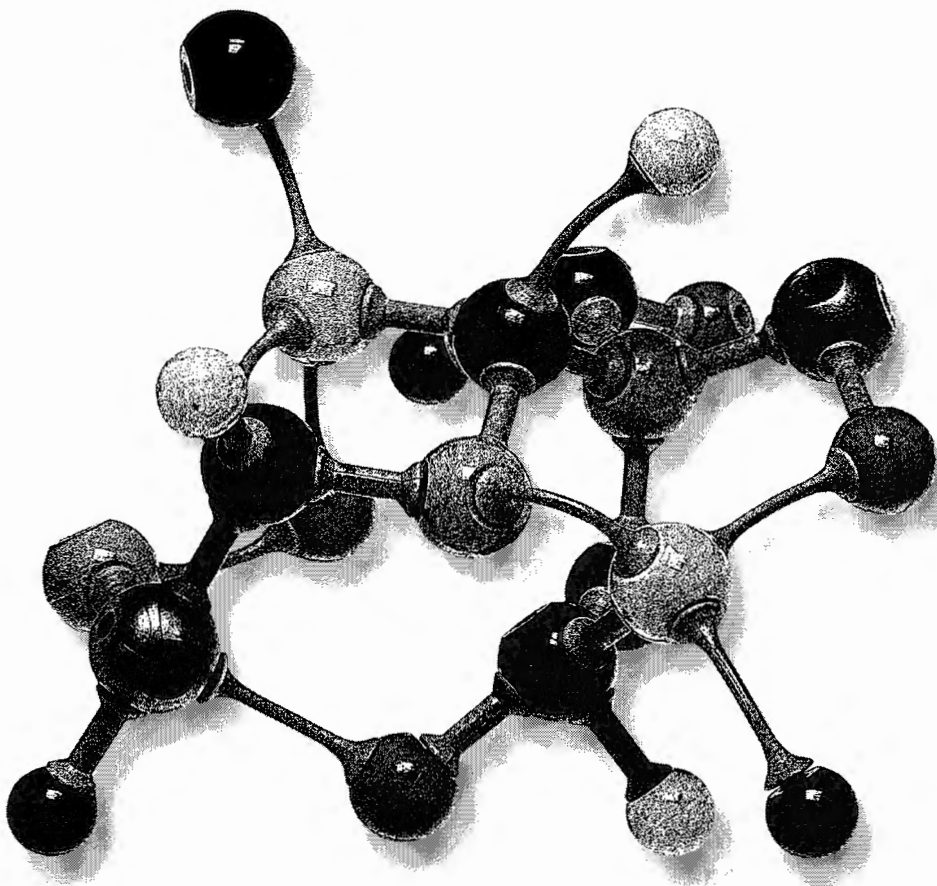


TALK

The Mainstream Magazine

Spring 2005



Working it out

Mark Greene
Andrew Letby
Harold Clarke
Martin Stow
Lynn Green
Peter Nodding
Nigel Wright
Rob White
and more...

Connecting leaders

**Mainstream
is committed to:**
Get passionate about knowing God.
Get real in relationships.
Get stuck into God's mission.

On blind spots and paradigm shifts

Like most blind spots it's all pretty obvious once it's pointed out, but can you see it beforehand? It's such an evident observation that church members spend most of their time away from church in the places where they work, study or live. But most of our time in terms of mission and ministry as church leaders has been poured into church-centred activities, and much energy expended getting people to sign up, support and run those activities we dream up. So the stress factor has been high and the fallout rate commensurate.



How have we missed the obvious? It's surely a remnant of the secular-sacred divide. It's the fact that as church leaders we take on all too quickly a church-centric view of the world, so that vision and strategies develop around what we know. But if our calling as a minority within an indifferent or even hostile society is, as in Jeremiah's day, to 'seek the well-being of the city' where we live as exiles, or as in Peter's day to 'live such good lives' as 'aliens and strangers in the world', then the topic of this edition of *Talk*, is an edition that's been needed for a long time. And much more important, this theme touches a nerve which demands a paradigm shift in the way we express ministry and church. What could be more strategic or important for relevant mission than the support of the scattered church in our everyday life?

If you've not yet had a major discussion within your leadership that asks the question, 'How can we as a Christian community support church members in their daily discipleship in the places where they live out the greater part of lives?', then this edition will hopefully give you a few resources to start that debate. It's a joy to interview Mark Greene from The London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, who has given the Church a lead in this area. And there are plenty of nuggets to be mined from the contributions of those in the workplace, and from those involved in workplace chaplaincy - frequently looked upon, totally unjustly, as a second-class expression of ministry by those in church-based ministry. God forgive us!

And, having sat in the editor's chair for four years, it's a joy to pass it on to Simon Jones to take *Talk* to new levels to resource and encourage you in your leadership roles. It's been a fascinating time and I've contacted many interesting people Walter Brueggemann and Stanley Hauerwas amongst them. Now I want to turn my hand to fuller-length publishing: I think there's a market for Grove-type booklets but from a Baptist, Free and New Church stable rather than a predominantly Anglican source. From one and to ones seeking the shalom of the city, farewell and God bless!

Stephen Ibbotson is the Editor of *Talk*.

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

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The working mindset

Stephen Ibbotson

interviews

Mark Greene

Mark Greene is the Director of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, having served at London Bible College as their Vice-Principal and Lecturer in Communications. Prior to that, he worked in advertising. He is the author of a number of books, including *Thank God it's Monday*, *Of Love, Life and Caffe Latte* and most recently *Imagine - How can we reach the UK?*. Mark is married to Katrina and they have three children.

You've critiqued church leadership for not addressing the day-to-day issues people face in their working lives. Why are church leaders and structures generally so poor at this?

There are all kinds of factors. There's the way pastors have been trained for a primarily neighbourhood-focused ministry; there's the rapid change in the nature of work - how many hours people are working, how far away from the church they work; there's the sheer increase in demands on pastors today to deliver a much wider range of 'products and services' and that makes it harder for them to connect to the texture of people's ordinary day-to-day lives, as opposed to helping their people in crisis. Ultimately, the failure to address work issues is theological.

The failure to address work is the result of a limited view of the creator-redeemer God

There's a wonderful scene in *The Passion of the Christ* where Jesus, already whipped, blood- and spittle-spattered, falls on the Via Dolorosa. His mother rushes to pick him up and he looks at her intently and says, 'See, mother, how I make all things new'. It may be a quote transported from Revelation but it reveals something hugely important about the Cross - God in Christ was seeking the reconciliation and renewal of all things. As indeed Colossians 1 puts it: not some things, but all things. The failure to address work is ultimately the result of a limited view of the creator-redeemer God

But surely 'running a church' demands much time and emotional energy, and isn't it too easy to snipe at this attitude, certainly during a time when people are off institutions? Are you adding another stress factor to already busy and anxious church leaders?

Well, that might be the case if what was required was a massive change in the programmes of the church and a massive amount of study. But essentially the pastors who are good at helping the workers are good at it not because they preach eighteen sermons on performance-related

Our church communities are not focused on making disciples but on making converts

and his purposes for his people in the world and the opportunities that they have to contribute to his redemptive, missional purposes in their everyday activities.

Another reason is that overall our church communities, as LICC's *Imagine* research revealed, are not focused on making disciples, but on making converts. Our most gifted and trained pastors are spending very little time getting alongside a select group of individuals to help them follow Christ more closely in their lives. It's what Jesus did most of but what our churches do least of.

pay. Rather, it's because they are conscious of the area: they see the applications in the texts they're already preaching, pop something into a prayer about where people are during the

Consciousness is the key

week, and ask slightly different questions over coffee after the service. Consciousness is the key. Later on of course there is a lot more to do - real disciple-making requires more than consciousness.

In contrast to the mindset of church leaders who are 'running the church', what preoccupies the minds and emotions of church members?

According to our *Imagine* research, the five top issues for workers were:

- Stress/burnout
- Maintaining Christian integrity
- Communications/relationships
- Overwork/long hours
- Insecurity/redundancy

And indeed, Christians in work cite more issues on their mind in relation to work than any other area of their lives. At the same time, there is plenty more on their mind - parenting, older parents, illness, bereavement - just the overall difficulty of seeking to follow Christ in a much more difficult cultural environment where as one person put it, 'The Body Shop is seen as a better mentor than the Bible', and

The Body Shop is seen as a better mentor than the Bible

where, unimaginable twenty-five years ago, the national broadcaster airs programmes with Jesus being sworn at in the crudest terms. You may be against censorship, but there's no denying we're living in a post-Christian society that's changed faster than anyone has really been prepared for.

So you're saying that what's needed is primarily a matter of changing a mindset.

Mindset is the key - that consciousness of God's interest in all, and his desire that his people would indeed do all that they do in his strength and in his ways.

If you were to give our readers key things to do to make a difference in helping to equip Christians in society, what would they be?

Listening is the first step. When Bishop James Jones was a curate, he used to set aside one day a month to go and visit someone in their workplace, and it had a hugely positive impact every way round. Maybe it might be more realistic to aim for six or seven times a year, but the pastors who do it gain a huge amount from it. And so do the ones visited and indeed the rest of the congregation. Secondly, you could do a simple bit of research - ask people what issues they're facing in various areas of their lives and see what comes back. I, for example, was not surprised to see stress on the list of workers' major issues, but I was surprised to see ethical pressure so high.

Give us some examples of good practice that you've come across.

There are lots of little things pastors are doing to change the community consciousness - prayer points for workers in the bulletin; ninety-second missionary interviews in a service asking someone what they do, what their challenges are, what they want prayer for; injecting

something about work in the offertory prayer; giving people a biblical framework through preaching, and so on. Still, if you're going to get people supporting one another in their everyday lives, you have to do something in the home groups or cells, so that it becomes legitimate and natural to talk and pray about the issues. *How to Support the Workers* has a whole section of practical ideas on everything from preaching to notice-boards.

Many readers of Talk are not in full-time church leadership. How can they play a positive role in helping to form the local church's response on this issue?

Invite their minister to their workplace. Give him or her a newspaper cutting about an issue they're facing. Buy them some resources - many pastors have a woefully low resource budget. Invite them to go to a workplace conference. Start a prayer triplet themselves. Suggest that there

should be a deacon in charge of 'beyond the neighbourhood' mission and ministry. Put mini-missionary profiles of 'workers' on a church notice-board as many now do with overseas missionaries ...

