

Editorial

THE CHURCH ISN'T!

- ... isn't real, radical, or relevant
- ... isn't scratching where people are itching
- ... isn't ready for the next century
- ... isn't even meeting the needs of the folk who attend its services of worship.

I am, of course, making generalisations, and there are, praise God, exceptions, but, let me illustrate what I mean. Roger Sutton, at a recent consultation on seeker services, told of a survey that a team from Altrincham Baptist Church conducted in their town. They asked 500 people why they didn't go to church. They expected to hear the answers that church folk believe the unchurched people would give, such as boring, out of date, old fashioned, and so on. What a surprise to find that 78% of those asked said "Why are you asking the question?" or words to that effect. The question of going to church does not have any relevance for large numbers of people in our society.

We might then, if we are feeling really brave, ask the people who do attend our churches Sunday by Sunday why they come and what they think. I was talking to a committed Christian who is considering offering for ministry within our Baptist churches a few weeks ago, and asked him in which Baptist church he was currently in membership. In the course of his reply he told me that he fought against attending any church more than once, because for him although the services seemed to fail to satisfy, he knew that after a number of visits he would become

committed to the people. He doesn't find reality for the expression of his faith in the hymn/song, prayers, sermon pattern, but for the sake of the people continues to attend. This is commendable for mutual pastoral care, but does it mean that our times of worship may be little more than cosy gatherings for mutual support and care.



NEWSLETTER No. 49 - FEBRUARY, 1994

Articles:

David Slater - Leaders under Pressure

Brian Andrews - Building a Bridge

Jane Thorington-Hassell - Urban Ministry

John Weaver - Preparing the church for ministry
in the 21st century

Book Reviews

The Mainstream Newsletter is designed to encourage life and growth among churches within the Baptist Union. On the understanding that contributors are in sympathy with this aim, they have full liberty of expression. Views contained in the newsletter are those of individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Mainstream executive.

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What about the renewal of worship, I hear you ask. For many older folk in our congregations there is a sense of loss and disorientation, with all the old familiar hymns and orders replaced by the new freedom and new songs of worship. This leads them to feel insecure, putting up a barrier to an encounter with God. For the teens and twenties from our renewed churches, that I have met in an "Agnostics Anonymous" group at Spring Harvest there is a disenchantment with both the style of service and the style of music. David Slater comments on this in his article, noting that the Ichthus leadership have found their teens and twenties describing services as "boring." What about children in our congregations - see it from their viewpoint. Imagine a child of five, six or seven entering a church building; what thoughts are passing through their mind? Why do these big people shake hands? What are these books for? - can't be much fun, there aren't any pictures. Why is everyone whispering when they sit down? Now there's music; how does everyone know what page to turn to and in which book? and how do they know when to stand up and sit down? If we're speaking to God why has everyone got their eyes closed and heads bowed toward the floor? What is it all about? We can be sure that a lot of adults are asking the same questions.

So who exactly is the service of worship for? It would appear that it is designed for a small group of insiders, who like to do things that way. The late Les Dawson was interviewed by Dr. Anthony Clare in the radio programme "In the Psychiatrist's Chair" and in answer to a question about belief said, "I've all the time in the world for Jesus Christ, but no time for his bride, the church." We are far removed from the commitment to community displayed by the church in the opening chapters of Acts, or from their concern to take the Gospel into the world, as shown by Paul's visit to Athens in Acts 17.

Maybe a change in the Sunday trading laws will do us a favour - forcing us to reconsider what the people outside of the church want and where they are in their experience of life. Listen to the reflections of Alan Coren, speaking in a radio debate on 9th December, 1993. He said that shopping is now one of the most popular leisure activities; 57% of men, even, like shopping. More than 60% of the population would like to be able to shop on a Sunday. The sound of the cash register has taken over from church bells. "There are now bells at Brent Cross to call people to Sunday shopping!" We will, rightly, want to emphasise the need for a day of rest and refreshment, designed by God for all humanity, but if we truly believe that the Gospel is Good News, then we will have to encounter people where they are and not where we would ideally like them to be. Time to listen again to the late John Robinson, then Bishop of Woolwich, writing in April 1963 in the *Daily Mirror* about his book *Honest to God*:

What drove me to write my book was that what matters to most people in life seems to have nothing to do with 'God'; and God has no connection with what really concerns them day by day. At best he seems to come in only at the edges of life. He is out there somewhere as a sort of long-stop - at death, or to turn to in tragedy (either to pray to or to blame). The traditional imagery of God simply succeeds, I believe, in making him remote for millions today. What I want to do is not to deny God in any sense, but to put him back in the middle of life - where Jesus showed us he belongs. For the Christian God is not remote. He is involved; he is implicated. If Jesus Christ means anything, he means that God belongs in this world Let's start from what actually is most real to people in everyday life - and find God there.

Perhaps John Robinson was ahead of his time, or perhaps the church was simply unable to hear. Whatever the reason, I believe that his words still speak to us today. Where is Christ? - in the world; but the church isn't. Time for a radical rethink, perhaps? The church is called to be in the world but not of the world. Trouble is that we seem to be of the world (in our materialism and self-centredness) but not in the world (through our outreach and Christ-like concern).

The church isn't! The call is to be:

- ... in renewal, as David Slater challenges
- ... in the community, as Brian Andrews encourages
- ... in the urban situations, as Jane Thornton-Hassell pleads

all of which will require understanding and training.



LEADERS

UNDER PRESSURE

Recently I attended the German Baptist Union's "GEMEINDE & CHARISMA" conference in Frankfurt. It happened to be over the Remembrance weekend and took as its theme Psalm 23, especially "he leads me by still waters." I quickly realised that the German word "fuhrer" (leader) was definitely not used because of its association with the second world war. In this country we are much more comfortable with the word leader and yet I suspect that Christian leaders themselves are experiencing many uncomfortable aspects of leadership. In my view there is a crisis of leadership especially in renewed churches or those in the process of renewal. I think there are several reasons for this.

1. Pressures from the Renewal Movement

There appears to be a general sense of hiatus with renewal in this country. The German conference reminded me of many conferences, and churches, several years ago in Britain. There was a freshness about what was happening, an excitement on the part of ministers, a great sense of expectancy, a willingness to try new things and a responsiveness on the part of the people who attended. In that respect I was quite challenged and began to see how quickly and easily a new movement of the Holy Spirit may become institutionalised and rigid, preventing the new life God brings from being experienced fully. But I also became aware of the danger for British renewal of becoming bored by the whole thing. For instance, speaking with a member of the Ichthus leadership recently I was told that many of their teens and twenties, children from Christian parents, are openly saying how boring the services are!

