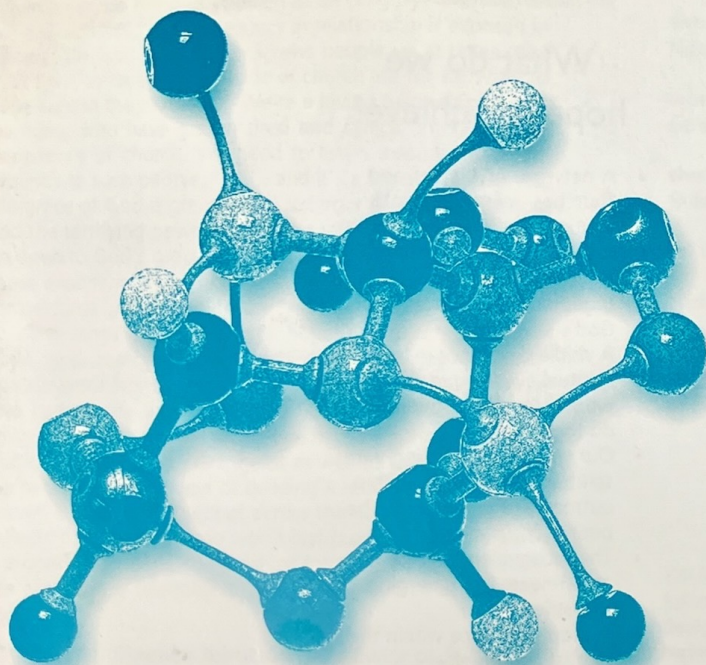


Spring 2002

TALK

The Mainstream Magazine



Connecting leaders

INSIDE

**Relationships –
get real!**

Stanley Grenz
Rob White
Geraldine Latty
Stuart Murray Williams
Simon Jones
Andy Aldridge
Stephen Callis
Regular columnists
news, reviews
and much more ...

Relationships! – get real



'I've been sent by God to tell people to put Christ at the centre of their relationships.' John Wesley described his ministry in this way. All of life is shaped by relationships – their richness or poverty – their fullness or lack. 'Good-enough mothers' was Dennis Winnicott's – a British psychiatrist – description of the foundational relation in early life that forms our sense of self and worth. Sadly pastors are all too often aware of void in someone's being where early parenting has not been 'good-enough'. 'Miracle' is the only adequate description of those who find in Father, Son and Spirit the One that more than compensates for their aching deficit in early life. So they are sent on the truly redemptive road of loving and serving others. Church is the community where we learn to live relationally towards the vision that all things will be one in Christ Jesus. It is training ground for us, and prophetic symbol to the world. To stick with church is the profoundest statement of hope. Relationships are not incidental to God's purpose and gospel, but integral and central.

Mainstream's second core value is 'to get real in relationships.' This edition looks at a subject with which we are always wrestling. In the fight we find ourselves both blessed and injured, because like Jacob we limp as blessed ones. Church can be bruising as much as blessing. All who lead know all too well how our inadequacy in relationship is exposed in church life, and how church screws people up at times. We don't like to face this dark-side of church life for we want to hide behind the myth that 'We're a loving fellowship.' I meet so many who have grown tired and cynical through their experience of church. We need to listen through our own wounds to such people. But ... and it's a big and saving 'but', the grace of God is greater and stronger than our inadequacy and the terrifying power of the community to harm. If we can be open to God's grace when we are mugged by church, it is those experiences that provide some of the most fertile ground for personal growth and future hope.

The range of contributions hopefully reflects both the hope and reality of relationships. It is a joy to have contributions from a theologian who has made relationships and community a core principle of his theology; from a counsellor who sees the down-side of church life being worked out in clients; from an evangelist as well as from pastors. But we're also in the process of building a relational network of church leaders and churches across the country. Our edition reflects this. We hope you won't just read but become part of a process of building relationships for the Kingdom because the Kingdom is relationships. Let's walk as well as talk the vision.

Stephen Ibbotson is the Editor of *Talk*.

He is also a member of the pastoral staff of Altrincham Baptist Church, Altrincham, Cheshire.

Contents

main feature

For better, for worse
Rob White 4

interview

Community & relationships – a theological 'take'
Stanley Grenz 12

theme features:

Church round the table?
Stuart Murray Williams 7

Relating in church – the good, the bad and the ugly
Stephen Collis 16

Relational evangelism
Andy Aldridge 25

baptist speak

Pastor – handle with care
Christopher Bird 10

regular columns:

the kairos kolumn
Rob Warner 15

the wright stuff
Nigel Wright 26

worship file
Geraldine Latty 6

the x files
Simon Hall 22

off the shelf 18

surfer's guide 11

newsdesk 21

network news 8

TALK The Mainstream Magazine Volume 1 Issue 3

Editor: Stephen Ibbotson **Production Editor:** Layout and

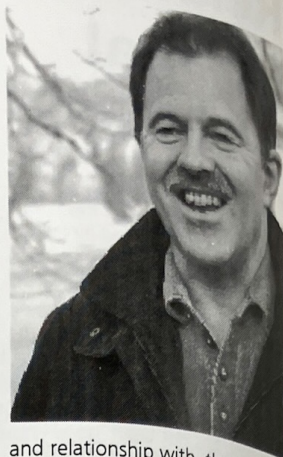
Design: Robert Parkinson **Editorial Assistant:** Jean Morgan

News: Craig Millward **Network News:** Peter Nodding

Reviews: Daniel Pritchard **Front Cover:** Wingfinger Graphics,
Leeds **Printed and despatched by** Moorley's, Ilkeston, Derby.

For better, for worse ...

by Rob White



Rob White is Senior Minister of Poynton Baptist Church. National Director of Youth for Christ for 10 years, Rob is now cultivating a vibrant ministry in Poynton and is a key member of the Mainstream network. He and his wife, Marion, speak regularly at *Spring Harvest* where they minister together as a team.

When they work well, they're great, but when they go wrong, they add so much extra pain and stress. No, I'm not talking about computers or cars, but relationships!

We could examine all types of relationships – with God, within marriage and family, in the local church, with the unchurched – but space does not permit. Here I want to concentrate on relationships between leaders (whether they be ministers, elders or deacons) at a local and trans-local level.

Let's get a little frankness out of the way first. Many of us don't bother too much with relationships that are not of immediate importance to us (family, church leadership team, etc.) That in itself raises a question: if I should be relating on a wider basis, where does it stop? I could spend all my time building more and more relationships! We'll look at that a little later.

Built for relationship

The foundation stone of all relating is that we are, by nature, built for relationship. First, we are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), who, in the Godhead, expresses the perfect relationships of the Three-in-One. Second, we are created, like it or not, according to God's design that 'it is not good ... to be alone' (Gen. 2:18). In creation, we see the God of relationship

not building himself a large playground or making beings whom he can move around like pieces on a cosmic chessboard, but opening up the relationship in the Trinity to created beings with whom he can share his heart and his desire for companionship (Gen. 3:8).

One of the great cultural shifts away from God's design for humanity is our highly individualised gospel. Certainly since the Enlightenment, the increased focus on self has given rise to a gospel that proclaims salvation for the individual, demanding an individual response. In scripture, however, God communicated with a people and his words demanded a response from that people.

we are, by nature, built for relationship

God was building community, and it was the obedience or disobedience of that community that prompted his pleasure or wrath. One of the most beautiful, but sad, songs that capture God's heart is found in Isaiah 5:1–2, which expresses his passion for the community.

Take another look at the Ten Commandments. They are not arbitrary rules to ensure that we do not misbehave, but principles that ensure the safe-keeping of community life and the integrity of relationships, which flow out of a single-minded devotion to,

and relationship with, the one God of community.

In the New Testament, Peter writes his letters to God's elect as 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation' (1 Peter 2:9–10). Take a look at the People's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13). The most obvious word missing is the first person singular ('I', 'me', 'my'), whereas the plural stands out. We share the same Father, long for the same kingdom, are concerned about the daily needs of others, are so committed to relationships that forgiveness is paramount, as is the desire that others will not fall into temptation or the devil's clutches.

In the book of Revelation, the picture is of a holy city (Rev.

21:2), not a crowd of holy individuals who have hacked their way through life and made it, somehow or other, to the other side, to find that loads of other individuals have made it as well!

Relationships – co-operative or consummatory

So, what does all this mean in terms of 21st-century relationships? It means that other people matter; that the cohesion of God's redeemed community matters; that I cannot find the true expression of who I am without you, and that the people

of God have a commission together in which I must play my part alongside others.

Tom Marshall, in his book *Understanding Leadership* (Sovereign World), has most helpfully pointed out that there are, broadly speaking, two categories of relationships: (i) instrumental or co-operative, and (ii) social or consummatory. The first has its origins in the created order as God gives man a task to fulfil (Gen. 1:28), and people relate to one another in order to realise an objective or a goal. Many daily relationships are like this – employer/employee, for example. The second, however, describes relationships that do not have a particular goal. They are not based on what the relationship enables us to do, but

concerned about mission and can help her to take her church forward; she finds that most of the time is spent sharing about personal needs as people drink coffee and eat doughnuts (two items that should be mandatory in every group, of course!). There's a good chance that she will be frustrated, find the group a waste of time and, again, perhaps become isolated.

Relationship expectancy

In a group, therefore, we need to understand what each person expects from it, reach an agreement and move on. We will probably find that the group sees itself in both these categories and, by addressing wisely the way the group is run, can satisfy both sets of needs without

the others about the importance that I attach to meeting with them. I may talk interdependence, but I seem to practise independence.

This is where the commitment comes in and, because relationships are two-way, we have to address the issue of how much we are prepared to invest in them. Relationships today have joined the list of consumables. They can be taken or left, picked up and put down, started but not continued – all to suit the taste and whims of the individual. What selfishness! I have to remember that I am only a part of any relationship; that it doesn't exist to pander to my needs and stroke my ego; that there is mutuality at work here and that I need to give even when it doesn't suit me.

If I treat a group or a relationship on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, perhaps I should do the decent thing and withdraw completely. At least then, others know where they stand. Otherwise I will be around only when I feel like it; if somebody might have appreciated my input it's just too bad! That kind of attitude is completely out of line with biblical teaching and can damage other people.