Switching to the workplace itself, is there any particular issue you think we're facing?

The research is clear - time. Work-

Work-life integration is the major presenting issue

life integration is the major presenting issue. We in the UK work five hours longer on average per person per week

than any other nation in the EU. And we commute a long way. We're time-poor. We're tired. And neither of those two fit neatly with developing a vibrant relationship with God or with other people. Does it have to be that way? Not for everyone - particularly when the consequences for their health and relationships are so serious but this needs careful work. Some people can work seventy hours a week and still maintain a vibrant relationship with God, family and friends and still run a youth group every Friday night. Not many though.

We are called to be a missionary people who are, in Jeremiah's shocking phrase, to 'seek the welfare of the city'. What does this mean for us today?

Contribute to the economy; help to create quality companies and institutions where people are treated like human beings; look after the people you work with; pray for them; take in chocolate biscuits one day a week to bring the team together...

Jeremiah also focuses on the quality of family life.

We're called to be a model, a minister and a mouthpiece for Christ

So what is a Christian missionary in the light of this?

A Christian who is loved by God, and goes, accompanied by Christ and on Christ's authority, into whatever context to live the good news of the redeemed and regenerate life there, to apply the good news to the issues and situations they find there, and to share the good news of abundant life in the now and in eternity with the people they meet. My friend Beverley Shepherd uses four 'M's - we're all called to be a model, a minister and a mouthpiece for Christ. And some of us are also called to be a 'mover and shaker'.

Any tips for people in the workplace?

We need a context where it is legitimate and natural to talk and pray about work issues

Find one or two people to support and encourage you and keep you focused on God's agenda for you at work. Pray. Be a blessing - you may not be able to proclaim the gospel every day but you can share the kindness of Christ every day. Ask God to help you love the people you're with. Build relationships. Do good work in Christ's power. Pray for opportunities to speak and, like the disciples in Acts, pray for the Spirit-empowered boldness to take them. Ask your home group to pray.

It's a demanding time to be a missionary (when wasn't it?), with many lights of faith being put out across Europe and the Western world. How do we cultivate both hope and realism?

The gospel is not just a great way to live; the gospel has power. I can't get away from the reality that Christ is real, that Christ is relevant to the deepest yearnings and most terrible rebellions of the human heart and that Christ's power is radical enough to satisfy those yearnings and deal with those rebellions. Furthermore, we are in a culture which is both spiritual in its orientation and bereft of any answers to the questions its people are asking about meaning, purpose and value. In that there is enormous and abiding hope. Has anyone got a better idea? On the other hand, the church's poor image, the enormous distracting power

of our media, our work-style, and our recreational, prescribed and illegal drugs do make it very hard to get people to stop and think about whether what they have is delivering what they really want.

Is our calling to be a faithful minority, or can you see a time when the tide of faith flows again in our society?

We are already a minority and I can see no return to the quasi-Christendom that we had up until the 1960s. Some think that Christians will be heavily persecuted, others that we will grow smaller before we begin to grow bigger again, whilst others think that this is a great time to be a Christian and that God is on the move. I'm in the last group and I think that there's an enormous amount of good work being done and an enormous amount of fresh, biblically-vigorous thinking being done that, whatever the next two decades hold, we certainly have the opportunity to prepare a new generation for the future with a gospel that is Christ-centred and whole-life-oriented and flourishes in robust, encouraging communities.

Finally, any resources you'd point

church leaders to, and any for church members?

My colleague Nick Spencer's work on where people are today makes compelling reading - *Beyond Belief; barriers and bridges to belief* (LICC, 2002, £5) is excellent. As is the follow-up work on the spirituality of people outside the church - *Beyond The Fringe: researching a spiritual age* (LICC, £7.99). As for mission in the UK, my graphic, illustrated essay *Imagine - How can we reach the UK?* has been very enthusiastically received by

We are in a culture which is both spiritual in its orientation and bereft of any answers

leaders and people alike (Authentic, £2.99). When it comes to work, my mother would recommend Mark Greene's *Thank God it's Monday* (SU, £6.99) to anyone, *How to Support the Workers - without going insane* (LICC, £5) to pastors and leaders and the six-part group video *Christian Life & Work* (LBC, £25) to any context where two or three meet. And my mother is very discerning in these matters. My father likes *Pocket Prayers for Work* (CHP, £5.99), which has a varied collection of mainly new prayers by contemporary 'workers' and ministers for personal, group and congregational use. LICC also do a bi-weekly e-mail: one begins with scripture and the Friday one begins with a contemporary event, book, film etc, and tries to bring a biblical perspective. Email mail@licc.org.uk to subscribe.



Galilee, toilet breaks and ministry



Andrew Letby

When Jesus appeared on the shores of Galilee and so impressed four ordinary working men that they were prepared to give up all they had for an uncertain life in the company of an itinerant preacher, it might seem that a model for future discipleship was set. That model roughly implies that paid work is a necessary evil that should never be allowed to take precedence over the call to Christian discipleship. However, a much more wholesome model is to be found at the other end of the gospel story. When the risen Christ seeks out his old friends in order to anoint them with the

So much pent-up feeling had never been allowed to be a part of Sunday worship

As a workplace chaplain, I am in contact with many people who are immersed in the struggle of everyday life. What I do is one part of the church's response to filling the gap, but not every workplace has access to a chaplain. It seems to me that we must encourage those in our pews to begin understanding that what they celebrate and learn on a Sunday is intimately bound up with what happens to them on a Monday morning.

prayer was incredibly moving, and not only did many of the congregation feel affirmed, the local minister was amazed at just how much he had learned about his congregation. I have tried to replicate the exercise in other places to limited effect, but on that day in that place it worked wonderfully. I felt it was a release of so much pent-up feeling that never before had been allowed to be a part of Sunday worship. Christians are present in almost every workplace, but if we assess the content of much worship and teaching, it is not always so obvious that workers and their concerns are present in all places of worship.

Andrew Letby is currently Workplace Chaplain in Newcastle with a specific focus on Newcastle Airport. He is also seconded as Economic Affairs Field Officer, helping to implement Methodism's strategy for engagement with the economy. He was previously in church and chaplaincy ministry.

I was almost in tears as I read of the issues people were concerned about

task of lifelong service, where does he go? Back to the lakeside and, surrounded by the night's catch, they discover their greatest lesson. I believe they finally understood that their real mission was right on that lakeside amongst family, friends and workmates.

A few years ago, I led worship in a large church with a pretty wide range of professional and skilled people amongst the membership. During the offertory the congregation was encouraged to write down issues that were of concern to them in the coming week. I took these away and during the afternoon I worked on them to produce prayers for the evening service. By the end of the afternoon I was almost in tears as I read of the issues that people were concerned about. The comments were wide-ranging: the pressure of being on call; the salesman stressed by driving; the IT manager responsible for a new computer system coming on line that week; teachers bound up in paperwork; grandparents struggling to care for young children whilst parents tried to hold down two jobs. The time of

So what are the issues? Every place of work is different, but what is clearly evident is that the contemporary workplace can be a very difficult place to be. I offer here examples from my own observations.

In so many occupations there is

There is enormous pressure to deliver

enormous pressure to deliver. This is as true of a bus driver trying to keep to time in heavy traffic as it is of the senior manager trying to find ways in which to make a business more profitable. I have read a number of articles recently suggesting that increasing numbers of people are 'downshifting' to less

people are 'downshifting' to less responsible and less well paid jobs, setting up small businesses or making other attempts to remove some of the strain. However, for most people these are not options.

In the UK we have some of the longest average working hours in Europe, with unpaid overtime running at record levels. Of course we have legislation to limit abuse, but for many people, particularly in middle and senior management as well as many professions, this has little impact. And how often do we seriously consider the issues for those who have to work on Sunday? As long as we focus our worship on a Sunday, we exclude many people who have no option but to work that day. How do we support such people?

I live in an area where some of the most significant employers are call centres. Many of these have developed a reputation for

manager who knew all the staff and had a welfare concern for them is becoming something of a rarity, and consequently staff feel isolated when things go wrong. A simple example: a shop worker who was clearly suffering from flu symptoms told me how she had pleaded to be allowed to go home. Because her manager was away that day no one would take responsibility for allowing her to go and so she had to stay and suffer, not to mention spread germs far and wide.

Is there anything we can do? Church leaders need to take a serious interest in the jobs people do. In some cases a visit at work might be appropriate; putting someone into their work context is important in getting to know them. Or what about people asking people to share something of their work during worship or in the church magazine? There is certainly scope for teaching and preaching on issues of faith and work, but

ask just because someone doesn't seem active in the church doesn't mean that they are not extremely busy people.

I vividly remember addressing a small congregation where everyone except myself was beyond state retirement age. My theme that morning drew on my observations of stress in the modern workplace. As the service progressed and I told stories of people I had met at work, I became less and less confident of my ground. Not because what I was saying was untrue, I knew that it certainly was true, but because I assumed that the subject could not possibly be engaging the congregation. However, after the service, a lady took to me to one side and thanked me for my message: 'What you said this morning is just what my son says about his work. I'm going to tell him that *someone* in the church is concerned about what is happening to him.' Since that day I have never been afraid anywhere and everywhere to talk about the issues I encounter. For a generation who wonder about the relevance of the church to their everyday lives, we ignore the issues that concern them in their waking hours at our peril.

The provision of paid toilet breaks is a serious issue in some call centres

high staff turnover, attributed in many instances to low pay and difficult working conditions. The provision of paid toilet breaks is a serious issue in some call centres and indeed some other sectors. Yes, this *is* a 21st-century issue!

Whilst we live in an era of low unemployment, we also appear to live in an environment of low job security. There are very few employers who now offer a 'job for life'. The need to retrain and the effect on pension contributions are serious issues, but how do you cope with the possibility that you could arrive at work in the morning to be told to clear your desk and go by coffee-time?

