

A WORD AND SPIRIT  
MAINSTREAM  
NETWORK

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MAINSTREAM 1978-1998  
A Retrospective.**

# MAINSTREAM 1978-1998 - A Retrospective.

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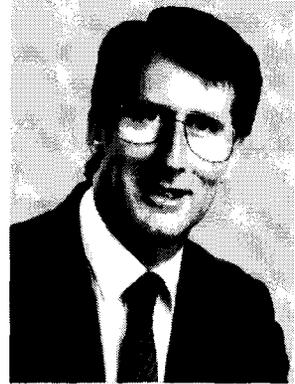
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# David Coffey

## MAINSTREAM

### 20TH Anniversary edition

In his book Fire over the Waters, Douglas McBain identifies three broad groupings which represented the interests of the early founders of Mainstream. The traditional evangelical, the Church growth school of thought and those involved in charismatic renewal. Looking back to the 1970's, I can pay tribute to each of these three streams as having made a contribution to my developing life and ministry.



Raymond Brown, was a very significant figure in the first grouping of broad-based evangelicals, symbolising a diverse grouping of people which went beyond his own Spurgeonian network. Ray was a scholar-pastor who through his preaching and writing ministry, and his strong connections with the Keswick Movement and the Evangelical Alliance, was a mentor to many of us, and I doubt whether Mainstream would have ever gained credibility in the early days without his support, and later that of Barrie White of Regent's Park College, Oxford. The Church Growth grouping was also influential in my ministry and the first British Church Growth Conference was a most stimulating experience with input from Tom Houston of The Bible Society, Derek Tidball of the London Bible College, and Paul Beasley Murray of Altrincham, each of whom would play a part in the future of Mainstream. The Baptist renewal grouping was led by David Pawson of Guildford, Jim Graham of Gold Hill and Douglas McBain of Streatham and I recall the Millmead and Pilgrim Hall conference days as a helpful mixture of teaching and fellowship. Douglas, in particular was a mentor and close colleague when we served together as ministers in South London. The monthly ministers' meeting offered a practical support for pastors, and wisdom and encouragement from those older in pastoral experience. I can still hear Douglas saying "trust the Church Meeting!"

I like to think Mainstream gave young performers their first big break. Steve Chalke was encouraged to play his banjo at a late night session ("His name was Jesus Christ and he's the leader of the band"). This early appearance at Swanwick would appear to have led to a decline of his musical career but his star talents as a television performer have compensated for this early career setback. Similarly, Steve Gaukroger and Nick Mercer laid the foundations for their seminal work on humour, ("Frogs in Cream volumes" 1

and 2 and the rumoured sequel - 'The Oxford Dictionary of Toads in Yoghurt'), by performing Alas "Smith and Jones" and "Diary of a Baptist Minister's wife" at a late night special at Swanwick. It followed that loose-knit movements which focused on personal and corporate renewal would soon develop an interest in the structural and spiritual renewal of organisations such as the Baptist Union, and somewhere in the my personal archive I have an autographed copy of the "Garfunkel Declaration" which was written on the back of a menu in a restaurant near to Victoria Station and signed by, amongst others, Nigel Wright, Peter Grange and Jack Ramsbottom.

In my estimation the early success of Mainstream was due to the following features.

1. It was strong on relationships. My earliest memories of Mainstream include the part played by the fellowship at Gorsley Baptist Church, Herefordshire. It was crucial to the growth of Mainstream that we had a regular home base where relationships could be deepened. Pat and Beryl Goodland were outstanding hosts and lasting friendships were formed with many of the church members who regularly provided hospitality for the Mainstream Executive. Honesty and openness were a feature of these executive meetings, which combined log fires and endless apple pie and custard, with vigorous debate and intercessory prayer fellowship. Quality relationships always lie at the heart of healthy associating and I suggest we were able to survive the early tensions of Mainstream, which Douglas McBain has chronicled in Fire over the Waters, because of the depth of these committed relationships.
2. It was a broad church movement. By definition, earlier post-war forms of Baptist renewal groups were narrower in their membership basis. Mainstream was more truly representative of the emerging Baptist scene at the end of the 1970's. I believe each Baptist College, and the London Bible College, was represented on either the Executive or the Advisory Council. The founders of Mainstream attempted to create a group drawn from the regions of the United Kingdom, avoiding the impression this was a "bible belt" grouping. The titles used in the early publicity were deliberately non-sectarian, so the terms evangelical and charismatic never appeared. They may have been used by those beyond Mainstream to describe the new movement, but for ourselves we preferred to stand by the slogan Baptists for Life and Growth, and left it to the individual to decide whether they would associate. There was no formal membership or basis of faith to sign. You paid an annual subscription to the occasional newsletter and attended the annual January Swanwick Conference. The Executive of Mainstream was loyal in stance, if critical in appraisal, in its denominational commitments and often chose speakers from other church

groupings who reflected this form of thinking, including Gavin Reid of the Church Pastoral Aid Society and Donald English of the Methodist Conference. The representative spirituality was wide in its sympathy, and included Richard Foster (Celebration of Discipline), Sister Margaret Magdalen (Jesus Man of Prayer) and Roy Searle (later of the Northumbria Community).

