



Editorial

GROWING TOGETHER

In our last issue we printed Richard Foster's *Renovare Covenant*, with its call to an integrated spiritual renewal. Foster's vision is the integration of the best of five key traditions: the contemplative, the holiness, the charismatic, the social justice and the evangelical.

It is a sign of the vibrancy of modern Baptist evangelicalism that the *Mainstream* newsletter covers a wide range of issues. In this edition are articles on evangelism and church growth - the underlying core of the mainstream movement. We also consider contemplative prayer and two of today's major areas of pastoral need: child abuse and transitions.

Such a mix is stimulating. But I consider the most important article of this issue to be the statement on men, women and biblical equality. Your church may have thought this through with great care, or maybe you've been putting off discussion for too long, but there's one fact you cannot escape. This is a burning issue in our cultural context.

I am so glad that this statement has now been produced by an international team of leading evangelical theologians, rigorously exposing the traditions of church and culture to the teaching of the Bible. Agree with it or not, if you make it available it should provoke and clarify discussion in your church.



Finally, do make sure you have booked for the *Mainstream* conference. With John White speaking, Nigel Wright leading worship, and a wide ranging additional programme, this promises to be a major stimulus for *Mainstream* Baptists. Do you want to know more of "Leadership in the Power of the Spirit"? Then place your booking before it's too late!

NEWSLETTER No. 38 - OCTOBER 1990

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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.

MEN, WOMEN AND BIBLICAL EQUALITY

The Bible teaches the full equality of men and women in Creation and in Redemption (Gen 1:26-28, 2:23, 5:1-2; 1 Cor 11:11-12; Gal 3:13, 28, 5:1).

The Bible teaches that God has revealed Himself in the totality of Scripture, the authoritative Word of God (Matt 5:18; John 10:35; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). We believe that Scripture is to be interpreted wholistically and thematically. We also recognize the necessity of making a distinction between inspiration and interpretation: Inspiration relates to the divine impulse and control whereby the whole canonical Scripture is the Word of God; interpretation relates to the human activity whereby we seek to apprehend revealed truth in harmony with the totality of Scripture and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To be truly biblical, Christians must continually examine their faith and practice under the searchlight of Scripture.

BIBLICAL TRUTHS

CREATION

1. The Bible teaches that both man and woman were created in God's image, had a direct relationship with God, and shared jointly the responsibilities of bearing and rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Gen 1:26-28).

2. The Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. The word "helper" (ezer), used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18, refers to God in most instances of Old Testament usage (eg 1 Sam 7:12; Ps 121:1-2). Consequently the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female subordination or inferiority.

3. The Bible teaches that the forming of woman from man demonstrates the fundamental unity and equality of human beings (Gen 2:21-23). In Genesis 2:18, 20 the word "suitable" (kenegdo) denotes equality and adequacy.

4. The Bible teaches that man and woman were co-participants in the Fall: Adam was no less

culpable than Eve (Gen 3:6; Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22).

5. The Bible teaches that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God's ideal order.

REDEMPTION

6. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ came to redeem women as well as men. Through faith in Christ we all become children of God, one in Christ, and heirs to the blessings of salvation without reference to racial, social, or gender distinctions (John 1:12-13; Rom 8:14-17; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:26-28).

COMMUNITY

7. The Bible teaches that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on men and women alike. Without distinction, the Holy Spirit indwells women and men, and sovereignly distributes gifts without preference as to gender (Acts 2:1-21; 1 Cor 12:7, 11, 14:31).

8. The Bible teaches that both women and men are called to develop their spiritual gifts and to use them as stewards of the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10-11). Both men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ, under His authority (Acts 1:14, 18:26, 21:9; Rom 16:1-7, 12-13, 15; Phil 4:2-3; Col 4:15; see also Mk 15:40-41, 16:1-7; Luke 8:1-3; John 20:17-18; compare also Old Testament examples: Judges 4: 4-14, 5:7; 2 Chron 34:22-28; Prov 31:30-31; Micah 6:4).

9. The Bible teaches that, in the New Testament economy, women as well as men exercise the prophetic, priestly and royal functions (Acts 2:17-18, 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Rev 1:6, 5:10). Therefore, the few isolated texts that appear to restrict the full redemptive freedom of women must not be interpreted simplistically and in contradiction to the rest of Scripture, but their interpretation must take into account their relation to the broader teaching of Scripture and their total context (1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:33-36; 1 Tim 2:9-15).