We might also raise concerns about the remoteness of management and the outsourcing of Human Resource functions. The personnel

it means looking beyond biblical commentaries and theological works in order to find the subject matter. A simple web search will bring up vast amounts of information from organisations like the TUC and Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, opening up hundreds of articles that will help in understanding the workplace. Got a sabbatical coming up? What about spending it in a secular workplace? Ministers have a range of skills that can be of use and more importantly could learn valuable lessons. I have learned to drive a bus, and reviewed recruitment and selection procedures for a large public sector organisation in recent years. Not sure where to go? Ask the workers in your congregations. Finally, when you're looking for a new treasurer or Sunday School teacher, think carefully who you

Methodist Church, *Let Your Light Shine - A strategy for the Methodist Church's Engagement with Economic Life*, Methodist Publishing House
G Stokes, *Working with God*, Mowbray 1992
S Pattison, *The Faith of the Managers*, Cassell 1997
www.peoplemanagement.co.uk
www.tuc.org.uk

The workplace as a mission-field



After being promoted into a senior management position just over three years ago, I became increasingly frustrated that the job 'demands' restricted my involvement with the local church. I would often miss cell group, church meetings and other events because I was away on business. My expectation was that I needed to have a role in the church,

I almost missed God's call because of the busyness I had created in my world

otherwise I wouldn't be fulfilling God's purpose for me. This led to feelings of guilt that my skills and experience were not being applied or used in church, and I often questioned if I was where God wanted me to be.

This changed two years ago when God spoke to me powerfully through Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, which showed me that he had placed me in a position of influence in a commercial organisation and he wanted to use me there.

Servant leadership It is so easy to become conceited and self-confident in my job. However, I am there to serve the team: to ensure that they have the support they need, resources to do the job and to remove any potential barriers. I can remember God illustrated this quite dramatically when one morning I had to drop all the urgent activities I was filling my day with to just listen and 'be there' for a young member of my team who was in need. I almost missed God's call because of the busyness I had created in my world. There is a real danger that one can become self-reliant and confident in one's own ability, particularly the more senior you become. On many occasions I have had to be reminded that my trust must be

in God, not just for the future but also for the day-to-day issues that I face.

Managing with integrity

Increasingly integrity isn't valued in the commercial world, although J&J has a strong ethical base. God continues to challenge me in this area on a week-to-week basis. I could quote

numerous examples in which God prompted me to 'stick out my neck' for particular staff to ensure they were treated fairly. In each case there was a risk involved in going against the flow. However, I have found that God always honours your action even though it may be painful at the time! Acting with integrity makes a difference in the workplace and impacts other employees around you.

Guarding time For me, guarding a God-time, reading the Bible and praying is critical. If I am away, but especially in the US, I wake up early due to my internal clock. The temptation is to start working, especially on emails which arrive at the rate of

Acting with integrity makes a difference in the workplace and impacts other employees

up to ninety a day! However, being able to spend fifteen to thirty minutes in God's presence puts the day in perspective for me. During this time I always pray for my family back in the UK and also commit to God the meetings and challenges I have during that day. Often I feel inadequate to conduct my role with the skills and experience I have, and I ask God for strength and support. Time is generally precious to me

with the hectic schedule I lead. The phrase 'Love is spelt TIME' had a big impact on me. Keeping the family/work/life balance is something I constantly struggle with. The keys are effective prioritisation, delegation and recognition that I can never complete all my work!

Importance of not walking alone

I feel privileged to have fantastic prayer support from my church. This is first of all through members of my cell group, who also help my wife and children when I am away on business, which can be up to 50% of the time. It typifies the concept of 'walking with us' so nobody walks alone. Also, through the relationships with the ministers as part of the Leadership Support Group, we text and email one another on a regular basis with prayer requests. Providing mutual support is the remit of this group. Going out for lunch with one of the ministers or one of the other members of the LSG provides a good sounding-board to talk through issues and concerns that are on our hearts, but is also a great opportunity to encourage one another. As part of the Leadership Support Group we are

applying some of the principles from the business world (of management, communication and leadership) to the ministry team of the church, and this is proving to be very powerful.

I am convinced that God provides enormous opportunities for evangelism when one considers the workplace as a mission-field!

Martin Stow is Director of Research and Development Worldwide for Johnson and Johnson, a multi-national healthcare company. As team leader, his job involves extensive travel in Europe and the US. He is a member of the Leadership Support Group at Skipton Baptist Church, a group set up to 'walk alongside' the ministers. Martin is married to Ruth, a deacon in the church, and they



Simon Hall

Simon is pastor of revive, a young-generation church within the extensive youth culture of Leeds. He is also tutor on the Oasis youth ministry course based in Leeds, and has become known as a writer and thinker about church, mission and youth culture.

When I think about work, I think about something beyond what we call church. According to the sociologist Peter Berger in

The energy flow isn't just weak it's in the wrong direction!

The Sacred Canopy, this ability to compartmentalize our faith and life is unique to the modern condition. The fact that our faith has nothing to say to our work is a new condition, and therefore may need some new ideas to get us out of the rut of privatized living. One of the things that frustrates me about church is how far we are from our dream of integrated living, in which the church is a source of energy for all of life. I mean, the energy flow isn't just weak; it's in the wrong direction!

The so-called 'five-fold ministry' of Ephesians 4 has been used as a definition of the positions or types of leadership, when it is in reality a description of the purpose of leaders: we are to prepare God's people for works of service. The passage goes on to describe the fruits of this kind of leadership: the building up of the body in spiritual, intellectual and communal maturity; loving discipline; an understanding of the role of each person.

In this picture of leadership, there is a flow of equipping, support, empowering from the leader to the church member. If the church is the body, and Christ the head, then leadership is the blood or the nervous system, providing life, energy, instruction, and purification. Such a metaphor moves leadership from a position of honour to one of near-invisibility.

There is no indication here or anywhere in the New Testament that I can find, that the leader provides church members with a 'vision' that they must 'get on board with'. Such a leadership will inevitably draw energy to itself,

will see people as resources to be used, and will drive a coach and horses over any vision that an individual might have. You end up with a body full of eyes, led by a 'head' in severe danger of usurping Christ's unique role.

The weaknesses of such a church construction only become apparent when we look at life outside the church itself. A couple of quick examples: Anna and I

both have a very strong memory of a youth weekend we helped to lead together. The speaker had been a young person at the church as well, and recounted his adolescent hatred of the church for taking his father away to mend the church roof on regular occasions. This almost passing reminiscence opened up a small flood tide of pain as many of the young people present expressed in hot tears the parental abandonment that their church had initiated and encouraged.

More recently, I have had the pleasure of encouraging two brilliant and dynamic leaders to step down from the leadership of our church. Eric (not his real name) was someone I had in mind as a bit of a protégé, but he has found his calling as an advisor to voluntary groups across the city. He is alive when he talks about helping this group or that, but weighed down by his

administrative responsibilities in *revive*. Likewise, Jacob was a gifted and fruitful evangelist until we took up all his time with church business. He is now stepping down to rediscover his call and establish his own business.

There was a time when I wouldn't have been able to conceive of someone's discipleship taking them out of the church - the same time I caricatured members of the Northumbria Community as 'Church Drop-outs'. Today, I see it as vital to the future life and health of the body of Christ. What both Eric and Jacob have in common is a level of maturity that means they can take hold of their own vocation and run with it. Organisational theorists call this 'self-organising'. As Wheatley

Leadership that provides a 'vision' will inevitably draw energy to itself

and Kellner-Rogers write in *A Simpler Way*: 'Organising is a deep impulse...'

But how many of us live and work in organizations that fulfill our desires? Our organizations rarely reflect our need for meaning, for connection, and growth...

Can organizations learn to sustain the energy and desire that called them into being? Can organizations learn how to support us as self-organising?'

It seems to me that we are never going to crack the workplace until we can change the way we understand church and see ministry outside the church as at least as valuable as ministry inside. And don't tell me we're already doing it - I've never been in a church that honours good secretaries and fire fighters alongside Sunday School teachers and house group leaders! Never!

Supporting disciples in a 24/7 world

Lynn Green talks with some friends



The question, "How do we equip our members to be effective disciples everyday of the week?" is one that has often been on the lips of leaders over the last few years. It demonstrates the increased awareness that many have of the value of ministry in spheres other than Church and also the need for people to be encouraged and supported in all areas of their lives. Picking up on this theme I have gathered together a small group of people from our Church to reflect on what it means to be a disciple 24/7 and how the local Church can offer support for that.

So firstly, let me introduce you to Tim Clark who is married and has a six year-old daughter. He is the Operations Director (Northern Europe) for a US multinational software corporation. Next we have with us Fay Hanniker who is also married and has two sons aged seven and twelve. Fay works two days a week teaching English to GCSE and A Level in a comprehensive school. She is also training as a couple counselor with Relate and so spends another day each week counseling. Then there is Dexter Lee who is single and still in his twenties (unlike everyone else!). He came to the UK from Trinidad eight years ago to gain further training as a car mechanic. He works for a family owned garage business, which specialises in classic cars. Finally we have Trevor Shortt who is married with a two year-old daughter. Trevor is the Deputy Governor at a large women's prison which serves the courts in and around London.

Tell us a bit about how your discipleship works itself out in your everyday life?

Tim - I hope in the way I conduct myself and interact with others that my faith will be self-evident. But beyond that I can say that my faith has helped me in getting alongside others in my workplace who have been experiencing work or domestic life challenges. Rather than seeing myself as someone with "all the answers", being a disciple for me means that irrespective of position, we are all learning and that sometimes that involves difficult periods in life. This sense of "levelling" has helped me tangibly in team building, in delivering difficult news, in safeguarding the company's human assets and in nurturing growth and productivity.

Trevor - I agree, for me too my faith has a lot to do with how I interact with people. Being a Christian, for me, establishes the moral framework for my work in the way that I deal with prisoners and staff. I am committed to ensure that the prison is a decent and safe place to live and work, where people are treated with respect. In my role, I have the opportunity to be involved in setting the tone and culture of the prison to try to make it a positive place where people can make changes to their lives for the better. Prison is often a forgotten place in society, yet for those who are sent to prison the impact on their lives can be huge. For women in particular, there are issues of separation from family and children, dissolution of home and housing, and many bring with them a whole range

of complex physical and mental health problems together with significant histories of abuse. A sad fact is that levels of self-harm are high. But for some, prison can be a place of safety where some of these issues can begin to be addressed.

