

In step with the Spirit



(being mainly a review of 'Keep in step with the Spirit' -
J.I. Packer Intervarsity Press - 301 pages)

This is a great book! Critical of the charismatic movement, it is nevertheless warmly appreciative of it in a way which makes it possible to receive the author's strictures seriously. He does not, like so many, patronise the charismatic - he does not damn with faint praise. Above all, he writes from encyclopaedic knowledge of Church history, and also from first hand knowledge of the charismatic movement today. Even where we do not agree, we shall have to listen. This is a book we shall all want to lend our friends - for there are shrewd tilts at every position - but we would all do better to read it for ourselves.

"This book takes the thought of the Spirit as charged and committed to mediate the presence of Christ as the clue to understanding some of the main facets of his ministry" - page 51. The key text is John 16.14. "He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you." Accordingly, "If what has been said in this chapter is right, two questions about the Spirit that we often ask today are wrong. First, we ask - do you know the Holy Spirit? We should not be asking that, we should instead be asking - do you know Jesus Christ?..... Second, we ask - do you have the Holy Spirit? That question too should not be put to a Christian, for as we have seen every Christian has the Spirit from the moment of his believing. No, the question we should ask instead, both of ourselves and of each other is - does the Holy Spirit have you?"

There follow two chapters on holiness which opt firmly for an Augustinian view of holiness, over against that of Wesley or Keswick. Some may think the writer is a bit haunted by the spectre of Keswick, given that he admits that that form of second blessing, holiness-by-surrender, teaching, is no longer taught at the Convention itself, but anyone who listens to charismatic teaching today knows that the idea that holiness is attainable in this life by some crisis experience is never very far away. Our people need so much to know that there is no holiness to be had apart from unremitting effort in this life, and no perfection to be had until the next. These are fine chapters, and preachers need to master them.

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REVIEWS

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The chapters likely to arouse keenest interest are the two on the charismatic life. Make no mistake - this writer knows his charismatics. He pays them twelve compliments, and charges them with ten failings. Then he proceeds to re-theologise. As we might expect, he is firmly against any normative second blessing. How then is the experience of Spirit baptism to be explained? "The right way to theologise and explain these experiences is as in essence deepened awarenesses of the Spirit of adoption bearing witness to the Father's and the Son through the Spirit to make themselves known to the obedient saint (see John 14, 15-23)..... They are in essence experiences of assurance." Pages 225/6. Such experiences of assurance are real enough and infinitely repeatable. I don't think many of us will have difficulty with that. When he comes to considering specific gifts of the Spirit, his touch seems to be less sure. He suggests that we cannot know for sure that the tongues speaking of today is the same thing as that referred to in Corinthians. Even more startling, "that the gift of healing enjoyed today is not the same as that reported in the New Testament, and this on the grounds that none of today's healers has a 'track record' like that of Jesus and the Apostles, who healed instantly, without relapse, people with organic defects and not merely psychosomatic diseases. This is bound to be challenged on point of fact by those involved in or researching the healing ministry over the centuries, and, in any case, it surely proves too much. If we cannot be sure our experience of spiritual gifts is the same as that spoken on in the New Testament - can we be sure that our experience of salvation, of the new birth, of assurance is authentic?"

Many readers will come to this book, as I do, fresh from the challenge of John Wimber's 'Signs and Wonders' theology". How far apart are these? At first sight - light years. Wimber's thesis is that the miraculous power of God has never been withdrawn from the Church, that signs and wonders are a normal part of the Church's message about the Kingdom of God, that the ministry of Jesus - preaching to the poor, healing the sick, casting out demons - is the paradigm of all Christian ministry. The style of ministry that accompanies this thesis would seem to merit all the bouquets and all the criticisms levelled by Packer at the charismatic movement. Two cautions, however. Wimber has not come out of the Wesleyan/Pentecostal second blessing heritage and is free of second blessing theology. Here is an evangelical who has come into an appreciation of the miraculous power of God by experience, not by inheritance (moreover the charge of anti-intellectualism cannot be made to stick in this case - Wimber's case is rigorously presented and well-researched - like Packer's). Secondly, we should not that John's gospel lies at the heart of both Wimber's and Packer's approach. Packer, as we have seen, sees the Upper Room discourse on the person and work of the Holy Spirit as the foundation of all Christian thinking on the subject. Wimber, likewise, gives central importance to the relationship of Jesus to the Father in John's gospel, especially, for example, John 5, v19. "Jesus said to them - truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise." But we are explicitly told that the relationship of Jesus to the Father is the model of the relationship the disciples are to enjoy through the ministry of the same Spirit. Because of this, they will do the works that Jesus did. "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father". John 14, v12. Curiously enough, this is a verse on which Packer has nothing whatever to say! What if the primary model for the Church today should not be the Acts of the Apostles, but the gospel ministry of Jesus? What if the great commission is not Matthew 28, but the instructions Jesus gave the 12 and the 72, recorded for us in such detail because of their abiding relevance? I do no more at this stage than point out that both men point us to the ministry of Jesus and to the Gospel of John as the starting point for our search for a better understanding of the Holy Spirit today - and that can't be bad!