Where relationship stops

How about the question posed at the beginning about where all this relating stops? I believe this is where we have to take an honest look at what we can realistically do, not only in terms of time, but also in terms of our personality. Some can form many relationships in different areas of life; some can only manage one group of relationships. Our main guideline should be: can I give to this group and go on giving? Can I be committed here?

Finally, we need to remember that it is in and through our relationships that God's kingdom is extended, so we don't have a choice. In order to help get the job done, we have to relate, for better or worse.

the Ten Commandments are not arbitrary rules to ensure that we do not misbehave, but principles that ensure the safe-keeping of community life and the integrity of relationships

are an end in themselves. Again we find the original example in creation, as God provides a helper (one who aids another to complete fulfilment) for the man (Gen. 2:18).

It is in understanding these categories that we find clarity in our relationships. Let us take, for example, a trans-local gathering of leaders – still often known as a fraternal, but hopefully being renamed, as more women find ministerial posts! Which category does this gathering fall into? Obviously, the two cannot be easily separated a lot of the time, but a fairly clear understanding will be helpful.

Let's say that Ian wants a group that is more in the second category (social or consummatory) and finds all too often that the articulation of, and planning for, vision takes the time; he may well end up feeling let down by the relationships and become discouraged, perhaps even isolated. On the other hand, Susan wants a group that is

frustrating or discouraging either 'party'. Usually, in these kinds of groups, vision flows out of relationships and so both needs are met. However, a word of caution is needed here: if the group, by default, falls into the social or consummatory category, not only may those looking for vision or help with the local task lose interest, but also those who want a deeper level of sharing and accountability may find it too shallow or ad hoc.

That awkward thing called commitment

What about commitment in relationships? I personally find it most discouraging when other members of a group, of which I am a part, are spasmodic in attendance at group meetings. It can give the impression that the relationships in that group are not a priority. And that runs counter to what relationships are all about! If I, as a member of the group, turn up irregularly, then I am giving a message to



worship file

**Leading worship:
preparing in the quiet place,
leading in the public place**

by Geraldine Latty

Geraldine Latty, a graduate musician, conducts workshops in leading worship. She also leads worship at national and international conferences such as Spring Harvest, Baptist Assembly and Worship Together. Previous to this she taught as head of music in a secondary school for 12 years.

For further details please contact Geraldine on geraldinelatty@hotmail.com.

What an amazing privilege to lead worship! I'm not sure if you feel this as you prepare and as you lead worship. You may feel quite the opposite, or a mixture of lots of things.

I thought I'd outline a few of my thoughts and the processes I go through as I prepare to lead worship. In the next issue I'll follow this up with some practical observations on song choice, hearing from God and giving space for non-musical responses.

Preparing to prepare to lead!

Last time, we identified a baseline for worship as essentially our surrender – an offering of ourselves to our God. Preparing to lead worship, then, flows from that place of surrender. So – before the song-list, before the programme, just seek him. Preparing to lead worship flows from the place of surrender.

How many times do I come to God, asking him for what he can give to me or to us, when in fact what Father God appreciates

the actual time we spend with him.

Sometimes in my preparation, I find that God will speak about things that I think have nothing to do with the meeting on Sunday morning, and I'm led to ask, 'Lord, shouldn't I be thinking about how many songs we will need, or about who I need to contact to lead the prayers?' And God says, 'Yes – eventually.'

But in this process God is not primarily looking for worship leaders who know how many songs to use. He is always looking for people who are seeking to be like Jesus, and in a surrendered heart and life offered to him, God will continue that process of building Jesus' character in us.

What are you doing, God?

A prayer I find helpful as I begin to turn my thoughts to the event/meeting is simply to ask Father God what he is already doing in the hearts and lives of

own agenda. This is a prayer we can pray whether we are given time and space and asked to lead worship within that, or whether we are given a list of songs and told where to slot them in. We can still ask our Father, 'What is on your heart, Lord God, for our time together?'

Do you love the people?

Another step in this 'quiet place' of preparation is to remember the 'gathering', the people – God's precious people who we will be leading. Obvious really, but I've not always remembered it. At this point in my preparation, Father God may convict me of a wrong attitude towards someone within that group, or give specific emphasis to issues people may be carrying.

And another thing – do I love them? Again, I confess that for me, this has not always been the case, but our heart attitude is what God wants to expose. He deals with us from a heart of mercy and compassion, and he invites us to treat others in the same way.

I'm reminded of Moses' powerful prayer in Exodus 33:18 during his amazing encounter with God (vv 12–23), when he asks God to '... show me your glory' – and he saw God! But notice that tucked away in the middle of Moses' entreaty are these words, 'Remember that this nation is your people' (v 13). What a lovely heart! May that be our prayer as worship leaders: 'O Lord, please enlarge our hearts to love your people as we seek to lead them.'

Preparing to lead worship flows from the place of surrender

is time *with* us, for us to hear of his love and care, to be challenged, for us 'just to love him' and to respond to him? Don't let this time be squeezed out. And in those times when situations don't allow for 'quality time', be assured that God sees our intentions. Our God is a generous God, and he sees our longing to seek him as well as

people as we gather: 'Lord God, what are you "breathing" into this meeting? What are you wanting to emphasise, sharpen, encourage or even rebuke?'

This prayer reminds my heart that it is actually God at work, and that he is always seeking to meet with his people. My 'job', if you like, is to align myself with his plans and not to create my

Church round the table?

by Stuart Murray Williams

Arguments about seating arrangements – pews or chairs, straight lines or circles, etc. – have occupied many happy hours at church meetings! Memories of these discussions and the bruises left from such encounters may discourage us from recognising that how we sit together is actually rather important. Our seating arrangements reflect and underpin what we believe about the church community, its worship, ministry and mission.

But it has been wisely suggested that starting with the seats is to start with the wrong item of furniture. Start instead with the table. Once you have discovered where the table goes, the seats tend to follow. I wonder what difference this might make to debates about seating arrangements in some churches.

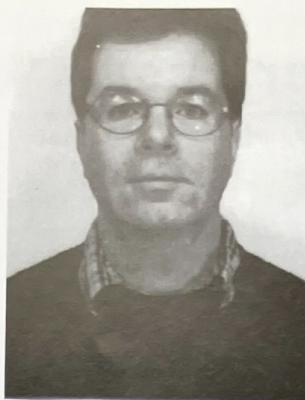
For some Christians, the place of the table has become increasingly significant, especially among those exploring fresh ways of meeting together. For those weary of churches that are focused on preachers, worship leaders and other performers, placing the table at the centre represents a place of gathering, levelling and inclusion. If the table (rather than a lectern, altar, bank of microphones or overhead projector) is the central symbol, the congregation is encouraged to think in fresh ways about its community life, forms of worship and openness to outsiders. Some alternative worship groups have thought deeply about these issues. Others have developed café-style churches where congregations sit around many small tables.

For others, weary of large-scale gatherings and ritualised informality, the dining-table has become the place where church happens. Unlike housegroups

that sometimes share a meal before the meeting proper begins (a shift signalled by a move away from the table, the strumming of a guitar, an 'opening' prayer or a call to 'begin now', and resulting often in a change of atmosphere and stylised rather than relaxed relationships), these Christians remain at the table all evening. Church happens around the table, around a meal, in a domestic setting.

Why? Some point to many occasions in the Gospels when Jesus and his disciples are at the table as a 'biblical basis' for this practice. Others have rediscovered the link between the Eucharist and meals, with hunks of bread and flagons of wine replacing the 'nip and sip' of formal communion. Some note that in a culture where fewer homes possess a dining-table because families graze individually rather than eating together, church around the table is counter-cultural, subversive and attractive. Others reflect on the significance of eating together for the success of the *Alpha* Course and have found that many people who would not attend a church service do accept an invitation to a meal.

For some, church around the table is essentially about mission – a place of invitation and open conversation. For others, it is a safe place for learning to pray and worship in new ways, for exploring faith and discipleship, for rediscovering church as community rather than institution. Some groups have written table liturgies, so Bible readings, songs, prayers, silence, the use of candles, sharing bread and wine, and other liturgical elements are woven into an extended meal. Some have rediscovered church as community, and speak of

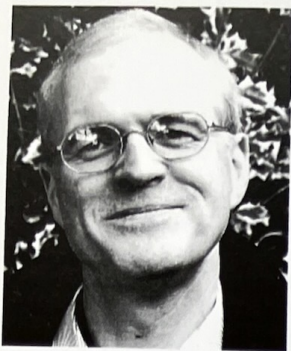


After planting a church in inner-city London **Stuart Murray Williams** headed up the Church Planting and Evangelism Course at Spurgeon's College. He currently directs a local congregation-based programme with a mission orientation for both Spurgeon's and Regent's Park Colleges.

friendship rather than the over-used and emasculated term 'fellowship'. Church around the table has been a place of refuge for over-committed church members, a place of discovery for those exploring faith and a place of reconnection for those who had dropped out of church.

Is this really church? It is not easy to foster transcendent experiences around a dining-table. It is not easy to be genuinely open to all in a living room. It is not easy to avoid charges of cosiness and self-indulgence, especially if such tables operate mainly in comfortable suburban homes. Many do, but not all. I know a church for homeless and marginalised people that operates as a table church, empowering all to choose the menu and help with the cooking.

It will be some time before such groups can show they have enduring power (the oldest I know is nine years old). Some may be mission groups that help people find their way into (or back into) congregational forms of church. Others may take their place as one expression of an apparently global (though not unchallenged) shift towards small-scale, relational forms of church. They will not suit all individuals or fit every sub-culture. But they may represent one faithful and relevant expression of church in a postmodern and post-Christendom culture. If nothing else, they move the goal-posts for discussions about seating arrangements!



Peter Nodding brings us news of the Mainstream network and other connections. Peter chairs the Mainstream Leadership team and is the Senior Pastor at Purley Baptist Church, Surrey.
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Younger Leaders' Consultation

In November last year, some 'emerging leaders' were invited to an overnight consultation at Sutton Coldfield with Peter Nodding and Rob White. What followed in the next twenty-four hours was to take all of us by surprise, bringing challenge to our faith and to our willingness to 'dream the impossible' and to act positively, but has now led increasingly to talk of the 'birthing of a movement'!