Fay - Like Trevor, my counselling and training with Relate has brought me into contact with many different people some of whom have acute needs. I have been challenged as I have encountered people with such different attitudes, values and beliefs. And although I have always tried to engage with people in a Christ-like way just like Tim and Trevor have been discussing, there have been times when I have really struggled as to whether the work I was doing is compatible with my Christian faith, because some of the relationships that I work with are so broken they cannot be restored. I have had to work through these issues before God and with the help of other Christians and I have reached a place of conviction that this is where God wants me to be. There is so much hurt in the world and although I cannot share my faith openly with clients, I really hope that I do show something of God's love. I have found that my faith has strengthened me and helped me from being overwhelmed by the pain of others. God also helps me with clients I find it hard to like and I always try to remember just how much God loves each one He has created. For me, I have found that praying before a counseling session makes a real difference.

Lynn Green is married to Stuart and has two primary school aged children. She serves as Minister and Team Leader at Wokingham Baptist Church and is also a member of the Mainstream leadership team. Prior to church based ministry she worked in marketing and was a commuter to London.

Dex - Life as a mechanic is a bit different to you guys! I work in a small business and although a couple of my work mates probably believe in God I am the only one who is trying to follow Jesus each day. What is the same as the others though is that my faith has definitely changed the way I do my job. It's not just about me doing a job anymore. When dealing with customers I take more time to be polite and friendly and I am more concerned about them. Now I also see more than ever that my job is about offering people a job and advice that they can trust. With my work mates and when I'm socialising I don't get grief for being a Christian, but it's not cool either. But as far as I'm concerned this is who I am and everybody knows about it even though I'm pretty laid back about things. I've had some great conversations with people at times and I can see some changes in people as a result.

Where do you find support and resources to help sustain you?

Trevor- My support comes from my colleagues at work, my family and my Church. My own devotional times are hugely important, but finding the time with a busy job and a young family isn't easy. I tend to use my weekends off to make up the deficits and to use the hour and a half I spend in the car each day to think, reflect and pray. "Watch and pray" has taken on a new meaning!

Fay - It is very similar for me too, although I have the added benefit of the support of my supervisor and other colleagues at Relate. When it comes to issues other than counselling though, I have been part of a prayer triplet for quite a long time now and that is a real source of support. We meet every other week and it is a great opportunity to really talk and pray through some issues on an ongoing basis. It goes without saying that my husband is also a great support! And both my Christian and not-yet Christian friends provide a much needed safety valve and reality check!

Dex - I get my support from Church and very much from my small group, which is like part of my family. We meet together every

week and for me it is a place to share anything and everything; it really is something special. It spiritually strengthens me. We get together as believers with similar problems although some with much worse problems and others going through good times. We learn more together about God and each other. As I said, it's special.

Tim - Like Dex the key to my support also comes from being part of the local Church. The opportunity to discuss "walking with Christ in the workplace" issues with Christian friends at Church, and particularly those in my small group, is essential. I'm fortunate that many in our Church work in similar environments and roles to me. There is an immediate empathy and an understanding of the pressures and challenges that I face as a Christian in the workplace. Although I have to say, like Trevor, I find managing the work-life-faith balance hard sometimes too. It is easy to get wrapped up in the "corporate momentum" and be consumed. So talking to folk in similar situations helps me to discover mechanisms to achieve both a successful and productive work life and also to grow spiritually at the same time. Although work and faith can sometimes seem to be at loggerheads I believe that through living out my Christian values and being a witness to Christ I am going to grow in my faith too.

In what you've said so far each of you have talked about some of the different ways that you are being supported and equipped by your local Church. Do you think there are ways for the local Church to improve what it offers?

Dex - I think our Church does a great job! I particularly like the way that I am being encouraged to be involved in the Church in ways that work with my lifestyle. I'm not left to be a bystander just because I'm not a regular on a Sunday morning, but I am being involved in things and this builds my faith which then makes me more able to follow Jesus throughout the whole of the week.

Trevor - Let's not lose sight of the value of weekly corporate worship as a source of equipping and support because this is something to build on. Church provides, for

my family and me, a weekly rhythm to a routine that is otherwise characterized by odd shifts; this is an anchor point. But looking at things from another angle my wife and I have also started attending The Marriage Course organised by our Church and we are looking forward to this giving us the opportunity to work through the balancing act of two busy jobs, unpredictable hours with the joys and demands of home and family life.

Fay From a practical perspective I think it would be good to have a formal list of people's jobs so that it would be easy to seek out people facing similar pressures and issues. Maybe it would also be good to have someone who takes the initiative with regard to workplace ministry issues and makes sure that people know about up-coming events, networks, resources and so on in a more consistent way.

Tim - I'm with Trevor on this one, because for me too corporate worship is key to energising me and setting the overall agenda and tenor of my Christian life, although as I said earlier small group interaction is also essential to get to grips with the practical nitty gritty of discipleship. Having said that though, it would be good to hear through things like conferences / tapes, etc. how prominent business leaders manage their business life in the context of their Christian life. Maybe it would also be good to draw together a lot of the informal stuff that goes on by having some sort of "gathering" develop to talk about Christianity in the workplace more systematically. Thinking about all this, I realise that there is something that I can do too and that is to make use of the resources and support that the Church already offers. I really do need to get organised to get down to the men's prayer breakfast at 7:15am on a Friday morning and get praying with the other guys...

Following an attack of the 'posts'

I succumb quite regularly these days to an attack of the 'posts'. Everything to be anything has to be 'post-' something. Anybody who wants to be anyone has to talk the 'post' lingo. It began with 'post-modernism'. Now it's viral with preachers. There's 'post-evangelical', 'post-charismatic', 'post-Christendom' and there's even talk of a state called 'post-Christian'. We used to call that 'back-sliding' - but nothing so politically incorrect is permissible now. For what it's worth, I'm not even sure of the validity and rigour of 'post-modernism'. To be honest I don't feel post-anything, but I do feel pre-glory. What's this 'post talk' about, and is there any cure for the virus? Or, as with unsuccessful visits to the doctor in search of antibiotics, do we have to sit this one out?

I don't feel post-anything, but I do feel pre-glory

I wonder whether the condition is a loss of confidence and disintegration of identity. Sounds painful! We no longer know who or where we are. We can't just be ourselves but have to look back over our shoulders (nervously?). Talk of 'emerging church' (see *the whitewash*) is possibly symptomatic of the same disease - a self-conscious striving to which Rob is allergic. It's an alien virus for those who define themselves by the dawn of the new order of God's dominion. And perhaps this gets us nearer to the issue. All this 'post talk' amongst Christians may be because we've lost touch with our gospel. We've lost confidence in a gospel that is both authoritative and convinces us, let alone those who have no faith commitment.

There is a lot of talk about how our current situation in society parallels the early Church as a

minority, marginalised group. And I can see the parallels. But one thing I can't see is any parallel between how the early Church's message and way of life was perceived and how ours is. Then it was a dangerous and/or intriguing 'philosophy' - the vanguard of a new way within a tired world wearied with its

I'm more excited about the gospel, Jesus and his relevance than I've ever been

paganism. Now the Church's message and way of life is like a detached guard's van, not even worthy of consideration. A friend chats on a train between London and Manchester with a 30-something successful businessman, who says he's looking for something more and considering various spiritualities. She shares her own spiritual

experience. His response: 'Well, I never even considered Christianity as having anything to say.'

I'm more and more convinced that we have much work to do to understand afresh our or rather God's/Christ's gospel. The old formulae and slogans have become clichés that lack bite and no longer carry weight. To be honest, I find many gospel presentations boring, irrelevant

I felt 'ashamed of the gospel'

or even worse. Standing alongside a non-Christian at a recent large-scale event with a well known evangelist, I felt 'ashamed of the gospel', and thought that if that's what he's being asked to believe, I would understand if he said, 'Christianity has nothing to say to me'. As evangelicals we pride ourselves on understanding the gospel. Perhaps that's our

problem. We assume we understand it and so become lazy in our thinking. Even something as good and effective as Alpha - and I support it - seems inadequate in certain fundamental respects. But personally I'm more excited about the gospel, Jesus and his relevance than I've ever been.

Much time is taken up as pastors keeping the wheels turning on the institution we call 'church', or reforming denominational life. These are second-order things, because the Church is nothing if it loses or is not shaped by its gospel that gives us our life. There is little more important than the task of understanding, articulating and passing on a gospel to resonate within a world that is increasingly small and co-dependent, individualised yet globalised, anxious and uncertain, a world in which the models of humanity on offer are impoverished by market ideologies and practices - see the articles on the workplace.

And what gospel themes need bringing to the fore? The new world order that Christ ushers in. A sense of our place in time (an eschatology) that changes the way we view and therefore live in the world. The confidence that a new humanity is being formed. The political shape of the gospel to accompany the individualised understandings with which we're familiar. And right at its heart, a more dynamic and down-to-earth understanding of the atonement. This is just for starters! Then we have to link a re-formed gospel, as Paul did, with forming communities that embody a new way of being human. We need a new Reformation.

'Stephen, as it's your last edition as editor of *Talk*, how about writing the Baptist Speak column? It's the gadfly column commenting on the weird ways of evangelical and charismatic Baptists.' 'Thanks for asking, Stephen. I accept.' 'Blessings in retirement!'



Leadership for a change

Dear Stephen

I came to the conference because I was attracted by the theme "Leadership for a Change". I am from a church in inter-regnum and without any full-time leaders, but a church that is being challenged to 'prepare for change'. Coming to the conference, perhaps, was another step in this preparation. I'm glad with John Drane we put post-modernity aside and quickly went on to the challenge as to whether we are going to hand on a meaningful church to a new generation. To be told quite starkly that the church as we have known it is dying and in ruins is the strong wake-up cry for us now! It was encouraging to hear John suggest that as we look to the future and seek to find new ways of 'being church' and new forms of leadership that the missionary leader might well come to the fore and that we seek other ways of nurturing faith becoming more spiritual and less religious. Certainly the key leadership style for the future must be relational as we seek to develop an empowering structure embracing informality, friendships, cell groups, and move to create space for individual experience, exploration and growth with God (Immanuel) as our nurturer.

Where shall we go to find those that are searching? We will need to look more closely at the lifestyle groups in our community and seek ways of meeting their different needs. John said that if we can connect personal stories together with God's story and Bible stories, then things begin to happen! One thing that is sure, as Rob White reminded us, we need the empowering of the Holy Spirit - a fresh outpouring - a re-baptism!