To return to Packer, the closing pages plead for revival. The charismatic renewal is not the revival, but the quest is right, and if we cannot settle for it, we certainly cannot avoid its challenge. For example, "The central charismatic quest is not for any particular experience as such, but for what we may call thorough-going and uninhibited totality in realising God's presence and responding to His grace..... The charismatic quest for totality is surely right, and even if this way of pursuing it is not one which all believers can happily buy into, it comes as a salutary challenge to the muddle-headed ideals of restraint and respectability that have bogged down so many within our older Churches, in a sort of conscientious half-heartedness. This challenge must be received as from God. Specifically, then, those who stand aloof, while doubtless not obliged to adopt the charismatic ethos or forbidden to think that some of what they see in the movement is childish and zany, must face these questions - how are you in your Church and fellowship proposing to realise comparable totality before the Lord? What are you going to do, for instance, about the brisk stylised 60-minute canter - clergy and choir performing to a passive congregation - that is the worship diet of so many Church-goers on so many Lord's Days? This is not total worship; how then are you going to turn it into such?..... Then, too, what are you going to do about the singing in whispers, the chilly formalities, the locked-up lives and lack of mutual commitment that have won for so many congregations the derisive description 'God's frozen people'? If the charismatic handling of all these problems fails to grab you, what is your alternative? Any who venture to criticise charismatic practices without facing these questions merit D.L. Moody's retort a century ago to a doctrinaire critic of his evangelistic methods "Frankly, Sir, I prefer the way I do it to the way you don't do it." The charismatic movement is a God-sent gad-fly to goad the whole Church into seeking more of totality before the Lord than most Christians today seem to know. Face the challenge!"

But what of revival? What is it? Like the chimes of a great bell, like the 'bongs' on the 10 o'clock news, Packer replies with four headlines:

GOD COMES DOWN

GOD'S WORD COMES HOME

GOD'S PURITY COMES THROUGH

GOD'S PEOPLE COME ALIVE

"While all this happening, outsiders come in, drawn by the moral and spiritual magnetism of what goes on in the Church." Pages 244-245. John Wimber could not have put it better himself!

This is a book written with clarity, warmth, sometimes with humour - above all, with passion - a passion for God's glory, a passion for the rebuilding of the Church and the salvation of men and women. At the end of the day, charismatic and evangelical alike must share this passion and kneel together and cry out: 'Come, Holy Spirit'.

Alastair Campbell.



SOUNDING BOARD

- 'this is what is on my heart'.



NOT WITH THE B.M.S.

"This is John Graceworthy and his wife", says the host, pointing to a photograph on the notice board. "They are serving the Lord in Upper Bongoland. Not with the B.M.S., however", he adds.

The deputation visitor nods and makes a non-committal response. Inwardly however he is wondering, "Why not? Why not with the B.M.S? They are members of a Baptist Church. Why should they not be part of its missionary society?"

This situation obtains in many of our churches. People are nurtured, brought to faith and called to missionary service in churches of Baptist tradition but often do not carry out their vocation through the principal means which that tradition affords. What is the reason? By and large, Christians of other communions find no difficulty in entering their own denominational societies. The Anglican knows his C.M.S. and U.S.P.G., Methodist are ipso facto members of the Methodist Missionary Society, but some Baptists appear to have never heard whether there be a B.M.S. Others may offer it token support but their hearts seem to lie elsewhere. Why is this so?

One reason may be our denominational structure. Whereas other Christians emphasise the connexional nature of their churchmanship Baptists start (and often end) with the fact of the local church. Our larger gatherings are associations of local fellowships and it is easy for any one, in its relative isolation, to develop an interest in other missionary societies, to the detriment of the B.M.S. Who is to say it nay?

