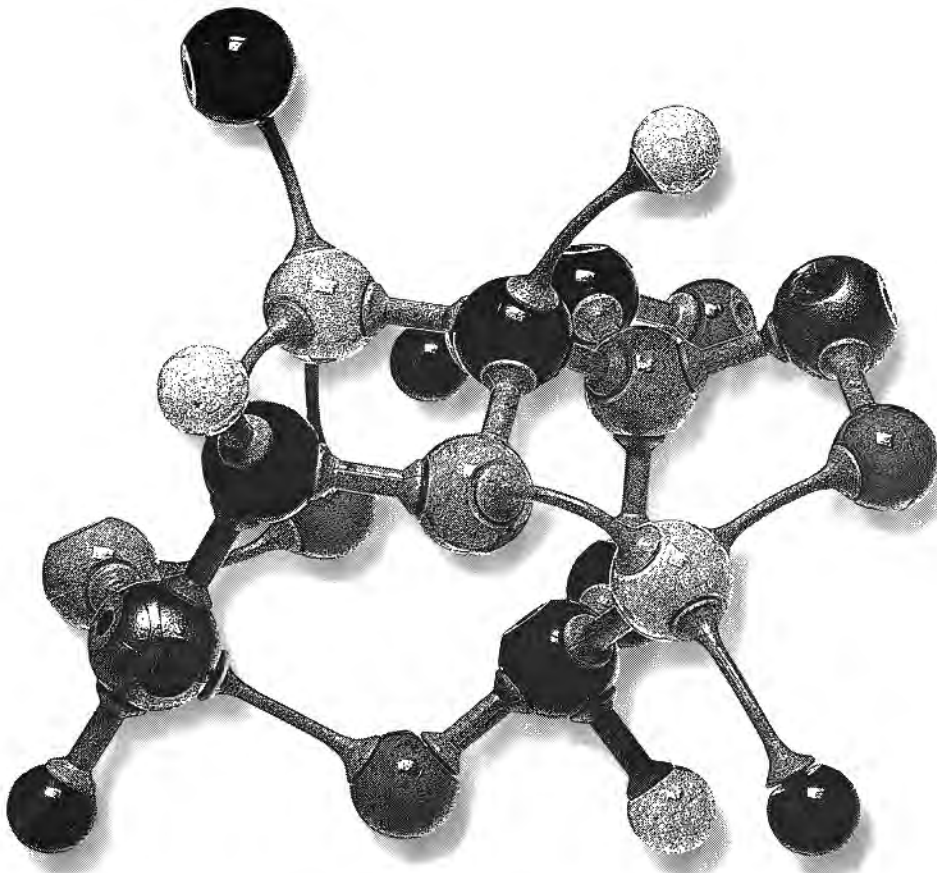


TALK

The Mainstream Magazine

Autumn 2005



Being a prophetic church

Barry Kissell
Glen Marshall
Peter Oakes
Adam Eakins
Stephen Rand
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.

Is there a word from God?



Recently I was standing in the Old Town Square in Prague, under the statue of Jan Hus thinking about all that has happened in this place now filled with happy tourists - the crushing of the 'Prague Spring' in 1968 and the celebration of Czech independence in 1990. The towering bronze figure of Hus saw it all.

And to Czechs he is a prophet, a preacher of freedom who proclaimed the equality of Christians in his radical insistence in the early fifteenth century that everyone receive wine as well as bread at communion. He paved the way for Luther and the Moravians, Wesley and the evangelical revival.

Over the summer I was in receipt of a very personal word to me from someone who prays regularly for me. It was an encouragement and a warning. And I was grateful for it.

God speaks. It is one of the wonders of the Christian faith that our God is one who speaks to us. More than that, God has poured his Spirit of prophecy out on his church so that he can speak to it and through it to a world starving for his voice.

So, in this issue of Talk you'll find all sorts of provocative stuff about prophecy: from Barry Kissell - one of the speakers at next year's conference - to Naim Ateek; from Glen Marshall to Rob White; from Stephen Ibbotson to Adam Eakins.

Does God speak? How does he speak?

Often our view of prophecy is limited to the 'word' voiced in a time of worship that says God loves us or God is pleased/displeased with us. Sometimes we think God only wants to speak to tell us that someone in our fellowship needs healing. Occasionally, a word comes that results in someone coming to faith in Jesus.

But surely there's more to prophecy than this. Surely God is looking for a movement that not only speaks prophetically but lives in a way that demonstrates that prophetic message. So Peter Oakes tells us about exciting developments in New Testament studies that speak directly to how we live in today's world. And Juliet Kilpin points to being a prophetic presence in the midst of our communities - be they council estates or leafy suburbs. And Stephen Rand wonders just how prophetic the Make Poverty History campaign might be.

What is God saying? Are we listening?

Simon Jones is the editor of Talk. He is also team leader at Bromley Baptist Church and author of *Why Bother with Church?* (IVP 2001)

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The Quiet Prophet

Barry Kissell interview

Simon Jones talks to the keynote speaker at January's conference

There is a matter-of-factness about Barry Kissell. He speaks quietly, deliberately; he narrates events in measured tones. He might be talking about the weather or a recent shopping trip. In fact he's talking about how God woke him to have him pray for someone who was being attacked at that very moment.

After 30 years at St Andrew's, Chorley Wood, he's now on the team at St Mary's, Bryanston Square, in the heart of London's media land. But in a quiet way the church's website indicates he doesn't lead or preach that often on a Sunday, he's listed as Associate Vicar.

The matter-of-factness seems to be a genuine humility about his status in church pecking orders. This is all the more remarkable given his role as travelling speaker at mega-conferences as well as Mainstream's gathering in January 2006. But that role seems more than unusually earthed in parish life - however extraordinary that life is.

As he plans to speak at Swanwick next year, what God is laying on his heart to share with us is rooted in his ministry among St Mary's' predominantly young parishioners.

Prophecy is not an additional experience for the specially-anointed few

'I'm speaking about the emerging prophet,' he says as he emerges from his kitchen with two mugs of tea. 'I'm looking at the prophet as healer, as seer and as proclaimer.'

Taking Isaiah 61 as his launch pad, Kissell will look at ministry based on the revelation of God's heart - as Jesus did in Luke 4 - and

the whole area of healing. 'Our church has grown to 1200 in two years,' he says. 'And the average age of the congregation is 26. The problem of this generation is broken hearts and addictions to things they think will mend their broken hearts. We often find that healing in this area comes through revelation of what's going on in people's lives.'

He admits that his church is in many ways abnormal. There are virtually no older people. A large proportion of the congregation are involved in the media and arts world. And the church has its own resident theologian, Dr Crispin Fletcher-Louis, who runs courses in theology for this highly literate and questing audience. Fletcher-Louis completed a PhD at Oxford in angelology in Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles (published as *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (Tuebingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2007)). He has been a Lecturer in the Departments of Theology at Durham and then Nottingham Universities as well as visiting lecturer at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Indeed the crisply designed church website shows a community that's busy in all kinds of ways reaching and equipping the emerging generation. For example, Power up

Mondays is a fortnightly programme looking to develop prophetic gifting in its people. Kissell's book - *The Prophet's Notebook* - is the manual for the course which 'seeks to teach the various ways in which God speaks.' Kissell also teaches a ministry course, a four week programme designed to train people for the prayer ministry team.

As the website explains, Jesus ministered through revelation and the gifts of healing, miraculous powers, the distinguishing of spirits and faith. He modelled this ministry firstly to twelve disciples, and then to seventy. And once he had shown them how it worked, he sent them out in twos to do it themselves. And after he rose from the dead, he indicated in the Great Commission to the church that this ministry should continue through all those who came to believe in him. At St Mary's, ministering in the power of the Spirit is one of our major values.'

'People in this area are very isolated,' says Kissell. 'Many live alone in bed-sits. They come to us to find others who are like them and a good number - maybe half - come to faith as a result. Some would find it hard to fit in other churches because they are involved in the arts, media and pop industries.'

Many of those who find faith at St Mary's join the ministry training courses that Kissell runs teaching people to pray for others in reliance on the Holy Spirit. 'We find that people who have known no other kind of Christian life learn this very quickly,' he says. 'It is normal Christianity to them relying on the Holy Spirit to show you what to pray for someone else.'

Thinking of the prophet as seer - one who sees - Kissell intends to explore the different ways in which God speaks and yet we may not perceive it. 'I'll develop this in the context of both the congregation and the culture we live in,' he says.

'I want to say something about the Word of God coming to the congregation. Often we talk about needing both Word and Spirit. But the Word comes firstly

by being read and then secondly through how we teach it and proclaim it - expecting a response to it. Thirdly, the prophetic word comes as people tell out what they think God is saying to them. And fourthly, the Word comes through personal testimony - as people share how God has acted in the lives of others.

'Once the Word comes,' he continues, 'we have to give people the opportunity to respond to it. We'll often pray for 60 people or more at the close of a service. And often it's when you're praying for someone who's responding to the Word that they receive the Holy Spirit.'

When I met him, Kissell had recently returned from a trip to Russia where he had seen how powerful such personal testimony combined with prayer can be. 'There's a real move of God there,' he reports. 'I'd be in meetings where there was an hour of praise, then a personal testimony, followed by an invitation to receive Jesus. The person giving the testimony would pray for anyone responding. They are then introduced to local pastors who sort them out a mentor who will disciple them. It's very exciting.'

Thinking about the prophet as proclaimer, Kissell has in mind the Lukan idea that all God's people would be prophets. 'It's based on Joel 2:28, fulfilled on the day of Pentecost which was itself a revelation of the fact that we'd become a people speaking the revelation of God.'

'God speaks to us about something specific,' he explains. 'We search the scriptures for something that's parallel to it and we proclaim it primarily to our congregations, though sometimes to people beyond as well. God intends his people to be prophetic and that should undergird all we do - whether we function in administration in our church or have an apostolic role.'

'What this means,' he continues, 'is that the Lord will lead us to what we are to put in place. Administrators need to be prophetic and anointed so that they will make everything flow smoothly. Prophetic treasurers have a specific

vision from God and the faith to use resources as God intends to fulfil that vision.'



Kissell has built up a reputation over many years as a teacher and leader in the area of prophetic ministry. He has written books about it and spoken on virtually every continent about the subject. I asked him how he became involved in such a ministry, what his first experience of being given a word from God was.

