



BAPTISTS FOR  
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MAINSTREAM

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***Issue Theme : MAINSTREAM and RENEWAL***

## Introduction:

The January 1995 edition of the Mainstream magazine is devoted to the many aspects of Renewal. Our Letter to the Churches comes from the word processor of Douglas McBain the 'shine Jesus shine' man as he was once - so appropriately - called. Douglas has been on sabbatical recently, researching Renewal. He takes time here to remind us of something of our history as Mainstream. There follow two personal testimonies to Renewal. One from Chris Ellis whose renewal experience I first heard of from Roger Hayden and, later, Nigel Wright. This is, I believe, a very significant article indeed as Chris, in his usual thoughtful way, reflects theologically on what has happened to him. I make no apologies for using Mark Abernethy again in the magazine so soon. His firsthand testimony to personal renewal in Toronto was a highlight of the Midlands Mainstream Regional Day this Autumn and is reproduced here with permission.

In my Editorial this issue I wrestle with questions of the breadth and scope of Renewal, again drawing on personal experiences over nearly 20 years. In particular I try to address the complexities of a Renewal that can embrace both Toronto and Rwanda. You must judge whether it succeeds. Malcolm Patten ably fills our 'From Probation' spot this issue and challenges us to see through 'boundaries' looking on them as growth points for ourselves and for our churches.

Finally in probably the most significant article by far this issue, Alwyn Thompson from Belfast reminds us of the things God has done and is doing in Northern Ireland as this historic year ends and 1995 begins. What better reminder can there be of the need for Renewal to escape the churches and flow into community and nation?

*Apology: The Editor would like to apologise for the grammatical mistakes that crept into Alan Pain's fine article on South Africa in the last issue. They were of course not in the original manuscript. I apologise for any embarrassment caused.*

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Please note that the views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Mainstream Executive.

# A LETTER TO THE CHURCHES



## Mainstream and Renewal

The birth of Mainstream took place on the late evening of the 24th April 1979. The occasion was a fringe meeting to the Assembly of that year and the place was the Central Hall, Westminster, to which the first supporters came after an inspiring evening at Westminster Chapel. The small executive had arranged a magazine-type programme with interviews, musical interludes and drama supplied by a wonderful orchestra, singing group and drama team, all from Lewin Road, Streatham. A conciliatory word of explanation was given by our wise President, Dr. Ray Brown. David Coffey organised the interviewing - down to the last second of detail. Paul Beasley Murray spoke with as much enthusiasm as ever on church growth. I led some worship - my colleague and close friend, Peter Wortley, writing about the evening in the Baptist Times, actually paid me a compliment about that and in print too! Since we also had printed our first News Sheet and arranged our first Swanwick Conference for the January of 1980 and were able to invite bookings then and there, this was the point when the secret mysteries of encounter, discussion and conception were all past, and the new life that Mainstream has always sought to express within the wider life of our Union, was tangibly expressed.

### **An evangelical alliance**

From the very beginning, Mainstream has represented a coalition of interests for all lively evangelicals committed to all those aspects of the working of God's Spirit among us that leads on to our shared life and growth within the Union. So the charismatic dimension was clearly represented from the start, as also conservative evangelical, the new evangelical concerned with new methodologies and presentation, and the radical evangelical of those drawn to the anabaptists. We were delighted and very relieved when our estimate for 500 to attend the Fringe was surpassed. In fact, between 600-700 turned up that night. Such was the interest that had been created by our enterprise, that John Capon, now editor of the Baptist Times but then Editor of 'Crusade' (forerunner to the present day Alpha), thought all this very significant. He wrote a column for the benefit of the wider evangelical constituency hailing the birth of Mainstream as the welcome evidence of a 'charismatic ceasefire'. To no-one's surprise our denominational leaders at the time were not quite sure what to

think. Some thought Mainstream would soon fizzle out. Others, more perceptively, saw things differently, and as time has shown, more accurately. Depending on a broad and inclusive definition, Mainstream had arrived as a main agency for Renewal.

### **But can Baptists ever unite?**

Having started life as a kind of ginger group within the Union and committed to it, then as now, there were endless questions to face concerning our developments. Could any kind of coalition succeed? Would the whole effort soon fall into the trap of Union-bashing as some earlier movements had done? Would it go the other way and become the docile evangelical arm of a tepid establishment? Would the obvious tensions within charismatic renewal at the time, through what we now call Restorationism, cause a fracture in trust and relationships? Would the conservative evangelicals dive for cover from all these possibilities through a return to the safer waters of evangelical insularity? These were some of the issues we had to live through in the early years of infancy following the birth. Over the years since then, there has been a steady growth at the grass roots of the charismatic influence within Mainstream, as within the whole Church, seen most of all through the all pervasiveness of its liturgy of relaxed informality, even in the most structured worship. The major public focus for the charismatic was the Fountain Trust, but by the end of the 70's the Trust took decisions which inevitably led it towards its own demise. This was when Restorationism began to peak with the great attractiveness of its suggestions for many Baptists and therefore for some within Mainstream. So a few comments are called for at this point:

Restorationism proposed a radical root and branch approach to church life through the recovery not only of the gifts of the Spirit but also of ministries for the ordering of church life and government. Of these ministries, apostles, with translocal ministries supplying inspirational input to churches, and also caring for vulnerable pastors who felt themselves to be the victims of contentiousness, were a new feature. Not surprisingly, several were attracted towards this teaching. Above all, restorationists also claimed astonishing church growth at a time when church growth and statistical analyses were becoming fashionable for all of us. Some really thought they would be in a position to take over many of the denominations - perhaps even starting with the Baptists. Today, however, their influence is not particularly large, their growth rate has substantially slowed, and they have lost their novelty appeal. Many have left them in profound disappointment at their obvious failures to reach their targets; but they still hold the loyalties of some who are attracted by the certitudes of their leaders in matters the rest of us find complex to unravel.

We are now seeing the welcome evidence of a serious interest in the theology of Renewal and this is making its own impact in our midst, if much too slowly. The pioneering work for this was led in the UK by Tom Smail, then of the

Fountain Trust, in the mid 70's. I still have a jealously guarded complete set of the marvellous supplement to the Renewal magazine he edited called Theological Renewal. Tom Smail went on to write a trilogy of serious theology: 'Reflected Glory', 'The Forgotten Father' and 'The Giving Gift'. He is also the senior author of the book 'Charismatic Renewal: The search for a theology', to which Andrew Walker and Nigel Wright have also contributed. This should be required reading for all of us in public ministry these days, simply because to ignore the theological issues raised by Renewal never causes them to run away but always causes the wilfully ignorant to fall into error in one of its many forms. Thirty years' experience of Renewal confirms that.