The conference programme, of course, was completed by the worship team led by Geraldine and the many opportunities to meet and share with others across the meal tables.

David Stapleton. Banbury

Dear Stephen

We were staying in Lakeside this year and I gasped up many stairs and along a very long passageway to find our rooms. At last I dropped my belongings into the room then dashed out to see if my friend's room was the same. The door slammed behind me - yes I was definitely locked out. On being rescued by a kindly member of staff I was sure there was a power cut because I couldn't find a light that worked. Then I read the notice, place your key fob here to switch on electricity. What a good start!!!

On entering the main conference room for the first session there was a buzz of anticipation as the worship team's last minute preparation ended and technical people tweaked the Powerpoint. Just for a while, Geraldine Latty assured us when the Conference got underway, we can come just as we are and simply 'be' in the presence of God in this place of safety. It was a safe place for people to share their successes and failures and I was impressed and delighted by the honesty and openness displayed as the stories emerged.

It was sad to reflect on the decline of the Church but exciting to hear how the message of Jesus can be proclaimed in communities. 'Doing Church differently' was highly recommended as was 'getting outside the box'. I certainly found my own mind opening to the possibilities. The session on spirituality was soothing and refreshing as Lynn Green and Stephen Ibbotson helped us reveal ways of getting closer to God in prayer. Conference is over and we're home again. I've bought tapes so that our fellowship can get a flavour of Conference, what is going on elsewhere and that there is help available.

Tina Kennedy, South Bank Baptist Church

Dear Stephen

This year's Mainstream...

Dear Stephen

I agreed to go to the Mainstream conference as part of our leadership team so that we could develop a shared vision: I had very little idea of what to expect for myself until the weekend before the conference, when I realised I really needed a renewal of my own purpose in being a deacon.

John Drane's sessions were very interesting; I found myself taking copious notes, learned that as a middle-class male I was part of a group most likely to be opposed to change and started to gain a grasp of the issues post-modernism raises for the church. I decided it was well worth getting a copy of his book, *The McDonaldization of the Church*, which I have since found to be hard work, but rewarding. His seminar on mobilising an entire congregation disappointed some by being about a one-off event, but led to some encouraging discussion about other leaders' similar experiences of involving whole churches in outreach.

The worship lead by Geraldine Latty and a band of superb instrumentalists was so good that I found myself thinking at one point that since worship in heaven would be even better, then it really was something to look forward to! It was disappointing that, when other parts of the programme overran, the worship sessions were cut short.

My vision as a leader was indeed renewed. The most helpful parts of the conference in this respect were two contributions from Lynn Green: a very straightforward talk on the first night, "Leading like Jesus", that included the point that this involved leading to the finish, a marathon rather than a 100m sprint, and her honesty in sharing about her own spiritual struggles in the seminar the following day on leaders and their spirituality.

Roland Young, Bessels Green Baptist, Kent

...stream Conference was a ~~three~~ ^{three} day package deal from the moment a friend and I set off, both happy to talk non stop for over three hours to the moment we repeated this on the way home! So it was about friendship, eating together, walking together and a glass of wine at the end of the day with other leaders from our church, getting to know them better and catching up with other friends.

It was also about being excited by God! And this in all sorts of ways:

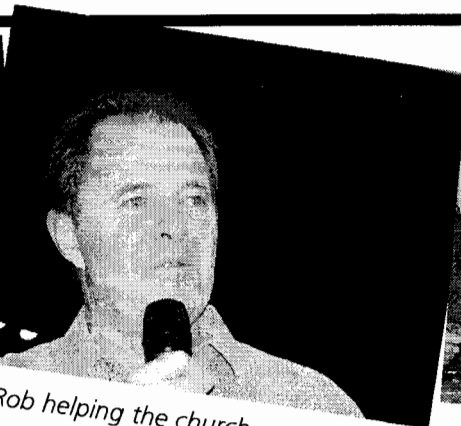
- John Drane reminded me of what I've known since the day I 'stumbled' across Jesus as an adult and wondered how the church had managed to keep him secret so well. His words refuelled my longing to 'hand on a meaningful Church to our children and grandchildren'.
- Nick Webb gave pointers on leadership from the business world - I always love seminars like that!
- It was refreshing to go for prayer and take some time out to think and pray through things God had said to me a few days earlier.
- And it's always releasing in worship, when I don't have to worry in case the words disappear off the screens or the person in front seems upset by something. It's freedom indeed!

Of course, nothing is perfect and so the odd session that I didn't appreciate, friends raved about and that's how it goes. A final observation. I work in London and the ethnic mix did not represent the mix of the leadership of London churches and I suspect some other areas too. That meant that we lost some important voices in a conference called 'Leadership for a Change.' The speakers were English and so again I believe that we missed out on hearing about important leadership models from vibrant growing churches around the world.

Pam Bryan, Purley Baptist Church.



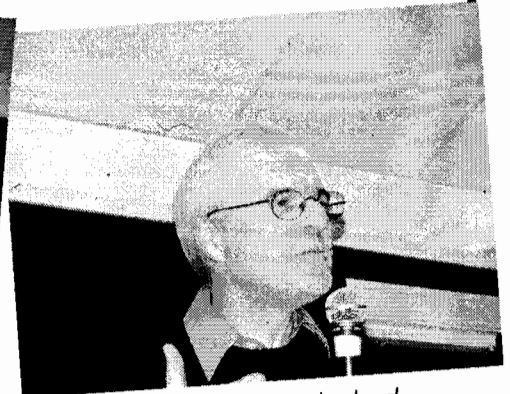
Conference worship



Rob helping the church get apostolic



Rob and Marion White commissioned



Peter taking the lead



Craig Millward brings us information from the Christian world. Pastor at Ormsby in Norfolk, Craig is a member of the Mainstream leadership team.

Breakthrough weekend

Care for the Family are running a weekend for anyone whose husband or wife has died early in life, whatever the circumstances. The event will provide understanding, encouragement and support to those who may have felt that no one else understands the loneliness, pain and heartache they have experienced since their partner died.

The programme will include the following workshops:

- Dealing with the emotions present in grief
- New relationships
- Helping children with their grief
- Especially for men - addressing the issues men find difficult

The weekend runs from Friday 8th April to Sunday 10th April and costs £95 per person, including accommodation and all meals. To book, telephone (029) 2081 0800 or via the website: <http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk>

Healing Rooms

Over eighty years ago, John G Lake became the focus of an astonishing phenomenon in Spokane, Washington. Many thousands of people were healed as Lake and others prayed for them, and official statistics of the time showed Spokane to be the 'healthiest' city in the US.

In July 1999, Cal Pierce reopened Lake's Healing Rooms and discovered that God has not changed. There are now well over 100 men and women from churches all over the city who come together in unity to lay hands on the sick, and over 250 people from all over America visit the rooms every week to receive prayer.

The Healing Rooms movement is now spreading from the States into the UK and, from what I have heard and experienced thus far, looks to have the potential to bring blessing to the communities around our churches. If you want to find out more, visit <http://www.healingrooms.com>

Trade justice

One of the most important contributions to our recent conference was made by Stephen Rand, who brought us up to date with a variety of organisations who are campaigning on issues of justice and trade. There are various ways to get involved:

- If you have not signed the Micah Call - a global petition to show leaders the strength of Christian support for measures to dramatically and sustainably reduce poverty - you can do so at www.micahchallenge.org
- If you prefer to ally yourself with the Vicar of Dibley and like the idea of sporting a fetching white wristband, visit www.makepovertyhistory.org
- If you want to follow Stephen's Jubilee Debt Campaign, you can do so at <http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk>
- If you want to join the 'Wake Up to Trade Justice' vigil on 15-16 April in Whitehall and Westminster (which will include activities and workshops throughout the night, including music, dance, celebrity contributions and a dawn procession past Downing Street with thousands of campaigners), you can find out more at www.tjm.org.uk

The focus of much current activity is the upcoming Global Week of Action on Trade Justice (10-16 April 2005), when hundreds of thousands of people across the globe will unite in action for trade justice. Just make sure you do something!

The Crossing: Leadership Conference

The Crossing is solely focused on helping leaders and churches around the world discover how to identify, embrace and implement change in a way that becomes a pattern of life. Speakers will include Dan Southerland (Purpose Driven Life, USA), Gary Clarke (Hillsong, UK) and Joel Comiskey (Cell, USA). The venue is the West Road Conference Hall, Cambridge.

For more information or to book, visit

www.cthree.org

email thecrossing@cthree.org

or phone 01223 844415

News from Iraq

According to the Barnabas Fund, the deputy prime minister of Iraq, Burhum Salih, pledged in a private meeting with Iraqi church leaders that the government would rebuild all the churches which have been bombed, and would also build a large new church in Kirkuk. He said that the Iraqi government realised the sufferings of the Christian community, and that they appreciated the honesty of the Christians. He also asked for the prayers of the Christians.

On the other hand, recent events in northern Iraq speak of ever-mounting intimidation and violence. Late last year, photographs of three senior bishops in Mosul were being circulated, with the message that they are agents of the USA, infidels, and that action must be taken against them. Church leaders have received letters from the Islamic militants ordering them to allow Christian women to marry Muslim men, thus enabling them to be 'blessed' and 'purified' by their marriages. Islamic militants were also knocking on the doors of Christian homes demanding money. They argue that since the Christians do not contribute weapons and do not fight, they must make a financial donation instead.

Leaflets are also being distributed with the message: 'Christians go; leave Iraq'. Word is being passed around in the mosques, telling Muslims not to buy anything from Christians. Not only are they infidels, it is said, but also they will soon be leaving, so the Muslims will be able to take their homes and property for free.

newsdesk

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Christian presence in the working world

by Harold Clarke

Harold Clarke is a Methodist minister employed by the Diocese of Bristol as Director of the Churches' Council for Industry and Social Responsibility, a five-denomination LEP with offices in Bristol and Swindon. For the last six years he has also been Moderator of the Industrial Mission Association.

People in the workplace are under increasing stress due to many factors, not least a mentality of 'best value', which is usually interpreted as 'cheapest option'. In recent months I have experienced a project with teenagers in a racially deprived sector that has been further deprived by the replacement of an effective committed and caring service by a careless, poorly funded substitute. Best value?