Having taken up the first, second and third waves of renewal, the big question for leaders is "What next?" The question has been with us for some time. While church structures, worship and leadership needed to be changed, and people in the church needed to discover their ministry, vision for renewal in the local church burned brightly. So long as there was some new emphasis coming from somewhere around the globe, which the leadership could buy into and apply, future direction-finding was relatively easy. But the pressure is really on leaders now to keep the 'hype' going so that the work rate is kept up. Not to be unnecessarily cynical, leaders seem to react in

two ways. Either by retrenchment into working at a few aspects of renewal and ignoring the latest emphasis facing the renewed churches scene, or else, by trying the latest add-on innovation. The first of those alternatives seems to me to lead to moribund renewal and the second to a church which becomes "weary in doing good". Leaders either become reactionary or else have to crack the whip with ever greater ferocity. The local church may end up either with token renewal or else exhausted from over-activity.

2. Pressures from the World

Leaders are under pressure from the world and there is nothing new in that. Christian leaders have always been under pressure from the world! With the progressive cuts in the welfare state, voluntary organisations are being encouraged to become involved. Whilst this provides many opportunities for evangelism to which evangelical churches would wish to respond, the relationship with social services and other voluntary organisations is at best an uneasy one. At worst it can provide a source of guilt because leadership and church are not responding positively to the needs of the community.

As we have noted in recent days, the church is on a hiding to nothing when it comes to social and moral issues. If we teach and emphasise morality at the expense of social need we are accused of moralising; if we speak out about the social at the expense of the moral, we are accused of politicising the church rather than being concerned about the spiritual life of people. Bearing in mind that many of our teens and twenties have little sense of morality based on a priori truth, including many whose parents are Christian and who regularly attend church, such pressures will increase in the future rather than decrease. All sorts of issues such as Sunday trading, debt, homelessness, unemployment, genetic engineering and euthanasia are begging to be addressed and answered by caring churches.

3. Pressures from pioneering change in areas of team leadership every member ministry

Many Christian leaders are under pressure from the changes they have introduced in church life! It is ironical that the very things to which many pioneer

leaders have been committed during the past twenty years are rapidly becoming like the scorpion's sting, arching over its own back to deliver an almost suicidal poison! For instance, those who have blazed the trail with plural leadership, multiple ministries, the employment of more than one associate minister are rapidly becoming aware of how delicate such team ministry is and how damaging the fall-out when things go wrong. From my contacts around the country I would say this is a particular danger for many of our Baptist churches espousing renewal.

Furthermore, developing the ministry of every person in the church also has its challenges to leadership. Gone are the days when, as was said to me recently, adults feared to enter the pulpit even when the church was empty because that was a place reserved for the "minister". Gone are the days when respect for the authority of the pastor came from the office as much as from the office-holder. We can see this as a positive change, but let us beware of the pendulum swinging so far in the other direction that those genuinely anointed by God for specific leadership roles are prevented from fulfilling their God-given ministry because others not so gifted set themselves up in such a ministry.

From my own experience of developing team ministry I know both the value and the pain of working through situations in which gifted individuals within the church begin to operate in ministry roles previously fulfilled by me! If there is any insecurity on the part of the leader it will be cruelly exposed by these developments. As a relative newcomer to church leadership, most of my College training ('76 - '79) was given with the one-leader model in mind. Unlearning and retraining oneself is a hard task at the best of times. It brings with it its own pressures, some from without and some from within. Those from without are the pressures of people who wish to be active in ministry and feel they are being held back by leaders, and of churches unused to such ministry. Sometimes, even the whole church meeting can pressurise its pastoral leader into agreeing to such changes before either the leader or the church is ready.

The internal pressures arise from the challenge to learn both to be accountable to others for what you do and to direct others in what they are doing. The ability to manage people is of crucial importance in today's church. Sadly it is something for which training is not always given and the basic talent is not always present. In many of these aspects of ministry and leadership, help might be given and received by programmes of in-service training. Such programmes are available nowadays and would be a beneficial use of time and resources.

4. The Pressures of our own humanity

Pressure comes from the inherent dangers of being in Christian leadership. Much has been made of the

moral failures of Christian leaders both in North America and here in Britain. These have been much publicised and concern the inappropriate use of money as much as sexual infidelity and the failure of marriages. Leaders who fail and fail in these ways need our compassion more than our condemnation. Gordon Macdonald's book, "Reordering Your Broken World" is at one and the same time a heart-rending account of failure and a heartening account of God and a church at work in restoration. If the church and its leadership are going to learn to handle the pressure, room must be made for failure to be recognised and restoration to be worked for.

What explanation may be offered for such a crisis? Church history would lead us to suppose that every new movement of God runs through various stages. The initial enthusiasm and perhaps even euphoria leads both to excesses and gives a vitality to the movement. It has proved hard if not impossible for that kind of momentum to be maintained for more than a few years. The next stage is either that the movement runs out of steam and dies, or else that the vitality and enthusiasm are channelled and become institutionalised. It seems to me that the renewal in British churches, especially those which have a denominational background, is swiftly becoming institutionalised. In its turn, this may lead to disillusionment on the part of some, and cynicism on the part of others. The latter may lead to a cosmetic renewal barely covering the blemishes and so little different from the former in net result.

Much of the explanation may be given in terms of leaders who are personalities attracting people to the movement because of who THEY are rather than for the principles of the movement and the presence of Jesus Christ within it. In which case, we must seriously ask the question about what happens when that leader moves on or dies?

5. Where do we go from here?

Whatever we may think about the presence of a personal Devil in the world, it seems to me that there is currently a fairly concerted "attack" being waged against Christian leadership. The powers of darkness are concerned about the number of Britons who have become Christians in the past twenty years and are attacking at points which will have the greatest effect, if those battles can be won by them. To diminish godly leadership by either destroying it or discrediting it is an effective way of neutralising the advance of God's kingdom in our land. For God's people to pray for God's anointed leaders in each local church is a key ministry. For those leaders to be accountable to one another and to keep watch on one another's behalf is of the utmost importance.

Furthermore, there is a question of basic spirituality. How closely are we walking with Jesus Christ in our daily lives as leaders? It is so easy to let it slip. It is so easy to become professional, familiar with the job

and performing in our own strength rather than in His. It is so easy to compromise and be compromised. It is so easy to take our eyes off Jesus and have our attention taken by the effects of the storm raging around us. Whatever becomes of the proposals for a "WORD AND SPIRIT NETWORK" and whatever happens with the possible restructuring of Association life there is no substitute for the spiritual disciplines of godly men and women in Christian leadership.

Finally, what might be the cure for such tension and trauma? In crisis we always tend to feel alone, like Elijah after Mount Carmel when threatened by Jezebel (1 Kings 19). Facing the crisis is the first step. Admitting you are in trouble, even if "only" to God is at least a start! Sorting out what are the really vital areas in which to fight is the next. I have discovered that the Devil tries to defeat us by throwing everything at us at once. Many of the things coming at us are trivial but seem so big. God gives us understanding of what is significant. To enlist the help of others in battling is vital. To admit that you are under attack (I wish I had done that many times!) is not a sign of weakness but of strength. To enlist the

prayers of deacons and elders, of a prayer chain and of people in general is to step forward into battle rather than turn your back and run away. Actively to seek apostolic ministry, care and counsel outside of your local church, to be accountable not only to the church meeting but also to brothers who love you and affirm your ministry is of the greatest possible benefit.