10. The Bible defines the function of leadership as the empowerment of others for service rather than as the exercise of power over them (Matt 20:25-28, 23:8; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:13-17; Gal 5:13; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

FAMILY

11. The Bible teaches that husbands and wives are heirs together of the grace of life and that they are bound together in a relationship of mutual submission and responsibility (1 Cor 7:3-5; Eph 5:21; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Gen 21:12). The husband's function as "head" is to be understood as self-giving love and service within this relationship of mutual submission (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7).

12. The Bible teaches that both mothers and fathers are to exercise leadership in the nurture,

training, discipline and teaching of their children (Exod 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 6:6-9, 21:18-21, 27:16; Prov 1:8, 6:20; Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20; 2 Tim 1:5; see also Luke 2:51).

APPLICATION

COMMUNITY

1. In the church, spiritual gifts of women and men are to be recognized, developed and used in serving and teaching ministries at all levels of involvement: as small group leaders, counsellors, facilitators, administrators, ushers, communion servers, and board members, and in pastoral care, teaching, preaching, and worship.

In so doing, the church will honour God as the source of spiritual gifts. The church will also fulfil God's mandate of stewardship without the appalling loss to God's kingdom that results when half the church's members are excluded from positions of responsibility.

2. In the church, public recognition is to be given to both women and men who exercise ministries of service and leadership.

In so doing, the church will model the unity and harmony that should characterize the community of believers. In a world fractured by discrimination and segregation, the church will dissociate itself from worldly or pagan devices designed to make women feel inferior for being female. It will help prevent their departure from the church or their rejection of the Christian faith.

FAMILY

3. In the Christian home, husband and wife are to defer to each other in seeking to fulfil each other's preferences, desires and aspirations. Neither spouse is to seek to dominate the other, but each is to act as servant of the other, in humility considering the other as better than oneself. In case of decisional deadlock, they should seek resolution through biblical methods of conflict resolution rather than by one spouse imposing a decision upon the other.

In so doing, husband and wife will help the Christian home stand against improper use of power and authority by spouses and will protect the home from wife and child abuse that sometimes tragically follows a hierarchical interpretation of the husband's "headship".

4. In the Christian home, spouses are to learn to share the responsibilities of leadership on the basis of gifts, expertise, and availability, with due regard for the partner most affected by the decision under consideration.

In so doing, spouses will learn to respect their competencies and their complementarity. This will prevent one spouse from becoming the perennial loser, often forced to practice ingratiating or deceitful manipulation to protect self-esteem. By establishing their marriage on a partnership basis, the couple will protect it from

joining the tide of dead or broken marriages resulting from marital inequities.

5. In the Christian home, couples who share a lifestyle characterized by the freedom they find in Christ will do so without experiencing feelings of guilt or resorting to hypocrisy. They are freed to emerge from an unbiblical "traditionalism" and can rejoice in their mutual accountability in Christ.

In so doing, they will openly express their obedience to Scripture, will model an example for other couples in quest of freedom in Christ, and will stand against patterns of domination and inequality sometimes imposed upon church & family.

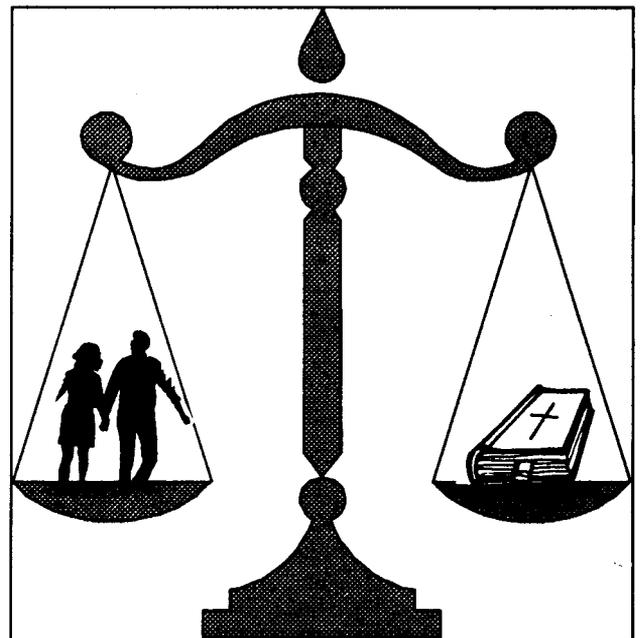
We believe that biblical equality as reflected in this document is true to Scripture.

