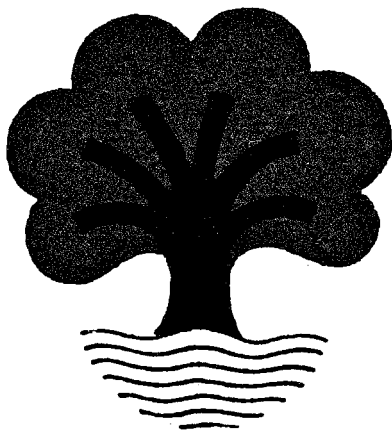


Mainstream

baptists for life and growth



Magazine Issue 50.

Issue Theme : WORD AND SPIRIT.

Introduction

Welcome to the new format Mainstream Magazine. Our 50th. We begin with a new feature: A Letter to the Churches from some of our Union Leaders. In this the first, our 'high octane' 1994-5 BUGB President Steve Gaukroger develops some of the themes of his Presidential Address: **OUT WITH THE CHURCH, THE WORD IN THE WORLD.**

This issue's Editorial Article - Recycling Baptists - raises at least some of the issues about Baptist associating which have given rise to the longing, among some of us, for a Word and Spirit network to emerge across our Union. This theme is developed in the next two features: The Word and Spirit Network - the story so far AND a view by one of the highly promising new generation of Mainstreamers Mark Abernethy. The voice 'From Probation' as it were is heard nowhere near enough in our Baptist family in my judgment. There is pain out there and loneliness as well as much ability, talent and potential.

I hope that future issues of this magazine can at least begin to rectify this silence by providing a platform for such voices to be heard. For many of us Roy Searle continues to reach parts of our spirituality that others don't. Here we reproduce part of his quite superb Mainstream Conference 1994 Bible Studies - Out of the Depths - for a wider audience.

News from the Executive and an extended footnote - **AND FINALLY...** concludes this issue. Enjoy it, I hope..... and if you do - or don't - please write and tell us.

Michael I Bochenski

St Albans

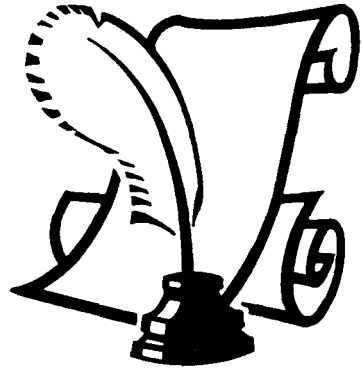
June 1994

Please remember that the views expressed in this Magazine are not necessarily those of the Executive as a whole.

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A LETTER TO THE CHURCHES



*From the 1994-5 President of the Baptist Union,
Revd. Stephen Gaukroger
of Stopsley Baptist Church, Luton.*

OUT WITH THE CHURCH: THE WORD IN THE WORLD

What is going on in our culture? Those who are ignorant of the kind of world we live in seem doomed forever to be irrelevant to it. Of course we know that it's a world where massive change is taking place constantly. It's not simply that our grandparents don't understand what's going on or our parents, but people of this generation are struggling with what Alvin Toffler called 'future shock'. There's a huge jarring in our world, an uncertainty about where we are going. We try all sorts of things, including a 'Back to Basics' nationally, in a struggle to find some secure footing in the sea of relativity that we inhabit. Where are we going? What will the values of the next century be? How are we to face them? We are suffering from what Peter Drucker has called 'an erosion of continuities'. The past doesn't any longer explain the present, never mind the future.

Technological advance occurs on every side: Fax machines replace telephones, mobile telephones proliferate, a whole world of computerisation most of us could never have dreamed of, exists ready to hand in our world. The social structure of family life is changing, there are - for example - three times as many people living alone in this country as there were thirty years ago. This has radically affected the way evangelism needs to take place, and the way that as the people of God we must relate to those who do not at the moment find themselves in our church families. We know what kind of world we live in, we might not like it but we are aware of it. The church must wake up to these changing values. If it doesn't it will be answering questions nobody is asking, and without this re-assessment about the nature of the world we are doomed, museum-like, to be an interesting feature of modern culture but no more, condemned to irrelevance. I believe at the end of the 20th century people are responding differently to the Good News than they may have done twenty, thirty or forty years ago.

We need, however, to move from our understanding of some of those things about our culture, to engaging our culture with the truth of Jesus Christ.

We not only need to understand it but we need a passion to see it changed. Sometimes we are very good at analysis but our analysis leads to paralysis, we understand so much. I long for a new sense of passion among us about changing this world and helping it encounter our Jesus Christ. To move on from understanding into activity. How desperately we need to remember that Jesus was crucified on a cross between two thieves, not in a cathedral between two candles. He touched down where it really matters!

