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<b>Contents:</b>	<b>Magazine Issue 61</b>	<b>January 1998</b>
Introduction		
Recognising Liberating leaders	Malcolm Goodspeed & Viv Lassetter	
Associating - The Yorkshire Baptist experience		Tony Peck
Liberating leadership - into mission		Stephen Rand
Liberating Leadership		Rob Warner
Trends in Ministry		Michael Bochenski
Forming Church leaders in today's world	John Weaver & Richard Burfoot	
Letters from Readers - Yes!		
Addresses and Subscription details		

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## Introduction

If all goes according to plan you will be reading these articles soon before or just after the 1998 Mainstream Conference. The very alert among you will also have noticed that the theme is the same. Cunning eh! It is good to see a new team emerging in the Ministry Department at Didcot again after a time of considerable pressure and an unacceptable workload. Viv's appointment as Ministries Adviser thrilled many of us. She and Malcolm set the scene for this magazine's theme in the first of two dialogue articles you will find in this issue. They remind us, among other things, of how the security or insecurity of we leaders can have enormous implications for both our churches and Union. Tony Peck has finally made time to contribute an article on the Yorkshire Baptist Association. The prize for the Union's busiest man must go to Tony at this time I suspect, so we are especially grateful for it. Stephen Rand of TEAR Fund re-opens the debate about what holistic mission actually means and considers the styles of leadership offered by Third World Relief Agencies in the late C20th. Rob Warner writes with that lightness of touch and yet power that those of us who have come to respect greatly his writing gifts will soon recognise. He has the gift of saying radical things attractively whilst at the same time making them seem achievable. Sometimes of course they are. Interestingly, in his article on liberating younger leaders he argues passionately also against the ageism that curses still too many a Baptist church.

I reproduce here a summary of some of the responses to a questionnaire undertaken under another of my hats - the Baptist Ministers' Fellowship. It concerns trends in ministry at the end of this century. By any account these replies make fascinating and insightful reading for those of us concerned to encourage effective liberated leadership as the C21st approaches. John Weaver and Richard Burfoot reflect in particular on the earlier stages of liberating leaders - training in college. They raise more questions than they answer in the process but at least they raise them. At a time when almost everything in our Union is being reviewed - and when there is a corresponding danger of government only by review - it is interesting to speculate on how radical the current BUGB consultation on the future of our Colleges will turn out to be in practice. If it tackles just a few of the questions John and Richard raise here their report too will be well worth acting upon when released. Oh yes, and we had not one letter but three in response to that stimulating ABY article *Championing a Baptist Future* in Issue 60. There is life out there beyond this particular PC it seems. It was pleasing, incidentally, to see the BT also taking up the document and releasing at least some of it to a still wider audience in the Autumn.

See you at the Conference I hope ... Remember: Mainstream needs your presence at our events and networks and not just your intellectual engagement. Mind you we need that as well. .... Letters to the Editor remain very welcome by fax, e-mail or - yes - snail mail.

**Michael Bochenski**

Advent 1997

## Recognising *Liberating Leaders*

- Viv: Liberating leadership. Well that's a weird subject for a Baptist publication isn't it?
- Malcolm: Does all this stuff about leadership mean that some of us think that we want some among the people of God to have power and status over the rest of us?
- Viv: Well somebody has to take the lead Malcolm don't they?
- Malcolm: Do they really have to take it, or is it something that is given, as leaders begin to grow and work among the people of God?
- Viv: I know that leadership is a gift and that it has to be recognised, but some people just have it in them don't they? They can stand up and are good on a platform and they can really take the people with them. Surely that's a leader?
- Malcolm: That might be a leader in terms of being a dictator and having a strong personality that dominates and rules by power, but in fact this might be alien to what God wants in terms of leadership. Was that the way Jesus worked?
- Viv: Well no, it wasn't the way Jesus worked; but this is the 1990's and frankly there are a lot of weak leaders about. We need people to stand up and show us the way.
- Malcolm: I think you and I need to work out what we mean by leadership first. What is leadership? And what is the appropriate way for leadership to come to expression amongst the people of God? I am intrigued that we've hit on this word "leadership" in a lot of our thinking when it's a word and concept in terms of etymology that doesn't actually feature in the New Testament. Can you think of where it comes from?
- Viv: Powerful leadership? Well, look at Paul. Paul was a powerful leader who was always telling people what to do.
- Malcolm: I think that's a misinterpretation of Paul. He had strong views and he wrote clearly, but seldom does he command. He entreats and urges action by the churches. There's little evidence to say that he was always the up front person. In fact, the Corinthians despised him because he wasn't up front enough. So, the fact that he had strong views did not make him a leader.



- Viv: I'm just thinking about the leaders I know who are good leaders. I think the attribute that would be common to all of them is security. They are secure people in who they are and in what they do. They are not dominant people. There are actually very enabling people who are good to be around.
- Malcolm: What do you mean by "secure" in that sense?
- Viv: I mean that they are not defensive and they don't have to grab a platform. They are very free to let other people operate through their gifts. I think what I mean is that they give people space and choice.
- Malcolm: I think that's true to a word in the New Testament which is translated as leadership and that's 'helmsman'. The helmsman on a boat was not the captain, but one who, under orders, moved the rudder to make the boat go in a particular direction. To do that they had to have other people working alongside them, pulling the ropes which changed the position of the sails, so that the helmsman's part was simply to point in the chosen direction, while others gave the power through their pulling of the ropes and other manoeuvres.
- Viv: Team work.
- Malcolm: It's about team work and someone who knows that their part in the team is very significant and for which they are accountable, but at the same time gives others the space to use their gifts to keep the ship moving.
- Viv: Yes, I can agree with that, because you often see people who don't feel valued and appreciated. People who know perfectly well that in actual fact the leader in their church or wherever, couldn't operate without them. But they are not given the affirmation they need, because the leader is insecure.
- Malcolm: Yes, my experience too would say that. Those who claim authority and who de-claim in an authoritarian style are those who are struggling to be sure of themselves on the inside.
- Viv: Right. So where do our recognition processes fit into all of this? Bearing in mind all the different personality styles and characters that offer for leadership within our denomination?
- Malcolm: I hope that the processes that we have developed through the years and are constantly trying to refine are concentrating on finding people with that inner security that comes from knowing God, which makes them able to be comfortable with people and to function without being threatened by others.

- Viv: That sounds as though we expect them to be already functioning in all of these ways. Do we look for people perhaps who are open and willing to being taught or trained and who recognise that, though they have potential, there's still a great deal to learn?
- Malcolm: This is where I think that there is a very real sense in which to be a leader is a gift and a calling from God, because unless that person has the inner security that such calling gives, they are not open to receiving new things. They are, as you said just now, defensive people, seeing questions as criticism and so unsure of themselves that they will challenge anyone who challenges them.
- Viv: People do get anxious about our processes, don't they? They feel that surely if God has called them, that should be enough.
- Malcolm: Yes. And I understand that anxiety and I hope that it's part of the serious testing of the call from God. It is good to have serious thoughts about calling. Testing of calling, in our way of being church, must always be a community decision. I need that affirmation from God and from God's people to release me to function. So our processes are ways in which the church discerns the mind of God in relation to a particular person. Then he or she can have that confidence that the body of Christ has released them to serve in leadership.
- Viv: And this, in turn, should give security to churches who then know that these processes have been applied and tested and actually go on being tested.
- Malcolm: Yes. It's a mutual flow between the individual and the community and from the community back to the individual that holds a balance and is never individualistic. It is always corporate and yet enables the individual to have space and energy to do the things he or she is called to do.
- Viv: I've heard people say about leaders that you can tell the year they left college, by the books on their shelves. One of the things that we want to encourage is continuing education. Do you think that it might appear to be belittling or undermining to assume that somebody, who has gone through four years of training, might actually have to continue to go on learning? I mean, how do people find the time when they are having to produce two sermons a week and might have quite a large congregation to pastor?
- Malcolm: My feeling is that the very process of producing two sermons in the course of a busy week, is part of a whole sequence of life. Because

I am living with God and am encountering God's people in exercising this calling, and in that context open to hearing God speak to me, my sermons arise out of this experience and I have confidence that I am living the whole process and not simply blocking diary time to do a particular part of the job.

Viv: So, you're saying yes, we need education which is not just book learning. It's part of the process of listening to the Holy Spirit who shapes us for ministry.

