

Editorial

THE CHANGING FACE OF THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND



The English Church Census makes vital reading for all Christian leaders. No survey can claim total accuracy, but Marc Europe have provided us with the most definitive snapshot of church health we could hope for. Every church should have at least one copy.

The church in England is changing fast. At every level old assumptions no longer apply. We need to understand clearly the new face of the church in order to understand our own place within it, both nationally and locally.

1) The impact of the Free Churches

Some Anglicans convey the impression that the Free Churches can be consigned to the ash heap of history, and that the future of the church in England is essentially Anglican and Roman Catholic. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In 1975, churchgoers divided unequally between these three sectors: the Free Churches with 30% were slightly weaker than the Anglicans with 32% while the Roman Catholics were much larger at 38%.

By 1989, only the Free Churches had grown numerically, with the result that the Anglicans are now the smallest sector at 31% and the Free Churches 34% are not much smaller than the Roman Catholics 35%.

In the light of current growth trends and age distribution, the survey goes on to project the size of churches in the year 2000. Without a dramatic shift of fortune only the Free churches are likely to enjoy overall growth this decade. That means, by the year 2000, that the Anglicans will remain the smallest sector, their share of churchgoers shrinking to 30%; the Catholic decline will continue, reducing their share to 32%; and the Free Churches will consolidate their ascendancy, growing to 38% of the total number of churchgoers. A major shift of identity is under way for the English churches.

2) The Character of the Free Churches

We should not think of the Free Churches as a fixed and predictable grouping, whose identity was defined immutably in times past. The shifting centre of gravity of English Christians is magnified in the changing face of the Free Churches.

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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.

In 1975 the Methodists (454,000) were the largest group, followed by the Baptists (193,000), the Independents (167,000) and the URC (150,000). By 1989, Methodists had declined markedly, but were still the largest group (396,000), while the surge of growth among Independents (293,000) overtook moderate Baptist growth (199,000) and the Pentecostals (119,000) replaced the URC as the fourth largest group.

Over the next decade, the Methodists and URC, sometimes described as the Establishment of the traditional Free Churches, are likely to continue their sorry decline. MARC Europe estimate that, by 2000, the largest group will be the Independents (397,000) who will have overtaken the Methodists (352,000) while the Baptists and Pentecostals continue to grow (205,000 and 119,000). If the Free Churches are becoming numerically dominant today, then this is because the face of the Free churches is changing: that face is increasingly Independent, Baptist or Pentecostal.

3) The New Evangelicals

As the face of the church changes, the only group who have been enjoying consistent growth are the Evangelicals. The Evangelical proportion of all churchgoers, including Roman Catholics, is now 27% and rising.

Among evangelicals too the ground is shifting. MARC Europe identify three groupings, although the borders between them must be blurred. In 1985, the smallest group was Mainstream Evangelicals (257,000) with Broad Evangelicals second (349,000) and Charismatic Evangelicals leading the way (395,000). By 1989, Mainstream Evangelicals had grown slightly (262,000), Broad Evangelicals had declined (340,000) and Charismatic Evangelicals had surged further ahead (425,000).

In percentage terms, Charismatics were 39% of all Evangelicals in 1985 and 41% in 1989. On current trends, by the year 2000, 24% will be Mainstream Evangelicals, Broad Evangelicals will decline from 35% in 1985 to just 29% and Charismatics will increase to 47%. No attempt to pretend that either Evangelicals or Charismatics can be marginalised or ignored will have any credibility in the coming decade.

4) The Real face of English Baptists

How evangelical are the denominations? The Anglicans live up to their reputation as a broad church: 12% Anglo-Catholic, 18% Liberal, 18% Evangelical, the rest low, broad or catholic. Among the Free Churches 56% are Evangelical, but the proportion varies widely. Methodists are 33% Evangelical and 16% Liberal, but their essential

identity is found among those who are low and broad (47%). The URC have the least Evangelicals (24%) and the highest concentration of Liberals (37%); they are also the Free Church experiencing the most severe decline.

What of the Baptists? We are the only historic denomination to have enjoyed slight growth recently, so does this reflect a different balance of groupings? What's more, we are frequently told by BU representatives that we are a "very broad denomination", but does the evidence bear this out?

In fact, just 5% of Baptists are Liberals, and 10% are low and broad. **84% of Baptists identify themselves as Evangelical.** This is surely staggering, and makes nonsense of the claim that what characterises Baptists today is unusual theological diversity. On the contrary, what marks out Baptists from every other denomination is an overwhelmingly clear identity. And that identity is emphatically evangelical.

We hope the new leadership team at Didcot will take note of this vital information, and speak without apology on behalf of the historic denomination which is uniquely evangelical. We must observe that if this evangelical identity is not reflected in our associations, colleges or other institutions, then those bodies are woefully out of touch with real Baptist life today. What's more, in ecumenical relations we must not neglect to ask which are the churches with whom we have most in common, in terms of evangelical identity. Our nearest neighbours, with whom co-operation should be the most ready, at local and national levels, are in fact the Independents, Pentecostals and Afro-Caribbeans.



REFLECTIONS ON THE PRESIDENCY

I did not expect to be so encouraged. In a year I travelled 28,000 miles in my car; spent £2,000 on British Rail; flew several times; slept in 123 different beds; preached 245 sermons and attended numerous other events, committees and functions. And it was worth it! I am aware that the President probably sees the best side of life in our denomination. The worst side is either kept discreetly hidden or, more likely, it just never gets around to inviting the President to visit. Even so, my verdict would be that we are in reasonable shape for the beginning of a Decade of Evangelism - a decade we still sorely need and cannot do without.

Thank God for the difference in spiritual climate both generally and within our own denomination from the climate I experienced when first I entered the ministry in the early 1970's. Let me identify five features I observed on my travels before commenting more generally, both about our strengths and our weaknesses.

First, there is rural life. So often I have heard people bemoan the fact that 'half our denomination' are small churches and many, in rural areas, seem without too much hope of real growth. Some time ago the Baptist Times carried a front page headline which appeared to suggest that rural churches could not grow and should take the situation lying down. But thank God for those rural churches which by their life and vitality are proving that it is possible to grow!