Steps may also be taken to reduce the pressure. At all times, to reduce the number of things we are doing and having to prepare for is helpful. It may give us more time to ask what exactly are his plans for the future. Rather than trying to implement the latest renewed doctrine or practice, God's specific desire for the fellowship and for its leadership is most significant. People will bless and follow leaders who show clearly that they are attuned to God's will, however that may come to them. Generally, to pray for God's leaders in the nation, week by week, in church, will pay dividends. This is especially true in crisis situations that will dissipate only if people and leaders alike face it, fight it out and catch God's vision for the local and national church. Perhaps the question in renewal, "Where do we go from here?" may then be answered.

DAVID SLATER, Kingsbridge.

Building a Bridge

Our church had been struggling in its relationship with the local community ever since the closing of the Boys Brigade was heralded on the front page of the local paper as "Church throws out Boys Brigade". Door-to-door visitation in the area revealed that the credibility of the church had sunk to an all-time low. We were struggling to make meaningful contact with most of the community in which the church was situated. We had buildings that lay empty for most of the week. However one or two leaders believed that one day these same buildings would be thronging with life every day of the week.

It was into this situation that God spoke and so set in motion a series of events that have begun to transform the attitude of the local community to the church. Looking back now, I see a number of factors, some of which I could not easily have recognised at the time. Foundations were being laid and they were crucial for building anything that was going to last. But looking at the foundations of a building is not the same as laying them and I am acutely conscious that I am not an expert at either although my heart is definitely in the latter.



FOUNDATION 1 - Listening to God

Listening to God is a key that can open doors. For a long time there had been a desire in our church to do something that would enable us to serve the local community. Attempts were made to start an open youth group; a mums and tots group closed down for lack of leaders. We wanted to know what God wanted us to do but we couldn't hear what he was saying. Then in a London park on a Saturday afternoon, one of our members listened and heard God speak.

In May of 1988, a group from our church were in Hyde Park following the first March for Jesus through the streets of London. Many were playing football while others sat on the grass. Ruth, my wife, had

made her way towards the temporary stage where Roger Forster from Ichthus Christian Fellowship was speaking. As she listened she began to hear God's voice as well as Roger's. In Ruth's mind a seed had been sown which gradually took shape. Over the next few weeks she prayed about it and wrote down the basic outline of what was to become Samuels Christian Nursery Group.

In the months that followed, the idea of setting up a nursery school on the church premises was considered by the elders, deacons and the church meeting. A document was produced which set out exactly what would be needed in terms of alterations to the buildings, purchase of equipment, running costs and staffing needs. When the decision was made to set up Samuels, the leaders and church members affirmed that they believed that the idea was from God and that they were prepared to accept the cost of implementing it.

Within the body of the church we need to encourage and enable our members to grow in their ability to listen to God. But there is a problem as James Ryle observes "Although the Lord is looking for listeners, He rarely finds them - a long-standing problem that has characterised the people of God throughout history."

Certainly in our own day the hectic pace of modern life seems to have made listening a lost art. In our relationships with each other we are far more concerned to speak than we are to listen. And things are much the same in our relationships with God. Prayer is often thought of in terms of what we say and do. Learning how to listen to God needs to be a priority for us all. I know that I often struggle as I seek to hear what God is saying in the seemingly endless activity of church life. I sometimes think about it from God's viewpoint. Who in our church would he choose to speak to if he had a message for the church? The leaders are the best equipped to handle it but they are all so busy. Training both leaders and members to learn how to listen to God is a wise investment and good stewardship.

Michael Mitton in his perceptive little book "The Sounds of God", reminds us of some of the ways that we hear God. His concluding chapter highlights what he calls "two basic ground rules, which are important to bear in mind, if we want to grow in hearing God." Firstly that to hear God will inevitably involve a process of learning to know myself better. Secondly that we need to have much more of a sense of adventure in our Christian lives, and that is to do with faith.

These two strands, growing in honesty and humility, and taking risks by moving outside accepted church patterns, I saw modelled at Willow Creek Community Church, near Chicago where I had the privilege of being part of a study trip organised by Partnership Missions to attend the Church Leadership Confer-

ence. There the innovative seeker-services to reach into the local community are run by men and women who recognise that God's work in them is unfinished and who are refreshingly honest about their failures and shortcomings. They are actively listening to God and in so doing they are building a real community within the church and are effectively reaching into their local community.

As we are slowly learning to listen to God at Broadmead we are experiencing a growing sense of unity within the church as well as an increasing impact in the local community. Simple steps that we have taken include encouraging individuals to have a notebook in which to note down anything that strikes them when they read their Bibles and any thoughts or pictures they have while they pray. Homegroups are encouraged to include times of quiet waiting upon God together. Members of the group then share as they are able. In my experience there is almost always someone who is helped through this process. I see the value of these "learning to listen" times not just in what happens on that occasion but as part of training God's people to expect to hear from their heavenly Father. It also introduces in a natural way the important ministry of discernment and testing.

FOUNDATION 2

Submitting to leaders and to the body

Scripture indicates a process of testing which needs to take place when anyone thinks that they have heard from God. Others in the church are to weigh or test it. (e.g. 1 Cor 14:29) These checks and balances are needed to prevent those with over-active imaginations or over-inflated egos, from claiming that they have heard from God and so fooling themselves and others. But there is a more fundamental reason why listening to God is to include more than just the person who hears. God brings those who are in Christ into a community in which each member functions for the good of the whole. One person hearing and others testing is one expression of this interdependence.

Both leaders and people have a part in this corporate act. We encourage individuals to share with their home group or with the elders, anything that they feel may be from God and we ask that no action be taken until this has happened. In our consideration of the Nursery School, the elders, deacons and church meeting shared in this role.

For many Christians today, listening to God is not part of their regular experience with the result that their initial attempts are likely to contain a fair amount of dross. Many suspect that this is so and therefore don't share anything for fear of it being rejected. But where there is real love in the Body of Christ, this fear of failure can be overcome.

One of the most striking features of Willow Creek was that, from the senior leadership down, failure was

acknowledged. It was spoken about in a natural and healthy way. In modelling honesty and integrity the leaders freed the community of believers to be real and not to feel that they had to get it right in order to be accepted.

When there is an atmosphere of acceptance in the church, discernment and testing can take place without ministering rejection.