Malcolm: Yes, and this is why I think it's an important shift of language to speak not of training but of formation, a word which we have taken on board from other Christian traditions. Formation involves the whole person and needs an openness of mind which is willing to listen, learn, and grow.

Viv: One word that's been around just lately, a word that I know worries some people, is that word appraisal. Some ministers get worried about appraisal and I think perhaps have a wrong idea about it. They think in terms of review and become anxious about who would do this process to them, not for them or with them, but to them. How would you go about answering that?

Malcolm: First of all it needs to be made clear that appraisal should never be imposed. I think appraisal is only useful when a person is prepared and willing to be enabled to develop and grow in his/her walk with God. It's a tool for the benefit of that person who can invite others to join, with him or her, so that she/he can be helped to recognise where there are strengths and weaknesses, and where to go to seek support on the continuing journey of faith. Appraisal must always be at that level. It's never something which the department can impose, but must always be taken up by the person concerned in fulfilment of the continuing call from God.

Viv: I can understand that. I'm just thinking how you work it out in practice.

Malcolm: I think we need to have a model to offer to people that they can be comfortable with and which enables them to recognise their own strengths and gifts yet helps them to see where they are not quite so strong. To be able to say to somebody I realise I am not the greatest preacher and to be able to say that comfortably, without a sense of failure, is an acceptance of self knowledge which can be gained through a properly conducted appraisal. Appraisal should always be handled sensitively by an appropriate person in a safe context.

- Viv: In what way? How could you handle creatively the fact that you are not a good preacher?
- Malcolm: If I can own that comfortably, I will then know that to ask for help is not to admit failure. I will be taking a creative step forward for myself and those I am called to serve. Such a step might involve going to someone and asking for help with my preaching and advice on what books to read. The appraisal scheme opens up the opportunity and makes it acceptable not to have to fulfil the expectations which I have placed upon myself, or which others have placed upon me.
- Viv: We are back to security again, aren't we?
- Malcolm: It really arises out of that. I can live with appraisal, if I am confident that God has called me and that the people of God have affirmed me. It's not about me having to demonstrate that I've got power and leadership.
- Viv: Nor that I've got every gift and no weaknesses. So appraisal links in with the recognition processes which bring the affirmation of the wider church, security and the right kind of authority.
- Malcolm: I think that's true and this is what I meant when I spoke earlier of the flow between the corporate and the individual. The Ministry Department in that sense represents the churches which are the body working with the individual, to enable him/her to lead comfortably and with confidence without the need to dominate.

*Malcolm Goodspeed is the Secretary for Ministry and Vivienne Lassetter the Ministries Adviser of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.*





# Associating - Some Reflections from the Yorkshire Experience

I begin with a confession - this article has been requested for some considerable time. I have pleaded overwork, and the Editor has shown the same forbearance, infinite patience, and kindness with me as he did when I was his Student Assistant many years ago. The result is that now I find myself writing on the eve of the publication of the Report of the Associating Task Group, knowing a little about its thinking but waiting for it with a mixture of eager anticipation and a certain existential dread!

It all began with a genuine puzzlement on the Editor's part on hearing different views of the effectiveness of the Yorkshire Baptist Association. And immediately there is the first problem in discussing Associations (though I prefer to discuss the active word associating). An individual Association cannot possibly be equally effective in the view of the wide diversity of churches and individual leaders which make up an Association like ours. One church's view of 'visionary leadership' is anathema to another. Our understandings of the nature of mission and mission strategy reflect differing priorities. Definitions of what constitutes 'Spirit-filled worship' are also widely diverse and perhaps it is only people in my position who pick up the full range of all this as I travel round the churches and lead worship in many of them. We still have a wider variety in our life together as Baptists than many are prepared to recognise.

All this does not mean, I hope, that in Association life we go for some kind of 'lowest common denominator'. We have tried hard to avoid this in recent years, preferring to plan events and strategies which I know will not find favour with everyone but which will hopefully touch the lives and concerns of the majority of our churches somewhere. But I have to say that in my experience we are becoming less tolerant of one another. There is a splintering of associating going on, sometimes born out of frustration and impatience, but often in my view unnecessary. If only we would learn to listen to and appreciate one another and see what we can learn from each other's gifts and insights!

And of course to begin to talk about Associations in general means immediately having to qualify which Association you mean. Quite frankly I do not recognise the picture of associating which is sometimes presented to me, and that is not to say that I do not recognise some of the weaknesses in my own situation. But the challenge for those who are charged with bringing proposals for the reform of associating is to find a way forward which will

bring about necessary change without imposing a dull uniformity and losing many good features of existing association life. Increasingly I have seen the Yorkshire Baptist Association as a Resource Centre for local churches. This is reflected in the YBA Mission Statement which was adopted a few years ago. The Yorkshire Baptist Association exists:

- to awaken and stimulate among the churches the greatest possible activity in evangelism, Christian social action and growth in Christian discipleship;
- to make resources available to the churches in all aspects of church life;
- to cultivate a closer co-operation among the churches in mutual; encouragement, fellowship, sharing in and giving to God's mission and advancing His Kingdom in the world;
- to be a channel for ecumenical co-operation in mission wherever possible.

### Resources for Mission

I am more and more convinced that mission programmes organised by the Association are not the most effective way to encourage and sustain mission in the local church. If we are honest the three-year traditional programmes of the preparation - mission - follow-up type have not been nearly as successful as we would like to think by any yardstick. In the YBA we recognised this some years ago by changing the job description of our Missioner to include half his time for up to six months spent working in depth with a local church or group of churches. This quickly proved to be the right move. In several instances the church concerned has been enabled to recover its vision and to move forward with new leadership at the end of this period. At present our missioner Stan Woods is working in this way with a new congregation which he was instrumental in planting.

This concern to resource the mission of the local church is also reflected in the Mission Strategy which we have recently adopted which is based on the recent thinking of Robert Warren and others about the Missionary Congregation. This too recognises the ineffectiveness of the kind of local church mission strategy which consists only of the 'special' programmes of mission for which we go into a different gear for a while, then return to the way we were before. Our Association Missionary Congregation strategy is quite simply 'that each member church become, in a way appropriate to its social and cultural setting, a missionary congregation'. It recognises the importance of the local church being 'missionary in everything it does'. It challenges churches to simplify their church structures in order to release more and more members into front-line mission. It sees the development of genuine koinonia and community, so often stuck at the level of 'warm fellowship', as a vital part of a local congregation's witness. And at the heart of it all lies a concern for a renewed

spirituality of the local church, reflected every time the church gathers together for worship.

As an Association we have set ourselves the challenge of resourcing this vision by:

- encouraging informal networks of prayer and support between churches;
- providing opportunities for leaders to share vision, experience and mutual support for one another;
- encouraging and resourcing new ways of mission, offering an evaluation of church life in terms of working alongside local congregations to articulate a missionary vision;
- considering how the financial resources of the denomination can be best used to finance the missionary congregation;
- continuing to develop a strategy for the best use of our church buildings for mission.

In all this we are conscious that the Association itself must be open to change if it means it is better able to carry out this kind of resourcing. And we hope to carry out some of the above in partnership with other groups such as the Northern Mainstream Leaders' Meetings, and the excellent Course in Evangelism and Church Planting, operating in the North and Midlands within which we are an active partner.

### Resources for Ministry

Over ten years ago, we produced *A Strategy for Yorkshire* in which we expressed the hope that every member church could have some kind of pastoral oversight within the next few years. With the enthusiasm and help of our then Area Superintendent, this was achieved in a remarkably short time. As a result a variety of leadership patterns now exists in our churches. It also means that we have a comparatively high number of full-time ministers, considering that we are an association of mainly small to medium-sized congregations. We receive a significant number of Home Mission grants for local churches, and recently we have been trying to establish definite criteria for supporting Home Mission applications. The Association has made Pastoral Aid grants available for churches which need to pay the expenses of a lay pastor but do not qualify for Home Mission help. We have pioneered several experiments in leadership, some of which have been successful whereas in others we have had to learn from our mistakes. As I write, the Association has begun a partnership with one of its churches to support a volunteer missionary couple from the USA International Mission Board to work with one of our housing estate churches in Leeds.

Overall we would agree with the thrust of the *Transforming Superintendency* Report that there must be someone at regional level whose prime concern is

the support and encouragements of local leaders.....but does it necessarily have to be the person we call the Superintendent?