The story of some of them is well-known. The work done at Gorsley under Pat Goodland shows what visionary leadership can do. It was thrilling to join a packed church one Sunday in July and to learn just how many of them had been converted in recent years. And that is in the wilds of Gloucestershire, or is it Herefordshire? I never seem to know. But there are many unknown stories, too, waiting to be told of rural life.

In Wiltshire I visited Westbury Leigh for the 324th Anniversary of the church where Joshua Marsham had been brought up. The building goes back to the 1780's without too much modernization since. A few years ago the church was down to a handful but now is a lovely relaxed family fellowship of about 70.

My last Sunday as President was spent in Norfolk, visiting three village churches. In Foulsham a small congregation have done wonders to their building to make it clean, modern and welcoming. The benefits are already beginning to show.

The story could be repeated many times. Rural churches need not feel, if they do, that the struggle is against them. Let the cloud of witnesses encourage them that life and growth is possible.



Secondly, new churches. Church planting is going to be a major issue on the agenda of the Decade of Evangelism. But there are already a number of places which have experience of planting churches. We have much to learn from them. The Southern Area perhaps takes the lead. Again, much of the progress is due to the visionary leadership of people like Geoffrey Reynolds, the Area Superintendent and of the other visionary leaders, ordained and lay, who give shape to Baptist life there.

In the Southern Area I preached at the opening of Lock's Heath while I was still Vice-president, and have been glad to hear of some of the space problems they have had since as growth has continued. I went to the more established cause at Woodleigh for a Berkshire Association Rally and was delighted to hear the story of growth there under Stuart Woodward. I visited Basingstoke where my predecessor at Mutley, Philip Withers, has been pioneer pastor for the last seven years, with a building which has only been open a few years. But already they have planted out a new congregation the other side of town.

New initiatives are not the exclusive province of the Southern Area. Nearby Kent has Waldersgrave. When I visited it the congregation were still meeting in a portacabin. The building, recently opened, was about waist high on the site next door. The vigorous evangelistic ministry of Trevor Jones was very evident

as most people I met over tea seem to have come to faith in Christ within the last year or so. This church was recently featured on a Home Mission Video and we need to remind ourselves that this is what Home Mission is for. The story applies 'up north' as well.

If we want to be pedantic some churches in this category are not so much new as resuscitations. But to all intents and purposes they are new churches. One cold December day I preached at the opening of Catshill (hardly North, more Midlands, I know). The church had long since been there but at low ebb. But then new spiritual life had begun to develop and did so to the extent that a new building was required. In Leyland, Lancashire, there was another story of resuscitation. Leyland is another church featured on a Home Mission Video, showing their vigorous evangelistic outreach and the missionary heart of their pastor Adrian Argyle.

Thirdly, there is renewed strength. The story of Altrincham Baptist was made well known when Paul Beasley-Murray, then its pastor, published *Turning the Tide* - a study on church growth still worth reading. Under Paul's ministry the church was strong. I was delighted to revisit it, however, and discover that under new leadership it is even stronger. Congregations had grown to the extent that they were then having to hold two morning services. They did not find that altogether satisfactory and it may not be their permanent solution but it was a nice problem to have.

In other well established churches there were encouragements, not always for the same reason; in churches, for example, as diverse as Frinton, Tilehurst, Retford and Poole. In Frinton they rebuilt a few years ago to create extra space. But they still looked to have space problems to me! In Tilehurst there was a packed congregation of mostly young people. Testimonies were given reporting back on outreach which had taken place the night before. They were not an inward looking complacent church for all their strength. In Retford long-standing problems of compromise had been dealt with recently, releasing the church for a new spiritual phase. In Poole the church which was packed to the door and full of a family feeling was planting out a new church up the road, near the new superstore development.

Then I was struck by our ethnic diversity. Admittedly we have a long way to go and our brothers and sisters from ethnic minority groups have some painful stories to tell us of the way we are so often blind to them still. Notwithstanding that, was encouraged by the racially mixed nature of a church like Windsor Road, Slough or Yardley, Birmingham.

One of my most thrilling events was to preach

at the launch of the Hackney Mission. Not even the perishing cold temperatures of the parish church in which we met managed to damage my enthusiasm! Stoke Newington Baptist Church, another of those churches which was almost closed a few years back, was taking a lead in this inter-church project. The congregation was between 700 and 800 on a perishing cold winter's night in inner city London. And they tell me nothing ever happens there! Racially mixed, it was a vibrant act of worship and commitment.

The BU Council met in Birmingham in November and at the invitation of the Inner-city Project, which links twelve of our churches together there, some of us had a meal together the night before and listened to some of the challenges they face in mission. In no way would I minimise the difficulties they face. But some of them could tell of sacrificial service and of God at work in ways which would put more apparently prosperous churches to shame. It's happening there too.

Fifthly, I was struck by fresh initiatives in mission. Although not part of my patch I jumped at an opportunity to visit Northern Ireland again. I went to speak at a conference organised by the Evangelical Alliance but was glad it gave me the chance to spend time with our Baptist brothers and sisters there, several of whom I had got to know over the years through *Mainstream*. I was particularly impressed by The Bridge and community centres like it. In the shadow of Harland and Wolf's shipyard, The Bridge is a thoughtful and appropriate form of mission that crosses the Catholic/Protestant divide. The centre contains a coffee bar, offers employment projects and a range of other community services. I spoke in my President's address about the need for the church today to discover 'bridges of usefulness'. This was certainly one.

Thankfully, not all such models of appropriate mission are across the water. Time and again I came across churches which were opening up coffee shops; laying on mums and toddlers clubs (which have resulted in many conversions); engaged in housing initiatives of a short-term or long-term nature for the disadvantaged; and seizing initiatives in terms of church planting. Market Harborough, where I called unexpectedly, is a case in point. With a new supermarket being built at the rear of their church, thus altering the whole centre of gravity in the shopping area, the church wisely sold the field they owned between them and the supermarket to a developer, who, as a condition of the transaction, was required to build them a coffee shop and new hall. It could not be more strategically placed. It serves good coffee and snacks and is well used. It has brought people into contact with the church who have not been near the place for years and all sorts of ministry to families and individuals has resulted.

Characteristics of growth

In all these situations the key element has been people of vision. Like Caleb and Joshua, they have not been daunted as they have spied out their territory. They have dreamed dreams and seen visions. They have seen what God could do in spite of the obstacles in their way. They have seen what God could create where there is nothing. They have believed when others doubted.