### **Renewal without tears**

Huge new possibilities were opened up for us through the Church Growth movement that was pioneered by Fuller Theological Seminary and through the teaching of Donald McGavran. It might have been thought that these developments would lead to the eclipse of the charismatic movement by these newer and less controversial emphases. This was not to be the case, however. A new wave of charismatic teaching arose to take account of the McGavran text and to supplement this with even stronger charismatic themes. The expert who led this new stage soon used the term "Third Wave" for this new development and he also carried the imprimatur of Fuller Theological Seminary. His name - John Wimber. After ten years at the top of the global charts for charismatic ministry he remains the foremost charismatic teacher in the world today. His ministry has been dogged by errors of judgement. He has been beset by difficulties with his own health and with tensions in his teams. Yet, in spite of failed prophecies and occasionally wildly foolish claims, there is no doubt about his continuing influence and effectiveness among those who follow his teaching. No doubt this is due to his excellent communication skill and his genial manner. Perhaps it is also because he is essentially a charismatic pragmatist and this suits the spirit of the age well. For some however, the ministry he offers as a consequence, directed to the satisfying of the felt needs of wealthy Westerners and describing the results in the language of the miraculous power of the Spirit, raises more questions than it answers.

### **A New Blessing?**

Although there is some uncertainty about the point of its origins, there is a clear link between the work of John Wimber and the latest expression of charismatic vitality often known by the city of its origins as the Toronto Blessing. As I have listened to the testimonies, read the reports, and attended the churches where these times of refreshment are happening, including now the famed Airport church itself, I have no doubt that once again Renewal is going through another phase of being renewed and many are rejoicing in the consequences of that. To me there is sufficient evidence of a fresh love for Jesus and His word to be sure that the Holy Spirit is involved in this fresh stirring. Yet the emphasis on the sensual as opposed to the spiritual, and the

promotion of the bizarre as if it is - without question - an example of the actions of the Spirit and nothing else, are dangerous tendencies. The evidence of history and the confession of one's own personal testimony must surely be that it is easy for things to start with the Spirit and finish with the flesh. We need to humbly seek God for refreshing outpourings, but I have seen nothing that causes me to declare the advent of the long awaited Revival in what is in a much lower key in Toronto than it is here.

### **What should we be doing?**

With such an incomplete thumbnail sketch of Renewal in Mainstream, I see four pressing priorities on which to lay some emphasis:

\* First, we need to continue the task - and a good start is being made - of clarifying our own identity by looking carefully at the underlying theological factors in our concepts of Union, Assembly and Ministry. At present we have various papers circulating that represent a first excavation of the issues. The deeper we dig, the stronger we will build the basics which will undergird our fellowship.

\* Secondly, we need to consider the relational factors not only with our ecumenical neighbours, whose churchmanship is vastly different from our own, but more particularly with our Baptist neighbours, whose churchmanship is similar to our own. Coalition was the strength of Mainstream at its founding and is the secret of the life of our Union family too. I see further alliances ahead with others who are as clearly evangelical as we are, warmly co-operative and socially aware too. Mainstream can help the Union become stronger by becoming more inclusive, but that process demands the investment of time, energy and spirituality within the existing structures we have now. We cannot do it on the cheap.

\* Thirdly, the strength of the Union will be demonstrated at the level of the Associations or Areas. If greater responsibility is to be devolved to the Associations or Areas, as I believe it should, then greater reform is also needed here so that we strengthen ties by offering relevant assistance, serving felt needs and giving the visionary leadership that inspires. Reform and Renewal belong to each other here, but the tempo must increase.

\* Lastly, we must continue these developments in the context of outward mission. For all the growth of Renewal in our midst, we have to admit that it is only the speed, not the fact of decline, that has been slowed thus far. Our churches have still not cracked the problems of witnessing effectively in an increasingly secularised society that is far from God. For all of this we need more of the Holy Spirit. Yes Lord - give us much more.

**Douglas McBain** Metropolitan Area Superintendent of the Baptist Union. November 1994.

*This article draws on research Douglas has undertaken, during a recent sabbatical, on the impact of Renewal on Baptist life over the past thirty five years. We look forward to, perhaps, a book coming out. How this material will see the light of day given the pressures of Area Superintendency in the 1990's, however, God only knows!*

*The Editor.*

# Reflections



# ON PERSONAL RENEWAL

Some may call it a *mid life* crisis. At forty-five I confess that in the last two years, through no goodness or cleverness on my part, the love of God has flooded my being. I have been a Minister for over twenty years and have been challenged and stretched by the many opportunities this ministry has offered, as well as revelling in the friendship of many wonderful people. Yet the work of ministry cannot be separated from the personal identity of the Minister and, however high the public profile, a Minister remains a struggling disciple of Jesus.

## **A Question of Prayer**

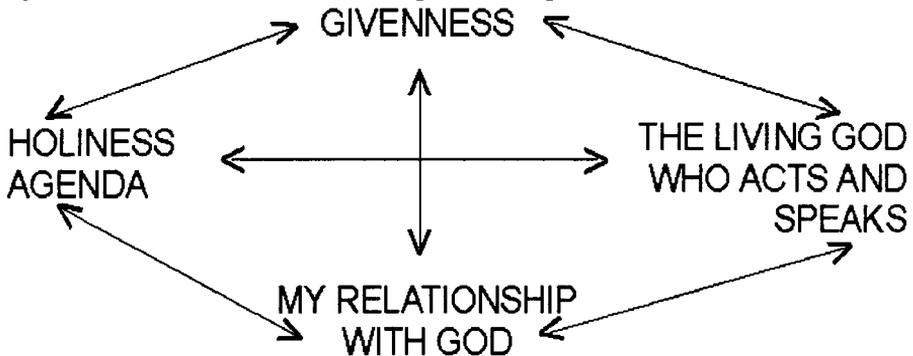
Prayer is a good focus of some of the things which have troubled me. People who regularly lead others in prayer can often experience difficulty in their own praying. In addition, prayer is a fundamental aspect of our relationship with God and it also throws up intellectual questions concerning our expectations of God's working in the world. For my own part, I found private prayer a barren experience. Just as my personal history was littered with failed attempts at losing weight, so also it was strewn with false starts of prayer. I could lead others in prayer, but when I approached God on my own I seemed to be posing rather than participating in a relationship. Ever since I was a student I had been disturbed by philosophical questions about whether and how God might act within the world of human affairs. Looking back, I can see this situation as a result of cultural captivity - a rejection of the supernatural and a suspicion of the emotional. I'm not sure whether my view of God could be loosely categorised as *Deist* or *Romantic*. On the one hand, I excluded the likelihood (not possibility) of God intervening in a mechanistic and secular universe and, on the other hand, I saw God everywhere - immanent but impotent.