3. It modelled personal and corporate renewal with a Baptist face. It's worth noting that Mainstream was born in the same year as Spring Harvest and it predated the re-birth of the Evangelical Alliance, which would organise the well supported Leadership '84 Conference. The Fountain Trust was organising conferences and there were some early expressions of Bible Weeks which were attended by some Baptists. The latter would have been too charismatically adventurous, whilst the annual Mainstream conference was considered by many ministers a "safe place" to introduce their deacons and members to a broader understanding of renewal worship and teaching.
4. It was organised with a lightness of structure. Although we attempted in our discussions at Executive meetings to expand the activities of Mainstream, through publications and regional gatherings, the focus of the organisation became the annual Swanwick Conference and the occasional newsletter. The Executive usually met a month after the annual conference and although we had booked Swanwick for the following year, we rarely knew the full line up of speakers and we always asked the question: "Is there a need to continue with Mainstream?" and "Are we fulfilling our aims and objectives?". At one stage in the early days, all the members of the Executive were serving members of the Baptist Union Council and its Committees and it was always our intention, whenever possible, to complement the policy and programmes of the Union. The provisional nature of Mainstream was important to its direction as a movement and we often reminded ourselves that the "gates of hell shall not prevail" verse was not spoken by Jesus with human organisations in mind.
5. It served as a forum, a workshop and a gadfly. These were the terms used by Alistair Campbell to describe the purpose and direction of Mainstream following the "crisis" atmosphere of the 1982 conference. A forum where ideas could be freely aired, a workshop for the sharing of experiences and a gadfly which "from time to time pierced the hide of our Baptist churches". No other conference offered the opportunity for Baptists to engage critically with such issues as the signs and wonder movement, as was ably demonstrated by Alan Pain and Donald English. It was a new experience for British Baptists to receive the "court jester" ministry of The American Baptist, Tony Campolo, who demonstrated that there was an

alternative to departing from the historic denomination. With pungent wit and cutting prophetic insight, he showed the way whereby Christian organisations can walk the humble and Christ-like way of self-reform. I pay tribute here also to a gifted succession of Mainstream newsletter editors, all of whom were prepared to confront difficult issues in both editorial comment and newsletter content.

6. It drew people from the nations of the United Kingdom. The attendance at the conference went across the usual boundaries of Baptist Unions in the United Kingdom, and from the earliest days at Swanwick, the larger contingent from England were joined by a celtic mixture from Wales, Scotland, and both sides of the border in Northern Ireland. The latter grouping have always been given a particularly warm welcome and there developed a tradition of the Irish contingent arriving on the weekend before the Swanwick Conference, in order to visit some of the BUGB churches for ministry and fellowship. Stephen Adams has been consistent in his attendance and a moving force in fostering these relationships.
7. It encouraged the creative power to spiritually envision. Looking back from my vantage point twenty years on, I now see more clearly than ever, that what is required for the true missiological reformation of the Church at the end of the 20th Century, is not a modest tinkering but a radical re-invention. There is a dire need for that which Walter Brueggemann defines as "the capacity to entertain images of reality other than those presently at hand". I am now not sure we addressed this central issue with clarity. Even our "crisis" conference of 1982, in my opinion, was more to do with the spirit of re-invention than a programme for radical reform. But we needed this mood of impatience as a sharp reminder of the gadfly role, without which the hide is never stung and the elephant never bellows. If a transforming movement is made up of, to quote Ben Johnson, "little innovations, tiny break-throughs, momentary revelations and visions", then Mainstream passes this test and will be seen to have contributed to that wider reformation of the Church for which we all pray and work.....

The memorable address by Barrie White at the Opening Conference of 1980, *Opening our doors to God*, carried the widest possible application and is still the need of the hour. He reminded us that beyond our hunger for programmes, numbers and new buildings, is our hunger for him. "Can you not hear him knocking at our doors.....can you not hear him summoning us to give ourselves to that worship which feeds the hunger of God's people for him...?"

*David Coffey is the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain. Extracts from Barrie White's marvellous address, to which David has just referred, follow .....*

## Barrie White

"This address is concerned with the means by which, given a growing hunger for God among us and our brothers and sisters in the Churches, the doors can be opened to Christ. In saying what I am going to say I believe I am pointing to a

programme which we in Mainstream must become committed to as part of our witness in the denomination. I do not pretend to cover any of the ground about fellowship, about social witness, about evangelism, I just want to talk to you this morning about opening our doors and opening them again and again to the living Lord Jesus Christ.

First in private prayer. Now we know, some who are ministers know far better than anyone else, how hard that can be. But in private prayers we open our doors to Christ's presence and blessing. What is it to grow spiritually? It is to grow up into the likeness of Christ, to become more fully human, open, unselfish, unfearful, compassionate, obedient to God, dependent upon God and, possibly, crucified. To become what Adam was intended to be and what the second Adam truly was. To be truly human. We need him, we need to pray for a hunger for him, we need to open our hearts' doors continually to him. We do not want to be like that one who once had a great experience of God and when someone came years afterwards to talk to him he said, "Yes, I once had an experience of God". He went upstairs to get the paper on which he had written it down but his experience had been eaten by mice. John Owen, who was a fairly stern and forthright Puritan, wrote On the grace and duty of being spiritually minded: "Sometimes indeed the soul is surprised into acts of gracious communion with Christ". But that is not to be expected unless "we abide in those ways and means which prepare and make ourselves meet for the reception and entertainment of him". If we are setting ourselves to prayer we will be walking the ways where God will meet us and catch up our hearts into his heart. God will sometimes cause our hearts to flame out with love towards him but not if we seldom and all too briefly think of him and spend no time with him. It is the temptation of ministers and church members to believe that because we are about the Lord's work we are open to the Lord, but it is very easy to be about the Lord's work and not to be seeking after him.....

But I want to speak also of the second way of opening the doors to the living Lord which we are all concerned about as worshippers. In corporate worship the congregation opens their door to Christ together. Christian



worship is not a ministerial solo, Christian worship is not a concert by the choir, and Christian worship is not a music hall programme in which various believers do their unprepared, unrehearsed turns. A story is told of an American visitor in John Gunstone's A people for his praise. The story is of an American visitor who was taken to a service in the ornate chapel of the Royal Holloway College by the Principal. When the choir began to sing an anthem the American began to join in only to be hushed by his host. "May I not offer my praises in the house of God?" protested the visitor. "This is not the house of God," replied the Principal. "This is the Royal Holloway College". But I think that is the least of our weaknesses, our trouble is, I think, the music hall rather than the concert hall.