I noted a number of other characteristic in growing situations too.

- * There was an openness of spirit, which manifests itself in worship.
- * There was a rejection of fear and protectionism.
- * Administration was considered important and of a good quality. (There were some events which were a waste of time where they obviously did not consider it important!)
- * There was rejection of narrowness and legalism.
- * Giving was of a high order.
- * There was a commitment to an evangelical gospel.
- * There was a willingness to heal past divisions. Some churches which had endured painful splits in the early days of restorationism were being reconciled to 'separated brethren'.
- * They were not self-serving. They were outward looking with a desire to serve.
- * There was a concern for holiness.

Concerns

The year left me with a number of concerns. It was not a year of unalloyed success and, in spite of the positive tone of this article, I am not unaware of some of the black spots nor the hard work which remains to be done. That is why I began by saying I think we have a good basis for starting a Decade of Evangelism, but we still need the Decade.

The vitality I have described is not universal. There are supposed to be three types of people in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who do not know that anything is happening! There are still too many Baptists in the last group.

Then, there is the concern that so much of our Baptist life is being channelled elsewhere. So many of our young people give expression to their discipleship away from our churches. In one sense that does not matter, since it is the kingdom of God and not the institution of the church which matters. But why should it be so? Why should it leave us often with scarce resources and denuded of the very help we should be able to call on? Why are we not offering them the sort of opportunity they find elsewhere?

I fear the issue of the ecumenical movement may side-track us and rather than serving, as many genuinely hope, to enable us to engage in evangelism it may serve to cause us to fight each other and so hinder the cause of evangelism. No one, as far as I am aware, is forcing anyone to go along with the new ecumenical instruments if they do not want to do so. Perhaps it is time for those who have fears about it to redirect their energies away from opposing it and to use their liberty to spread the gospel.

Finally, I believe that whilst our Union and many of our churches are expressing life and demonstrating an ability to cope with change, our associations are not. They are often the low spot of our life. That of course is a general statement to which there are several glorious exceptions! But there are too many associations which are resistant to change and where there is not change there is usually no life. For many of our members associations seem irrelevant. We must work to foster their life and renewal so that they can serve our generation, as they served people in previous generations. They were formed, most of them, for mission. Where there is no mission, the associations perish.

And abroad.....

Space does not permit me to comment on my travels abroad. I was thrilled to be able to see ourselves in the wider perspective of the world church. Each country I visited having something different to impress upon us. In Brazil, I was impressed by their tremendous zeal for church planting and saw plenty of evidence of the growth that results. I was disturbed by their lack of social concern. In Korea I was struck by the remarkable prayer life of the churches and their commitment to an evangelism which was culturally relevant. I was concerned for their worship of success. In Romania I was humbled by the depth of commitment the church had shown in days of harassment and persecution. I was thrilled to be with them in their new-found conditions of liberty. I was fearful for the new temptations and battles they now face for which they may not be prepared. In Germany, I met with Baptist youth leaders from across Europe and was encouraged by the self-giving of these leaders in countries where they have little resources and facilities. I was reminded that we have a vast mission field on our doorstep.

I could not have had a better period of orientation to my new responsibility as Secretary for Mission and Evangelism than a year as President of the Baptist Union. So, thank you for preparing me for the task so well by electing me to that office. Once again, one marvels at the providence of God!

Derek J. Tidball

Baptists in Scotland

– The Real Trend

Scottish Baptists have more churches but less members than 25 years ago. Guessing that new churches and a few growing churches propped up the figures, I suspected that there must have been a gradual decline for a number of others. Now I have checked out the data the results are what the tabloids would call "shocking!"

I compared the 1964 year book entries for every church with those in the 1989 directory, looking at membership of churches in the Baptist Union of Scotland then and now.⁽¹⁾ That was a laborious task. It was also demoralising. In round figures here are the results:

- * In 1964 16,200 members were in the churches I studied. Now there are 13,000 in them.
- * The change represents a drop of 20 per cent.

That kind of decline is bad news. Sadly, the real picture is worse than that.

- * Since 1964 only 38 churches have grown, but many very significantly. Their average rise is 55%.
- * That leaves nearly three times that number, 102 churches, which have lost numbers or ceased completely.⁽²⁾ Their average decline is 41%.
- * Thus 27% of churches have grown; 73% have lost ground.

What this means is that in nearly three-quarters of the longer established churches the number of Scottish Baptists has almost halved in the last 25 years. We haven't noticed it in our annual statistics for two reasons – the significant growth of a minority of churches and the founding of 24 new churches⁽³⁾ containing 1800 members.

Both of these factors – encouraging as they are – have hidden what's been happening in our "Baptist heartlands". The growth of the few and the new has propped up the total. But, increasingly, those sitting in the majority of our longer established churches have had fewer fellow-worshippers for company.

Couldn't the explanation be that many of the people have moved to our newer churches? Is there simply a shift of population or allegiance?⁽⁴⁾ But the pastor of one of our largest new churches reckoned few of his members had a Baptist background. Those who had would constitute considerably less than one third of his members. That

matches my own past experience in Livingston. A comparatively few transfers to other churches simply don't explain the numerical drop in the majority.

With numbers nearly halved in one quarter century, there is only one result if the trend continues. Few churches have "died" so far. Plenty must be struggling for life.

Some would prefer not to have read this, or even that it shouldn't have been written. But Satan loves delusion, and pretence that everything in the garden is rosy stops us praying and working to turn the situation around.

Now, before it's too late for many, must be the time to seek God's power. No one can claim that power is being released in most of our congregations. If it is, where are the signs?

To think we can trundle on as if everything will be alright is to ignore a cancer in the body. That can lead only to death.

No one can claim healing and renewal of the Body of Christ is a simple, "pray-it-down" experience. It involves crucifying self (and our own, old ways), allowing God to do his will, and working very hard to keep up with what he says.

There's nothing easy about that. But we either change or die.

Alistair Brown

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Notes

- 1) That's not as straightforward as it seems. A few churches either were out of the Union then but in now, or vice versa. Some others reported statistics in 1964 but not in 1989. Where no comparison was possible I omitted that church from my calculations in order not to bias one total. My belief, though, is that leaving those churches out probably makes the figures look less dreadful than they are.
- 2) These numbers include six mergers into three pairings.
- 3) Plus another three not making returns in the last year book.
- 4) If the latter were true, we ought still to ask why they felt the need to move.