My dissatisfaction turned to genuine prayer as I remembered the words of St. Theresa of Avila: "Lord I don't love you; I don't even want to love you. But Lord, I want to want to love you". One day, in worship led by someone else, I discovered that I had been "lost in wonder, love and praise". My personal prayer time became too short and my life and relationships were changed irrevocably. The main change in me was not a source of pride but of gratitude as God dealt lovingly and gently with me. However, within a year, I found myself being tempered on the anvil of God's love - a stronger relationship forged in the fear and uncertainty of major surgery.

## **Making sense of it all**

There is too much to tell. Much remained the same yet everything changed.

It was as though I had been watching a television in black and white and someone had adjusted a knob and now the same picture was in glorious colour. Certain moments have been of special significance. However, I would describe my experience as a process - a process which, thank God, is still going on. Trying to make sense of it all, I would describe my experience as *charismatic*, but do not see myself as therefore joining a group within the church. Wineskins have been burst open. Renewal means the transformation of the whole of life, not its readjustment into a new church party. For a brief period, I had to set aside my philosophical questions because they were predetermining my experience rather than reflecting on it. I have since tried to reflect on what has happened and have engaged in what I believe to be a genuinely *inductive* attempt at doing theology. I have tried to reflect on experience and allow that reflection to affect my expectations and actions. While there are many ways in which my theological framework has been challenged and changed, I can summarise the main features in a diagrammatic form. Even though I shall list them, the order must not be taken too seriously. Their very inter-relatedness indicates not only the dynamic nature of the experience, but the need for a dynamic and flexible understanding of that experience.



**Givenness**

With all the honesty I can muster, I do not believe that what has happened to me can be described as a self-improvement programme! I have spoken in terms of what has happened to me. Those words are carefully chosen - "to me" indicates the belief that what has happened has happened with myself, at least in some sense, as the object of an action of which someone else is the subject. I believe that what has happened has been an act of God and it cannot be explained merely in terms of a conscious decision on my part to improve my life or seek various experiences. Indeed, the very word experience creates difficulties. There have been times when I speak about "my renewal experience" with a measure of defensiveness, or at least uncertainty. This is because all I can share is my experience and I must distinguish that from my explanation. Yet I am convinced that the experience is not something which

has only happened within my own mind but has been the result of stimuli from beyond myself. I have been changed. This is a more accurate description of what has happened to me than to say that I have changed myself. So there is a givenness to what has happened. Here is a quality of event which is not purely subjective, but which is received and acknowledged. I labour this point because it is the key to many of my changes of view. I haven't decided to construct a new theology or consciously to change the way I understand God. These changed attitudes have been the result of recognising that God has worked in a new way in my experience.

**A recognition of the Living God Who acts and speaks.**

My ideas about God have changed. As I have claimed, I do not believe that this shift has happened as the result of a conscious decision to develop a new theology, or even as the impressionable result of outside theological influences. The shift has come because of my reflecting on my experience. The very givenness which I have just described presupposes One who has acted towards me and within me. The best way that I can describe this change is to talk about a recognition of the Living God. While the formal statements of theology may not have changed greatly, their content has been transformed. Orthodox statements about God may seem to flow from the human theological enterprise, where we can all too easily construct a picture of a static deity. Yet now my theology flows from the recognition that God is at work in my life and in the world, in a way which I would previously not have understood. Before, if I had spoken about God "speaking", I would have used those words as a code for human beings discovering what is eternally true. Now I want to speak about a personal God who relates to the people He has created by communicating with them. Not only am I wanting to affirm that God speaks, but that He speaks to people. This is not megaphone diplomacy but intimate dialogue.

Similarly, I now want to speak of a God who is active in the world in a way which cannot be reduced to trends or the activity of Christians. While I cannot pretend to understand the mystery of miracles, and God's activity in and through the events around me, I nonetheless want to affirm that the God who has shown himself to me is a God who acts in very specific ways. I believe he calls us to share in partnership both through the use of our actions and through the inspiring of our prayers. Such a belief in an active, sovereign God, heightens the problem of suffering and evil. I do not understand how God can break into my consciousness and make a difference to my life, yet allow terrible evils to continue for others. Yet it is no answer to deny my own experience in a wrong-headed attempt at solidarity with suffering people. At a philosophical level, I recognise that the way in which I use words to talk about God has changed. While I recognise that all theological language is in some sense metaphorical, I believe the reality of God is closer to the simple or obvious meaning of the words than I had done previously. Here is a challenge to the relativism of our rationalistic age, where the Gospel offers both a critique of our

assumptions of what is possible, and a challenge to live by faith - enabling theological reflection to serve rather than pre-determine our experience of God.

### **A transformed personal relationship with God**

Renewal is relational! I have attempted to reflect on experience and that therefore implies that the activity of God is an activity which takes place within the sphere of my own life. I am not analysing as a spectator, but reflecting as a participant. The God who acts is the God who has acted in my life and who calls me to trust Him to live my life on the basis that He wants to continue to act in and through me. The God who speaks is not only the God who speaks in general to a world in need, but a God who seeks to speak to me and wants me to listen to His voice. The God Whom I worship is the Father who draws me to Himself and calls me His Son. The worship I offer does not only use the language of relationship but expresses the personal relationship that exists both between God and myself and between myself and other Christians. When I worship I am inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore worship is not only relational in terms of my relationship to God but is relational in the sense in which I and the worshipping community are lifted up into the relationships of the Godhead. When my experience of God increases my faith and love, I am encouraged to take risks and be more open to God working through me. Faith leads to more adventurous living and love leads to more relational existence.

Not only is my relationship with God renewed, but my relationships with other human beings are transformed.

The plans I make for my life, which are often based upon insecurity and the desire to carve out recognition, are dealt with by the realisation that God doesn't only love the world in general but loves me in particular. Paul tells us (Romans 8:15-16) that it is the work of the Spirit within us which brings us to the realisation that we can call God "Abba!", which is not a public title for the Father of all, but the term of endearment in a trusting, family relationship. My understanding of the Kingdom is transformed when I realise that God wishes to begin His new creation in me and that depth is as much His concern as breadth. Nonetheless, it is a kingdom of persons, all of whom are children of the Father, and my relationship with God affects the way I treat them. There is a very close link between this understanding of this renewed relationship with God and the fourth theme of holiness, because my relationship with God has brought me to the point where I want His will to be implemented in my life. This relationship affects the way I view everything.

