

Editorial

## BAPTIST EVANGELICALS AND EVANGELICAL BAPTISTS

There are two distinct breeds of evangelical among Baptists. I'm not talking about the difference between conservatives and radicals or between charismatics and non-charismatics. A much more fundamental distinction needs to be faced today: there are Evangelicals who also happen to be Baptist and there are Baptists who are also evangelical. These two breeds have a different sense of identity and even of priority, and can easily misunderstand each other.

For the Baptist Evangelicals, being a Baptist is absolutely fundamental to how you see yourself as a Christian. It matters a great deal to know how many Baptists attend Spring Harvest or use Person to Person. It matters a great deal for your church to establish strong links with other Baptist churches, to support the BMS and Home Mission, and to play your part in association life. For the Baptist evangelical, being a Baptist comes first.

For the Evangelical Baptists, what matters most is not being Baptist but being Evangelical. The primary sense of identity and conviction is evangelical and not denominational. The growth and strength of evangelicalism is of more concern than the growth and strength of the denomination. It matters a great deal for your church to establish strong links

with other like minded churches in whatever denomination or stream, and you want to support a wide range of mission agencies, rather than putting all your eggs in a denominational basket. Many have explored links with such groupings as New Frontiers, Ichthus or Pioneer and a resurgent Evangelical Alliance is not seen as a threat but as a sign of hope.

This contrast is seen in every part of church life. The Baptist evangelical likes to refer someone who is moving away to the nearest live Baptist church. The Evangelical baptist will refer someone to the nearest live church, irrespective of denomination. The Baptist evangelical will warmly identify with the "Baptist family"; the Evangelical baptist will warmly identify with the wider evangelical scene, and in particular will often be much closer to new churches that are charismatic, evangelical and believer baptising than to non-evangelical Baptist Union churches. The Baptist evangelical will be challenged to plant new Baptist churches; the Evangelical baptist will identify first with the wider vision of planting new live and Bible believing churches, irrespective of denominational label.

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### NEWSLETTER No. 45 - AUGUST, 1992

**Articles:**

- Editorial - Baptist evangelicals and Evangelical baptists
- An American Reflection Andrew Green
- Church Planting - Learning From Others Penny Snowdon
- Democratic Government Through the Church Meeting
- Biblical, Baptist or What? Ron Viner
- Teach Them Derek C. James
- Endangered species? - A Reply M. Smith
- Details of the 1993 Mainstream Conference

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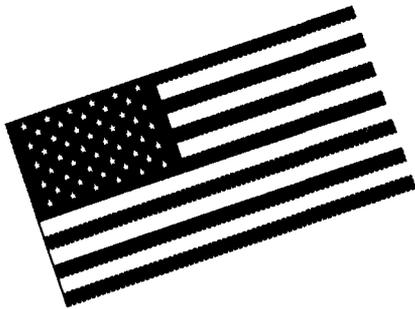
The Mainstream Newsletter is designed to encourage life and growth among churches within the Baptist Union. On the understanding that contributors are in sympathy with this aim, they have full liberty of expression. Views contained in the newsletter are those of individual contributors and do not necessarily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

For reasons of background and temperament, at least as much as theological conviction, neither group is about to disappear. But they can make life uncomfortable for one another. The Evangelical baptist can lapse into cynicism about denominational involvement. I have been sorry to hear someone dismissed as a "company man", or held under suspicion as an establishment figure, when they are serving with integrity within the corridors of the denominational structure.

The Baptist evangelical can become equally strident, urging everyone to get involved in the committees which seem to plague denominational life: such a task is surely a special calling from which some of our strategic leaders and evangelists need to be preserved at all costs! I have been sorry to hear someone dismissed as "disloyal" or even held in suspicion as an undercover new church representative, when they are serving with integrity within the networks of wider evangelicalism.

So what do we need to do? It must be healthy, first of all, simply to come to terms with the diversity between these two breeds of evangelical. We must resist the tendency to squeeze everyone into a single mould and approach, and repent of any misplaced judgmentalism or emotional pressure. We need to enjoy more mutual respect for callings and perspectives which, while significantly different need never be seen as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, it is together that we can accomplish in a pagan society a pincer movement of life and growth in the nation.