The problem of worship for us is highlighted by two movements of the Holy Spirit. First, there is the movement which was almost alone in the Church before the 1960s! The Holy Spirit and the liturgical movement which quickened many Christians in many denominations in their concern for right worship. Then there came in the '60s the second movement of the Holy Spirit. This was the charismatic movement. To some extent in some denominations the two are still interlaced. For example, the liturgically structured worship of our brethren in the Church of England has benefited enormously from both movements, they have moved on from "1662 and all that". We do ourselves a great disservice by not recognising that our problem is very different. Our churches were hardly touched by the liturgical movement, Payne and Winward notwithstanding. What happened was that the charismatic movement did not come to a structured worship, it came rather to an untheological crumble sandwich; is it surprising that all you have now is untheological crumbs? Hence we have therefore got to think very hard about the structures of the worship of the people of God. We have not yet taken sufficient account of something else also: that we face an untaught, unaware, untraditional generation of worshippers, many of whom have no background in the churches. Many of those who are converted and come into our churches, the more effective we are in our outreach, will have no background at all. You can assume nothing .....

And now, lastly, the third way of opening doors to the living God is the Lord's Supper. There we open the door to the crucified, risen and triumphant Lord. I am more and more convinced, not only on historical grounds and Biblical grounds, but in my own experience, that we must set this service at the very heart of our worship. By the way we observe the Supper we can slam and bolt and bar the doors against Christ. Yet he knocks that he may sup with us as host and feast. From the earliest days the Supper was at the heart of Christian worship. At the heart of the week was the Lord's Day: at the

heart of the Lord's Day the Lord's Supper was and is the Lord's presence! How does our practice slam the door on him?

- 1) By thrusting the Supper from the centre to the edge of our worship. Is that not what so many of our churches do?
- 2) By confusing the Lord's Supper with the Last Supper; the two are not the same. There is the Resurrection in between. I have heard a minister have us sing, "Oh come and mourn with me awhile" at the Table of the Lord! My brethren, that is tragic, especially when we have in our present hymnbook a very strong section for the Lord's Supper. And the resurrection hymns we need not leave for Easter Day only. One should not be afraid to sing "Thine be the Glory!" just because it was written by a Regent's man!
- 3) We slam the doors on the Lord by the rigidity of our practice, there is no warmth, relaxation, experiment. We have not got to keep to a very special form at the Lord's Table.
- 4) By these individual little cubes and individual glasses we deny the fellowship of the body. I know our doctors will say how dangerous it is for us to drink unfermented wine together. Well, eat some unfermented bread together, if you cannot get round to the wine. At least that would be a start!
- 5) By our emphasis on remembering rather than upon feasting we forget the presence of the Lord amongst his own gathered in his name.
- 6) By stressing our act of remembrance rather than God's deed we become unexpectant that he will set the place alive by His presence, at His Table, among His own. We do not have that expectancy. "You do not receive because you do not ask", says the Lord. You do not ask because you do not expect.
- 7) By emphasising the past and a little of the present we fail to look forward to the glory of the marriage supper of the Lamb and the triumph of our God in Christ. This should be a festival, this should be a celebration! It should not be grisly after-the-funeral-meal with the mourning family, lamenting an absence.

The Lord's Supper proclaims the fullness of the gospel in its three dimensions and I think one of the reasons why our worship is as it is, our churches are as they are, our experience is as it is, is because we do not set the Supper at the heart of our worship, with its three dimensions, the past of the Crucified Lord, the presence of the Living Lord and the future of the Triumphant Lord. All three dimensions belong to our experience of the Lord

Jesus Christ and ought to be in our worship. They belong to worship at the Table of the Lord.....

Can you not hear him knocking at our doors, over our prayers, our private prayers, our covenanting together to hold each other up to pray? Can you not hear him summoning us to give ourselves to that worship which feeds the hunger of God's people for him, not a hunger for programmes, not a hunger for theology only (though I believe theology is vitally important) not a hunger for numbers, not a hunger for new church buildings but a hunger for him. Ought we not expect him to satisfy our hunger at his Table where we come at his invitation for his hour. Do you not hear the Lord Jesus knocking at our doors?"

*These extracts from an address given at the inaugural Mainstream Conference in January 1980 are used by kind permission of the Revd Dr Barrie White, a founder member of the Mainstream Executive.*

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## Paul Beasley-Murray

### A MAINSTREAM RETROSPECTIVE



**Mainstream**  
*baptists for life and growth*

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I was there at the moment of conception! Yes, my memories of Mainstream go back to 1977. That was the year of the Nottingham Baptist Union Assembly when Douglas McBain and I, quite unexpectedly, found ourselves together publicly challenging, and eventually getting the Assembly to overrule Dr Ernest Payne! He was that year's distinguished President of the Baptist Union, who had sought to disallow a debate on the Report of the Council and in particular on "the numerical and spiritual decline of the Baptist Union". The following week I phoned Douglas McBain to say that we must do something -for the sake of the Gospel we could not allow our churches to continue to wallow in decline. The result was that a little later Douglas and I got together with Ray Brown and we became instrumental in helping to give birth to a movement which, without exaggeration, ultimately changed the face of the Baptist Union.

But unlike a birth of a human child, the birth of Mainstream took many months to develop. The embryo took definite shape at a meeting in September 1978 when representatives from all over the country came to deepest rural Herefordshire, to the little village of Gorsley where the Baptist pastor was Pat Goodland, a dynamo of a man. There at Gorsley we decided

upon a name - **Mainstream: Baptists for life and growth**. Mainstream, we declared, "is composed of people who see themselves as standing in the mainstream of Christian life in general and Baptist life in particular. Theologically this involves a wholehearted commitment to the Union's Declaration of Principle (shades of the Christological debate in the early 1970's). Ecclesiastically this involves a wholehearted commitment to the life and work of the denomination". The term "evangelical" was deliberately not used - although we were clear about our own evangelical identity, we wanted to be inclusive. Hence we turned our backs on a formal membership - instead we invited people to subscribe to our newsletter.