### **The holiness agenda**

Jesus said "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments". (John 14.15). My exploration of God's activity arises out of my recognition that the changes which have taken place within me are changes which have been made possible by Him. Personal holiness is placed on the agenda both because I am brought to the point of wanting to be as He wants me to be, and because of what He

has already done. This gives me the hope that God can actually bring about those changes which I cannot make myself. This is not to say that holiness will just happen, or will be the straightforward result of a superficial request. It is as much a question of partnership as any other area of my relationship with God. I need to exercise faith and trust in order for Him to work His will within me. The point about holiness is that it is not enough to believe that God will work through me. It is also important to believe that God will work on me and change me. The kingdom is within as well as beyond. This is the truth in holding together not only the giftings of God's grace, but the fruit of the Spirit. The holiness agenda is about being as well as doing, about being changed as well as changing the world. In worship, this will mean that what I offer to God will not only be words, however profound, or offerings, however sacrificial, but the worship of my heart, the confession of my sin and the repentance of my living. Both in ministry within the church and in the service of the Kingdom beyond it, the holiness agenda means that the way in which things are attempted is as important as the tasks which need to be accomplished. There is no moral high ground. Change needs to begin with me, and the closer I come to God the more I become aware of the unfinished agendas that He needs to deal with. Holiness is not only about a purity of relationship, but about an obedience of lifestyle and a commitment of purpose in the daily living in God's world.

### **What has happened?**

Each of these four themes has arisen from the belief that God has worked in my life in a way that has changed me. Historically, it began with a dissatisfaction on my part and a request that God should increase my love of Him. From that request has flowed so much. Every area of my life and ministry has been affected. My expectations of worship as an area of God's activity, pastoral relationships and the place of prayer. Yet these reflections and changes are only snapshots on a journey. The greatest change is in the increase of faith, hope and love which expect so much of the future...

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**Christopher Ellis,**

Minister, Cemetery Road Baptist Church, Sheffield. Advent 1994.



# 'The Toronto Blessing'

- a personal testimony.

Like many of you, when I first started to hear about the events in Toronto, I was intrigued. Ever since I trained at a Bible College founded by a Canadian man who had a vision to prepare people for a Revival that was coming to Britain, I have had an interest in Revival. So, when I heard about events at the Airport Vineyard, I wanted to know more. As I investigated what was happening I knew that I had to go. I shared this with the leadership of the Church and they agreed to send me.

I arrived in Toronto on Tuesday 6th July tired. Although excited at being in Toronto, I was going through some struggles in my relationship with God and feeling spiritually dry. At this time the Toronto church had meetings every night except Mondays and on Wednesdays they had a meeting for Pastors. This meeting was an opportunity for church leaders to ask questions and the church would do their best to answer. Opportunity was then given for prayer for anybody who wanted it. On this particular Wednesday (my first meeting) an invitation was given to all those Pastors who were feeling spiritually tired and dry, to come forward. I went forward but nothing particularly dynamic or spectacular happened. I went back to my motel to prepare for the evening meeting. The evening meetings took the following format:

A time of singing, followed by a relevant testimony, a sermon and then an opportunity for prayer. This first evening meeting followed this pattern and I went forward for prayer. A man whom I had never met before came forward to pray for me and as he started to pray it was as if he knew exactly what I was thinking. God spoke through that man and although I thought I had blown it, God confirmed to me that he still loved me and that I was precious in His sight, valuable to Him, and that I should not look down, but rather hold my head high. Encouraged, I sat down and reflected on those words. People were being prayed for everywhere. Some people were crying, some laughing, others on the floor.

I wanted more of God and so I found a square inch of floor space and stood up, putting my hands out in prayer. Nobody was around me at this point in time and I was just praising God when I started to rock back and forth. I wasn't sure if this was self-induced so I asked God to help me. With that prayer the intensity of the movements increased and I fell to the floor. My arm was shaking as I lay on the floor and a sense of well-being filled my body. Eventually, I got up and tried to walk over to some people I had been sitting with. The only problem was that I couldn't get my legs to move in a straight line. It was as if I was drunk (and I know what that is like!). I staggered over to a chair and collapsed on it. With a new sense of God's love for me, I just wanted to praise Jesus. Eventually I got back to my room and prepared for the next meeting the following day. On subsequent nights I went forward for prayer, hungry for more of God.

On two occasions over the next few days a couple of people independently of each other had prayed for the release of what I will call prophetic gifting for me. At the time I didn't take much notice - that was until I came to the Thursday afternoon prayer meeting. Coming from a good evangelical background I was expecting a 'typical' prayer meeting: those silent, reverent occasions when we all sit in a circle and pray about various needs. I had only been seated for a few moments when I started to become aware of God's presence in a powerful way. My foot started to move up and down, quivering. I tried to stop it, embarrassed, because this wasn't the sort of thing you did in a prayer meeting. Again, I remember asking the Lord to help me, and praying that if I was hyping myself up or being influenced by anything other than Him, to help me stop. The foot carried on moving and my hand started to shake. Again I asked the Lord to lead me only into what He wanted, and as I prayed this prayer the intensity of movement increased. At this point during the prayer meeting people were sharing Scripture passages, pictures etc. Suddenly I was given a passage in Hebrews 12 and I knew I had to share it. I stood to read the passage and as I was coming to the end of the passage I sensed a surge of what I can only describe as energy shooting through my body. Instantaneously I started to shout out a prayer of praise to God. Then everybody seemed to leap up and shout out their praises to God and this quiet prayer meeting was no more.

After the prayer meeting some people wanted me to pray with them and as I did this I was given insight into something of their circumstances, even though I had never met them before. Towards the end of this extended prayer time I was sitting down drinking a cup of water, when I noticed a lady walk in front of me. I saw the word 'disappointment' written across her dress. I asked her if this meant anything to her and she just broke down in tears. This enabled a number of us to minister to her in a way that had not been possible before. I began to discover that God didn't need to wait for a special meeting or

ministry time to do His work. After the Sunday morning church service, the congregation was asked to stand and pray for those standing next to them. No sooner had I put my arm on the shoulder of the guy next to me to pray for him than I suddenly found myself thrown to the floor, with chairs everywhere and no prior warning. I can only describe it in terms of being plugged into the electrical socket!.