DAYS OF HEAVEN ON EARTH



One of the definitions given by Martyn Lloyd Jones of revival is 'days of heaven on earth'. In revivals it seems the sense of the nearness of God's presence and the outpouring of His power truly make earth feel like heaven.

For myself, reading the accounts of revivals has always caused a deep sense of longing.... if only we could know times like that again!

For three weeks in May and June of last year, at Stocksfield, we were given just a glimpse of what that might be like.

Let me give you something of the background to our church, we are not very big... about 75 adults and 60 kids in our congregation. Our self-awareness would be of a definitely evangelical and mildly charismatic nature. Of course that all depends from where you are looking at us. We jettisoned the Baptist Hymn book some years ago. Our diet of Worship is mostly new songs on the OHP, openness the occasional tongues with interpretation, more often prophecy, 'singing in the spirit' etc.... and a good forty minutes exposition of scripture.

So happily we are, according to Marc Europe's 'Christian England', within that stream which has all the signs of growth. In fact according to the same source Baptists in Northumberland had grown some 50% between 1979 and 1989. (There are only four churches, one recently planted. All are evangelical and open in their different ways and to different extents to charismatic renewal).

As a church we have been through the various trends that most of our sister churches have... Mr Wimber et al having mostly a good effect upon us... but leaving some questions.

We have prayed many times "Father pour out your Holy Spirit". And many times we have been thrilled with His goodness to us. However, Friday May 25th 1990 still took us by surprise.

I had arrived back from the States three weeks before and found the fellowship in a state of expectation. Things had gone well whilst I was away (two weeks ill and out of the pulpit, then three weeks in America). People were in good heart.

One of the things we have introduced in our meetings is a time for testimonies of God's goodness. On Sunday morning 20th May we had four spontaneous testimonies.... (the week after seven!).... something was beginning to happen. Then on the Friday night at a gospel dinner (FGBMFI in which a number of our members were quite active at that time) twelve people responded to the appeal for commitment (out of about 45). As these twelve stood together dedicating their lives to Christ it happened. The Father graciously poured out His Spirit.

The next two hours, thinking them over again, seem almost unbelievable. In fact, trying to put words to what we saw and felt hardly does justice to what actually happened. There was the most incredible sense of God... I can only say that the Holy Spirit fell upon the people. People were healed of various illnesses. A man from Africa who had been deaf since a child regained his hearing. My wife, Jane, who had suffered for some five years with pain and weakness in her shoulder following a fall on the ice, was healed. I was standing next to her and literally saw the muscles in her upper arm convulsing in the most unnatural way. Jane's testimony was that as soon as the prayer was made her arm went numb... as if it didn't belong to her. She looked on as if watching someone else being prayed for.

That night there were many similar testimonies of healing. A number of back-sliders and waverers being prayed for fell over under the Spirit. I saw people literally and involuntarily jump as the Spirit came upon them... If this all sounds strange, even alarming, I am trying to tell it as it happened.

For us at Stocksfield it was the beginning of three incredible weeks. The sense of God's presence and power continued in every meeting... Sunday services, housegroups, prayer meetings, training meetings. Conversions flowed (eighteen made commitments to Christ), testimonies flowed... It seemed we only had to pray and God answered.

One prayer meeting stands out. Those of us who were there still speak of it as 'The Prayer Meeting'. Looking back it has an almost dream-like quality about it. It started very average. We sang songs in a mediocre sort of way. But then we simply asked, "Father would you pour out your Spirit." And He did! There was a tangible change in the meeting. It could be felt... almost touched. We saw people fall as the Spirit came upon them without any specific prayer and without another person touching them. I was standing opposite a girl... only converted a few months before. At one point she was standing, arms semi-raised, eyes closed, no one touching her or praying for her specifically. There followed a 'physical jerk'... like a shock to her body... and she collapsed. When she came round from her faint she spent the next hour in pouring out her heart to God in words and tears. That kind of thing happened to the larger part of those in the meeting. Writing it after the event does not even begin to convey the awesomeness of that meeting. We were on holy ground.

Another thing we had never seen before was the effect on our children. There were instances of little children, 6, 7 and 8 years old repenting and

weeping over their sins. And that not in a meeting.. simply being at home and something came over the home. Of the Spirit resting upon little ones for a whole evening accompanied again by involuntary shaking and trembling.

For three weeks we saw that kind of thing on a virtual daily basis.

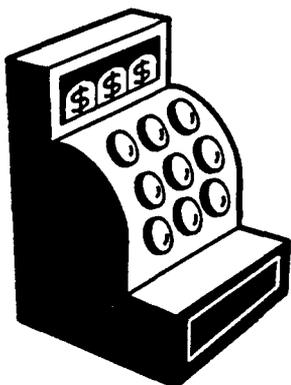
Days of heaven on earth? We have since agonized and asked God "Why only three weeks?" I have personally asked God to show me if there was anything in me that quenched His Spirit. There were certainly those in the fellowship who doubted the work. And strangely some were those who had agitated for renewal and 'the baptism in the Spirit'. When He came in power they didn't recognise His coming.

Our tentative conclusion is that God gave us something of a foretaste of what can be. In the weeks and months that followed there was certainly a deepening of the lives of many in the fellowship. There was a definite impetus towards holiness and many buried, suppressed things were brought into the light and graciously dealt with by Jesus. A year later we are still moving on with God but without the same intensity. People are still being saved... but those three weeks early last summer... that was something else.

Even in the re-telling of the story it feels like something is taken from it. Unless you were there I'm not sure you can understand. However, we are convinced of its reality and our prayer, now all the more earnest, remains... Come Lord Jesus! Come Holy Spirit!

Andrew Fitz-Gibbon

The above article previously appeared in an abridged form in 'The Northerner', the magazine of the Northern and Yorkshire Baptist Associations, and in the Journal of the Post Office and Telecommunications Christian Association.



The CO\$T of Di\$clipse\$hip in 1991 - can I afford it?

You know, when I became a Christian. I had no idea of the cost of discipleship. At my rough estimate, to be a Christian in the UK today costs on average £300 plus tithe per year.

An example: 3 worship tapes	21
1 music book to go with above	8
Spring Harvest (or other) + travel	170
One other conference + travel (or church houseparty/weekend away)	60
4 or 5 Christian books (paperback)	15
Subscription to a Christian mag.	16

	290

plus tithe etc.