FOUNDATION 3 - Counting the cost

Jesus was adamant that, before starting out on any project, it was necessary to count the cost. Deacons seem to have learnt this lesson well, as in my experience the discernment that God may be speaking to us is quickly followed by "how much will it cost?" Of course we have to calculate that in monetary terms but we mustn't stop there. When we were considering the Nursery, the budget of £6,000 was readily agreed but there was considerable discussion about the cost in terms of people. Had we enough people who could staff it? What would be the time commitment required of those helping? Were we taking on more than we could manage? Was the church committed to the vision or was it just in the hands of a few enthusiasts? When we had counted the cost we were in a position to move into the area of faith. We didn't have £6,000 but we believed that God would supply it through his people. Also, we needed three qualified nursery staff and to start with we only had one. In the months that followed God supplied the finance and brought to us the people we needed.

For those who have not caught the vision the cost will be too high. The vision needs to be well birthed and well berthed. A vague, unclear vision cannot be effectively costed; it must first be birthed properly. On the other hand a clear vision that is not

securely attached to the accepted mission of the church is in danger of being regarded as too costly in terms of time and commitment. It is adding further to the burden of ministry rather than providing an opportunity to accomplish what has already been agreed is the church's agenda.

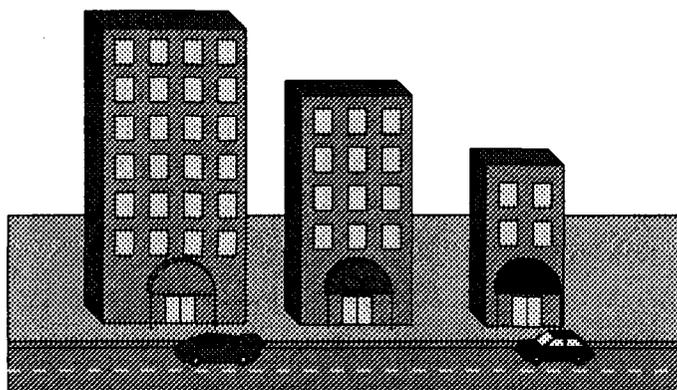
When each of these three foundations are well laid, God is able to build something substantial that is effective and will stand the test of time.

Samuels Nursery has been open for three and a half years now. It has very quickly gained a high reputation as parents have spread the word about the care from the staff and the standards that are maintained. For the church in its relationship with the community it is now so very different from just a few years ago. As we serve the families in our area we are slowly gaining the opportunity to share Jesus with the children and their parents. The staff frequently report having significant conversations with parents, some of whom have come to know Jesus personally. Doors of opportunity are constantly opening. Each year there is a fresh intake of children and, amongst the parents of the 35-40 children who move on to school each summer, there are a significant number who express a desire to keep in touch.

I thank God that he raised up someone to listen to his voice, leaders who were able to discern and church members who, having counted the cost, had the faith to boldly go forward. Would that it was always so in your church and mine.

Brian Andrews
Broadmead Baptist Church, Northampton

URBAN MINISTRY



Where to train?

You believe God wants you to work full-time or part-time with the church. You think you could be a pastor, an evangelist or perhaps a community worker, or even a church planter. Or maybe there's a person in your church who has obvious leadership gifts, vision and is willing to work, but needs more training. Can they train locally or do they need to go away to train? Will the training they receive

equip them to be an effective enabler of others or will it cause them to lose touch with their grass roots and, in fact, de-skill them? We do not need Baptist clerics, but practical theologians and enablers of others in the church's mission. "Theological education must be judged in terms of its effectiveness in facilitating dynamic ministry throughout the whole people of God." (John Vincent, Urban Theology Unit, Sheffield).

What are we training for?

Before we can devise training we need to be very clear on the nature and purpose of the church and of Theology. Ecclesiology is a key determinant of our leadership needs. The social context that the church is in will also bear heavily on our training. I am assuming as Baptists we are happy to see the church not primarily as an institution, but Christian worshippers covenanted together to continue the mission of Jesus Christ to make disciples and bring in God's kingdom. Mission is our focus and all Christians potentially agents of this mission.

Generally speaking the Christian church in England has declined over the last 100 years and, of interest to us, urbanisation has continued to increase. Ministers and church workers have said that their training did not prepare them to work in Urban Priority Areas or inner cities generally. (6.56 "Faith in the City", 1985). There is often a discontinuity between the theoretical and actual practice of ministry. In this article I am unashamedly considering training leaders for an increasingly urban world. Even the suburban and rural world reflects urbanism (the effects of urbanisation). This helps us to set certain priorities in our mission. More people are living in urban environments, but the percentage of Christians in these areas is decreasing. David Barrett calculates that in 1900 69% of Christians lived in urban areas and now only 46% do and this percentage is decreasing.⁽¹⁾

Redemption lift, the phenomenon of upwards and outwards mobility following Christian conversion, has taken its toll on inner city churches and communities. Christian converts from largely working class urban areas become cut off from their contemporaries in terms of culture, lifestyle and value systems. They may choose, for a complexity of reasons often involving housing and schooling, to cut themselves off geographically from their roots. Redemption lift moves Christians not just up the social ladder, but out to the suburbs.

Christian investment in suburbia, in terms of people, their homes, churches and in local community involvement, is disproportionate compared to investment in the urban, particularly the inner city. Consciously or subconsciously this investment has contributed to the decline of the church in inner city areas. 9% of our Baptist churches are smallish churches in urban areas. By far the majority of the

population lives in these areas. 50% of our churches are generally larger and based in suburbia or small towns.⁽²⁾ I am not saying that there are too many churches in suburbia; I am saying that there is an imperative to evangelise the urban peoples. We must, therefore, take particular decisions to train urban leaders who know that their task is to make disciples and build relevant local church bases from which worshippers go out in mission. Wealthier churches must consider diverting funding to train workers in needier situations. There are immediate urban imperatives on those involved in training. Training effective leaders, I suggest, is one of the keys to unlocking many doors that are closed at the moment.

Growing poverty in the cities in many ways determines that the church will automatically be involved in getting alongside people who have many financial and personal pressures.⁽³⁾ A high percentage of the poorest in our nation live in urban areas. They are part of a rich mosaic of cultures and backgrounds. In contrast there are also numbers of people who now live in the inner city as a result of gentrification (the upgrading of property to attract professional occupiers).

There is a shortage of financial resources in many inner city churches, despite growing memberships and generosity on the part of many people. Since Home Mission is unable to fully fund the growing needs and opportunities, we need to look for new finances and also consider models of training which are not only more effective, but also cheaper. Finance alone, must not dictate how many people we train and in what ways we train them. The context of increasing urbanisation and consequent changing requirements from ministers and church workers, and new findings in andragogy (adult learning), all have their bearing on training.

There have been responses from theological trainers to urbanisation, but we do need to question whether these responses are adequate. We need a full examination of theological education and training in the theological colleges and other places. Ian Bunting spent two years surveying colleges and courses to assess the present priorities of British trainers, in terms of aims, goals and methods of training. His view is that, although there is a wide range of training initiatives focussed on urban mission, there is a lack of cohesion. He also doubts the contemporary relevance of much theological education.⁽⁴⁾ The Baptist Union document, "A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000", recognises the need for effective training and proposes an enquiry into training.

