doubt many joys and satisfactions of the role, many a Superintendent has felt he has a pretty thankless task. We might have a theology for the local church, we might have some understanding of the nature of associating, and we may (perhaps) be able to develop some theology for the existence of the Union, but I suspect that the role and understanding of the Area Superintendent has arisen pragmatically rather than theologically. We struggle as it is with authority in the local church and I suspect we struggle even further with the role of a Superintendent who is expected to offer leadership without authority.

Nigel Wright in "Challenge to Change" has argued the case for Baptist bishops and I do not merely wish to reiterate or take issue with the points which Nigel has made there. I rather want to reflect upon the current situation and ask questions of it. Please will you understand I come as one with a great deal of respect for our Superintendents and in particular those with whom I have had personal contact. I am not seeking to relieve personal frustration, rather to seek an objective discussion.

Let us examine the areas of responsibility that each Superintendent is deemed to have:

To give pastoral care to Ministers and their families

Of necessity, much of the pastoral care given in this context is reactive rather than proactive. Area Superintendents may be good at stepping into a crisis, I suspect they simply don't have the time to develop the necessary relationships to care for Ministers and families. Much of this area is presumably delegated to the Area Pastoral Committee or Area Ministers within Associations. We are back here to the question which has provoked much correspondence in the Baptist Times of late as to who pastors the Pastor? I further want to ask what sort of model is it giving to the local church if we explicitly suggest that the Pastor of the Pastors is the Area Superintendent? Many churches are moving away from, I think rightly, a suggestion that pastoral care in the local church rests with an individual. Are we in danger of proclaiming this in one context and yet practising the opposite in another? If we were to honestly ask those in pastoral charge in our churches

where they receive their support, I am not sure that very many would initially turn to the Area Superintendent for the ongoing day-to-day prayer, empathy, encouragement, support that is needed in the pastorate. Personally I am very grateful for a small support group who meet with Jennie and I on a regular basis to pray with us, to share with us, to laugh with us and cry with us, and often it has been their support in the norm of pastoral experience which has helped me to maintain perspective. Further, if we were to ask honestly what is the attraction for leaders in a house church network, I think we would have to consider the friendship, support and prayer of leaders together to be of significance. Frankly, I wonder whether part of the privilege of being on the accredited list should mean that we have the responsibility (with our wives) of meeting together with other leaders in our area and to consciously develop that mutual support and encouragement we so desperately need.

To give oversight to the churches, encouraging and advising them in their mission

Strategy in mission must be surely at the top of an Area Superintendent's agenda. We need, as many have said more eloquently elsewhere, to be a mission-minded people and the recent initiatives emanating from Baptist House are to be welcomed. If this is to work out on the ground, we must have mission-minded Area Superintendents who will see their priority as encouraging and advising churches in their mission, being prepared to take churches to task which are not maintaining a mission priority, and they need to be men or women of vision who are able to see the mission potential in a locality. This is not simply about church planting. Could it not be a regular part of the Superintendent's work to challenge and, with a local church's leadership, to reflect upon the mission effectiveness of the local church? It seems to me that time spent here would keep many a local congregation from introspection.

To provide leadership in the area in taking initiatives for the furtherance of Christian witness and education

Again, surely, a priority area and we need to be appointment men and women to the Superintendency who have the necessary gifts.

To facilitate ministerial settlements

The cry at present seems to be from many quarters that review is needed in the settlement procedure. Surely we must all share the concern expressed in the Union Annual Report for 1991 concerning the difficulty in settling gifted men and women into pastorates. Malcolm Goodspeed has recently

expressed his concerns via the Baptist Times of churches not calling men and women who have been trained, and has questioned whether that is the non-listening of the churches as opposed to the colleges or the individuals concerned. I would want to also raise a fundamental question - what really is the role of the Superintendent in settlement procedures? Our Baptist colleges are entitled to advertise for tutors, why is it that churches are not allowed to widely advertise that they are looking for pastors or those to join ministerial teams, and whilst I appreciate the prayer and time which goes into the monthly meeting of the Superintendents' Board, in the end is this system a bottleneck rather than an enabling process? I am well aware that great sensitivity is needed in the area of ministerial settlement but perhaps it is time we encouraged an openness of relationship between a leadership and the church members such that issues of moving on, a new sphere of service, additions to the ministerial team, and so on, were not surrounded in any form of secrecy but were openly prayed through and discussed by the leadership and the church at regular intervals. Perhaps fixed term contracts in the pastorate, with reviews, would encourage this openness, although again I do appreciate that it is not always helpful to be facing such review during a particularly difficult patch in ministry!