Another reason may be lack of gratitude. Many churches have been helped to start and grow through help given by other Baptists. The Home Mission Fund, the Baptist Building Fund and our Colleges have done much to erect buildings and enable churches to grow. Those engaged in such pioneer ministries felt no difficulties or qualms of conscience in seeking this aid. Yet when it comes to expressing their own missionary vision some seem to lack that sense of obligation and indebtedness to the rock from which they were hewn. Other societies find acceptance. The B.M.S. is sent empty away.

A further reason may be lack of enthusiasm "at the top". If the church leaders are not committed to support the denomination's missionary society how can the congregation be expected to be different? How many leaders have an adequate knowledge of the Society? How many have been taught about its origins and history? As far as I know, none of our Colleges includes any systematic teaching about the role of the B.M.S. in developing and maintaining world mission. Thus many ministers are thrust out into their work dependent on what they may or may not have read. Personal interest may all too often determine a church's missionary attitude.

A fourth reason given for lack of support is that the B.M.S. is not evangelical enough. Often this is because the Society has no written doctrinal basis. Yet it sprang out of the Evangelical revival. Its founder yearned over perishing souls in India and elsewhere. It has a record second to none in the history of Protestant Missions and wherever it has worked

churches of converted believers have sprung up and have in turn begun to evangelise their neighbours. As an integral part of its work missionaries have done much to pioneer and maintain advances in medicine, education, social care and agriculture. This "holistic" approach forms just as much a part of evangelicalism as does a statement of faith; and the Society's policy of co-operation with other missionary bodies abroad has often been a reproach to their parent churches who did not always get on well with each other at home.

Yet again, some may say that the Society is not evangelistic enough. Most former missionaries were preachers but this is not so now. Too many of its members, it is said, are doctors, teachers and nurses committed to working in institutions. Their time is largely taken up with professional work and they have little time for personal witness or preaching. Institutions develop a life of their own. They grow and absorb personnel. They tie up people for many years. Reports in the *Missionary Herald* no longer tell of the conversion of sinners. They deal too often with the problems of a school, the training of medical staff or the polluted drinking water of tribal peoples. There is some substance in this criticism. The cutting edge of mission ought always to be evangelism and missionary publications should often feature the growth of the church. Yet the Society has now been working in some countries for almost 200 years. The church has taken root and is now making its own contribution to general life through schools and hospitals. It is right that this partnership work should be mentioned in despatches. Matthew 23:23b.

A final reason given is that the B.M.S. has lost its pioneer spirit. Established work calls for all our personnel. None can be spared for new ventures. The number of missionaries has dwindled to under 200. Yet the Society once led in pioneer work. China, India and Africa were all virgin fields of endeavour. In the past thirty years only Brazil and Nepal can be added to this list. We give God thanks for all He is doing in these places but population statistics should quieten our cheers. It is estimated that about 2,700 million people have never yet heard the name of Jesus. In the light of Matthew 28:19 ought not these to be our priority, as far as we are able? Is the B.M.S. really doing as much as it can to discover new fields and alerting the churches to their responsibilities? If it is not, then other groups will gain the hearts of our young people and the support of the older ones.

What can be done to improve matters? Joint Headquarters may help, but it is doubtful whether organisational re-adjustments ever give birth to spiritual movements. The reverse is more likely to happen.

Informed debate is more likely to help us. Mainstream newsletter should be an ideal place for this to take place. Perhaps the criticisms are false or exaggerated. Maybe the answers given were too facile. Let one of the Secretaries of the Society comment "from on high" and lighten our darkness with beams of celestial light from 93 Gloucester Place.

Actions would speak louder than words. The bi-centenary of the Society is due in several years' time. Celebrations will rightly look backwards with thanksgiving. Let them also look forwards with vision. There are still unoccupied fields to which to direct the attention of young people in our churches. China presents a vast challenge and opportunity, though undoubtedly in a different way from pre-1951 days.

Let no one belittle what other people have done. God is Sovereign. He is more than a super Baptist. We give thanks for all that everybody has done to spread the Gospel. Nevertheless we maintain that for reasons of loyalty and conviction every Baptist considering overseas missionary work should seriously consider first doing it "with the B.M.S."

Fred Stainthorpe.

THE CHURCH MEETING

There was a time when the loudest "Amen" to what Douglas Sparkes wrote about the Church Meeting (Mainstream, April '84) would have come from me. It says exactly the kind of thing I used to believe and teach about the Church Meeting. But now, in the traditional Baptist sense, I no longer believe in "The Church Meeting". I no longer believe either that as a regular basic event it is the authoritative body for decision making, or that it is justifiable from scripture.