How to train?

In an attempt to isolate the principles for theological training in an urban world, it is helpful to consider the

ALTERNATIVE MODELS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

AND TRAINING AND CRITIQUE THEM. At the same time we must begin to critique the training offered by the Baptist theological colleges.⁽⁶⁾

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|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. University | 6. Congregation-Based |
| 2. Seminary (College) | 7. Apprenticeship |
| 3. Adult Education | 8. Professional |
| 4. Theology-Action Centre | 9. Study-Mission-Study |
| 5. Extension | 10. Co-operative |

1. University theological education aims to produce the "educated cleric". Theology is viewed as a set of disciplines; its emphasis linguistic, historical, systematic and academic. Ordinands have generally supplemented this with various ministerial and denominational studies. This method of doing theology is of itself open to criticism.

Theology is a process which needs a context. An academic context for theology is not contextual theology. Theology is something we, as Christians, should be engaging in as we live in the world and are involved in ministry. To say this does not undermine the need for academic thought and reflection, and the nurturing of skills and use of theological tools. On its own it is an inadequate preparation for ministry and church based mission.

2. Seminary (College). In recognition of the criticisms of a purely academic training in a University, many Christian theological colleges were founded in the 19th century. Originally the aim was the formation of a minister in an ethos apart from the world. The aim is generally to produce a preacher-scholar minister. Many students study for a degree or similar qualification, receive training in a particular denomination's tradition, study pastoral theology in parallel to academic theology and undergo short block placements, as well as church involvement throughout the year.

This sort of training is still only doing contextual theology in a limited way and students and pastors have complained that the tools given and skills trained are not adequate for the job. The student is usually detached from the 'everyday' world and can become a "class apart", especially if they are from a working class/urban background. The residential aspect, often on a small campus, is criticised for failing to live up to the myth of community. Spouses particularly seem to complain that they feel in "limbo land".

3. In Adult Education, students continue either full or part-time in their job. There is a stress on human development, not just acquiring knowledge, and daily life is drawn from. Courses may be at University, based on their extra mural courses. The pluses are the training of educated indigenous leadership fairly cheaply, not having to uproot families and encouraging a willingness to consider bi-vocational ministry. The difficulties will be those associated with balancing the pressures of working and training at the same time and finding suitable training in all regions.

4. Theology-Action Centre. Two very different examples of this model are the Urban Theology Unit in Sheffield and Ichthus in South London. The centre, perhaps a house, shop or complex, is a base for action, mission and training, and is rooted in a specific geographical area. The pluses are that all theology is contextual with ongoing looking, action and reflection on both Bible and situation. Students from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities can work together, sometimes holding down part-time earning jobs. It is possible to tie such a programme into other courses or qualifications if it is organised on a modular basis.

5. Extension. Distance learning, including correspondence courses and tutor guided study, are increasing. In the U.K. the Open Theological College has adopted this method which is widely used outside of Europe. Various Baptist colleges offer courses for distance learning. This method of training is particularly important in the training and affirming of indigenous ministry and promoting contextual theology. It is only useful, however, for those with high literacy skills. To guard against parochialism, a local tutor, regional groups and study weeks are needed for corporate and global reflection and to train skills of de-contextualisation. Such courses are relatively financially user friendly. There is some criticism that extension learning tends to confirm people in their prejudices and reinforce traditional ecclesiologies, replicating rather than producing new ministries. Nevertheless, it is less trainer controlled and can encourage collaborative learning in groups. It encourages an integrated theology because places, principles and methods are interwoven. This method can helpfully erode the distinction between so-called professional and other ministries. Training is in ministry rather than for ministry.

6. Congregation-Based. Northern, Spurgeon's and Regent's all offer some of their students church based training courses as ministers. Northern seems to have developed the understanding of contextual and integrated theology more fully than the others. Spurgeon's/Oasis also offers the Church Planting & Evangelism course. Some time every week is based in college on these courses. The aim is to produce leaders well equipped through experience in the field and in integrated theology, who can do the job needed. No false distinction is practised concerning academic and applied theology. Congregation-based training differs from the older student pastor idea, since it runs over twelve months, not just during term times. Unfortunately congregation-based training is often unduly pressurised, since there are no other full-time workers in the church. Such training can be linked to academic qualifications and, its proponents would argue, is rigorous in every way, not just academically. Modular designed courses can lead to greater versatility and relevance, since all students could study certain

plenary modules, ecumenical colleges could offer a variety of denominational modules, and colleges training pastors, church planters, youth and community workers alongside one another, can offer a selection of modules. This method of training engenders the practice of ongoing learning and reflection and is a better preparation for team ministry and mission. This also has the advantage of giving a more stable and 'normal' environment for families. Difficulties can arise in funding such training for small or urban churches, particularly if there is no available accommodation. The community, as well as the church, serve as the main training resource.

7. Apprenticeship. I would have to say that congregation-based training would be better if the trainee could work in an internship relationship alongside an experienced mentor or on a team. The danger of a narrowness of perception and analysis is always present.

8. "Professional training" could be more widely used in ministerial preparation. It is widely used in the secular world to train particular skills. It is used by Oasis as a part of training for Youth Workers. They spend a third of their time doing a youth and community work course validated by Kent University. Secular courses are presumably more widely recognised by 'everyone', including grant funders. Job flexibility, in areas like youth work, is an advantage. It equips Christians to work within and alongside other agencies. Financially it is advantageous to use existing agencies. Training should be relevant since it is vocational and skills based.

9. Study-Mission-Study. This is a variant of (6) and could simply be called a sandwich course. The aim is to train an 'all rounder'; a theologian and a missionary. A student may, for example, spend a foundational year in college, 2/3 years in a church or project and a further year in college for reflection based on the years in the field. This has the advantage that the congregational/community training is contextual and hopefully could be an internship alongside an experienced worker or team.

10. Co-operative. This is a group who covenant locally, both trained and untrained, to learn together as they work and mission in the local community. Kenneth Leech, Community Theologian at St. Botolph's, Aldgate, speaks of those committed to the pursuit of theology from a community base outside of academia. Existing Bible study groups can develop further along these lines. Such groups can encourage local theologies to develop, help us make sense of our neighbourhood and region, and serve, hopefully, as a springboard for local action and mission. These could perhaps be developed further as local urban training centres, making use of church buildings and local experience, and enabling access to further training.

Some of these models overlap and not in an unhelpful way. Variety in training opportunities is good if it serves the mission of the church. Any models must include the Christian basics of things like Bible use, Church History, Pastoralia and Spirituality, but we also need to include certain aspects of urban studies, sociology, psychology, DSS literacy and other relevant modules. The aim of each model of training is not exclusive, but it may well dominate and we need to consider what sort of leader we want to train.