Sometimes I wonder, when I am speaking to Christian organisations, if we haven't moved past the exuberance of the 70's and 80's into a time of sophistication in the 90's when the passion, the fire in our bellies, has somehow gone. The desperation to see the world won to Christ is strangely absent. It reminds me of an impoverished noble Lord who was facing massive debts and bankruptcy when he learned that he had inherited ten billion pounds! When asked for his response he said 'I'm really rather pleased'. Some of us are so sophisticated, we are so in control, we know so much about what is right. I believe God wants to call us as a denomination and, as individual local churches, back to a renewed passion for our culture to be encountered with the Good News of Jesus.

I also believe that we need not only to see our world change and to rediscover a passion for change, but that we need a new confidence in the Word of Life. Gimmicks or novel ideas in and of themselves; techniques and skills. These are never going to replace the need for our churches to be increasingly emphasising that the Scripture is God's Word; teaching it, praying it, reading it, studying it, sharing it with others. Not in some arid and sterile way but letting its truth come alive and its life transforming power out and loose. Sometimes we seem to box it in. God wants the Scripture, the Scripture speaking of Jesus, to be released among us. In fresh ways, so that our home groups, our deacons' meetings, our church meetings, our church services are filled full with Scripture. Not for the sake of it but as a way of hearing from Him and encountering His principles and His values over and against this 'crooked and depraved generation'. His Word still does have its ancient power!

The Bible does have power to transform society, and I believe God wants us to let it out and let it loose among us, and with no agenda but His! We often find the Lion of Judah tamed and dancing to our own particular tune whatever it may be. So far from believing the authority of Scripture we stand over it and read into its pages the pre-suppositions we have brought to it. Let's let the Lion of Judah roar for Himself; not bring our agendas to Scripture. Let's take a risk. Let's invite God to speak afresh through His Word. In line with the whole of Scripture, in line with the wisdom and teaching of the church down the ages, let's let Him speak to us as faith-communities genuinely under the authority of the Word.

Too many people want a 'decaffeinated Christ' who won't keep us awake at night! We do not have that option if we want to be the people of God. We have a risky Christ, a dangerous Christ. The Christ who fills the pages of

Scripture. May God help us to know that confidence in His most holy Word. God wants us to do deeper business with Him; to look afresh again at what we are doing and why we are doing it. What kind of church life does God want us to have now and in the next century? For God's sake and for the sake of the world, let's look again at all we do. Out with the church, beyond its walls, beyond its comfort zones, into the world which desperately needs its message. Let's look at the church tenderly, let's look at it gently, let's look at it with affirmation, but let's look at it again and ask God to help us to be the people He wants us to be. And, brothers and sisters, this isn't going to be without cost. Some of us are going to face this challenge and find ourselves coping with all the normal resistance to change in the life of the church.

Some years ago in California there was a woman who inadvertently locked her keys in her car that had a young baby in the back. It was very hot and she was frantic to get the child out. As time went by and she couldn't break the door down or force it open, she ran into the supermarket looking for help. Inside the car the baby was obviously getting more and more distressed and overheated.

Eventually a lorry driver saw her in distress and coming out of his lorry he got a crowbar and smashed a window and dragged the baby out and placed the baby in her arms. She was heard crying as she ran back into the supermarket, 'my car, my car'.

I think that if we are really radical there will be some breakage. God is wanting us to preserve what is utterly right, a commitment to His Son in all its fullness, but not be afraid to lose those things which are peripheral to that. We need, I believe, such a call to our churches, not because they are bad but because they are often good, but God longs for them to be better. I believe He wants us to understand our world and have a passion to engage it with the truth. He wants us to hold out the Word of Life which is the Scripture, and his Son revealed in Scripture. He wants us to become the church, not bound by anything but liberated to be all that He wants it to be.

May I plead for a new desperation for the local church to be changed? Will you come with me and re-commit yourself to a new commitment and confidence in this Word and the Jesus who inspired it? Join me in the exciting challenge of praying that God will come despite our own agendas and without our restricting presupposition. May fire fall from Heaven, taking us beyond head knowledge into heart knowledge, to a new passion for Him, that our nation, in our generation, will be profoundly affected by the Good News of Jesus and that in politics, education and every level of the social strata, on the lips of ordinary men and women in all aspects of Society, the Name of Jesus will be known as Saviour and Lord.

Before Him, every knee will one day bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. To Him be glory in the church. Amen.

(An article based on material used in the 'extemporaneous' Presidential Address at the 1994 Baptist Assembly, Bridlington). Stephen Gaukroger Stopsley, Luton May 1994

EDITORIAL -

RECYCLING BAPTISTS



I believe in Baptists associating; always have and always will. I am, with I know many others, unconvinced that the present BUGB structures for our associating together are adequate or, more to the point, right for the 1990s, never mind the next century.