We were invited to share our experiences as 'emerging leaders' and, although situations differed, there emerged a consensus centred around feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction and isolation. These arose from the lack of meaningful relationships, the lack of input from experienced 'senior' leaders, the failure of local associations to take seriously 'needs' and aspirations about mission, and our desire to see Word and Spirit effectively brought together.

All found the current provision for further development patchy and

inadequate. We readily acknowledged that our frustrations would not be universally shared, but the sense of dissatisfaction was unavoidable. Some even spoke with envy of our contemporaries in some new church streams who benefit from strong support networks alongside committed senior leaders, and whose development was taken more seriously, with greater provision given to the maturing of personal gifts that could only strengthen church and mission.

Speaking personally, I have been blessed by an excellent senior friend, colleagues near enough for me to be honest with and accountable to, and an area that has provided regular support and input. All is not negative. But still this has not been enough. Our overarching desire is to remain Baptist, but to be radical mission-centred Word and Spirit Baptists.

I believe that there is an opportunity for Mainstream to play a key role in the

support and development of 'emerging leaders' from the charismatic wing of Baptist life. Our plea is for regular contact with each other, but also with 'high quality senior leadership' that is strongly relational, challengingly developmental and spiritually inspiring. There will need to be more intention and, with us, a sacrificial willingness by some senior leaders, who are genuinely committed through relationship and opportunity, to give time to investing in the next generation of leaders for the expansion of God's mission and God's kingdom.

Not one of us knew what the future held after this meeting, but we sensed that a movement was being birthed and only time will reveal its character and identity. But there was strong agreement that turning back was no longer an option.

Rob May, Horley Baptist, Surrey

Ascension Update

It's been a roller-coaster few months. We've been involved in a three-way bidding process for a Manchester city centre site with the most successful club in Manchester and one of the biggest names in the music industry! Reached the last two. Thought we'd pulled it off after a face-to-face meeting with the landlords in London. Heard on Christmas Eve that they had decided to give it to the biggest name in the industry. End of January received a phone-call from the site landlords: their deal with the large corporation had fallen through! They've now officially offered us the building and even improved the financial terms of the arrangement!

The next few months will be hectic as we seek to raise the finance, recruit and train staff, refit the bar and club, launch the first Ascension

album and market the Ascension brand. We are still looking to open at least the bar and pre-club in time for the Commonwealth Games in late July. Through the events of the past weeks it would seem that God is confirming Ascension as his vision. When miracles like this happen, it grows faith and encourages us for the challenges that no doubt will lie ahead.

If you would like to receive regular news and prayer updates, visit our church website and register your details: www.ascension-info.com

Steve Cockram



Mainstream Leadership Conference

view from a first-timer

Word & Spirit Network

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Eating out is a favourite pastime of mine and there are various things I look for in a good meal. It must be appetising, taken in good company, ultimately sustaining and, best of all, prepared by someone else...

As a first-timer at the Mainstream Conference this year, I'm happy to say my first taste was well and truly satisfying. It was a palatizing three days. The worship was refreshing and creative, and the teaching hit the mark. The seminars were

relevant and even my bed was comfortable. And it was all prepared by someone else.

After a busy period in my local church, being a pew-filler for a few days was wonderful. The most positive aspect of being at Mainstream for me was the 'networking': an opportunity to meet up with people I haven't seen for a while and to make new connections with people in my locality and beyond. I'm in my second year at Spurgeon's and I am aware that these contacts will be important as I begin my life in

Baptist ministry. I guess this is to be my 'family', so it was good to get a taster of what family life in this denomination is like and to get to know the people who are part of it.

I highly recommend the conference and am hoping to bring more of our leadership team next year. Being with other like-minded leaders in an atmosphere of faith and worship did me good – a very positive experience all round.

Ellen Hussey, Assistant Pastor, Emsworth Baptist Church

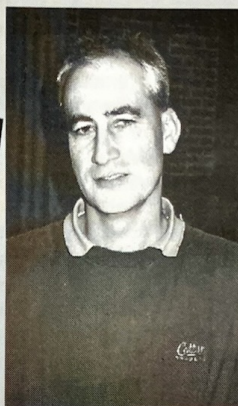
Dear friends

With the help of my church family and with a grant from the American Baptist Churches, USA, I had the pleasure and privilege of attending your *Mainstream* conference this past January. The conference was great! I thoroughly appreciated the opportunity to meet and fellowship with many of you; to worship with you in such a refreshing way; and to sense how God's spirit is moving and acting in your midst.

To be quite honest, I wasn't sure what to expect upon my arrival. Save for a strong recommendation from a close friend, I wasn't too certain of what I was going to experience with *Mainstream*. Now that I'm home and back into the regular ebbs and flows of life and ministry, I'm discovering that my *Mainstream* experience was just what I needed. Thank you for your encouragement and for the dynamic way in which you're striving to live out the call of the gospel!

I look forward to attending more *Mainstream* conferences in the future and to finding ways in which we as American Baptists can relate and participate with you and the broader Baptist family of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. With your sensitivity to God's Spirit, I believe you have much to share and teach us as we strive to fulfill ministry and mission in our culture and context. I pray God's blessing upon you and upon the work that *Mainstream* is yet to do for the advancing of God's kingdom here on earth!

Brian Henderson, pastor of Upper Merion Baptist Church, King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, USA, umbcpastor@snip.net, www.umbc.org



This year's Mainstream Conference was held at Swanwick from 14th to 16th January. The theme was 'Pursuing God' and the main speakers were Ken McGreavy and Roy Searle.

The conference also featured seminars and chatrooms where participants could share their experiences and engage with issues at a deeper level. Pictured here are Nigel Coles (above) who led a chatroom on 'Integrity in leadership', Lynn Green and Lisa Holmes (below) who led a chatroom session on 'Resourcing your spiritual life' and among the worshippers above are Peter (current BMS President) and Kathryn Morgan.





Christopher J Bird is Pastor of Christ Church Baptist, Kings Langley, Herts. He is married to Rachel and has two Children: Samuel (aged 3 years) Lydia (aged 4 months).

My mind is buzzing. Having recently attended the Mainstream Conference, I feel refreshed and re-envisioned. As one of those strange individuals they have been calling 'emerging leaders' (whatever that means), I've had the privilege of meeting with members of the Mainstream leadership. There have been conversations, prophecies and visions imparted and discussed at a veritable plethora of forums over the past couple of months or so, most of which fill me with anticipation. However, in the midst of my excitement, I still have a nagging concern that, after all the talking is done, everybody will congratulate each other for their invaluable contributions, but nothing will actually change as a result.

So why am I getting so excited? In short, it is the prospect that through Mainstream I am finally finding other Baptists who genuinely want to see the Spirit bringing new life to our congregations and our Union. I am becoming increasingly sceptical about our Union, which shows so little interest in the spiritual well-being of its pastors. I should perhaps confess to being one of those who has frequently considered ministry within other church streams. However, at this year's Mainstream Conference, I believe God was challenging us to stop playing at being church, and to start to offer one another the kind of support and help we

Pastors - handle with care

by Christopher Bird

need to get on with the job to which He has called us.

One of the most talked-about alterations within Union life recently has been the developing of mentoring to replace the old system of senior friends. As a young minister who left college a couple of years ago, my experience leads me to believe that the Union is not interested in my relationship with God, only my ability to chair a church meeting or drink tea with old ladies. Now I must state that my senior friend is superb, a huge blessing to me. But I still have the impression that mentoring is just a nicely re-packaged version of the same old product. As with so much of Baptist life, great emphasis is placed on the mechanics of how to 'do' things, and precious little emphasis on how to 'be'. If we are only concerned to teach our new ministers how to 'do' the job of ministry, then all that will happen is that each generation will simply replicate the last. No wonder the church is always a generation out of date.

'Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!' (Isaiah 43:18-19). I believe God is showing us a new thing. Rather than mentors, perhaps God is challenging us to consider spiritually mature leaders taking on apostolic ministries amongst us? Mentoring is imposed upon new ministers as a requirement of their accreditation, whereas apostolic leadership cannot be so imposed. What's more, Mainstream is in the unique position of being able to offer genuinely apostolic leadership to

those who have the eyes to see its benefits. It would require time, commitment, sacrifice and cost, but if this is of God, what is the cost in comparison with the blessing of walking in the centre of His will? Mainstream boasts 'getting real in relationships' as one of its aims. Does this include relationships that offer truly godly oversight to one another?

Joel prophesied about old men having dreams and young men having visions. I want to see realised what God is showing us, before I reach an age when I have to dream about what might have been, or about the wonderful things that God will use other, younger people to accomplish. What saddens me most in all of this is the number of people I chatted to at Swanwick who speak of involvement with Mainstream as though it were some covert movement, seeking to undermine the Union, and the feeling that Mainstream is somehow frowned upon by Didcot. Well, if 'getting passionate about knowing God', 'getting real in relationships' and 'getting stuck into God's mission' causes anyone to frown, maybe that says more about them than about those who choose to become part of what God is doing through Mainstream. In reality, all that Mainstream stands for and all that it seeks to do are, as far as I can see, entirely in line with current thinking within the Union. As for me, I intend to align myself with those who are seeking to be led by God's Spirit; whether they are Baptist or otherwise is of secondary importance.

Netting relational church

by Simon Jones



Simon Jones is BMS World Mission co-ordinator for London and the South East and author of *Why Bother with Church?* (IVP 2001), *Discovering the New Testament* (Crossway 2001) and *Discovering Luke's Gospel* (Crossway 1999). A former editor of *Christianity* magazine, he was pastor of Peckham Road Baptist Church from 1989 to 1996.

The future of the church hinges on relationships. Poverty of friendship is one of the main reasons given for people struggling to stay in the church. A desire to deepen relationships is a common reason for embarking on the search for new ways of doing church.

Not surprisingly there are a range of websites that address this issue from a variety of angles. Many of them are aimed at young people or the 'emerging' generation. But since Mick Jagger (at 58) reckons himself to be still emerging (indeed he has given rise to a whole new marketing category – the adult-escant), there's probably a good deal to be gleaned from these sites.

www.tribalgeneration.com is a good place to start. I have a vested interest here as at **www.tribalgeneration.com/living_meatdrink_church.shtml** you'll find the first chapter of my book *Why Bother with Church?* which looks at why people struggle with church and why the church is struggling in our culture.