We stand united in our conviction that the Bible, in its totality, is the liberating Word that provides the most effective way for women and men to exercise the gifts distributed by the Holy Spirit and thus to serve God.

CHRISTIANS FOR BIBLICAL EQUALITY

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FIVE KEYS TO GROWTH

Learning from Bracknell Family Church

When people ask me "To what do you contribute the success of Bracknell Family Church?" my first response is, "What is 500 plus among 80,000 local population?" Hardly a scratch on the surface! Yet, in 26 years I have seen a church grow from little more than twenty to its present size; work through two building projects, the second costing £3 million; move in and out of temporary accommodation a number of times; offerings grow from £12 a week in 1964 to £4,000 a week at present. It needs to be mentioned at this point, all accompanied by many mistakes en route. The question is, what are the underlying reasons for the growth small though it is?

1. Vision

"Without vision the people perish." I went to Bracknell straight from College with a God-given belief in my heart that God was going to do something big in Bracknell - big numerically, big in influence. The vision was not understood by me except in its crude form - the refining was to come.

Was it to be one big church or a number of small ones? After constant and painful self-analysis, along with a group of fellow leaders, deacons, elders, and the people, the decision was agreed. We regularly involved the people. We chose the drip feed method. At every opportunity, in every kind of group and meeting, we talked about the vision. Sundays were used too, and expository preaching incorporated the vision. Question and answer meetings were also employed in an effort to take as many people with us as possible. Prayer meetings with specific, direct praying became a high priority.

Communication ebbed and flowed, but all the while there was a deliberate, conscious effort to inform and discuss and refine the vision with as many people as possible. Believing that the local church is God's unit to feed the saints and evangelise the non-Christian, the vision was eventually summed up in the words - work hard locally, think internationally.

2. Faith

We faced the truth that we "walk by faith not sight". Nothing, therefore, became impossible. We exercised faith against traditional arguments - "We've never done that before." "Haven't got the people or the expertise or the experience or enough leaders." "Others have tried it and failed."

"People won't cope with change." "If you implement that, Mr and Mrs So-and-so will leave." (Some people did leave!) We committed ourselves to obeying God's word. We prayed, gave our money, evangelised, sought to have open relationships, worshipped, preached the word.

Not everyone agreed with the vision of the church. Not everyone felt able to exercise faith. We stressed faith without anxiety, reasoning from the Bible for our actions. We sought to allow God's Word to dominate us. We knew we were far from God's norm but we went for it - faith in the immediacy of God. We expected God, through his Spirit, to lead us in the details. We believed "faith without works is dead" so we sought to implement all the works the Spirit of God revealed to us.

3. Finance

God showed us that money is a key to growth. Tithing is preached as "a starter" for giving. Eventually the people were asked to double tithe their gross income, one tenth for the ministry and one tenth for the building project. Many, though not all, responded. Tithing gross income has been a characteristic of our church for at least 25 years. We have sought never to ask as a first question "Can we afford it?". Rather, we ask, "Is it God's will?" We then proceed believing that the money will come in.

Money flows between family and family, individual and individual. The higher earners help the lower earners. Those in debt are helped to get out of debt through gifts of money, and through advice on how to handle finances. We haven't had 100% success, but many people have amazing testimonies of God's grace in their financial experiences.

We feel God spoke to us about the church's money being tithed. We give away 10% to missions. This 10% covers philanthropic, though not necessarily Christian, organisations, like for example local hospitals and Relate. 10% goes to people who minister to us and to people who minister elsewhere. 3% goes into a fund to help the needy within our church.

We are seeking to combat one of the most insidious sins in the British church today, namely materialism. Life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions. I salute so many of our people who have committed themselves to a new life with a new lifestyle.