Since coming back to Britain my own fellowship have heard the details of what happened to me and some of them have received a fresh touch from God. We started to hold open meetings inviting anybody to come along in order to share what we believed God was doing. I can't say we have seen dramatic things like those I have described, but people have been encouraged in their Christianity. We have seen people released from depression, given courage to deal with on-going struggles in their lives. One man was healed of back pains that stopped him from driving for long periods of time. Another person saw God provide for a practical need after coming to the church meeting. On a personal level I have discovered that this so-called 'Toronto Blessing' (I'd rather call it God's Blessing) is not a panacea for all Church problems. It hasn't meant effortless discipleship for me either, but generally I can say that it has given me a new love for God, a deeper appreciation of His power, and a deeper realisation of His love for me.

Let us continue to make ourselves available to Him, to pray for His wisdom and give Him the glory in all we do. A well known Christian leader was recently asked to comment on the 'Toronto Blessing'. He replied that it is too early to say whether it is all from God, that we should let the bush grow a little and then examine the fruit. I would agree that, human nature being what it is, not everything under the banner of 'Toronto Blessing' is necessarily from God. Perhaps this is blossom. If so let's appreciate it and not uproot the bush before the full fruit has come.

**Mark Abernethy,**

Church at Bushy Meads, Herts.

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## EDITORIAL:

# Renewing Renewal.

Ah I remember it well. Like many of us who entered Ministry in the 1970's charismatic renewal was a major influence upon my call to ordination. We were there at the Fountain Trust rallies. We read our Bennett and Pulkingham and our Watson and Harper with the best of them. We were there being prayed over by earnest Pentecostals. We got the Pawson tapes and the Fisherfolk records. We enthused over the work at St Michael le Belfreys and, love John Stott as we did, were convinced Michael Harper was in the right after all at All Souls, Langham Place.

For me personal renewal came at Queens' College, Cambridge. 1975. It followed a time of deep spiritual longing and of intense spiritual warfare. This all culminated in an experienced of God's love and joy and peace (Romans 5:5) as I trusted the words formulating in my spirit and began to pray in tongues. This precious gift I have exercised in my personal devotions ever since. It was not without pain then to be a 'Charismatic'. From being star disciple of my home church I became someone to be a little wary of, 'love him as we do'. I still remember the pain of being the subject of a circular letter warning of 'those seeking to bring neo-Pentecostal tendencies into our Church'. I now think it's a compliment actually but how it hurt at the time. Over the years since I've tried to both think seriously about Renewal and then practice it in the local church.

I've always been of the Harper and Watson school however. Renewal within the existing denominational structures rather than beginning whole new denominations (whoops!) and calling them 'house churches' or 'New Life Communities' Or 'Restored'. God knows the Body of Christ is divided enough as it is without new contenders in Church History's Perfect Church competition. Yes I know the Lord has richly blessed and used these newcomers on the block and, in many cases, continues to. Others have long since run out of steam but that, as they say, is another story. Not for me, though, the shying away from defeat at Church Meeting by creating alternative church government structures. I prefer the resilient fight back! Not for me the driving out of all the classic hymns the organ and the best of Free Church liturgy in favour of exclusive music groups or even more exclusive contemporary songs, often badly handwritten out and projected onto poorly sited OHP screens. Give me a hymnbook or songbook anytime! Not for me the careless suffocating of structures which still have much spiritual life in them - like the Boys' or Girls' Brigade for example - and then calling it 'pruning' and not prejudice! Call this moving deckchairs on the Titanic if you will. I believe in a God well able to raise the Titanic - do you? Not for me either the excluding from leadership or fellowship of those who do not consider themselves charismatic or even evangelical. I've discovered Christ too often in some of those who do not share

my theology or my experiences to want to de-Church them. As Steve Gaukroger might put it: God may have bad taste but then He is God and can bless whoever He wills...and does!

Renewal only of the individual and of the local Church internally, however, has never satisfied me. What is it all for? I ask again and again. Or, better, God asks me. The local church must be turned inside out. The Bible tells me so. Transformed into a church committed to 'evangelism and other aspects of God's Mission'. So in three pastorates now Evangelism Action Groups have been prayed and nurtured into life and given a simple brief: just DO it and keep us doing it, PLEASE. Similarly I have tried to express Renewal in a commitment to the local community and its needs. The collapse of the real NHS which we were protesting about back in the early 1980's when I ministered at Cowley, Oxford. The plight and penury of so many British pensioners ... and the Oxfordshire Pensioners' Action Group was born. John Biggs' Presidency and Graham Ashworth's presence among us in Blackburn led to the forming of the West Blackburn Grimewatch Action Group. More recently I have been involved heavily, as Convenor of Churches Together in St Albans, in a project to launch a Night Shelter for homeless and badly housed people in St Albans: Open Door which has just completed its first full year of existence.

Please excuse the autobiography and even more, perhaps, the touch of pride. It is all I have not achieved for Christ since ordination that is the real story I suspect. Nor can Renewal stop at the local community however. Little wonder that John White, speaking of Revival, could say: 'To pray for a Revival to sweep the land is much more significant, demands far greater exercise of power than merely tossing Mount Everest into the Indian Ocean'. Incidentally, his addresses to a past Mainstream Conference remain a highlight of the past 15 years for me. I hope we can return soon to large scale Conferences of such power and relevance. Renewal must surely maintain a vision for the nation and continent and world as well. A Revival vision. If we are not interceding for our nation. If we are never lobbying our MP or local Councillors or if we are not at least modelling new patterns in local church life of a better Britain, then what credibility or relevance do we have for the millions of unchurched people around us? Or what integrity? If similarly, we have no vision for the Europe we are already in and have been for centuries, whatever the Tory right might claim. If our vision of the Kingdom does not extend to and through the Channel Tunnel and on to Prague, or Warsaw or Moscow then how small a God are we actually worshipping? If too we are unconcerned about Third World Debt, or the pain of millions articulated by the theologians of liberation or the injustices and obscenities of the C21st world we are all contributing too NOW in the First World then where is our the faith in the 'politics of Jesus' and the manifesto of Luke 4?