But around the same place you'll find Stuart Murray helpfully talking about the church living on the margins following the collapse of Christendom.

(**www.tribalgeneration.com/living_meatdrink_margins.shtml**).

There's also a whole section of links to churches doing inventive things with the emerging generation that with a bit of imagination could be applied to congregations of all ages and sizes.

www.newway.org.uk is a mainly Anglican-oriented site looking at alternative models of church. The site has lots of news, links and resources but its chief interest is a long paper by Jeanne Hinton called 'Getting started small and in place: practical steps

in forming small Christian communities.' Here is a wealth of wisdom on setting up groups that satisfy the hunger for relationships and help reach out into our neighbourhoods.

www.church.co.uk, an Oasis initiative and **www.vurch.com** are both virtual churches. There are loads of these on the web. They are aimed at non-church goers, so the interest for us lies in seeing how to construct simple, welcoming, attractive venues that help people engage with Jesus.

For meatier insights into what makes people tick in our rapidly changing world and how to engage them with the good news of Jesus, a network of sites under the banner of 'gospel and culture' offer a range of goodies from a number of continents.

www.deepinsight.org is based in New Zealand. There's lots of good stuff here that takes its cue from British missiologist Lesslie Newbigin. You can download whole magazines and papers (many of them in .pdf formats so you'll need to download a free adobe acrobat reader) and pick up links to lots of other sites.

Among the ones worth checking out are the UK site **www.gospel-culture.org.uk** (which among other things contains the complete text of Newbigin's seminal *Beyond 1984* – at **www.gospel-culture.org.uk/os1984.htm**) and the US site **www.gocn.org**. In the newsletters available here there is an excellent article by Ann Wilkinson-Hayes reflecting on new ways of being church out of her experience in the UK (June 2001 newsletter at **www.gocn.org/133newsletter.pdf**).

The church of Scotland's report on church without walls which highlights the need for all

churches to work at their relationships – both internal and external – is available as a .pdf file at

www.churchwithoutwalls.org.uk

Among other sites that highlight trends and bring Christian reflection of what's happening in the wider culture, two US magazines are worth checking out.

www.relevantmagazine.com and **www.next-wave.com** are both heavily slanted towards music and pop culture. Relevant Magazine, which debuts in print later this year, but which can be delivered to your inbox on a weekly basis, has a publishing arm which was responsible for a stimulating book on U2 called 'Walk on: the spiritual journey of U2' (well worth checking out if you like the music, want to keep up with the world's biggest rock n' roll band or just want to keep abreast of the spiritual journey of generation x).

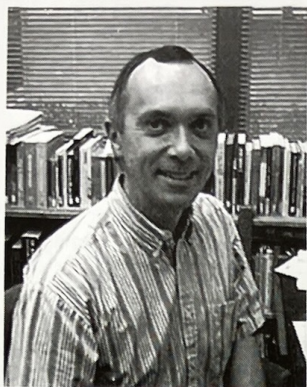
Finally **www.leonardsweet.com** is the web site of US preacher and cultural commentator, Leonard Sweet. You'll find papers, sermons ideas and outlines, some good downloads, as well as merciless plugging of every book he's written.

Of course, having surfed all these sites still leaves us with the toughest task: creating those relationships that attract people to our churches from our hurting world.

Please note: all web addresses are to be entered in your browser as one word (with no spaces or line breaks). The constraints of narrow columns make it impossible to keep all addresses to single lines in this publication.

Community & relationships – a theological ‘take’

Stephen Ibbotson interviews
Stanley Grenz



Dr Stanley J Grenz is one of the leading Baptist Theologians of our time. He is the Pioneer MacDonald Professor of Baptist Heritage, Theology, and Ethics at Carey Theological College, Vancouver. A prolific writer who has published numerous articles in journals and periodicals, Stan has authored or co-authored over twenty books with both a popular and scholarly focus. Among them are: *Theology for the Community of God*, *Sexual Ethics*, *A Primer on Post-modernism* and his most recent, *The Social God and the Relational self*.

Before the publication of your latest book I noticed that the theme of community is important in your work. You keep coming back to it in your 'Theology For The Community of God'. Why is it so central to your theological thinking?

'Community' is central to my theological thinking because I am convinced that it is both at the heart of the biblical narrative and speaks clearly to the contemporary context. More specifically, community is crucial because it arises out of the very essence of God. At the heart of Christian theology is the doctrine of the Trinity, which declares that God is not only the one who enters into relationship with creation, and hence relates to us in time. Rather, God is internally relational within the Godhead, and hence eternally relational. Moreover, the Christian teaching declares that God is a trinity, rather than merely a binity; God is three-in-one. This suggests that mere one-to-one relationality does not exhaust the essence of God. Instead, the one God of the Bible is the fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to cite the traditional Trinitarian terminology. In short, the God revealed in Jesus is communal, or community.

In this and your latest work I can see that the connection between community and our Trinitarian God is important. Why is this?

Ultimately, the appeal to the Trinity is crucial in that our conceptions of the world and ourselves in all the various disciplines of learning must always be theocentric rather than anthropocentric. That is, they must be generated from an understanding of, or an appeal to, the nature and character of God, who as the Creator is the transcendent archetype for us as humans in our calling to be the divine image. This forms a grave contrast to much modern thought, which is anthropocentric in that it appeals to what we suppose to be nature of the human person.

Were there any personal experiences you had of community that helped you go on this journey in your thinking and practice?

In a sense, the beginnings of my journey to this theological

German Lutheran Pietism. This group never participated in the modernist-fundamentalist controversy. They were instinctively somewhat conservative doctrinally, but more importantly they were held together by the warm-hearted approach to the faith and the relationality they sensed within the group. This, in turn, influenced my father's own very relational operative theology.

In university, seminary, and graduate school, and during my first years as a theological educator, I gravitated to a more cognitive approach to the faith and consequently to theology as an intellectual discipline, although looking back on those years I realize that I never lost the undergirding that the pietism of my upbringing had engrained in me. In the mid- to late-1980s two important events brought this underlying pietism to the surface. I read Robert Bellah's intriguing study *Habits of the Heart*, on the effects of radical individualism in American culture, and I returned to Munich to write a book on the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg. The result was an

community is crucial because it arises out of the very essence of God

perspective may be found in the churches my father served during my childhood and teen years. I was raised in a Baptist conference (association) that has its roots in work among German immigrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a result it was deeply imbued with the warm-hearted pietism that characterized the early leaders, many of whom had come out of

awareness that something was missing in the 'scholastic' approach to theology – true piety. Upon my return to the USA, where I was teaching at that time, I set out to rewrite my theological lectures in a manner that would incorporate into the foundational work that I had already done, the pietist aspect in a manner that gave place to the importance of corporate

relationality – community. The result was my theology text, *Theology for the Community of God*.

That's fascinating and shows how much we are indebted to the 'community' of the generations. Does our very present and future obsessed society makes us vulnerable as church communities and if so in what ways?

Let me preface my agreement with you by offering a little caveat. I think that the proper perspective from which to engage in theological reflection and construction is the future or eschatological viewpoint. That is to say, we should be seeking to answer the central theological questions from the perspective of the eschatological fullness of God's program for the universe. Hence, we should define what it means to be human from the destiny that God intends for us. As Christians, we know this destiny to be that of our being risen and glorified saints enjoying fellowship with God throughout eternity. Similarly, we should define the church from the vantage point of our communal purpose to be the sign and foretaste of the fullness of community that will be ours when Christ returns. Therefore, we must see ourselves as called to live in the present in the light of the glorious future that awaits us.

But the valid orientation toward the future ought not to lead us to cut ourselves off from the past. As many sociological theorists have pointed out, a true community is a 'community of hope' – one that anticipates its glorious future – as well as a community of memory, a people who remember their communal past. One real danger in the church today is that we become fixated on the 'new' that we fail to appreciate the 'treasures' of our heritage. One obvious area in which this is evident is in the music chosen for worship services. Although I truly enjoy and appreciate much of what is being written today, we dare not ignore the great musical treasury

bequeathed to us. Why not allow worship to build from a 'conversation' among a variety of musical styles and music from a variety of eras?

The last century saw a lot of thinking about the individual in relationship – Martin Buber immediately comes to mind. Why do you think this interest developed, and what can we learn from it?

Buber stands at the genesis of a movement in philosophy that found a crucial parallel in

the Imago Dei. In this book, I seek to indicate how a truly biblical understanding of the concept of humans as the image of God offers a way forward in a context in which people have experienced the loss of the sense of 'centred self.' In the book, I indicate that in the Bible the *imago dei* – the 'image of God' – is a social, rather than an individual reality. The biblical focus is on 'we' being the divine image, rather than the image being lodged within each individual. Moreover, the *imago dei* is a communal concept. The

radical individualism is both intellectually suspect and experientially unsatisfying

theology, namely, the proposal that to be 'person' means to stand in relationship. Developments in science moved us away from the Newtonian model, which viewed reality as consisting of independent entities that are assumed to be complete in themselves and then engage in relationships with each other. The Newtonian model was drastically altered by impulses from Einstein, quantum theory and other developments, which pointed to a much more relational universe. Not only humans, but everything in the universe, has been shown to be far more relational and connected than was previously assumed. We could also point to the growing realization that radical individualism is both intellectually suspect and experientially unsatisfying. Buber's lasting contribution was that of helping us realize that we are to relate to each other as 'thou' (person), rather than as 'it' (object).

You've recently published a key book in this area. Is there something distinctive we need to get hold of as Christian communities?

My latest book, which came out last November, is entitled: *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of*

locus of the divine image in the New Testament is the community of Christ who together comprise the foretaste of the new humanity in Christ. This is where I seek to go beyond the important work of Buber, who offered the paradigm of the one-to-one relationship.

How do relationships within the community of God differ from relationships within any other shared interest group? Are we fooling ourselves if we think we are in any way different from the numerous 'tribes' that seem to be all around us in our pluralist society?