I cannot accept some of Douglas Sparke's N.T. exegesis as valid. In fact I believe it is not so much exegesis, as "eisegesis" a reading into the text of traditional Baptist polity. It comes over in the way I have noticed in a number of such articles, i.e. with a conservatism that seems to want to maintain the status quo. Equally, I notice that there is a similar tendency in such articles to paint decision making by elders or leaders in extreme colours with emotional language. (See the last paragraph of p.8 in the APRIL issue, and note the emotionally charged words "be spattered" "lust for power", "demand"). Of course such extreme positions are easier to knock down.

The issues really are about leadership, and (since many Baptists seem frightened of the word "authority"), authorisation for decision. If I read Douglas' article correctly he is saying that while the church may, perhaps must, have leaders and leadership, nevertheless the final authorisation for decisions must come from the whole body in and through the church meetings. I do not believe that such "Church Meetings" can be defended from scripture.

That the whole body was called together from time to time is undeniable. In Acts 6:1-6 and Acts 15 we have two such occasions. It is not clear to me that there are any other occasions in Acts when the "whole" church was called together for a matter, but even allowing the examples cited by Douglas from Acts 11-12 (some of which are clearly NOT the whole church) what is clear is that the body was concerned about a particular matter that seriously affected the whole, e.g. the tension between Judean and Hellenistic Jews and fellowship with Gentiles. Clearly it is prudent that the whole body should be consulted and involved in the decision making process in such important matters. Leaders who act executively without reference to the body in such matters are failing to "discern the body". (1 Cor. 11.29).

But the calling together of the body for such important issues is one thing. It does not justify a regular "Church Meeting" for continual decision making and authorisation. In any case we should look carefully at Acts 6 and 15 to see who made the decisions. It was not the whole body.

In Acts 6 it was the twelve who summoned the body, and the body obeyed the summons! It was Peter on behalf of the leaders who made the statement about their own responsibilities (v 2 & 4) and directed the body (he did not "recommend"), but no doubt with grace and sensitivity to select or elect the seven. He carefully laid down the parameters within which the seven should be chosen, and presumably by implication the freedom to disallow any who did not so qualify. Some would say that "we may appoint" means the apostles as distinct from the whole body (that would seem to be confirmed by V.6) but clearly the ministry of the seven needed to be recognised by the whole body, or they could not function.

The right balance between leaders and led in the body is beautifully illustrated in v.5 "What they said pleased the whole multitude". The leaders spoke with the persuasiveness of truth, and the led had the spiritual maturity to recognise it and gladly submit to it. V.6 shows clearly that it was the apostles who led with authority, though not without the goodwill and

confidence of the whole body. This is a far cry from recommending a matter to a church meeting and being unable to proceed or act without the authority of the church meeting.

Equally, far from some other concepts of leadership, the apostles clearly did not make decisions because of "right" or "status". They had won the confidence, respect and trust of the body no doubt by their good track record as well as by their personal spiritual maturity and wisdom. It is the "right" or "status" kind of leadership which Douglas Sparkes rightly objects to when he writes of a "spiritual elite". But that is not to say that all leaders who make decisions regard themselves as a spiritual elite. The only authority that is worth having is the authority of truth, love, service and humility. That is what the N.T. leaders and decisions makers had. Spiritually mature members of the body would regard it a privilege and pleasure to "obey such leaders and submit to them" (Heb. 13:17) as we have seen was the case in Acts.6.

Again in Acts 15 over the question of the admission of uncircumcised Gentiles to fellowship, careful attention to the text shows that the decision was made by the leaders, not by the whole body, though again not without the whole body's support and partnership - perhaps submission would be the better scriptural word!

Paul and Barnabas were sent on their way by the church (v.3) presumably the whole body, because again the matter affected the whole body. They went to consider the question with the apostles and elders (v.2) who gathered together to consider this matter (v.6) which clearly has its parallel in our meetings of pastors, elders and deacons. It was not a meeting of the whole body, but of leaders in camera. As we have the text there was clearly plenty of debate and freedom of speech (v.7). However there is no suggestion of a vote, even by the Apostles, Elders, nor is there a search for unanimity (a word beloved by our Baptist Church Meetings). Rather, there is a seeking of what is the mind of Christ, and the truth, and we can imagine that some of the conservative minded elders - and perhaps apostles, had misgivings about the summary of what seemed to be the truth given by James, himself no Hellenistic radical, to judge from his letter!