Many churches only have contact with their Area Superintendent over ministerial settlements and this is often perceived to be the main area of their work. I would seriously question this. Certainly, mission-minded Superintendents with a view to building up the local church, can encourage and advise that church on the leadership they require, but I do wonder whether they need to be so intimately involved in the whole process.

To act as the representative of the Baptist Union at the appropriate level in ecumenical discussion and action

Who would seek such a position? Of course, ecumenical relations are important, and of course that has to be worked out in any particular area and locality. Certainly if we saw Area Superintendents as having a primary focus on mission, we would want to involve other Christian groupings in strategic mission advancement. However, does the Area Superintendent always have to be the person who sits on those committees for the sake of having a "Baptist" presence?

To promote the objects of the Union

Certainly we cannot have Area Superintendents who are not in agreement with the leadership and direction of the denomination as a whole, and of course they need to be informed and to keep informed those in their areas. Again, though, how many churches realistically look to the Area Superintendent to keep them in touch with Union matters? The recent initiatives from Baptist House concerning

Baptist Leader and Sec Check are to be applauded, as is the striving for a corporate Baptist identity. I would suggest, though, that the Area Superintendents have no more or less a role in that than do the rest of us, as we have opportunity from time to time and as we are kept informed and keep ourselves informed of events in the wider Baptist family.

Where does all this lead? I am very conscious that it is easy to knock and not so easy to be constructive. I would want to see the job description of the Area Superintendent tightened and to be prioritised. I think there are areas as indicated above that can be taken away from the Superintendents and that, by so doing, we will free our gifted men and women to be strategic mission-minded leaders around the country. The time is ripe for revision and we need to think this through, not just for our own sakes but for the sake of the advancement of the Kingdom.

Steven Hembery.

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Charismatic Renewal in the German Baptist Union

A Statement of the Study Group "*Gemeinde und Charisma*"

In the past few years the points of concern of the charismatic renewal have very much been on our minds in the German Baptist Union. Some link this with the deep longing for a far-reaching spiritual renewal of personal and church life. Others are more filled with anxiety, that a more dangerous development could be taking place. Various charismatic groups and the "Spiritual Church Renewal", which are to be found in the Catholic and Protestant Churches, are affecting our churches in an increasing manner.

The study group "*Gemeinde und Charisma*" (Church and Charisma) in the German Baptist Union sees its task in giving spiritual impetus into our churches, and to take up the challenges and the experiences of the charismatic renewal movement and make them fruitful for the Baptist Union. In this process it can only be in a manner which corresponds to our understanding of the church, a fellowship of Christians who have been baptised as believers.

1. THE LONGING FOR RENEWAL FROM THE WORD AND THE SPIRIT OF JESUS CHRIST

We recognize with thanks, that time and again God has given our church movement new spiritual life. Here we see the work of the Holy Spirit, who speaks to the church of Jesus and calls us to change our ways, and in this spiritual life is preserved, because He constantly renews it.

This renewal has various dimensions:

- * The living, credible testimony of Christ in both word and service;
- * The use of the gifts of mercy (charismen);
- * A conscious observation of responsibility in the world;
- * Unity within variety, which is brought about by the Holy Spirit;
- * A growing love towards the Bible;
- * Worship which is alive;
- * A truthful testimony of love in the church.

The longing for such a far-reaching renewal, brought about by the Spirit, is growing among us. This, as a gift of God, will lead to new life in our churches.

Although our churches have never given up the objective, in desiring to be New Testament churches, so often desire and reality are poles apart. This is why the number of those who can no longer identify themselves with the church reality is growing more and more.

This discrepancy between desire and reality can be seen especially in the following areas of church life:

1.1 Church Services

Church events, especially church services, do not

offer enough scope for the immediate impulses of the Holy Spirit during praise, worship and whilst listening to God. Many complain about the "sterility" of our meetings, the unrealistic message, too few opportunities for involvement and lack of warmth. Of the many promised charismen only very few are to be found in our services, some are even undesired.