I would suggest that we can best see the difference, when we introduce several key insights into the nature of communities offered by contemporary communitarian thinkers, coupled with aspects of the narrative understanding of identity formation. In the quest to make sense of our personal lives and the world around us, we are dependent on narratives that provide the 'plot' by means of which we tell the story of our lives. The overarching narrative is mediated to the individual person by the community that embodies it. To be a Christian means to tell one's personal story – and hence to find one's identity – in

accordance with a particular narrative, the story that is passed from generation to generation through the Christian community, but which is ultimately found in the Bible, the book of this community. This story, of course, centres on the narrative of Jesus.

This suggests we are both similar to and decisively different from the tribes that inhabit the postmodern world. We are similar in that each group, including the Christian church, functions as a community to its adherents. We are different, however, in that we find ourselves – we make sense out of our lives and our world – by means of our participation in the life of Jesus Christ, who is Immanuel, God with us, and the Word made flesh.

A key distinction in this

this perspective and apply it to my own theological work.

What responsibility do church leaders have in forming the local church as a genuine expression of community?

A local congregation of believers is a community ultimately in that it mediates to its members the grand narrative of God at work in creation, commencing 'in the beginning,' centring on Jesus Christ, and climaxing in the glorious vision of the consummation of God's program. The first and most basic task of church leadership is to keep this biblically-given narrative before the congregation, doing so in many and varied ways – preaching, teaching, through the ordinances (or sacraments) in pastoral care, and even in church

This suggests as well a 'bottom-up' rather than a 'top-down' leadership model. Leaders derive their status in the church first and foremost from their participation in the life of the congregation. They are called to shepherd and empower the people for the task to which God has called the whole community. And to this end, they seek to keep before the congregation the biblical vision of who we are as the people of God, as well as to seek to live out that vision in their own lives and relationships.

How does good theological thinking help practically in forming and maintaining healthy church communities and healthy mission?

Solid theological reflection is crucial in the practice of ministry, understood both narrowly as the work of ordained leaders and in the wider sense of being the whole life and mission of the people of God. Actually, today the chief rival to ministering from a theological base is engaging in the practice of 'church' by means of a pragmatic outlook, that makes decisions largely if not solely on the basis of a consideration of what 'works.' In the long run, however, the pragmatic approach is self-defeating, simply because it transforms the community of faith into an institution whose chief end is not the glory of God and the fulfilment of a divinely-given mandate, but survival. The long-term health and viability of the church demands that its leaders and people return again and again to the forming and informing vision of what the community of Christ is called, mandated, and empowered to be by the Lord of the church. Above all, I would add, we are called to be a people who embody in our life together and in our relationships to all humans and even to all creation the great narrative of the biblical God, the one who has come to us in Christ and now empowers us through the Holy Spirit poured out in our hearts and in our fellowship.

the chief rival to ministering from a theological base is a pragmatic outlook, that makes decisions on the basis of what 'works'

discussion is the differentiation Robert Bellah makes between a lifestyle enclave and a true community. My favourite contemporary lifestyle enclave is 'Fitness World' – or whatever may be the local version of this in your context. At Fitness World one finds a sense of community and what appears to be a fellowship based on mutual, genuine concern. Yet the concern and the fellowship extend only to a narrow aspect of personal existence, namely, to the matters relating to one's weight-loss or body-building program. And at Fitness World, one's sense of identity is bound up with this quite truncated aspect of one's life. In a true community, in contrast, fellowship and concern extend to all aspects of one's existence and a full-orbed sense of personal identity emerges. I find insights such as these helpful. My task as a theologian is to draw from the work of the sociologists and social psychologists who offer

'business' meetings. As this vision works its way through the life of the congregation, the people will begin to minister to one another in a manner that will build the more visible and directly experiential aspects that we generally call to mind when we hear the word 'community'.

Could you also comment on the way church leaders need to incarnate this way of living?

Well, leaders must be 'community-arians' themselves. That is, they must acknowledge – and let the congregation they serve know that they understand – their own 'embeddedness' in the life of the community. They must see themselves as Christians first, and only then as those whom the congregation has singled out for the leadership role within the community. Hence, they must participate in the worshipping life of the congregation, to cite one example, as worshippers first and only then as leaders in worship.

The limits of censorship

by Rob Warner

When I studied literature at university, many of my favourite novelists had something in common. Flaubert, Joyce, Lawrence and Nabokov had all been condemned by the church and their books had been banned. No single faith tradition has a monopoly on championing censorship: Roman Catholics, Anglicans and free churches all have a history of suppressing the arts. Zealous Protestants had no time for Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights, in whom they could only see debauchery, finding no beauty in the language, no truths that endure.

Artists explore the nature of existence: they are better at questions than answers. That means they also probe false certainties, seeing conventionality as a prison for the human spirit.

For as long as the church in Western Europe was powerful, the church was rarely a friend to artists unless they produced devotional art. The more questioning artists became of the church, the greater the conflict between church and art. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the church was often more interested in controlling artists than promoting artistic freedoms. The church was instinctively authoritarian, repressive and intolerant of imagination and uncertainty. If some churchmen had ever had the Taleban's power, they would have produced similar excesses in Western Europe. Calvin's Geneva may have produced enduring exegetical insights, but it also exemplified the intolerance of dictatorial religious conformity.

Coming from an unchurched background, my love of literature did not seem in conflict with my Christian faith. However, time after time when the church had opposed – and often successfully

censored – a great novel, my sympathies were with the novelist, not the church. Life was enriched by these novels the church sought to repress. Both art and life were narrowed and enfeebled by the pious authoritarianism of the church.

It need not be that way. Jesus was a great story-teller, harnessing the imagination to communicate eternal truths more richly than through the abstractions of systematic theology. When he questioned conventional thinking, the religious authorities' attempts at censorship eventually led to the cross. Repressive religion was implacably opposed to the crucified artist.

So here are three ironies. First, when the church seeks to impose censorship, it often backfires, providing publicity for mediocre art, turning something that was likely to have been ignored into a *success born of scandal*. Second, when the church imposes censorship but

If we build upon the early Baptist principle of freedom of religion, we will limit the application of censorship to the most extreme barbarities

later generations conclude that the church was wrong, the attempt to control artists brings great discredit upon the church. Third, when the church was powerful, it attempted to use power in authoritarian ways; now the church is weak, the politically correct elite may turn the very authoritarianism that Christians used to abuse back against the church. We could even become a censored minority.



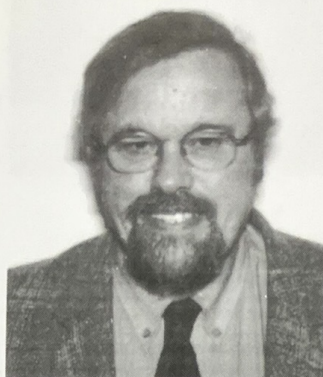
Rob Warner is one of our regular columnists. A pastor and author, he has served in London churches at Herne Hill and Wimbledon where he presently leads Kairos, a church that's been started from scratch. He has a wider speaking ministry and is involved in Alpha for believer baptising churches.

So is there an alternative? The early Baptists emphasised freedom of religion: not just for Baptists, but for all. The freedom to evangelise was accompanied by the importance of respecting the convictions of others and defending their equal right to freedom of religion. From this can readily be derived the broader liberty of freedom of speech and the values of liberal democracy and a pluralist society. If we build upon the early Baptist principle of freedom of religion, we will be champions of civil liberties, maximising freedom of speech and minimising the application of censorship to the most extreme barbarities.

Next time you hear an over-zealous Christian calling for the burning of Harry Potter books, be wary of their certainties. Those who promote authoritarian

censorship could pave the way for the Bible to be placed on a list of banned books. The charges are predictable: it's intolerant, makes exclusive claims both monotheistic and about Christ, and does not allow homosexual partnerships to be treated equally with heterosexual marriages. Those who live by the repression of others may one day be repressed themselves.

Relating in church – the good the bad and the ugly



by Stephen Callis

Stephen Callis has pastored churches in Luton and Macclesfield. He has a Masters degree in Counselling and practises as a counsellor, supervisor and trainer, both privately and within his local hospital's psychology department. Stephen is the author of a book on bereavement. He has also written articles on the effects of caffeine poisoning in anxiety and depression, and has appeared on television to promote this research. He is married to Val and has three grown-up daughters.

Early in my Christian life, I learned to prepare myself for the worst whenever someone's opening remark was, 'I say this to you in love'. Over the years the phrases have changed, but the content remains the same. It seems that in Christian circles, it's OK to say to someone else things that outside the church context would be considered totally unacceptable. We knock big chunks off each other spiritually and emotionally – and all in the name of Christ.

We see two contrasting elements in Christian life. On the one hand, there is the good that comes from relationships where Christ is made manifest in the care of others – not just in relationship with individuals, but in cell groups and fellowships as well. I'm sure we can all look back and remember with great gratitude those who have helped and encouraged us. On the other hand, I know a depressing number of Christians who now no longer attend any place of worship. When asked why this is so, the reason they give is the way they have been treated by others in the church.

So – what elements make for supportive and ministering relationships, and what causes people to be hurt, and ultimately so damaged by their experience of church that they choose to leave and not return?

Before we look at what makes for a healthy relationship facilitating growth, it is helpful to look at the dynamics within the church that can contribute to the damaging of relationships.

The first problem is that of the holding of theological dogmas with a passionate intensity. When we hold any belief very strongly, be it doctrinal or ethical, we might be in danger of being tempted to impose our beliefs or standards onto others. The statement that 'religion is the cause of all wars' is true in the sense that people will only fight over what they feel passionate about. Historically that has often been religion, whether that religion stems from personal belief or from a cultural system that defines a group of people.

The second problem is that of power. Religion is unique in giving the possibility of making ex cathedra statements. The temptation is to make statements with absolute authority. The need for power and its expression may prove too great a

instance, if we unconsciously struggle with the feeling that we are projecting a false self, we might find it impossible to tolerate those we think of as being hypocritical.

Finally, Eric Berne, one of the leading psychologists of the 1960's, spoke of those who were well integrated psychologically as being able to say, 'I'm OK, you're OK'. Those who felt that they were lacking in some way would take one of two options. Option 1 would be to say, 'I'm not OK, you're OK' – often expressed as, 'I wish I could be more like you'. Option 2 would be to say, 'I'm OK, you're not OK', where a sense of well-being is maintained by constantly being able to find things that can be criticised in others.