Summary Suggestions

The integrating rationale and focus of the church's life should be mission. The context of this mission is increasingly urban. We need to train a variety of church leaders who are skilled in enabling other Christians in mission. We need a means of pooling all that was being learned by theological trainers, both inside and outside our colleges, as regards training for the urban situation and a determination to act on what we find out.

Theological training is most appropriately done using a church based model. Residence is therefore in the community. This is vital for the process of Contextual Theology. Scripture and its hermeneutic in everyday life is integral to this. Theology is, therefore, an ongoing process and is not falsely compartmentalized into academic and applied areas. For this reason I would like to see further phasing out of residential college based training.

Church and community are the main resources for training of ministers. Nevertheless, local church training that is solely "in house" is pitted with dangers of parochialism. Clear college participation in terms of enabled reflection, education and skills training is vital. I would always advocate themes organised on a modular basis which, amongst other things, gives a greater degree of versatility and promotes an integrated view of theology. Modular courses also allow students to make more use of training with non-church agencies in the community, or to take appropriate professional modules.

If our goal is to effectively share Jesus Christ particularly in the urban and inner cities, we should target the equipping of indigenous leaders, particularly amongst today's inner city working class people and urban ethnic minorities. To do this we need to consider and plan access routes and courses into training for urban ministry.

The examination of training proposed in "A Ten Year Plan Towards 2000" needs to take place. The full co-operation of the colleges, with a willingness for rationalisation, is a prerequisite. Full consultation has to include local churches, associations and also other people and groups involved in urban training courses.

If we continue to favour church based training as

the most appropriate way to train ministers and stress the local church, community and neighbourhood rather than college community, we do not need to keep colleges as small as they are at present. Colleges are already offering distance learners time in college and so the numbers of people passing through the buildings is growing. Do we really need four English Baptist colleges? It is possible that Northern could further develop its aim to serve Northern churches (Brian Haymes). Spurgeon's could develop a remit to serve the South of England. I feel Regent's, with its University connections, is particularly suited to serve the denomination as a centre of post-graduate and post-ordination study and training. If we do need another Midlands college, then our urban mission priority would be better served if it were located in Birmingham at some point in the future. Bristol College is obviously at a crucial point in its history. It is possible that it should consider something as radical as closure to release funding, or change its focus of training to Theological Education by Extension in the way Oak Hill (Anglican) College is doing. The Christian Training Programme and its off-shoots could well be operated from such an extension college.

My own opinion is that we should not be training less people for ministry. We need to train more people within the reality that much ministry will need to be bi-vocational. We also need to consider how we can validate a greater variety of ministries in local churches.

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PREPARING THE CHURCH FOR MINISTRY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

How do we go about mission in 1994 and how are we training folk for ministry? There is no such thing as part-time or full-time ministry - we are all engaged in full-time ministry and mission for Christ; this is the calling of our discipleship. Mission is the essence of life and we never stop learning. When I sat my driving test (for the third time) I was relieved to hear those comforting words, "Mr. Weaver I am pleased to be able to tell you that you have passed," but then challenged by the examiner's next sentence, "Now you can begin to learn to drive!" The same must be true of the mission and ministry of the church, we continue to learn from the Holy Spirit, from our reflection upon Scripture in the light of our experiences in the world, and from the experience of others. Training is not something that only goes on in theological colleges and seminaries; it should figure on the agendas of elders', deacons', and church meetings, as together we seek to work out our God-given calling to be the church of Christ. Statistics produced by the Bible Society tell us that 80% of Christians were brought within the sound of the Gospel by a relative or friend. Go into any supermarket these days and you will be invited to sample some new product, or we may receive the samples as unsolicited mail through our letter box. However we receive the sample, it is an invitation to purchase the full-sized product. When it comes to the Gospel, we are the free samples, wherever we live or work.

The World of the Nineties

At the beginning of the Second World War France and her allies depended on the "impregnable" Maginot Line, a line of forts facing Germany. It failed because the German army simply skirted around it. In criticism it was said that "the trouble with the Allies is that they are always ready to fight the last war!" The same complaint is often levelled,

rightly, at ministers and churches - we're always ready to answer the questions and operate within the culture of the last generation. This even applies to our "modern" church music, which bears a strong resemblance to the secular music of the '60's and '70's, and leaves many young and old Christians cold. A youth worker, referring to church music styles, recently told ministerial students that given the

choice between Bach and Max Bygraves, most young people will go for Bach. Sorry Max, or is it Graham, or Dave, or Chris?

We live at a time when 85% of young people under 16 years have never been to church; where Jesus Christ is unknown, except as a swear word; where 300 teenagers leave U.K. churches each week, never to return. It's not a matter of music but of relevance. Bowater and Kendrick are as foreign as Wesley and Watts, and actually less attractive.

N.O.P. and Gallup tell us that 90% of people in the U.K. have a vague belief in God; but 82.5% will never go to church, except for weddings and funerals - mostly funerals these days.

A lot of people are ready to talk about spiritual things (27% in a survey we carried out in Rushden, Northamptonshire, in 1991), but the churches are not ready for them. Most of the growing churches in this country are orphanages, growing by the transfer or migration of spiritual gypsies. There are of course, praise God, exceptions.

Figures produced by Marc Europe reveal that while the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and U.R.C. churches are in severe decline, Baptists are holding their own, and Independent churches are growing. But this should not lead us to be complacent, for we are called to mission.

How do we reach a world that is secular, where the knowledge and challenge of God does not exist? Where people are happy with their godless (sinful), hedonistic, materialistic life. The problem is that many churches are operating with a 1960's rather than 1990's model. (I am indebted to John Lewis of Skipton for making this observation) The 1960's model of my teenage was one where it was believed that people were striving to reach God, to be good enough for eternal life, but did not understand how this might be achieved. They tried to cross a chasm called "sin" by being good neighbours, or by praying, or reading their Bibles, or even by attending church. But none of these was found to be a suitable bridge to cross the chasm; the only bridge was found to be Christ. After a couple of years of running "Agnostics Anonymous" at Spring Harvest I should like to introduce you to the 1990's model. Before we reach the chasm called "sin" there is another, wider, chasm called "questions," such as: why should I believe in anything at all? it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere! what about suffering and war? hasn't science done away with the need for God? The bridge over this chasm is relevance.

The world has changed. According to a recent survey the top issues on people's agenda are: the environment, poverty, unemployment, parenthood, crime, and war. These are the issues that the media are constantly dealing with, and so heightening the community's awareness of them. But how often does our preaching or Sunday worship address these

issues? When did you last hear or give a sermon on one of these issues? The Bible has a great deal to say - but when did we allow the people to get out of God's word, what God put into it? We are also faced by a world in which there is a loss of meaning, and, in consequence, a loss of hope. Leslie Newbiggin recently suggested that we are reduced to nothing but the development of self until "we are wheeled off to the crematorium." (Gospel as Public Truth conference, 1992) To such a world as ours we have a Gospel of hope.