It is clear that the word of James as the leader of the leaders carried weight and was accepted by all the apostles and elders. It was they, with the whole assembly (EKKLESIA) who chose leading men to represent them and send them with a letter containing their decision. Some will argue that "with the whole church" conveys a clear picture of a Baptist Church Meeting. I do not believe that the apostles and elders did not feel free to act without the "authority of the Church Meeting". It says that they acted on behalf of the whole fellowship and with the support of them. It is clear from the text of the letter that the leaders took the decision. The letter begins with the name of the senders, v.23, as the Apostles and Elders, amplifying the word "brethren". Twice in the letter we read "it seemed good to us" in v.25 and v.28. In both cases the "us" seems to me to mean the apostles and elders, though clearly in v.25 with the considered endorsement of the whole body. It was the leaders who made the decision having first submitted themselves to the Holy Spirit (v.28) and the body submitted to the leaders. Confirmation that the decision was made by the Apostles and Elders and NOT by the whole body is clearly seen in Acts 16:4 "They delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem". Thus, if leaders made the decisions in such crucial matters affecting the whole body's future, how much more should we expect decisions for day to day matters to be similarly made by leaders?

It seems to me therefore that a "presbyterial" form of church "government" is more truly scriptural than the traditionally Baptist "congregational" form. The first General Baptists under Smyth & Hyelwys were presbyterian. In parts of the world (I believe in Zaire and U.S.S.R.)

Baptists have a presbyterian form of government. It seems to me that where the leadership of a local church is multiple or plural (as in the N.T.) and not in just one man, and where they are men of the spiritual quality and maturity shown in scripture (especially 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-5) there is nothing to fear in their "rule" (1 Tim. 5:17) and we need not hesitate to "obey" such leaders and "submit" to them. (Heb. 13:17).

The purpose of scripture is not to equip us with proof texts to support various doctrines and practices. It is to import to us the mind of Christ by the Holy Spirit. The Gospels show clearly that Christ intended his apostles to be men of authority, not recommenders. Their authority was to be himself in them by the Spirit. The same authority is in godly leaders to-day. It behoves all of us to obey and submit to such authority. And it behoves all of us who are called to lead to do so by example of our own submission to Christ.

The truth is that many Baptist Church Meetings have taken on the atmosphere of parliamentary democracy, shareholders meetings and trades Union meetings. Members have been encouraged by a misunderstanding of the priesthood of all believers that it is their "right and duty" to attend the church meeting. Consequently, while we say that we meet under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to seek the mind and will of Christ, in actual fact there is too much democracy in church meetings, i.e. the rule of the people, where the will of the majority is binding on the whole. There is too much "I want" and corporate self will. This is clearly seen in all who will, having their "say", and then everyone voting on the issue. And all of us who have had to chair such meetings know that this is so.

But the body of Christ is not concerned with the will or rule of the people, but the will of God, and in scripture, both Old and New Testaments, we see that God reveals his word and will to his chosen and appointed leaders, who in turn convey it to his people. You cannot discuss or vote on the word and will of God. You either obey it or disobey it.

It has been said that this is a spiritual fault in the membership rather than a fault in the system. There is some truth in this, since whatever system of church government is adopted, unless those involved in decision making are spiritually mature and maturing, then no system will work. But it is simply not facing up to reality and the facts of the situation to expect that to be true of the whole membership of any church of any denomination. Most, if not all, of us called to leadership have experienced the sorrow of having those things which we believe have been laid on our hearts by God, prayed and pondered on sometimes for months, only to be dismissed by Church Meetings - In such cases people of spiritual immaturity, of little faith and vision, have hamstrung the leadership of our churches. The system has encouraged the religious club mentality "This is our church and we will only allow it to do and be what we want".

It is not without significance that almost all the Baptist Churches I have visited which have shown amazing growth in numbers and spiritual maturity, have abandoned the church meeting in favour of presbyterial leadership. This is not only biblical, it is a recognition of the realities of group dynamics, that when the church grows numerically it can no longer function as an assembly where everyone is free and able to stand up and speak their contribution. Large churches cannot work like that. One is tempted to conclude that to insist on "the church meeting" is to plan to keep the church small.

It is no light matter to be a leader or elder with such responsibility for decision making and leading the flock. Jesus said "to whom much is given, from him also will much be expected", and that applies equally to

responsibility and privilege, as well as to money and possessions. That is why James warns, "Let not many of you become teachers (leaders, elders) my brethren, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." (James 3.1). Leaders are accountable to God in a way that those they lead are not. They are "men who will have to give account" (Hebrews 13:7). Read carefully Ezekiel 33-34 and see the awesome responsibility and accountability placed on pastors and leaders. They dare not treat the flock high-handedly as though it was their own. If the whole church takes upon itself the responsibilities that is rightly the leaders, then it must face the same awesome accountability.