1.2 Fellowship

The sole concentration on church events does not allow enough scope for the fellowship of believers, which is described in the New Testament as a fellowship in which the believers live and serve together. Hospitality, social welfare work, counselling, blessing and confession are often missed. On the one hand, many complain about the lack of commitment in the church, whereas on the other hand some groups with a more binding form of fellowship are in danger of isolating themselves from the church.

1.3 Leadership

The existing forms of leadership allow too little scope for the priesthood of all believers. On the one hand the longing for spiritual renewal can be heard where the priesthood of all believers is restrained, and on the other hand, where the gift of spiritual leadership is refused. Many complain, that we are increasingly unable to reach agreement concerning the question of spiritual authority; that the gifts of the word of knowledge, the word of wisdom and the word of prophecy are being replaced by a management mechanism and that the mothers and fathers in Christ are becoming rare.

1.4 Evangelisation

The capability of being involved in personal evangelisation goes to waste, when the calling to evangelisation is limited to evangelistic meetings, or where the responsibility is designated to individual people. Many complain about the restriction of the spoken message and miss salvation reaching the people in their spiritual, psychological, physical and social condition. There is not enough scope for the gifts of healing, deliverance and mercy.

2. THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL MOVEMENT

For more than 20 years we have encountered an increasingly extensive renewal within Christianity, this became known as the "*Charismatic Renewal*". This renewal has been registered in all continents and in all denominations. Initially the re-discovery of the Charismen was the main point of concern, later on the inclusion of the personal life of the believer was greatly emphasized. Today we must face up to the challenge, of integrating the gifts of the Holy Spirit

into the church life.

Even if there are numerous different forms of expression, it is possible to underline the following corporate emphasis:

2.1 The movement is understood as a renewal through the Holy Spirit.

2.2 Condition for this spiritual renewal is the rediscovery of the New Testament connection of repentance, faith, baptism and receiving of the Spirit (baptism in the Spirit) as basic spiritual experience.

2.3 The Holy Spirit leads and guides the believer in following Christ (discipleship), to holiness (fruit of the Spirit), to the beginning of service (gifts of the Spirit) and to a joy in reading the word of God and in praying.

2.4 The services in the charismatic renewal movement are characterised by praise and the worship of God, and above all through new songs (choruses), time of blessing, intercessory prayer, and a prophetically characterised message.

2.5 The fellowship in which believers live and serve together is often effected in a manner in which a good general overview can be kept. Alongside the large worship church, we find the house church, the community and the prayer group. Here each individual Christian should be integrated in counselling care. The willingness to reconcile previous denominational boundaries is large. New independent churches come into being, because the room for living (Lebensraum) within the existing denominations does not appear to be available.

2.6 The evangelistic mission is emphasized. The preaching of the Kingdom of God is connected with the expectance of the following signs and with the social responsibility in mission, e.g. in connection with fellowships in which believers live together.

2.7 The following gifts of mercy belong in a special manner to counselling: prophecy, discerning the spirits, word of knowledge and the gift of healing and deliverance.

2.8 In many charismatic groups the gift of leadership is clearly emphasized. Other groups emphasize the priesthood of all believers.

3. THE SITUATION IN THE GERMAN BAPTIST UNION

The group "*Charisma and Gemeinde*" (Charisma and Church) was called into being by the leadership of the Baptist Union in 1975. Since then, this group has taken on the various impulses and made them fruitful for our churches.

This endeavour found expression in various conferences. A large number of churches have taken on elements from the charismatic movement; services of blessing, new songs or regular worship services, in which there is more room for spontaneity, have found their place in the church.

Unfortunately it has not always been possible, to avoid developments which have led to painful separation. Some churches after experiencing an initial opening to the charismatic renewal, have

retreated again.

The study group continues to encourage, to embark on the road of charismatic renewal:

3.1 We must speak more clearly about the conversion experience of new birth, and thereby emphasize the connection of repentance, faith, baptism and the receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2, 38). Although in our churches conversion and baptism are understood as a conscious act of faith, the receiving of the Holy Spirit is not stressed enough, neither in teaching nor from experience. We believe it is helpful, when expectant prayers for the receiving of the Holy Spirit, follow the act of believers baptism in a time of blessing.