'41/42 years ago, when I was at college and just married,' he replies. 'We were in our lounge and suddenly I was weeping, kneeling by my chair and weeping. I said "someone's trying to murder a prominent church leader." The man was one of the leading lights in the early renewal movement in this country. I prayed and wept. Later I phoned and discovered that the man had been visited by someone who had attacked him with a knife on his doorstep. But he had been protected by an invisible hand that knocked the knife away. It happened as I was praying for him and weeping.'

'I had recently been filled with the Holy Spirit,' he continues. 'But I didn't know what to do with this experience at all. I began to see things so I thought this was normal, it was just what one did as a Christian. If we are filled with the Spirit of prophecy, then we will be a prophetic people. This will be the normal Christian life. It's not an additional experience for the specially-anointed few.'

'This is what I teach. And I find that those who have just become Christians move more naturally into this than those who've been around a few years for whom this is a new teaching.'

He has experience of introducing this aspect of normal Christianity to a sometimes willing, sometimes sceptical congregation during his years at St Andrew's, Chorley Wood. 'We had all the problems associated with the Holy Spirit coming in a new way. But this is what we taught and how we ministered. And I haven't changed. It can't be an optional extra, a bolt-on, third-Sunday-in-the-month sort of thing.'

'Now, of course, some people take to it quickly and others take their time adjusting to it,' he continues. 'If people are allowed to come into it at their own pace, they will stick with it; it will become part of their normal Christian life.'

After a brief pause, he adds: 'Of course, you need courage to push on with it.'

Kissell has been ministering this way for more than 30 years and over that time has come to the realisation that if the church is going to grow, this must be part of the package of Christian ministry in churches up and down the land.

'If you don't have the ministry of the Holy Spirit,' he stresses, 'then people aren't helped to deal with the real issues of their lives. As an example of this, I was ministering at a meeting in our church and the Lord showed me that someone there had been severely traumatised in a car accident some years before. I announced this to the congregation. Someone said "that's me", came forward for prayer and the Lord broke the power of it. This is what God wants to do.'

How matter-of-fact is that? But just in case you're thinking that Kissell has learned all there is to learn and is handing down tips to us lesser mortals from the mountain top, he adds: This is not a big success thing, you know. We're all on a journey of discovery.'

How true. When we come to Swanwick in January, let's be praying that we'll discover God's heart for us to be a prophetic people in this land and beyond.



Adam Eakins is Director of Joshua Generation. He mentors, trains and resources the 20's and 30's generation in leadership development and has co-authored 'The JoshGen guide to Manifesto for Life' (JoshGen, 2001). He also has spoken at many conferences and retreats including EA assembly and Spring Harvest's At Work Together. Alongside this he is leading a small team who are planting an emerging church in a cafe/bar in Northampton called Quench. This is part of a local Baptist church where Adam is on the leadership team. He is currently studying for a degree in Popular Culture and Sociology. Family life is full of fun, being married to Karen and looking after Joel, who is two years old and Lauren who was born in May 2005.

The Top 5 Myths of 'Emerging Church'

It seems everyone is talking about 'emerging church' or 'fresh expressions'. OK, maybe not everyone, but recently on holiday in Scotland I had two conversations which made me realise that when you talk about doing church for people who don't do church, people are interested. The first conversation happened in a Reptile Centre on the Isle of Skye. We had been given a brilliant tour showing us the snakes, frogs and lizards much to my son's delight. Then our tour guide asked me where I was from and what I did? He was full of questions about Quench (the name of our fresh expression), like who was coming? What we did? What did we serve for breakfast? On travelling back from Scotland I received a phone call from a Times journalist who wanted to interview me about what we were doing.

Over the last year there has been increasing conversation about 'fresh expressions' or 'emerging church'. Often the same issues are brought up in discussions and I have collected these to create the top five myths about emerging church.

1. It is run by people who are fed up with church!

Now it has been said that most youth services are started up by youth workers bored with the normal church services. The same has been said about emerging church. Some people have suggested that those involved only want to do something different because they are fed up with church as it is. Is this true of those who are involved in setting up Quench? Yes, most of us do get frustrated by church at times (come on, we all do). Over recent years the church could be accused of serving itself too much, having stuck with outdated traditions and in danger of becoming totally irrelevant to our culture. Jesus got frustrated with the religious leaders and how things were done so getting hacked off is OK, the key is how we respond to these dissatisfactions.

The church is the bride of Christ and is part of God's plan to be a witness to the world. I love the church; where else can you



receive the love and support that is on offer? However, mission unfortunately has become a consequence of church whereas it can be argued that church should be a consequence of mission. At Quench we are seeking to be missional and to engage those who are seeking and exploring. This is a challenge to all churches whether a new expression or a traditional one. An important question to consider is what percentage of your resources (money, people and buildings) are going towards mission in its widest sense and what is going towards those already within the church?

2. It is a threat to the established church in the UK!

This just can't be true. The established church has survived much bigger threats than the emerging church. One of the key aspects of what we are trying to do at Quench is to remain as part of an established Baptist Church. We don't want to be a threat to it but to work in partnership with it and to continue to come under the authority of the church leadership. We have been released to go and seek to connect with the non-churched and de-churched but we want to remain in relationship with the main body rather than set ourselves adrift.

One of the key aspects of what we have been able to do is to take the whole church on the journey with us. We know that people regularly pray for us, others have given money to support us and everyone shares in this new adventure far beyond the original team of seven.

There are much bigger threats to the church than the emerging church. The principal one is that we are guilty of not taking risks for fear of getting it wrong. However, if the church is not willing to take risks then it is in danger of ceasing to be creative and without that we may find ourselves dead. We can no longer be rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic. We need to find our voices in our communities to tell the stories of Jesus.



3. It is the latest fad and will amount to nothing!

Everyone who is leading something new believes it is the great hope and not the latest whim. Now, it maybe completely wrong, but as a team we do believe these are significant times. The stats regarding church attendance are very depressing and yet the times we are in suggest that many people are searching for security, acceptance and significance. Jesus offers all of these and if emerging church can play a part in enabling people to see this then that can only be a good thing for the whole church.

Over recent months we have seen discussion around the whole issue of atonement prompted by Steve Chalke's book (you may have heard about it!!!). However, the book alongside others is stimulating discussion about what is the gospel and how modernity has shaped the good news we now offer. There is not the space to do this subject justice but as Stuart Murray-Williams puts it, our gospel message was aimed at people who felt guilty, sinful and miserable. However, people on the whole today, don't feel that way. Therefore, how do we express the gospel that engages people who on the whole feel moral and generally happy? The people who have attended Quench so far don't feel that they are sinful people but they have expressed a desire to explore the message of Jesus, to understand further what being a spiritual being is about.

4. It is ignoring the Holy Spirit!

When people make this statement I think (however I may be wrong) what they mean is that we are not

interested in the manifestation of the gifts. Yes, we have not seen any 'carpet time' or 'ministry time' within Quench but certainly we don't want to shy away from all that is available to us from our generous Heavenly Father. However can the Holy Spirit only be found down at the front of the church after a ministry call? As a team we have every confidence that God's Spirit is at work in all we are doing. We want to see God at work in all ways because we want people to encounter the Creator who is seeking to connect with his creation.

5. It is the answer!

If it is the answer, what is the question? As the church in the UK we are desperate to discover the key that will unlock revival in this country. I have seen it with other things like seeker services, alpha and cell church. Nothing wrong with them, but can one programme ever be the complete answer? The only answer, as all children in Sunday School know, is Jesus! Emerging Church may go somewhat towards engaging those who are seeking spiritual truth but it is one of many missional changes that may need to happen in our churches. Brian McLaren says he doesn't like the term 'The Emerging Church' because the last thing we need is another 'The' movement. We have had 'The Cell Church Movement', 'The Charismatic Movement' and many others. The only movement we need is a movement of God through his people seeking to engage with the world. Fresh Expressions (no longer using Emerging Church if Brian says so!!) can be a part of that as can many others.

Well there you go, the top five

myths. If you have got anything from these thoughts then that is great. If you think some of the thoughts are way off then you may well be right. We have been planning this for about 2 years and running it for 6 months; we still have loads of unanswered questions, probably more than when we started. Please take this from someone who loves Jesus and wants as many people to be exposed to the living water which Jesus offered to the Samaritan women by the well that will quench a people thirsty for a real spiritual encounter with a living God.

And Quench is...

Quench is a new expression of church being planted into a culture from Broadmead Baptist Church, Northampton. We meet in a bar/café on the first Sunday each month. We offer coffee, tea and juice as well as a range of breakfast pastries. The Sunday papers are available for you to browse.

Each time we will consider a topic which many of us face. This is done in a variety of ways including discussion, watching a film clip and hearing stories. We are not there to just give answers or give the Christian viewpoint. We are there to explore the stories that we all find ourselves in and seeking to understanding more about the world we live in. Our main aim is to understand what a relationship maybe like between the Creator and his creation.

For more information go to www.quenchme.org.uk

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'Stephen Ibbotson is on the pastoral staff at Altrincham Baptist Church and is a former editor of *Talk*

Listening to the singers of the song of the Kingdom

Stephen Ibbotson

The glacial valley was deep and wide. The panorama from an elevated position, looking along the valley, was like a scene from *Lord of the Rings*. People in groups and clusters moved along the valley towards what were, unseen by them, early coloured veins of dawn. Some groups moved purposefully and in unison, while others were caught up in human eddies and backwaters which hindered their progress. Either side, steep hills and mountains climbed towards the darkened sky. On outcrops and promontories stood lonely figures, faces turned towards the breaking dawn, singing a delicate song that permeated the valley. I asked, 'Who are these Lord?' 'They are the prophets. They have learnt to sing the song of the Kingdom.' 'Why do some struggle along the valley, while others make decisive progress?' 'There are those that have learnt to listen to the song of the Kingdom. They recognise its cadence, phrasing and rhythm. It has become the song of their hearts. Others are busy and do their best, but the song of the Kingdom does not form their walk or ways.'

Prophets are those with a spiritual gift of transcendence. They position themselves at some distance from the fast fury of life. They are often alone. But they see with clarity things of which the rest of us are unaware. They have learnt to see into the distance of hope. Their lives are rhythmically ordered by the beautiful cadences of God's Kingdom. Down in the valley

we value the workers and especially the organisers of the workers, those that lead, plan and strategise. They are often people of great ideas and clear vision. But the best among them are those that have learnt to listen to the singers of the song of the Kingdom.

'Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' Christian living is about learning to spot the Kingdom as it comes towards us and realign ourselves accordingly. If we pray that prayer with meaning, we become increasingly alert and conscious of the movements of God's Spirit of life, and sensitive to dynamics that lead to stagnation or death. Prophets are those who, as God's gift to the Church, are able to prepare us to see the future of God's Kingdom as it comes towards us. Apostles are those who lead us towards that future, stepping out with courage to say 'Come with me.' This is why the church is built on the apostles and prophets. We need to be prepared to receive the future that is forever coming towards us.

We are a busy and active people. We want to do things well and to be about God's mission. God takes pleasure in this. But he takes even greater pleasure in a people that is about the Father's business whilst guided by the rhythms and cadences of Kingdom hope. We live in a time conscious of the need for good management, of careful considered process. But however good our management systems are, the

Church is more than an organisation of productivity, a system to be managed or change-process to be negotiated. It is the people learning to be responsive to the Spirit of life. And to become responsive we need transcendence, the ability to rise above our human anxiety and even merely our determination to do good. We need the song of the new dawn to wash over our ears and capture our hearts, changing our badly co-ordinated movements into the rhythm of God's Kingdom dance. The challenge of Peter's use of Joel's vision remains: that the whole community is permeated with the prophetic, pervading all human categories of age, class and gender.

This vision came when I was reflecting on what it means to become a healthier and better-formed community and disciple. Its impact underlined how much we need to give a place to people called to listen to God's voice. They are overlooked in our culture of anxious activism, marginalised because they don't always come with loud voices, dynamic ministries, and front what they say with 'Thus says the Lord.' For them, to seek God's voice in the wilderness is more important than engaging in the busyness of human life. Like Moses they have learnt to turn aside from the ordinary things of this life, and attend to the strange approach of God. We need more prophets. We certainly need to listen to their song more attentively. Perhaps our conference will give us such an opportunity.

Digging up the gen on prophecy

Glen Marshall



Glen Marshall teaches at Northern Baptist College, having held pastorates in Altrincham, Barnsley and Wakefield.

How about this as a list of the qualities of a prophet: vision, insight and dedication. I got the list from www.prophet.com - the website of a professional marketing firm specialising in branding consultancy. Not exactly what The Bible means by a prophet! But then what does The Bible mean when it speaks of prophets and prophecy? Come to that, are our contemporary charismatic models any closer to scriptural notions than that of the ad men?

Trouble is there is no one biblical model. Within the Old Testament alone there is great variety: Daniel is not Amos and Isaiah (or should that be the Isaiahs?) is/are not Nathan and none of the aforementioned is at all like Moses. Even within the pages of the New Testament we can't be sure if Agabus was up to the same kind of thing as John the Baptist, let alone those nice people at Corinth or the frankly rather strange John of the Apocalypse.

So when we argue for the restoration and elevation of the prophetic ministry within today's church it's clearly important to ask which particular biblical expression of prophecy we have in mind. It's not enough just to use the word and assume that what we have now is the same thing, the one thing, they had then.

I hope to spend time at next year's Mainstream conference doing a bit of biblical spadework on this issue and perhaps even coming up with one or two answers. I wonder if for now you'd allow me to get away with just raising one or two questions.

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First of all, have those of us with a charismatic bent taken sufficient account of the extent to which many of the biblical prophets had a ministry that was to do with reinterpreting earlier revelation? Examples abound but check out Isaiah's deployment of the exodus motif in his utterances concerning the restoration of Judah. Alternatively there is Revelation's reworking of Ezekiel's prophecy which in turn, of course, draws heavily on the priestly material in the Pentateuch.

I wonder if in our anxiety to carve out a place for prophecy distinct from that of preaching we haven't laid ourselves wide open to the kind of prophetic word that, because it is free floating and extempore is prone to being banal, deviant or nonsensical. "Thus saith the Lord" doesn't have to be the precursor to an utterance that has dropped fresh from heaven, bypassing the rational faculties of the speaker and requiring no knowledge of what the Lord has already said in days gone by.

Then again is it ever appropriate anyway, given God's post-Pentecost indiscriminate sloshing around of the Spirit of prophecy, for anyone today to introduce an utterance with, "Thus saith the Lord ..." or "I, the Lord, say unto you ..." or by shouting just a bit too loud so you can tell it is God, not me? Pre-Pentecost, each prophet was held accountable for the validity of their oracles. Post-Pentecost, during the era of the prophethood of all believers, the responsibility for testing lies with the Spirit-endowed community.

Now of course we know this,

but have we always followed through on the implications? If we are presenting a word to be tested by the church, is it not more fitting to *offer* rather than to *declaim*: to suggest what we feel God might be saying rather than drawing ourselves up to Elijah-like proportions and speaking in such a way that it becomes very difficult for anyone to test what is being said because it feels like they are sitting in judgement on what is clearly a divine pronouncement? If we trust God's wisdom in democratising the gift of the Spirit there is surely no need for us to adopt tactics a little too similar to those of the Wizard of Oz.

Whenever I have a prophetic word it seems more appropriate to preface what I have to share with words such as, "I think God might want to say to us that"

Am I alone in believing that contemporary prophecy would benefit from being a bit more modest?

I could go on: there are many more questions. Have we contracted the prophetic gift by reducing it to the merely verbal? What does it mean for a *church* to be prophetic? Is it legitimate to address prophecy to secular powers? Is Breuggemann right to suggest that the essence of prophecy is the ability to see differently, imagining a world radically other than that prescribed by the powers that be and then having the guts and the skill to help others see it too?

But space forbids and besides the good people at prophet.com suggest that retaining an air of mystery does wonders for your marketing. See you at Swanwick.



The New Testament, the Roman Empire and Shopping

Peter Oakes

Peter Oakes is Greenwood Lecturer in the New Testament at the University of Manchester. With the help of his wife, Janet, he edits the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Booklist*. They are both members of Didsbury Baptist Church and are particularly involved in the youth work there.

I have just been looking up the story of Jesus' temptations in my favourite commentary on Luke (John Nolland, *Luke*, 3 vols, Word Biblical Commentary, 1989 etc). On the second temptation, in which the devil offers Jesus authority over the kingdoms of the inhabited world 'because it has been handed over to me and I give it to whoever I want' (Luke 4.6), I was surprised to see that Nolland says, 'Despite Morgenthaler [cites a couple of old articles] no direct contrast between Christ and the Roman emperor is intended.' Sixteen years is a long time in Biblical scholarship. Since 1989, things have changed so sharply that, far from meriting a one line dismissal, I am pretty sure that the majority scholarly opinion now would be that, in a Gospel that sets up the story of Jesus so carefully in relation to Roman history (Luke 2.1-2; 3.1-2), some sort of reference to the Roman emperor is certainly intended in Luke's account of the temptations.

Early Christians constructed their lives from a different view from which governed their society

One is always tempted to jump straight to modern politics to look for explanations of changing fashions in the way that scholars view the Bible. In the United States, lots of people have followed the

line taken by writers such as Richard Horsley, who sees early Christianity as being opposed to the Roman empire and relates this to present-day Christianity as being opposed to what is seen as American imperialism. Similarly, in India, scholars such as Simon Samuel carry out work using a 'postcolonial' approach, which explores the complex relationship between texts produced by an imperial power (such as Rome) and texts produced by people living under that imperial power (such as the early Christians). However, other scholars have got into this area apparently by accident.

When I began PhD study on Philippians, under Tom Wright, I decided, as one does, that I needed to investigate the setting of the letter. I was shocked to discover that the archaeological and historical material had hardly ever been seriously looked at. Before I knew it I was heavily into trying to think through the dynamics of being a predominantly

by issues such as the way in which the depiction of Christ's universal authority (Philippians 2.9-11; 3.20-21) compared to the prevalent depictions of the Emperor's authority.

Tom Wright himself has had a long-standing interest in ideas about Jesus, rather than Caesar, being Lord (see, e.g., *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Lion). He has got more and more heavily into this in the last decade and it is bound to feature strongly in his latest doorstop of a book, *Paul: a Fresh Perspective* (SPCK). Also, his doorstops always tend to appear at about the same time as tomes on a similar topic from his scholarly arch-rival, Dominic Crossan. J.D. Crossan and J.L. Reed's, *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (SPCK), appeared recently. Personally, I am not heavily into seeing the main point of all this as being that the early Christians opposed the Roman empire so we should oppose imperialism. The sentiment may be right but I think it is too sweeping, as a view of what the New Testament writers are doing. I think it is better to look in more detail at what particular NT books are aiming at in terms of helping their readers to live as Christians in their particular situation.

If pushed to look for a general message from the range of NT material as it

Greek Christian community living in a Roman colony in a corner of Macedonian Greece. When I turned back to Philippians it was inescapable that the recipients of the letter were bound to be strongly struck



relates to the Roman empire, I would point to the idea of living out your view of the universe. In particular, early Christians who were converted from a non-Jewish background had to make sharp changes in their view. Before conversion, their universe was run by a diverse, sometimes unpredictable, set of gods. One thing the gods had got around to doing in an organised way was handing earthly power to Rome. The status of the Emperor was clearly somewhere roughly on a level with that of the gods - certainly high enough to be offering sacrifices to him and holding processions and festivals for him. At conversion, the whole cosmic order was, in principle, binned and replaced with a more Jewish one with God in control, angels and other beings, and, in the Christian view, Jesus somehow on a similar status-level to God. This change had all sorts of implications, from obvious ones such as avoiding rituals that involved worship of the Emperor, to subtler points such as no longer believing in the prevailing rhetoric that the world was now in a golden age of peace and security brought in by imperial rule (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5.3).

Early Christians were constructing their lives according to a different view of the universe from that which governed their society. We are faced by the same challenge. In our society, what is the dominant view of the universe? I suppose it is that the universe is empty apart from us: no God or gods running the world and, consequently, neither an ultimate constraint on what we do nor an ultimate goal to which we are heading. For us to live as people whose universe has God Father, Son and Holy Spirit at its centre, means living with a world-view at odds with the one that most of the people around us hold and which, consequently, informs most government policy. This has lots of implications. For example, if the universe is empty of gods, it tends to lead to the assumption that the

pursuit of pleasure should be the primary aim of life and that maximising general access to pleasure should be the basic goal of government policy. As Christians, we should rejoice in pleasure, as a gift from God, and should support efforts to broaden people's access to it. However, because our universe is centred on God, maximisation of pleasure cannot be our primary goal. This will inevitably cut against the assumptions of our society in various tangible ways.