### Resources for Buildings

There is no doubt that it is great advantage to our Association that we are the Custodian Trustee of almost all our churches. It enables us to have the kind of integrated strategy which sees buildings as tools for mission and seeks to make local help with buildings readily available. It may well be that we could administer this differently to release those like myself called to ministry in the Associations. But I believe that with the help of the dedicated team of legal and property professionals we have in the YBA, and indeed in the other Trust Corporations, we are able to deliver the kind of support and advice that is just not possible from a national office.

### Resources for Local Associating

Five years ago we carried out a reorganisation of our Association which simplified our structures, encouraged the creation of task-oriented, rather than representative groups, and introduced greater flexibility into our life generally. One of the 'planks' of this was the encouragement of small groups of churches to associate together for prayer, mutual encouragement, and the sharing of resources for mission. Here lies our greatest failure and our biggest challenge for the future. The YBA is divided into seven Districts whose life in many cases had become little more than a quarterly business meeting. We encouraged the doing away of these and the creation of District Teams to give leadership to the churches. This has only been partially successful, and there is no doubt in my mind that we need to find another way to associate together as small groups of churches. Perhaps the BMS Mission Link Groups provide a model in some cases. This though is something which I am hoping the Task Group on Associating has as an urgent priority.

This is not to say that there are not some excellent examples of good associating going on in our area. It happens not only with other Baptists, but both ecumenically and with some of the newer churches. But as I mentioned earlier, there is also a splintering of associating taking place, partly based on the view that a local church can only associate effectively with other like-minded churches. At a recent Mainstream Leaders' day David Coffey challenged that view and talked about the riches which we can share with one another from different perspectives. It would be sad if local associating became a gathering of the like-minded which ignored the needs of other congregations in need of help and encouragement.

### The key to effective resourcing - collaborative ministry

I have tried to share some of our experience of Associating in Yorkshire and how I believe the Association should be seen as a regional resource centre for the churches. Much of what we have been able to do over the last decade or so has been made possible because of a strong commitment to collaborative ministry through the Association Team. This consists of Superintendent, Association Minister-Secretary, Missioner, Youth Co-ordinator, BMS Co-ordinator and others who from time to time have had an association-wide ministry. We meet regularly for prayer, the study of God's word, and to do some overall thinking and planning about associating in our area. Increasingly our experience has been that for the sake of the life and mission of the churches distinctions created by job descriptions have become blurred at the edges. We have had more of a sense of using our complementary gifts to ensure that leadership is given in different areas. So we have provided 'cover' for one another from time to time without worrying about whether this is a 'superintendency' issue or an 'association' one. So long as the necessary giftings are covered by a regional team, should we worry about who is leading on a particular issue?

### The Future

Based on our experience I believe that it is such regional teams which provide the best way forward in the leadership, encouraging and resourcing of associating. They need to be appointed and confirmed by a genuine partnership of Union, Association and local churches where no one group seeks to have overall control. I believe that the priority of such teams must be threefold:

- the support and encouragement of leaders;
- the resourcing of the mission of local congregations;
- the encouragement of local associating so that no congregation feels isolated.

Meanwhile I await the Report of the Task Group on Associating .....

*Tony Peck is the Minister-Secretary of The Yorkshire Baptist Association*



and stopped teaching in an inner-city boys comprehensive with a 45% ethnic minority population, I only then started to be prayed for at the church missionary prayer meeting.

At Teddington we have been working hard to break the barriers between 'everyday' life and the church. At one service people were asked to write down what they did to serve the local community. All the pieces of paper were placed in front of the communion table, and as we broke bread together we sought to acknowledge the service of the body of Christ that they represented. But when I read the pieces of paper after the service, it was fascinating how many had limited their answers to those things they did in and through the church. It is very easy to encourage others to equate service for the Lord with service for the church when the church is the focus for our own ministry. I understand the longing 'for Church to be a place where life is lived to the full...' but I long even more for church to resource its members to live life to the full whenever, wherever.

The split thinking cripples our understanding of sharing the gospel in two ways. Because church is the focus of our spiritual life, and because faith is largely thought of as our mental assent to a set of doctrines, then evangelism is seen as something we have to 'go out' and do in order to encourage people to 'come in'. And when they 'come in', we have to arrange our activities and our services in order to 'present' the gospel. Apart from the fact that church is often the major stumbling-block to faith, we must also recognise the force of the research that showed that the way people come to faith crucially affects the way they live their faith. So someone converted through the methods described above will largely understand their faith in terms of intellectual acceptance of doctrinal truth, and their life of faith as being mostly about the kind of spiritual activities experienced and talked about in church.

Please don't misunderstand me. I have just been tremendously encouraged to have heard of someone coming to faith in Christ through our Alpha course. It is precisely because I care deeply about people's eternal destiny that I am concerned about this false division between evangelism and social action. My fear is that if evangelism is defined as being the process by which we seek to bring people to faith in Christ, then the division is actually counter-productive. The key is love. The good news is the good news of God's love. People respond to that love as they experience that love. And we all know that for love to be real it has to be demonstrated as well as proclaimed - and love does not make a calculated choice; it simply generates both, naturally and enthusiastically. Just as problems arise in marriage if there are words with no action, or even action with no words, so it is in our witness to the truth of the gospel. If we are as leaders to liberate our churches into mission, we have to

allow the Spirit of God to liberate the love of God to flow into our own lives, the lives of our congregations and the life of our churches so that it overflows into all areas of life, to all the people we meet, into the fabric of our community.

Love is not calculating. It is not a means to an end. So it will not set up a mother and toddlers group in the church, and then talk about closing it down because none of the mothers have been converted. I have had people insist to me that evangelism must be of prime importance because of its eternal significance. I then discover that in addition to talking to their own children about Jesus, they have also fed them three times a day, sent them to the best school, called a doctor when they are ill - and they have not had to calculate this holistic approach to life; they have simply loved their children. God loved the world so much he did not engage in an evangelistic project, he gave his son - who 'went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every kind of disease and sickness.' Sadly, it is often assumed that arguing for wholeness is arguing against the proclamation of the gospel. Far from it! Just as we can cripple our 'evangelism' by limiting it to proclamation, so we can cripple our 'social action' by limiting it to demonstration. The Holy Spirit's power to transform individual lives through faith in Christ is crucial to positive lasting change in a community.

In my travels around the world to see Tear Fund partners at work, I have discovered the Holy Spirit does liberate Christian leaders into expressing the love of God in demonstrating and proclaiming the gospel. Tear Fund, uniquely among relief agencies, is committed to working in partnership with evangelical Christians overseas for precisely this reason. We want the hungry to be fed and to have the opportunity to come to faith in Christ. Justice for the poor is working to end their oppression and helping them to hear good news to the poor. We want the needy to discover the love of God for themselves in the way they are treated by Christians and in the message they receive from Christians. We believe in life after death and life before death! We are not ashamed to identify with those who echo St Francis and say they preach the gospel at all times and when necessary they use words; which means that we want to work with those who believe that Jesus is the only way, and are not ashamed to say so. In Sri Lanka, for example, it means working with a project established by an evangelical Christian to provide employment for local youths, which saw many of them making a profession of faith in Christ, and which brought the local Buddhist and Catholic priests together to organise opposition.

Michael Taylor, recently of Christian Aid, points out in his excellent and provocative book *Good for the Poor* that good development practice demands listening to the poor, whereas traditionally, mission has demanded that the



poor listen to the missionary. But while it is vital to feel the challenge of this tension - which applies just as much to our interaction with our community here in Britain - I do not think we have to share Michael Taylor's conclusion: 'Any insistence that good development must in the end involve not just a concern for the human spirit as well as for our material needs, but also the acceptance of a particular (Christian) faith pays little respect to the high value we have placed on moral creative beings creating their own values...' Rather, taking care to act in humility and love, we demonstrate what Roy McCloughry helpfully calls 'proper confidence' in the gospel and speak its truth in love. I care passionately about this. The split thinking about evangelism and social action leads to thinking there is no difference in the way Christians and non-Christians do 'social action'. So Oxfam, Save the Children, Christian Aid, Tear Fund - surely they are all the same? The hungry need food, so what difference does it make who feeds them? Should evangelical Christians care about which relief and development agency they choose to express their concern?

Perhaps a story can make the point.