Add to that, if you are a Pastor, the 37 'not to be missed' books (recommended last issue for our bookshelves) at, say £5 average, and that's another £185 to get up and running as a leader!

Yes, the Christian commercial world loves pastors like you and me. We are the sort who want to be aware of what is going on. We want to be in the forefront of evangelical thinking, and to encourage our congregations to buy books and tapes and go on conferences and Christian holidays in order to "grow". But there is something within me that is beginning to stir uneasily when I think of the pressures upon my church to "be open" to the new things that are happening and available in the Christian world - to read about it and be informed, to go to it, to experience it and to buy the tape of it afterwards! In this article I want to try and share some of my concerns.

Have you ever been to one of the Christian Resource Exhibitions? They are an eye opener, and a wallet opener as well. I had no idea there was so much business vying to get at my hard earned pound, with packages available for every need, whether it be sound systems, computer software, ecclesiastical garments or new training notes for the latest course on the latest topic in Christian circles.

I sometimes wonder if we could do anything without it being packaged. I am becoming more convinced that we only need things packaged because we don't have trained trainers going around and doing the work clearly commanded for us in Ephesians 4:11-13, so that we might all learn and start to DO the work Christ called us to do.

We are all so busy learning how to do it, that no one is doing it!

We all seem so busy reading about it that no one is telling it! And it's costing us (personally and as a denomination) a fortune. If on average it costs £300 a year to "be" a Christian, then for the say 170,000 Baptists in this country that's £51 million pounds of disposable "Christian" income going on everything but the Baptist Union budget or any other budget. (You think I'm overplaying things? Then let's say only one quarter of our denomination is going to spend anything like that a year. It's still £21.75 million pounds a year going into some coffers somewhere).

I believe we are in danger of becoming lazy and complacent. The church of Jesus Christ fills its time with conferences and big events (all at a cost) while the world goes to hell. Yes, I too admit to having been to a selected choice of conferences. I was appalled at a John Wimber Conference when someone I knew came up to me to ask if this was my first "John Wimber Conference". "Yes it was, I replied. "Oh, we've been to all of them" they purred.

What on earth is going on that we have to go and get our buzz from the latest international or national speaker? What is the flavour of the month now anyway? It is wonderful, isn't it, to know that I can now go to conferences on how to exercise, exorcise and organise - and ALL of these with lunch included! What a boon to my ministry! As if conferences weren't enough, I must ensure I've been to the right day seminars and called my people to follow my example. Am I and my church meant to be Renewed, Revived, AlMed, Prophecied, Come Alived, Dirty Handed, Muddy Feeted, New Wined, Spring Harvested, or Crying Freedomed?

On the home front, I'm drowning in a paper sea of Amazonian rain - forest coming through my letter box offering me the latest in worship tapes (first one free, of course), Bible study aids, Sunday school materials, adult materials, teenager camps... courses for every variant of interest known to my congregation. For a fee, I can choose to have the facts of denominational and church growth at my fingertips, or defeat demons, go on Christian holidays, know how to reach children, deal with wives of non-Christian husbands, understand the problems of child abuse, take a break at a Christian holiday again, deal with alcoholics, support Romanian children, learn how to write/read/edit/compose/-conduct/change/sing or play music, develop my worship skills, subscribe to another journal, get involved in politics from a Christian perspective, book for a one day conference... and at the end of all that, if I have any money, pay my BU Superan-

uation premium.

When, oh when, will this crazy roller-coaster of 20th century crass Christian commercialism come to a halt? To follow on from the Editorial in the newsletter 39, renewal is being not marginalised but commercialised. And in so doing, it is being pitched at the lowest common denominator - an easy spirituality for a supermarket mentality Christian mass consumption.

We can be mesmerized by the heavily promoted "success" of others and seek the quick and easy way to a successful ministry ourselves. We are in danger of relying too heavily upon pulp and pop publications to fill the minds of our people AND of ourselves, at the expense of the depth of studying scripture and the practising of prayer that we are so desperately weak at. I believe it is time we as Pastors stop allowing ourselves and our congregations to think that other people who are conference speakers have "got" the gospel sewn up, sorted out and worked out. We must stop chasing after the latest buzz, and then we can get down to exploring the things that are fundamental to all of us as Christians - the gift of the Holy Spirit poured into our lives and into our gathered congregations bringing life and energy to people who are saved because we have a God who cared enough to die for us!

Is it because we are so immersed in keeping up with the latest Christian thing being said and done that we have forgotten the first Christian thing given us to do - the great commission from the lips of Jesus in Matthew 28. It is in the act of doing the commission of Christ that we are freed from the freezing inactivity of just thinking about strategies for our churches and planning our diaries so we can be at as many conferences next year as possible.

And quite frankly we Mainstreamers are just as bad. The "oohs" and "aahs" that accompanied the frantic scabbling for Filofaxes at the Swanwick Conference Centre when it was announced that Tony Campolo would be at Mainstream next year only supports my case.

Why should I go and hear Tony Campolo? For the sake of hearing him? Is he just the latest big name to come to these shores and so I must "be there?" How am I going to respond to what he says? If I go to hear him because it would be wonderful to hear him, what on earth use is that? If he challenges me, will I be in a position to rally the church to this new cause, or will it just go into that endless and bottomless pit known as "the pastor's latest idea".

Or is it now the excuse that it's "relaxing" for us to get away from it all and have some "spiritual teaching" and "recharge our batteries?" Good grief, what a soppy lot we are.

The end result of all this chasing the lowest common denominator and "getting away from it all" is that we are now a race of spiritual pygmies. Where are the spiritual men (I hesitate to say giants) of our denomination? Where are the Wesley's and

the Moody's today? Where would I go on one of my Sundays off to be spiritually fed? (I actually go to an Anglican church). Who are the people in our denomination that I would go to because I knew they were men who walked close to God? In all honesty, I don't know of a single one. Oh, I know of plenty who have ministries that are large, growing and without doubt God blessed. I know of plenty of men who love Jesus with all their heart - but are not spiritually close to Jesus such that the fragrance and character of Jesus comes through them to me.

Please don't show me administratively efficient pastors or high profile Spring Harvest speakers. Show me Jesus in a man.