There too at Gorsley we began to develop a statement of intent: "Mainstream believes that our denomination is on the verge of one of the most exciting periods of its life and is determined to encourage, co-ordinate, publicise and support every venture that will lead to further life and growth"

Mainstream was actually born on Tuesday 1st May 1978. On that day, Gunter Wieske, a good friend of mine from the German Baptist Union, flew into Heathrow to address an invited audience in a private room in the House of Commons. His theme was "Evangelism - a national priority". In my letter of invitation to Gunter I wrote: "We do not expect you to have all the answers for us, but nonetheless we are very much hoping that what you will have to say will stimulate us to think in terms of bolder programmes of mission and church planting". From the word 'go' Mainstream had a passion for evangelism. That launch was an incredibly exciting occasion - and all the more as the division bells kept on sounding!

In those days it took courage to be associated with Mainstream. We were viewed with great suspicion by many and were felt to be the young Turks of the denomination - with the result that anybody who wanted to become somebody in the denomination thought twice about being seen at a Mainstream event. In this regard I wish to pay tribute to Ray Brown and Barrie White who in spite of their respectability as college principals were prepared not just to add their name to a council of reference, but rather to be active members of the Mainstream executive. We owe a great debt to these two men.

No doubt many of the memories which will be shared in this "retrospective" will focus on conferences and other public events. For me the highlight of my Mainstream involvement was turning up to our 24 hour executive meetings at Gorsley. In the early days, although a member of the Manchester Baptist fraternal, I felt very much on my own in Altrincham, with the result that the meetings of the Mainstream Executive became great

opportunities for fellowship. But it was more than fellowship we shared. It was a place for learning and for growth. In those early days along with Ray Brown and Barrie White the members of our executive included people such as David Coffey, Peter Grange, Jack Ramsbottom, and also, of course, Douglas McBain. I am indeed grateful to God for the tremendous encouragement the members of the Mainstream executive contributed to my life and ministry.

Frankly, it was not an easy decision for me to resign from the Mainstream executive in November 1993. However, I believed that God was calling me to face up to a new challenge and to devote my energies (when not engaged in Baptist ministry!) beyond purely Baptist circles. In many ways, however, my involvement in the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry is but a development of the work of Mainstream. For the RBIM too is concerned with life and growth - and in particular "to provide a supportive resource for all in pastoral leadership so that they may not only survive, but also grow and develop, and become more effective in the ministry to which God has called them".

But to return to Mainstream. The movement, at whose conception I was privileged to be present, has now come of age. Congratulations are well and truly in order. So too are good wishes for the future. May Mainstream continue to challenge the establishment with its radical passion for the life and growth of our Union!

*Paul Beasley-Murray was a co-founder of Mainstream and, for fifteen years a member of the Mainstream Executive (1978 - 1993). Paul served as the first editor of the Mainstream Newsletter (issues 1-9). Paul is now senior minister of the Baptist Church, Victoria Road South, Chelmsford, Essex and Chair of the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry.*

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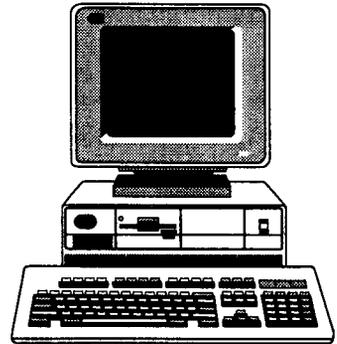
# Michael Bochenski

I too was there at the inaugural conference. Partly out of an enormous and continuing respect for the Principal of the College where I was then training, Barrie White. Partly, too, because I sensed that something truly significant was being born among us - albeit then a cloud no bigger than a man's hand. Why though have I *stayed* with Mainstream for nearly twenty years now? It's a question I often ask myself. I think, in the end, the answer is simple. Mainstream has continued

to be committed to conversion growth. We all begin there of course - in the Holy Spirit's maternity ward - but far too many ministers and churches soon forget this in all the pressures of maintenance and the exciting byways and alluring meadows of the Christian Faith. Too many of us soon learn to run from the sheer pain and difficulty of birthing and then rationalise what we have done. Mainstream, for some twenty years, has not run but has continued to provide many of us with inspiration, good practice and examples to follow and continues to believe in conversion growth. It has been worth my recurring inferiority complex over my church's baptism statistics and the suspicion my involvement has engendered in some, to be part of *such* a movement. Without Mainstream I suspect that the numerical decline of our Union would have been significantly worse than it currently is as the new millennium approaches.....

As I reflect on my own personal involvement with Mainstream at executive level, my own three priorities have been:

- 1) To ensure the successful launch of the Word and Spirit Network as a new way of Baptist associating. It is probably not exaggerating to claim that our lead in creating the **Word and Spirit** networks helped to kick start the review of Associating we are all currently engaged in. These new Mainstream groupings among us certainly helped to concentrate many minds. Good!
- 2) To build bridges across our Union and so to enhance Mainstream's credibility and effectiveness in the process. In these pages you will find some references to the suspicion and mistrust that has greeted Mainstream on occasions. I too have known it. It has, however, not always been undeserved. At times we are, in my Mainstream experience, far too dismissive of others in our Union whose spirituality and theological



integrity in Christ are not the same as ours. I learned myself in January this year after a conference session I led went wrong, how quickly you can cease to be one of the beautiful people! The whispers began overnight. It was good for me .... The experience did cause to me to recall, however, those who have shared their hurts from Mainstream with me over the years. While we rightly congratulate ourselves twenty years on let us never forget, please God, that Christ's people in our Baptist Union and beyond - mercifully transcend Mainstream's mailing lists.....

- 3) To engage in a thoughtful way with what it means to be church in all the complexities of the late 1990s. In that is, as *still* has to be said, the numerical and spiritual decline facing parts of our Union and of the Church in these islands. In the process, I have determinedly taken the magazine the way of a journal. The next editor must decide whether to continue that policy or move in a new direction altogether. Part of the genius of Mainstream has been its ability to change its leadership and then move on over these two decades of course.

