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# The Fraternal

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# Editorial

Finding words quite inadequate, the Hungarian delegate encircled the group in a crouching position to illustrate how his nation had fared under Communism; his excitement about the future was electric. This was back in September. And even in view of what had already taken place in Hungary and Poland, the East-West Meeting in Arnhem, of which we were a part, could not have envisaged the cataclysmic changes, or the speed of them, which would sweep from Warsaw to Sofia, Prague to Bucharest, rolling back forty years of monolithic one-party state. It has been quite breath-taking to see the 'domino theory', as it was once applied to creeping Communism in S.E. Asia, applied in reverse to Eastern Europe. All eyes must now be on Albania.

What of the prospects for the Church? At present the respect and prestige widely enjoyed has been won at the cost of unremitting sacrificial witness to human rights and values. It reflects also appreciation for the way that the churches have often acted as catalysts for freedom and change. But in the furious ferment of the moment, with social democracy such a vulnerable and tender plant, the Church may well have to act as a sheet anchor to the state: a source of stability. And in the future? One hopes and prays that the prophetic witness borne in the teeth of Communism will not be blunted as Eastern Europe embraces the new freedoms, anticipating a free market economy and a more affluent tomorrow. For history teaches us that Christianity finds it harder to thrive when it no longer needs to fight for its very life.

In view of all this it might seem that our first article is now hopelessly out dated, dealing as it does with a regime in the DDR which no longer exists. But Larry Kreitzer approaches his subject from a novel perspective, that of philately, showing how the re-writing of history to serve the prevailing ideology is an irresistible temptation. Following this, Michael Bray shares his experience of house purchase in the ministry; a timely contribution in the light of property values and consequent anxiety at the point of retirement. A third contribution reflects Mike Nicholl's concern over our inauthentic use of language in the light of the New Testament. In 'Ministry – Mean What You Say!' he points out the anachronisms and makes some suggestions for reform.

Jacob Bronowski's final comment at the end of his spell-binding 'The Ascent of Man' was to lament the fact of a loss of nerve as he perceived it: a turning away from the rational scientific pursuit of knowledge into Zen Buddhism, extra-sensory perception and mystery. One expression of this allure of the non rational is the Occult. Mark Woods, with the insights gleaned from a research project, reflects on the phenomenon from a theological point of view. Articles from the United States are few and far between in *Fraternal*. Therefore we are particularly pleased to receive a guest article from Robert Williams of New England. He brings to our attention some definite trends in American Church life. It is instructive to compare his list with U.K. trends, identifying where the Spirit is blowing.

# The Reformation in East German Ideology

In the present political climate it has become fashionable once again to explore the boundaries which separate Christianity and Marxism. From the East we hear with every passing day more and more about the winds of change that Mikhail Gorbachev is bringing to the USSR via his programme of *Perestroika*. How does this programme affect the Soviet satellites, like the Deutsche Democratic Republic (DDR), which have a long history of significant contributions to the development of Christianity underlying their latest (socialist) phase of national history? I would like to suggest that we can fruitfully explore this question by examining how two Reformation figures, Martin Luther and the Anabaptist leader Thomas Müntzer, have been focal points within official DDR propaganda. In so doing we gain a small but valuable insight into how avowedly religious figures have been viewed within a Marxist ideology and also note one way in which that ideology becomes transmitted to the populace.<sup>1</sup> This will enable us to be sensitive to and properly interpret the official rhetoric that we will no doubt encounter more and more in coming months and years as the dialogue between East and West, between Christianity and Marxism, accelerates in the Gorbachev era.

Six years ago I sat in Westminster Abbey as a participant of the celebrations surrounding the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birth. This remarkable man was honoured in a variety of ways around the world at that time; the service at Westminster was but one way that the occasion was marked in this country. Another of the most significant of the international celebrants was the DDR (East Germany), for in that country Luther is still hailed as one of her greatest sons. It is easy to forget that Luther was born on November 10 1483, in what is now East Germany, in the Thuringian town of Eisleben. By an ironic twist, which seems to often characterize history, Luther was to die in that same village 63 years later. Much of his life was thus spent within the present borders of the modern socialist state of East Germany.

Luther is one of those few historical figures about whom it can legitimately be claimed 'He altered the course of history'. Since his contributions were so momentous and wide-reaching he has often been the subject of exhaustive investigation (and exploitation) by the modern world. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than within the DDR's systematic presentation of Luther as the precursor of the modern socialist revolution. To a certain degree this interpretation of Luther was fostered by the treatment given to the 16th century by both Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Engels published a major tract in 1850 entitled *The Peasants' War in Germany* on this theme.<sup>2</sup> By a policy of deliberate choice of detail and selective emphasis the course of Reformation history was rewritten and Luther was anachronistically portrayed as a medieval supporter, even instigator, of the class struggle which was to blossom into the October revolution in 1917 in Leningrad. Thus, the Reformation as a social movement is fitted neatly within a Marxist historical analysis.

In an effort to document this clever propaganda move I would like to observe two sources: the philatelic issues of East Germany connected with the Reformation<sup>3</sup> and the official government publication of the DDR which was issued in connection with the 500th anniversary of Luther's birth. Let us first consider the philatelic evidence.

## **Martin Luther Stamps**

There are two specific stamp issues given over directly to the life and work of Martin Luther. The first comes in 1967 and was issued in connection with the 450th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. It consists of three stamps: one of the Wittenburg Church upon whose doors the 95 Theses were nailed (the symbolic act in 1517 which is generally thought to have inaugurated the Reformation proper); one of Luther's house in Wittenburg; and one portrait of Luther taken from a contemporary engraving by Lucas Cranach the Elder (Figure no.1).

The second set of stamps was issued in connection with the November 1983 celebrations mentioned above. It consists of five stamps – four regular issues and a miniature set (Figure no.2) The four regular issues are comprised of two Luther portraits and representations of two wax city seals. The two wax seals are of places intimately linked to Luther's life; one is from his birthplace, Eisleben, and the other from Wittenburg, the site of his Reformation pulpit and centre of most of his activity. The miniature sheet displays the title page of Luther's translation of the Bible surrounded by a collection of city crests and shields. Certainly the subject matter of the miniature sheet stands as an apt memorial to Luther. Undoubtedly the translation work was the single greatest contribution that Luther made to the Reformation movement.

There is little in either of these stamp issues which betrays a covert message of Marxist ideology. The only possible hint is in the 20 pfennig portrait stamp of the 1983 issue which shows us the famous "Junger George" disguise Luther adopted in Wartburg while under the ducal decree of imperial and ecclesiastical banishment. It was thought at the time that the characteristic beard and moustache of the disguise served to identify Luther with the German peasantry as over against the ruling classes. Perhaps there is a subliminal reflection intended here, with Luther's allegiance to the peasantry in mind. All in all, the Luther issues are relatively innocent and not themselves blatantly linked to Marxist ideological interests, but the inference appears clear. However, we should also consider two other philatelic issues which demonstrate more clearly the propaganda use of a Reformation leader by the East German government. They both involve the enigmatic figure of Thomas Müntzer.