First let it be said that if there are two kinds of Baptists, when it comes to associating - inclusive or exclusive - I am firmly and happily in the former camp. Throughout my life in the Baptist family I have been happy to work with Baptists who share my particular convictions - evangelical, ecumenically open, charismatic and politically radical - and with those who don't. My life, and I believe my ministry, is much the richer for that inclusivism. Let me then pay tribute to sister and brother Baptists all over the Union who continue to work creatively in and through existing Association life, serving our Lord in this His call to them. Let me name just a few. The names are intended to represent dozens of others:

Chris Haig, who has helped to weld together, alongside Keith Hobbs, Baptists all over the North West since his appointment in which - with many others - I played a part. The Lancs and Cheshire All-Age Association vision (which originated with the Superintendency of the already much missed Trevor Hubbard) has long struck me as a model far more should be following. Tony Peck's committed and so professional work among the Yorkshire Baptists. Eric Westwood's life given over to the cause of helping the world to believe. Andy Bruce, bringing a passion for social justice to West Midlands Baptist life. Frances and Harry Godden showing that Team Ministry can be more than just a buzz word in the 90's, in the East Midlands where I was nurtured. I salute their courage - and that of others - over the devolutionary Home Mission pilot projectsgladly. Peter Wortley and Douglas McBain's partnership that has helped to bring Baptist identity alive with large gulps of fresh air in the London Baptist life of the 1990's. Michael Humphries' quiet leadership from the middle here in Hertfordshire where I minister. David Chapman - soon to retire - busy in East Glamorgan not least in putting Poland on the Welsh churches and BUGB maps. The list above is a personal one. Others deserve to be named perhaps more... but I hope the point has been made. There ARE encouraging things happening in Association life as we currently know it. Ah, but there is also much dullness, inwardness, deadness and lifelessness around as well, isn't there? What one Church historian has called the 'Lord have mercy' as opposed to the Hallelujahs!

It seems to me that in that one kind of Baptist associating we make so

much of : at traditional Association level, on BUGB Council or on the many committees set up by both of these - we are recycling, on the whole, only some 5% (if that) of all available Baptists. An inbred self-limiting referral network is far too often the pattern of our Association life still. There are many, many Baptist Christians out there that we are hardly touching, reaching, networking with, interesting, or even meeting. Some of the finest ministries among us are being put in by pastors, leaders, members who have little if anything to do with any of our official Association life. Some of our finest churches do not relate at all to our present Association structures and it is time we acknowledged that they may have a point and that it is we who must change, not them.

At many of our Fraternal/Leaders' Gatherings fine Baptists are conspicuous by their absence. Some of them are weeping alone, struggling alone, spiritually low and longing for a pattern of Baptist networking that *will* minister to and help them. Others are now in positions of strength and yet know often from locust year experiences, that the present Association structures will eat into time and diaries that can more creatively be used for Christ and the Kingdom. They are wise enough to obey God rather than Association Secretaries in the end! It is my hope and prayer that the so constructive 'Green Paper' on Council Restructuring ('A 'Green Paper' on Council Restructuring' BUGB Publications £1.00p) which has clearly emanated from a mind which seeks to love God with all its strength, will lead to a Baptist Union Council leadership that incorporates such folk as well. Those who are not interested in playing Association power politics but who should be on Council as much as any Association Secretary for example. If that does not in fact result from this Green Paper in the end, we will continue to juggle around with the same 5% or so of Baptists throughout the whole 'Towards 2000' programme... and our present Associations will go from strength to strength in some parts of our Union and will wither and deservedly die in others.

This, in part, is why I believe that right across our Union access for Mainstream Baptists to some kind of Regional Mainstream - Word and Spirit Network is vital. If handled wisely by our Executive this networking can complement more traditional patterns of Associating and not threaten it. If handled very wisely it will draw in at least some of the 95% into new patterns of contemporary Baptist associating. Please God. I, like many Mainstreamers, will continue to support Association life and events as I can and have always made that clear. I equally warmly salute and welcome, however, the proposed Regional Word and Spirit Network. So should we all I suggest. In the excellent words from the stimulating and provocative document produced by Paul Fiddes and others for debate throughout our Baptist family ('The Nature of the Assembly and the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain' BUGB £2.00p)

'At the same time, we must expect development in the very form of our associating together. This report assumes that there will continue to be regional Associations of local churches to be represented in the national forums of

Council and Assembly, since the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ means that Christ desires to embody Himself in every area of human society; but in using the term 'Association' the report does not assume that this covenantal grouping will necessarily continue to have the same form, organization or size as Associations at present.' Here, in closing this my first Mainstream Magazine Editorial, is a manifesto for Association life:

- Never again will Associations be led by squirearchies of chiefly men over 50. Instead determined efforts will always be made to cross a generation and draw into Association life women and men under 40 as well as some of those fresh from College.
- Never again will an Association Assembly be held anywhere in the country which fails to fully embrace children and young people in its original planning, in its overall programme and in the event itself.
- Never again will worship at Association Events suggest that charismatic renewal has never happened; that neither Graham Kendrick nor John Bell have ever been born or that God has only given us the organ or the piano to worship Him with. The splendid - and I mean it - range of worship on offer at our National Baptist Assemblies now show us all the way forward here.
- Never again will Association programmes be drawn up which fail to recognise that - if only by virtue of our sheer numbers - Baptist Evangelicals must be catered for AND that the imperatives of evangelism and mission must never be allowed to drop from our mutual agendas.
- Never again will Association events present the water of monochrome Baptist Christianity instead of the wine of the multi-coloured variety. Instead genuine choice and variety, over a day or a weekend's events, in worship styles, teaching content and musical options will always be on offer.
- Never again will Associations that are no bigger than Baptist Districts elsewhere in our Union pretend to be on a par with all the others. Instead please God, they will discover a new identity for the C21st like the grain of wheat.
- Never again will Association Officers complain about absent friends without first inviting their representatives to come and speak frankly and openly about why the Lord tells them to stay away.
- Never again will Area and Association leaders look unkindly and threateningly on those who love the Lord and the Union as much as they do but who judge that the time is right to discover complementary but new 'Association-free' patterns of Baptist networking and mutual support.

When such Baptist Associations come into being there will be no need for nascent Word and Spirit Networks to address at least some of these issues. Until then

A Word and Spirit Network - the story so far

Throughout 1993 a process of consultation went on to determine whether new patterns of Baptist life at Regional level need now to emerge. Should Mainstream move beyond its well tried and safe zones of an annual Conference and an occasional newsletter into all the risks and controversies of alternative Baptist Regional networking?

A consultation document, drafted by Rob Warner, was published by the Mainstream Executive in March 1993. Four Regional days were planned in different areas of the country to explore these possibilities. Several themes overlapped. There were, I think, present those who wanted an exclusive charismatic-evangelical Baptist network to emerge. There were equally those who had tried and tried again Baptist Association life around them and found it sadly wanting. There were those who, for much of Mainstream's 15 year history, had worked for Association Renewal with some successes and some failures and now wanted something new and better, please God. There were also those - and I am among them - who will continue to value and relate to Association life but who also know in our hearts that more is now needed to meet the demands of Baptist associating in these 'Towards C2000' months and years. AND there were the simply curious or the unsimply threatened present. If you got conflicting signals from some of those you know who attended a Regional Consultation day, I hope what I have just written will explain why!

The final Consultation with Regional representatives was held in Sutton Coldfield in November 1993. There, a remarkable degree of unanimity was experienced, much to the surprise of some present. From that day emerged the paper 'Mainstream - a Word and Spirit Network' which was presented to the 1994 Mainstream Conference as both an agenda document and as a summary of the process to date. In responding to the paper critically but constructively at Swanwick, David Coffey recognised that these developments are "the logical outcome of the last 15 years", whilst appealing for more humility in the next stages of the process. "We need to give the Union back to the churches" he concluded.

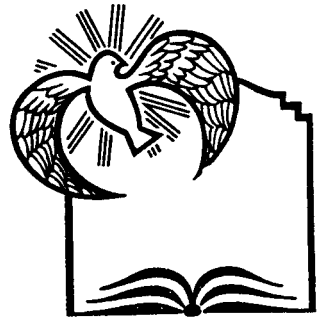
And next? The plan is to hold Launch Days in five Regions this Autumn to work through some at least of the implications of the paper. The five Regions are: South West; London & South East; East Midlands; West Midlands and - quite a generalisation this - The North.

Much has been written, not least in the BT, about the document already. It is published below in full for the wider Mainstream family to judge for itself. The Letters column is already open for the September Magazine.

(The Editor).

A WORD AND SPIRIT NETWORK

After two years of discussion and prayer, the Mainstream Executive feel the time is right for a new change in direction. Mainstream was founded in 1979, with the purpose of networking evangelical/charismatic Baptist Churches together. The aim of networking was to encourage life and growth in the Union. Its vision nationally was to see women and men in places of leadership who held the same values and vision. Much of that original vision has been achieved.



Mainstream in the 1990's will continue to work for life and growth in the Union, and in particular, turn its attention to the renewal of local Association life, Regionally.