About nine months ago this was brought home to me when, in a desperate need to discover the art of praying - real praying - I contacted a well known Baptist figure to try to see him. This dear man, known to all of us, was caught totally off guard and could only suggest something about me reading some light and flimsy tract on prayer before, embarrassed, he quickly hung up.

There was no sense of care; no sense of wonder that a soul was searching for the deeper things of God and wanted spiritual direction.

Saddest of all, it was obvious to me that this man could offer no spiritual direction to me or to others.

When then have we done to the gospel of Jesus? I believe that we may be in danger of a great deception. We could believe that by going to events where supposedly spiritually successful people speak and perform, that somehow this will rub off on us in the form of ideas and even spirituality. We can imagine that the act of going and hearing what others have to say, or buying their books or hearing their tapes, is somehow godly, and that godliness will rub off on us.

It hasn't; it isn't; and it never will!

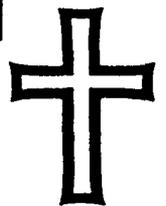
Once, just once, I would like to go to a conference where the speaker says to the audience "Instead of me telling what I have done, you get up one by one and tell what you have done for Christ and what He has done through you", and where the cost of getting in is not in pounds sterling but in souls won for and work done for and in the name of Christ. That would shock us!

In fact, come to think of it, I am going to such a conference. I'm not sure of the date, but I know the venue - the judgment seat of Christ.

My problem is: I honestly don't know that I can afford to go there yet.

Peter Jamieson

THE FAILURE OF ASSOCIATION



"Association is the future of our life together as a denomination." I found myself saying these words to an evaluator of our East Midlands Association audit. They burst out from me with a sense of conviction. However, the sheer audacity and folly of these words make them words of a Shakespearean clown rather than a considered reflection of the reality of association life as I've experienced it. Association as experienced seems to be a boring irrelevancy to the Church and its members, whether you look at district, county or national level. The reality is so often the tedium of committees and reports with the "umph-factor" at zero. In truth I can hardly ever commend to my fellowship that a trip to an association event will be worthwhile. So if that's the future of our life together, then God help us!

Yet.. yet... I still sense that association is the future of our life together. I can't escape that there may be some clownish insight into truth in that outburst. Throughout the country "association" as a principle of Church life is being expressed, rediscovered and has become the vehicle for continued life and growth. "Where?" you ask. "Association" is not the word that is used - "relate to", "network with"

etc. are more the jargon - but it fits the same level of Church life as our associations; that is, giving expression to "church" at a wider level than the local. This is surely a biblical emphasis, although interpretations of the words "that each Church has liberty... to interpret and administer His laws" have almost deafened some to "hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The positive experience and use of association is, of course, the likes of Pioneer, New Frontiers, Plumbline, Ichthus, Harvestime and the like. They are treading the well-trod ground of our ancestors. And for all our criticisms of them - many of them ill-informed prejudices - they are expressing what we fail so miserably to express in our Associations i.e. real association. Why are their associations successful and ours an abject failure so often? I suggest three reasons.

Vision is the heart of their association. It's the vision of a church in renewal and undergoing restoration. Other churches wanting to explore these things for themselves go for help to those that

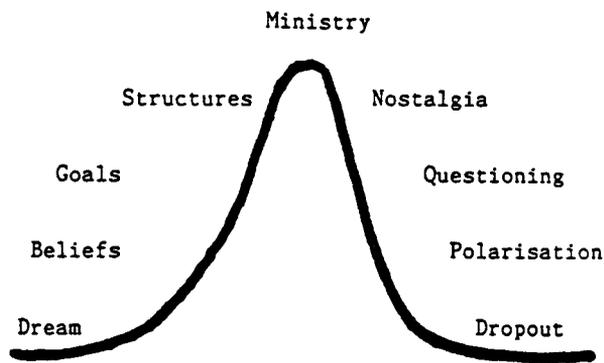
are experiencing it and travelling in the same direction, and not to a moribund committee structure that fills two to three hours with reports about well-meaning irrelevancies – I speak bluntly to make the point. So, as well as planting churches of their own ilk, other local churches, many of them Baptist Churches, associate with them and get much help and blessing in the process. It's no good us whinging and saying that they are being selfish and that they should be willing to give to Association structures. The truth is that we are not scratching where they itch, and they are often churches that are visionary and out-going to the needy society around them, and they are looking for help and support to be even more effective. If we get the menu right then they will come to us.

Second, relationship is the oxygen of their life and body. They serve one another and minister to one another, often spending much of their time together in prayer and worship, rather than the tokenism we give to these things. Because people get fed and supported they would not think of missing a meeting. They are a priority. In our association life, where we have become detached from the original dream of association, the only thing on which we can fall back is a bureaucracy. We have our committees that "deal" with issues, imagining that if we have the structure we are doing all that can realistically be done, and we sit and bemoan how we can do so little because of this factor or that.

Third, mission is their reason for being. They are aware of the call to mission and as a network they are committed to growth-goals. Whereas in our committees we talk about church planting, organise conferences on evangelism and social action, they are challenging their leaders to come back with goals for church planting to be accomplished in the next five years. – I speak of a specific situation where I have heard the contrast between our system and their fellowship within the last few weeks. We talk at association level, whilst they are acting. The fruits are seen and will be continued to be seen in the English Church Census.

So what is to be done? Robert Dale in his book, "To Dream Again" bases an analysis of church life and structures upon the wave cycle as observed by business consultants. Their curve is

His adaptation to church life and structures is

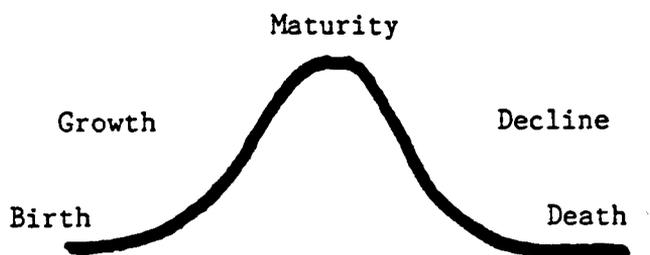


It may be a model from which we could learn much. In terms of association and Union life we have known and still know the experience of the downside. How do we get back to the upside? Robert Dale claims that it will happen only when we go back to the dream stage. However, I have sat in on many groups where we go back to the structures stage. We tinker, evaluate, propose, discuss, amend and re-constitutionalise. If Robert Dale is right then it will be doomed to frustration. I have a gut feeling that he is right. Where there is a group or association that is growing then there is a clearly articulated dream or vision at its heart.