Nearly a year ago now I gave notice to my colleagues on the executive that I intended to relinquish the editorship of the Mainstream Magazine - in case you hadn't noticed it is no longer a newsletter! - from the Autumn of 1998. In doing so, I was simply responding to a conviction from God that this is now the right time for me to give up the editorship just as I responded to an equally clear one from Him to take it on back in 1994. Over the past five year's I have enjoyed producing some 14 magazine issues beginning with the Golden Jubilee 50th edition and moving on to this Mainstream retrospective issue. This, my final issue, contains a dozen or so reflections on Mainstream, past, present and future. The occasionally great and the often good feature in these pages ..... as has been true of the other contributors throughout my editorship. I am grateful to you all. For the uncommissioned letter through to the many distinguished *letters to the churches* from key leaders among us which have begun most of the issues I have been responsible for.

During my time on the executive I have sought to use the magazine to play a part in the development of what - as is clear from these pages - has been and is a significant movement in the Baptist Union. I personally have gone from Amstrad to multi-media pc in these five years. From snail-mail to e-mail ..... with relative ease. A few button clicks on Outlook Express and the always professional team at Moorleys in Derbyshire now have the whole magazine e-ed onto their pcs ready to polish and finish. THANKYOU MOORLEYS for highly professional Christian service, at always keen prices, over these past 20 years. Thankyou too to Derek Wick and to the church at Sutton Coldfield for

releasing you to serve as our unpaid and always careful administrator for so much of the second decade of Mainstream's life.

The issues I have edited have covered topics such as: Word and Spirit. Mission. Renewal. The C21st Church. The decade of evangelism. Building Bridges. Shalom. The New Europe. Patterns of Associating and Leadership. In taking on this role I was very conscious of a good heritage of Editors before me. I would also like to pay tribute to them here. I have tried to involve probationer ministers and womens' voices in the process. Ironically, this has been one of the few issues where - due to two understandable declined invitations to write - no woman leader's voice has been heard through these pages. Ensuring that such voices *are* heard is also part of Mainstream's future challenge and I suspect increasingly our Union's too.

The newsletter and now magazine have been, under God, part of the glue that has helped to bind this movement together. In this way, it has complemented the vital role of the annual conference. Some have cut their journalistic teeth in its pages and whole books have followed. Some articles have found their way into national publications as well as many church magazines. A few have even been properly acknowledged!

Mainstream ..... both my Januaries and ministry would have been much the poorer without you. My love and prayers will be with the new executive as you lead Mainstream on into the third Christian millennium. One which seemed so far away in 1980 but which is now so nearly upon us....

*Michael I Bochenski is the Vice-President of the Baptist Union and ministers at and from Dagnall Street Baptist Church, St Albans.*

# Patrick Goodland

## Mainstream Reflections The First Decade



The beginning of Mainstream in 1978, found a number of ministers associated with the conservative evangelical wing of Baptist Union, like impatient fathers in a maternity unit. The realities of conception were overwhelming, while the expectations of the new life, endowed with such great potential, was exciting. For several years a number of us had been involved in small initiatives, seeking to meet demands for fellowship among Baptist ministers and church leaders. Increasingly in the 60s and 70s, there had been growing disillusionment with the Baptist Union's seeming lack of concern with the spiritual and numerical decline of our constituent churches. There was also unhappiness regarding the ecumenical negotiations, and dismay when the Union's report 'The Ministry Tomorrow' was released in 1969.

The situation was further exacerbated by an address given at The Baptist Union Assembly 1971, by Dr. Michael Taylor, principal of the Northern Baptist College, on the subject of, 'The Humanity of Jesus'. This address could not have been given at a more insensitive and inappropriate time and place. This again looked like an 'own goal' for the Union. A concessive paper on the person of Christ could have stimulated discussion in an academic arena, but it caused pain and embarrassment to numerous pastors who wanted to remain loyal to the Union. Church members voiced their concern, and some called for their churches to break from the Union.

Forty-eight churches were lost to the Union in the 1970s. The growing strength of the Charismatic movement, the 'Guilt by Association' lobby and the influence of Restorationism all brought their own challenges and attractions. Christian gurus were arising and unwise claims, to validate their ministries, were as evident as they were damaging. Losses in membership reflected in the Annual Report of the Baptist Union, presented to the Annual Assembly in 1977, prompted the intrepid Doug McBain and Paul Beasley-Murray to challenge the status quo, and to issue a call for action to reverse this trend. At the 1978 Assembly six of us met after an evening session for prayer and discussion. Ray Brown, Peter Grange, Clifford Roseweir, Douglas, Paul and I found common concern and a desire for positive action. We arranged a two day conference at my home church in Gorsley, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire. It was there that Mainstream came to birth.

From the outset our focus was quality life and growth within our local churches. We were committed to renewal which enabled a church to grow in 'wonder, love and praise'. We longed to see numerical growth, not at the cost of biblical, thoughtful Christianity, but because of it. None of us aspired to be leaders of a new Baptist organisation. We were already busy people who were not looking for additional burdens to carry. We passionately desired to stimulate a movement for unity and to end the curse of evangelical fragmentation. The annual conference at Swanwick became the main platform for ministry and fellowship. This was the largest gathering of Baptists, after the denominational assembly. As Paul Beasley-Murray commented in the May 1998 issue of the Mainstream magazine, 'for the first ten years of its life Mainstream was not distinctively charismatic, rather it was a group which deliberately sought to span the divide between charismatics and non-charismatics'.

One of the strengths of the movement in the 1980s was a willingness to listen to each other and to absorb the tensions which variety creates. The executive meetings were not safe havens. We were lobbied, criticised and affirmed. The issues of Church leadership, styles of church government, the recognition and enabling of spiritual gifts and the emotive dialogue on the use of songs versus hymns, were perennials provoking discussion and not a little humour. In fact one of my cherished memories of those early years, is of the quality of creative discussion, sometimes impassioned, often deeply affecting, which was the hallmark of our two-day conferencing as an executive twice a year. Bonds of fellowship were created in worship and prayer as we sought God's will and direction for this unique movement, its conferences and the right choice of speakers. We were in the midst of the turbulent 1980s rediscovering our tradition of dissent and identity. The 'Me-Culture' outside of the church was, to some extent, being transposed into a growing narcissistic and self-centred influence within the church. The 'feel-good' factor often appeared to be the crucial test of fellowship. We were in some danger of losing one aspect of dissenting truth, that Jesus is Lord in the experience of the individual, and this inevitably has social, moral and political consequences.