4. The Charismatic dimension

We look for the character, fruit and gifts of the Spirit to flow together, seeking to keep a biblical balance. The gifts operate in small groups and in the larger Sunday meetings. We are willing to weigh prophecy publicly, ready to make mistakes, admit them and learn from them. We are unwilling to be emotionally blackmailed - not allowing tradition to rule, recognising that tradition is merely a democracy of the dead.

In our worship times we want to follow the Spirit, seeking not to crush the spontaneous uniqueness that comes from him. Institutional and organisational religion has been gradually giving way to New Testament life. In all things we look to the Bible as the final authority.

5. Evangelism

Believing the call to "go into all the world and preach the gospel", we seek to go. We quickly found that there were excuses made not to evangelise, but we said "No!" to our prejudices and fears and went.

We encourage people to talk to their friends, work mates and neighbours. We run regular guest services on Sundays. We use barbecues, men's breakfasts, and any other method people feel able to employ. We advertise in the local papers, through leaflets and we do door-to-door visitation. We welcome visitors at each meeting and encourage the church to think visitors, think evangelism.

Behind all this activity is a sound belief in the sovereignty of God. If God does not save people, nothing we do will. Jesus Christ and his death as the sin bearer is openly preached. All other aspects - for example that God will meet your personal, social, friendship, financial needs - come second.

With evangelism, like every other aspect of our lives with God, we have found a continuous need for teaching, training, exhortation and exam-

ple. Follow up and helping new disciples to grow are also, of course, essential.

6. Outside help

The sixth reason I believe our church is growing is because we saw the biblical truth of Ephesians 4 ministries today, and committed ourselves to receiving outside help. In fact, in all my ministry, by God's grace, I have sought to encourage the church to receive outside help. Firstly in the normally accepted way, Sunday visiting preachers. Then we had weekends when people with specialised ministries came; implementation of truths received was given high priority.

Finally we sought ongoing relationships with men who could advise and help us to build our local church. Things had to be worked out and the major question for all local churches, of course, is "Who rules the local church?" Is it the local leadership in good, open relationships with the people, or is it the outside ministries, whatever name you give them?

Our answer is, It is all built on relationships, with our primary relationship to God. Anything that is built on power, whether it be in the hands of an individual or groups, ends in disaster. We have come to work out in practice such truths as: leadership and following; mutual submission and accountability; the priesthood of all believers. We saw that it is not God's will for any local church to go it alone.

In conclusion, let me say that we have so much more to learn. We are still making mistakes. We recognise that, but for the grace of God, we would not have seen what we do today. We are yet a scratch on the surface, but we know that we stand with millions of others in that historic and evangelical and evangelistic line of dissent that was declared to Abraham - "Your descendants will be more than the stars in the sky." Quivering with excitement, sobered by the reality of the Lord's work, we remain people of vision and people of destiny.
Ben Davies

THE MAINSTREAM CONFERENCE 14th - 16th January 1991

Theme: Leadership in the Power of the Spirit
Main speaker: Dr. John White

Dr. White, psychiatrist and Christian leader, was formerly Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Manitoba. He has also worked in Latin America with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. He has written many international bestsellers including *The Fight*, *Eros Defiled*, *The Masks of Melancholy* and *When the Spirit Comes With Power*.

Cost: £44.00 including a non-returnable £10 deposit, cheques payable to Mainstream.

Bookings with deposit to:

Dr. John Weaver, The Manse, 35 Highfield Road, Rushden, Northants. NN10 9QD.

Praying the Jesus Prayer

The Jesus prayer is one of the shortest of ancient Christian prayers. In a handful of words it is a confession of faith, an expression of devotion, a recognition of personal unworthiness and a submission to God's grace in Christ. It can be learnt in a moment and prayed for a lifetime:

**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
Have mercy on me, a sinner.**

Like a great painting, poem or piece of music, this prayer does not yield up its fulness in an instant. It is a prayer to dwell upon, in thoughtful repetition. As medicine requires time to restore you, let the truth of the prayer sink in slowly. As a connoisseur savours a single sip of rare wine, savour the truth of this prayer as you repeat it before the living Christ.

At first you may be tempted to turn quickly to other prayers. Don't rush. This prayer is an antidote to the pace and superficiality of life today. There's no need to gloss over and hasten on. Centre your soul upon this vital truth; there's nothing more important in your life.