If this is true, what does it suggest practically? The need is for visionary leadership teams that share a united vision for their association. This means that above all we need visionary superintendents, association secretaries and missionaries who have a shared dream for their association. We need to move from a leadership of association which is shaped by a maintenance mind-set (e.g. defining the superintendents task primarily as "pastor of pastors, and pastor of pastorless churches" as it was expressed in the BU Council recently), to one which has an apostolic and mission mind-set. That dream must be formed, shared, articulated, sold, amended, shared, articulated, sold etc. until the whole constituency knows it, believes it, share in it, and contributes to it. For that to happen you need to have committed networks through which to operate.

Therefore, we need to lay to rest the traditional fraternal, where we meet to discuss issues of ministry, but we never truly meet as persons to support one another in a commonly shared goal of mission and ministry. Relationship, genuine relating as brothers and sisters, as we share in a joint task and ministry, needs to be striven for and held to until it is seen into being. We have the form of this, but we do not have the substance of it in terms of commitment, honesty and brotherly/sisterly love.

And finally the need is for mission to be at the very heart of the association's reason for existence. The imperatives of a godless society must shape the agenda of our associations' leadership. As a commissioned people we cannot ignore our basic calling as the Servant to be a light to the nation.



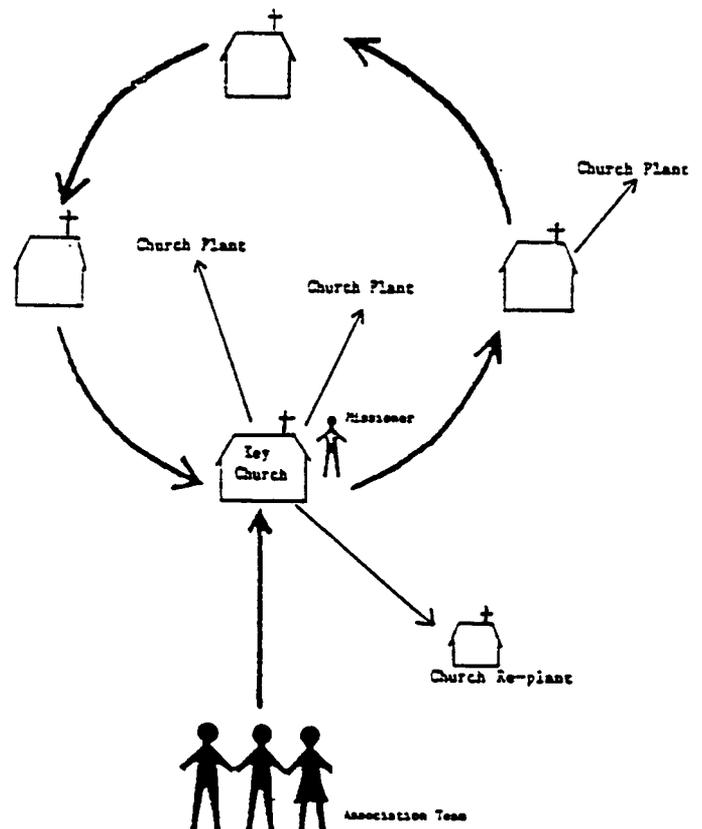
This must be at the centre of all our discussions and decisions, otherwise we fail to be what we are. The association teams need to identify key churches within their association which have or could have a "regional"/"district" influence, and who have a mission heart. WE need to resource those churches so that the mission policy can be outworked. This poses deep and radical questions about mission policy and its funding. Is there within our associations a clear mission policy that undergirds and shapes how we allocate resources? It's all so ad hoc and lacking clear mission thinking.

Here is a diagrammatic portrayal of what needs to happen. Basically the need is to push missionaries-/evangelists/church planters out into the grass roots where they can be attached to churches with a mission policy for that district. Our present missionaries can only be effective if they focus their time in one or two situations, and so we need to use them areas where we do not have effective witness at present, whilst they draw in local churches to share in a shared mission policy in that church's district.

These sketchy reflections come as I bow out of association life because of an impending move. My reflections are sharply critical of my association experience, and yet... and yet..." association is the future of our life together." If we do not see renewal and restoration of our association structures then I believe we will see an increasing polarisation taking place as people drop-out from the structures. People will look for association elsewhere, and the structures will be left to go on their own sweet bureaucratic way for another generation.

Stephen Ibbotson

Association team & district mission strategy



BOOK REVIEWS

The Kingdom of God is a Party

by Tony Campolo

Word Books, 1990; £2.99

"What kind of church do you belong to?" "I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3:30 in the morning". Any book that starts with a story that concludes with that exchange has got to be worth reading. As with everything by Tony Campolo, this book is written with the pacy verve of a station thriller. But it isn't one long anecdote on how Christians should be party animals. Rather it is a look at the gospel through the metaphor of 'the party'.

This enables him to look at OT celebrations, the parables, Jesus' care of and invitation to the outcast and poor as well as the partying culture in which all of us live and minister - parties which Campolo

describes as counterfeit. It's a great read and he casts new light on familiar themes. For instance, he shows that the Tithe as describe in Dt. 14:22-29 was not for 'religious' activities but for a massive blow-out! Ten per cent of our income is for partying - the other 90% was for God and his work!

He captures the joy and vitality that should attend our lives together as Christians without falling into an irrelevant triumphalism. There is an excellent chapter called 'Suffering through the Party' on how Christians cope with and live through tragedy, upset, disappointment and bereavement.

A book worth reading and passing on.

Simon Jones

Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke:

A fresh assault on the Synoptic Problem

by John Wenham (Hodder & Stoughton, 1991; £9.95)

I know what you're asking: 'What has the synoptic problem got to do with my ministry?' Add to that questions about why I should read pages of untranslated Greek, detailed literary analysis, painstaking reconstruction of the early years of the Christian church, minute examination of the relationships between major and minor players in the NT and you begin to see why this is a must for those quiet moments in your week when you want to put your feet up and forget about the dally grind!

This book is a cross between a Cadbury's Boost and the very best John Le Carre-Style novel. It is a treat and a rivetting good read. And at the end of it your confidence in the reliability of the gospels as historically accurate accounts of Jesus' ministry will have received an enormous boost.