As in any movement there were 'highs and lows', 'blessings and blemishes', but for all its warts in the first ten years, Mainstream had an influence within the denomination which has, in measure, changed its style and perception of its ministry. When David Coffey was elected General Secretary of the Baptist Union in 1990, a change was evident. Mission rose higher up the agenda than maintenance. Again, Mainstream in the early years of the 80s decade was first perceived as a 'Baptist Ginger Group', with the inference that we were not particularly respectable. After seven years the

Baptist Times was able to say in an editorial article (16/1/86) 'Mainstream exercises a positive influence and as time has progressed the organisation has been treated with less suspicion by fellow Baptists.' I believe the movement was in part responsible for arresting the haemorrhage of churches leaving the Union in the late 1970s and 80s. It held a unique position as a contributor to unity within the denomination.

I believe we provided a forum where evangelicals could share in fruitful dialogue what God was doing, and how we could discern the movements of the Holy Spirit. At a time when certain movements and emphases were causing unnecessary havoc in many churches, Mainstream offer a haven for theological analysis, where the truth and wholesomeness of claims could be tested in love. Alongside the exploration and evaluation practical seminars were organised. Two-day Seminars on, 'Expository preaching' led by Dick Lucas, were outstanding and over subscribed. On one sweltering day over thirty of us in pastoral ministry, sat in a circle under a large yew tree in Gorsley's spacious grave yard. Each person in turn offered their synopsis and exposition of a designated biblical passage. Can you imagine the conversation of two rural people tending their relatives grave. "What they be a doing over there then?" The other person who had some connection with the chapel replied, "summit about preachin' to bring people alive from tha dead!". The astounded questioner blurted, "really, you don't mean that do ee". I can't vouch for the accuracy of the conversation, but it points up for me what Mainstream was about in the first decade of its ministry, stimulating spiritual life and growth in the churches of our Faith and Order.

*Patrick Goodland is now actively retired in his beloved Herefordshire.*

PS Michael, thank you for all your excellent contributions to Mainstream. All good wishes.

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## Peter Grange

When the editor asked me to write something for this Mainstream Retrospective edition, twenty years on. I couldn't believe it was that long ago we began, but foolishly, I said yes. Starting to think about those early years has been an interesting journey down memory lane and has evoked a tremendous sense of gratitude for the privilege of working with some remarkable people. Most of us know that other people's reminiscences, like holiday photos, are a bit of a bore, but once they are out and handed round there is little you can do about it. Reminiscence, analysis and reflection he asked for, so here goes.



My role during the first ten years of Mainstream was looking after the money, providing administration for the newsletter, publications and conference. Looking after the money was not too onerous because we didn't have any – not that stayed, anyway. We operated on a shoestring and were very grateful for the generosity of those who initially primed the pump. Subscriptions to the Newsletter and attendance at the conference were the two ways to “belong” to Mainstream and the two sources of revenue trickling into bank. The combination of both forced the local Post Office to build an extension to my pigeon hole - so I was told. Administering the newsletter also introduced me to the baffling logic of some subscribers. There seemed to be a regular inability, on the part of some, to make the logical connection between not receiving the newsletter and not renewing the subscription.

In the late 70's Mainstream was a movement of its time. As I recall, it arose directly from a number of those, who eventually formed the first executive, seeking to respond positively to the issue of numerical decline within our churches. This subject had been raised in the annual report of the Baptist Union presented to the 1977 Assembly. The initial response was set against the perceived background of complacency from the Union and frustration from many churches, who did not see the high priority of mission is Association and Union structures. This common concern for life and growth within the Union captured the imagination and support of evangelicals across the charismatic/non-charismatic spectrum. It reflected to some degree what had been happening with Anglican evangelicals through the National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Keele in '67 and Nottingham in '77. It characterised a new evangelical confidence not seen within mainline denominations for several generations. In short, they felt to some of us like exciting, pioneering days.

Whether they were pioneering days or not is a matter of debate. It could be argued that Mainstream has always been a follower rather than a setter of trends. Its beginnings were based on the premise that the vast majority of Baptist churches and ministers were evangelical anyway, but did not see their concerns for life, growth and renewal adequately reflected within the Union's life. The value of the movement has been in its ability to explore and express those priorities within the context of the Union; to provide a forum where those central issues could be discussed and developed in a creative and supportive environment; to provide the network of friendship, fellowship and encouragement where the fragile flower of vision could be nurtured.

Has it been worth all the effort, or would the changes we have seen in the life of the Union over the last twenty years have evolved through other circumstances anyway? Who can tell? I can only reflect on certain things, which to me seem significant. The early annual conferences in January, provided necessary personal contact, ministry, celebration and reflection for a wide variety of people. My recollection of those gatherings is of a heightened sense of anticipation and immense gratitude from those who came. Some were finding a quality of fellowship among Baptist Christians they had not experienced before. Others knew that belonging to the Union should mean more than they experienced in local and Association events. They discovered that Mainstream provided a model, which at that time gave hope for the future of the Union. The model included more than meeting at Swanwick. The newsletter and other publications provided a platform for the exchange of ideas and stimulated debate. For many, the need to belong to something bigger than the local, which focused their attention on God, his mission and resources was provided by the conference and the newsletter. I believe they gave real heart and encouragement to many.

However, much of the original vision still remains unfulfilled. We have not seen the life and growth we hoped for among the churches. There are, of course, some notable exceptions where courageous pioneering work has broken new ground, but on the whole it still remains a dream. We have yet to see a more widespread development of grass roots relationships between our churches and ministers for the purpose of mission, pastoral care and the building of vision. The Word & Spirit Network may be part of this, but the recommendations of *Relating and Resourcing* are crucial when they ask for a new start here. Decisions about our relationships as churches are not to be relegated to the few who are interested. These matters are for debate, prayer and decision in our Church Meetings.