The Nigeria/Biafra civil war was at its height. Relief supplies were beginning to arrive in Biafra, but food was disappearing and not reaching those in the most need. A Scripture Union worker was asked if he could supply a number of incorruptible young men to oversee the distribution. He asked a group of Christian students, who responded with dedicated service in the face of horrendous suffering. In refugee camps, with people facing starvation, they found there was also a deep spiritual hunger. 'People would immediately leave the food and crowd around us... As we started talking about the love of God... many just wanted to give their lives to him in a wonderful way... I was convinced that in those camps where people were being taught to trust in the Lord, that the food went much further! The difference between camps where the gospel was taught and where there weren't Christian leaders was quite marked.'

If, as leaders, we are to 'prepare God's people for works of service' (Ephesians 4: 12) then let's work hard to find ways to liberate the love of God in the power of the Spirit. Then the good news of Jesus, the only way, will be seen so clearly in the life that he brings that words will be demanded to articulate his truth.

*Stephen Rand is Communications Director of Tear Fund and serves as an elder at Teddington Baptist Church.*

# LIBERATING LEADERSHIP

At the end of 1996 I retired as chair of the Evangelical Alliance Younger Leaders' Group. No-one pushed me, but once I was forty I wanted to make space for the next generation. I was therefore absolutely delighted when Heather Evans agreed to be the next chair. The younger leaders' group was set up in response to a crisis of double ageism in our culture. In business, people are increasingly considered past it once they are in their mid-forties, unless of course they are senior directors. The old pattern for redundancies was last in, first out. The new consensus is that you keep the young managers - lean, hungry and relatively cheap - while those beyond a certain age are expendable. In the last decade most churches will have needed to provide pastoral support for at least one person in their mid fifties who may never work again.



As Kingdom people we surely need to cry out against the absurdities and injustice of ageism in the workplace. When experience and loyalty count for nothing, a company rejects its most important asset: the people in whom it has invested, who have served faithfully over many years. To reject workers simply on grounds of their age is as deeply unacceptable as racism and sexism. The church must not compromise with the ageism of our society, but we should constantly re-affirm the respect due to older generations and the invaluable contribution that can be made by those in their fifties, sixties and beyond. Indeed, some churches are already enjoying the benefits of those taking early retirement who are able to serve the church and the community, sometimes with little or no need for financial support.

At the same time we need to come to terms with the reality that there are now two generations living beyond retirement. First there are the elderly, who often need practical care and support and who still enjoy traditional daytime midweek meetings. Their children are the young retired, who often have no desire whatsoever to be called "elderly" or "old". Their lives are active, and the fortunate among them have a reasonable income no longer constrained by the costs of a mortgage and children. The younger retired are likely to want to make an entirely different contribution to church life and are extremely unlikely to be interested in our traditional midweek activities for the elderly. They want to be active and participatory, not a passive audience for a cosy preacher. Ignored or even despised by our society, the pre-retired and young retired can provide a gold mine of resources for leadership. We owe it to the church to release these resources for effective service.

There is, however, an equal and opposite ageism at work among Christians. While some are doubtless infected by the prevailing prejudices of our society - the cult of youth and anorexic beauty - in most churches the marginalised generations are under forty. All too often we patronize the young - and even the not so young - patting them on the back while bemoaning the fact that "We can't find any young people these days with leadership ability." Those in their twenties are given great responsibility at work while the church offers them trivial and marginal tasks. In many churches Jesus could never have become a deacon or elder because he was crucified before he was old enough to be considered eligible for leadership.

Sometimes we are threatened by the young - perhaps they will do so well that no one will want our contribution any more. Sometimes we are impatient of their naive enthusiasm and boundless energy. Sometimes we wince at their lack of diplomatic skills and tact. The trouble is that once leaders have learned how to influence people through less abrasive means we have often begun to run out of steam, losing the drive and adventurous vision of the days of our youth. Many churches reflect this double ageism when they produce a job description for a new minister - he or she should be over thirty five and under fifty five. Now if churches really believe that ministry is a twenty year vocation they should presumably be paying people accordingly, contributing generously to an early retirement fund so that ministers can be put out to pasture in their mid fifties without the prospect of prolonged impecunity. If we think this preference voiced by many churches is nothing more than an ageist prejudice, then we should say so, and advise churches that we expect them to take very seriously all candidates, irrespective of their generation.

Within the local church, a number of initiatives can be set up to develop emerging leaders. First, we can emphasise the value of a multi-generational leadership team, encouraging serious consideration of those in their twenties and thirties. Second, we can ensure that opportunities are provided for people to develop leadership skills - for example by working on teams for short term projects. Third, we can provide opportunities for developing preachers, whether on Sundays or during an Alpha Course. When a minister is doing all the preaching at their church it seems to me less a tribute to their giftedness than an indictment of their possessiveness. How *will* we grow tomorrow's preachers unless we give them opportunities! Fourth, we can explore training and mentoring opportunities, so that we not only seek to impart skills and experience, but also give people an opportunity to "shadow" existing leaders, learning from them in an apprenticing relationship, just as Jesus not only conveyed teaching but also shared his life with those he sought to develop as leaders.

As a denomination, larger issues are raised. We need to ask searching

questions about the age at which people train for ministry. I remember talking with one man who spent three years at college and then about five years in ministry before retirement. I am unable to see how a three year course is cost effective at that stage of life. Those beyond a certain age need an express route into ministry. At the other end of the age scale, we have to ask why those in their early twenties are not coming forward for ministry. I was told recently that the average age of students at our colleges is about 38. There is much to affirm in the value of people coming to ministry as a second career, bringing with them their experience of a more typical workplace. But we surely also need to recover the value of a lifelong vocation. Are younger men and women not applying because they think the churches won't accept their ministry? Or is our image as Baptists too old-fashioned, middle aged and safe for those in their early twenties to take us seriously as the denominational context for their ministry? Statistical analysis has revealed that most ministers reach people within ten years of their own age. If we are unable to recruit younger leaders and ministers, we are unlikely to produce missionary congregations that are effective in reaching those in their twenties - already the least reached generation of them all at the end of the twentieth century.

We also need to ask serious questions about the age profile of delegates to the Assembly and of BU Council. We need to continue to encourage and persuade churches to provide a younger delegate, say under 35. In turn this means that the style of the Assembly must continue to be overhauled - both the worship and the meetings. Although great strides have been made in recent years, it remains far too old fashioned. I dread to imagine what would happen if we had a sudden influx of younger delegates without radically reforming the culture of the event.

As to BU Council, I would like to see an annual public listing of the members, with an analysis by age, gender and ethnic origin. We should then actively encourage a much better and more representative spread in future. We need to make space in our governing bodies for the voice and representation of those in their twenties and thirties. Of course, more searching questions still must be asked about Council: the total number of members is excessive, the number of supporting committees has proliferated like bindweed, the cost in travel expenses and distribution of paperwork has spiralled far too high. A radically slimmed down committee structure with a radically slimmed down Council would be a wise and strategic preparation for the new millennium, rigorously minimising our administration costs in order to maximize our investment in mission through the local church.

In personal terms, I am exploring two initiatives to give younger leaders a voice. I plan to launch with a publishing house a new library of books by

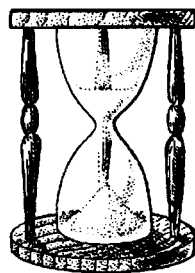
"leaders of the new millennium", giving them a platform and helping them to be heard. I will also be launching a leadership programme on Premier Radio. One of my stipulations is that, alongside a guest list of the usual suspects we will endeavour to include younger leaders, empowering their contribution and believing in their insights. If we really believe in leadership development, we must not only provide training and support, but also make space and create opportunities so that their emerging ministries can be maximised. True greatness in leadership is not to look back and congratulate ourselves that no one in the next generation could ever replace us, but rather to look upon the next generation's contribution and congratulate ourselves that we have released into ministry those who can excel in ways far beyond our own abilities. We urgently need to invest in third millennium Christian leaders.