An example of this can be seen in the practice of the husband-and-wife writing team of Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat, whose recent book, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (IVP) is very entertaining (stories, imaginary conversations, etc) and challenging (even if the argument is occasionally shaky!). Two things particularly strike me. First, they directly challenge a common authorial practice, that of apologising to their family for having had too little time for them while writing. Walsh and Keesmaat say that if they had had to make such an apology it would have invalidated the lifestyle that the book itself was calling people to. Second, they avoid supermarkets. In their context, near Toronto, they do this by being part of a cooperative that buys food together, directly from suppliers. In the UK, if a group of church members went down the route of avoiding, or minimising, the use of supermarkets it might be by switching to smaller, local shops to help rejuvenate the local economy (local shops recycle most income locally: supermarket chains take much of it out) or by, say, supporting a project in a developing country by bulk-buying certain products through a particular supplier. This issue of shopping is an example of not

maximising pleasure. Cutting down use of supermarkets loses us some of the pleasure we could have, in terms of consumption, because we typically pay a bit more for what we buy. There is also some loss of free time.

However, God's presence in our universe gives us priorities other than just seeking to maximise pleasure.

A changed view of the universe does not, of course, just (or even mainly) have possible effects on shopping habits. For the early Christians and for ourselves it affects worship, personal morality, hope for the future, and a thousand other things. The key point is that if our universe is different, then our lives should be different. In a magazine issue devoted to prophecy it is worth remembering that the Old Testament prophets (and Jesus in his prophetic role) did not just speak, they also carried out symbolic actions that showed the people around them the reality about God. Church action that flows from living out our alternative view of the universe can have a prophetic force beyond the apparent scale of what we are doing.

Make Poverty History - a prophetic movement?

Stephen Rand

Attending the UN World Summit in New York and the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund gave me an overwhelming reaction: the gap between vision and reality can be very hard to bear. But then if you are active in church leadership you already know that!

Waiting outside a room in the UN while delegates inside take two hours deciding whether they can agree to meet again in two hours time. Watching officials who have been working all night to try and reach a consensus at the World Bank having to admit they have failed - and agreement on a debt deal that has been announced for four months has escaped them.

There are encouragements to be found in the US. It was Jim Wallis who in the light of the surge of concern about poverty among Christians, including evangelicals, felt the urge to pronounce that 2005 had become a *kairos* moment: *'The massive reality of global hunger and poverty has revealed our own spiritual poverty and is bringing us together...all these efforts are being undertaken to bring the religious community's moral energy and agency to bear on the world's pre-eminent moral issue.'*

But progress on aid, trade and debt is painfully and pitifully slow. The UN Summit was supposed to review progress on the world's efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals for halving poverty by 2015. Three weeks before the Summit the USA tabled 750 amendments to the draft outcomes statement, attempting to remove all reference to the Goals, to remove the references to the pledge of wealthy nations to allocate 0.7 per cent of national wealth to global poverty eradication.

The USA was not the only nation on the offensive. But it did reinforce a complete change of emphasis, so that the hope of real progress was replaced by relief that something was salvaged from the potential wreckage.

At the World Bank it was Belgium, among others, standing up to the political might of the G8, calling into question their willingness to finance the debt cancellation deal they had announced unilaterally in June. So, in an extraordinary development, the G8 Finance Ministers individually signed an open letter promising that they were doing all in their power to guarantee the funding for the next forty years - and still Belgium was not convinced, and the deal still awaits final agreement.

Tony Blair was hoping that by now debt and aid would be dealt with, leaving trade to be triumphantly settled at the World Trade Organisation meeting in December. And that seems an even bigger challenge. He noted that every nation thought positive change was a good idea until they sat at the negotiating table. *"This World Trade Organisation round in Hong Kong is the test of whether international cooperation is prepared to live up to the demands of the inter-dependent international community we live in today. It looks as if we are heading for a failure in that round; I am going to do whatever we need to do to get that back on track. If we end up with a failure in December, that will echo right round the world, and I am not prepared to have that, at least without the most monumental struggle."*

The Government are in no doubt that Make Poverty History has helped to bring change. The Prime Minister introduced the Labour Party Conference by saying: *'Our values continue to guide everything we do - a sense of justice, of compassion and the decent instinct that we should strive to leave our world a better place than we found it. It was these values, and huge public support, which drove us to secure agreement at the G8 Summit on a ground-breaking deal to help Africa.'*

Gordon Brown said to one Make Poverty History group: *'Let me congratulate you for your key role...demonstrating the truth of the belief that as individuals we are not*



powerless but, acting together we have the power to shape history.'

Quoting the Chancellor, who loves to quote Isaiah and Martin Luther King, makes me wonder just how great the pain of the gap between vision and reality was for the prophets. I am still moved close to tears by reading Isaiah 65 - and by the account of the suffering servant a few chapters earlier. And of course it is precisely the link between suffering and the vision becoming reality that Isaiah reveals.

The church has played a key role in Make Poverty History. And while not everyone involved in Make Poverty History is a Christian, the vision for a different world has undoubtedly been prophetic. It has been prophetic because it has challenged world leaders to take seriously God's kingdom values of justice and concern for the poor. It has been prophetic because it has challenged God's people to do the same.

By offering a vision rooted in kingdom values, it helps to shape the life of the church and its members by challenging the priorities for its activity. Make Poverty History will fulfil its prophetic role in the church as churches and individual Christians take seriously the challenges to lifestyle that follow from concern for the poor - from Fairtrade to responding to climate change, from emphases in giving, to active involvement with the marginalised on our doorsteps.

And for those evangelicals who still doubt this priority, let's reflect on the

purpose of prophetic ministry: not only does it call God's people to 'love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with God.' (And is anything less than this really prophetic?) It recognises that when God's people do this they honour the name of God and commend him to the world. People living in God's world God's way have evangelistic impact. That's why people of vision have to engage in the messy nit-picking world of reality, so that reality can be changed. The prophets knew that when the transforming power of God touched

his people God could touch the world.



Stephen Rand is co chair of Jubilee Debt Campaign and part of the leadership team at Kairos Baptist Church, Wimbledon. Information about continuing involvement with Make Poverty History can be found at www.makepovertyhistory.org and on Premier Radio at 10.30 on Saturdays - www.premier.org.uk/mph

A prophet from Palestine?

Simon Jones

Naim Ateek is a Palestinian Christian. A theologian, he runs an ecumenical centre in East Jerusalem called Sabeel (which means 'the way' in Arabic). Some say he's a prophet.

At this year's Greenbelt Festival he spoke powerfully about two strands of Old Testament messianic expectation - the Son of David strand and the Suffering Servant strand. The one foresees a warrior leading his people in military conquest. The other sees liberation coming through suffering love and sacrificial self-offering.

Jesus, said Ateek, chose the latter option. Indeed he used the idea of the suffering servant found so powerfully in Isaiah 40-55 to critique models of messiahship, popular in first century Judea, that expected a military leader to initiate an uprising against the Romans. From the Pharisees to the Zealots and Essenes, everyone wanted a war, says Ateek.

'Jesus did not join those groups,' he continued, 'he chose a different sabeel (way or path); the way of faithfulness to God even if it resulted in suffering. Presenting God as the loving Father, Jesus called people to live in community, non-violently and to be salt and light in a warring world, pointing to the Kingdom of God by the way they lived.'

Israel today is the sixth biggest military power in the world. It is a place of violent revolutionaries now

as it was in the first century,' he says. 'It needs a church prepared to walk the way of Jesus. We shall overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. Suffering love brings healing. We must reject the way of empire and build the community of peace and justice.'

Now that's prophetic talk. It's also prophetic walk. Back in East Jerusalem, the group he founded stands a witness to this sabeel of love in immensely trying circumstances.

Cedar Duaybis is one who has lived her whole life this way. A child when the modern state of Israel was declared in 1948, she has spent her whole life seeking to know the God who calls her in Jesus Christ.



'1948 was a challenge to the faith of Palestinians,' she says. 'We lost everything and became refugees in our own country all because of what the Christian world said was the fulfilment of prophecy. We were

Christians. We revered and trusted the Bible as our Holy Book and yet this book was the apparent cause of our destruction.'

Now in her 70s, Cedar is the widow of a Christian minister, who has read the Bible and wrestled with it through her whole ministry. 'We read the Old Testament with Jesus' eyes and seek to be a witness to that,' she says. 'He spoke of the Kingdom of God not a land. He spoke of people coming from all over the world to become part of a single people of God. He spoke of the olive tree and grafted us into it.'

Quietly this group of Palestinian believers receives visitors from all over the world, tells their story, shares their faith and approach to the seemingly intractable conflict that continues to engulf their land, organises conferences and takes pilgrims on tours of holy sites and small Christian communities.

In all this they are saying that there is another sabeel, a way that does not involve suicide bombers and helicopter gunships, a sabeel of the suffering servant who walked the way of self-sacrifice to open a Kingdom for all who'd come in repentance and trust.

It's a prophetic word that speaks way beyond its troubled context.



Prophetic Rebellion!

By Juliet Kilpin

Juliet Kilpin is one of the ministers of Cable Street Community Church in East London. The church developed out of the work of Urban Expression, a mission agency which recruits, equips, deploys and networks self-financing teams to pioneer creative and relevant expressions of church for under-churched areas of Britain's inner-cities. For more information visit www.urbanexpression.org.uk. She is also a half-time Mission Advisor for church planting and evangelism.

When my husband and I were walking around Shadwell looking for the community in which Urban Expression should place its first team, our senses were struck by all the usual factors that characterise such inner city communities. The streets were crowded with people who looked and sounded different to us, there was rubbish all over the streets, drug dealers stood on the corner, and we were surrounded by the claustrophobia of tower blocks and dense housing estates. We looked at each other and asked, 'Who in their right minds would choose to live here?'

And that was it! We knew in that instant that we had no choice but to move there. Everything 'normal' within us was saying that this wasn't the right thing to do - what about our safety, what about our pension, what about our children and their education? What about the nice 3 bed semi we would leave behind, and what about the insecurity of not having a regular income?

But everything slightly courageous within us was saying, 'Let's go for it! What a great place to see God at work!'

Looking back, I think there was a slight sense of doing something a little bit rebellious. We knew we were going against the trend of avoiding the inner-cities and choosing secure stable futures, as were those who were coming as part of our team. We knew that this was risky and the task of trying to create church here was not guaranteed success, and yet we couldn't think of anything more exciting! But as well as feeling slightly rebellious, there was a sense of being slightly prophetic in our choices too. Choosing to trust God's understanding of security and success rather than human understanding, choosing to see beyond how things looked in the present to see what the community could be like if God, who was already working there, was given more hands and feet to express his Kingdom in the neighbourhood.