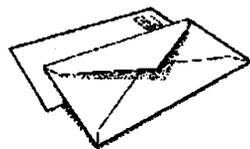
Renewal is hard. I remain fully committed to it please God 'strong in the strength which God supplies through His eternal Son'. It is also a big subject. The letters page of the 'BT' has been full of responses to 'The Toronto Blessing' for months now. I thought Nigel Wright's was the best article ('The unconscious self reacting to the divine presence' BT 8/9/94). We do indeed need to be both open to God and yet discerning of 'the flesh'. Too many people still in the Baptist family, however, are of the Butler school of religious experience. Speaking to Wesley he complained: 'Sir the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing; yes a very horrid thing'. The God I believe in cares both for Rwanda and for those individuals experiencing His individual love at Toronto airport or wherever. The Bible I read is big enough to embrace and minister to them both. And yours?

Revd Michael I Bochenski

St Albans

Advent 1994

## LETTERS



Dear Editor,

In her 'Letter to the Churches' in Issue 51 of *Mainstream Magazine*, Anne Wilkinson-Hayes comments happily on the prevailing view taken across the spectrum of Baptist churches which sees "Salvation in wider terms than the conversion of individual souls". If she is merely implying that Baptists see it as imperative to join the new convert to the community of the church, I can share in her approbation. If however, she feels that churches are bringing 'Salvation' to their localities by social action which does not necessarily result in the conversion of individuals, then I must deplore this change in the accepted meaning of the term 'Salvation'.

Terms do seem to be changing in meaning though. In the editorial 'Conversion' is applied to the church and 'Mission' includes far more than Our Lord's summary of it in Matthew

28: 19,20. God's Kingdom on Earth is no longer to be identified with the church as it is in Matthew 16: 18,19.

These new meanings will doubtless please a very broad constituency but since they do not seem to be based on Scripture, I get the distinct impression that the word 'Mainstream' is also undergoing a change of meaning.

Yours sincerely,

*Richard Blunt.*

(Dr. R. Blunt, Highfield Baptist Church,  
Rushden).

*Editor. Mr Blunt can rest assured that Mainstream remains - as always - fully committed to the personal conversion of individuals. The thrust of the whole of issue 51, however, was that Mission biblically does not and must not stop there.*

## News from the Executive.

*\* Regional days of one kind or other have been held, in different parts of the country this Autumn. In the North, Steve Gaukroger was the speaker at one of the regular Northern Leaders' Gatherings. In the Midlands Nigel Wright spoke on 'Signposts to Revival' and worship was led by John Brewster. Prayer ministry and Communion was also made available during the day. In London and the South East those who had expressed an interest in the Word & Spirit Network were invited to the 'Times of Refreshing' days held at Wimbledon where Norman Moss and Executive Member Rob Warner were among the speakers. In the South West despite the good efforts of David Slater and Ian Coffey, the Mainstream Regional Day did not happen. Perhaps in 1995?*

*\* GEAR the United Reformed Church Group for Evangelism and Renewal are well ahead of us in regionalisation. Their latest newsletter list several regional GEAR events in places as far afield as Mersey, Bridgwater, Wales and, reminiscences of Hardy here, Wessex.*

*\* The Executive met as planned with the Senior Management Team at Didcot as part of a long-standing commitment to consult and communicate with one another. Topics covered included Baptist Associating, the Superintendency review and the role of the Assembly and Council. Another concern was the need to affirm and encourage leadership among the under 40's.*

*\* Plans for the 1995 Mainstream Conference at High Leigh, Hertfordshire are advanced now. Please contact Derek Wick (021-378-3020) to check on late availability of places.*

*\* Some at the Midlands Regional Day expressed strongly the hope that 1996 would see us back at Swanwick ... a view common elsewhere we understand? Please write and let us know your views on this.*

*\* The recent Consultation for Senior Pastors organised by Mainstream 's Secretary David Slater was, we understand, much appreciated by those who attended. It is hoped to repeat / extend the consultation in 1995. The provisional dates for this are November 20th-21st 1995. Further details from David Slater (01548-852770).*

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# SPIRITUAL GROWTH AT THE BOUNDARY



I believe I am not alone in being a minister with a charismatic heart, leading a fairly traditional church. Mine has been a movement from a young, vibrant, charismatic church, through a 'historical' student pastorate, to a now even more 'historical' church for my first full-time ministry. All of this has led me to work through the essence of what is 'charismatic' and to explore how to work through those life-giving charismatic principles for the benefit of the whole church without suffering the inevitable inertia created by concentrating on worship alone.

Inspired by Paul Tillich's autobiography 'On the boundary' I put together a rough thesis to guide me and one year on it is bearing up rather well. The thesis is this:

*That most human and spiritual growth takes place when boundaries in life are crossed; that the nature of the Gospel is to take us to those boundaries and empower us to cross them; that therefore the Christian Minister true to the Gospel will lead and help people through such boundaries rather than allow people to be hindered by them, so that true and wholesome growth will occur for the benefit of all and for the glory of God.*

*I believe that this existential approach to pastoral ministry interfaces with the charismatic one in such a way as to present us with a vision of the growth of the individual and the church, rather than one of 'patching-up' and 'restoring to normal' which is too often the case.*

## **1) Growth at the boundaries?**

To begin with, some explanation of what I mean by 'boundaries' is necessary. Life is full of boundaries: fences, pavements, coastlines, colours, all create boundaries, but the kind of boundaries I am thinking of here are the boundaries of life and death, sin and righteousness, faith and unbelief, material and spiritual, hope and despair, love and hate, and so on. Now suppose I am bereaved: at that moment I find myself on the boundary of life and death for death has confronted me, yet I am still alive, but I am also reminded how frail is my humanity and how close death hovers all around me. I am on the boundary of life and death and at that point I will either grow (spiritually and emotionally) or I will shrink back and try to ignore or suppress the experience. It may be that at that point too, I doubt God; I may then be on the boundary of faith and unbelief and also hope and despair. Allow me next to give three further examples of boundary experiences from my life in the last few years:

a. A cultural boundary.

When I first moved to London from the North East I was soon struck by the number and variety of people whose history lay in another culture. In my student pastorate I encountered such people first-hand; Indonesian, African, Caribbean, Arabic and Indian. I found myself on the boundary of culture, each culture at times complementing, at times clashing with each of the others. Yet it was a growth experience, more so than if I had remained in a one culture church.

b. An intellectual boundary.

In my College studies I quickly discovered which authors confessed a similar 'creed' to myself, those who were within the same conservative-evangelical stream of the church as myself. However, although I accumulated knowledge, my growth and development was limited until I began to read and contemplate theologians from another stream of the church and began to think for myself on the boundary.

c. An environmental boundary.