In short, instead of trying to turn everyone into a Baptist evangelical or everyone into an Evangelical baptist, it's about time we accepted a simple truth: we will certainly not always agree, but, for the sake of the gospel of Christ, the more we learn to respect and trust one another, the stronger we will be.



# AN AMERICAN REFLECTION



# REFLECTION AMERICAN AN

"A little knowledge is highly dangerous", runs a familiar proverb. It is therefore with some diffidence that I comment on American church life and culture. Firstly, my experience of

American churches is limited to just 5 states visited during a recent sabbatical - Florida, Washington, Philadelphia, Minnesota & California. Secondly, I am aware of the tremendous variety of cultural groups and church groups within the country. Yet despite this limited perspective, any observation on American culture is useful because the US has such an effect on British culture and church life.

I write with a sense of indebtedness to the many Americans who showed me kindness and overflowing generosity. I have learnt so many good things from our cousins in the States, but I also want to reflect on those things which may not be quite so helpful, but will certainly have their effect on us this decade.

## 1. The pragmatic culture

The American system of education (like any education system) not only reflects the culture, but shapes it. In particular, the modular approach to education means that

a student at any level studies a subject for a semester and then completes that body of knowledge. By contrast, British education speaks of a "spiral of knowledge" in which students keep returning to a subject, but on each turn of the cycle there is a greater depth.

This modular approach encourages a sense of completeness within that area of knowledge. Knowledge is nicely tied up and presented - and with that there is the classic American pragmatism. This means that in church life there is always a "how-to" approach.

- \* Seven ways to be an effective father.
- \* Ten steps to be a positive thinker.
- \* Seven ways to make your church grow.
- \* Three steps to know God.

This handy packaging of knowledge makes the gaining of knowledge attractive. Many Americans like to gain knowledge because it is presented practically and in an understandable form.

In Britain we can learn from this approach. We are often far too theoretical and abstruse. At the end of any sermon most people want to ask, "What does that mean to me for Monday morning.?" Any expository ministry needs simplicity and pragmatism so that each church member understands what is said, and knows what they can do.

The down side of this approach is that simplicity leads to being simplistic and superficial. The constant emphasis on the pragmatic means that something of the mystery of faith is missed. On the whole Americans are great on a sense of the immanent, but poor on the transcendent. (When it comes to corporate worship Britain is far ahead of the Americans!)

I am sure that this pragmatic approach will increasingly come to Britain. The Bill Hybels model of the "seeker service" encourages topical, practical preaching. His model is going to be the "in thing". As indicated above, there are good things about this, and not-so-good things too!

## **2. The open culture**

On the whole Americans are far more "open" than we are. For example they are more open to friendship. Their sunny smiles and warm personalities are attractive. Complete strangers will go out of their way to be helpful. In churches the way they made sure everyone has a welcome is worthy of a study in itself!

Americans are more open to talk about themselves; their salary, their marriage, their friends and enemies. Whereas most Britons have large areas of life labelled "private", Americans are more transparent. So many things about their national way of life confirm this trait. Politically they operate a more open government. They have much more freedom of information by legal right. History, government and culture all conspire to promote a spirit of openness.

Of course so much is good about this and worth emulating. The Bible tells us that the "secret things will be revealed"; and much that we call private needs to be revealed. In our personal lives, in church life and community life we should be far more open and less secretive. There is no doubt that we could learn much about friendship and welcoming from the Americans.

The down side of this usually positive trait, is that some will say Americans are so open - they are open to anything. For example, they are open to the cults and fringe religions in a way that Europe is not. They are also open to every extreme of evangelical Christianity - so that Los Angeles has every conceivable flavour within the one city.

Several Britons living in America, have suggested that Americans are "seekers" in a way that people in Britain are not. As suggested above, this may not be a purely subjective opinion, but have roots in the national way of life. If this thesis is true, however, then we need to bear that in mind when we adopt American models in church life.