As you repeat the prayer, take it slowly. Find a posture which suits you. Some like to kneel in penitence, others prefer to pray while walking. Still others find it best to sit in a relaxed and open posture, comfortable and trusting before the Saviour.

You may like to link your breathing to the prayer. As you breathe in, remembering to keep

it slow, silently pray the first line. In this way seek to receive the presence of Christ by his Spirit, even as you inhale oxygen physically. As you exhale the carbon dioxide, which would poison you if it remained in your lungs, pray the second line, giving over to the Son of God the sin which poisons your life spiritually.

If it helps, remember that one of the biblical words for the Holy Spirit is "breath". Just as in communion you can "feed by faith on Christ in your heart", even as you eat the physical bread, in this meditative prayer the simple act of breathing can take on a sacramental significance.

We naturally want to avoid empty repetition, any use of this prayer seen as a grasping after uncertain forgiveness, or indeed hyperventilation. But in an age of stress, intensity and haste, countless Christians have found in this prayer a deeper peace. Try it, and see if it helps you "still and quieten your soul before the living God" (Psalm 131).



Rob Warner

CHILD ABUSE

One in thirteen children are sexually abused in Britain today according to recent statistics. This includes oral, anal and vaginal penetration. Sexual child abuse takes place where children under the age of seventeen who don't have the knowledge or are unable to give informed and adult consent, are made to take part in sexual activities which break to taboos of society's norms. To protect the innocent, names have been changed in the following case history.

Case history

The Kane family had been attending church for a couple of years since they moved into the area. Jeff and Louise were an integral part of church life and Jane, their eight year old daughter, was a regular attender at Sunday School and Brownies.

One Sunday Jane was unusually quiet. Her Sunday School teacher spoke to her and Jane told her that her father, who had always played

"games" with her in bed, had asked her last night to touch parts on him that she didn't want to touch. He had been very angry with her when she refused.

After discussion with the minister, Jane's mother was informed. When confronted Jeff admitted having abused Jane for the past two years. He was told by the minister to admit this to the police. Social Services became involved because of their legal obligation to protect children. Does the church have a role?

Unfortunately, Jane's history is not uncommon. Child abuse is rarely discussed within the church, but it is prevalent in our society. If the church is committed to performing God's work, then it must face reality. The church can be a wonderful community of healing, bringing discipline, accountability, loving support and a framework for true growth.

As children we grow up making sense of ourselves and others by the relationships we have with our parents. We begin to trust them at an early age. It is natural to do this and we rarely challenge their actions. When abuse occurs, the message the child receives is mixed. Jane enjoyed the games; she had no reason not to trust her father. It was the only time he paid much attention to her, and she interpreted these abusive games as fatherly love. However, sensing something was wrong, she felt uncomfortable and so she disclosed.

Disclosure is only the beginning of a long struggle. Jane's world and future life changed from that day. She experienced guilt for breaking up the family, for having enjoyed the games, for hurting mum. She felt unclean and bad. She had lost her dad who she loved despite what he had done. Jane needs to be given constant reassurance that she is believed and was not to blame.

If she does not receive professional help to counsel her through the experience, Jane may grow up "blocking" the past. Long term effects of sexual child abuse can be devastating. Her trust betrayed, she may lack any self-esteem. Relationships with men may be poor. Her view of God, despite her present belief in one, may become consumed with anger at Him for allowing the abuse to happen.

Louise, Jane's mother, is "in the middle". Her own world is disappearing once Jane has disclosed. As a wife, she is taught to support her husband. As a mother, to protect her children. She condemns herself for not noticing anything, but cannot believe it really happened.

Louise's own support has gone. She relied on her husband financially and emotionally. Her guilt feelings are because of her failure as a mother, and perhaps as a wife. She needs to

reassure Jane she is believed and for any hope of reconciliation or rebonding, she needs to give Jane an effective foundation.

For Jane and her mother to survive and grow through the abuse to wholeness, they need a lot of reassurance and support. Jeff too has a life to rebuild, if he is willing. The church has enormous scope to respond with compassion to the calamity of child sexual abuse.