## **Thomas Müntzer Stamps**

The Anabaptist leader Thomas Müntzer was one of the most radical of Luther's contemporaries during the tumultuous era of the early 16th century. A charismatic leader given over to mystic tendencies, this eloquent man whipped up the more extremist factions of the peasantry and preached a message of social upheaval and political reorganisation. His famous "Sermon before the Princes" in Allstedt in 1524 was particularly revolutionary in tone and, not surprisingly, alarmed the landed ruling powers of the day. Müntzer was not one to separate his preaching from his practice – he was an active participant in the various military campaigns leading up to the Peasants' War. He was eventually captured following the rout at Frankenhausen in May 1525, was tortured and executed. It is very easy to see how this man, with his extreme and radical views of social justice, lends himself to use as a propaganda tool to those wishing to perpetuate what they see as the same ideological class war.<sup>4</sup> The East German government was not slow to capitalize on this fortunate "coincidence" of history.

Müntzer himself is the subject of two stamp issues, both of which leave no doubt as to the revolutionary associations they are designed to invoke. The first (figure no.3) appeared in 1953 under the title of "German Patriots" and depicts Müntzer leading a band of peasants into armed confrontation. The stamp is one of a set of five (another value of which depicts the 1848 revolution). The second set appeared in 1975 and was given over to commemorating the 450th anniversary of the Peasants' War. This 6-value set depicts the various aspects of this Revolt (figure no.4). For example, a critique of the capitalistic economic system is driven home by a stamp illustrating a medieval woodcut decrying the practice of indulgence-selling and is entitled "Forced Labour". We also see within the set a portrait of Müntzer, a depiction of tithes-paying, two views of the peasants in revolt, and one of peasants on trial. The miniature sheet of this stamp set includes the first few lines from the title page of the Memmingen Statement, a collection of 12 Resolutions outlining the grievances of the peasantry which served as a rough programme around which the Revolt was organised. It seems clear that the figure of Thomas Müntzer has become an important focal point for Marxist historians seeking to ground and interpret history along accepted and predetermined ideological lines.

It should be noted that although Müntzer is deliberately associated with the Peasants' War / Class Struggle, there is nothing remotely suggestive of this being a divisive issue amongst Christian leaders. There is no attention given to the agonizingly painful decision that Luther had to make against the radical actions taken by many, such as Müntzer, during the Peasants' War. Luther's pamphlet "Against the Murdering, Thieving Hordes of the Peasants" stands as one of his most vitriolic. Yet the attempt at stabilisation that it represents is glossed over and receives no official acknowledgement. It is assigned to the realms of silence.

We should not think that Luther's voice was left silent as a witness to the ideological aims of Marxism, however. Let us turn to consider a final bit of evidence at our disposal.

### **Luther's Quincentenary Volume**

The final document we need to take into consideration is the official publication of the great Reformer's quincentenary entitled simply: *Luther: 1483 – 1983* It is published under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture in corroboration with the Martin Luther Committee of the DDR. <sup>5</sup> The 140 plus page book, which is attractively presented in four languages and profusely illustrated, draws upon a whole range of 16th century woodcuts, prints and paintings to illustrate the events and characters of that period. In addition, more recent artistic work and photographs are used to depict some of the implications of the Reformation for our modern world. These encourage the reader to draw the appropriate associations between the Reformation and the class struggle with which the modern society is presently engaged. Erich Honecker, head of the State Council and the Martin Luther Committee summarizes this point of intended association well when he says:

"On November 10 1983 will be the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's birthday, a man who is among the greatest sons of the German people. The German Democratic Republic and her people pay homage to the historical achievement he accomplished by initiating the Reformation –

actually being a bourgeois revolution – for the benefit of social progress and world culture. It is just the deep changes at our time that call for the support of historical progress, of reason and humanism.”

The book approvingly assesses Luther’s contribution to this desired world revolution, quoting no less a figure than Marx himself on the matter:

“Today we are facing an upheaval similar to the 16th century”

Or again:

“Luther was the man in whose brain the revolution begins”

Nothing summarizes the thrust of this interesting commemorative volume more than a section found near the end of the book. It contrasts on a single page a quote of Luther’s and its ideological interpretation.

“ Luther: If you doubt, you are lost. A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”

“Official Comment: The power of the word, the faith as well as the arm, guided by reason, guarantees peace, happiness and prosperity to the peoples. The Church of Jesus Christ and the Workers’ and Peasants’ State know that both are unanimous in devoting themselves to man.”

This juxtaposition demonstrates clearly the dialectic which characterizes Church / State relationships in modern East Germany.

There can be little doubt that both the Reformation in general, and Martin Luther and Thomas Müntzer in particular, have great contributions to make as far as our understanding fully the social implications of the Christian faith. It is one of the sad ironies of our present time that much of the strength and vitality of the Christian movement, its ability to speak out concerning society’s ills and thereby lead the way out of our darkness, has been lost, forgotten or deliberately abandoned. Marxism has been quick to try and fill the resultant void, much to its credit. There can be little doubt that one of the reasons Marxism, in a variety of forms, is seen to be a viable option in so much of the Third World today is because of its perceived relevance to contemporary economic and socio-political issues. Yet, at the same time, we must guard against anachronistic interpretations of history, such as that exhibited by the East German propagandists in their rewriting of the Reformation period with the resultant story being inconsistent with the actualities of that history. Even the attempt to exploit the popular medium of postage stamps along such lines should be seen for what it is. <sup>6</sup> Finally, if we criticise Christianity for social blindness, we must also criticise Marxism for its tendency to prostitute history. Time will reveal which is the greater evil.

**Larry J. Kreitzer**

## Footnotes:

1. The Reformation period itself was one in which popular propaganda abounded in an unprecedented manner. On this see, Gerald Strauss, "Capturing Hearts and Minds in the German Reformation" *History Today* (June 1981), pp21-25; Bob Scribner, "Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation" *History Today* (October 1982), pp10-15.
2. A recent edition (1975), published by Progress Publishers in Moscow is readily available. It includes within it a translation of Marx's letter of 1856 to Engels, in which Marx, commenting on the 1848 revolt says; "The whole thing in Germany will depend on the possibility of backing the proletarian revolution by some second edition of the Peasants' War."
3. East Germany is not the only Eastern European country to issue postal stamps commemorating Luther's birthday. Three other socialist states, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, have also done so.
4. Abraham Friessen, "Thomas Müntzer in Marxist Thought" *Church History* 34, (1965) pp306-327; Abraham Friessen, "The Marxist Interpretation of Anabaptism" in *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* edited by Carl S. Meyer, (1970), pp 17-34.
5. Unfortunately there are no page numbers given within the volume.
6. It is a fact of life that every country uses the medium as a cheap propaganda forum. Witness the British stamps which appeared immediately after the Falklands / Malvinas war.