It is clear that too many people are prevented from giving of their best because what drives companies so often are cash solutions in which values and the

Christ speaks to the whole person and does not allow us to compartmentalise our lives

as if directors don't want people to be too settled for too long. In manufacturing we hear of work being taken out of Britain and placed overseas because it is much more cost-effective; in the west of England it is happening in industries ranging from those producing white goods to those producing aero parts.

All of this carries a flavour of short-termism and bottom-line economics. Politicians work the same way. We elect a government for five years, but

seems to be in a sprint. Do people, having worked under such pressure all week, want to come 'home' to be confronted by the same sense of urgency? If not, where do we find the vitality that is the gospel? The most popular way of dealing with this is to accept a time-and-place schizophrenia: we are one person at work, another at home and another at church. I am always intrigued by the Hollywood portrayal of a Mafia 'Godfather': ruthless and brutal, with no thought for the families of others when sending out a 'contract', yet protective and loving as a father and husband and family member at home. Who are these people? Will the real Marlon Brando stand up?

All of that is not very real and it is not Christian, especially since we know that Christ speaks to the whole person and the Christian ethic does not allow us to compartmentalise our lives. Christianity is about who you are in the eyes of God and how what you do reflects that. What you believe God 'thinks' about you will be affected by how you perceive God. Here are a few concepts with which I work.

What often drives companies are cash solutions in which values and the cost on people are either squeezed or ignored

cost on employees, customers and suppliers are either squeezed or ignored. This is happening in public service as well as private enterprise. There is little doubt that some evaluation of services must take place, but what we need to call into question is the criteria which are used in each situation. In recent weeks there has been more than one banker who has indicated the frustration of working with new criteria within the culture of their bank. That which was customer-focused is now business-driven. 'Business loans should not be made without selling insurance' is one example. Another is the pressure to move departments regularly,

we know that it has to work at real issues in the first three and then please the electorate in what is left. Business often works on a much shorter timescale. Each new MD will come with an agenda, top of which is the need to cut costs. There is a short time in which to accomplish it because his/her successor arrives with the same item at the top.

We are running a marathon when the world seems to be in a sprint

The Church does not operate at this speed. There is a mindset that tells us that we are running a marathon when all the world

'**The God of love**' hangs out there. Love is not thrust down your throat, because God will not force it upon anyone. It is

most evident to us when we believe it, but it cannot be exclusive only to those who believe. It is different from human love, because it transcends events and actions that could destroy human love. Hosea has much to teach us about God's love and its depth. Ignore the context of Hosea's story and think about the nature of his love and then translate that into the workplace. How do we deal with those who betray us, whether they are above or below us in the hierarchy? Self-protection is not the primary or prime reaction of God. To work with primary reaction and prime consideration begs the question, 'What is essential about your relationship with God and the rest of his children?'

blame the system and then proceed to act as though the system is evil and has to be changed. The expectation is that as we move closer to perfection, the system is in need of redemption. In religion we seem to concentrate on individual and personal shortcomings, adhering to the philosophy that if only everyone believed what I do, then perfection is assured. As a Methodist, I am committed to a doctrine of Christian perfection as a spiritual state being achievable. It is beyond my experience, and I have to say that it would have to exist as one of the wonders of the world and certainly would count among the miracles. However, Wesley expressed that it is very personal and a result of God's redemptive power. Can that be

demanding can God be?

In the light of love, creativity, redemption and hope, can we view 'best value' in a different way? We are certainly employed for our skill, time and energy, and for those to be targeted toward the ends that the employer wants. That is the contract. The gospel demands that we see our role, our part in life, in a much wider context, of which working life is an important part. In its worst case, 'best value' will be applied to money alone by those with a narrow vision. A broader vision might allow us to see the wood as well as the trees, interpreting 'best value' in the longer term in the context of the totality of the whole person, wider humanity, creation and the environment - and God's voice saying, 'It is good'.

Christians, like newspapers, are good at looking for the bad

'The God of creativity' complicates a God of love to the nth degree. 'And he saw that it was good' compels us to have a view of the world which is positive. With the gift of the Spirit we have been given the gift of co-creativity. What we make is made in the presence of God whether we like it or not. Money, things, services, relationships, structures, systems, communities, things conscious and unconscious - all call upon our creativity. So our creativity at work is not just in what we produce or provide, but in the very community essential to its provision. Then when we think of God's creativity and our partnership within it, our work life is an important part of that. We, along with our colleagues, are participating in the creativity in which God rejoices. Sometimes the use of our creativity is not for the best, or it has become jaded through carelessness, abuse or familiarity. Christians, like newspapers, are good at looking for the bad. We need to learn of the positive approach of God to creativity.

'The God of redemption' means that when things go wrong, he desires and commits his being to putting things right. Stories in the Old Testament teach us that God is no longer interested in mass destruction as a way of bringing the world back. Jesus teaches us that God is interested in working in the world as it is, warts and all. When we do identify errors, and particularly those that have caused people distress or worse, then our tendency has been to

available only to people? No, but to all creation, including the communities of work, recreation and residence to which we belong. The imperative is to work for it, pray for it, live it and let the Holy Spirit work with you.

'The God of hope' does not accept the concept of the irredeemable. Look around and see what is good. Some years ago a machinist who was beginning to take his discipleship seriously sat with me as we tried to work out what shape it should take within the workplace. The first things we cleared away (without dismissing them) were things which were unlikely in his case: no full-time work in the church, unlikely to be a candidate for promotion and no inclination to become a trade union representative. He knew that he needed to offer some ministry in the place where he spent a high proportion of his waking life. No schizophrenia here. The start for him was to identify in his own mind a few people in whom he would take a 'pastoral' concern not necessarily his natural friends and certainly not avoiding people because they were difficult. He would open himself to them by presence and friendship, taking care to avoid threat and swift judgement. It would be a long and hard ministry, much more difficult than mine where I moved into situations with implicit status. The hope of God, the gospel, was to be demonstrated by John in its most powerful form amongst those who knew John and his failings the best. How much more tough and

Emerging church - submerging mission?

Rob White



Emerging church. Now, there's a subject to attract a serious amount of attention! Books written about it; conferences held in honour of it; conversations enlivened by it.

What exactly are we trying to find out when we ask the question, 'What will the emerging church look like?' Are we indulging in that which captures our imagination, but about which there can be no definitive answer - the same kind of fascination that causes us to discuss what heaven will be like or, more mundanely, how life would change if a few million pounds came our way? Or are we hoping someone can tell us how church life should be lived in order to attract more people? Or is it that we are passionately concerned about the seeming lack of interest in the Christian faith by those outside the church?

It seems to me that only one of those questions is of any intrinsic value. The first one could be anywhere on a scale from fun-to-discuss to mind-sharpening. The second one has stacks of heart, but is misplaced. The third starts at the right point, but even then will lead us via another route.

Rob is our Mainstream apostle, encouraging churches and leadership teams in the work of mission. Marion works closely with him. We are grateful to them both. Please pray for them. You can contact him on rob@pbcmanse.freeserve.co.uk

Theological purists could be muttering out loud by now, so I need to explain that here I am using the word 'church' in the way it is used in popular parlance: 'the church down the road', Smallville Baptist Church, etc. I may be totally wrong, but that's how I sense the word is basically being used when the subject we're addressing is being aired. So, back to the question. In the last issue of *Talk* there were two reports on the Future of the People of God conference, held in July at Hothorpe Hall, at which N.T.Wright was the

speaker. Both reports contained expressions of surprise, or disappointment, that he could not, to quote from one, '...offer a form of church that was different...'. But, I contend, there's no answer he could have given. Some ideas, possibly, some examples of more recent experiments, but nothing more.

I would suggest two reasons for that. Firstly, it is not possible to say what something emerging will look like - precisely because it *is* emerging. Secondly, and more importantly, because the church will look like the people of whom it is made up, in the context in which they are. I appreciate that much of Western mission has resulted in the opposite, imposing its own shape of church on other cultural groups.

Our primary calling is to draw people to the King and his Kingdom

But our talk of church to come must surely assume that we are learning that lesson.

Earlier I suggested that if the question about emerging church is based on the need to attract more people, it is misplaced. Surely it is not our task to attract people to the church. I am not saying that it doesn't matter if church appears unattractive. It *does* matter what we do and how we do it. However, our primary calling is to draw people to the King and his Kingdom. If we are serious and successful in doing that, the church will take

Spending too much energy on emerging church could imperceptibly submerge mission.

shape naturally. The King and his Kingdom speak of citizens who live and serve according to that Kingdom's principles, a community with a calling and a character. It is that community that is either attractive or

obnoxious to those outside its number (2 Cor.2:15,16). And, of course, that community is called 'church', but this time in its truest sense as the people of God.

So our task is to represent that King and his Kingdom in the way we live, work, love, interact, care for the earth and its peoples. And, as other people respond, we must help nurture their faith in ways and settings that match their most helpful ways of communicating and learning. We will then need to expand their horizons by enabling them to worship their new-found God and to express friendship as portrayed in scripture. This, I

suggest, will happen innately by the prompting of the indwelling Spirit, and our leading of it will be guided by the same Spirit. That may happen over a beer and informal discussion in a pub, over a burger in McDonalds, over a round of golf followed by discussion and prayer, or even sitting in small groups and neatly ordered rows in Sunday services.

So, what will the emerging church look like? Pass! It's a fascinating question and it reveals that those who ask it have a major concern for the church's future, but my fear is

that if we spend too much energy on emerging church we could find ourselves, all too imperceptibly, submerging mission.