The role of the church

1. The church must recognise that sexual abuse exists.
2. Church leaders must become acquainted with how to recognise abuse and the nature of abuse.
3. The church, a community of healing, can offer survivors acceptance, love and affirmation that they are people of self-worth. The road to healing for many is long and rugged, with many pitfalls. The church can support families such as the Kanes by prayer - prayer partners perhaps. Some could be trained to counsel and offer practical help - this may include help with financial difficulties arising from the break up of the family.
4. The family may need explanations and guidance through the legal network.
5. They may also just need someone to listen. Support groups for family members could be formed, or premises offered for such groups to be set up.
6. Children may have only been used to loving attention when abused. This may result in them not having an adequate concept of love later in life. They may block out what happened, or it may lead to early promiscuity. Teaching on the love of Christ can help.
7. Children will feel dirty, unclean, horrible. They will even perform ritual washing for two to eight years. In helping them become "whole", the church needs to help them bring to the surface all those feelings, and also help them to forgive.
8. Those who offend need to accept the responsibility for their actions. If they continue to make excuses and not accept the blame, their relationships cannot be rebuilt (1 John 1:9). It is recognised that this can be difficult as any admission of guilt may lead to imprisonment and further aggravation of the family's predicament.

9. Imprisonment may not do the family or the offender any good. Many abusers have been abused in their own childhood. The chain needs to be broken, and they need counselling help.

10. Discovery of abuse will often lead to instant break-up of family life, with feelings of guilt. It has been found that you often have to break up to rebuild again. The church family can show practical concern and support to make this less stressful.

11. Church members need to understand the tremendous emotional burden placed upon those working with the sexually abused. This frequently leads them to feel their care is inadequate and superficial. They will feel the effects of shock at the tragedy of abuse. They need a special measure of encouragement and love from the church (Acts 4:3).

12. In short, if the church is to be the healing, nurturing body of Christ, we must begin by acknowledging the problem, and we must then be there for the victims and their families.

"Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom all help comes. He helps us in all troubles so that we are able to help others who have all kinds of troubles." (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

John Lewis

Supper Party Evangelism

(These suggestions grew out of learning through experience, together with the invaluable advice of Pam Robertson and Eric Delve, and also a faith sharing team from Millmead.)

Purpose

Yet another tried and tested method for sharing the good news of Jesus.

Method

A guest speaker and informal, unforced conversation.

Style

Warm, friendly, relaxed, non-threatening, definitely non-churchy - don't parade bibles!

Place

Anywhere from your own home to a church hall to a local hotel or pub. If you use a church hall, make an effort to make it feel more like a restaurant - subdued lighting, table decorations etc.



Our first dinner party was under fluorescent lighting and we all agreed the lights had to change. Next time we had wall lights and table lights, plus attractive framed pictures on the walls - the ambience was transformed!

Guests

Your friends, both those who would be uncomfortable or unwilling to attend a service yet, and also those who have come on a Sunday and want to find out more. If all your friends are Christians you need to take time first getting to know some neighbours or colleagues.

Christians cannot just come for the meal or to hear the speaker, they must bring a friend. But make sure you have at least a core group of Christians present (3 out of 7 would be sufficient for example).

Don't Invite

Strangers, cult members, too many for comfort at your venue.

Guest Speaker

Anyone in the public eye who is a Christian eg. a sports or TV personality, or a person with an intriguing life story, hobby or career. Make sure they are an interesting speaker! Make it plain that they are there to tell a story, not to be a preacher/evangelist, and give them a time limit. If necessary someone else can round off the evening, but remember to avoid any hard sell. Keep it informal and in the style of the evening.

Don't speak yourself. Should a guest take offence, you can maintain your friendship when someone else is the speaker.

The Meal

Vary the menu according to the style of the evening and your area. A quiz night will probably require different food from an evening with a celebrity speaker. In one area we had to call it a "dinner party" to make it sound important enough and indicate there would be plenty of good food. In other areas "dinner party" would sound too formal and give the wrong idea about what to wear and the tone of the event.

You will need a separate catering team for a larger event. You don't want the Christians to hide away preparing the meal. Some guests will be nervous about a church event, so don't add to their nerves with an unusual menu. Unless exotic

food is part of the event - eg. a Caribbean evening - stick to familiar food and avoid anything awkward like meat on the bone ("Am I allowed to pick it up?") or spaghetti. Fish bones can also be tricky...