We could see then that there were both positive and negative elements that already existed in the community, but we could see clearly that God had many more positive things that he wanted to contribute to the neighbourhood.

One of the first things we saw when we eventually found a home to live in was a derelict adventure playground. Those in their 20's and 30's could remember it being a fun and safe place to go to when they were children, but in recent years it had been left to grow over and become unsafe to use. Wouldn't

it be such a great sign of God's Kingdom to see that up and running again, we thought to ourselves.

Nothing much happened for 5 years or so, but eventually the opportunity came up for our fledgling church community to pull together a working group of local parents to look at how we might raise the funds to re-open it. With the help of a play association we raised enough money to employ two full-time qualified staff and two part-time workers. Today the playground is up and running, colourful, and a focus of attention in the community. It is a safe place for children to learn how to play, how to grow plants, how to saw bits of wood to make more play equipment, and how to get splinters - an important learning curve for kids who only ever play on concrete!

Were our hopes and dreams pure imagination, or were they prophetic visions of the future? Where is the line between dream and vision, prophecy and rebellion? Local people know that our church community was involved in the management group, but do they know that God was involved? Does it matter if they don't? They still see evidence of Good News, something positive in a neighbourhood where the negatives are emphasised, and something that has changed for the better in a community which believes that 'nothing ever changes around here'.

Looking at my Bible I think about Daniel - he and his pals looked pretty rebellious when they





refused to eat and drink the fine food and wine offered by King Nebuchadnezzar and instead chose to go all veggie. The guard probably thought they were crazy, but in essence they were being obedient and prophetic. And what about Jeremiah, the happy soul - all his smashing of pots, wearing of mouldy belts, putting on of ox yokes, and telling the exiles to settle down in a foreign land. He must have looked and sounded very rebellious, not to mention slightly mad! He was often saying the opposite to what everyone thought God must be saying, yet he was God's prophet for the day.

One of the 5 core values of the Baptist Union of Great Britain is to be a prophetic community. What does this mean for us who call ourselves Baptist? It doesn't sound like a very safe thing to me. In fact it sounds pretty dangerous! What would our congregations be like if we all took this seriously? They might not be in church on Sunday mornings but could be off on demos against injustice, or maybe out picking up litter off the streets, or maybe they might have to miss house group in order to attend a local community action group. Or they might be wearing sackcloth to repent of corporate and individual

sin, (imagine that! Not in today's day and age surely!). Or they might lead worship that actually engages with injustice and oppression rather than avoid it by telling everyone to 'leave your troubles at the door'.

A church family that is committed to being prophetic is certainly not asking for things to be neat and tidy and predictable. Unpredictability and messiness is more likely. I was recently introduced to the word 'chaordic', which means chaos that is ordered



or allowed, which I think explains this idea of embracing messiness well. But alongside these characteristics of living prophetically come excitement and adventure, perhaps the odd bit of persecution, and a sense of being part of the movement of God's Kingdom.

Besides, it will give us something more interesting to talk to Peter about when we see him at the Pearly Gates, than what our favourite chorus was!

Building the Kingdom while playing games

Pam Bryan of Purley Baptist reports on a conference about how to run more effective toddler groups

Bods and Tods is the name of our Parent and Toddler group, which meets every Wednesday morning. Our Lower Hall is packed full of small children and their carers, who say that it's really well run and a great place to come.

So we could say that it's very successful! But we are very aware that although people love to come, we very rarely see people coming to Church or even asking questions about 'spiritual things.' We are also aware that it's the same story in many Carers and Toddlers groups.

So we decided to host a day conference run by an organisation called the "Go Project". This conference asked the question, "Would you like to see your Parents and Toddler group being as effective as possible in reaching people with the good news of Jesus?"

And thirty four people came from churches in the South East, even from as far as Hove.

Caroline McQuaker led the day really helpfully, giving insight that she has learned from other groups. Colin Cartwright, a Baptist Minister, passed on the fruit of his sabbatical research, identifying key factors in making these groups effective in outreach. I had to gather a group of young children for a presentation by Georgina Widdington. Some brought their younger brothers and sisters and so there was a wide age range but she had them and all the adults spellbound, as she told us all how much God loved us and how special we are to him using a variety of visual aids and song.

What a wonderful introduction to a powerful tool.

As important as the input was from the front, it was really helpful to have an opportunity to share ideas that had worked for us, worship together and pray for one another.

Caroline pointed out that only two men had come to the day and this reflects the leadership in our Parents and Toddler groups. She said that we need to encourage more men to take part because now, for many children, these men could be a really positive role model and possibly the only one some of the children will have. Something for us, as church leaders, to take on board.

I'm worried now, because one of the Bods and Tods leaders from my Church came rushing up on the next Sunday inspired and reenergized. She said she'd been up at midnight writing down all her thoughts and asked how many ideas she could have! What will that mean for us? More work? More people involved?

Actually I'm really excited and I hope each of the 34 delegates were up at midnight writing down their ideas because one thing that I'm sure of, is that it will mean that a group of people who come into our Church premises regularly will have an opportunity to hear about Jesus and that's what we are all about, isn't it?





network news

JOSHUA GENERATION

developing leaders to transform society



Over ten years ago a young training minister called Matt Bird got frustrated to see many of his peer group who knew Jesus struggling to work out their faith as they transitioned from full-time education into the market place. As they dealt with not only the pressure of establishing themselves in the workplace but also relationships, housing and many other challenges, it seemed that the church was doing very little to equip them for the world they lived in. To counter this he began holding weekends away for his mates to encourage them and aim to equip them for this stage of their lives.

Out of this was born Joshua Generation and over the last ten years it has been involved in developing leaders to transform society in partnership with many individuals, churches and organisations in a variety of arenas. However, over the last year, JoshGen has been refocusing its vision to **"releasing the leadership potential of young adults in every area of life, through mentoring and training individuals; while resourcing churches and organisations to do the same"**. Our desire is to serve young adults as they leave full-time education, seeking to live as a follower of Jesus. That in all areas of their lives they are resourced to express faith in a Christian community as well as their work, household and networks during this challenging time of transition. This we do in the following ways.

Website This is a gateway for individuals and congregations to enable them to access many resources both on the website and the team members themselves. www.joshgen.org

Individual Updates - Individuals are able to sign up for a monthly update which will equip, empower and envision them for the whole of their lives. This will include book recommendations, links to inspiring writings, resources/conferences available and thoughts on issues that young adults face.

Congregational Updates - We offer a quarterly update for churches that wish to be linked up with us. This will offer those who are seeking to equip, empower and envision this generation access to resources, best practice and consultation.

Mentoring We seek to mentor younger leaders as well as encouraging others to do the same. There are resources available on the website to enable leaders to invest in emerging leaders which is vital to leadership succession.

Training We have a team of great communicators who have vast experience in working with young adults as they transition. We have spoken on issues relating to work/vocation, graduation, wholelife discipleship, household, leadership succession and emerging church.

Resourcing There are many books and resources which are available to resource people in this area. Highlights include Mentoring Guide, Manifesto for Life Guide, Eastenders, Foundation and Leadership Succession.

If you have a passion for seeing young adults expressing faith in all areas of their lives while being supported and to see a generation emerge as leaders in all spheres of society then we would love to serve you.

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Profile: Simon Jones

I'm writing this to the strains of Neil Young's new album *Prairie Wind* the haggard and beautiful musings of a man maybe reaching for faith. And it dawns on me that my life has a soundtrack, songs that recall the highs and lows of the journey so far.

I grew up in a happy, middle class suburban home in Leicester a pretty anonymous place back in the 60s. I had a much older brother who left home while I was still at primary school to work in London. So in some ways I have the sensibility of an only child - easy in my own company, awkward around others, not good at small talk.

A bout of childhood flu resulted in the purchase of my first single. My brother bought me the Beatles' *I want to Hold your hand*. I played it on my dancette until I nearly wore the grooves flat.

The Beatles, Stones and The Who were the soundtrack to my grammar school years. But the first album I ever owned was the over-blown (but still magnificent) *Chicago Transit Authority* a double album of rock and jazz fusion washed with counter-culture lyrics and anti-Vietnam war sentiments.

I didn't live in a church-going house. I was never sent to Sunday School. If my parents had any faith, they kept it very well hidden. But as a teenager, I remember telling my mum in our cramped kitchen, as she fried rissoles, that the world couldn't have arrived by chance, that there must be a creator of some kind.

I wanted to change the World, end the war, ban the bomb, wear flowers in my hair.

Around that time I joined a church youth club run by a radical Anglican curate who was also a Labour councillor. His name was Alan Billings. He's now a vicar in Kendall and regular contributor to Radio 4's Thought for the Day. He's the reason I'm a Christian. I wanted to change the world, end the war, ban the bomb, wear flowers in my hair, see everyone in Africa

fed (it was the time of the war in Biafra and images of starving children from that time are still seared into my memory) and sow love and peace wherever I went.

So did he. And his way of doing it was by being a follower of Jesus. I was impressed. At the same time I'd met a group of Christians from the local evangelical free church. They impressed me too - partly because their youth group had much prettier girls than mine!

In the lounge of one particular family I would play my Jimi Hendrix records and talk about the meaning of life. I gave my heart to Jesus as Larry Norman sang of 'Walking backwards down the stairs/trying to get higher'. As I did so, Audrey, my spiritual mum, said to me that I was going to be a pastor because I had a pastor's heart - beware the effects of prophecy on the young and vulnerable!

At university I played in a couple of Christian bands, singing around campuses in the North West, preaching the gospel, even appearing on Manchester's Piccadilly Radio. Music helped me express my love of Jesus in a way mere words couldn't.

I worked as a journalist after university writing about business and economics while longing to be doing album reviews and meeting bands. I met and married Linda - we sang together for a while around London.

In the mid-1980s I went to LBC and thence with two daughters - to the ministry in Peckham. I arrived as Nirvana was exploding onto the US rock scene

with the kind of impact the Pistols and Clash had had a decade before. I heard in this music the longing of a generation for reality, for something beyond the tarnished glamour of celebrity. I wept when Kurt Cobain killed himself as I had done 20 years earlier when Hendrix died and a decade earlier when I heard of Lennon's death.