THE TWO MOTIVATING FACTORS OF MAINSTREAM

1. MISSION

This is seen as the primary motivating factor for Mainstream. The Network would be a group of leaders whose heart is to reach the Regions of this country with the Gospel of Christ in their generation. Mainstream would encourage churches to work together in their locality. Mainstream would agree and define explicit goals for church growth and church planting. Teams would be made available between churches to help with evangelism and training.

2. ACCOUNTABLE RELATIONSHIPS

A need has been identified for the mutual support, encouragement and care of ministers/leaders. Developing groups of leaders who begin to grow in love and accountability towards each other. A coming together of evangelicals and charismatics around the prime nature of Mission. Groups not based on competition and insecurity. Groups who in particular relate spiritually to each other and to recognised leaders.

MAINSTREAM & ITS RELATIONSHIP TO OUR WHOLE UNION

There is no discernible spirit of division or anarchy within the discussions so far. People involved have a deep respect for their Baptist principles and are committed to the Union and to its leadership. Discussions so far have been conducted in a very open and honest way, always seeking to communicate, inform and consult with the Senior Management Team and local Superintendents. Mainstream would always seek in the future to maintain this spirit of openness and unity.

Although there is strong support for the Union and its leadership, there is also a deep desire for structural change within the Union. Mainstream would want to affirm the present local structures as good and necessary for a previous

time. However, new wine is being poured into our Union. Structures must serve this new life: new wine skins are needed. In this regard, Mainstream fully endorses the 'Towards 2000' proposals. This process of change will be painful and difficult as it has been within church life in recent years. Mainstream would seek in a spirit of love and gentleness to:

- a) Challenge the present structures and expose their inadequacy.
- b) Seek to present ideas for the Union to adopt in the future.
- c) Model these new structures in order that they can be tried and tested.
- d) Seek to understand and answer the pastoral problems such a change in our structures would cause.

The kind of people Mainstream will attract will be those who hold the above principles. They will also need to have a spirit of courage to take a stand and seek to achieve these principles. A spirit of openness and love towards any who hold other viewpoints, must also be present. Mainstream should always be bridge-building.

POSSIBLE WAYS AHEAD IN THE FUTURE

The vision is an emerging one. However, we do need to begin to firm up on possible ways ahead for Mainstream in the 1990s. Here are some ideas we could adopt:

- a) Change the membership of the Executive to better reflect a new Regional emphasis.
- b) Continue to hold a national conference, perhaps on a bigger scale.
- c) Appoint Regional and local facilitators to encourage the formation of ministerial/leaders' groups who would set up regular meetings to encourage prayer, sharing, accountability and future development of mission.
- d) Begin to draw up a register of ministers/leaders and eventually churches who wish to relate to Mainstream nationally and regionally.
- e) To help accelerate the change process within the Baptist Union. This could be thought through by the Executive and carried out at the national and local level.

THE PRIME FOCUS OF MISSION

The process of change will not be easy, and much grace and understanding will need to be given. It will however only be achieved if the prime motive of Mission is kept central to the vision. It is because of the desperate need of our country to experience the Kingdom of God that we are driven towards change and growth. Our Baptist principles of independence must be balanced with our understanding of our part in the wider Body of Christ. A prophetic word has driven our thinking in recent months'. Why do you fight alone when I have given you each other to fight alongside with?'

(From The Mainstream Executive January 1994)

Reflections on a Word & Spirit Network

I find myself becoming more and more excited as I read through again one of the early documents on a proposed Word & Spirit Network: the Executive's Consultation Paper of March 1993. In particular two words which seem to me to be the key ones are 'sharing' and 'support'.

As a Probationer Minister in his first pastorate I have discovered needs within me, and also through my observations of local Church life, that our Baptist family must acknowledge. I realise that my experiences are not going to be everybody else's and to help you put this article into a more meaningful perspective, some background might be helpful.

I write as somebody who has been brought up in a Christian home and ever since I can remember taken to the local Baptist Church where my parents were in membership. This Church experience was seen at the time as an irrelevance and in later childhood an embarrassment and chore. I write as somebody who, in their middle teenage years, discovered the need of a Saviour and the joy of salvation through entering into a new relationship with God. I write as somebody who became committed to that same local Church with all the zeal and enthusiasm 'young men' can have. I write as somebody who discovered the excitement of being filled, baptised, overwhelmed (insert whatever word you feel comfortable with here) with the Holy Spirit. I write as somebody who discovered an increasing desire for the relevance of God at the heart of my daily life and the life of the local Church. I have seen Church life from the position of a willing attender, a committed member and now full time Leader. From the chairs of a well attended Church described as Charismatic or 'Renewed' and from the pews of a more traditional, less exuberant, Church.