The Evening

Serve fruit juice as people arrive and play quiet background music to help them relax. Tapes are fine but live music is ideal - mellow rather than high brow or heavy metal!

Serve the meal as soon as possible - a long delay will only make you and your guests ill at ease. At a large event hand around a visitors' book and ask everyone to sign it. Sign it first yourself, to make it plain that the Christians are not meant to pass it by. *This gives you the information for a follow up letter.*

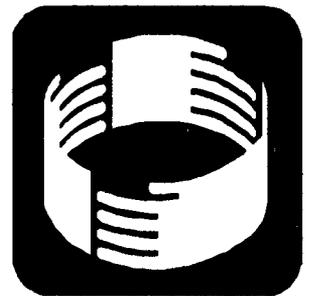
Arrange your room so that after the meal, whether still at tables or having moved to a lounge, everyone is gathered facing the speaker. Introduce the speaker and do not serve coffee until after the talk. Where there is space, coffee provides an opportunity to mingle.

The Christians' Task

Don't pressurise your friends. Ask them over coffee what they made of the speaker. Keep in touch. Maybe they would like to come to a service, watch a video with you or join an enquirers' group. Pray fervently and thank all those involved, before, during and after. Above all, enjoy yourselves, and expect great things from God!

Rob Warner

TRANSITIONS



Dear Mr. Editor,
I have recently had the opportunity of reading a fascinating article by Wayne Price, a Southern Baptist pastor in Williamsburg, Virginia. Entitled "**Rites of Passage and the Role of the Church**" (Search, 27-34, Summer 1990) he writes not only about the traditional rites of passage - birth, baptism, marriage, and death - but also about the more modern transitions: graduation, retirement, career change, divorce, and moving.

Price argues, for instance, that the church has not handled divorce well, with the result that a couple's journey is often out of the church as well as out of marriage. He refers to Sheila Davis, a social worker in Birmingham, who wrote a few "positive sentences" as a means to help reduce the "rancour and recrimination" of parents locked in child-

custody disputes. She asks couples to join hands and say, "Goodbye and thank you for the good times we had in our marriage. I wish you all the best. Our relationship will continue as father and mother of our children, but not as husband and wife. Good luck". Clearly the final words of "blessing" would not be appropriate in a Christian context, but is perhaps Wayne Price not on to something when he suggests the church would do well to find a "ritual answer to separation" which is more than a civil decree?

Or what about the transition of moving? This can be quite traumatic for some families - indeed, people have often likened a move to a bereavement. But what do we as churches do about helping people to cope with their loss? Wayne

Price writes:- "The church tends to do well in welcoming and incorporating new people into the congregation; the church does a rather poor job of dealing with the emotions brought to intensity by leaving and by entering". It may be of interest that at Spurgeon's for our first year students we are running a Friday evening/Saturday morning and afternoon conference entitled "Coping with change", when we will be seeking to help our new students come to terms with the pain of moving.

Another transition increasingly encountered by people today is that of career change. Indeed, it is now said that our young people should expect to have at least three careers in their life-time. How do we as churches deal with such changes? Is Wayne Price right when he argues that "good-byes need to be said to what is left, and in some cases some kind of ritual permission and blessing facilitates that leaving"? Price is not arguing necessarily for a public ceremony, but he is arguing for some kind of ceremony.

Then there is the transition of retirement. To-day's newly retired face the prospect of many years of useful activity ahead of them. And yet sometimes the prospect of the "countdown to death" and the fear of being a burden on one's family can prevent many from being reincorporated into society in a new role. Price argues that churches should be actively involved in retirement preparation, with appropriate "after-care".

The reason for my writing to you, is not only to draw attention to a significant article, but also to ask the question: *What are our churches doing about the more modern rites of passage?* As one who is involved in training men and women for leadership in our churches, I would also be glad to have ideas to pass on to my students. Personal letters would always be welcome.

Paul Beasley-Murray

BOOK REVIEWS

The Lord's Song

Jim Thompson (Fount, £3.99)

The Psalms have attracted all kinds of commentators from those who dissect them for indications of what the cultic life of Israel was like to those for whom these ancient poems are springboards to musings on the life of faith. This book, by the bishop of Stepney, is closer to the latter than the former category.