For example, when Bill Hybels re-orientates the whole of his church for the seeker, we need to understand that in its American context. A seeker in America is different to the seeker in Britain. Our evangelistic methods need to recognise the "private" side of the average Briton. Moreover, there is a characteristic cynicism and made-up-my-mind attitude among many outside the church in Britain. We may wish that there were more openness to spiritual things on this side of the Atlantic, but most evidence indicates that this openness is not there.

## **3. The consumer culture**

In Britain we are used to the American view of the consumer society. So we are aware of such axioms as "the consumer is king" and "the customer is always right". Post Thatcher Britain is aware of the power of the market, so much so that principles of consumerism are applied to education and health.

It is perhaps small wonder that consumerism is being rigorously applied to the church. George Barna, the church growth guru of the moment, has written such titles as, "Marketing the church" and "The user friendly church". The basic thesis is that churches are just like business in the sense that they are in the market place to reach people with their "product". We may not like the thought of such an idea, but Barna suggests, the consumer society is the culture we are in and we have got to communicate in these terms.

The application of consumer principles to church life are legion and need to be carefully evaluated. The consumer philosophy regards the "customer" as the one who dictates the quality, quantity and packaging of the "product". The job of the good "producer" is to listen carefully to his market; this listening will result in success.

When consumerism is put in such bald terms and then linked to the church, alarm bells immediately start to ring.

To be fair, Barna and others nowhere suggest that the "consumer" dictates the form and content of the Gospel message. What they do say, however, is that the church has got to package and market this gospel product better. For example when it comes to a church program the consumer wants more choice and flexibility. The consumer is used to a very professional TV age, so the marketing of the church has got to be of a similarly good quality.

As we evaluate what we can learn from the American churches, we need to be aware of the subtle distortion that consumerism may be having on the church. Ultimately the consumer is emphatically

NOT king. Our first duty is to be obedient to Christ's Word; sometimes that obedience will cut across the foibles of the consumer.

#### 4. A "me - feeling good" culture

It is at the heart of fallen humankind, no matter what culture, to be turned inwards upon self. Americans are no different to Britons. However, self-preoccupation in America is particularly evident in the emphasis on physical and mental health. Healthy life styles are all the rage, and all food is marked as to whether it is cholesterol free. More significantly it is the psychological jargon that litters every TV program that makes one realise the prevalence of that need to feel good about oneself.

As I have travelled around I have realised that the "psychological approach" has quite a strong influence within Christian ministry. The healing that the Gospel brings is presented not primarily as a necessary reconciliation with God but as a reconciliation

with ourselves and those around. Again the pragmatic "how to" culture prefers the concentration on relationships we can see among family and friends to the relationship we can't see with God. We need to be aware that valid psychological truths of scripture do not obscure the primary imperatives to be reconciled to God.

#### CONCLUSION

Travelling in America one is aware of being in a culture close to our own, but a few years more advanced. Criticisms of American culture, are likely to be criticisms of ourselves - given a few more years. Maybe, as we look in this American mirror and see OUR reflection, we will have time to put things right.

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# CHURCH PLANTING: LEARNING FROM OTHERS

In order to prepare for a church planting programme in and around Herne Hill I decided research the strategies of the British leaders in this field. No two church plants are identical, but if we are serious about church planting we need to learn from the modern day pioneers. Although my research for our church went wider, I want to present my findings about three key movements: Kensington Temple, Ichthus and Pioneer.

#### Kensington Temple

K.T. has planted around forty churches over the last five years. Their goal is to plant another 2,000 over the next ten years.

They take spiritually mature leaders who have a vision to plant a new church, and spend some time with them to ensure that the vision is from God. If the leadership is confident that there is a clear sense of calling, then the people who want to be involved get on with it!

The new leaders do not need to have much experience in leadership. Often the church in England has been too choosy about who can be an enterprising leader, and therefore has not grown as quickly as it could have done.

They encourage each church plant to be independent from the beginning, otherwise K.T. would run out of resources too quickly to plant many churches.

#### *Problems encountered*

- \* People wanting to return to the mother church after a few months because they found it too costly being involved in the plant.
- \* Negative reaction from other churches who feel threatened.
- \* Some failures, but better to try and fail than never try at all. The churches of England are plagued by an attitude of "safety first"!