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.
Peter.nodding@purleybaptist.org

Word & Spirit Network

Contacts:

Anglia: Craig Millward 10493 731009

craig.millward@ntlworld.com

Costwolds: Phil Deller 01386 840721 ccbc1@suresfish.co.uk

Devon Richard Starling 01626 834755

ris@baptiser.freemove.co.uk

East Sussex Andy Caldwell andycaldwell@1caldwell.freemove.co.uk

Hertfordshire: Chris Densham 01992 462838

chris@cdensham.freemove.co.uk

Kent Derek Hills 01732 352824 derek.hills@tbc-online.org.uk

London (South) Peter Nodding 0208668 0422

peter.nodding@purleybaptist.org

London (North) Stephen Ibbotson 0161 9415899

stephenibbotson@altrinchambaptist.org

South Coast Graham Jefferson 01903 262313

graham.jefferson@new-life-church.org.uk

Surrey Ian McFarlane 01372 811313

ianmcfarlane@bookhambaptist.clara.net

Surrey (younger leaders)

Rob May 01293 782242

robmay@horleybaptist.org.uk

Mission through partnership the story of Hove & the Valleys

In 1994, after learning to put our passions to work for the kingdom, Holland Road Baptist Church, Hove, began to ask how Wales, the country Senior Pastor Rhys Stenner cheers for, could feature in our life and ministry. As a result of a few phone calls to ministers in the Rhondda and Merthyr Valleys, an opportunity arose to make a weekend visit and to serve six local chapels. This visit launched us into an ongoing eleven-year relationship with the Valleys. In 2004, we and our sister church, New Hope Baptist Church, Atlanta, partnered with over thirty churches across the denominations, including churches in Abergavenny and in the Rhondda.

We continue to be committed to serving the churches and community of the Valleys through a combination of regular, short, small team visits plus a main partnership mission in the summer. This year will see our largest team yet, with possibly 100 joining us from New Hope. The initial focus of our attention is our partner churches in the Merthyr, Taff and Cynon valleys, but we will also begin to partner with some churches in the Abergavenny area. Is it worth it?

Two examples of the rewards of long-term partnership are Tabernacle Baptist Church at Troedyrhiw and St Luke's at Gelli Deg. David Chilcott, now pastor at Troedyrhiw, after a hesitant acceptance of our help in 1994, is now our greatest champion in the Valleys. When we began to help the church, they had about twelve regular attenders at their morning service. The average attendance now is nearer fifty. We saw our role as one of encouragement, with some occasional mentoring.

Gelli Deg is a much more recent venture. John Parkin is a Church of Wales minister who was keen to plant a church on a very needy council estate, one of the poorest in the UK. He very readily accepted our offer of help. Last year, a number of task teams from Holland Road worked on a variety of practical projects for the local community and school, and in the summer, a fifty-three-strong New Hope team added to our number. Many of them were involved in a week of activity, culminating in a Family Fun Day at Gelli Deg, which was visited by a large number of estate families.

A year ago St Luke's had a handful of people attending a monthly service; fifty now attend each Sunday morning. A family of six came to faith recently and were added to the church, and twelve have come to faith since last summer. They pointed to the Fun Day as the time when they began their journey of faith. It's most definitely worth it.

Philip Deuk
Holland Road Baptist Church, Hove

By hook or crook

The old myth states that a vampire can only enter your house if it has been invited. I was invited to be pastor of Crook Baptist Church in 2003 with 100% of the vote (that's twelve out of twelve, to you and me) and the mandate that 'We must change'. Eighteen months later and nine people had left, another nine had joined and everyone felt bruised and confused as to why we didn't just commute to Durham - after all, 'it's only ten miles away'. To be frank, it was a bit of a mess and I was fairly sure that I had made a huge mistake in coming to Crook and brashly pushing an agenda that wasn't wanted.

Then God reminded me that it was actually him pushing the change, although in a more pastorally sensitive manner than my preferred football fan approach. Once this had been communicated to the church, there was a sense of being able to see what God had been doing all this time and a realisation that the end of the eighteen months was to be a watershed. We realised that our failed attempts to work in the schools weren't failures but times of planting: I am now a regular feature in all ten of our local schools, with the teachers now coming to us and asking for help in delivering their pastoral and citizenship programmes.

Our Sunday School grew from my one daughter to seven children; a youth club was formed that is still growing; a CU has been started in one of the schools. We also saw an elderly lady discover Jesus for the first time, and had the blessing of baptising her before helping her move to Canada where she would live with her son, who also had just found Christ.

Two of our newer members felt called by God to support asylum work in Newcastle, and now have two Congolese women living with them. This is a ministry that is sending ripples throughout the 99% white town and is a timely witness, as the BNP have begun to target the area. These are small but significant beginnings. There are only around twenty-five of us on a Sunday, but there is a real knowledge that God is at work and that Jesus is being (re-)discovered by many in the church and the town - and even by the pastor.

Graeme Fancourt
Crook Baptist Church, County Durham

Rooted in prayer & fasting

In November 2004 we held the second of our overnight fasts at Sutton Coldfield. The Leadership Team had asked a number of leaders to join us in order to seek God's mind about our development. About thirty leaders gathered and, as many of us were new to each other, we learnt some lessons about fasting.

The previous fast had been with the Leadership Team and one or two others, most of whom have regularly prayed and listened to the Lord together. On reflection, we should have given clear instructions at the outset and waited longer on the Lord before sharing what we believed he was saying. However, we were very grateful for those who gave up valuable time, and for the insights they shared. This has enabled us to move forward in our planning, particularly about trans-local/apostolic ministry. On these occasions it is always important to pray for leaders and listen to God for them as part of our time together.

The next fast will be on 20-21 April. The first day will be for a wider group of leaders supportive of Mainstream. The second day will be for the Mainstream Leadership Team to process what has been shared on the first day. At its heart is to give quality time to seek God about the future of our movement with particular reference to mission.

Peter Nodding



Personal Profile:

Peter Nodding shares his story

From the age of thirteen I knew that God was calling me to the ministry. I am not sure how this conviction 'came to me', but it was certainly real. I was far too embarrassed to mention it to anyone, but tried to plan how it might work out in later years. Our plans are not God's plans, so I had to do some readjusting along the way. As I had been brought up in a Methodist home, I imagined that I would be a candidate for the Methodist ministry, after a few years in secular employment.

I attended Cliff College in Derbyshire, only intending to do the one-year lay training course, but was encouraged by the principal to apply for their evangelistic staff. I served the college for the next five years in evangelism: preaching, children's work, coffee bars, factories, schools, home groups - all proving to be invaluable training. It was at Cliff College that I met and married my wife, Wendy. Definitely a good move, and I know that without her I would not be the person I am today.

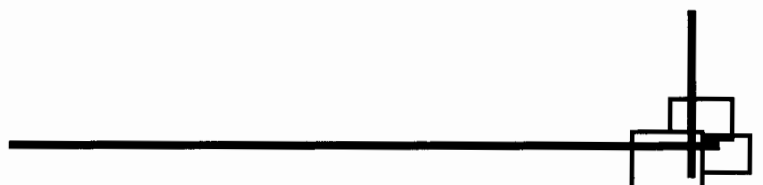
Sure of my call to pastoral ministry, I sought theological training and, on the advice of Howard Belben, the Cliff College Principal, went to St John's College, Nottingham. These were three challenging years, during which I resigned my Methodist membership and became a Baptist, which was hard for my Anglican friends to understand.

I was placed at West Bridgford Baptist Church for the second half of my course, and later the church called me to join them as an associate minister. Shortly afterwards, I was asked to lead the church, and over the next twelve years planted five congregations, baptised over 300 people, and encouraged many into the ministry. These were also the years when our two children, Catherine and Jonathan, were born. They continue to be a great joy to us in lots of ways, but particularly in their commitment to Christ.

I was feeling settled in Nottingham when I received a call from the Millmead Centre in Guildford, Surrey. After a lengthy interviewing process, which I enjoyed immensely, I was called in 1990 to lead the church into their next phase. Lots of people have asked, 'What was it like to follow David Pawson?' (Actually, it was Bob Roxburgh who followed David, but he was only there for seven years.) I always acknowledge David's unique gifts, but I am secure in the fact that each of us has our own particular contribution. I remember the Millmead years for many things, but especially for excellent cross-church relationships and planting out congregations into the suburbs.

Towards the end of my time at Millmead, I wondered if I was being called to a wider ministry and explored the possibility of either staying at Millmead in a different role, or moving towards regional ministry. Eventually it became clear that I am 'a local church man'; my current church, Purley Baptist, and I agreed that part of my time would be freed up to serve more widely through Mainstream.

I love serving God as a minister and long for local churches to be spiritually strong and to be agents for transformation in their communities. I dream of relational networks like Mainstream being a way that leaders and churches can be strengthened through trans-local gifted ministries. I also believe that the best is yet to be.



off the shelf

Review compiled
by Daniel Pritchard



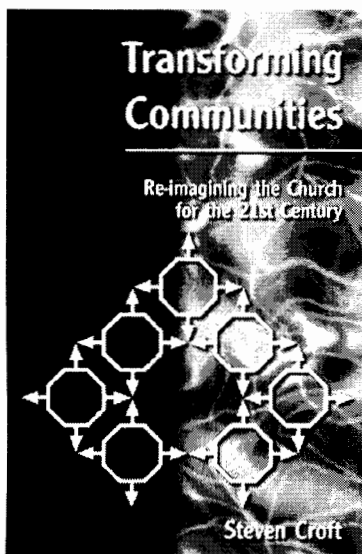
Daniel Pritchard is a member of the pastoral staff at Battle in Sussex. He has an interest in theological studies and compiles reviews in each edition. Reviews and suggestions for reviews can be submitted to: daniel@thepritchards.freeserve.co.uk

I picked up a number of books at the Mainstream Conference in January. Some of them I put down again - a few I bought and took home! Among the handful that made the homeward journey with me were two written by Anglican authors, which I have been working through in the weeks since the conference. It is always a challenge to see things from a slightly different perspective to my own and these two books, one on re-imagining church, the other on leadership, have proved stimulating and refreshing.

Andy Caldwell reviews *Every Man's Battle*, a call to men to live godly and pure lives in the face of sexual temptation. Not just a book to read, but a resource to assist personal discipleship.

Transforming Communities: Re-imagining the Church for the 21st Century

Steven Croft. Darton, Longman & Todd, London (2002)
ISBN: 0-232-52465-4



I recently read a review about this book on a website, which rather scathingly dismissed it as 'yet another book about

housegroups'! Believe me, it is a little more than that. Steven Croft is a leading Anglican thinker in this area and writes with real enthusiasm and depth on his subject.

Drawing from scriptural models and examples, Croft takes the readers on a journey: The starting point is an honest evaluation of the present situation, summarised in the fairly blunt assessment: 'The old ways which have served the people of God well are no longer working. Change is needed.' That has put a few of you off already, I know, but bear with me a moment longer. Croft is not simply a prophet of doom, but one who really seems to be able to imagine a new future. The second phase of the journey begins that process of re-imagining, exploring possible models for church. In the meantime, the author asserts that there is a need for the kind of leadership now that can manage transition and change. It is one thing to imagine a new future, but this author is realistic about the issues involved in caring for existing congregations and churches and the patience required to carefully reshape structures in line with new vision.