We have yet to see the renewal of our Association life in ways that place mission at the top of the agenda and relationships as the structure on which

it operates. Those of us who began twenty years ago, committed ourselves to work for change within the structures of the Union. Some of our friends were indifferent and some had already dropped out believing it to be a lost cause. We have come a long way, but reform and renewal provide a continuous journey. If the recommendations of *Relating and Resourcing* are to be effective, they call for a commitment from us all to make them work.

*Peter Grange is the Area Superintendent of the East Midlands Area of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.*

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## Jack Ramsbottom

### Mainstream Memories

Really, I should never have been involved. It all came about because Brian Butcher was unable to attend the inaugural meeting that took place in Chester Square, London after the evening missionary service at the BU Assembly in April 1978. I was asked to go in his place.

The inaugural meeting led to our first executive meeting at Gorsley. Ah, that name conjures up some very happy memories - the thriving church, the lovely scenery, the marvellous meals, the warm hospitality, the genuine friendship, the friendships that have stood the test of time and the home grown fruit and vegetables waiting to be picked up at the end of the meetings. It was at Gorsley that Mainstream was born. It was there that Douglas McBain, in a brainstorming session, came up with the name Mainstream. It was during the first meeting that various tasks were assigned - Jack Ramsbottom conference secretary! I found myself at the close of the morning session ringing up Swanwick to book the first conference in 1980. The only dates they could offer were the 28th - 30th of January. If you have ever wondered why Mainstream is held in January, with snow, hail, rain and biting winds, well that's the reason!

Little did I know what the job involved. It demanded a steady work load throughout the year and a particularly heavy load during the few weeks leading up to the conference. I was greatly helped in my church at Kidlington by Janet Thomson who undertook quite a lot of the secretarial work. During the nine years that I did the job, we were blessed with a full conference each year. What a relief it was and what a joy to see on the first afternoon of the



conference the long queue of guests waiting to register. I was ably assisted at the reception desk by Peter Grange and Jean Smith.

I love giving notices and what better place to give them than the conference hall at Swanwick. I managed to find a suitable joke for each occasion and don't think I ever repeated myself. By the way have you heard the one about....? The most memorable notice concerned a pair of pyjamas flying from the flagpole at the top of The Hayes. Covered with confusion I had to announce at the next session that the offending garments were mine, lovingly placed there by two of my elders.

I enjoyed writing to many first rate speakers in this country and abroad. As far as I recall I never had a refusal and was never let down at the last minute. Not one of them gave a keynote address (perish the term!). They all spoke to the heart from heart, from the mind to the mind and we experienced challenge, insight and encouragement from their words.

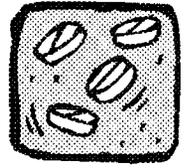
I count it a rare privilege to have had a part in the beginning of Mainstream. I am sure I got far more out of it than I put into it. There is no doubt at all about its impact on the life of the denomination, the ripples of which are still being seen today. But perhaps the greatest benefit of Mainstream is the help and encouragement it has given to men and women who have come to the conference from small and struggling churches. These people have gone away thrilled having had the chance to meet and to worship with a large crowd of like-minded people, and strengthened in their endeavour to serve the Lord in their home situation.

*Jack Ramsbottom is actively retired and lives in Chesham, Buckinghamshire.*

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# Glen Marshall

## Mainstream - The Philisan Files (\*)



Both Mainstream and I are becoming middle aged. Men approaching forty and twenty year old renewal movements can begin to stiffen up and lose a little bit of their spark.

This may not be the place for me to inflict my own mid life *angst* on you but it might be helpful to reflect about the past and the future of Mainstream. What have been the achievements of the past? Is Mainstream still sufficiently vibrant, flexible and awkward enough to count for much today? If the denominational consultation process ushers us into a golden age of Baptist life do we have a meaningful role to play in the future? Or is the very fact that we are celebrating our twentieth anniversary with a special edition of the magazine a worrying sign of creeping institutional rigor? These then are my own very personal musings:

### *The way we were*

Mainstream has actually been on my horizon, with varying degrees of prominence ever since I started training for the ministry back in the days of the S.D.P., punk rock, and Patrick Goodland. I remember news filtering back to LBC from the likes of John Balchin and Derek Tidball of a new organisation which those of us hoping to get into Baptist ministry through the back door of the residential selection conference ought to get involved in. I didn't listen. Not that is until I ended up as assistant pastor at Altrincham Baptist Church with Paul Beasley Murray. Then I had no choice. Working on the assumption that the important stuff sticks in your memory, what has my involvement with Mainstream meant to me?

### *Conferences*

I've nearly always enjoyed being at Swanwick in January ... for various reasons. Memorable key note speakers such as Tony Campolo, Richard Foster, Gavin Reid - who actually taught me something about how to preach evangelistically - and Donald English whose message on the social/political dimension of mission changed my whole understanding of ministry. Powerful worship, especially as led by, Sue Rinaldi & Roy Searle who not only led me into God's presence but also gave me a new understanding of how rich worship can be and how bland evangelical/charismatic worship often is. Finding excellent role models of how scripture should be expounded and how powerful the preached word can be. Alastair Campbell, Andrew Green and Michael Quicke really did it for me and encouraged me to try and do it for my people. Times of ministry, particularly in the one year we met at High Leigh. I doubt that Roger Sutton remembers the three words of prophecy he passed on to me but I do and they still shape my life and ministry. The very valuable

involvement of our friends from Northern Ireland whose passion for God and heart for their land has often been very moving indeed. Loads of Laughter - Gaukroger and Mercer's rip off of Smith and Jones, David Cook, just for his joke about Wesleyans and Lesbians (you had to be there!). And of course last year with Mike Huck and Jon Archer was nothing short of vintage.

### *The Magazine*

Finding encouragement, fresh ideas and reassurance from other churches' stories and what at the time felt like radical articles questioning our patterns of church government and daring to suggest that we might have things to learn from the house churches.