John Tucker.

WORKSHOP

- 'we tried it and it worked'.

An invitation to Dinner

An attractive shop window invites the passer-by to investigate further, and perhaps even to enter the door.

In the past year the occasional 'Country Dinner' has been introduced at our Church. We view this as the 'appetiser'. Instead of the 'Church' being a building which is 'passed by' (or by passed), it takes shape - (hopefully not overweight!) in the form of people. In a relaxed and congenial atmosphere we eat, and converse.

How do we start about the preparation for a Country Dinner?

1. A date is decided - we usually go for a mid-week evening.
2. One of our four catering teams organises the **menu**. A wholesome meal is provided, for example:-
Starters: choice of Soup/Grapefruit/Prawn Cocktail/Fruit Juice.
Main Course: Lamb with apricot stuffing, vegetables.
Dessert: choice of Trifle/Fruit Salad/Mousse/Gateaux.

We provide waiter service. It might be young people, or a team from our over 60's group. Extra crockery might need to be borrowed or hired. A separate team tackles the washing up.

3. An after dinner **speaker** is invited. On the four occasions so far, we have had talks on: a River Rover expedition to Peru, Wood Work - and in particular the making of the Church pulpit, the Hospice movement - and a focus on characters met in a 'Chat Show' on a Christian T.V. Network in U.S.A. The latter was given by an interviewer who was visiting this country.
4. A simple **invitation** card is printed. Church members might invite a couple of neighbours, or book a complete table. We charge £1.50 per ticket. This cost is kept as low as possible as many Church members pay for their guests. The venture is underwritten by the Church though to date we have not had to draw on Church Funds. We can accommodate about 100 people. There is always a problem with getting early bookings, but inevitably all places are taken during the last week!

5. **Seating** is carefully planned. 'Gopak' tables are used. They seat 6 people, and we endeavour to have at least 2 Christians to a table. It has been very encouraging to discover that the proportion of attenders has been 60% non-Church friends.
6. **Decor** Table centre decorations are in keeping with the subject, e.g. the 'wood' evening had a small arrangement using wood shavings. Each table has a couple of candles. We bring in a few standard lamps from our homes. Curtains are drawn, main lights are switched off, and we find the lighting from the lamps and candles is adequate to give a cosy atmosphere.
7. **Conversations** which are commenced around the dinner table will often continue late into the evening.
8. Relevant **Books** are displayed on the bookstall e.g. when we focused on the Hospice movement "Fear no Evil" by David Watson, and "Dying, the Greatest Adventure of my Life" by James Casson, were in evidence. Incidentally, even though a talk on a Hospice for the Dying doesn't seem to be a particularly suitable subject for an after dinner talk, it proved to be a very powerful evening. The Administrator of the Hospice felt that God had called him not to be much the 'Good Samaritan' as the 'Innkeeper'.

This experimental new approach to evangelism is a part of the programme of involvement with our local community. It is through the infiltration of Christ's love that a new understanding of the gospel of the kingdom is coming to previously closed minds.

Mrs. Beryl Goodland,
Gorsley Baptist Church,
Herefordshire.

Forming a GRIEF RECOVERY GROUP

Visiting the bereaved has always been a part of our Church life, but a new venture commenced at the beginning of the year with the setting up of a Grief Recovery Group (GRG). This came about when our Pastor approached me about working with the dying and bereaved in our Fellowship - I myself having nursed in the Hospice Movement. I would like to share with you our experiences.

The first group was set up with a little fear and trepidation, not really knowing what to expect. Having worked in the Hospice Movement, it was quite routine for me to invite groups of bereaved folk together to discuss how they were coping, and to see where we could help, but somehow with Christians, it always seems different. Do Christians cope differently with bereavement than folk who do not have a living faith? Yes and No! - they are assured that the God of all comfort is with them, protecting, guarding and guiding them, but the loss of a loved one is a painful human experience, which only the bereaved person fully understands.

Having looked back through our records, we discovered that there were a great number of people we could invite. For the first group, we decided to limit numbers to those whose need was felt to be the greatest. We also separated off parents who had lost a child, so that the group all had in common that they had lost a husband or wife. Twelve were invited, eleven eagerly accepted - the twelfth could not accept due to a prior engagement.

On arrival, coffee was served. 15 minutes later, the Pastor opened the meeting with prayer and a reading. He was then very honest with the group, and said that we wished to be led by them as to the format of the occasion. A few seconds passed and then one member told of her experience, losing her husband whilst abroad on a touring holiday last year. She went into great detail, about the experience, but all those there had time to listen and shared it with her, understanding exactly how she felt. Others began joining in, telling of their experiences.