#### *Faith and long term vision are essential*

#### Ichthus

Ichthus began by planting out new congregations from a mother church. They now have many congregations across London which have been linked in areas. However they are in the process of re-structuring their network of congregations, so that they return to the model of having strong mother churches, with satellite congregations linked to them. This pattern seems to have brought the greatest growth. Ichthus have a vision to see one congregation for every 1,000 people in any given area.

#### *Preparation and methods*

1. They usually begin with a home group in the area, which then concentrates on evangelism.
2. As people are converted they then begin to meet on Sunday mornings.

3. They have regular open air praise times. Indeed many Ichthus' leaders refer to Saturday as their "evangelism day" - not that they don't evangelise at other times, but that this is a peak time. Sometimes in these open airs they share communion together, as a declaration of Jesus' victory on the cross.

#### *Leadership*

The new congregation has a leadership team which may be made up of the home group leaders and, possibly, Ichthus networkers (a team of full time, short term volunteers).

Those with leadership potential are trained up to lead and then released in order to see sustained growth. The leaders meet once a fortnight, and also twice a week for early morning prayer.

#### *Problems encountered*

1. Ichthus soon discovered the need to train their potential leaders.
2. Spiritual opposition. Team life has helped support those involved.
3. They have needed real wisdom in handling some of the problems they have met, e.g. crime, debt, drug abuse.....
4. Discipling the new converts has proved time consuming. They aim to train all the members of the congregation to disciple others.
5. Perseverance. This type of work requires much perseverance, prayer and fasting.

#### **The Revelation Church, Chichester** **(linked to Pioneer)**

At an Evangelists' Conference in December, 1991, I heard how this church have planted new congregations in their area. Their methods are similar to those of Ichthus, so I have only listed the areas they emphasised.

#### *Preparation and methods*

1. Training for leaders and for members of the new congregation. They usually allow three months for this.

2. All of their home groups have several streets which they are responsible for. (Praying, leafletting, evangelising.....)
3. For the first year, the new congregation do nothing but evangelism.
4. The sending congregation have to be committed to praying for the new plant.
5. Identify and aim to reach the "leaders of influence" in the community.

#### *Leadership*

1. It is essential to identify the key "breakthrough person", who is a pioneer and motivator.
2. The leadership team needs to have a balance of other giftings.
3. The leaders must have Christian maturity and a clear sense of calling.

#### *Method of selection of people to launch a new congregation*

1. Identify leaders.
2. Invite those the leaders would like to join the plant to pray about being part of the team.
3. Invite other people in the church to "apply" to be part of the team, and then decide who are suitable.

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## **DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE CHURCH MEETING: BIBLICAL, BAPTIST OR WHAT?**

### *INTRODUCTION*

Any discussion relating to church government stems from the universal belief of all Christians that Christ is the Head of the Church, that church government is theocentric. However, the way in which that role of Christ manifests itself within the church has been a perpetual source of division amongst Christians.

Government has two aspects: first the deciding of policy; and second its implementation. In combination these two aspects of government provide the direction, control and regulation of a group of

people, an organisation or a nation. The style of such government can differ. In our society and culture, one or other, if not both of these aspects, are expected (or believed) to be subject to a democratic process. To varying degrees this is the general understanding of church government in English Baptist churches today, and finds its expression in a 'one member, one vote' philosophy for the church meeting.

But just where does this belief in democratic government through the church meeting spring from? Is it

either biblical or Baptist? Can it be supported from the New Testament or traced back to the earliest days of Baptist history? My research (for my Baptist Principles essay at Collegel) suggests that the answer to both these questions is 'No', and that a more likely answer is that it reflects cultural values which need to be tested against both Scripture and Baptist history.

#### **NEW TESTAMENT EVIDENCE FOR DECISION MAKING BY THE WHOLE CHURCH**

It must first be admitted that the phrase 'the church meeting' is not in the New Testament. There is no verse or passage which unequivocally advocates or instructs church government in the sense of democratic control through the church meeting. In order to establish the role of the church meeting we need to consider the places where the New Testament prescribes the whole church as the correct decision making body or where the whole church was actually involved in the decision making process.