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## **Trends in Ministry as the C21st approaches**

At the 1997 Baptist Ministers' Fellowship (BMF) Pastoral Session in London a questionnaire was launched with the help of the speaker on that occasion, the Principal of Spurgeon's College, and Mainstream Council of Reference member Revd Dr Michael Quicke. The questionnaire was also reproduced in the July 1997 issue of the 'Journal' the quarterly magazine of the Fellowship. What follows are some of the responses to seven of the forty or so questions contained in the questionnaire. These are the questions that impact most immediately on some of the issues before us as a denomination in 1997: appraisal and mentoring; Transforming Superintendency with its strong emphasis on the care of ministers and of local churches by the Supers and Regional Team; the Review of the Colleges and - for those of us committed to this way of supporting each other within the Baptist Ministry - the future role of the BMF itself. The returned questionnaires will be fully processed next by Bill Allen of Spurgeon's College in time for the 1998 Pastoral Session. What follows, then, should be considered as an interim report. No attempt has been made to quantify the responses in percentage terms. Less than a hundred questionnaires were returned - more than one Minister complained of review-weariness! - making that method less difficult but also less reliable. Rather, the replies below have all been lifted directly from the questionnaires and are



offered here with the minimum of comment. Though some comes later! For convenience the replies have also been listed in four groupings: Ministers in their 20s and 30s; 40s; 50s & early 60s and retired Ministers.

The questions referred to in this summary are :

Why are you in ministry today?

In what ways do you think appraisal / mentoring might help you?

What are the dominant trends in the church & ministry for you at the present time?

What concerns do you have about ministry in the local church?

What do you think were the major omissions in your ministerial education and training?

How might the BMF provide for future requirements for ministry?

### **Ministers in their 20s and 30s**

*Why are you in ministry today?* Many of the answers duplicate across all the groupings here e.g. 'I was called by God and in the main enjoy the work' ... 'The call of God' .... 'Still feel called'.... 'The most useful way of spending my life' ... 'To help people live in God and know God better'

*In what ways do you think appraisal / mentoring might help you?* 'It will keep me focused on agreed tasks'... 'It will help me towards an objective assessment of self'... 'Who will set the agenda?'.... 'Personal choice of someone you trust is better'... 'It will encourage the setting of personal and church goals' .... 'It has helped me in the past and does so now'.... 'There must be follow-up support as well or it will do harm'.... 'A positive way to evaluate my ministry' .... 'I already do this annually'.

*What are the dominant trends in the church & ministry for you at the present time?* 'The Holy Spirit's fullness'... 'Teams in larger churches' ... 'Smaller churches are being squeezed'... 'The absence of people in inner city churches'.... 'Ecumenism'... 'Community involvement'.... 'Seeking to develop missionary congregations despite the apathy'... 'Too many reviews!'....'Changing worship styles'... 'Seeking to develop creativity in mission'.... 'The need to challenge understandings of success based on numbers'... 'Pan-evangelicalism'... 'The death of Sunday'.... 'Worshippers who will not become members'..... 'The struggle to fill leadership gaps'.... 'The decline of midweek activities in favour of Sundays'... 'People will commit to God but not to structures or organisations.'

*What concerns do you have about ministry in the local church?* 'Ministry is becoming too expensive for the smaller church'... 'Insularity'... 'Lack of administrative help and resources'...'Inherited workaholic models of ministry'... 'The spirit of the age - individualism'.... 'The understanding of what ministry is can be poor' .... 'Too leadership-centred' ... 'Stresses on my family without support'

*What do you think were the major omissions in your ministerial education and training?* 'Counselling'... 'Management of Resources' ... 'Conflict

management' .... 'Spirituality and spiritual direction'... 'Self-awareness stuff'... 'Conflict resolution' .... 'Making things happen' .... 'Practical church administration'.... 'Children's spirituality' ... 'Retreat days'... 'Managing volunteers'. Editor's Note. These replies varied according to College and, of course, the years of training. The nature and content of College courses are under almost constant review these days. It is suggested then that these comments be used as checklist for College syllabuses today rather than as stones to throw at them as it were then!

*How might the BMF provide for future requirements for ministry?* 'Provide local spiritual directors' ... 'Serve as our voice to the Ministry Department'... 'Safeguard the rights and welfare of Ministers' ... 'Be more pro-active'... 'More articles in The Journal of news and interest as now'

### Ministers in their 40s

*Why are you in ministry today?* 'I can't do anything else'... 'Ongoing sense of God's call' ... 'God stopped me doing anything else' ... 'What else could I do?' ... 'I am committed to the people of God' ... 'I still feel called and I need to live!'... 'God hasn't let me leave'.

*In what ways do you think appraisal / mentoring might help you?* 'It would make me accountable' ... 'It would have helped in the past but as I approach my 50s I'm not so sure now - the odds are weighed against us anyway' ... 'It terrifies me' ... 'We're under enough pressure already' ... 'It must not be success or failure orientated' ... 'It would provide feedback on self-assessments' ... 'It would make me stop and think' ... 'I would be willing to accept such a pattern whatever it may cost' ... 'It would affirm and encourage greatly' ... 'I would feel too much under scrutiny' ... 'This is the latest buzz word' ... 'The mentor must understand my local situation'.

*What are the dominant trends in the church & ministry for you at the present time?* 'Friendship evangelism' ... 'Introspection, insularity and individualism' ... 'Survival!' ... 'More internationalism is needed' ... 'The church attracts more and more hurting people' ... 'A success orientation' ... 'The latest moves of the Spirit become old-hat very quickly' ... 'Superficiality and Apathy' ... 'More relevant worship' ... 'Too much paperwork and administration' ... 'Lack of spirituality' ... 'The importance of a properly professional approach to ministry'.

*What concerns do you have about ministry in the local church?* 'Increasing social mobility' ... 'How to prioritize time' ... 'Church is seen as an option or bolt-hole only' ... 'People's unreasonable expectations' ... 'My energies all go into coping' ... 'The pressures of a declining church and denomination' ... 'Attitudes of succeed or leave' ... 'Finances are tight' ... 'More team ministry is needed' ... 'Training in evangelism is very difficult' ... 'Ageing congregations' ... 'Finance in rural and inner city churches' ... 'Consumer attitudes'

*What do you think were the major omissions in your ministerial education and training?* 'Practical help e.g. with preparing funerals and weddings' ... 'Training in counselling' ... 'Management skills' ... 'Local church politics' ... 'Small group work' ... 'Interpersonal skills' ... 'Leading a team composed of professionals and volunteers' ... 'Managing limited finances' ... 'Building management' ... 'Time management' ... 'Spiritual direction'.

*How might the BMF provide for future requirements for ministry?* 'Good publications to stimulate thought' ... 'Be involved in discussions about the form appraisals might take' ... 'Area Training Days' ... 'Closer ties with local Ministers' ... 'Encourage networking and run appraisal schemes' ... 'Encourage excellence in ministry'.

### **Ministers aged 50-65**

*Why are you in ministry today?* 'I love it' ... 'The call is still real' ... 'The challenge and privilege of serving' ... 'God has kept me there'.

*In what ways do you think appraisal / mentoring might help you?* 'It must not be a threat' ... 'It does help greatly' ... 'It will help to get out of ruts if it is coupled with appropriate in-service training' ... 'It might have helped me years ago' ... 'Some work sheets might help' ... 'Input from trusted colleagues is invaluable' ... 'The local church only should do this with us - with guidance' ... 'It will give an objective assessment of my ministry' ... 'My Senior Friend still provides this' ... 'It will help clarify personal and church objectives and methodology' ... 'No Big Brother please' ... 'It will help to identify training needs' ... 'I am appraised every Sunday by the congregation and regularly by the Deacons' ... 'It would be an immense help to me' ... 'I am sceptical - is this another bandwagon?' ... 'It should be done informally only' ... 'The Area Superintendent or Regional Minister should do it' ... 'Seeing weaknesses and unloading pressures' ... 'It is very important in moving forward in life and ministry' ... 'Not a lot now - I retire in five years' ... 'Better if done by another Minister' ... 'The BMS already do this'.

*What are the dominant trends in the church & ministry for you at the present time?* 'An older congregation with few resources' ... 'Information Technology' ... 'More community involvement' ... 'More bridges to the community, less resources' ... 'Informality of worship' ... 'Older congregations are not engaging with local communities' ... 'Bandwagons that do not last long' ... 'Ecumenism is vital' ... 'World Church consciousness needs developing' ... 'The breakdown of denominations' ... 'Homogenous groups' ... 'Worship is as important as preaching and teaching' ... 'The collapse of women's and youth activities'

*What concerns do you have about ministry in the local church?* 'Not understood' ... 'Meeting financial targets' ... 'Still too one-man orientated' ... 'Involving people' ... 'Dictatorial trends from outside' ... 'Dwindling



congregations which will die' ... 'Serving a disadvantaged community' ... 'The volunteers now are mainly retired people' ... 'Inter-racial issues' ... 'Independence and isolation for other churches' ... 'How will small churches survive?' ... 'There is little interest in training' ... 'Consumerism and the unreasonable expectations it creates' ... 'Backwards and inward-looking churches' ... 'Stress levels in life generally' ... 'Mobility of members' ... 'The high costs of building maintenance' ... 'Lack of conversions' ... 'Lack of commitment' ... 'Too self-centred'.