There were tears, plenty of them, stories told with tears in the teller's eyes and on their cheeks, but with no embarrassment by the listeners. It was interesting, even in that first week, to see how even the most recently bereaved stretched out loving hands and almost forgot their own grief. The meeting was forced to close due to lack of time, and the resolve was made to meet two weeks later.

The second meeting began with one member saying that at the first meeting a wound had been opened which she had thought had healed, and now she was suffering terrible pain. She had returned to this meeting somewhat reluctantly, but she felt she needed help and healing. On delving deeper into the matter, it turned out that she had not really mourned or cried at the time of her husband's death. By the end of the meeting, with the help of her friends, the deep innermost healing had begun. Another member, a gracious and very godly man, who had experienced two bereavements in the past eighteen months, his son and his wife, felt led to share. His honesty was immense. He felt God was playing 'cat and mouse' with him - a statement of this sort could only be made and not misunderstood in such a group.

The third meeting was different again. There were tears, there was laughter, there was a positive approach to the future. From this group emerged the task force of the future. They would be only too willing to help the widows and widowers of the future, the women offering hospitality, the men practical abilities, the retired bank manager his help on where to seek advice on immediate financial matters. There was a great sense of caring. I have led one small group since this initial GRG met - it was great to see that even while coffee was being served, support and arms of love and friendship were being offered to the recently bereaved.

I do urge you in your Churches to think about the bereaved, not only for the first month, but maybe for up to two years. If you have no GRG or similar group, consider starting one. We now call ourselves the Bethany Fellowship, and all the members have found a practical source of help and comfort that they had not known before. This Fellowship is continuing at the demand of its members. It is not just another meeting to be crammed into a busy Church life. It plays an important part for those who need it most. The frequency of meetings will depend on the members and we need to be led by them. Bereavement is a journey into the unknown, but with Christ leading, and the fellowship of the like-minded, the grief process will be worked out and resolved with greater ease.

Marion Harper.

Additional reading material: Death and the Caring Community
by L. Richards and P. Johnson
(Multnomah Press)

Everlasting Spring - when a loved one dies
by Philip W. Williams. (Falcon).

Marion Harper is a member of Upton Vale, Torquay. She is married to a Solicitor and has a 10-month old son. Until recently she was on the full-time staff of the Roe Croft Hospice in Torquay. Her Pastor is David Coffey.

Reviving an Association Assembly

Can these Bones Live?

What do you do when a two Counties Baptist Association is expiring through diminishing interest? Our Annual Assembly was attracting only 65-70 persons, the majority of over 55 years of age. Even the faithful reflected a general lethargy.

A survey of churches and some discreet interviewing, brought some blunt responses. 'Association meetings are boring', 'Two and a half hours of drawn out business is of no interest to us', 'There's very little real worship', 'Most topics are frankly irrelevant', 'The best thing you can do is to close it down'. The survey almost unanimously, asked for a rethink and change.

We were forced to acknowledge that denominational structures were human creations, which can become brittle and stifle the flow of new wine. The structures of organisation need to be constantly evaluated to see if they are serving the objectives of the Kingdom of God.

By general vote, the Assembly accepted a number of changes. The two most significant were:

1. Association Business Procedures

The General Committee were empowered to take more responsibility and decisions. This has made possible an expeditious and timed agenda at Association level. The additional secretarial responsibility of an annotated agenda has resulted in delegates being more prepared for participation and intelligent comment. It is also encouraging greater attendance.

2. The Format of Association Assemblies

We are a group of 45 Churches, mostly rural. 'To make it relevant to church and family life' was the general consensus. After a careful appraisal, the committee produced a programme for an Association Family Day which included two sessions of objective, praiseful worship and ministry, and six elective seminars. The subjects dealt with were: Effective Youth Programmes. Running an Attractive Bookstall; Drama and Music for Contemporary Worship; Church Centre Programme for the over 60's; Growing Churches in the Country; and Coping with Children and Family Problems.

Throughout the day refreshments and food were available at realistic family budget prices. Displays ranging from Video's for teaching and evangelism through to the World Missionary enterprise, created much interest. A children's programme, including farm visits, enabled parents to participate in the Seminars unencumbered.

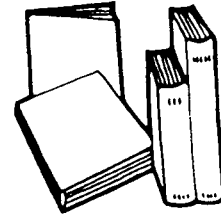
The day has generally been voted a good new beginning and delegates have overwhelmingly voted for a bi-annual Family Day.