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Figure no. 1



Figure no. 3



Figure no. 4

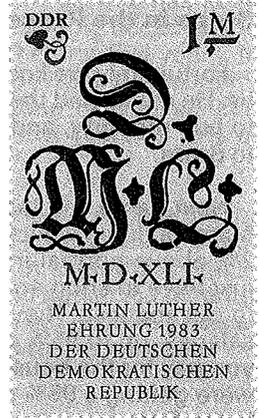
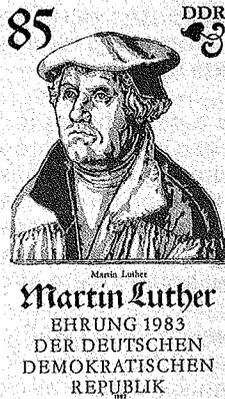


Figure no. 2

# A House of Our Own: Purchasing a Property

It was during our last pastorate that my wife and I decided that when we next moved we would buy our own house. Our children were just reaching the age where it was possible for Jill to return to teaching, at least part time, to help pay for the mortgage. Although house prices were high, and still climbing, we would probably have been able to get a mortgage for a small house in a place comparable to Birmingham where we were then living.

Eventually I received a call to a new church in London where we would have been hard pushed to have bought a shed, let alone a house. We talked to our new church about the possibility of sharing the purchase of the manse, but after much thought the deacons felt that in the long term this was not the best for the church, a decision I am sure was right. We were not interested in buying a holiday home, so it seemed our dream of being home-owners was coming to nothing. If only we had stayed in Birmingham where houses were affordable.

Then it occurred to us that if we could afford Birmingham prices, we could buy in Birmingham and rent the house out. We had been told there was a chronic shortage of rented accommodation, so there was clearly a need. But would we get a mortgage for a house we were not going to live in, and if we did, would we get tax relief on our mortgage interest payments? How would we go about finding tenants and doing any repairs that were required during a tenancy? Would we be able to furnish the house to a satisfactory standard for tenants? The uncertainties seemed endless.

## Steps in the Process

Fortunately we knew an Estate Agent in Birmingham who was willing to advise us. He confirmed there was a market for rented accommodation, advised us where to buy property, and looked out for suitable houses for us to look at on our trips to Brum.

Next came the task of persuading a building society to lend us the money. Many building societies will only lend money on a house that is going to be let, at 2% above normal interest rate. The smaller societies can be more helpful; you just have to shop around. By chance we went into the Woolwich who said "Yes" to our request. They were willing to lend us a sum based on 2.5 times our joint salaries, up to 95% of the value of the house. (The value is not necessarily what you pay for the house but what the building society estimates as its value.) As we were getting a 95% mortgage we had to pay an extra insurance premium of 337 in the first year.

Eventually we found a suitable house – one that did not have too much garden, was easy to maintain and not too old. Further it was in the right part of the city for letting.

On returning to the building society to finalise details of the mortgage we found that, contrary to what we had first been told, as we were letting the property we would have to pay 2% higher interest. We argued that we had been assured that, as it was the only property we owned, we would only be charged

the standard rate. The manager of the branch would not budge. He said it was company policy. We decided to phone the most senior person we could get through to at Woolwich headquarters and explain our position. The senior manager immediately agreed that ministers were a special case, along with publicans and others living in job-related accommodation, and could have a mortgage at the standard rate. He then telephoned the branch to tell the manager "actual company policy"! Half an hour later we were back in the building society signing on the dotted line. I tell you this tale because it is important not to be put off by stumbling blocks. Branch managers do not know everything. Also on finance, we wrote to the Inland Revenue, at the insistence of the building society to check that they would agree to us receiving MIRAS (Mortgage Interest Relief at Source) The Inland Revenue have a special clause to cover people in job-related accommodation who buy property that they one day hope to live in, but in the meantime lease out.

Our next task was furnishing the property. We had allowed a budget of 2,000 for furnishing our three-bedroom house. We were amazed how many people were either throwing out good furniture or were trying to sell it cheaply. Almost all of our furnishings were second hand, accumulated over a period of about four months. For that period one room of our manse became a repository. We bought curtains and carpets from the previous occupier. The only new items were beds and bedding, a washing machine (we did not want one that was always going wrong), cutlery, crockery and some cooking utensils. Many of the new purchases were made in the sales and were end-of-line stock. We did not, in the end, spend anywhere near the 2,000 allowance.

The final stage was finding tenants. Our estate agent friend put us in touch with a local firm who now act as our agents. They drew up the contract that has to be signed by the tenants. (This also has to be agreed to by the building society, who will not let us have any tenant for more than one year for the first five years. In case we default on the mortgage they want to be able to repossess the property within a reasonable time.) The task of finding tenants, getting references, collecting rent etc is dealt with entirely by the agents. This service costs us 10% of the rent, but is well worth it.

Between tenancies we visit the property to do any necessary decorating or repairs. Any damage above normal wear and tear is paid for by the tenant out of a deposit held by the agents. A friend, who is very talented at everything practical, acts as our handyman. If anything does go wrong with the house the tenants, through the agents, can call him in to fix it. This saves calling out professionals at great expense, for what might be a minor problem. He is paid for his services.

## **The Cost**

How much has this venture cost? For us the purchase of the house – Legal fees, 5% deposit on house, insurance, furnishings and other out of pocket expenses – was in the region of 6,000, much of which was borrowed. Out of the rent we pay 10% to the agents, 25% to Inland Revenue and rates. The net income from rent currently pays for about half of the mortgage, But our mortgage should not go up above its present level, (unless interest rates rise even higher), and could well come down. Our salaries and income from rent, though, should go up, so the burden of the mortgage should get less as the years go by.

When we started out this venture seemed formidable. Although it occupied much of our spare time and energy during 1988 it proved much easier than we expected. After all, it's not so different from that which the young couples we marry are having to do.

**Michael Bray**

## **Ministry – Mean What You Say!**

At the moment in the Christian world there are many words which are either confusing or inappropriate in terms of the use to which they are put. For instance, labels like "evangelical" and "charismatic" may denote certain common interests among people who are known under those labels, but within the groupings there would be great diversity and certainly no single agenda that could be described as a movement. Equally a word like "worship" is often used in the phrase 'A time of worship' to describe a session of song-singing during a service. What is really meant is a time of praise within an act of worship, which ought to be set within a life of worship.

Just as Charles Wesley wrote many of the hymns of the eighteenth century for educative purposes, so that as people sang the words again and again a right theology might be inculcated into their thinking and living, so it seems to me that today we need to be very careful in the language that we use within Christian life and work. For what we think and say we very often are and do.

### **Credibility Gap**

The particular concern of this article is the credibility gap that exists between the theory and practice of the word "ministry" among Baptists at this present time. The fact is that in all sorts of ways "ministry" is a term restricted both in terms of people and practice. Yet in theory Baptists uphold the conviction of the ministry of all, believing that the priesthood and prophethood of all who are in Christ is something that needs to be stressed. That Baptists ought to believe in the ministry of all Christians is undoubted. It is true biblically. The disciples of Jesus were not archetypal bishops but archetypal believers who confessed their faith and followed Christ in the manner that all new believers must. When Paul spoke of the Church he used images like bride, body and building. He indicated the destiny and function of the church as a vehicle of the activity of the risen Christ by the Spirit, reflecting the glory and presence of God. Furthermore, within the body and the building every member and every stone has a lively strategic and unique role to play. Every member ministry is crucial to the Pauline doctrine of the church.