The Word & Spirit Network excites me because with the background of experiences that I have outlined I have discovered needs within me that have remained unfulfilled to date. We all know the answer given to the enthusiastic member who comes to the Pastor with a list of problems about the Church. 'If you find the perfect Church don't join it because you will spoil it'. We all accept that our Churches will not be perfect in every aspect, but I fear we can use this saying to deflect debate that might help our Churches to become better equipped to be all that God intends them to be.

Why a new Regional Network?

A Word & Spirit Regional Network excites me because its stated purposes could help us all, whatever our Church flavour, geographical location or sphere of service might be. None of us can afford to be complacent in our Churches today, whether we serve in a large active Church or in a small active Church, or for that matter a large or small inactive Church! Why? - because we live in a Society where the majority see us as an irrelevance to their lives and modern day living. Where Church people are 'weaklings' who need some crutch to help them through life. Boring people who don't know how to have a good time.

One of the stated purposes of the Word & Spirit Network is summarised in the following sentence 'to bring us together so that we can maximise our impact upon the nation by sharing our resources, skills, ideas, training programmes and dreams'. For me, this is a key sentence in the initial Word & Spirit document. We need to find ways to maximise our impact upon the nation and working together will give us resources to do this, both nationally and on a local and regional basis.

If every Baptist Church saw the need for national awareness and impact and at the same time could see instruments that could help to achieve this, then they may be more willing to commit their resources (time, money, gifts etc.) to such instruments. This happens to some extent in some Churches and some people within these Churches, but if we have grown to know and trust each other more through working together and spending time together, then we might see an increase in the support of existing resources as well as the releasing of new resources. Working together so that we grow together seems to be important and goes beyond just a written agreement issued by a national Executive. Working together means that we exercise our will and remove our preconceptions, take some chances and become willing to be vulnerable so that we might honestly share our weaknesses as well as proclaim our strengths, i.e. sharing.

SHARING

As a minister of a local Church who meets from time to time with other ministers, I know how easy it is to project an 'everything is fine' image. How important we think it is to be seen as 'successful' by our colleagues. Working together would involve the willingness to expose more of myself which could be risky. I might have to raise my hand and say 'help, I'm not doing this well' or 'look, the Church I serve is struggling over this issue'. It would then enable others who have gone through that issue or dealt with that aspect of ministry to say 'here, let me help you, and while I am here you might be able to give me some advice over this issue'.

Looking at this key sentence I am excited at what sharing our resources, skills, ideas, training programmes and dreams could achieve.

- Resources and skills As a new minister in the full time sense, I am beginning to discover issues that I come across in the course of my work, that have been faced by others before me. It occurs to me that as I seek to lead a group of people and grapple with particular problems, somebody else may have been there already and have the resources to give me good advice on how to deal with such problems, sharing skills which I don't have. Skills that I don't have can be compensated for, or skills that lie undeveloped may be identified and nurtured by people who already have those skills and are more proficient in them.
- The sharing of ideas or brainstorming can also be helpful as it enables a person to think about an issue in ways he or she had not seen on their own. What's wrong with copying an idea that has worked elsewhere, or admitting that somebody else's idea helped you in the development of your idea?
- Training programmes could be developed that tackle areas of ministry which we have 'come into'. It has to be admitted that our Theological Colleges are all different and perhaps stronger in some particular aspect of ministry training, than others. As it is not possible for every ministry student to experience every aspect of every college it is clear that our ministry students need additional training in certain areas that their college was unable to give them. These programmes could be given by people with particular experience in an aspect of ministry at a level that basic ministry preparation is unable to give. As training programmes have different values to different people, depending on their own interest, ability and experience, training could be given not just to those entering ministry but to those who have been in ministry for some time. Refresher courses and courses for those with more experience to help them to advance could also be used.
- Dreams 'I have a dream' said Martin Luther King and it changed his life and the lives of many others. Dreams are important because they can give us focus for the future. Where is the place for dreaming? Privately in the Study, yes, but is that the only place, some private corner? Is it possible that the sharing of dreams will not only enable the dream to be tested - are all dreams from God? - but also to allow these dreams to be defined, sharpened, implemented. Could it be that in the sharing of dreams, direction, dedication and encouragement could be given? The sharing of dreams is a costly business and if they have value, as I believe they have, it excites me that a structured environment could be developed where such practice is sensitively fostered.

SUPPORT

The other key word mentioned is support:- Some birds learn to fly by being pushed out of the nest, some people learn to swim by being pushed in the deep end, but in both situations somebody needs to be in the background ready to help before disaster strikes. For the fresh-faced newly trained minister life in the first pastorate is important and as one college tutor would sometimes tell me 'the college cannot prepare you for every eventuality in ministry but it will provide you with the means to sort it out for yourself'. This was directed primarily to being able to think through theological issues which, of course, is valuable, but what about the day to day practical issues?