*What do you think were the major omissions in your ministerial education and training?* 'Management skills' ... 'Hebrew' ... 'Fora for radical praxis' ... 'Dynamics of the local church and of spiritual direction' ... 'People skills' ... 'Rites of Passage training' ... 'Urban ministry' ... 'Stress management' ... 'Change management' ... 'The Holy Spirit' ... 'Culture' ... 'In-service training'.

*How might the BMF provide for future requirements for ministry?* 'Encouragement' ... 'Work with the Ministry Department on in-service training' ... 'A more practical journal' ... 'Convene fraternal in areas where they are dormant' ... 'Ministers' pay matters' ... 'Publication of dates of lectures and courses nationwide' ... 'A monthly newsletter with nationwide news' ... 'Campaign on the wider issues that concern us' ... 'The Pre-Retirement Course' ... 'The Journal articles already help'.

General comment: 'Given my own particular situation with six years of ministry to go before retirement I am especially interested in what can be done to make those last years of ministry as fruitful as possible... Is the idea of a Conference for the many Ministers in their last five/six years of Ministry a pipe-dream?'

### Ministers who are 'retired'

*Why are you in ministry today?* 'The call does not cease on retirement' ... 'God seems to want me to be in ministry still' ... 'God has not yet dismissed me'.

*In what ways do you think appraisal / mentoring might help you?* 'It is always helpful' ... 'Resist the idea' ... 'Might help some but for others it will be a burden and a threat' ... 'I am not sure about this' ... 'By revealing blind-spots and updating' ... 'It frightens me to death - but I might at last be told what the job is really about!' ... 'It might persuade me to retire fully!'

*What are the dominant trends in the church & ministry for you at the present time?* 'Small groups' ... 'I get lost on any computer' ... 'Low standards of preaching and worship' ... 'The loss of dignity' ... 'Team Ministry'.

*What concerns do you have about ministry in the local church?* 'The decline of Sunday Schools' ... 'Ageing Congregations' ... 'World Mission vision is missing' ... 'Insufficient pastoral visiting' ... 'Lack of visionary leadership' ... 'Low levels of worship and preaching' ... 'Multi-faith challenges' ... 'Complacency' ... 'Its decline' ... 'The family comes first mentality'...

'Problems of finance for ordained Ministers'.

*What do you think were the major omissions in your ministerial education and training?* 'Leadership skills' ... 'Too long ago now' ... 'Management skills'.

*How might the BMF provide for future requirements for ministry?*

'You do well' ... 'Train Diaconates on how to encourage and support your Ministers' ... 'Support lady Ministers' ... 'Provide professional study material' ... 'Be there'.

### **Society**

The questionnaire also asked these questions about the contemporary context for Christian leadership: *What features of contemporary Christian Leadership do you feel uneasy about? What trends in society will provide the challenges to ministry in the next five years?*

**Retired:** 'Moral relativism' ... 'Militant Islam' ... 'Multi-faith Britain' ... 'Co-habitation and lesbian and gay rights' ... 'Hostility to Christianity' ... 'Growing materialism' ... 'Human life is being devalued' ... 'The use of drugs' ... 'Money!' ... 'Racism' ... 'Our something for nothing culture' ... 'Abortion' ... 'Modern medical ethics' ... 'New Age' ... 'Post modernism'.

**50-65s :** 'The marginalisation of Christianity' ... 'The acceptance of homosexual practices' ... 'Religious relativism' ... 'Health care for pensioners' ... 'The breakdown of family life' ... 'Violence' ... 'The Media' ... 'NHS cutbacks' ... 'Mental health needs' ... 'Information Technology' ... 'Increased leisure time' ... 'The uncertainties of unemployment' ... 'Fragile family life' ... 'Changing work patterns' ... 'The if it's all right for me it's all right mentality' ... 'The vulnerability of the old' ... 'Education' ... 'Islam' ... 'Stressed Christians' ... 'Divorce and single parents'.

**40s:** 'The poor' ... 'The marginalized' ... 'The intolerance of absolutes' ... 'Cynicism among the young' ... 'Pluralism' ... 'Our pick and mix society' 'Pseudo-spirituality' ... 'The millennium' ... 'Changing ethical standards'

**20-30s:** 'The post-Thatcherite search for spiritual values' ... 'Increased leisure time' ... 'Neo-paganism e.g. the National Lottery' ... 'Political correctness gone berserk' ... 'Lack of community'.

### **How long?**

Perhaps the final section of this summary is the most significant. It paints the backcloth against which liberating and liberated leadership must be practised as the C21st approaches. The importance of our prayers for Revival can only be strengthened by these reminders of the Britain within and to which we minister. The importance of well-trained, well supported and well resourced ministry is once again highlighted by the replies to the 1997 BMF *Trends in Ministry* questionnaire. Appraisal receives a clear if at times cautious welcome

in many of the replies. Many benefits from it are noted alongside some words of warning and even fear. As Malcom Goodspeed works, in the interests of us all on this topic, and as he prepares his report and recommendations for the November 1998 Council, let us remember him in prayer and let us also continue to contribute our views directly to him. These summaries are part of this process of course. The BMF have been concerned in the long quest for an appropriate appraisal scheme for many years already. Perhaps the time for such a scheme across our Baptist Union has at last arrived. I for one hope so and, from many of these replies, it is clear that I am not alone.

*The Transforming Superintendency* recommendations also come back to the March 1998 Council for a long overdue debate. The various replies on trends in local church life and in ministry today found above are surely illuminating in this context. Anyone who has ministered or led in our local churches for even a short period of time will recognise the enormity of the challenges we and our churches face in ministry and mission together. The importance in all of this of proper training, of good encouragement, of pro-active support and of the need for the effective pastoring of our Ministers and other local church leaders cannot be over-emphasised. *Transforming Superintendency* argues that the main priority of the transformed Supers - as part of a regional team - must be support for and encouragement of our National Mission Team, Baptist Ministers. It also argues that support for and encouragement of our National Mission Team front-line units, local churches, must increasingly become the main responsibility of reformed and mission-minded Associations. Put another way more of these at times expensive denominational regional bodies - if they do in the end survive in some form in the third millennium - must exhibit a far more effective and meaningful care for local churches than has sometimes been the case in the 80s and 90s. The tragedy - for example - of smaller Baptist churches with their backs to the wall or closing for lack of leadership is a scandal in our midst as the C21st nears. Many of us - of course - are waiting to see the recommendations of another key review in this context, rushed as it has had to be. That on Associating and Associations.

The BMF questionnaire replies summarized above can only add to the sense of urgency with which the Union must soon debate these two major reports, make decisions and then begin - at last - to act upon them. Pray God it will be in this millennium and not the next!

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# FORMING CHURCH LEADERS IN TODAY'S WORLD

## Some questions for discussion

*This article takes the form of a dialogue between Richard Burfoot a 3rd year church-based ministerial student at Regent's Park College & John Weaver, Tutor in Pastoral Theology at Regent's Park College, Oxford.*

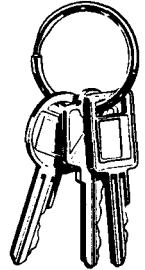
### Introductory Remarks

In answer to the question, *How has ministerial training shaped you?*

#### Richard writes:

- a) It has developed my ability to think on my feet about a wide range of pastoral, ethical and life situations; greatly broadened my understanding of people (not just Christians) and the love that God has for all of humanity; learning not to form judgements hastily.
- b) I can now see God at work in places and situations which beforehand I would never have considered or noticed; it has given me the ability to stand back from life and reflect on the wider picture of what is going on around me, something which I am sure many people miss; along side my greater love for people has come a greater belief both in them as individuals and in their potential.
- c) My understanding and practice of leadership has developed beyond my time at work. I am now able to let people do what they do best. (Still a long way to go!) But sadly, not all has been positive:
- d) I have become very cynical about much that goes on in Baptist life, such as: our individualistic faith and ghetto mentality; the abuse of ministers and their families; our orgasmic, but shallow worship - a reflection perhaps of our shallow spirituality; the dead feel of Association life; and the lack of apparent support after training.