### **New Testament Ministry**

In the New Testament a pattern emerges in which Jesus, the Beloved Son, is sent as the Apostle of the Father and then sends His disciples, commissioning them to do His work. The task of the Church is to do the work of God as Jesus has done it. Its ministry is His ministry, as His is the Father's. In Paul's imagery of the Church as the Body of Christ the members are given gifts and with the gifts the ministries of proclamation, teaching, healing, caring and administering. They are given the Spirit of Christ in order to do the work of God – the things that Jesus

did. The three main "body" passages in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Romans 12:4-8 and Ephesians 4:4-16 are all in the context of ministry. The Body is the living presence of Christ active in the world and doing His work. Just as Christ's priesthood makes possible the priesthood of all believers, so His commission makes possible the apostleship of all believers.

The Church's ministry is to be Christ's ministry through His Church. It is given to all His people and it is not to be confused with office. The important thing in the New Testament is not the structure of office in the Church but the whole Church fulfilling the ministry of Christ who is the chief Shepherd and Overseer (1 Peter 2:25 and 5:4), the Great High Priest and Apostle (Hebrews 3:1), the One who comes to serve (Mark 10:45) to whom all authority is given (Matthew 28:18). It is His ministry and it is entrusted to all His people.

Ministry is thus given to the whole people of God. The Holy Spirit gives varieties of gifts but all are baptized into the one Spirit. All have to seek the highest gift of the Spirit, which is love. No one has exclusive rights nor exclusive duties for carrying out the ministry of Christ in His Church. The ministry of the Church is the ministry of Christ carried out by the whole Body of believers who are enabled by the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament the role of leaders, according to Ephesians 4, is to equip all the saints for the work of ministry to the world. Thus, biblically it is right to speak of the ministry of all and the leadership of some.

## **Ministry in Baptist History**

Historically, Anabaptists of the sixteenth century spoke of the Fall and Rise of the Church. They believe She fell from her pristine glory when Constantine wedded Church and state. They characterized the fallen Church as formal in worship and hierarchical in life style. They recognised that ministry was being restricted to a select group who alone could do things that were denied to others. Believing that Anabaptists had been sent to restore the Church the ecclesiology of these continental believers, from the mid-1520's onwards, expressed a strong antipathy to any wedding of Church and state and a strong commitment to a covenant membership between Christ and His people, entered through believer's baptism. They affirmed and practised the ministry of all. Deriving, as they did, much of their biblical attitude from Zwinglian literalism, they affirmed in the practice of the Lord's Supper the idea of a community meal in which each served the other. They believed in the leadership of some and the ministry of all.

Baptist heritage derived not only from continental Anabaptism but from English Separatism with its roots in Calvinistic theology and ecclesiology. Throughout the last four hundred years Baptists have always wrestled with the identity of their pastors. Some have emphasised that pastors are ministers of Word and Sacrament; and in the twentieth century the ecumenical age has led many Baptists to define their view of ministry in terms that are much more acceptable to the wider church. This has inevitably involved a stress on the clergy as distinct from the laity.

## **Leaders not Ministers**

Thus the situation today is that although biblically and historically Baptist roots would indicate that we believe in the ministry of all and the leadership of some,

our language suggests that we believe in the ministry of some. We generally call our pastors ministers, a term whose servant connotation is right in itself, but it does lead to confusion. We talk about some people who have a call to the ministry and inevitably this distinguishes them from those who are called by Christ to serve in other vocations in the world. It leads to a false dichotomy between church and world; between service in the body and service in the world. We talk about Ministerial Recognition Committees, a list of accredited ministers, and so on. All of this, it seems to me, needs to be eradicated. We need to affirm the ministry of every believer within the body of Christ, and the leadership of some who will equip and enable the ministry of all. This means that we must begin to talk about those who are called to leadership and especially to be pastors. We must speak of Leadership Recognition Committees, a Secretary for Ministry, provided that his role truly involves the training and equipping of all God's people and not just of leaders. We need to have an Accredited List of Nationally Recognised Leaders, not because those on it are all ministers of Word and Sacrament, but because with different functions all are called to nationally recognised leadership roles.

Thus some will exercise an apostolic and prophetic ministry, others an evangelistic ministry, others will be teachers and some pastor / teachers in local churches. We need to rethink the language we use in regard to ministry, affirming again the ministry of all and the leadership of some. This has implications not only for the life of our denomination; it has implications for mission. We need to learn again from our Third World brothers and sisters that mission is not just the prerogative of pastors, elders and deacons; it is the privilege and responsibility of all members and it is to be encouraged by those who lead. We must no longer use the term "Ministry team" to indicate a few select people who are in the leadership of the church. The ministry-team are the whole body and the leadership team is to equip that body for the totality of their work. Such teams must no longer be made up of people who are attempting omnicompetence, but of different people whose gifts complement one another and who in the totality of their work, are able to serve the membership and equip them for their ministry.

This means that in our worship we must encourage the participation of appropriately gifted and trained people, so that all God's people are ministering to one another, edifying the body, glorifying the Lord and equipping the people for the work of ministry to the world.

The implications and benefits of the right use of terms are enormous. At the moment we do not mean what we say. We must say what we mean – the leadership of some to equip the ministry of all: the work of Christ in the world.

**Mike Nicholls**

## **Reflections on the Occult**

My interest in this subject (professional rather than personal) began as a Bristol College student, when with Peter King, now of Eynsham, I was asked to produce a report for a group of local churches. In this article I wish to attempt a broad survey of the issues (perhaps too broad), concluding by pointing out possible pitfalls for the theologian.

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It is a subject fraught with difficulties, one of which is defining the area to be covered. Is 'the occult' witchcraft, New Age movements, spiritualism, ouija, paranormal phenomena, or demon possession? All of these? Should we consider its scientific, pastoral or theological implications? The tabloid sensationalism of much Christian writing about the occult has also created enormous barriers to understanding, alienating the sceptic and terrifying the credulous. Is it possible to step back and allow reason a voice?

There is a peculiar fascination in most ages with what cannot be explained, as opposed to what has not been explained yet. So, Uri Geller bending spoons attracts an audience of thousands, while the physicist explaining progress towards a Grand Unified Theory will never have quite the same appeal. The occult may be defined as those phenomena held to be inaccessible to rational inquiry, together with the beliefs that these generate and by which experience of the phenomena may actually be conditioned (the Satanist who takes hallucinatory drugs and expects to see the Devil probably will). The depth of interest in the occult indicates that it requires a Christian reaction. Yet it often seems that we have only two responses – scepticism or hysteria, neither of which is satisfactory.