Virtually all of Thompson's ministry has taken place in the inner city and so his angle of entry is how the Psalms, written for a rural people using metaphors drawn from agriculture and village life, relate to the late twentieth century city.

The things that concern him in Stepney for the most part concern me in Peckham and I have found his musings on a selection of his favourite Psalms (namely 1, 23, 42/3, 46 51, 90, 104, 137, 139) gently provocative. His comments on Psalm 46 and the city of God in the heart of London are particularly moving and set me off praying and dreaming.

For Thompson "the Psalms are a springboard for prayer, meditation and worship". Many will find this book to be a similar springboard.

Simon Jones

Waiting: Finding hope when God seems silent

Ben Patterson (IVP £2.95)

Waiting is something we are not good at. Few things set us on edge as much as a delayed bus, a cancelled train or sitting in a traffic jam. Everyone seems to be in a hurry; and ministers aren't

exempt, as the nineteenth century preacher Phillip Brooks remarked: "I'm in a hurry, but God is not!"

So many Christians seethe and writhe with impatience; we ache for the fulfilment of God's promises to us; we cry 'How long, Lord? Why the delay?' And we fall foul of many who offer instant leg-ups to holiness, humility, self-control or power. Patterson writes for people like this and those who minister to them. And he writes with such winsomeness and wisdom that we have to listen and in listening we find ourselves refreshed by the cool, clear water of the Spirit.

Focusing on Job and Abraham, Patterson writes about what God achieves in our waiting, about how waiting, far from being an experience of emptiness and the absence of God can be the place where we encounter God more deeply than ever. The book is awash with insights and a vast number of great illustrations for sermons. I recommend this little gem: buy it, read it, live it.

Simon Jones

The Promise of Health and Wealth:

A Historical and Biblical analysis of the modern faith movement.

Dan McConnell.(Hodder & Stoughton/C.S. Lewis Centre, £5.99)

Prosperity theology has not yet sunk roots in the UK. But it is here in a nascent form in a number of churches and para-church groups. If it takes root over here its effect on the church could be as devastating as the effect of ivy on a small rose bush at the bottom of my garden.

The bulk of Dan McConnell's book, published in the US under the title *A Different Gospel* (what a pity

that title wasn't used for the UK publication), is an investigation of the roots of Kenneth Hagin's teaching. But it also casts sideways glances at the effects of his doctrine on the US church, especially those parts of the church that are involved in the charismatic renewal.

His historical resume of the movement is well-researched and documented and written in a fairly lively style. He shows beyond reasonable doubt that the origins of this movement are cultic, being found in the nineteenth century new age movement. His book is a sobering reminder that heresy lurks at the doors of the church and can enter when an over-literalistic interpretation of scripture is combined with a strong leadership style.

The best way to prevent the church in Britain being side-tracked by this pernicious teaching is to know enough about it so that we recognise it when we see it and can nip it in the bud. This book will help us with the former; the Holy Spirit will equip for the latter.

Simon Jones

English Baptist History and Heritage

Roger Hayden Baptist Union, CTP, 176pp.

The best popular history we have ever had, and invaluable for all who want to understand better what it means to be a Baptist Christian. The Secretary of the Baptist Historical Society has put us all

in his debt with his informed yet highly readable account. The many illustrations enhance the text, despite the poor quality of some newly commissioned line drawings. Provocative discussion starters are found throughout for those in a study group. This book deserves the widest circulation, well beyond those using it as a set text in the Christian Training Programme.

Rob Warner

On the Anvil

Robert Warren - Highland Books, £5.95, 192pp.

Warren's previous book, In the Crucible, topped the Christian bestseller lists for several months. That told the story of the remarkable growth of St. Thomas' in Sheffield, including invaluable insights on the prayer and management behind a massive building project and the development into an evangelical and charismatic LEP with the local Baptist church. If you missed that, buy both books!

This time Warren takes a step back from the story to assess ways of learning the art of leadership.

"It is not just experience, but the constant process of reflecting on experience - both good and bad - which has been at the heart of my learning."

Warren is renowned as one of the most outstanding managers of the Church of England. Here he demonstrates his readiness to continue to learn and develop. On the Anvil is an illuminating manual for all who aspire to excellence in leadership.

Rob Warner



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