The key to good relationships in the church is love as expressed in the New Testament. Again and again throughout the Gospels and the Epistles, we are exhorted to love one another. In order to love one another, we must first learn to love ourselves. We have a legacy of self-

We tend to dwell on our unworthiness, or our sinfulness, instead of accepting that in Christ we are loved and special

lure to many of us.

The third problem is what in psychology would be known as 'projection': the disowning of a characteristic or trait within ourselves (what Jung called our 'shadow side') and the projection of that trait onto others, whom we then condemn for it. For

flagellation in the church that has been with us since the Desert Fathers. We tend to dwell on our unworthiness, or our sinfulness, instead of accepting that in Christ we are loved and special. When we can appreciate that God truly loves and accepts us as we are, with all our faults and

imperfections, then we can begin to love one another.

When we realise that we are loved, we can begin to love others with God's own self-giving love. In practice that means several things. It means that we acknowledge that every human being is made in the image of God; that all are of infinite worth and value to God; that anything we do to damage others is going to offend the God who loves them.

Jesus put it more strongly than that. He said, 'If anyone should cause one of these little ones to lose his faith in me, it would be better for that person

**When we appreciate that
God truly loves us as we
are, with all our
imperfections, then we can
begin to love one another**

to have a large millstone tied round his neck and be thrown into the sea' (Mk 9:42, GNB). It means that as we become aware of our own total acceptance by God, of being completely loved by him, only then we can be a container that spills out his love for others. It is the sense of that security of love that enables us to love as Christ loves us.

Finally, we do well to seek to maintain an appropriate humility, remembering that humanity's first sin was pride. God has not appointed us to judge others' motives or to judge them as people because they have opinions that are different from our own. Jesus, when asked to judge the woman taken in adultery, suggested that the accuser without sin should throw the first stone. It is easier to remove specks out of other people's eyes than it is to see the logs in our own. It is on the basis of love and humility that we can begin to build fellowships that will truly proclaim in word and deed that the kingdom of God is among us.

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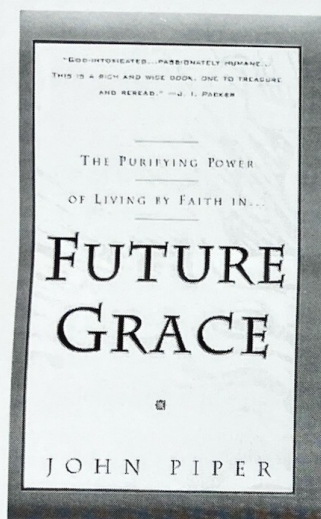
Daniel Pritchard is a member of the pastoral staff at Battle in Sussex. He has an interest in theological studies and compiles reviews in each edition. Reviews and suggestions for reviews can be submitted to: daniel@thepritchards.freeserve.co.uk

off the shelf

compiled by Daniel Pritchard

With a backward look over his shoulder at the theme of January conference, 'Pursuing God', Craig Millward introduces us to one of his favourite authors, John Piper. The rest of the reviews in this edition relate to the current issue's theme, addressing various aspects of relationship.

John Piper, *Future Grace* (IVP, £11.99 pb, ISBN 0851111629)



Those who know me best will know that I am a Piper junkie. He has the ability to paint pictures like Yancey, whilst also handling scripture with the skill of a master preacher. Everything Piper writes is built on the foundation of 'Christian hedonism', a concept fully explored in the marvellous *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* and *The Pleasures of God*, but is best summarised by two quotes from the opening of *Future Grace*:

'You can't praise what you don't prize. Or, to put it another way, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in

him.' 'Sin is what you do when your heart is not satisfied with God.'

Future Grace was the first book I read by Piper, and I immediately ordered several copies as presents. The task of the book is to show how the promises of God can be put to work to free us from the deceptive promises of sin. It is therefore rooted in the grace of God, who does not treat us as our sins deserve, but redeems, cleanses and restores us and then continues to promise us everything that is necessary for our growth in Christ.

Piper begins by arguing that 'gratitude' to God for our salvation cannot be pressed into service as a motive for living an obedient life. Despite many attempts by well-meaning teachers, the insistence that 'God has done so much for you; now what will you do for him?' cannot deliver the goods. Neither was it intended to, for it has little or no biblical support: gratitude for past grace is not fitted to serve as a spur to trust in God's future grace. No, the key to growth and obedience is faith in God's numerous promises.

The book has thirty-one chapters (one for each day of the month) and is written in eight sections. As you make your way through the book, it feels like ascending a spiral staircase servicing an eight-storey building. Each section of the book begins in a remarkably similar way: the central premise is the same and the path is similar, but the suite of rooms Piper leads into is different. So, on the first storey, the journey through chapters 1 and 2 ends with an explanation about how faith in future grace can be applied to combat anxiety. Three chapters later, it is addressed to pride; then to misplaced shame, impatience, covetousness, bitterness, despondency and lust;

before closing with an explanation of how the finality of future grace affects our suffering, dying and hope for a redeemed creation. At the exit of each room, we find a list of precious promises, the application of which secures the relevant prize and sets us free to love and enjoy God more fully.

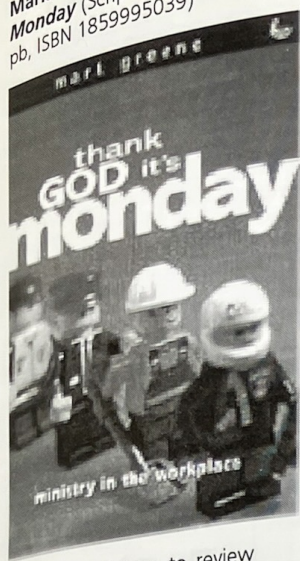
Finally, in a chapter in which he acknowledges his debt to Jonathan Edwards, Piper argues again for the liberating value of his understanding of Christian hedonism. 'The chief end of Man is to glorify God by enjoying him forever – which is the essence of Christian hedonism, and of living by faith in future grace. There is no final conflict between God's passion to be glorified and man's passion to be satisfied. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him ... It follows from all this that it is impossible that anyone can pursue happiness with too much passion and zeal and intensity.'

'God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him'

Future Grace is one of the most helpful books I have read. It has provided a corrective to my tendency to adopt what Piper calls 'a debtor's ethic', and has vastly increased my love for the Word of God, my understanding of the power of God's promises, my appreciation of the splendour of his grace and my desire to persevere in faith. If you still doubt me, visit www.desiringgod.org and download the free copy of *Desiring God*. You'll be hooked.

Craig Millward

Mark Greene, *Thank God it's Monday* (Scripture Union, £5.99 pb, ISBN 1859995039)



It was a privilege to review Mark Greene's updated version of *Thank God it's Monday* (*Ministry in the Workplace*), if somewhat daunting. Why? Well, the Bible excepted, I am not a great reader of Christian books, or any books really. Balancing my work in the Civil Service

challenges us to see our workplace as a place full of people ... who need Jesus

(including a workplace Christian fellowship group), my responsibilities to my wife and four children, and my role as an elder at Battle Baptist (a lively and growing church), leaves me with little time to read (especially as I drive to work).

Yet this excellent book is just for people like me. This is the second time I have read it. The last time was in 1998, and four years on, the updated version is even more relevant. God has used it to speak to me again.

The first thing going for it is Mark Greene, a Christian and a Spurs fan too (a club rooted in the Old Testament) – what a wonderful combination. It is a highly practical book that looks at how we can make most of our time at work, helping us to see our jobs, colleagues and superiors the way God does. It challenges us to see our

workplace as a place full of people, with all sorts of troubles, who need Jesus – a mission-field ripe for harvest. The book is many things: an autobiography (using Greene's personal experiences), a practical teaching tool (with self-examination and instruction exercises based around real-life case studies), and a reference book (with further resource suggestions). It is well designed for busy people, with short chapters providing the right mixture of encouragement and challenge, peppered with good humour, plus one-liners at the end of each chapter that are more than just sound-bites. I managed to read it in one day thanks to a train trip, but it's also a book you can pick up at any time, and read a little without losing the thread.

Greene stresses the biblical importance of work, and gives an insight into how we can be model employees along the lines of Colossians 3: 23 (one of my favourite Bible verses), and better servants in the way we lead and manage people. It also offers a challenge to Bible colleges and

the church to better equip and support God's people as missionaries in the workplace. It is a book, not just for those in secular work, but for those in full-time ministry too – after all, it's all work.

I thoroughly recommend it.
Andrew Garlick

Tommy Tenney, *Chasing God, Serving Man* (Destiny Image, £9.99 hb, ISBN 0768450071)

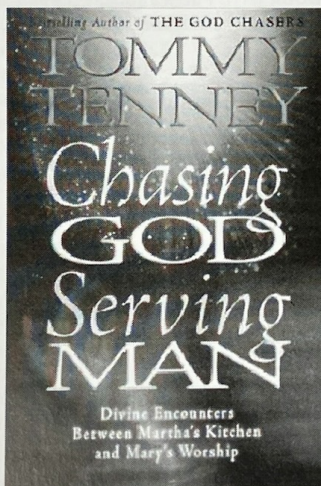
To be Mary or to be Martha, that is the question. Or is it? In this book, Tommy Tenney, author of *The God Chasers*, explores the dichotomy which, to some extent, we all face: are we primarily here to worship God or to serve people? In the prologue he says, 'Pursuers of revival will say, "Tommy has abandoned the pursuit". Socially conscious practitioners will say, "Tommy

has finally come to his senses". The truth is somewhere between Martha's kitchen and Mary's altar.'

From a cursory glance at the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38–42), you might think that it is quite clear-cut: Mary had chosen the better part. However, Tenney's thorough and refreshing treatment of this familiar story, and the characters of Mary and Martha, throws up many new and helpful insights.

Jesus, who had 'nowhere to lay his head', was as at home in Mary and Martha's house in Bethany as anywhere on the earth, because it was a place where both his humanity and his divinity were served. 'Sometimes He just wanted "biscuits and gravy"; at other times He was to be received as divinity.' Between them, Mary and Martha attended to His needs, but there were times when they didn't get on. Tenney paves the way for modern-day Marys and Marthas to appreciate one another, to work together and to learn to both prepare for and to prioritise the Lord's presence.