## **Responses**

Firstly, only the most obdurate rationalist would argue that occult phenomena simply do not occur – that all clairvoyants are fakes, that witnesses of poltergeist phenomena are imagining things, and that nothing ever happens when a group of schoolchildren use an ouija board. There are frauds and fakes, certainly. However, evidence for such phenomena as clairvoyance and precognition conducted at Duke University by Rhine and Pratt place the question virtually beyond doubt. Anecdotal evidence is obviously more suspect. However, now that the scientific ice has been broken, both the scientist and the psychologist see the occult as a legitimate area of study.

Others respond to the occult with extreme credulity. It is regarded with great suspicion, as being demonic in origin, or at least a gateway for demonic forces. Explicitly non – or anti – Christian manifestations of the occult, such as witchcraft and Satanism, are accepted at face value. So, some Christians get very agitated when they hear of Satanists "praying against Christian marriages" (a recent scare) as though Satan hears and answers prayer like God. Similarly, stories are told of pacts with the Devil, appearances of the Devil, and mysterious powers granted by the Devil which owe much to the imagination and little to Scripture or to reason.

Something of my own view should be clear by now. If we are concerned with the phenomena themselves, whether altered states of consciousness or poltergeist activity or whatever, we should first bring to bear on them all the resources of science and psychology. Christians ought to have learned since the Renaissance that when we claim for religion ground which properly belongs to science, our inevitable defeat is likely to be painful and humiliating. If these things happen, can they be explained in terms of what we already know? If not, might we explain them one day?

It does seem likely, granted that odd things do happen and that psychic experiences may be more than a figment of the imagination, that most if not all of them

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**To the Readers of the Fraternal.**

Dear Friends,

In November 1987 when writing my letter for the January Fraternal commenting on the fierce storm of the previous month I little thought I should find myself much pre-occupied in early 1990 with the damage wrought by storms of similar magnitude on the 25th January. On the earlier occasion we were told such devastation could be expected in this country only once in three hundred years!

At this stage it is difficult to judge whether the claims cost will be greater from the recent storms than the previous disaster. Certainly the damage has been spread over a much wider area, although there may not be so many instances of very severe damage. By the time this letter is read the picture will have become more clear.

Our main concern over the last few days has been responding to hundreds of letters and telephone calls notifying claims, and our staff resources have been fully tested. As last time I am confident we shall meet the demands of the situation.

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Yours sincerely,

**M.E. PURVER**

will one day be explained. The great achievements of our century in the physical sciences tend to blind us to the fact that the human brain is still a mystery, and its potential unknown. Christians, clairvoyants, mediums, and "New Agers" should all be wary of attempting to interpret psychic phenomena according to their dogmatic presuppositions.

A certain amount of demythologizing is necessary in considering the occult. However, to allow the scientist and psychologist their place is not to exclude the pastor and the theologian. Are there real dangers? If so, what are they? Leaving aside for a moment, then, the question of whether or not supernatural forces are directly concerned, it remains true that involvement in the occult can lead to psychological and spiritual problems which fully justify traditional Christian hostility.

## **Dangers**

It can, for example, lead to an erosion of personal responsibility. Fortune-telling seems (and often is) a relatively harmless pursuit. One chuckles over tabloid horoscopes in which every prediction is equally relevant, no matter what one's sun sign may be, but astrology can very easily become addictive. Most of us are filled with horror at the thought of Ronald Reagan consulting his wife's astrologer before making political decisions; many, though, would think it quite sensible. Serious belief in astrology has consequences in every area of life. The fault, then, is in our stars, not in ourselves. Marriages fail not because of lack of effort or selfishness; they fail because "She's Virgo and I'm Agittarius, and what do you expect?" Ultimately one is not responsible for one's own actions, because one's character is fixed from birth; neither is one in control of one's life, because its course is predictable. As long as the predictions are favourable (and they are, of course) this is a comforting thought, and allows a womb-like existence permanently cushioned from reality.

Christians have worried especially about spiritualism, including ouija. Much is certainly fraudulent; however, again these worries are justified. Involvement in spiritualism often begins with a desire for reassurance that those who have died are still accessible. While "proof" of this might well be comforting, it can lead to a virtual enslavement to the dead person. They are consulted on major decisions, efforts are made to please them, and in the mind of the friend or relative they are not allowed to die. This is profoundly unhealthy. When "messages" are unhelpful or malevolent the evil is compounded.

Witches and Satanists have always been regarded as the special concern of the Church, since these groups have appeared as the antithesis of Christianity on every level. In the case of witches proper, this is not strictly true. Many would regard themselves as followers of a religion of nature ("Wicca") which is not opposed to Christianity so much as indifferent to it. They are undoubtedly sincere in their belief, and attempts by Christians to portray them as monsters of iniquity are misplaced. It cannot be denied, however, that Satanist groups do exist and are evil in nature and intent. What may begin as a game or as a conscious rejection of Christian morality and dogma becomes in many cases commitment to a cult. Violence, drug-taking, sexual perversion and blackmail are the usual ingredients, and the whole is bound together by a spurious though sophisticated diabolology.

We can say, then, that while the objective nature of much of the occult is in doubt, its dangers are grounds for much concern. In its different forms, it panders to the desire for power over others and to fear of personal responsibility. In its claim to provide secret knowledge it creates a gnostic aristocracy. This fundamental moral weakness can lead to the release of destructive emotions and desires which are antagonistic to the Gospel and the Christian way of life. We should be clear on a pastoral level that occult involvement is unhelpful and unhealthy.

## **Realities**

Nevertheless, this response is not entirely adequate. We have not so far recognised that encounters with the occult are often felt to have a particular quality of evil about them. To attempt to explain these perceptions away is to fail to do justice to the spiritual experience of many mature Christians. We need to reflect theologically on this question, and ask, what are the spiritual realities underlying the occult?

Our answer will depend on our view of evil in general. Some believe in the literal existence of Satan, and see him as the author and inspirer of wrong, playing on our natural tendencies to evil. Others see Satan as a myth, and trace all evil to human weaknesses manifested in corrupt society and flawed psychology. Words of caution need to be spoken to both parties.

If we think Satan exists, we should not automatically regard the occult as the front line in the battle against evil. Those involved often use a vocabulary familiar to us. They speak of spiritual forces, demons and powers of the air. These may ring bells; but we are not therefore to assume that Satan is any more active here than elsewhere – in a missile silo, a sjambok (a whip) or a cardboard box at Charing Cross. A set of assumptions has grown up around belief in Satan which does not bear close examination. Too often, these are developed by occultists, and unquestioningly accepted by Christians. One example of this is the way in which the nature of God is inverted and used to describe Satan. God hears and answers prayer; it is held that Satan does the same. God is omnipresent; this is often virtually held of Satan. We trust in Christ and are saved; we may make a pact with Satan and be damned. Christians worship God; Satan is available for worship in the same way. There is no reason to believe any of this.

We should also notice the proliferation of “deliverance ministries” centred around belief in demonic activity. Again, belief in demons does not require us to believe that a person can be possessed by demons of lust, anger and whatever other personal problems they may have; nor that demons can be named, bound or conversed with; nor that they are especially active in homeopathic medicine and financial institutions. A modern demonology has grown up rivalling anything which the 17th century produced. Is it true?