What are we to say in response to these observations? Rightly or wrongly the Church is perceived as playing games. There are the intellectual games of the scholars and theologians; there are the spiritual games of the modern pentecostals; the social games of the comfortable club-minded church goers; the biblical games of some more fundamental evangelical Christians; and the community care games of those whose human compassion has taken precedence over an overt proclamation of the Gospel. And all the time the world has important questions that are in need of answers. There is a clear need for the church to get its act together and to ask the very serious question: What on earth is the church for? There is a great need for the Church to live out its faith and to be able to give Gospel answers, real good news, to a hurting and questioning world. To do this the church must be equipped.



## Questions that need to be asked:

a. For whom are we enabling students in training to minister? - Only about 10% of the population are regular book readers. Terry Dunnell - in '*Christian Education and the Non-Book Culture*', *Viewpoints, Issue 1, 1996*, National Christian Education Council, pp.4-6 - notes that discipleship does not depend on literacy. Before the invention of the printing press the Bible was generally read in community, and the focus of the church was around the altar - symbols and images and the story told in words. Few read for pleasure; as many as 10% may be functionally illiterate; most find the TV more appealing than books. The average USA adult watches 7.5 hours per day and in the UK this figure may be as high as 5 hours per day (Andrew Walker, *Telling the Story*, SPCK, 1996).

So Dunnell asks, how can the Bible continue to be the primary means by which God communicates with people, when their chief source of information is the TV set or the computer?

- \* How important is literacy in our society?
- \* How do people in this very visual age gather the information they need in order to make decisions?
- \* What methods will be most appropriate for evangelizing and discipling non-book people?
- \* How do we bring non-book leadership into the Church?

Richard comments that Christianity has become in some ways an academic faith. This is especially reflected in some ministerial training. Whilst ministerial formation does indeed require academic input, those involved need to be aware of issues of communication, particularly where books are not the main source of information.

b. How well do we know the cultures and "worldviews" of those to whom we minister? - When we speak of a pre-modern society we are safer to talk of an underlying Christian story than of a worldview. It is also dangerous to suggest that many people in our society would hold a scientific rational worldview - in fact this belongs essentially to an intellectual elite.

- \* What sort of God do people believe in? Is he/she/it the "god" of folk religion; superstition; new age; or neo-paganism?
- \* Why are people leaving Christianity? The reasons given are issues of relevance, relationship and leadership rather than belief! (Michael Fanstone, *The Sheep that Got Away*, MARC, 1993) If our ministry concentrates on doctrines of God and Church, we may well find that we are scratching where very few folk are itching!
- \* What are the marks of a secular world? They appear to be materialism, scientism, hedonism, marxism? This has developed out of a reductionist world view, but what does this mean for society? - breakdown, despair, disintegration.

Richard comments that ministerial formation encourages an open mind towards "other" worldviews. If we are to communicate this life-changing message we must be prepared to meet with and listen to people where they are. College does offer some openings in this area, particularly in reflection sessions, where we are faced with other views and opinions about faith and life. This allows students to ask theological questions and air views about God and his activity in the world, in a "safe" environment. I believe that many in ministry would value this.

c. Where is the place for training and what part should colleges play? - The temptation for churches to favour maintenance rather than mission is always a danger, especially when numbers are falling. We are faced with the problem of producing leaders for the existing system, while wanting to advocate a change to that system. There is a tension here and this will be a hard question for the colleges, and indeed the Denomination, to face up to. Paul Mortimore is right to maintain that we urgently need "to encourage a generation of theologians who in appropriate language and styles are able to resource the communities of faith with tools which all God's people can use in the task of theological reflection". (*The Worldly Church*, BU internal paper, 1993).

- \* Can we consider a form of "liberation theology" for the UK, where learning and equipping for mission and ministry takes place alongside daily work and family duties, and where theology is developed through reflection on experience and scripture?
- \* Should congregations and Associations be encouraged to establish communities of learning, providing appropriate contexts and means through which training, resourcing and support may be offered?
- \* How should we meet the clear need for the training that exists in the urban situation, ministering with the poor of society (especially in seeking justice for the powerless), the youth culture, and ethnic minorities/majorities?

Richard comments that colleges which train academics alone are more likely to produce ministers who miss the cultural mark! There is a need to equip ministers to enable people to reflect theologically upon their own findings in life and not upon those pushed at them by a minister, whose worldview is likely to be quite different.

d. How important is it for trainers to be practitioners? - In the last half century there has been a growing rediscovery of the church as a community; a biblical concept of co-operation and working together. The more general use of phrases such as the Body of Christ, body ministry, fellowship and the priesthood of all believers, has underlined "lay" involvement in the mission and ministry of the church. With this has come

the recognition of the need for training. Such training is an integral part of being a disciple, and should best take place in the context of the local church, drawing on the experience of those who would be trained. For this to take place in many churches there will have to be a paradigm shift in understanding of education and leadership. Edward Farley (*Theologia - the Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, Fortress Press, 1983) states that the laity cannot be theologically educated because theology means a cluster of studies pertinent to the church's leadership. As long as this mind-set prevails, theological education must remain an enterprise of seminaries, not churches. It is important that those who are involved in teaching in our colleges are themselves practitioners. We look for a community of faith that functions as a redemptive community in and for the world. This is the place where Christians learn their discipleship and learn to relate their faith to their life and work. Doing theology is the ability to engage in a living dialogue between contemporary issues in faith and the witness of Scripture and church tradition. To do this we will need to help teachers/leaders to be open to the experience of their students/ congregation and to know that they are also learners.

Richard comments that in college students are often encouraged to "read" theology, whereas in the churches we must enable people to "do" theology - a practice whereby faith and life meet on the same road and find a workable interpretation and framework within which to live.

- e. What are appropriate methods of teaching and learning? - How do adults learn? In what ways do we enjoy learning? A Chinese proverb says: I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand

What important things have you learned in your life? How did you learn them? From whom did you learn them? What enabled you to learn? What sort of teachers are we?

- \* Does the lecture system provide the right model for ministerial students to follow?
- \* Can Distance Learning provide a helpful style of learning for would-be church leaders?
- \* How do we ensure that students learn to be open to the experience of others?

Richard comments that church-based training at Regent's does work, and that future training might be predominantly church-based, with the colleges providing the place to which the students return to reflect upon their experiences and practices. This pattern of experience-analysis-reflection-action is best grounded in the daily experience and practice of the community of faith.

Thus college plays a secondary, though vital, place in the process of formation.

### **Where do we go from here?**

Richard comments that being a church-based student (RIPT - two days per week in College, with the rest of the time based at a church) has given him the ability to listen to varying views on life and theology without immediately making value judgements. The support of the RIPT student group and the opportunity for reflection upon the outworking of the Gospel has been invaluable in his formation as a minister. He says, "the model of experience, reflection, action etc has begun to permeate my whole way of being! (Yes, I hear you cry .... a convert!)"

From the viewpoint of a tutor these are encouraging words; the heart of ministerial/church leadership formation is the development of people who listen to others, and value others for the gifts and abilities that God has given to them. The gift of Christ through the Spirit is the appointment of those who will equip all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12). We will prepare ministers who are: enablers, encouragers, trainers, open to people, and open to their community, as well as being communicators and preachers of the Gospel. In the same way as the BMS provides orientation-training for new missionaries, we encourage ministers to spend the first weeks of their ministry in a new church listening to the church's story; the community's story; the stories of individual church members; and learning the language and culture of the area. We need to listen to all the questions raised in the preceding paragraphs and consider how they might be addressed through training. Is it possible, for example, to fully prepare students through a college-based course?

We might note - if you will excuse a brief self-compliment - that the mixed nature of the community at Regent's is an asset in training. Ministerial students have an opportunity to be in college with those who are at various stages in their understanding of the Christian faith, and who are studying a range of subjects. These members of the community will pose a variety of questions and share different insights that come from their own growth in understanding. In addition the ministerial group listen to each other's stories and learns from each other's experience. The Centre for the Study of Christianity and Culture attached to the College helps this sharing process, through both formal lecture series and through more informal evenings, where students and tutors share aspects of culture that appeal to them. Alan Kreider, the Centre director, has set up a project for tutors and students to spend time listening and sharing experiences and insights with a group from the congregation of John Bunyan Church, Cowley. It is hoped that this will help us all to recognise the rich experiences of life and faith that are available to us through the lives of others, and to begin to understand the variety of cultures



that will face us in our involvement in Christ's mission in the world.