The Senior Friend system has the potential to help and when a good match is made much benefit can be obtained. However, not every Senior Friend proves able to help or has the resources or experience to do so. It would be ludicrous to expect any one person to have all these resources anyway. A network of people with a common vision, united in a common bond of acceptance, provides the potential to offer support to a person which one individual cannot give. We all have different perspectives based on intellectual ability and personal experience. A network which allows support to be given from a pool of people seems to me to be very exciting. Not only for the newly appointed probationer, but also for the more experienced and exalted 'accredited' minister, such support might prove helpful at times.

If every ministry knows times of success and times of 'hard slog' then support from as wide a range as possible, which is as relevant as possible, is something worth looking for and working for. Some of us recognise the need for this support and are forced to look for that support. Praise God, we do find it, but do we have to make it so hard for this to happen?

I realise that some of these areas are being addressed by various groups within our Baptist family. Often such support seems to be restricted to geographical areas and personal friendships which an individual may develop. Association life has provided encouragement, support and resources for many of our churches in the past but is it still providing this today? The answer seems to vary according to geographical area and Churchmanship. How exciting to think that such networks could be made available to all the Mainstream family and prove to be - it is hoped - for the benefit of the whole Baptist family.

As the debates, consultations, papers and presentations continue, I find myself excited at the possibilities for the future of the Baptist family with such a Network in place. A group formed with a desire to affirm, to work with and for each other, united in a common commitment to Christ has my vote. How about yours?

Mark Abernethy

Bushey Meads

May 1994

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

- Roy Searle

Mark 1 : 1 - 13

The Bible has many examples of people finding God in the desert. Abraham, Jacob, Moses at Sinai, John the Baptist and Jesus for example. The desert - Scripturally - can be a place of revelation. The desert is also a harsh place, a place of extremes. For Christians, the desert is that place where we battle with the enemy within - ourself. This battle can take many forms. We may find ourselves struggling with:

- The need to BE somebody.
- The need to be recognised.
- The need to DO something.
- The need to be affirmed.
- The need for 'a powerful and significant ministry'

God is Lord of the desert as well. In the desert we learn to come face to face with God... and ourselves. The desert exposes our deepest wounds and our hidden places. Questions of the heart scream out to us from the desert. there we begin to learn how to sing God's song in the dark and not just in the light. There we discover the need to develop the life of our inner hearts.

- Many of us, still, fear being truly alone with God.
- Many of us still have to learn to seek God for His own sake and not for our ministry's sake.
- Many of us still have to learn that true integrity in ministry flows only from true communion with God.

Mark 1 : 35.

How we all need, in life, and in spiritual life, one of those so helpful maps that guide us around the large Shopping Malls of Britain. We need to know: **YOU ARE HERE!**

Jesus knew the importance of the solitary place. The place where He was alone with the Father. We must follow His example. Too often we also have the constant demands of people and all sorts of pressures bearing down upon us:

- The pressure to perform well.
- The pressure to achieve.
- The pressure to DO.

The enemy of the best, remember, is not the bad but the good! Our lives are full of 'OUGHTNESS'. We are like a child's letter outpoured onto a page but without punctuation. Human life, similarly, does not make sense without its fullstops, pauses and commas.

Ah, but does our local church and the Church have the ability to listen to and receive what God is actually saying and doing among us by His Spirit? Only those who lean on Jesus' breast hear God's heartbeat. Jesus established a balance between solitude and ministry; between prayer and mission. And us? We are called to be in the world but not of it... a Church without walls. Often it is in the solitude that we meet God, ourselves, our real motives. We live in a Society that has lost the art of reflection. The monsters of the immediate win again and again. Spirituality is seeing ordinary things with God's eyes. In a religious 'pick and mix' culture we need to rediscover wisdom and discernment through solitude, reflection and prayer. That is our challenge today.

Editor's Note: Mainstream 1994. Cassettes of the full Bible Studies as well as of the various Seminars and of Dr. William Kumuyi's stirring voice from the exciting context of vibrant Third World Christianity are still available from Sherborne Sound. An order form is inserted in this Magazine.