Nevertheless, if Satan is active in this area, to become involved in the occult is indeed to open oneself to the activity of spiritual forces. The desire for power and forbidden knowledge is wrong in itself, and to surrender to this desire is to begin a descending spiral of spiritual destruction which is legitimately to be seen as Satanic.

Those who regard Satan as a myth also need to be careful. The danger in this case is that the depth and complexity of evil is not fully recognised and engaged. One way of approaching the occult in this way begins with a recognition of the limits of our knowledge of the supernatural. We can know and describe God only in human terms, calling him wise, loving and powerful, but we realise that he is more than we can understand. We make him in the image of what is best in human nature, as though human goodness were to be reflected in a convex mirror. The theist wants to say that something corresponding to this image does really exist. Now, obviously, each person has some idea of goodness of their own. This idea is necessarily inadequate, however, and needs to be fleshed out by the perceptions of the whole community of faith. We might also say then that Goodness cannot be fully comprehended without "God" – God conceived by the theist, as actually existing, or conceived as the qualities and characteristics of goodness gathered together and expressed by the word "God".

Similarly, we may wonder whether evil may be fully apprehended without Satan or the demonic, as myth or reality. The idea of the Devil is present in almost every culture in different forms; there is an almost universal belief that the amount and complexity of evil in the world is not reducible to formulae. The Holocaust may be explained in political and socio – psychological terms, but we feel that the explanation is incomplete. There is sometimes an overbalance of evil in events and in individuals which must be called demonic. We must realise that involvement in the occult tends to weight people towards evil.

**Mark Woods**

## Trends

Trends have the unique quality of looking to the past, representing the present while serving as the indicators of the future. A trend shows how we are moving in a new or at least a different direction. It builds upon the past while it broadly hints as to the future. It draws to our attention that something is taking place in a continuing way. In this article I want to indicate one person's observations of some of the trends in the American Baptist Churches, USA.

As the Region Executive Minister for the American Baptist Churches of Vermont and New Hampshire, I have observed significant changes in the past fifteen years. I share with you what I see as the trends which point to future changes in our American Baptist Churches as we enter the decade of the 90's.

This article is a working document. Hopefully it will be of interest. However, its real value will be if it stimulates study and discussion of the trends in Baptist life and ministry in the United Kingdom. This, then, is a working document in outline form. I would be happy at some time in the future to write in more detail and in greater depth on items in the outline.

### **Trends in the American Baptist Churches as a denomination:**

1. There is a concerted effort to insure maximum feasible participation in the decision-making process. In all the expressions of our denominational life there is a concerted and concentrated effort to involve as many as possible in



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the planning, promotion, preparation and program of our ministry and mission as American Baptists.

2. There is a move toward a more ordered ministry and process of ordination throughout the American Baptist Churches in the United States. The National Commission on Ministry has developed Recommended Procedures for Ordination, Commissioning and Recognition for the Christian Ministry in the American Baptist Churches. The policies and procedures outlined in this booklet have been accepted by the Region Commissions on Ministry and they are now being implemented by most of the Regions.
3. There is a continuing effort to make our placement (settlement) system work for our pastors and for our churches. The Region Commission on the Ministry, Ministers' Councils and Region Staff are united in making the placement system open, fair and effective, being beneficial to professional church leaders and local church pulpit committees alike. The American Baptist Personnel System has developed new Personnel Profiles for all professional church leaders. It has also developed Church Reflection materials which help the churches to know themselves and to know what they are looking for in a pastor.
4. There is a growing emphasis on the pastor – to – pastors and pastor – to – churches role of the Region Executive Minister. The key role is not to be the business administrator, the mission promoter or the program developer. The key role and responsibility is pastoral.
5. There is the growing use of hearings and forums in local churches to discuss and act on social issues and concerns. Many of our churches are engaged in local ministries, meeting the needs of those in their community.
6. There is a continuing strong support of our American Baptist Churches USA mission outreach. This would be true of both the regional, the national and international expressions of our missionary program. The trend continues in all our work to train local leaders to assume the responsibility for the leadership program in their area or country.
7. There is the growing interest in Personal Witness. This is found in outreach work, sharing the Good News through a variety of Evangelistic and Social Concern efforts.
8. There is evidence of a new vitality and growth in all the different types of churches within the ABC. This has been in part due to local churches participating in the denominational Grow by Caring emphasis.
9. There is a new concern and an excitement about starting new churches and working at the same time to revitalize older churches. A dramatic turn about in opinion and in spirit came into the ABC through its new program in New Church Development.
10. There is a new interest in our heritage as Baptists and in the history of our branch of the Baptist Family. Region wide programs of continuing education on Baptist History, Theology and Polity have been supported beyond anyone's expectations. Local churches are having study groups to help their

members to know and appreciate their Baptist Heritage.

11. There appears to be a definite trend in reference to job satisfaction and sense of effectiveness on the part of our local church pastors. This is a turn – about from a few years ago when lack of job satisfaction and lack of self – worth as pastors was evident across the land.
12. There is a developing concern for the renewal of the worship experience in the local church and with a deeper spiritual life for clergy and laity on the part of our denominational leadership.
13. There is a continued interest and participation in programs of Continuing Education for clergy and laity.
14. There is a growing number of women in our seminaries and every year a larger number of ordained women are being placed in local churches. Twenty percent of the pastors in the ABC of Vermont and New Hampshire are women. Women find it more difficult to find placement outside of the Northeastern part of the country.
15. There is a new emphasis and excitement in the work and witness of the laity in the American Baptist Church life.
16. There is evidence that American Baptists are becoming more ecumenical, more inter – racial and more evangelical. The churches in the ABC are working to broaden their involvement in ministry with other Christians, to become a truly inclusive denomination and to be a more effective witness of God's love as revealed to us through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I had planned to share fourteen placement trends and issues from the perspective of American Baptists, but space will not permit me to do so at this time. If there is interest, I would be glad to share them with you some time in the future.

We American Baptists here in Vermont and New Hampshire look forward to the new decade of the 90's. Our prayer is that we stay close to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in order that the Lord may use us as the agents of His reconciling love and the instruments of His Holy Will.

**Robert W. Williams**

## Book Reviews

**Morality and The Market Place:** by Brian Griffiths (Hodder & Stoughton, 1989, 160pp, 5.95)

It all started with Milton Friedman who posed a fundamental question: "How can you be a Christian and advocate the market economy? After all, didn't Jesus say that it is more difficult for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven?" In that context Brian Griffiths, professional economist, and among other influential positions, a member of the

P.M.'s policy unit at No. 10 and a committed Christian, explores the answers to the challenge. You can be a Thatcherite, with all that it implies, and be a good and responsible Bible believer.