3.2 We hold on to the belief, that every born again Christian has received the Holy Spirit, is a member of the body of Jesus Christ and has been called to the priesthood of all believers. Out of this the responsibility grows, to live a life under the authority of Jesus and also to promote the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

3.3 We desire to have livelier church services, 1 Cor. 14, 26, could be instruction for this: "*Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*" The introduction of special "*charismatic services*" can be a temporary help; the goal, however, is the revival of all our meetings.

3.4 We want to take the command of Jesus, to preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God and to heal (Matthew 9, 35f), more seriously in the mission of the church and in our personal lives. As believers we expect, that God will reveal Himself in the preaching of His word through signs and miracles (Mark 16, 15-18). This comprehensive command can only be fulfilled in a clear relationship to His church.

3.5 We desire to see churches in which the body of Christ becomes more and more alive. For this we need an openness for forms of fellowship where committed spiritual life is possible.

3.6 We desire to see a good connection to the charismatic renewal movements within other denominations and we are prepared to learn from each other.

4. DANGERS

Those wishing to promote the charismatic, must also be aware of the dangers:

4.1 The plain manner of speaking about receiving the Holy Spirit must not be allowed to lead to a general experience model, as to how and when the Holy Spirit is received (Dogmatizing the teaching of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit).

4.2 Concentration on only a few of the charismen, restricts the promised wealth of mercy gifts.

4.3 The danger of extreme exaggeration begins, where the charismatic experiences leave the connection to the cross of Jesus Christ, in that the temporary signs of the Kingdom of God are mis-

taken for the final perfection (Romans 8, 18). The wealth of charismatic experiences does not release us from faith.

4.4 The laying down of particular forms of the church service misjudges, that the many-sided, creative power of the Holy Spirit can find expression in both a dynamic time of quiet as well as in enthusiastic forms of expression.

4.5 The lack of inclusion of the gifts of leadership within the body of Christ, and herewith also the correction through the church, leads to the danger of manipulation. The dependance upon the spiritually gifted leaders and members of the church is a danger for every Christian.

5. CONCLUSION

The desire for a spiritual revival among us is taken seriously and we want to promote the charismatic renewal. This is not possible without the willingness to

repent. As a church of believing, baptized Christians we are searching for our own way within the charismatic renewal movement. Many first signs are already in existence. That is why spiritual renewal among us has a strong character of following on from existing experiences, or experiences which have for various reasons been lost. We desire to see a stronger integration of all charismen in our church reality and see a great element of protection, when gifts of mercy are not practised detached from the local church and our corporate historical way. That is why we pray full of trust: "Lord, renew our churches and start with me".



THERE'S A WORLD BEYOND THE CHURCH

A review article by Paul Beasley-Murray

Davida Foy Crabtree, The Empowering Church. How one congregation supports lay people's ministries in the world. The Alban Institute, 4125 Nebraska Avenue NW, Washington DC 20016; 1989 (reprinted 1992). 72pp: \$9.95.

I have recently become a member of the Alban Institute, and as a result have gained access to a treasure trove of material relating to pastoral ministry and ministerial development. One of the many "resources for people who care about congregations" is Davida Crabtree's stimulating account of how her church came to expand its understanding of lay ministry.

Colchester (Connecticut) Federated Church has its origins in the union of a Baptist church and a Congregational church. With its 610 members it is a large church by our standards, and perhaps therefore its relevance might be dismissed by those of us in smaller churches. My own conviction, however, is that this is a church that has much to teach us. Just as the Willow Creek Community Church has challenged many of us in the area of evangelism, so Colchester Federated Church offers a real challenge in the area of lay ministry. (If the term "lay" offends you, forgive me - I know that strictly speaking we are all members of the "laos" of God. However, in this context the nomenclature is actually helpful).

Challenge Number One: Ministry Beyond The Church

The first challenge the Colchester church lays down, is the challenge to make a realistic assessment of the extent to which we encourage ministry beyond the confines of the local church.

The fact is that in most English churches little encouragement is given for genuine lay ministry. Or rather, the encouragement that is given for lay ministry is all too often within the circumscribed context of the church. Certainly this had been the experience of Davida Crabtree's church. The church's worship and preaching "effectively communicated the biblical mandate to go out in ministry. The church's organizational systems and structures, however, encouraged members only to serve the institutional church".