How are we communicating the message of the Gospel of Christ? Today millions see the same message at the same time. We receive information from all around the world and our own land in an instant. But in 1945 no one watched TV; in 1946 there were the first sets with only one channel. By 1977 18.1 of the 18.9 million homes in U.K. had at least one TV set, and on average people watched 2-3 hours per day, choosing between four TV channels. Today, children watch at least 6 hours per day on average; most homes have a video; and many have cable or satellite TV, giving a great variety of channels.

TV presents events as they happen, with instant analysis; facts pulled out of a computer and expressed graphically; often accompanied by balanced, live discussion, introduced by experts. People today think in blobs and sound bites. Their minds move from one distinct thought to another. Most people do not think along logical lines of progression; such a pattern of thought belongs to higher education. When one minister asked his deacons, most of whom were professional women and men, what part of the Sunday service they received most from, they were unanimous in identifying the children's address.

All of this raises questions about our presentation of the Gospel, our style, language, and format. Perhaps we need to take another look at the way Jesus addressed people. He didn't preach very often, and certainly not to those outside his own close group. He used direct prophetic words, statements of truth, miracles accompanied by explanation, and parables - stories related to the actual life and happenings of the community - the issues of the day. We need to begin to preach the Gospel from the Gospel, instead of getting tangled up with Paul's theology for churches who were, in large measure, getting it wrong. This is not to dismiss the need for clear teaching to the committed, nor to suggest that the Holy Spirit does not take human words and fill them with divine power. But the world has changed. Not only TV but also in the realm of education. Children no longer sit behind rows of desks learning by rote or taking notes. Learning is experience based, varied, deductive, moving from one activity to another. Young people discuss, debate, question, investigate, and use all the equipment of a technological and computerized age.

This must all be related to the training of those who would be ministers into the next century, and also to the mission and ministry of the whole church.

Training in the Nineties

We want our people to recognise that each church member and indeed non-member has a contribution to make; we all have our different experiences of life. I believe that this should be reflected in the nature of our college communities, where the pastoral training takes place. The college should mirror the world. What do we think was taking place in Acts 2:42-47? A number of colleges now operate in-pastorate or church-based training programmes, where the emphasis is placed on reflecting on pastoral experience in the light of theological understanding.

We can consider such a process of training under three headings: reflection, integration, and formation.

Reflection: the emphasis is not on telling students "how to do" but rather get them to draw on their own experience and ask questions about life and the place of God in the world. Reflection begins with experience; moves on to consider the Bible - its application and interpretation; actions and events in the world outside the church; and asks, what is God saying in all of this? Examples of this, for me, recently have been cohabitation, marriage & divorce; and the new cosmology of Stephen Hawking, Paul Davies and others. In considering an issue such as cohabitation and marriage it is important to face up to the social patterns of our times, to face up to the Bible and the society of the New Testament period, to consider the approach of the church through history, and then to develop a theological and pastoral approach for today. In the scientific arena, the discoveries of the new cosmology of the "Big Bang" origin of a universe with design and purpose, has opened up the possibility for a Christian apologetic. The questions now being posed by such scientists as Stephen Hawking can only satisfactorily be answered by theology. We must be ready to take these questions seriously and address them out of a serious consideration of the Biblical picture of creation.

Integration: it is my belief that we should seek, wherever possible, to integrate academic studies of theology with pastoral training by running the courses alongside each other. This can be developed into a close relationship for church-based or in-pastorate students, but it should also be a priority in the planning of residential courses. As well as reflection, we should encourage students to relate their theological studies, biblical and philosophical insights, back into the practical, pastoral, and social issues of the church and world. The success of this clearly depends on our ability to break down the

compartmentalism that may exist in the individual student or church member's mind. Leaders should be encouraged to work these issues through with their churches. Prayer, Bible study, and worship need to be integrated into the whole of life. For example, when the church considers its prayer life on behalf of the world, we should encourage our workers, doctors, nurses, teachers, local government officers, trades union officials, industrial managers, and so on, to share their feelings, needs, and work experiences with the whole congregation. The same should apply to family life, the care of the elderly and the bringing up of children. These issues should also form part of the agenda of our house groups as we seek to see our faith worked out in our life in the world.

Formation: the result of reflection and integration will hopefully be, what these days is referred to as "ministerial formation." Which, to put it another way, is not to teach students how to, but to help them to be. To be open to the shaping of the Holy Spirit so as to be the person that God can use in ministry.

Not how to take a funeral, but learning to face our own death.

Not how to run an effective Sunday School, but to understand what children feel and how they think, learn and perceive the world.

Not how to lead worship, but what is worship.

What is true for students must also be true for all of Christ's disciples. The responsibility of church leaders is to "equip the saints" in ministry and mission. This will mean the application of the Scriptures to everyday life; it will mean taking the abilities and the experiences of all our church members seriously; and from these working out our theology of life as the people of God in the 1990's.

In-service training: will also need to figure in the experience of ministers and church leaders, and through them to all church members. As colleges we believe that this is important during the first three years of ministry (the probationary period), but I believe that this should continue throughout ministry. At Oxford we intend, from 1995, to offer an annual two-day conference for ministers to consider the current issues in society and in church life.

Partnership and Reality

Putting it all into practice is no easy task, and there are no right answers, it will be a constantly changing agenda as we address changing needs in a changing world. I believe that reflection, integration, formation is the pattern of learning for students, tutors (I learn at least as much as I teach), and for churches. I believe that church leaders should spend time with deacons and in church meetings and house groups, working through this pattern of training. Whether we are seeking to do this in church or in college, it will require time spent with small groups for discussion and interaction rather than a lecture or distance

learning approach.

My own experience of observing the churches in Brazil taught me an important lesson as I was able to observe the strategic use of students from the Theology Faculties as a resource in church planting and evangelism in the regions around those colleges. I believe that our own Baptist colleges should give attention to sharing in the mission of Christ in their local areas through church plants, church resurrections, and supporting urban and village churches. At Regent's we have used students in such strategic placements, and seen God bless their ministries. Larger churches might also consider their role in building the Kingdom rather than developing an empire of their own. Large churches could consider the use of their resources in mission, not only through planting new churches but also through the support and encouragement of new life in existing churches.

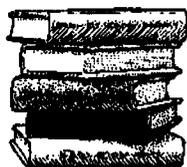
We must keep the message and the training fresh and real; there must be relevance. At Oxford, our ministerial students train with those who are studying other Arts subjects, who are looking toward employment in a variety of businesses and professions. They

are asking questions and making observations about the Bible and about life that our ministerial students need to listen to. The same is surely true within our church fellowships; church members should be encouraged to bring the questions that arise within their work or home situations and seek answers through the Scriptures and within the community of faith.