As an economist he lives in the world of the theory and practice of money policy making. As a Christian with clear convictions about the nature of the Gospel, he is dismayed at the current privatisation of religion, the irrelevance of most religion to public policy, the inability (and unwillingness) of many preachers and members to make any connection between biblical faith and the new economic world, and the approach of so many left wingers (Marxism in disguise). He draws upon what he sees as biblical principles: wealth creation; private property; the family as the central unit for our society with a legitimate claim on the economy and stake in it; the relief of poverty as of more significance for Governments than the promotion of equality; and their responsibility to alleviate injustice. It must be added that he is cautious about all 'ISMS, not least materialism, and places a central importance on accountability of individuals, leaders and governments. His Christian perspective is different from mere capitalism or Marxism and pleads for a questioning of all presuppositions and assumptions. His theory is one of "a market economy bounded by biblical principles of justice". He is very critical of Marxism as an alternative and is equally scathing of those Christians who adopt a Liberation Theology stance: "...accepts uncritically an economic and political ideology based on Marxism and then interprets the text within that framework". He is critical too of the old social gospel, where the Kingdom of God is some social reality based on sharing and caring rather than a fundamental christological category. His method is one of "creation ethics" rather than "social ethics", and believes that more consideration should be given to the "mediates", i.e. those institutions and structures which mediate between the individual and the global and corporate societies in which we live e.g. the family; the trade union; the village; and school. He calls for a theology of mediation. The concluding section of the book sets Western approaches of the market economy into the framework of the needs of the developing world.

This is a seminal book, strangely relevant to recent events in British politics. I believe all ministers should read it and Churches could well use it as the basis for discussion and prayer. It certainly calls for some serious theological and biblical work to be done, and for a working theology for all of us whereby we can relate the Faith to the structures of our society in order to transform them. You don't have to agree with him to recognise that he's saying something important!

## **David Tennant**

**Conversion: A Spiritual Journey** by Malcolm Muggeridge. (Fount, 1989, 160pp, 2.95)

From Atheist's Champion to God's Advocate – so we have come to think of Malcolm Muggeridge, famed journalist and broadcaster who writes: "In the beginning was the News, and the news became words, and dwelt among us, graceless and full of lies." We don't hear much of the atheist here, but of the search for faith which Muggeridge traces through his life.

He tells us that he was received into the Catholic Church on 27th November 1982, and asks: "Was it a Conversion?" The rest of the book shows how his life

was leading to this point. He writes of himself in the third person. Thus we read: "The Boy acquires a Bible of his own and reads it surreptitiously, as it might have been some forbidden book like 'Fanny Hill'." As an undergraduate "Our student manages to master the 'Evidences' to the point of satisfying the examiner, but in thus 'proving' God's existence, he finds that actually it has been called in question".

And so we are taken through his life – as Child, Boy, Adolescent, Undergraduate, Teacher, Journalist, Soldier, Foreign Correspondent. Mother Teresa had a major influence on him, and wrote to him: "I think, dear friend, I understand you better now...you are to me like Nicodemus (who came to Jesus under cover of night), and I'm sure the answer is the same: "Unless you become a little child..."

We, too, will understand more about Malcolm Muggeridge from this book – and perhaps about God, too. Almost every page has some witty or challenging or thought – provoking passage. Writing at the age of 84 he recalls another octogenarian who, asked to account for his longevity, replied, "Oh, just bad luck!" He ends: "And so I live, just for each day, knowing my life will soon be over, ....knowing that although Christendom may be over – Christ lives!"

### **A.C. Duncan Johnstone**

**God of Our Journey** by Michael Walker (Marshall Pickering, 1989, 152pp, 4.99)

*God of Our Journey* is a deeply devotional and theological book. It focusses upon our need at every stage for spiritual growth. The introduction highlights two perspectives from which we view Christian theology; the balcony or the road. This book is concerned with participation, rather than spectating.

Michael Walker recognises that each of us view God from the perspective of our own limited theology. Whilst remaining sympathetic to differences in the Church, he views critically the barriers which have been erected. Along the way live issues are tackled: power in the Church; forms of worship; religious sectarianism; spiritual exclusiveness; use of religious jargon; why churches from a tradition of dissent find dissent most difficult; what theologies of the Incarnation and Atonement really mean and how they affect our relationship with God and the world.

I found the chapter on prayer very helpful. It reinforced the need for a personal encounter with God. Yet more moving are the final chapters on 'suffering' and the God of our journey. Michael Walker speaks of the loneliness of pain and suffering's arbitrary nature. Death, Resurrection and Eternity fill the remaining pages. His description of Mary's encounter with the risen Christ is most telling. The world as it *was* had not been given back to her. Jesus had not been raised so that everything could revert back to normal, but so that he might direct her to a future which lies in God's fullness and which is shared with all his people.

Finally, his view of preparing for death is an inspiration to Christian faith and hope, and is especially moving when we consider how close the author was, in his own words, to arriving home, uncertain of what other journeys await him within the limitless possibilities of God's eternity.

### **Anthony Orr**

**Volunteers: A Resource for Your Church** by Lesley Edmonds (The Volunteer Centre U.K., 1988, 52pp, 3.50)

Apart from ministers, our churches are run by volunteers. The author, who is now training for the ministry at Regent's, has drawn on material originally written for an MSc., with the aim of helping ministers or church leaders maximise the potential of volunteering in their congregations.

There are useful chapters on recruiting, involving and keeping volunteers, as well as on why we need them, and what motivates them. In the course of a short space many good and helpful things are said, but I was left with questions in two areas.

Firstly, there is considerable importance given to providing job descriptions (two samples are given in an appendix), planning the task concerned with the volunteer, informal assessment and formal appraisal. Even if these things are desirable they are light years away from what goes on in most of our churches. (For some people even the suggestion of training is threatening, let alone job descriptions and the rest). Perhaps the author will write further about how to implement this approach in churches which don't have it and don't want it.

Secondly, on the first page she promises that what she has to offer will save ministers time. A promise likely to encourage one to read further, but one which is not fulfilled – at least not if the minister is to be the volunteer organiser, write the job descriptions, approach people, train, evaluate and appraise them. If all this is done the church will surely function more effectively, but the minister will be busier than ever! The way for the minister to make more time is to find someone else to be the volunteer organiser, but the job as outlined is so vast as to daunt all but the most capable and committed.

A stimulating piece of work, then, not least because of the questions it raises, as well as the points that it makes.

**John V. Matthews**

(Copies available from 29 Lower King's Road, Berkhamsted, Herts, price 3.50)

**The Case for Women's Ministry** by Ruth B. Edwards, (SPCK, 1989, 244pp, 10.95)

Ruth Edwards is lecturer in New Testament at the University of Aberdeen and a Deacon in the Scottish Episcopal Church. This book is one from the Biblical Foundations in Theology series, edited by James Dunn and James Mackey.

The book is well constructed, readable and informative particularly for non – historians. In the first half of the book Ruth Edwards considers both Jewish and Graeco – Roman cultural views of women. She also examines Jesus' treatment of women and re-examines Paul's practices. She develops her theory by careful handling of the biblical material as she considers not just women, but the nature of the New Testament conception of Christian ministry.

In the second half of the book she goes on to analyse the historical development of attitudes to women. She leads us to question some major misconcep-



# WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

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Dear Fellow Ministers,

I never cease to marvel at the number of folk who have been influenced by the work of the West Ham Central Mission. There is hardly a family in the East End who have not had some connection, often many years ago, in the worship and practical service offered by the Mission for 85 years or more.