Although somewhat repetitive in style, Tenney gets his message across. We can be so busy 'preparing the house' in anticipation of a divine visitation that we miss it when He comes. 'Know when to drop the duties



of the kitchen so you can drop on your knees before His face.' We need to work together to build spiritual Bethanys. This

requires us to be so passionate in the spiritual realm that God will be pleased to come and 'take His seat on the throne of our praise', and so credible and compassionate in the human

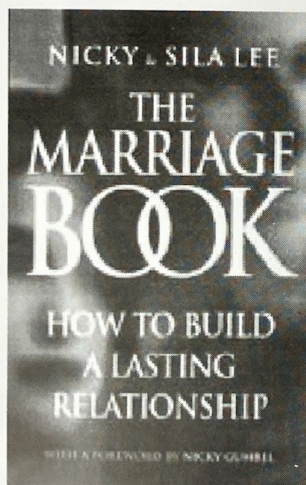
passionate in the spiritual realm ... credible and compassionate in the human realm

realm that people will come and listen. 'If you can create an environment where Mary and Martha can get along, then you will have the credibility to call for Jesus and see Him raise your dead brothers.'

Tenney has not abandoned 'the pursuit', and does not ask us to do so. Rather, he has found a place of peace in the middle ground; worshipping like Mary and working like Martha. I found this to be a very challenging book, both on a personal level and in the wider context of church, giving plenty of food for thought!

Alison Pritchard

Nicky & Sila Lee, *The Marriage Book* (HTB Publications, £5.99 pb, ISBN 1902750268)



In this recent book from the HTB stable, Nicky and Sila Lee address what for many is (or should be) their most important relationship after God. With something to benefit couples at any stage, this book would be equally at home on the pastor's shelf or the bedside table, and is worth giving to every couple preparing for marriage, or starting out in married life.

Based largely on HTB's Marriage Preparation and Marriage Courses, *The Marriage Book* (How to Build a Lasting Relationship) is a reasonably easy read, and the text is interspersed with helpful personal observations from each of its authors. It moves swiftly but effectively through a range of topics, such as communication,

forgiveness, sex, and how to deal with the in-laws.

love in action, conflict and forgiveness, sex, and how to deal with the parents and in-laws. Shunning the purely theoretical approach, the authors earth their material in their own experience of the joys and struggles of marriage. Numerous anecdotes and insights from their life and growth together are told with refreshing openness and honesty, and their enduring convictions about the joy and wonder of Christian marriage shine through.

No subject is covered in huge detail, but used as part of marriage preparation, *The Marriage Book* would be a valuable resource and discussion-starter. Helpfully, it also contains a short bibliography and resource section at the end.

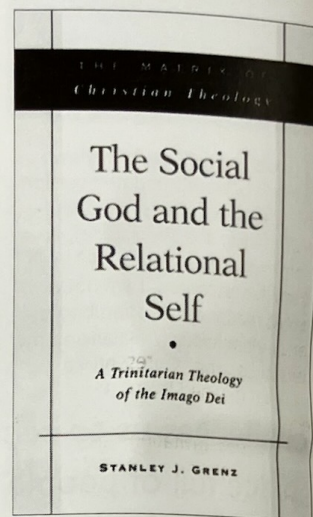
Daniel Pritchard

Stanley J Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self* (Westminster John Knox Press ISBN 066422203X)

Here is a weighty contribution to our understanding of our human selves by a leading Baptist theologian. Stanley Grenz has for many years emphasised the place

of community as central to the theological and pastoral task. This provides a theological foundation for such. Individualism in all its guises has failed to provide an adequate theory and practice for healthy human existence. He argues comprehensively for an understanding of human beings created in God's image as social creatures formed for relationship with God and one another.

He starts by building on the renewal of Trinitarian theology last century. We are made in the image of the social God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit. He maps the



development of the modern outlook with its emphasis on the individual self, tracing it back to Augustine's 'turn inward'. He describes the decisive impetus unleashed through key thinkers of the Enlightenment giving rise to the isolated modern self – self-sufficient, controlled and controlling. This ends with the myth that we are in control of our destiny, our healing and ourselves. This deep movement has touched every aspect of our lives and culture. In reaction to this there were those that understood our nature in terms of individual uniqueness and self-expression. But any sense of a centred controlling self was gradually eroded and has given way to the postmodern self in which fleeting experiences, images and styles define how we

continued on page 23

Baptismal Survey Results

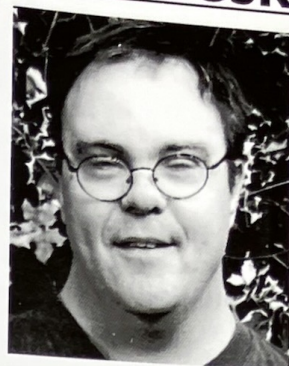
The Baptist Union has carried out an investigation among those recently baptised in our churches. The booklet outlining the findings from the survey was published last September, and is now available as a PDF file from the Union website www.baptist.org.uk in the 'Hot News' section. There is also a PowerPoint presentation that can be downloaded to help you discuss the material in your church.

The Care for Pastors Network

According to a recent survey, out of every 10 church leaders, 3 have felt like leaving Christian service, 7 feel heavily overworked, 3 feel their families suffer because of their work and 4 say an inadequate income places them under extra pressure. As a result, church leaders miss Sunday activities each week as a result of stress-related illnesses and 1,500 have left the ministry over a 10-year period.

Our Baptist Union provides subsidised access to professional care and counselling facilities, and the Evangelical Alliance is the latest national agency to offer further help by bringing together organisations that support people in Christian ministry in a single database. See the EA website at www.eauk.org.

newsdesk



Craig Millward brings us information from the Christian world. Pastor at Ormsby in Norfolk, Craig is a member of the Mainstream leadership team. His new book *Renewing Harvest* is reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

Pastoral Care Today Workshops

The Evangelical Alliance and CWR have arranged a series of four leaders' days in central London to present the material gleaned from their recent Pastoral Care Today survey. The invitation 'to explore why we as pastoral leaders went into this strange business of Christian ministry' aims to examine how our aspirations conflict with the ambiguities of ministry, and each day will also include biblical and pastoral reflections.

The first workshop entitled 'Managing Ministry' has already taken place, but the second, 'Embodying Ministry', will be on 28th May. Each day has been specially designed for the busy leader and is intended to be both personally inspiring as well as practically relevant and helpful. It will be an opportunity for personal refreshment and fellowship, and, for some, a ministry 'life-saver'. Designed for full- and part-time leaders, these workshops will also be helpful for elders.

The last two sessions are entitled 'Surviving Ministry' and 'Envisioning Ministry', and will be held on 17th September and 3rd December respectively. For more details, contact Beth Davies on bdavies@cwr.org.uk or at Waverley Abbey House, Farnham, Surrey GU9 8EP.

Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change Purpose Driven, Reaching the Unchurched Network and the Evangelical Alliance are co-sponsoring a tour by Dan Southerland from the Flamingo Road Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

'Transitioning: Leading Your Church Through Change' is a seminar designed to help leaders who are in the process of discovering new ways of doing church and are asking the question, 'How do we change from the church that we are to the church that we want to be?' The eight-step process taken from the book of Nehemiah covers the following topics:

- I. Preparing for change
- II. Defining the changes

- III. Planting changes with your key leaders
 - IV. Sharing changes with the congregation
 - V. Implementing the changes
 - VI. Dealing with the opposition
 - VII. Making adjustments
 - VIII. Evaluating the results
- Dan Southerland's seminar has previously been presented to the Saddleback Purpose Driven Church Conference, where the sponsors were unanimous in their desire to bring him to the UK. The tour visits Glasgow on April 8th, Belfast (10th), Aylesbury (11th) and Derby (12th).

For further information contact:
Lindsay Kirk
Evangelical Alliance
186 Kennington Park Road
London SE11 4BT
Tel: 020 7207 2131
Email: lkirk@eauk.org

We're all teenagers now



by Simon Hall

Simon Hall has been involved in youth ministry since his theological studies at Oxford. He is presently the Pastor of revive, a congregation linked with Sharing Life, reaching out to the extensive night club and pub culture of Leeds. He has become known as a writer, speaker and thinker about Church, mission and youth culture.

I have discovered that something fairly terrible happened to me last September, without me ever knowing it. If the information I have now had been available to me at the time, perhaps I would have organised a wake, a moment of silence at least. Apparently I grew up. In America, the MacArthur Foundation funded a \$3.4 million research project called *Transitions to Adulthood*, which declared that for men this transition ends at 34, the august age I attained last year. Actually, I've been feeling old for nearly two years now, ever since Anna gave birth to twins.

But is there any truth in this research, or is just another marketing exercise to persuade older and older people that it's OK to hang out in McDonald's and wear shiny Nike trainers? Well, Brit Robert Elms reckons that we are *all* teenagers now. The thing that was special about teenagers in the 1950s was their use of disposable income to spend on useless stuff. Records. Clothes. Funny shoes. Hairdos. Only really rich people spent money defining themselves by their possessions until teenagers came along. Now we all do it, spending more and more money on useless stuff just so we'll look good to others. Hence, we're all teenagers.

Hmmm. I think that might be pushing the point. We're all sad consumerists, victims of the latest fads and fashions, desperate to be liked, to be 'in' somewhere. Teenagers were just the first. However, I do think that the period between leaving childhood and 'settling down' is growing ever wider. In some ways, even though I've been

married for over ten years, I never wanted or tried to settle down until the aforementioned bundles of joy arrived in my life. Before that, settling down was the worst thing that could happen to me.

All this seems to be underpinning a definite change in ministry to young adults. Until recently, in our kind of churches, most people aged 18–30 would normally do one (or more) of a limited number of things: go to university, help out in the youth group, drink coffee and try not to 'morally compromise' each other in the singles group, or just fade away. Now they are starting to act like the teenagers: making demands, doing their own thing, not fitting in. I have just returned from a gathering organised by New Wine for people like me who lead 'ministries' to young adults. What I found most

from www.tribalgeneration.com, a network started up from St Thomas's Church in Sheffield, famously home to the Nine O'clock Service. This is just one of a number of networks that are starting up to support young adults and their leaders, without requiring them to start a new church or listen to dance music. After the initial advance of the so-called 'alternative worship' movement, it seems like there is now an increasing number of much more 'normal' expressions of young adult spirituality.