Has anything positive been achieved? 350 people worshipping the living God is not a bad place to start. Hundreds of people meeting to expand the Kingdom of God is another plus. What can't the Holy Spirit do with creative seed thoughts which were scattered freely throughout the day? Friendships, Fellowship, yes, an awareness that we need each other if we are going to be vitally effective in making Jesus Christ real in our contemporary rural society.

Not an insignificant irrelevant beginning to way we trust is the dawning of a new day for the Gloucester and Herefordshire Association of Baptist Churches.

Pat Goodland.
Gorsley Baptist Church,
Herefordshire.

Book Reviews



A GUIDE TO EVANGELISM edited by Clive Calver, Derek Copley, Bob Moffett and Jim Smith. Marshall 1984 302pp £5.95.

My initial response on being asked to review this book was one of delight. Alas my delight quickly evaporated and the work of reviewing became a tiresome chore. Far from containing a galaxy of new ideas for reaching out to the lost, as the whole it proved to be a re-statement of the obvious.

Annoyingly repetitious (see e.g. the innumerable references to Evangelism Explosion) one was made very much aware of the drawbacks of having 70 authors. "70 authors!" you might exclaim, "How come?" The answer is that the book is composed of some 77 brief articles relating to evangelism. Presumably the hope was that it would form a work of reference, but unlike most works of reference only a minority of authors included a bibliography or a list of addresses to write away to.

My apologies if this review seems somewhat damning, there were, however, a few bright spots, I appreciated reading again Roy Pointer's ideas on 'Spheres of influence'. Likewise there were thought provoking articles on TV meetings (Peter Anderson), School Gate evangelism (Renee Gibbs), young couples evangelism (Michael Cole) and evangelism among the unemployed (Gary Gibbs). Alas, the rest was straw.

Paul Beasley-Murray.

Review of the Book, 'HOW DO CHURCHES GROW?' By Roy Pointer.

Published by Marshalls, Price £5.95.

Here is an excellent book packed with facts and figures to help leaders in the local Church identify areas of the Church life where there are signs of growth, and where growth is hindered by the structures. I suppose it is basically an anglicised version updated for the British scene of the principles of the Church Growth Movement initially launched by Donald McGavran as long ago as 1955! (Does it really take more than a quarter of a century to stir the hearts of God's people in Britain to these simple, logical principles?!)

For those who have a mathematical turn of mind, you'll love the profusion of pie charts, bar charts, statistical tables and graphs scattered about on nearly every page. Others may be put off, but don't be! As the author himself says, 'Some Christians are surprised that church growth has a firm theological foundation, historical perspective and contemporary relevance, and that the stress on evangelisation is both biblical and spiritual.' (p.2) You will find the whole book shot through with Bible foundations and quoted verses. Of course, the main aim of the book is a practical guide to help you as a Church leader to encourage, organise and plan so that your Church will grow BY WINNING PEOPLE FOR CHRIST.

Following the introductory chapters, Roy Pointer considers the complexity of Church growth and the various factors which affect whether or

not a particular Church will grow. From there on, the book moves logically through chapters on 'signs of growth' (i.e. the factors the need to be present in order for a Church to grow), 'Laying a Foundation for Growth', dealing with the nuts and bolts of analysing your Church realistically - membership, finances, and the area in which you live. The next chapter entitled, 'Organised for Growth' gives an overview of the way a local Church should make its structures strong and flexible with an ability to include rather than exclude new people. The role of leadership and the activity of the membership takes a high priority. The final chapter on planning for growth is a plea for people in our British Churches to be on fire for Christ and outward looking, always seeking opportunities to present the person and message of Jesus Christ to anyone who will listen.

Give the book to your deacons and elders. At your Annual Church Meeting each year do the kind of analysis the book encourages and see how your people change their view of your Church. If there are any dangers to a book like this they must be with regard to the reader getting the idea that a Church can grow if only it will apply a few basic organisational and administrative tools. Finally, can I nitpick? I do wish we could weed out the split infinitives our friends across the pond are so fond of from our British Books! To summarise: good book, well written, sound ideas, worth reading, get cracking!

David Slater.

APOLOGIES

'Believers Baptism for Children of the Church'. The review of this book printed in the last Newsletter was written by **Mark Rudall**. We apologise for accidentally omitting his name.

'Building Bridges for the Gospel'. The second part of Robert Scott Cook's article on church planting, like the first part, first appeared in **The Harvester** and was used with the editor's kind permission (as well as that of the author). We apologise for failing to repeat the acknowledgement when printing the second part.

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