#### **Matthew 18:15-20**

These verses deal with the matter of church discipline when there are sinful disputes between members. If the other steps prescribed fail to bring reconciliation, the instruction is to 'tell it to the church; and if he' (the offending brother) 'refuses to listen even to the church.....' The role of the church here is to encourage and exhort reconciliation between members. The validity of the complaint has already been tested by two or three witnesses (v16), and the church has two alternatives only: to instruct the offender to repent and be reconciled or, if that instruction is ignored, to excommunicate him or her (v18). Some hold that verses 19-20 justify government through the church meeting, but the whole of *Matthew 18* deals with life and discipline between members within the Christian community. Therefore verses 19-20 should not be taken out of context: 'They allude to the efficacy of prayer..... and the presence of Christ in His Church with reference to disciplinary decisions such as those outlined in verses 15-18.'<sup>(1)</sup> The scope for the church's decision making in these verses is strictly defined and limited.

#### **Acts 6:1-6**

In response to complaints by one section within the church of unfairness in the daily distribution, the Apostles (the undisputed authority in the infant church) delegated the choice of seven men to wait on tables to 'all the disciples' (v2). Before doing this they had instructed that those chosen should be 'full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.' We are not told how all the disciples (whom we can equate with church members) went about that decision making process, but after so doing the seven were presented to the Apostles who appointed them by prayer and the laying on of hands. The church's role here was to

choose leaders within the policy clearly defined for them by the Apostles.

#### **Acts 15**

This chapter contains the next clear example of the whole church being involved in decision making. The church at Antioch appointed Paul and Barnabus to consult with the Apostles and elders at Jerusalem on a matter of doctrine and practice. On their arrival they reported to the whole church at Jerusalem (v4) and a group within the church expressed opposition to the practice of Paul and Barnabus (the first suggestion of anything like our normal church meeting?1). The matter was then considered by the Apostles and elders (v6). Paul and Barnabus reported fully to them (in context 'the whole assembly' in v12 is quite clearly that of the Apostles and elders only), Peter reminded them of God's past action as a precedent and James, the clear leader of the Jerusalem church at this stage, decided the issue (v19). The narrative does not indicate clearly whether James expressed the consensus view of the meeting or simply made a judgment on his own authority. The whole church then became involved with the Apostles and elders (v22) in choosing delegates to convey the decision to the Gentile churches through a letter from the Apostles and elders only (v23ff). On arrival in Antioch the delegates gathered the whole church together to deliver this letter which was read by all (v30-31). The decision of the whole Jerusalem church here related to implementing leadership policy on a matter of doctrine and practice. The whole church in Antioch is then gathered to receive and accept, but not to debate, that policy decision.

As far as I can discern, these are the only New Testament examples of the whole church being involved with decision making. They suggest a four-fold basis for the church meeting, apart from worship, fellowship, and ministry, namely:-

- i) The disciplining of church members:(*Matthew 18:15-20*). The whole church is the ultimate authority, not in deciding the rights and wrongs of any dispute, but to exhort and encourage reconciliation or to excommunicate the stubbornly impenitent.
- ii) To select those needed for ministry and service: (*Acts 6:1-6*). Such people, however, must meet Apostolic (in our context Scriptural) requirements.
- iii) To receive information concerning God's activity through his servants: (*Acts 15:3-4*)
- iv) To publicly deal with questions concerning doctrine and practice by:
  - (a) raising the question for the leaders to consider (with other church leaders as necessary) (*Acts 15:2,4-6*);

- (b) receiving their decision and deciding how it should be communicated and acted upon (*Acts 15:22,30-31*).

Important as these matters are, we are left with the following somewhat uncomfortable conclusion in the light of much current thought and practice in Baptist churches: that there is no clear justification in the New Testament for government in the sense of policy making by democratic means through the church meeting. There is some support for the church meeting implementing policy, but even this is strictly limited.