News from the Executive:

The current members of the Mainstream Executive - who have still not read Galatians 3:28 - are:

John Weaver	-	Regent's Park College, Oxford	Acting Chairman
David Slater	-	Kingsbridge	Secretary
Steven Hembery	-	Crawley	Treasurer
Derek Wick	-	Sutton Coldfield	Conference Administrator
Michael Bochenski	-	St. Albans	Magazine Editor
Jane Thorington-Hassel	-	Bow, London	
Glen Marshall	-	Wakefield	
Roy Searle	-	Wooler	
Roger Sutton	♦ -	Altrincham	
Rob Warner	-	Herne Hill, London	
Nigel Wright	-	Spurgeon's College, London	

- Recently retired from the Mainstream Executive are Paul Beasley-Murray (a founder member of Mainstream), Andrew Green and Terry Griffiths, to each of whom the Executive wishes to record its thanks for fellowship, service and friendship.
- Plans are underway already for the planned Regional launches of Mainstream in five areas this Autumn: East Midlands; West Midlands; the North; London and the South East & South West. Details will be finalized at the next Executive to be held on June 27th at Oxford.
- A 24 hour consultation for Senior Pastors is being planned at Gorsley on November 7th-8th, concerned especially with Team Work in Christian Leadership. Details from David Slater, ☎ 0548-856848 / 852770.
- Also in the Autumn, the next of the Executive's regular meetings with the Baptist Union's Senior Management Team at Didcot is planned.
- The theme of the 1995 Mainstream Conference is to be 'Word and Spirit'. This will be a very different kind of Conference it seems, not least because of space limitations. The venue will be the High Leigh Conference Centre, Hertfordshire. The ethos will also be different as, at least initially, the places will have to be by invitation only. Dates: January 16th-18th 1995. Speakers approached include Faith Forster, Rob White and Derek Tidball. Further details in the September Magazine OR from Derek Wick, ☎ 021-378-3020 / 021-355-5088.

AND FINALLY

This is an exciting time both for our Union and for Mainstream. The foundations are indeed being shaken. Association life is under the searchlight as perhaps never before. Not since the 1970s has so much in our Union life been so genuinely up for review and assessment. Let us hope we all do a far more thorough job this time around. The whole pattern and scope of Superintendency is under active review. The nature of both our Annual Assembly and its relationship to the BMS is being reconsidered. The Baptist Union Council, dominated as it is by Association representatives, is similarly being reassessed and, many of us hope, redirected. The European and World Christians scene is increasingly affecting the British one and, of course, vice versa. The imaginative 'Towards 2000' Listening Process is clearly already bearing fruit in a number of ways. If we can all avoid meltdown (!?) in all of the 'shaking going on' then the C21st should, please God, be an exciting time to minister and serve within a very new Baptist Union.

So. Where does Mainstream fit into all of this? Few of us, I hope, would doubt that we who have been near the forefront of at least some of the changes that have moved through our Union - in worship styles, local church life and denominational leadership in the 1980's - must ourselves be willing to change? Those of you who do not like this new Magazine format for example! Mainstream must itself come under the spotlight, change and adapt as we too move Towards 2000. The Regional Word and Spirit Network, of which we have heard something already in this magazine, is due to be launched all over our Union in the Autumn. The Executive is itself in transition as some familiar names are no longer around - well you know what I mean! A new generation of Leaders is beginning to emerge. Here's to the under 40s I say. I write as one who recently passed that particular milestone.

The magazine too is changing. A more reader-friendly A5 format and print style. The introduction -soon- of a Letters page and a regular News from the Executive spot and a 'Letter to the Churches' to focus on. Goodbye Book Reviews - though extended articles on helpful books drawing out something of their relevance to our Mainstream Churches are still welcome. The 'BT' is making such a fine job of Book Reviews these days it seems pointless to reproduce them twice within our Baptist family I suggest. Unsolicited articles for possible publication, signed and dated, are also always welcome. Shorter ones of 1000 -1500 word are more likely to get published, especially if I agree with them!

All for now. The next edition will be published in September when there will be fuller news of the very different 1995 Mainstream Conference. There will also be an Evangelicals and Community Action focus in that edition.

The Editor.

The Mainstream Executive are:

Acting Chairman: John Weaver, Regent's Park College, Pusey Street, Oxford OX1 2LB ☎ 0865 - 59887

Secretary: David Slater, 7 Waverley Road, Westville, Kingsbridge, South Devon, TQ7 1EZ ☎ 0548 - 852770

Subscriptions and Treasurer: Stephen Hembery, 27 Crabtree Road, West Green, Crawley, Sussex, RH11 7HL ☎ 0293-546177

Conference Administrator: Derek Wick, 12 Barnard Road, Sutton Coldfield, W. Midlands B75 6AP ☎ 021-378- 3020

Magazine Editor: Michael Bochenski, Baptist Manse, 18 Gurney Court Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire. AL1 4RL ☎ 0727-856537

- Jane Thorinton-Hassel - Bow, London
- Glen Marshall - Wakefield
- Roy Searle - Wooler
- Roger Sutton - Altrincham
- Rob Warner - Herne Hill, London
- Nigel Wright - Spurgeon's College, London.

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