Young adults are an even rarer breed in our churches than teenagers, so it seems sensible to take care of the ones we have. In my experience, many of these new groups are not so much an expression of the need for a new church, but of the glass ceiling that still exists for people under 30 when it comes to church

a glass ceiling still exists for people under 30 when it comes to church leadership

interesting about the 120 or so there was that only two of the churches represented were 'youth churches'. All the other people there were involved with 'young adults groups', 'tribes', 'expressions of church' – which were all in effect youth groups for 20s and 30s. The people they are working with were teenagers 5, 10, 15 years ago, and they still haven't decided to settle down and settle for church as they know it in their locality.

Although New Wine kindly organised the conference, the energy behind the event came

leadership. When someone leaves school or university, it may be ten or fifteen years before they 'settle down'. Why not use that energy for your community?

For an article about the MacArthur research, try www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A49581-2002Jan1.html

For the best stuff on 'Generation X' access www.youth.co.za and go to 'The Generation X Internet Onramp'

continued from page 20

see and understand ourselves – this is the world where style and image are king. He then provides a brilliant thumbnail sketch of how Christian thinkers have understood the image of God throughout Church history before turning to a detailed exposition of the key texts that speak of the image of God in human beings, and of Jesus Christ as the perfect image of God in whom we are being formed. In the last part he reflects on the way human sexual difference is a reflection of God's own diversity within the unity of the Trinity. He finally argues that the church community is the place where relational understanding of self is worked out in love within an eschatological destiny. Identity is formed relationally as believers swap the narrative provided by modern understandings of self-formation for the narrative of Jesus.

We are made in the image of the social God

This is no easy read, and some prior theological or general cultural reading is essential. It is helpful for anyone who wants to think seriously about how to understand our human condition in our society. It provides insights into how we have arrived at our present times. It helps form our agenda as God's community in which we must emphasise building relational communities that embody unity and diversity. It suggests we must engage in relational mission that respects the integrity and value of all people. More application to pastoral and mission issues would have helped. Drawing out the implication of unity and diversity within the relational God for human life, and therefore for the way we do church, would have strengthened it further – an urgent theological task as we live within a fragmented and pluralist society.

Stephen Ibbotson

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Inside government

Stephen Rand of Tearfund, and Co-Chair of the Jubilee Debt Campaign is a regular at our conference, writes about the world debt issue.

I attended the meeting this morning – 5th February – on behalf of Jubilee Debt Campaign. The context was that Gordon Brown and the Treasury launched 'Tackling Poverty: A Global New Deal – A modern Marshall Plan for the Developing World' (www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media_store/otherfiles/globalnewdeal.pdf) It includes a section on debt relief under the heading of financing for development, and its first action point is for the developed countries to 'move forward on debt relief'.

The format of the meeting was interactive, with Clare Short, Gordon Brown and Paul Boateng, answering points raised by three or four guests, then inviting further comments. Here's a flavour of the meeting.

Clare Short: 'Campaigners need to be inspired by what has been achieved'; 'conflict is costing 2% of growth in Africa'; 'globalisation with equity is a possibility'.

Gordon Brown: referred to 'an economic and social strategy that includes debt relief'. He emphasised that whatever method of development funding was chosen, they all required political will to make them happen. He also said that the 'EU aid budget is a disgrace in the way it has been misused'.

A recurring theme was their urging churches and agencies to do whatever they could to influence matching organisations in the US – the dominance of the Christian Right's view that does not take world poverty seriously

was seen as the major problem preventing further progress. We were able to focus on debt relief, and proper financing for sustainable development. I reminded the Chancellor that his 'virtuous circle' included debt relief, and insisted that our report demonstrated the key significance of further debt relief if the Millennium Development Goals were to be achieved. I concluded by asking whether the problem was that the economic case for further debt relief had to be made, or that political realities had to be dealt with. I received no answer!

stephen.rand@tearfund.org

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Relational evangelism

feature



by Andy Aldridge

In all my relationships with unchurched people, my overall aim is to create an environment of trust whereby any and every topic can be aired and discussed in a way which always leaves room for manoeuvre. I cannot stress too strongly the importance of mutual respect in such relationships.

I have found the following guidelines to be helpful:

Be realistic

Do not underestimate the power of the dark side. In our culture, spirituality is in, religion is out. Spirituality is the light side; religion is the dark side. Christians, therefore, are perceived as the dark side. To change this perception will take many things, one of which is Christians forming real loving relationships with the unchurched.

Be in the right place at the right time

I've realised that in certain situations I develop relationships much more readily than in others. The contrast is quite stark: in some contexts I am comfortable making conversation, whereas in others I feel completely left out, unable to interact with anyone. The key is to identify and spend time in those social situations which help you to develop relationships. You might find it easier to talk to people while walking the dog, or meeting people at Crufts. What matters is that you find environments that allow you to be you. While we can pray and ask God what is the best place for us to develop friendships,

there seems to be a lot of trial and error here, so stick at it.

Be authentic

For most of us, life involves struggle. Nothing puts me off people more than when someone has all the answers to life's difficulties. Immediately I am very suspicious. Friendships are built on openness and trust, so don't pretend you have everything sorted.

Be accepting

Someone once said to me, 'I feel I can talk to you about spiritual things'. He didn't know why this was the case, he just felt that it was. Something inside him said that this relationship was a safe environment in which to express his opinions and to listen to mine. Being accepting of someone doesn't mean you approve of all that they do and say, but it does mean that you take them as they are.

Be distinctive (but not rude)

Being accepting of people doesn't mean I have to compromise what I believe. If push comes to shove and an unchurched friend asks me to do something I believe to be wrong, I will, by the grace of God, stand my ground. Having said this, how I handle it is very important, as I know they are going to find my behaviour a bit wacky. I explain it along the lines of, 'I know this may seem a bit strange to you, but as a Christian, this is where I am coming from'.

Be normal (get a life)

It is very difficult to connect with people when all you can talk

about is churchy things. In short, 'get a life' – sport, cinema, anything!

Be intentional

Getting to know people is a bit like being Noddy and Big Ears. First you nod, then you nod and say hello, then you nod, say hello, and ask how they are. When they see you've got big ears, a friendship starts.

Be complimentary (but not sickly)

In most conversations I have with unchurched people, I find myself seeing their spirituality as they tell me how important their family is to them. I often end up saying, 'You'd make a good vicar' or 'You're a spiritual person'. This is a genuine comment, not a 'formula', but it does put spirituality on our agenda.

Be curious (but not nosy)

Most people love talking about themselves, so I always ask a few questions to try to tap into people's passions. I might be in a situation where I have five minutes to get to know someone: I ask questions which enable them to tell me about their interests as part of their 'story'. For instance, if I already know what line of work they're in, I would ask them how they came to be at the point they are at now.

Be prayerful

God gives the increase, so pray and ask God to give some more.

Andy Aldridge worked with Youth For Christ for many years before becoming Outreach Co-ordinator at Poynton Baptist Church.

From Poacher to President

by Nigel Wright

Dr Nigel G Wright is the principal of Spurgeon's College, London and vice-president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. He is well known for his many books including *The Radical Evangelical* and *Challenge to Change*.

In a short time I shall assume the presidency of the Baptist Union for the year 2002–03. It's the kind of thing you are surprised to find yourself doing. In my earlier days, I would not have believed it possible. What we needed to be was a movement, not an institution. Institutions were slow and lumbering. They were self-protective and self-interested. They were obsessed with rules and regulations, not initiatives and action. They got on board with movements of the Spirit about twenty years after they happened, i.e., twenty years too late. They were to do with Temples – static and immovable – when what we needed was Tabernacles – mobile and built for pilgrimage. I had read Howard Snyder's *New Wine New Wineskins* and he had said it all to my complete satisfaction. I was happy therefore to 'critique' (a horrible term, but more positive than 'criticise') things from the edges and know for a fact that, along with others, I gave at least one superintendent a few headaches.

Has the poacher turned gamekeeper? The truth is that I still believe everything that I ever did about institutions. We need to watch them like hawks and bend them in the right direction by the application of continual effort. But at the same time I have come to see that they too have a place.

There are various dimensions to this. One is theological. It has to do with the Body of Christ as a corporate, translocal reality. Of course, as a good Baptist, I firmly believe in the local church as the place where church really happens. If it isn't local, it isn't real. But local churches that are not open to other congregations

of God's people are frankly defective. They are violating the universal nature of the church. They are also missing out on the glories of belonging to the church of Christ in all its diversity and richness.

In the present broken state of the Christian church, which means that we are often divided from each other, the emergence of denominations has been significant. They provide networks and communities which offer a wider dimension to Christian solidarity, while allowing us to maintain our distinctive identities. They are organs of connectedness. If they didn't exist, we would probably set about inventing them. One day, of course, all the distinctions will perish, so we do well not to make too much of them, and certainly not to make distinctions



Photo: Jackie Sheppard

mean the doctrinal centre of the church's faith as supremely expressed in the doctrine of the Triune God. But I also have in mind the wisdom of the church as it has grown and developed over the years, a wisdom that can be preserved in the structured life of the church at its best.

There is an extra spin to this: relationships are crucial to the whole of the Christian life. But we can sometimes manipulate relationships. We can gather

there is a charism, a gift of grace, that God imparts through the corporate life of a communion of churches

into divisions. But, in the meantime, they fulfil a role and they offer a home.

The other dimension is more personal. As I have participated in the renewal movements of the last thirty years, I have noticed that people who are not rooted in a tradition have a tendency to become eccentric. They spin off towards the margins in the search of the exotic and novel. And they persuade others to spin off with them. By contrast, my instinct has been the opposite – to become more deeply rooted in the centre, and to be increasingly accountable to others rather than less for what I believe and how I behave. By the centre here I

around us people who think as we do and whom we can persuade to see things our way. We can get them to collude with us. Even our relationships therefore need to be held within some wider form of accountability that will make it more difficult (nothing is foolproof) for us to get away with deluding ourselves.

I guess you could say therefore that I have become something of a denominationalist. For me that means that there is a charism, a gift of grace, that God imparts through the corporate life of a communion of churches. As with all God's gifts, we are foolish to turn it down.