For the past 15 years I have been attempting to earth my ministry in the gospel of Jesus and the culture we live in, believing that if the church in the UK is not to go the way of the church in Antioch, it needs to stay firmly rooted in the Word and Spirit of Christ and speak the language of our neighbours.

Elbow has just replaced Neil Young. This Manchester band's *Leaders of the Free World* is one of my albums of the year. The track *Everthere* which speaks of longing for someone who will stick close whatever happens, articulates the deep need for contact and belonging that pervades our culture.

I played it in church on Sunday evening. There wasn't a dry eye in the house. Who will we be 'Everthere' to?

Mainstream at Tonbridge Baptist Church, September 13th 2005



A young couple in my church in Croydon are about to move to Tonbridge. So of course I took a whole day out of my busy September schedule to visit the church where I hope they will attend once they move. Such is the quality of my pastoral care.

No, I didn't imagine you'd believe me. (I'm not even sure the young couple in question will attend said church anyway.) The truth is that I spent a day with around 45 other church workers, mainly Baptist ministers, because I knew from experience that it would be a refreshing and stimulating time. And so it proved to be for many of us.

In particular, I always find it a blessing to worship together on a day like this. 45 Baptist ministers sing about three times as loudly as my church of 130 ever does on a Sunday morning. This means I can warble away however I want without leading anyone astray!

The usual suspects Nodding, Jefferson & Hills were on hand to explain, extol and exhort us to all things Mainstream. Not being a card-carrying Mainstreamer I let most of this wash over me. However the dual emphasis on Word and Spirit finds a hearty Amen in many of us who can't fit another conference into our diaries.

Peter, Graham and Derek offered us a choice of three seminars; one on building healthy clusters, another on purpose-driven preaching, and another on what it might mean to be committed to Word and Spirit. In this, Peter warned of the dangers of divorcing theology from experience, and gave some helpful advice on handling prophetic words in the context of worship. The main question in my mind was over the relationship of Word to Spirit and vice versa. In an age when many Christians know little of the Bible, how can we encourage a broader spirituality in worship (and elsewhere) which continues to be rooted in the Word? How can we keep Word and Spirit together?

Finally, there were some great stories shared of the way the Lord is working through his servants. Andy Caldwell and Mark Humm in particular illustrated the main encouragement I took from the day, which was to hold on to God's words to us even if we can't yet see their fulfilment.

So thanks to our hosts at Tonbridge and to everyone for a great day!

David Taylor
Croham Road BC
S. Croydon

Peter Nodding brings us news of the Mainstream network and other connections.

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

Anabaptism and Mission: IBTS Directors Conference

During the last century the anabaptistic mission understanding and praxis was found to be a helpful bridge between opposing views of what mission was really about and also offered pointers to holistic mission.

This conference, in an attempt to reconnect to Anabaptism and its mission understanding, will evaluate how early Anabaptists understood and practised mission and, instead of euphorically and blindly following their example, will identify what is relevant for the 21st Century of the church in mission, how their understanding may need to be contextualised and what key aspects may be worthwhile developing.

The conference is at the IBTS in Prague from 30 January - 3 February 2006. For more details go to <http://www.ibts.cz>

Children's Ministry Conference: Helping you reach a new generation

Children's Ministry Conference with over 60 seminars and workshops covering topics such as special needs, bullying, all age work and others. The conference will include specialist streams for 'Tweenagers' ministry, under 5s ministry and those in leadership.

From 27-29 January 2006 at Eastbourne Conference Centre.

For more information or to book visit www.childrensministry.co.uk, or phone 01323 437759.

Eco-Congregation

The Eco-Congregation programme developed from a partnership between the Government funded environmental charity ENCAMS (which runs the Keep Britain Tidy Campaign and the Going for Green brand) and the Environmental Issues Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. It aims to encourage churches to consider environmental issues within a Christian context and enable local churches to make positive contributions in their life and mission.

Eco-Congregation can help you undertake an environmental check-up/audit of your church to identify its existing good environmental practice and prioritise areas for development. Eco-Congregation then provides ideas and free resources to help you put your plans into action. For more information check out their website: <http://www.ecocongregation.org>



calling all Youth and Children's specialists to an unmissable conference

June 28th - 30th, 2006

**at High Leigh,
Hoddesdon, Herts**

find some space to:

...worship ...learn & get ideas ...share ...make friends ...be prayed for

Mainstream and the BU's Mission Dept. have teamed up to provide this conference. Take the passion & overarching value (keeping Word & Spirit together) of Mainstream, and the energy, ideas & experience of the BU Mission Dept., put them together and you have one of the best times you will ever have been a part of. In short..... simply unmissable

(details of speakers & worship leader to follow. You'll find them soon, together with booking details, on Mainstream & BU websites.)

PM of Vanuatu dedicates nation to Jesus

The revival in Fiji is making waves across the Pacific, spilling over into the troubled nation of Vanuatu. After fresh elections in July delivered to power a Prime Minister thought by some of the nation's pastors to be an 'evil Catholic', hope was waning. One month later, Serge Vohor stood before a public rally in Port Vila and repented of his and the nation's sins. He then invited Jesus into the city of Port Vila and the nation of Vanuatu.

The background to these remarkable events was a 'mini transformations conference' which was conducted by pastors from Australia. They taught local pastors about principles of transformation learned from the Fiji revival. These principles included corporate repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation between denominations, healing the land and inviting Jesus into the community led by a chief or community leader.

When they suggested to the pastors in Port Vila to approach the Prime Minister for this, their initial reaction was that the new Prime Minister was not a Christian man and might not respond positively to the request. Some said he was too busy with trying to cope with his political worries. After some encouragement they decided to make an attempt at the top. A delegation of 12 pastors turned up at the Prime Minister's office at 2pm the next day and the PM warmly and openly accepted the responsibility to lead the corporate repentance and invitation of Jesus into his nation. This response shocked the pastors.

After the corporate repentance at a public rally, Vohor invited the pastors for breakfast the next morning. To show he was serious about on-going prayer and dialogue, he gave \$1000 as seed money so the pastors could cultivate unity amongst themselves and his office. He has also established a section of his office so different pastors can come and pray with him each week.

Source: www.joelnews.org

The Bible Centred Youth Worker 4

The fourth in this annual series of residential conferences for those working with children and young people. The programme will include a mix of Bible readings, talks, seminars and discussion groups as youth and children's workers look at the challenges and issues they face week by week.

The conference runs from 23-26 January 2006 and is at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hertfordshire.

For more information or to book visit www.thegoodbook.co.uk, email alison@thegoodbook.co.uk or phone 0845 225 0880.

If you knew what was out there...

Simon Jones



Simon Jones is team leader at Bromley Baptist Church and author of *Why Bother with Church?* (IVP, 2001). Previously he was BMS World Mission Co-ordinator for London and the South-East.

Type 'prophecy' into Google or any other search engine, I imagine and you'll be inundated with a million bizarre sites, run by over-eager Americans determined to tell you that the latest catastrophe in the world was predicted by an obscure verse in Ezekiel providing you read it with a squint.

Among the most entertaining and biggest is Prophecy Central A World of Information about Biblical Prophecy (www.bible-prophecy.com). It carries news, bible studies and side-swipes at other Christian groups who don't read the Bible the way these guys do, links to like-minded seers and lots of other stuff.

A lot of these sites are run by pro-Israel dispensationalists who are grinding political axes more than illuminating the Word of God. So perhaps in the name of balance I should recommend www.sabeel.org, a Palestinian Christian site that seeks to bring an alternative Christian view to events in the Middle East.

Then there are sites about the Celestine Prophecy a best selling book by James Redfield, apparently and, of course, Nostradamus. Now did you know that he predicted the rise of the current US president because a French word he used meaning 'doubtful' (dubieux) sounds like George W Bush's most common nickname, dubya? Well, well...

So if you're looking for anything useful, you need to be more specific. Type in author names or organisations. If you do that, there's some good, stimulating stuff to be found.

Mark Stibbe's book on *Prophetic Evangelism* (reviewed in this issue) put me on to www.dougaddison.com. There's a host of interesting, short articles on aspects of prophetic ministry. Also worth checking out is www.isaalmasih.net which is a

site aimed at followers of Islam, seeking to explain the Christian to them. It's of relevance here because of the numbers of people having dreams about Jesus, the 'man in white' and coming to faith in him as a result. Just click on the dreams and vision tab on the welcome page.

A good place to begin a study of prophecy and prophetic ministry is with the Bible and the web boasts a number of great sites to do this. www.ntgateway.com is my home page Mark Goodacre's weblog is required reading for keeping abreast of developments in the field. www.otgateway.com is a sort of companion site but nothing like as richly attired as its New Testament cousin. Both will offer great help in getting to grips with what the scholars are saying about the subject.

On the practice of prophetic ministry, especially in evangelism as well as some reflection on it www.extremeprophetic.com is worth checking out. This is a Vancouver-based outfit but they have done courses in the UK the son of one my leaders attended one and was blown away by it.

For an unusual angle on this ministry, check out Howard Brinton's 1950 pamphlet at www.pendlehill.org/pdf%20files/hp054.pdf. Quakers have historically believed that God could speak through anyone at their meetings. This gentle book has a number of useful insights wheat in the midst of chaff.

The restoration movement of Australia has a huge website of pamphlets and articles that invites hours of browsing so be warned! *Prophetic Ministry*, a 1963 pamphlet by Allan B Clark can be found at www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/pp/PP102.HTM.

There's an excellent article by John Paul Jackson of Streams Ministries on the danger of prophetic ministries getting above

themselves and leading people astray at www.vineyardusa.org/upload/Prophetic%20Reformation.pdf. He is not opposed to such ministries he shares platforms with Mark Stibbe among others but he is aware of the dangers that attend high profile prophetic ministers.

Finally, we ought not to leave the subject of prophetic ministry without glancing at all things emergent. Some argue that the emerging church movement (if it is such a thing) is prophetic in the sense that it is pointing to where the church might go in the future. There's some truth in this. So if you're still in the dark about what people mean when they talk about emerging church check out www.emergingchurch.org and www.emergentvillage.org. Also worth a look is www.vintagefaith.com which seeks to root emerging church in ancient life of the NT and early church.

Lots of Baptists are blogging these days. Blogs, for the uninitiated, are on-line diaries or rambles by people who want to share ideas, fly kites and see what reaction they get. I have one (<http://bromleyboy.blogspot.com>) called 'a sideways glance' check it out, leave a comment, join the debate.