It would be easy to be put off by the Anglican perspective which permeates the book up to this point, but it is worth persevering and making it to the third and fourth sections. What is envisaged is far more than simply introducing housegroup models to churches. Rather, the author explores the possibility of local churches made up of small missionary communities; groups which come together with a purpose to both nurture and encourage one another and to engage in transforming mission.

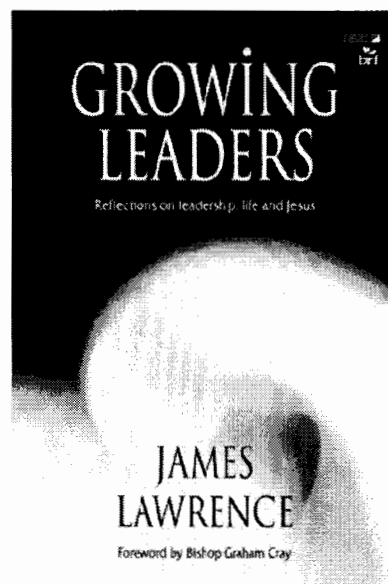
The analysis of the significant differences between meeting as larger congregations or as smaller groups is particularly useful.

The final sections of the book give a biblical basis for a 'community focussed' approach to church life (material which is designed for use in study groups), and then some guidance for developing the model in a local church setting, including the obvious matter of needing to develop a lot more leaders. In a sense, this is an appeal not so much for something totally new, as a return to the old paths. As many of us are involved in a similar journey, Steven Croft's insights are a welcome addition to the growing range of materials seeking to help us on the way.



Growing Leaders: Reflections on leadership, life and Jesus

James Lawrence. The Bible Reading Fellowship, Oxford (2004)
ISBN: 1-84101-246-7



So, if the church is in the process

of change, what sort of leaders will we need in the future? Certainly not more of the same, argues Graham Cray in the foreword. We need, he continues, 'to train them to think, act and lead in ways we could not otherwise have imagined'.

Developed out of the Arrow Leadership Programme, a ministry of the Church Pastoral Aid Society (CPAS), James Lawrence's book highlights the need for leaders to be released far more creatively and in greater numbers than before. It is an excellent read, often covering familiar ground, but putting it together in a very accessible package. Again, it could provide excellent study material for local churches. The book explores the model for growing leaders, which is at the heart of the Arrow programme offering it as a resource to both emerging leaders and those already in leadership, who want to be better equipped to meet the needs of a changing church.

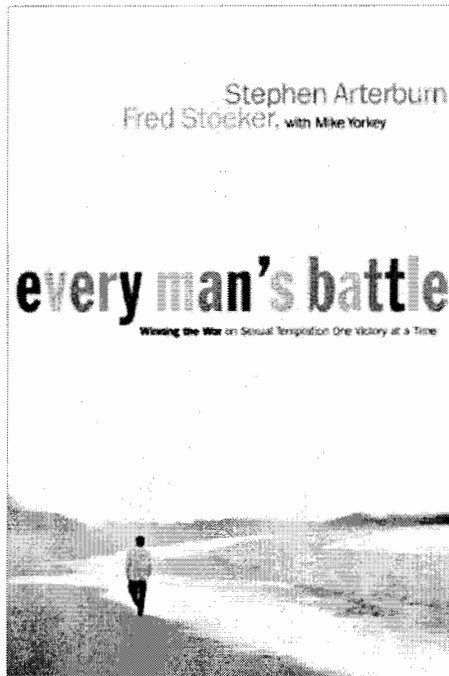
The foundation for effective leadership is the security of the leader's own relationship with the Lord. This is the starting point for the model that Lawrence explores. Being 'chosen' is my starting point as a leader. This certainty will guard against me twisting the privilege of leadership for my own needs or desires. The model unfolds then, to look at the call, character and competence of the leader. There is nothing original in the headings, but the topics are well handled, with a devotional feel about them. What sets this book apart and connects it to the theme of the previous review, is the emphasis on leadership in *community*. It is the challenging context of team, reflecting the heart and character of God, which shapes and grows the best leadership.

With a useful resource section at the end, to enable further exploration and study, this is a very helpful book, and could be ideal for leadership groups to use together.



Every Man's Battle: Winning the War on Sexual Temptation One Victory at a Time

Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker, Mike Yorkey (Ed.) Waterbrook Press (2000) ISBN: 1578563682



One of the issues gripping the lives of many men today, strangling their spirituality is the constant bombardment of sensual images they face. Internet, magazines, films and the way most people live today mean that very few men can say with Job "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl." (JOB 31:1). As a pastor I am finding that more and more men are confessing this to be an area where their lives are out of control. These men are desperate to be free, looking for help in overcoming the temptations of the "second" lustful glance at an attractive woman, or an addiction to unhelpful or pornographic images on their computer or TV.

"Every man's battle" is a superb book which seeks to give men tools in dealing with sexual temptation, helping them to live out Paul's command "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people." (EPH 3:5). It is written in an easy to read conversational style that is uplifting and encouraging.

The writers are honest in their own personal battles with purity and the

examples are ones to which many men could relate. The book asks men to dig deep and be disciplined. It calls them to a life committed to God's holy standards. More important, it gives clear practical advice on how to win the battle with their eyes.

The final chapter on what it means to cherish my wife still sticks with me as the best single piece of marriage advice I have ever been given. One word of warning though, it *is* American, and therefore there are some Americanisms, such as the chapter on "Your Mustang Mind", but don't let this put you off. All pastors should read it and pass on to those who are locked into a battle with their eyes, but longing to be free and all that God has called them to be.

It comes in two editions. There is "Every man's battle" for married men, and "Every young man's battle" for single men.

Rev Andy Caldwell Heathfield, Sussex



Photo: Jackie Sheppard

On returning to a theme

By Nigel G Wright

Some years ago I placed into the public domain a radical idea. It is possible for the Baptist Union to become a communion of churches which not only holds its own numerically but begins to grow. I argued that two things were necessary for this. The first is for our churches to become communities of conversion, where people came into the transformed life which is possible in Christ. The second is for the Union to become such a welcoming and hospitable network that it attracts and adds whole churches to itself.

Those who know their history will understand that this second strand of growth is far from new. Many Baptist churches did not come into being as such. They simply started as communities of Christ which over time came to define themselves as Baptist and then signed up with others who bore that name. There are many churches in our country which have existed as independent congregations and to which the BU ought to make itself attractive.

A striking and sad aspect of the current scene is the way in which several of the networks of new churches have either ceased effective trading or fallen into disarray. The story which Andrew Walker wrote some twenty-five years ago about 'Restoring the Kingdom' could now be written in reverse as Covenant Ministries, Pioneer, Ichthus and Cornerstone, and probably others, have had their idealism dashed and experienced a scattering. It is not, of course, that the individual churches have

ceased, but the networks and some of the ministries which sustained them have fallen on hard times. It reminds me of the ways in which the early Anabaptist congregations were scattered after the rebellion at Munster in 1535, but then along came Menno Simons and

need to create a new climate of openness and of the positive possibilities.

Denominations can suffer from a regulatory mentality which makes them reluctant to take risks or to include those who don't easily fit the mould. It must

Are we a 'seeker-friendly' denomination?

brought pastoral direction and wisdom to bear on their needs.

Are we a 'seeker-friendly' denomination as far as these churches go? I sometimes think we have the same attitude to churches who might want to join us as the British have to asylum seekers. Our first instinct is to be mistrustful and to keep people out lest our 'identity' be diluted. Yet we are told that in economic terms asylum seekers are net contributors to the nation's wealth and abundantly repay the hospitality they are shown. People can integrate swiftly. They can bring into a nation's life the riches of their culture and experience, to the benefit of all.

Baptist churches need new blood and are well positioned as a

be admitted that there are risks - I think of false teachings and faulty practices which we wish neither to validate nor take into our life. But recruiting new churches is like recruiting new church members: there are important issues to be weighed, but always in a spirit of welcome and warmth. We want churches to join us and need to strategise about how this might be done.

Here is one strategy: Let's create a new category of membership. Let churches become linked to us as associate members where they don't have to prove that they have all the Baptist bits and pieces in place, such as an approved constitution or a formalised church meeting. Let's make room for the 'baptistic' churches and invite them to

We need to create a new climate of openness and of the positive possibilities

bridge-building denomination to provide a home for others. We have institutional resources and can bestow a sense of place, belonging and credibility on others. What we have not properly learnt is how to deploy these resources for the benefit of others and ultimately of ourselves. We fail to see what a store of capital we have accumulated in this regard - and some of the new church networks are struggling precisely through lack of this capital. We

travel with us for a period of years, to build relationships, to learn from each other, to see if we fit together. Let's concentrate on life and relationships first of all and worry about the formalities later. Let us esteem the pastors who may not have had a theological education or known any form of accreditation. Let us offer them what we can give them and draw them into our life so that they want more of what we have.

Dr Nigel G. Wright is Principal of Spurgeon's College, and a former President of the Baptist Union. His next book, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* will be published in May by Paternoster.

What's Mainstream all about?

Mainstream is an informal network, mainly comprising Baptist leaders and churches. We are absolutely convinced that the authority of God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit must always be brought together. It's only then that we can be fully under the Lord's control, direction and empowering and have any hope of doing properly the things he wants us to do.

- Local groups where leaders get together to talk, pray and encourage each other.
- Regional meetings where we encounter God and receive significant input to resource our ministries.
- A national leadership team drawn from those leading the local groups.
- A quality magazine that addresses the issues and concerns that matter to us.
- An annual conference for teaching, ministry, building relationships, and releasing gifts and ministries.

What do we hope to achieve?

- A network of leaders and churches with authentic relationships, sharing their experience and resources and committed to working together for the advance of God's Kingdom.
- A visible difference in leader's spiritual lives and in God's work through the things we do together.
- Our churches throbbing with spiritual life in their worship, outreach and ministry to the poor in Jesus' name.
- The recognition, mentoring and release of emerging ministries.
- A prophetic voice within the Baptist community.