#### OTHER NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES AND DOCTRINES USED TO SUPPORT GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE CHURCH MEETING

Other passages in Acts are sometimes appealed to in support of the concept of congregational church government. *Acts 13:1-3* describes the setting apart of Barnabus and Saul by the church at Antioch, but the inference of these verses is that this was again a leadership decision. F. F. Bruce comments: 'On this occasion the divine message directed the leaders of the church to set Saul and Barnabus apart for a special work to which he had called them.'<sup>(2)</sup> In an article in the Mainstream Newsletter some years ago, Douglas Sparkes referred to *Acts 11 and 12* as showing 'the business of the early church.'<sup>(3)</sup> However, whereas these chapters demonstrate the activity of the early church, I find it difficult to discern how they either suggest or support democratic government through the church meeting. Paul's pictures of the church as the body of Christ are often invoked to support government through the church meeting (*1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 4:15-16*). Undoubtedly this imagery teaches us that every believer is gifted by God and is essential to the well-being of the whole body. However, Paul, with his limited knowledge of anatomy and physiology, knew that the body does not make corporate decisions. It has one decision making centre, the head, and so the church has one decision making authority, Christ who is head of the church. This authority to govern in the context of the local fellowship is delegated through those gifted by grace to be leaders - 'We have different gifts according to the grace given us....if it is leadership let him govern diligently....' (*Romans 12:6-8*); 'But to each of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it....some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service....' (*Ephesians 4:9-12*).

The clear teaching from such passages is that those with different gifts carry different responsibilities within the body. Nowhere does Paul suggest that decision making is a corporate activity. Rather the emphasis is that those in leadership have a God-given responsibility for governing the church and are personally accountable to God for this ministry as those

entrusted with the care of the flock (*of 1 Peter 5:2; Hebrews 13:17*). As the body's nerve centre they need, of course, to receive, understand and respond to the signals from other members to aid and shape their rule, but they are appointed and are directed by Christ. The principles taught in these passages do not lend any support to the concept of congregational government. David Watson has expressed it this way: 'The church is not a democracy with equal votes for every member on all decisions. The clear principle of headship is true both for the human family and the family of God, the church. And if the picture of the New Testament church is that of a charismatic community, we must remember that one of God's gifts to the church is the charisma of leadership.'<sup>(4)</sup>

The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is also appealed to in defending government through the church meeting. This doctrine emphasises the removal of any human mediator between humanity and God save the man Christ Jesus himself, our High Priest and Mediator of the new covenant. Thus each believer is able to offer their own 'spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (*1 Peter 2:5*). The church constitutes a priestly body 'whose business is to be the medium or expression of Christ's priesthood, to declare the message of this reconciliation between God and man achieved through Him.'<sup>(5)</sup> This doctrine teaches the equality of each believer's standing before God, but it really has nothing to say regarding the structure or method of church government.

These considerations suggest that democratic government through the church meeting is an alien concept to the New Testament. Government was considered to be the function and responsibility of leaders within the church who were understood to be personally responsible to God for exercising this ministry.

#### CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN BAPTIST HISTORY

If support for such a form of church government is hard to find in the New Testament, from where and since when has the concept of government through the church meeting entered Baptist thinking? Confessions of Faith produced by our Baptist forefathers in the early days of the separatist movement clearly express the biblical teaching that government or rule is the function of the recognised leaders of each local church. For example, the Somerset (Particular Baptist) Confession of 1656 states in Article 33 that 'the authority of Christ in an orderly ministry, is to be submitted into (*Heb. 13:17; 2 Thess. 3:14*)'.<sup>(6)</sup> Similarly, the Standard Confession (of the General Baptists) of 1660 states in Article 15, 'The Elders or Pastors which God hath appointed to oversee and feed his Church....are to feed the flock in due season and in much love to rule over them, with all care, seeking after such as go astray;'.<sup>(7)</sup> Other confessions both earlier and later display this same

understanding<sup>(6)</sup> whilst also affirming that matters of discipline and the appointment of leaders should be decided by the whole church.<sup>(9)</sup>