Paul Lavender has a good one (<http://lavenders-red.blogspot.com/> - notice most blogs do NOT have www in their address), as does Sean Winter of Northern College. He blogs about the New Testament, Baptist life and other things that interest him at <http://britishbaptist.blogspot.com> And another NT scholar worth checking out from time to time is Alan Bandy at <http://cafeapocalypse.blogspot.com>.

'Thus saith the Lord...'

Rob White



How many times have I heard that over the years, prefacing some vocal pearl of wisdom or even a paste jewel of anaemic content?! It seemed for many years that a spoken delivery, purporting to be a word from the Lord, couldn't be given unless started in that way.

I've lived, for thirty years or so, between two extremes: one where no prophetic words are ever given, and the other where such words come almost as fast as an auctioneer's patter. I can remember many occasions (seasons, even) where a gathering of the saints was deemed to have been defective if there had been no prophetic gift in evidence and also occasions where, if some Christian tried to be obedient to what he felt to be the Spirit's promptings by sharing a word, the leader would look daggers at him, if not able to take such a blade and inflict silence that way!

Then, of course, we went through the whole thing of whether the prophetic word really was a prophetic word, a figment of the speaker's imagination (sanctified, of course), or could pass as a blessed thought. Rarely, if ever, did we encounter a prophetic word of foretelling, except delivered to individuals. I'm not sure if we would have known how to handle them if they had come.

Have we moved at all since those days? In some ways, yes: there seems generally to

be no real need to pepper gatherings with words of prophecy in order to say that we had a 'powerful' time, and hopefully we are more serious about those that do come. But in some ways, no: we have regressed to the point where people in meetings of the church often do not seek God for something to bring which may edify the hearers, and that element of spontaneity and sense of God's supernatural presence seems often to be missing.

So where to now? I refrain from saying, "Thus saith the Lord...", and instead offer two suggestions! Firstly, let's keep encouraging people to step out and obey the Spirit's promptings. Let's be honest about what is brought - do we sense that this is a word from the Lord, or not? What do we do about it? I'm sure we've moved away from the need to use the 'Thus saith the Lord...' guarantee of authenticity and allow people to be uncertain as to whether or not what they say is from God. To encourage people to bring such words (or pictures) is to broadly encourage the church to be involved in participation and giving to others. I seem to remember that such things are mentioned somewhere in the Bible.

Secondly, and more importantly, we need to be listening for the prophetic voice to the church, local and at large, and be open to listening to God's speaking through His people for what He might want to say. We can't live on human wisdom,

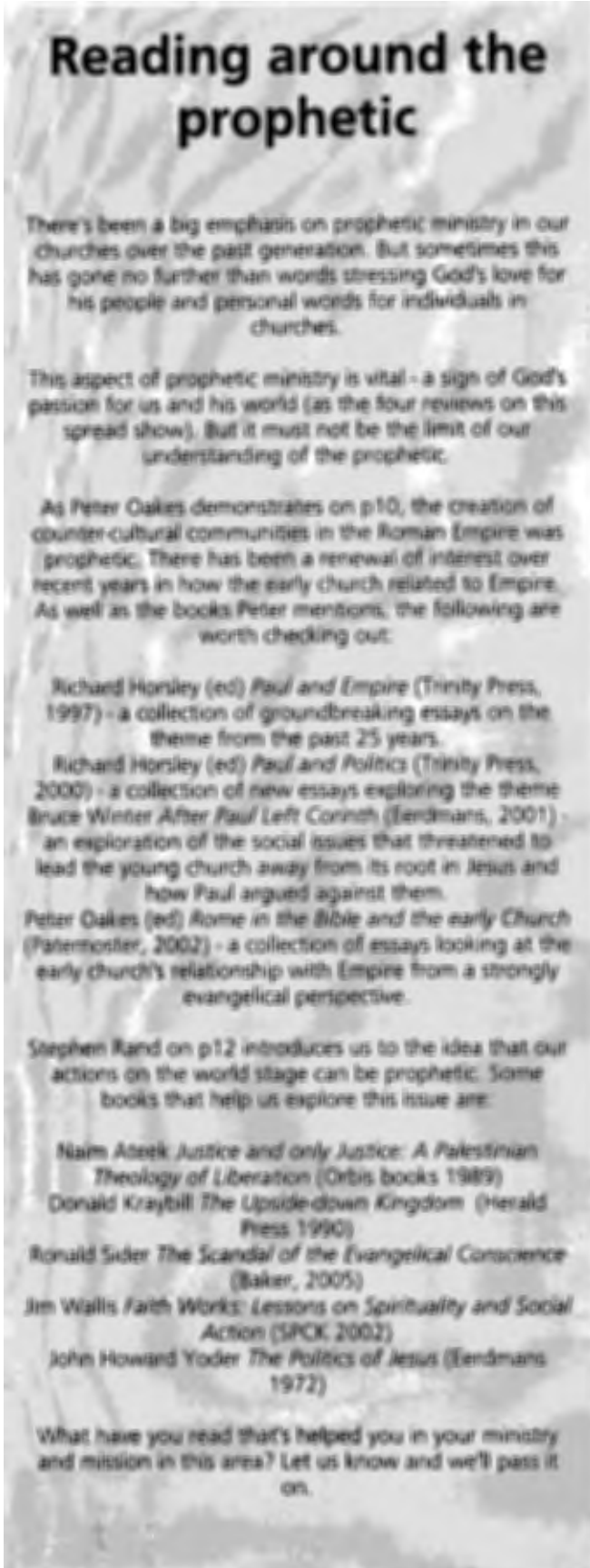
individual or collective, or bright ideas or the best strategies we can come up with after a brain-hurting brainstorming. We need to hear the voice of God. I know we know that, but often we substitute team-talk, committees or councils.

As **Mainstream** we need to hear what God has to say - about the steps to be taken in order to grow; how to encourage local clusters; how to interact with the wider BU; how to ensure that in our Kingdom actions of love we don't lose the proclamation of Jesus as the King. As the **BU** we need to hear God's voice on the structures of leadership at national level; on how to take Godly authority in church situations where leaders are being mistreated; on how to ensure that our colleges inspire & enthuse about leadership as well as giving theological training; on how to exorcise the insidious spirit of independence.

I have purposely written here about the prophetic as expressed in word or picture, assuming that the most pressing subject of the prophetic church and prophetic lifestyle will be excellently addressed elsewhere in this edition of TALK. In whichever way we look at the prophetic let's pray that whatever is lived out or spoken could at least be worthy of the phrase, 'thus saith the Lord...'

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.marion@ntlworld.com

off the shelf



Wayne A. Grudem,
The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today.
 (Crossway Books, Wheaton Illinois, 2000)
 Price appx. £13.99

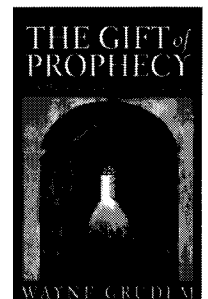
Grudem explains that this was written as a popular version of his doctoral thesis: *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians*, so, you have been warned! Actually, it is not that heavy a read and even the notes and appendices are quite accessible, but it does follow a scholarly and systematic approach.

Along with Bickle, Grudem believes in the need for the New Testament gift of prophecy to function today. However, it is apparent that Grudem, in developing his ideas for his thesis, was, at the same time addressing what he perceived to be errors in some expressions of the prophetic in the church today. I am not sure whether he and Bickle would entirely agree on all points regarding the nature and expression of the gift!

So, bravely trying to woo both charismatics on the one hand and cessationists on the other, Grudem solidly and carefully develops a biblical basis for the New Testament gift of prophecy. He firstly compares the New Testament gift with the Old Testament ministry of the prophet, who speaks 'the very words of God', and then with the ministry of the Apostles and writers of the New Testament Scriptures. He helpfully explores their difference in authority and import. The underlying point, which comes out further in the appendices, is the supremacy of Scripture above all other forms of revelation. With that as background, the next few chapters contain some careful and thorough exegetical comments on passages in 1 Corinthians, (amplified by other Scriptures) all of which builds an argument for a careful and considered exploration of the use of prophetic gifts in the Church today. He also tackles some of the 'how to' and relationship questions, but again this is biblically rather than experientially based and follows the same exegetical and scholarly approach and style as the earlier material.

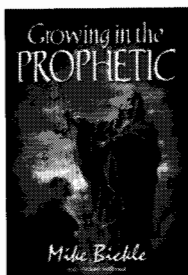
The exegetical stuff is excellent and very helpful, but the problem is that in attempting to bring together opposite poles, Grudem seems to end up sitting firmly on the fence. I found myself thinking that he was playing down both the potential and possibility of the gift, in reaction to his perceptions of errors and abuses among charismatics. In so doing, the moderate view of the New Testament gift of prophecy which emerges could leave the cessationists thinking 'well, so what? He may be right, but we're not missing much!' I think he and Mike Bickle would agree on the fact that the gift of prophecy is important for today, but I suspect Bickle would get a good deal more excited about it!

Nevertheless, this book has a great deal to commend it and will give considerable help to anyone wanting to see the prophetic gift used in the local church in a way that builds up and encourages. Read it alongside a book born out of experience, like Mike Bickle's or Jack Deere's *'Surprised by the Voice of God'* for a thorough and balanced understanding.





Mike Bickle (with Michael Sullivan)
Growing in the Prophetic.
(Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne, 1995.
Later re-released by Charisma House)
Price appx. £8.99



What do you do if you're a pastor who does not move in prophetic ministry surrounded by a group of prophets who are not always very pastorally sensitive? This dilemma sets the scene for Mike Bickle's contribution to our understanding of the New Testament gift of prophecy in the local church.

This is no simple 'how to' book, but rather a challenging analysis of the place, purpose and practice of prophecy in the church, written by someone who has witnessed this gift expressed at a powerful and extraordinary level. Put aside for a while everything you have heard or read about the so-called 'Kansas City Prophets' (and there is plenty) and read for yourself the thoughts of the man who led the Metro Vineyard Church in Kansas at that time.

What emerges is a passionate conviction that the gift of prophecy is for today, alongside honest reflections about the lessons learned in handling prophetic gifting in the context of a congregation. The latter half of the book deals more specifically with the nature of the gift of prophecy and its use in local churches, but don't rush to get there. The earlier chapters give important insights into how the author's thinking about prophecy has developed. The chapter on 'false equations about spiritual giftings' is helpful, as is the next, which discusses the possibility of our taking offence at the methods and people God may use to bring his prophetic word.