We live and minister within a changing world, but a world in need of the Gospel of Christ, and the transforming power of the Spirit; a world which needs to be shown a demonstration of life in all its fullness and completeness. But then we also need to experience this for ourselves, through our application of the Gospel to daily living. I believe that reflection, integration, and formation, as disciples of Christ will be a helpful pattern to follow. There needs to be a reality to our lives that expresses the relevance of the Gospel we believe, and the outworking of the Spirit. If there isn't, then it is unlikely that we will make any impact for Christ in the world.

John Weaver, Oxford

REVIEWS



"First Among Equals - a study of the basis of Association & Oversight among Baptist Churches" Geoffrey G. Reynolds 1993 Berkshire, Southern, and Oxfordshire & E. Gloucestershire Associations pp.136 £3-50

The Baptist Times in its "Feedback" page on November 11th, 1993 carried a series of letters under the headline "No Baptist Bishops, Please." This was a response to an extract from Geoffrey Reynolds' book, which had been published by the paper. Letters suggested that "bishops" were the equivalent of Baptist ministers, at least until the Middle Ages, and that General Superintendents were more closely related to "apostles." The same column on 25th November carried a further set of responses, one of which pointed out that the extract published by the paper was just that, and that people should read the whole book before jumping to conclusions. This was the one letter, with which this reviewer felt in full agreement.

Geoffrey Reynolds begins his study of oversight in the Church with the recognition that the Baptist system of Superintendents, which has existed for over 75 years, has never been defined ecclesologically nor theologically. With the suggestion, in the current ecumenical environment, coming from the Anglican Church, that the Free Churches should "take episcopacy into their system," the author attempts to

define the role that the Superintendency fulfils within the union of Baptist churches.

The first half of the book is devoted to a review of the New Testament Church, and the development of the church through the last 2000 years. This is a most helpful summary, recognising the struggles of the early years and the development of variety of levels and types of leader, both within the local church, and throughout wider areas. In his discussion of the history of the church, Geoffrey notes the development of the Baptist "Messengers" and "Superintendents." He notes (page 57) "It is interesting to discover that in 1655 Thomas Collier was ordained 'General Superintendent and Messenger to all the Associated Churches' by the Particular Baptists in the West Country."

The second half of the book seeks to reflect theologically on the nature of leadership within our Baptist churches, including bishops and Area Superintendents; and the place of Associations within our shared mission and ministry. Geoffrey recognises the vital role of the Church Meeting in the life of the church, but recognises as a weakness the fact that Baptists have tended to put independence before cooperation, throughout their three and a half centuries of existence.

Considering the nature of leadership, he states that while Particular Baptists identified "bishops" with the pastors of local churches, the General Baptists identified "bishops" with their Messengers, who had a wider oversight, and who were also responsible for church planting. Geoffrey recognises that Baptists are happy with the New Testament understanding of

"bishop", but not its outworking in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches today. He goes on to note that the Baptist view of association implies oversight, and that in this sense an Area Superintendent is a bishop in all but name.

He pleads for the restoration of Association life, its *raison d'être* being mission and fellowship. He desires to see covenant relationship at the centre of Association life, worked out in contribution, commitment, involvement and responsibility. This will be particularly important in the outworking of a mission strategy. Within this there is a need for oversight, it is a matter of function, not status, nor indeed name. He says, "Although the traditional tasks of the Superintendency are still important, the urgent need in the 1990's is for translocal leadership, an apostolic ministry, which is concerned with more than administration or even pastoral care." Their "prime responsibility is pastoral oversight of ministers and churches and spiritual leadership in mission and evangelism" but he laments that it is administration and diaries that dictate. The Baptist priority for superintendents should be that of the Anglican bishop as described by John Taylor, former Bishop of Winchester, "a bishop should be a leader and inspirer of evangelism in the whole church."

In his conclusions Geoffrey quotes from Paul Fiddes' *A Leading Question*, "Within our Baptist tradition we shall want to preserve the conviction that the local minister inherits the apostolic functions of episkope - guarding the faith and representing the universal Church. From that basis we can then recognise a threefold ministry, but with the regional episkope as a wider version of the episkope which already exists within the two-fold structure of episkope and diakonia in the local fellowship." His own final conclusion is that Baptists must "recover the theology and practice of association, strengthen and renew their covenant fellowship, and safeguard the pastoral, apostolic and evangelistic ministry of those called to care for all the churches. For where there is fellowship, Christ gives episkope (Ephesians 4:11-12)."

This is an important study at a time when the Baptist Union is beginning to debate a review of the superintendency, and when Mainstream is considering its evolution into a "Word and Spirit" network. It will be a great shame if people get hung up on the word "bishop" and fail to hear what Geoffrey is saying about the need of association and oversight, especially when the former is seen in terms of mission and the latter is seen in terms of vision, inspiration and strategy. Baptists, like other mainline churches, will surely need to rediscover their roots; recovering the nature of association life and the function and role of the "Messengers." When the areas, where our churches are situated, are asked to make suggestions for candidates to be appointed as Area Superintendent, we will need to take note of the important pleas made in this book.

John Weaver.

"Your church can grow in England - stories of nine growing churches by those who led them" Edited by John Metcalfe (Karpimos, 1993) 91pp. £2; available from: E.J.Metcalfe, 6 Stevenson Rd, Doveridge, Ashbourne, Derbyshire. DE6 5NX

This book has been compiled as an encouragement to smaller churches and their leaders. It begins with John's own testimony and vision for growth in the churches that he himself has pastored; then details the stories of nine growing churches told by those who led them; and ends with an analysis of those factors which influence growth. As Derek Tidball says in his forward to the book, John's "work has the merit of being the findings, if I may say so, not of a professional researcher, but of one who has been at the sharp end. It has a down-to-earthness about it with which many will identify."

John takes up the 1992 "Dawn 2000 Congress" challenge to see a doubling of the number of practicing Christians in England by AD 2000. Having given personal testimony to such growth in his own pastorates at Sale, 1955-66, and Towcester, 1983-90, he gives space to similar encouraging accounts from across England, including new town, inner city, and rural situations. Under God, he believes that the Dawn vision is possible.

He identifies a number of factors that are common to each of these growing churches. These include: leadership; prayer; biblical and Christ-centred preaching; a valuing of people; and an openness to the Spirit. He believes that leaders must have vision, need to encourage the formation of a team in ministry, and should be prepared for a long term pastorate. While recognising that new situations, such as a new minister, new building, or new challenging situation, may have sparked off growth, an openness to change combined with believing prayer were essential if that growth were to be maintained.

"Written to encourage all beleaguered churches to believe that they can begin to grow again; large churches through church planting and smaller ones by adding to their numbers," this book will encourage its readers to prayer, and to catch the vision.

John Weaver.