The first indications of democratic congregational government in Baptist Confessions of Faith do not appear until the twentieth century and the first hints come from the USA. Article 7 of the 1816 Principles of Faith of the Sandy Creek Association reads 'That Jesus Christ is the great head of the church, and that government thereof is with the body.'<sup>(10)</sup> The 1923 Articles of Faith of the Baptist Bible Union of America include the statement 'we hold that the local church has absolute right of self-government.....'<sup>(11)</sup> although this probably stresses the independence of the local church rather than its form of government. The first unequivocal reference appears to be in a document entitled The Baptist Doctrine of the Church which was approved by the Baptist Union Council in this country in 1948 which describes the church meeting as 'outwardly a democratic way of ordering the affairs of the church',<sup>(12)</sup> although it limits the function of the church meeting to caring for the well-being of the believing community, appointing its officers and exercising discipline, not so far removed from Baptist roots. Then in 1952 the Minnesota Baptist Convention substantially adopted the Southern Baptist Convention Baptist Faith and Message with the addition of, inter alia, the following statement, that '.....each congregation recognises its own democratic self-containing government as its highest authority for carrying out the will of our Lord Jesus Christ.'<sup>(13)</sup> No doubt the practice of democratic government through the church meeting preceded its clear expression in word, but not by 300 years!

By 1960 Morris West could write 'In the present ecclesiastical situation we have the local Baptist Church functioning - so far as government is concerned, through its own church meeting.....'<sup>(14)</sup> though one might question his assertion that 'Baptists have always held that it is through the church gathered to do the Lord's work that the Holy Spirit commands, namely the Church Meeting.'<sup>(15)</sup> Baptist history suggests that the case is far from proven. Fred Bacon describes the church meeting as where 'members come together to make decisions affecting every aspect of the church's life and work.'<sup>(16)</sup>

Such understandings of church government seem at odds with that of our Baptist forefathers. Looking back at them I echo Dr. Wheeler Robinson's feeling that 'This little group of men and women.....is so tremendously in earnest, so authoritative in its interpretation of Scripture, so fearless in the application of its authority, that we cannot but be impressed.'<sup>(17)</sup> Writing as long ago as 1927 he could continue 'English Baptists have had their faith modified by the world'<sup>(18)</sup> Could it be that the commonly held view of democratic government through the church meeting owes its origins more to post-Enlightenment Western political values than it does to the rigorous concern of Baptist pioneers to have their life shaped by Scripture alone?

Ron Viner,  
Cragg Hill.



## TEACH THEM - The Forgotten Imperative

Christian education does not immediately grab the headlines in any denomination, partly due to the fact that it is still largely misunderstood. Mention the subject to an unsuspecting deacon, or even a minister, and the reply is frequently "Oh yes, we have one or two school teachers in our church" or "We have quite a good Sunday School at our church".

In fact, of course, these two responses represent only a small portion of the topics covered by Christian education. However, broadly speaking, there are two main areas to consider, namely national education and, Christian education in the churches.

In 1988 the Baptist Council made an historic decision to channel its contribution to national education through the auspices of the Free Church Federal Council. Since 1989 their Education Consultant the Revd Professor Howard Marrett, has represented us

vigorously at all levels of national education, including Primary, Secondary and Further Education as well as in the specific subject of Religious Education.

This left the way clear for a new appointment to be made by the Union of a Christian Education Adviser whose main responsibility would be Christian education in our churches from the cradle to the grave. Clearly some topics were already covered such as distance learning through the Christian Training Programme. But it was recognised that there was a much wider field involved such as the work among children, people with learning difficulties (6 million of them) and the whole question of all-age learning.

Following my appointment to this wider task a questionnaire was sent to all churches and met with a good response. A Christian education policy document was written which is still very relevant to

today's needs and it has been included as a significant document in the "Towards 2000" initiative. This policy document sets out definitions, aims and objectives regarding Christian education in our churches and is a must for any church leader who wishes to be conversant with Baptist thinking on the subject.

A lot of space and time could be spent in analysing the many initiatives touched on in the policy document but there are two in particular which I shall outline in detail due to their paramount importance. They are the work among children and the production of HELP packs for leaders of small groups in churches.