Even more impressive, though, is the fact that, as I travel the country in my preaching and 'deputation' work, I am constantly meeting folk in all kinds of unexpected places, who have been aware of our work for the whole of their lives, and who, in one way or another, have shared in it. "We always had a West Ham Central Mission collecting box in our home" — or — "I remember how, as a child, I used to help pack parcels of clothing or toys to send to the Mission".

Our work has been a very real part of the 'Baptist' consciousness for a long time — and I am delighted and heartened by the evidence of this.

We can't simply live off the capital of past generations — (whether it be spiritual or financial). The work is going on and, I believe, *must* go on. There is still vital work for us to do, and we intend, under God, to do it.

If this is to happen, though, we need to engage the interest, prayer and financial support of *today's* men and women. We want to feel that the West Ham Central Mission is known and appreciated by the *young* members of our churches — not just their parents and grandparents.

We shall do all we can to make it known — but will you help too? It is you who are in touch with our church members and committees. Please commend our work to them as you feel able, so that, in the 21st century folk will still be saying — "Oh yes! I know the West Ham Central Mission".

Every good wish,

**Trevor W. Davis**  
**Superintendent Minister**

tions present both inside and outside the Church as to the nature of priesthood, ministry and authority. Throughout she shows her understanding and insights are not limited to those of Anglicanism and there are helpful interjections as to Non – Conformist perception of ministry.

I found her chapter on “God as Father and Mother” carefully judged and very helpful. Throughout she leads us to begin to draw conclusions although these are not forced on us by an overtly polemical style. The evidence of Bible, Tradition and theological reason are threaded together with an unobtrusive strand of personal experience which seems to be the secret of making fairly weighty material digestible. That Ruth Edwards concludes women should be fully incorporated into every form of Christian ministry and leadership is not surprising, but the way she presents her case is sufficiently unique to make this book worth buying and reading.

## **Jane D. Hassell**

**The Rural Church: Towards 2000** a symposium by the Rural Theology Association (1989) 200pp, 7.50)

Firstly, for those of you who, like me, know nothing about the Rural Theology Association (this book grew out of a conference held by the afore – mentioned Association) let me put you in the picture. RTA was founded by three Anglican clergymen, and functions in five basic ways:

1. Rural Groups meeting in different parts of the country.
2. Theological discussions related to practical issues of rural life and ministry.
3. Associations with organisations and individuals who share a common interest.
4. Consultations in different regions.
5. A Better Country Magazine, published three times a year.

Now a word about the book itself. *The Rural Church: Towards 2000* grew out of a conference held at Scargill in 1988. It is an attempt to move into more general things about the rural Church, its particular style, tradition and opportunity. The book starts with the historical setting and moves into theological reflection. It covers a variety of subjects by different kinds of people. It mentions such things as “a rural consciousness”, “given-ness about rural society” and I quote “Neighbourliness does not happen. Many villages act as their own police force without conscious arrangement. There is also a given-ness about the Church, so that growth comes when fresh initiatives engage with what is already given.”

It mentions how rural life is changing dramatically. “In some areas villages are becoming a community of communities where different groups have little to do with one another. Does the Church have any option but to be just one community among the others?”

This book has very much an Anglican bias, only a few times does it seem to recognise the Free Churches in village situations. "In some cases people look to the nearest they can get to the nineteenth century parson, in others to the nineteenth century Free Church".

Speaking of Evangelism the book says: "Evangelism is urgent but not easy. The personal challenge will be made where people live out their faith cheek by jowl with others in the wholeness of their lives. But it is also necessary to invent occasions, and challenge structures. It is necessary to bring in men and women of faith from outside".

Personally speaking, I found the book uninspiring and difficult to get into, but there again that may be my fault.

### **Tom Elsby**

(Copies may be obtained from R.T.A. c/o Bulwick Rectory, Corby, Northants)

### **Useful Resources**

1. *Today's World*: A series of current affairs studies produced by the Baptist Men's Movement, and written by experts in their field, covering such areas as World Hunger; Changing Patterns of Family Life, and Poverty and Powerlessness. Each pamphlet contains up – to – date facts, together with discussion starters and practical suggestions for follow-up. Complete sets of nine studies may be obtained from the Secretary, Clifford Challinor, Kingsley, Pontesbury, Salop, SY5 0QH Cost: single copies 10p (15p post) and set of nine 50p (24p post)
2. *Coping With Difficult Emotions*: A Series of seven Bible studies produced by Sutton Baptist Church, dealing with such emotions as 'fear'; 'anger'; 'loving'. Biblical material is interspersed with stimulating questions and comment. They may be obtained from Michael Ball, 10 Bridgefield Road, Sutton SM1 2DG.

(If your church has produced similar material, suitable for a wider circulation, we should be pleased to make it known in *Fraternal*. - Ed.

## **Commonwealth and USA**

I am glad to report that I am receiving a steady flow of correspondence from some of our Overseas colleagues. Most of it comes from Australia where the majority of our overseas colleagues, who are interested in the *Fraternal*, reside. However, I recently had a very warm letter of appreciation from a Rev. Brian Meadows of Auckland 4, New Zealand, who says that he has been receiving the *Fraternal* for thirty years and, despite changes of Editor, has gone on enjoying the contents. Brian sent a generous contribution to the postage etc. and we appreciate it.

Initially, it is to pay subs. that ministers from overseas write to me; but after that, with some, a more regular correspondence ensues. I wish to develop this — so colleagues 'down-under', please take note! It is interesting to receive news from you with your

views on the *Fraternal*, plus any information that you think your English colleagues might find interesting!

I have just received a letter from a minister in Grovedale, Australia, who wrote on behalf of a friend who has gone to Zimbabwe, asking if we could continue to send the *Fraternal* to him as he served as a missionary there. We, of course, will do that. The name of the missionary is Ray Sprigg. The friend who made the request added that he too had enjoyed reading the current issue of the *Fraternal*. Such an 'invitation' to send out another *Fraternal* could not be missed, so I asked Jim Clarke to send a copy to this minister. Hope you enjoy your own copy, Andrew Biggs!

We have received news of the movements of some of our colleagues in Australia from the Australian Baptist Union representative, Geoffrey Holland. I mention just a few of the more significant moves. I appreciate that for us in England this information is about friends who are unknown; but if we include some items and use them as a prayer basis, we will begin to build a real fraternal link with our overseas colleagues.

Ruth Sampson, a pastor at Box Hill, began, in January, a job as a member of the Pastoral Staff of the First Baptist Church in Washington D.C. The church is next to the Australian Embassy Office — is this chance or providence?

Andrew Stelling and his wife Jenny are travelling around Europe, the Middle East and the USA during 1990. We wish them safe journeying and much blessing as they see new places and meet so many different people.

Christopher Page, who has been Assistant Minister of Outreach at McNeil Baptist Church, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, has now been appointed Senior Minister of the Church. Congratulations Chris — a very happy and fruitful ministry in your position.