There are vast numbers of people who live in a completely different environment to ourselves and in particular live life in a very dry, infertile, and invariably hostile environment for which life is a desperate struggle. I faced up to this environmental boundary and the boundary of wealth and poverty at an inter-College conference entitled 'Listening to the Poor'. It struck me there how easily we were prepared to send things and people across the boundary to help them on the other side and yet how reluctant we were to attempt to move beyond the boundary to a closer fellowship. One where we could be enriched by their testimony of suffering and despair, and at the same time share our wealth and resources for mutual benefit too. This, again, was a particular point of growth as I wrestled with life on the boundary.

**2) Growth at the boundaries and the Gospel**

I have attempted to show so far that boundary experiences are the particular points in our lives when growth can occur, and indeed will occur, if we are able to go beyond the boundary itself. I now want to suggest that the Gospel by its very nature drives us to the boundaries of our existence in order that spiritual and human growth in all its aspects may occur. Indeed, Christianity itself was born out of the boundary experiences of both Christ and then His disciples:

- Jesus took Himself to the boundary of life and death: '...not abandoned to the grave ...raised to life' (Acts 2:31-32)
- of sin and righteousness: '...assigned a grave with the wicked...though he had done no violence' (Is 53:9),
- and of time and eternity: 'In the beginning was the Word...the Word became flesh and lived for a while among us' (Jn 1:1,14).
- His disciples found themselves on the boundary of faith and

unbelief: 'I will not believe it...My Lord and my God!' (Jn 20:25,28)

of hope and despair: 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God...Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!' (Matt 16:16,22)

of earthly necessity and eschatological reality: 'I'm not going out to fish...It is the Lord!' (Jn 21:3,7).

The disciples grew through these boundary experiences in a necessary way, in order to be ready for the tasks ahead. Even then, they continued to find themselves on boundaries which challenged their faith, their commitment and their love. It is also clear, that the Gospel takes us to boundaries that we may not hitherto have faced and the Gospel empowers us too to go beyond boundaries that we reach by uncertain means.

Allow me again to give three examples:

a. The boundary of friends and enemies.

The Gospel clearly states 'Love your enemies' (Matt 5:44). Here then is a command which takes us out of our comfortable enclaves of friends to reach out and love people who are on the other side of a boundary. This command will stretch us spiritually, emotionally, rationally, and perhaps even physically to actually move to the boundary and reach beyond. If we do, we will grow more at this point in the power of the Gospel and in our relationship with God, than weeks of sermons and Bible studies teaching us about the pros and cons of this very same thing.

b. The boundary of life and death.

"For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ". (Col 3:3). The Gospel confronts us with death and brings it into our daily language: we must die to our self-sufficiency, our sin, and live a new life in Christ by the power of the Spirit. But there is more than that too. The fear of our own physical death is challenged by the Gospel which reminds us that Christ holds the keys of death and that if we live in Him then death has lost its sting. So then, before death becomes our natural experience, the Gospel takes us to our own death and challenges us to reach beyond this boundary to eternal life.

c. The boundary of church and state.

In Matt 22:15-22 there is recorded an incident where the Pharisees challenged Jesus with regard to where their loyalties should lie i.e. with the State or with God. Jesus' reply was to "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's". In this instance it was the Pharisees who found themselves on a boundary not knowing which way to tread. In effect, Jesus' reply was not to take them away from that boundary into a safe enclave on either side, but to recognise that the boundary was a point of growth for them and to encourage them to think beyond the boundary. By so doing the boundary would become

not a limiting factor to them, but a point of growth which would liberate them to honour both the State and their God in appropriate ways.

We could survey many, many more examples of the Gospel driving us to the boundaries of our existence for our growth in all aspects of spirituality and humanity, for the glory of God and to further His Kingdom, but we must now consider the Christian minister's role in all of this.

### **3) The Christian Minister and growth at the boundaries**

Because the Gospel drives us to places of growth, it becomes the role of the Christian Minister to lead people to points of growth (i.e. to such boundaries as the gospel demands) and to help people reach beyond them (i.e. to actually grow at this point and not withdraw out of fear or apathy). Furthermore, the Christian Minister must help those too who find themselves on a boundary, however they reached that point, to grow through that experience too.

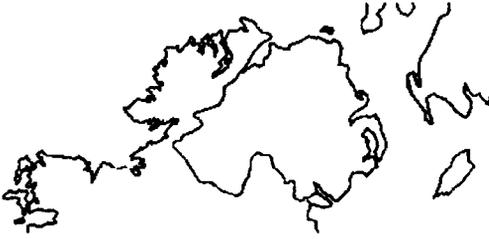
Paul, in 2 Cor 12:10 wrote "But (the Lord) said to me 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness'. That is why for Christ's sake I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong". Boundary experiences make our people vulnerable and weak, but when they can be helped to comprehend the power of God through Christ at such times in their lives, then they will be open to many possibilities for growth; into becoming the people God wants them to be.

### **(4) ... and Mainstream?**

If you accept this as a model for spiritual growth for the individual, accept it too as a model for the growth of church, and yes, for Mainstream too. The new Mainstream 'Mission Statement' in defining its role within the Union captures neatly this philosophy of growth: "to challenge...to present new ideas...to model new structures...". On the other hand, its suggested role in serving the Ministers smacks more of retreat: "groups not based on competition and insecurity ...who in particular relate spiritually to each other and to recognised leaders". We Ministers in situ need support and encouragement, we need an oasis from which to drink, and an environment within which we can grow, but should not our encouragement from Mainstream be to create these oases and establish these environments within our local context, by going with our congregations to these boundaries of growth? Is there a danger of being glad to leave our local churches behind while we go for our spiritual boost? Then again, maybe this temptation to retreat will itself become for us a boundary too!!

**Malcolm Patten**

Probationer Minister at High Road, Baptist Church, Tottenham.



## RENEWAL IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- A PERSONAL VIEW

What is your impression of evangelicalism in Northern Ireland? Men in black suits

with blacker Bibles? Gospel preachers on street corners? Men wearing sandwich boards proclaiming the end of the world? Perhaps yours is a more sinister image - preachers of division, intolerance, hatred. And who could blame you for reaching this conclusion? It would be nice to say that it is completely false but sadly that is not so. We do have all of these kinds of people. Yet if not entirely false, the image is not entirely true either. There is much more to evangelicalism in Northern Ireland than many people might imagine. There has been Renewal in Northern Ireland.