Those of you who read Wenham's earlier *Easter Enigma* will know the kind of thing this book holds in store. Wenham takes seriously every little piece of data he finds in the NT, pieces all the bits together like a complex jigsaw and presents the whole in a way that casts great shafts of light on the early history and content of the faith.

The old certainties regarding the two document solution of the synoptic problem which we probably all got served up at college have been under attack for a good 20 years. Many scholars, including Wenham, no longer see the need for Q and an equal number – though usually different scholars – play down the whole idea of direct borrowing of one evangelist by another in favour of a much more fluid situation of traditions about Jesus being preserved and passed on by various early Christian communities.

Wenham's solution that Matthew was the first gospel to be written, followed by Mark and then Luke will not command universal assent. I'm not sure I find it convincing. Neither will his sympathetic treatment of patristic sources as evidence of how the gospels came to be written be seen as compelling by many readers, though on this point I feel more sympathy for Wenham's approach.

ASSEMBLY LINE



How do you assess the Bournemouth Assembly? It depends where you are coming from.

Measured by previous assemblies, good progress continues to be made. Compared with the sheer dullness of a few years ago the strides forward are impressive, and the organisers are to be congratulated. The success of using a modern convention centre made many wish never to assemble in London again.

Measured by the best evangelical and charismatic events, the event is still predictable, routine

His book, however, is a joy to read – though the untranslated Greek can get a bit wearing! – and has given me a fresh appreciation of the care the gospel writers took in compiling their accounts which in turn has given a fillip to my confidence in the reliability of what they wrote.

Simon Jones

The God of Stones and Spiders

by Charles Colson (Hodder & Stoughton, 1991; £6.99)

If The Sun had a God slot it would, I suspect, read something like this book. Colson, a man for whom Watergate was literally a God-send has gathered up his columns from *Christianity Today* and *Jubilee*, the newsletter of the Prison Fellowship, and published them for a wider public.

Colson, well known for previous books, such as *Life Sentence*, turns his tabloid popgun on a variety of targets – political, cultural, social and economic – trivialises them, reduces them to a one sentence moral issue and then serves up a homespun philosophy of life that's a cross between the Republican party's manifesto and a Pat Boone record.

All the concerns of the Moral Majority are here – abortion, homosexuality, Euthanasia, freedom of religion and pornography. But I searched in vain for concern about homelessness, poverty, unemployment, racism, militarism and sexism.

I also searched in vain for anything approaching intelligent analysis of even the issues Colson focuses on. For example, in one piece he says that all terrorism is a conspiracy to overthrow the West (a society who's values he savages in most of the other chapters) and is only 'gratuitous bloodshed'. There is no attempt to lift the stone and find the reasons for the PLO or the Sandanistas. His only explanation is that terrorism might be God's judgement on our society.

It is this kind of book that earns Christians their reputation for knowing nothing about politics: we merely use the public square (as they call it in the States) to force our own agenda on an unwilling populace. We'd all do better to read John Neuhaus *The Naked Public Square*.

Simon Jones

and safe. A lot of catching up has been done, but not enough; the worship and general approach from the platform remains locked in a time warp.

The age distribution of the delegates must give rise for concern. It is pleasant to have an opportunity for retired ministers to gather and reminisce; but where is the vigour, the sharpening of a vision for Baptist Mission tomorrow?

We surely need to shift our essential concept of the assembly, from "a cosy reunion for the Baptist family", to "the strategic gathering of God's army in

preparation for advance".

We urgently need an analysis of the age distribution of delegates at the next assembly, so that we have hard information on which to base a radical overhaul of the programme, in order to avoid the assembly degenerating into a Saga holiday for retired Baptists.

We need to consider giving over one evening to a celebration in the style of Spring Harvest, the largest annual gathering of Baptists, at which there should be a vigorous biblical exposition.

We need to consider incorporating professional seminars from such groups as MARC Europe and Administry.

We need to understand the fine line in drama between wry humour and an attitude to God which is demeaning of him and of us.

If we invite overseas speakers they need to speak far earlier in an evening meeting than Jim Wallis did.

If we now see life deacons as a mistake of the past in the local church, we should also see life membership of the BU Council as unhealthy for the denomination, no matter how grateful we may be to individuals who may have been honoured in such a way in past generations.

In short, the end of term report might read: signs of progress, but no room for complacency; a great deal more imagination, adventurousness and boldness are required.

Evangelical Under Forties Forum

During the past year a new initiative has been launched for younger Baptist ministers. Three one day conferences have been held in the north and three in the south. We seek to address issues of pastoral theology, rooted in the practice of local church leadership. We want to work together at pastoral theology in such ways that we become more effective leaders and develop a clear and vibrant vision for the future.

Our discussion usually springs from a paper raising a pressing issue, eg the futures of renewal, the development of worship. A second paper provides a biblical and doctrinal perspective for the immediate concern. We also seek to build in an opportunity to pray together, for vision building and mutual support, plus personal prayer for anyone in particular need.

The popularity of these days has shown there is a real need for this kind of forum, which is not met elsewhere. Next year further regional groups are likely to begin.

This Autumn sees our first national consultation, when we meet for 24 hours in Sutton Coldfield 5-6 November, lunch till lunch. The theme will be "Ministry in the Nineties", and Malcolm Goodspeed, shortly to be the new Secretary for Ministry, will join us for the Tuesday evening session. For further information or to book your place, please contact Glen Marshall or Rob Warner. (See the Mainstream Executive list for their addresses.)



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at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire.
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There will also be a variety of seminars

Name:
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Special Requirements:

I wish to bookplaces (Maximum of 10 per church) for the Mainstream Conference. I enclose a deposit of £10 per person (cheques payable to Mainstream).

Twin-bedded rooms with en-suite facilities £62 per person Number required:
Single and twin-bedded rooms with wash basins £53 per person Number required:

Where a multiple booking is being made, please enclose a list of names of all delegates, and indicate who is the contact person for the bookings.

Accommodation will be allocated on a first come first served basis. We regret that we will be unable to offer any day visitor places until December 1991, if at all.

Completed forms should be returned to:
John Weaver, The Manse, 35 Highfield Road, Rushden, Northants. NN10 9QD.
Tel: No. 0933 53493

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