As I see it, this "marginalization of the laity" from the real world is often particularly evident within charismatic churches. For although charismatic renewal in Britain has been an important and positive vehicle for de-freezing "God's frozen people", there has been a tendency for charismatic renewal to restrict the use of the gifts of the Spirit to the church. The primary purpose, however, of spiritual gifts is not to enable us to worship the Lord better, but rather to serve his world more effectively. True, Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14 has the church primarily in view, but 1 Corinthians 12-14 is directed at a particular situation and should not be regarded as the last word on the ministry of all God's people.

However, the present subservience of lay people to "the church systems which keep them marginalized" cannot simply be blamed on charismatic renewal. To my mind, pastors have much for which to account. One of the temptations of pastoral ministry is to be constantly setting up church activities, which in turn ensure that conscientious members have no time and energy for any service beyond the borders of the church. I sometimes wonder

whether it is a perverse form of "egoism" which causes pastors to encourage their members to be so church-orientated - is there a feeling on the part of some of us that the more activities we set up, the more successful we are?

Challenge Number Two: The Integration of Faith and Work

The second challenge the Colchester church offers is for us to discover more effective ways and means of integrating our faith with our work.

In 1986 the Colchester Federated Church began to take a fresh look at lay ministry and formed a "listening team" of three laity, who invited occupational groups to spend an evening talking about their work. Areas for discussion by the groups included:

- Describe how you spend your day?
- What is satisfying for you in your work? What stressful?
- What is the impact of your work on your health, on your family, on your financial life?
- How does your workplace need to change? How can you help, or not?
- What are the ethical and justice or fairness issues you have to deal with at work?
- Does it make any difference that you are a Xian in your workplace? How does your faith connect to your work?

The listening team's work led to the creation of Covenant Groups of 10 members who spent 10 months together focusing on faith and work issues. In their group meetings the members talked about each individual's life, work and ministry.

As I read of these groups, I was most impressed. It is so easy for home groups to do Bible study in a vacuum. Here is a way of relating the Christian faith to the real world of work. Here is a way of helping God's people to fulfil their ministry in the world in which God has placed them. Is this something some of our churches could emulate? Maybe we could not give over all our home groups to such a purpose. Maybe in the first place a pilot group might be set up. Whatever, it is important that our people are enabled to work through the practical implications of their faith.

Challenge Number Three: Membership Classes With Ministry In View

At Colchester Federated Church when people apply for membership they are invited to participate in a four-week long membership class. These classes are offered on a quarterly basis. Davida Crabtree comments that, although they work with as few as two people, but they are best with six or more members.

Each session begins with time for getting acquainted and then deals with the following sequence of content:

1. The church's way of work: "how we are organized, history, understanding of membership and its meaning".

2. Gifts Identification. This process involves both individual reflection and interaction. I appreciated David Crabtree's wry comment: "When we do gifts identification now, it is done as a service to the person, not just as a self-serving talent hunt on the part of the church". Ouchi

3. Introduction to the Ministry of the Laity, when the group is asked to reflect together on the purpose and mission of the church.

4. A frank talk about faith and about money: "our tradition's beliefs, our denominational relationships and setting in Xian history; our understanding and expectations in mission and stewardship (give out pledge cards)".

I think it is still true to say that the vast majority of British Baptist churches do not have membership classes - or at least, not for those transferring their membership from other churches. An application for membership in most churches normally only involves a conversation with two "church visitors" appointed by the Church Meeting - here the opportunity is normally given for the applicants to share their testimony of how they came to faith. Where, however, churches do run membership classes, my observation is that the content of the course is primarily church-centred. Clearly, it is good for new members to understand something of the ethos of the church to which they are about to commit themselves. However, what challenges me about the Colchester church is that their membership classes not only introduce people to the church, but also help new members to think about how they might serve God, both within and without the church.

Challenge Number Four: A Structured Approach To Ministry - and Mission In and Through the Church.

Colchester's emphasis on ministry in the world does not do away with the fact that, like any other church, there are opportunities for ministry within the church. Just like ministry beyond the church, so ministry within the church is taken seriously.

Thus at Colchester Federated Church, the "Human Resources Committee" has developed a job description for every "board" and "committee" position. When members are asked to serve in positions in the life of the church, the committee gives them a copy of the appropriate job description, and asks them to consider the invitation for several days before giving an answer. Interestingly, "exit interviews" are conducted with outgoing leaders. It all sounds extremely business-like. But why not? Why should any church be content at being simply a happy bunch of amateurs? Surely we should offer our very best to Christ?