### **But what is Renewal?**

Is it the presence of signs and wonders? Is it the manifestation of 'charismatic' gifts? All of these phenomena reached Northern Ireland a long time ago. However, I want to work with a different definition of Renewal. Renewal happens when God does something new. In some cases that new thing may be marked by certain kinds of spiritual manifestations; in others it may not. The important thing is that God is doing something new in the lives of individuals and churches. So, what is God doing in Northern Ireland?

### **Renewal in the Church**

The major Protestant denominations are the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, each with an active membership of approximately 220,000. The Methodist Church in Ireland has a membership of just over 20,000. In each case the overwhelming majority are from Northern Ireland. In each of these denominations God is working. Individual churches and Ministers have been changed by the power of God. Men and women have been brought to faith in Christ through their ministry. Barriers have been broken down; divisions overcome. Away from the spotlight many individuals and churches have worked tirelessly in their local communities taking seriously Jesus' call to be salt and light.

There are of course other movements and tendencies within each of these denominations. Yet God is at work among His people in the major Protestant denominations. Significantly, God is also at work within Roman Catholicism. Irish Catholicism, like Irish Protestantism, is more conservative and traditional than its English counterpart. Yet, here too, God has been bringing new life to men and women. Evangelical Catholic Initiative introduce themselves in their leaflet 'What is an Evangelical Catholic?' thus: "Millions of Roman Catholics

throughout the world have a personal relationship with Jesus, many of them through the various Renewal Movements in the Catholic Church. They are evangelical in the strictest sense of the term in that they have received the basic Gospel, accepted Jesus as personal Lord and Saviour and are manifesting the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. These 'Evangelical Catholics' have a growing love and respect for Scripture as the Word of God. They are born again Christians. They would identify themselves variously as committed Christians, charismatic Catholics, renewed Catholics, born again Catholics, or simply Catholics who love the Lord. Surely they are the brothers or sisters in Christ of all evangelical Christians in the various Protestant Churches?"

God is at work changing and challenging men and women within Protestant Roman Catholic denominations, both North and South of the border. God is also at work beyond the boundaries of the main denominations. The past two decades have seen the founding of a large number of new churches, many growing out of house fellowships. These communities have a particular significance in Northern Ireland given that the main denominations, rightly or wrongly, are often associated with one side of the community. Many of these new churches are working across the divisions in their local communities and in doing so have experienced God's blessing on their work. What else is there? The Christian Renewal Centre in Rostrevor, founded in 1974 by Cecil Kerr, has provided leaders from all denominations and none with fellowship and encouragement. Spring Harvest in Ayr regularly attracts a large contingent from Northern Ireland. A similar local event, 'Together for the Kingdom', is now well established. Marchers for Jesus have marched through the centre of Belfast - a place that has seen many marches for many causes. In 1994 believers from all over Ireland marched in Drogheda in the Republic of Ireland. I could go on - but I will not. This should give some idea of what is happening on our side of the Irish Sea.

### **Renewal in Political Life**

In the past few months some radical changes have occurred in Northern Ireland. I'm sure you are aware of these! Things that we had hoped for, for so long, have become reality - for the moment. The mood following the announcement of the IRA ceasefire was well summed up by the headline writers. 'Euphoria and Suspicion, Hopeful and Uncertain' wrote the Irish Times. 'Joy and Apprehension' wrote the Daily Telegraph. After 25 years it almost seemed too good to be true. Yet so far the peace has largely held and the IRA ceasefire was followed by a similar Loyalist ceasefire. In the weeks since, there has been a very obvious change of atmosphere. Little things point to this change. The semi-permanent checkpoints outside police stations have gone. Soldiers, those still patrolling, are wearing berets, not helmets. Police officers use automatic cash dispensers without having two colleagues standing guard. We walk into shops and open our bags for the security check but the security men are gone. These may seem trivial details but after 25 years they

mean a lot.

And yet...what we have at the moment is more a truce than real peace. The paramilitaries still have their members and their weapons. The murder in November of Frank Kerr, a postal worker from Newry, by an IRA gang, and the continued 'punishment' beatings demonstrate how fragile the peace is. Yet, in some ways ending the violence is the easy part. The harder tasks are still to come - the task of creating a Society that all the people of Northern Ireland can have a share in, the task of overcoming 25 years of bitterness, hostility, fear, sorrow, suspicion. What has this to do with Renewal? Simply this - if Renewal stops at the door of the church it is an irrelevance. If Renewal means only new ways of worshipping God it is a trivial self-indulgence. If Renewal is to mean anything in Northern Ireland it must mean a new willingness by the people of God to respond to the new circumstances distinctively and constructively. They can respond distinctively, not for the sake of novelty, but because their convictions are shaped by biblical values and by Christian discipleship. They can respond constructively, not in a naively optimistic way, but because they are a people of hope whose confidence and trust is in God. Many Christian people are already playing an important role away from the spotlight of publicity. Others have adopted a more public profile. Among these is Evangelical Contribution On Northern Ireland (ECONI).

ECONI represents a diverse group of evangelical Christians who share a concern for the integrity of evangelical witness in Northern Ireland. Not all come from churches that would be clearly identified with a 'Renewal Movement'. Nevertheless, many have experienced the renewing work of God in their lives as He has transformed attitudes and assumptions which were unworthy of their Christian calling. God is remaking them, not only spiritually, but politically. ECONI has responded publicly to both recent ceasefire announcements. On November 5th Dr. John Stott addressed a conference on the theme of Christian Citizenship which ECONI helped to organise. The following day, ECONI Sunday, 65 churches in Northern Ireland focused on this same theme. From January to June of 1995, ECONI and the City of Belfast YMCA are planning a series of seminars as part of a Christian Citizenship Forum. The goal of all of this is that Christian people will be challenged to think biblically about what it means to be citizens of heaven and citizens of Northern Ireland.

At this time of opportunity it is all the more important that Christian people play a positive role in this country. If real, lasting peace comes, what a tragedy it would be if the history of these times was written in years to come with no reference to the role of God's people. We do not want the glory for ourselves but we do want it for God. There is still plenty of suspicion and hostility; there are still many individuals playing on people's fears. All this is dishonouring to God. But God will not forever allow His name to be dishonoured. The

ideology of 'For God and Ulster' dishonours God. God's people in Northern Ireland, those who have been renewed by His power, have a responsibility before God to challenge the dishonouring of His name and to live their lives For God and His Glory Alone.

**Alwyn Thompson**

Belfast

November 1994

*Alwyn has attended the January Mainstream Conferences and is a committed member of ECONI which seeks to promote a greater understanding and application of Biblical principles in the Northern Ireland situation.*

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