For many of us, the most relevant material is that which relates to the use of the gift of prophecy in the context of public worship and the gathered congregation, as this is where most difficulties can occur. There is good advice on setting guidelines and ground rules for bringing prophetic messages to the gathered church, along with advice on what to do if they are not followed! Wise insights about the accountability and character of those with prophetic gifting are scattered liberally throughout the book, and there is a helpful chapter that deals specifically with the relationship between pastors and prophets and the importance of working in team ministry.

Mike Bickle writes as a pastor and uses Scripture frequently to support his observations, but this is not intended to be a scholarly theological work. If this is what you want, then Wayne Grudem may be your man.

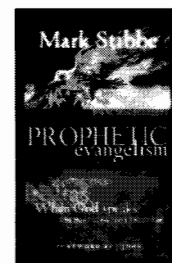
Graham Cooke,
Developing your Prophetic Gifting
(Sovereign World International, Tonbridge, 2003)
Price - £9.49

Definitely one to have on your shelf. Graham Cooke brings the blend of personal experience, trial and error, together with a thorough understanding of the Biblical material, to strongly encourage the place and ministry of the prophet in the local church.

Divided into three parts after an introduction on *Understanding Prophecy*, it is all here. *The Gift of Prophecy*, looking at the nature of the gift and the character of the prophet; how to bring prophecies and when not to. *Prophecy in the Church*, addressing the issues of judging and weighing prophecy; dealing with the implications and effects of prophecy in the local church. *The Leadership Role in Prophecy*, picking up on the themes of team, relationships between ministries in local churches, authority, discipline and so on.

You will not agree with everything Graham Cooke says, you may not believe it all in fact, but it is a stimulating read from a very experienced source. No footnotes, no appendices, just a lot of very thought provoking material. If you are only going to buy one...

Mark Stibbe
Prophetic Evangelism
(Authentic Books 2004,)
Price £7.99



This is a good book for all sorts of reasons. It's easy to read, the argument is clear and the handling of scripture is exemplary. On top of that, it's bursting with great stories of God speaking into the lives of non-believers and causing them to put their trust in him. What more could you ask for?

Stibbe believes that prophecy ought be exercised when the church is doing evangelism. The obvious justification for this is Jesus himself especially in John 4 (an exposition of which takes up most of chapter 3). He outlines how this works not only in his ministry but also in that of others.

The later chapters of the book deal with lots of practical issues for churches getting started in this kind of ministry, making it the kind of book a leadership team or church ministry group could usefully study ahead of launching into this kind of Mission.

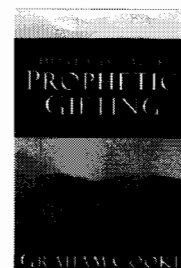
But it is the treatment of scripture that makes this book stand out from the field. Stibbe is a scholar. It's not often that a limited bibliography of a book dealing with this kind of issue would include James Dunn's *Magisterial Jesus and the Spirit* (SCM 1975), but Stibbe's does.

And his scholarship shows not only in his treatment of John 4 but especially in his handling of 1 Corinthians 12-14. He demonstrates in chapter 3 that prophecy is different from a word of knowledge or wisdom. The latter, he says, almost always occur in preaching and takes the form of expressing something in a manner so clearly that your congregation grasps the point being made. This is the consensus view of contemporary scholarship.

Prophecy is a God-given insight into a person or situation such as Jesus had of the woman at the well. When he spoke, she said 'ah I see you are a prophet.'

In chapter 5, Stibbe deals brilliantly with what Paul meant by tongues being a sign for unbelievers while prophecy was for believers, showing how prophecy reaches into the life of the unbeliever and draws out the response of faith.

This lucidly written, well-argued and illustrated book would be a useful addition to every minister's book shelves.



Confessions of a reluctant prophet

One woman's tentative steps to hear God and persuade the church that she might have done

In a magazine dedicated to prophecy, I felt it might be appropriate to tell my story. I am humbled by the calibre of the other contributors and so feel that maybe I ought to apologise in advance for what you are about to read. In fact apologetic sums up how I have been feeling over these past few months. Let me explain...

Three months ago I received a clear vision concerning the church I attend. No, I'm going back further. Apology number 1 - see what I mean?

When I think of prophets, I think of solitary figures that spend many hours talking to and hearing from God. For some reason they are always sitting on hills. Me - and I hesitate to call myself a prophet any way - I am an extremely busy mum with three small children who has just taken on a part-time job.

But I received this vision and I was so frightened that I did absolutely nothing.

Apology number 2: I was scared to tell anyone in case they thought I was barking; I was worried that they would think I had made it up - and to be honest I had similar doubts myself. But my biggest fear was with the Church itself, how would they react?

Foster an atmosphere of acceptance and trust

But the vision wouldn't go and in the end, with fear and trembling, I told my pastor, a man hugely gifted by God. He wasn't surprised at all - in fact he informed me someone else had given him a similar picture and he felt that mine confirmed this earlier one he'd received.

Apology number 3: I didn't give him the whole picture. I skipped over the more difficult bits. But I felt that now I had

'done my bit'. God had other ideas, however. He woke me up at 3am and just said 'Nahum' - as clear as if you had spoken it across a room to me. On reading Nahum, a book I confess I knew nothing about at the time (up to speed now on Nahum and looking forward to meeting him one day!) - I was terrified. What was I supposed to do with this? Emailing the pastor at 3:45am seemed like a good idea! I was a bit surprised to receive an extremely urgent email in response - albeit at the more respectable hour of 7:30am - urging me to give him more details.

Emailing the Pastor at 3.45am seemed like a good idea

There was nothing to say except that I had not been totally open the first time round. I was learning that if you think God has said something - no matter how difficult - it pays to tell whoever it concerns the whole picture. Let them weigh it up, test it out - not you! I heard also that God may stop using you if you stop being obedient to the promptings of his Spirit - now that is truly terrifying.

So, that was it. I've delivered the

life upside down. My qualifications to bring a word from God, a prophecy, are virtually non-existent: just a desire to do his will - but actually with a God as awesome as ours, that is the only qualification you need.

So my personal plea to you as church leaders is this. Someone out there facing you as you do your thing on Sunday mornings may well be hearing directly from God. And it's not always the most likely candidate (although matchsticks holding the eyes open might be a clue!). If you can simply foster an atmosphere of acceptance

and trust, acceptance that God could speak through anyone in the congregation, trust that you will treat with discerning respect what they offer - then maybe we would hear more often the promptings of the Spirit of God. Too frequently people feel fear and confusion especially in the early stages of their receipt and use of this gift. If what they say is greeted with suspicion or disdain, then we might find ourselves quenching the Spirit - with all the consequent loss of blessing that brings.

Bottom line: would I have changed anything? It has been an awesome and humbling experience to hear from our Heavenly father. Roll on the next time!

message as instructed, now I can get on with my life - wrong yet again. God had not finished and again in the early hours of the morning, He shared his concerns and love for the Church. They will find out this weekend in a Prayer Day what he has to say - I'm not sure if they will take any notice but I expect a good few will and just maybe it will turn the Church upside-down, so to speak. That really is exciting. I know I have taken notice and it has turned my



Photo: Jackie Sheppard

Reading for Profit

By Nigel G Wright

I have long been persuaded that movements only thrive when they are sustained by big ideas. What, after all, is preaching all about if not the communication of ideas worth wrestling with and living by? It follows that the making of books (of which there is of course no end: Ecclesiastes 12:12) is an important activity. And this is true, not least for the Baptist movement of which I am a part. Sadly, despite the best efforts of many, the Baptist Union has yet to rise to the challenge of a sustained publishing strategy despite the occasional and helpful books that do appear in its name. We trust for better things. A distinctive imprint is one of the things we would benefit from, hopefully in partnership with a friendly publisher, like Paternoster.

Despite this, it has been a good year for Baptist publishing and we are better served at this point than we have been for a long time. Holes in the provision for what is usually called 'Baptist history and principles' have been successfully plugged. First of all there was Roger Hayden's book, *English Baptist History and Heritage* published by the Baptist Union, which set out the story of English Baptists to the present day in a well-informed and digestible way. This should be enough to give anybody the bigger picture. Then there came Ian Randall's acclaimed work on *The English Baptists of the 20th Century* published by the Baptist Historical Society, the latter stages of which not only set

out the significant contribution of *Mainstream*, but also identify as key players not a few who will be reading these very words. In this *magnum opus* Ian has done us a huge favour in interpreting our recent past and doing so in highly readable form.

Then there appeared (if I might be so bold) my own *Free Church Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision*, published by Paternoster, in which I set out, intentionally in text book form, exactly what those ideas are that have guided Baptists in the past and why they continue to be utterly relevant for the whole church in the future. Sadly, in writing this, I did not have the benefit of a further book which appeared shortly afterwards: Paul Weller's *Time for a Change: Reconfiguring Religion, State and Society*, published by T. and T. Clark. In this study Paul, with Baptist perspectives, addresses in a way highly informed both by theology and social research the reworking of the Church of England's mono-dimensional established status in a society which is now multi-dimensional: Christian, secular and religiously plural. This is a significant book which refutes the claim that there is nothing that can or should be done to rework the place of religion in society and points in useful directions for doing just this.

Last, but by no means least, is the book *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples*, edited by Chris Ellis and Myra Blyth and published by Canterbury Press. This is a worthy successor to previous

service books which have been resources for ministers and is characterised by a breadth and flexibility of material which is impressive. It draws together the good material from other places but also makes fresh contributions. I imagine this book shaping and forming the ordering of Baptist worship for many years to come and, as with the older 'Payne and Winward', being a constant companion for ministers.

Thank God for good books from which we can derive ideas which help us to live and to teach. Ministers who have given up reading have given up grappling with the large issues of life and faith. In my experience it does not take many books to give us food for thought. If we were each to select five challenging books a year with which to wrestle we would not do too badly. It is not a question only of the number of books we read but of the depth at which we read them. The books I have identified here could form a handy list for a year's study. They also offer a kind of refresher course in what it means to be a Baptist Christian in the contemporary world and why it is that this way of being the church continues to have explosive missionary potential. These are not ideas about which to be apologetic or coy (as we are often tempted to be lest we appear narrowly denominational) but to hold to with confidence and to give fresh expression to in every generation.

Nigel Wright

Dr Nigel G. Wright.
is Principal,
Spurgeon's
College, London. A
former president
of the Baptist
Union, his latest
book *Free Church,
Free State: the
Positive Baptist
Vision*
(Paternoster) came
out in May 2005.

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.