Go with the people.

Live with them.

Learn from them.

Love them.

Start with what they know.

Build with what they have.

But of the best leaders when the job is done, the task accomplished,  
the people will all say,

"We have done this ourselves."

Lao Tsu (China 700BC)

*Richard Burfoot is a third year church-based ministerial student at Regent's Park College and minister-elect of Chalford Baptist Chapel, near Stroud. John Weaver is the Tutor in Pastoral Theology at Regent's Park College, Oxford and a former chairperson of Mainstream.*

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## Letters from Readers



I'm taking the Editor's hint and responding to the stimulating article in the Mainstream magazine of September 1997, comprised of the deliberations of ABY. I thought many keen observations were made and many interesting suggestions posited. I do, however, have to comment (perhaps not surprisingly?) on the final part of the article, entitled "Practical Problems of a National Eldership".

My first challenge to those responsible for the article would be regarding the basic assumption that, for an Eldership to function, there must be enough people to geographically cover the country, a kind of Baptist peripatetic pastoral hit-squad! Surely Eldership is based on anointing, calling and gifting and has as its prime purpose the spiritual and

visionary oversight of those under its care. It is not about enough bodies to be available to cover every situation. When I was National Director of YFC we had a small Leadership Team called, we believed, of God and responsible for visionary, caring oversight. The vision then spread to other responsible leaders in regional, area and local settings. The great strength lay in the fact that, whilst local interpretation of vision differed (as so it should), there was a recognisable, uniting vision nationwide. Surely no-one in their right mind would advocate "... National Leaders build(ing) up significant knowledge and understanding of the areas to enable them to initiate a church-planting strategy", to quote the article?

The article then goes on to state, "Therefore, the answer as to what is the best way to co-ordinate a church supporting and planting strategy seems to lie more at Association level". But that's exactly the point!

It's not happening effectively at that level! Hence one of the reasons for needing a National Eldership/Leadership! My second challenge then follows from that. It lies in this thought that, if we all became involved in our Associations, the Associations would change, and then maybe everything would start to work out right. That seems to me to smack of the "let's renew the old wineskins" approach. That approach scores highly in the loyalty, courtesy and tradition leagues but doesn't get anywhere near what should surely be the premier league - that of up-to-date, culturally relevant, "white-knuckle", pioneering mission.

All the current discussion on rediscovering associating must take centre stage. If that means that Associations as we know them die, so be it. We will get much further, I believe, if we associate with those other churches whose broad view and ethos of mission is similar to our own. The cause of the Kingdom is crying out for it! New Church streams have demonstrated it. And please hear me carefully here - I'm not advocating an ecclesiastical elite, a kind of Baptist churches Dream Team, where only the big and (seemingly) successful enjoy a privileged togetherness, but rather an associating, a uniting, a standing together of like-minded churches, small and larger, mutually accountable, helping each other and fighting on the same side. *That* would need regional and area co-ordination, but would only have real strength if relating to a National

Eldership/Leadership so that there was a nationwide vision with nationwide Baptist values. Maybe such a movement could even become, in the enemy's eyes, "Terrible, as an army with banners". May it be so!

*Rob White*

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Thank you to Steve Blunden and the ABY Planning Group for an article brimming with ideas, and rooted in a clear passion for a renewed Baptist identity.

I have responded to the Editor's challenge because I agree with the main foundational principle the ABY article is built upon: namely that since it is churches that have been chosen to fulfil Christ's mission, those churches are our source of life and dynamism. The Union exists to support the churches and help them relate together, and in a system such as ours national structures cannot change churches.

The article makes many points that are worthy of prayerful consideration. But it is not yet complete, because it is not true to itself. Whilst pleading with churches to become more vibrant and relevant, and noting that if the Baptist churches do nothing to change themselves changing BU structures will all be futile; the main thrust of the article is upon finding ways of reforming the Baptist Union. So it pleads that the BU communicates better, changes its image, becomes more missionary oriented and spurs us to action more effectively. The truth is that we get the Union we

deserve - indeed we get the Union we really want - because we are the Union. The Staff at Didcot, the Superintendents, the structures are all our servants - and I am tremendously grateful for their energy, their passion and their commitment to our cause. But we can't look to them to change us - even if some of them were to become members of a National Eldership.

And surely it is not better communication or a new image that we need, but a radical refocusing upon our purpose - admirably sketched out in the ABY article. Purpose brings identity - not primarily because of human zeal to fulfil a goal, or even because we are united in the same task - but because it is God's call and purpose we are responding to and it is He who equips us to fulfil it. So it is as we are sold out for The Kingdom that God gives us the Kingdom blessings (Mt 6:33). And the zeal to glorify God and the motivation of love are just two of the supernatural gifts of God.

May I paraphrase two of Steve's comments and then respond to them?

\* Why are today's Christians more aware of the latest goings on at HTB than they are of the excellent information produced by the Union?

\* Never before has the church been so over-equipped, and yet so under-motivated.

I believe that we have not yet understood the lesson the New Churches are teaching us. I fear that our Baptist church life is too caught up in the mentality of "doing things for God and the Church, and trying

our hardest to make sure they are scriptural, loving, planned and coordinated..." rather than seeking His face, His empowering, His supernatural gifting and His blessing. It is His mission, not ours. He prepares his great banquet and beckons us to call others to join Him - but not as servants who have heard there's a good meal down the road. We are servants who have tasted the first fruits and seen that God is good. My sadness is that we are not going to learn these lessons by caricaturing the New Churches in the way this article seems to. It contains a handful of generalised slurs - which in my experience are simply not correct most of the time.

I believe that we need to seek to understand where the new churches are coming from - and recognise that we too have been there in our distant past. For example, it is true that the New Church leaders I know and fellowship with are full of what God is doing in their churches and their streams. But that is precisely because in their passion to see God's primary purpose fulfilled they have returned to God again and again and He has blessed them so that they might be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3). We should not be threatened by their confidence in Him. It is also true that they have sought the blessing of God - but to treat this so dismissively and say it has produced little real action is not fair. So often God has given them something life-changing to share because they have sought Him for it. And many of them are not as over-equipped, and under-motivated as

some of us precisely because they are prepared to trust God to use them as people who demonstrate the power of the Word rather than just big words and great learning (1 Cor 2:1-5).

I thank the ABY for their article, and for their Leaders who have clearly put a great deal of thought into it. I also feel for them in their pain at the loss of one of their leaders to New Frontiers. But I implore them not to let that disappointment become a resentment that obscures the lessons we Baptists can learn from the New Church groupings. I know that they have faults, just as we do. But please let's not write off others simply because they don't do things the way we do. Let's look to the Purpose that unites us as brothers and sisters in Christ - and be resolved to learn all we can from each other.

*Craig Millward*

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"Championing a Baptist Future",  
Issue 60 I believe that Steve Blunden's article may help us in considering the future development of Mainstream itself. Steve is suspicious of New Churches, partly because he has seen people leave to join them. Let's not forget that the reverse is also true and some (including myself) have moved the other way. However, I believe that we can learn from them, particularly in the development of regional leaderships whose task is to support and encourage local congregations. They have also found it much easier to motivate their congregations to support the wider church network. Steve may be right to note that these networks are smaller than the BU but

that may also be a key to their success.

Steve noted reluctance in our churches to participate, something which most of us will relate to. However, progress is possible. Here in South London a few local Baptist churches meet periodically to worship and share news on a Sunday evening. Two of these churches are also involved in funding an ecumenical youth worker. These small steps show that motivating a local congregation is possible, providing the church can relate to the project and providing they can sense that something worthwhile can be accomplished.

The lesson for us? Whatever the difficulty in creating a national eldership Mainstream has the opportunity to help develop and model new forms of regional leadership. Forms which are primarily relational rather than institutional. By working on a smaller scale we have the opportunity to create a regional leadership where local churches and their leaders can develop meaningful relationships with each other. Relationships in which local churches are challenged and provoked. Within this, regional leaders could act as facilitators encouraging churches to help and serve one another. While this model also raises questions of resources and of churches' willingness to release leaders to help the wider body of Christ I believe that, on a smaller scale, it would be possible for churches to catch the vision!

*Neil Brighton*

*2nd Year Student, Spurgeon's College*

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*“Perhaps I could explain what I meant  
by ‘shared leadership’ . . .”*

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(\*) Please note that not all these groups describe themselves as Word and Spirit Networks but *all* share similar aims.

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