### Children

The problems relating to children are at last being highlighted in many denominations and a significant contribution to this debate is the Anglican report "All God's Children". This has drawn attention to the fact that 86% of children never darken the doors of a church at all and that many of the remaining 14% quickly lose contact with the church after childhood has passed. The report raises many questions such as the relevance of children's activities in church for today's world and highlights the urgent need to look upon children not as the church of tomorrow but as the church of today.

Baptists have been working in this field for many years through an important body called the Consultative Group on Ministry Among Children. This is now a working group of the Christian Education Network and has firm links with all the major denominations in Europe. Through two conferences a year and a triennial conference with its European neighbours children's issues are thrashed out and many resources shared.

Currently CGMC is working on a new course for training workers with children in churches which will be called "Kaleidoscope". The material will be ready for publication next Summer and we have undertaken to purchase 300 copies for use in the denomination. The course is well written and will be an excellent basis to prepare our leaders for work with children during the decade of evangelism.

### Help

The other issue concerns our HELP packs. Many of our ministers are spending laborious hours writing detailed course notes for those within their church completely unaware that "Joe Bloggs" down the road is doing exactly the same thing. With our first production of HELP1 we printed a selection of these courses at cost price for use in the local church. This means that the minister/leader can save a lot of time and is free to adapt the material to her own circumstances.

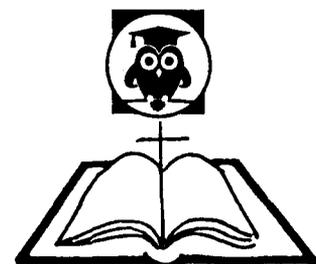
HELP1 covers four courses - Understanding The Bible, Everyday Christian Living, Learning From the Lives of Great Christians and Jesus of Nazareth - The Video. Each course has Leader's Guides and Participants' notes with a host of helpful suggestions in leading and managing this kind of learning situation. The authors are the Revds. Phillip Gathercole and Peter Thomas.

HELP1 has been such a success that we are now preparing a reprint. HELP2 is in preparation and we already have plans for HELP3. Any minister who has produced course material particularly with participants' notes, as well as leader's notes, is welcome to send it to me for possible inclusion in a future edition of HELP.

Meanwhile, if you would like to know more about the Christian education office of the Union and our vision for the future, please contact me at Baptist House. Plans are in hand to extend our services in Christian education and a leaflet will be circulated in due course giving information.

You can help by making sure your church is informed, articulate and supportive in the work of Christian education. Remember the Great Commission - "To evangelise?" I hear you ask. Well, yes - but equally to **TEACH**; that part of the Great Commission we so often forget.

Derek C. James  
Christian Education Adviser,  
Baptist Union of Great Britain





# MAINSTREAM CONFERENCE 1993

11TH - 13TH JANUARY

At The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

## "EVANGELISM THROUGH THE LOCAL CHURCH"

Main Speakers:

Bible Studies: **Pat Took**

Worship Leader: **Roy Searle**

**GERALD COATES**, Evangelising the UK and Europe

**TOM HOUSTON**, The Place of the Local Church in Evangelism

**STEVE GAUKROGER**, Communicating the Gospel to the unchurched

**STEVE IBBOTSON**, Church Planting as a key evangelistic strategy

Additional Seminar themes:

The nature of salvation; Spirituality; Networking; Help, I think my church is irrelevant!; Drama; Dance.

While many delegates come on their own and benefit greatly from Mainstream conferences, we particularly encourage leadership teams to come together. As a follow up to the CHALLENGE 2000 conference we will be inviting delegates to develop and report local church planting goals for the nineties. There will also be opportunities for personal prayer ministry during the conference.

Deposit: £10 per person, non-returnable.

Please send your booking form, with deposit to: Mr. Derek Wick,  
Mainstream Conference Secretary, Sutton Coldfield Baptist Church, Trinity Hill, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1TA.

✂ .....

### BOOKING FORM

Name: .....

Address: .....

Please book me ..... places at the Mainstream Conference in January, 1993. I enclose a £10. deposit per person, in a cheque made payable to Mainstream.

Twin-bedded rooms with en-suite facilities, £65 per person.

Number required: .....

Single and twin bedded rooms with wash basins, £55 per person.

Number required: .....

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