I was further challenged by the way in which the

Colchester church has developed an imaginative approach to structuring the church for mission. At the time of writing The Empowering Church Colchester Federated Church was in the process of setting up eight "ministry committees". (I confess that I am not enamoured with the word "committee" - I much prefer the term "team". However, at the end of the day, what is in a name?). Each of these six-person ministry committees has a number of specific responsibilities. They are as follows:

1. **Ministry in the Workplace**
 Vocation & career
 Ethics & justice
 Retirement
 Leadership
 Youth vocational discernment
2. **Ministry in the Home**
 Parenting
 Ageing
 Child care
 Singles
 Life cycle issues
 Parenting one's parents
3. **Ministry in Church Life**
 Community building
 Hospitality
 Cultivation of group life
 Encouragement of members' participation in church life (e.g. choirs, fellowship groups, social occasions)
4. **Ministry in the Community**
 Service and advocacy on local issues
 Public schools
 Scouting, recreation, etc.
 Housing issues
 Caring ministries at times of need/crisis
 Encouraging service on government/community boards
5. **Ministry of Stewardship**
 Finance and budget matters
 Property management
 Investments
 Pledge campaign
6. **Ministry of Mission and Witness**
 Global mission promotion and interpretation
 Citizenship issues (state and national)
 Denominational relationships
 Peace and justice
 Advocacy
7. **Ministry of Education**
 Sunday school
 Intergenerational classes
 Youth ministry
 Confirmation program
 Adult education
 Consulting with other ministries on their educational programs
8. **Ministry of Gifts and Leadership**
 Gifts identification

Leadership development

Helping committees to be communities

Consulting with other ministries on their human resource needs

As if these eight ministry committees were not enough, every member is asked to affiliate each September with one of the ministries in workplace, home, church, or community. *"A husband and wife might decide to affiliate this year with the workplace ministry because they are approaching retirement and want to learn and grow in preparation for that major change. Or in another family, the husband might decide to affiliate with the home and family ministry because he has been overworking and is feeling the need for support for changing his lifestyle. His wife might affiliate with the community ministry because she is already active with the town's library board and wants to be better equipped to give leadership there".*

In addition to these ministry committees, there is a rather large diaconate, which together with a chairperson is comprised of two members from each ministry committee. Davida Crabtree comments: *"A point of recovery for the missionary character of the congregation is the rediscovery of the diaconate as the organizing centre of the church's structure..... the diaconate integrates all the aspects of the church's life under the category of service".*

I find myself exhausted simply describing the structures of Colchester Federated Church! It really is quite some operation. Clearly it would not be appropriate for any church to slavishly copy this particular model of ministry and mission, even if it were possible. On the other hand, it does seem to me that Colchester's model provides a helpful challenge to us to think - or re-think - our own church's approach to ministry and mission. Have we developed the kind of structures which encourage our church members to be involved in meaningful ministry and mission?

The Empowering Church is indeed a stimulating read.



BOOKS FOR CHRISTMAS

Biography

John Pollock's biography of John Wesley (Lion £6.99) is a highly readable introduction to the life of perhaps the most influential English Christian. But the most important Christian biography of the year is that of David Watson (Hodder & Stoughton £7.99). I knew David first as a member of his church and then as his publisher, and I have no hesitation in stating that he was surely the most influential leader of renewal in the Anglican church in his generation and probably the most gifted English evangelist since the war. Teddy Saunders and Hugh Sansom are not afraid to reveal the pressures of leadership and the personal weaknesses and strains which marked David, but their candour does nothing to diminish the stature of this great leader. The tone of the book seems to me rather more definitely Anglican than I ever found David to be in person, but we still have much to learn from him, and therefore much to gain from this first biography.

Booklets

Sovereign World are as yet a little known publisher, but their Explaining series of booklets deserve to be found in every lively church. Each booklet introduces a basic Christian truth in simple language, presenting a good mix of biblical teaching and personal application. Recent topics include Colin Urquhart on Faith, David Pawson on Water Baptism, John Edwards on Speaking in Tongues, and Peter Lawrence on Hearing from God. For busy people with little time to read these are invaluable brief presentations.

Something different for Christmas

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