### *Executive Meetings*

Extremely stimulating conversations. Grappling with such on-going questions as should we continue to exist, should we have a membership, to what extent should we be avowedly charismatic, do we need full time staff, how can we find more women to lead, speak or join the exec, the failure of some of our very largest churches to throw their weight behind Mainstream

### *Mainstream North*

The early days of the under forties forum at Skipton - the only time I've ever eaten lobster thermador at a Baptist ministers' meeting - developing close friendships and touching real pain caused by being in ministry. The sense of appreciation from those who attend, valuable opportunities to minister in the churches of people I've got to know through our Skipton Days. John Lewis's impressive ability to encourage, enthuse, inspire and organise.

### *Generally*

Mainstream's ability to hold together and to honour folk patiently working for reform from within the official structures of the denomination and others who have felt called to more direct action whilst shouting encouragement from the sidelines. Delight at Mainstreamers such as David Coffey, Doug McBain and Derek Tidball rising to prominence in denominational life.

Frustration with inertia within the union and the perpetual sense that we Baptists somehow contrive to be less than the sum of our parts. An occasional sense of hurt at some expressions of suspicion and even hostility towards Mainstream.

### *The Verdict*

Have we changed the face of denominational life? Who can say - but the face of denominational life has undoubtedly changed. Mainstream's original aim to give a voice and better representation to the mission minded evangelical mainstream of Baptist life does seem to have happened to a large measure. Has the other aim of promoting life and growth been achieved? Only partly. There have no doubt been success stories and many speak warmly of the

encouragement provided by conference, magazine and regional days. If, though, we are truly mission minded and not just absorbed with internal denominational politics then we have to say that there's a long way to go - the church in the UK including we Baptists, continues to decline.

### *A Future for Mainstream?*

If Mainstream is becoming middle aged the BU by now is positively antique. While the present process of reform does give me reason to hope I believe that any institution such as the BU will always need its friendly critics to encourage and advocate more radical change than might otherwise happen. Mainstream's gadfly ministry will still be needed.

Leading Edge is a welcome addition to the Baptist scene and is to be applauded for its vision and daring in finding a new way of encouraging Baptist Christians. Hopefully this will act as a complement to the conference which, focusing as it does specifically on issues of leadership, will continue to have place to provide stimulation, vision and debate. I suspect though that some of the progress of the last couple of years in trying to be more creative and imaginative in how we do things will need to be taken much further.

While the jury is still out on the consultation process in general and Relating and Resourcing in particular, Mainstream will still need to develop local networks of leaders and churches focused on mission and committed to ongoing renewal.

There are also new challenges - I hope Mainstream will provide an arena for Baptists to think through what it means to be evangelical today as the evangelical movement grows, diversifies and seeks to relate meaningfully to our rapidly changing culture. We also need to get to grips with the fact that while being Baptist might matter greatly to most Baptist leaders it counts for very little with many church members - what role for a denominational renewal movement in a post-denominational church scene?

In my view Mainstream is in pretty decent shape for its stage of life - the magazine subscription is as high as it has ever been, regional networks continue to develop and the conference continues to provide a quality gathering for leaders. How effective we will be in the future will depend upon our ability stay flexible, radical, creative and positively critical of own denomination. At the same time we need to remember that whatever happens to us Baptists, what really counts is the mission of God and that any denomination, or any renewal movement for that matter, that becomes an end in itself has utterly lost the plot and is showing signs not just of mid life angst but of senile dementia!

*Glen Marshall is the Northern chairperson of Mainstream and ministers in and from Wakefield.*

(\*) The spelling is wrong I think but then who cares! Some of us find far more useful tonics during our 40s anyway Glen ..... The Editor.

# David Slater

## Mainstream's Life & Growth



**Mainstream**  
*baptists for life and growth*

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The early years of Mainstream were characterised, in my view, by what some might have said was *healthy debate* and by others was *disagreement!* I became part of the Executive in 1981 as David Coffey's assistant. Executive meetings were always lively and sometimes quite hotly contested. The most significant reason for this was the tension between Executive members who were sympathetic to charismatic renewal and those who viewed such an approach with detachment, anxiety or fear. In spite of it, there was a real sense of fellowship and of the need for Mainstream to provide an open forum for evangelical Baptists to meet, talk, debate and start acting together. If it was hot at times, that was part of the fun.

As I look back to those days, I think Mainstream has made a number of contributions to the denomination. Firstly, it provided a talking shop for evangelical Baptists. It stirred not a few to action in their own locality and within their Associations to ensure that the voice of the majority of Baptists, who were and are evangelical, was heard and appreciated. The Mainstream Conference became the largest gathering of Baptists outside the National Annual Assembly. Although it was frequently noted that many more Baptists would attend Spring Harvest each year, Mainstream's Conference was specifically for Baptists debating a Baptist agenda.

Secondly, a concerted effort to take responsibility within the denominational structures began with the advent of Mainstream. It was not simply the voice to be heard, but getting involved in the daily responsibilities of affiliation to the National Union that counted. Over the years, a large number of subscribers to the Mainstream Newsletter (about the only way of counting heads in Mainstream!) and a surprisingly large number of Executive members were appointed to responsibilities within the Union and as Superintendents.

Most of all, I think Mainstream, predominantly through its Conference, was able to raise issues and react to issues raised by others within the Denomination which would probably not otherwise have been discussed. Partly this was reflected in the Mainstream publications, such as Douglas McBain's "*No Gentle Breeze*", and partly in study days, such as the one held at Bristol Baptist College about the then new ecumenical instruments being proposed and which resulted in the Churches Together organisations. The Executive also met at intervals with the Superintendents to talk about matters of mutual interest.

Two other things, I think, are worthy of note. Over the years of my time on the Executive, there was a significant shift of emphasis towards involvement in renewal. This reflected the same kind of shift within the life of the churches. It has recently generated the process of transforming Mainstream into the Word and Spirit Network. With all that I have expressed about the tensions within Mainstream itself (and, of course, the denomination), there has been a tremendous amount of sheer fun. I remember one Executive meeting in London when we felt it was important to lay out some of the aims and objectives of Mainstream. We ended up having a working meal at Garfunkel's Restaurant in Victoria - the resultant document was, of course, called the Garfunkel Declaration.

Finally, I think it may be worth a look forward. Any appreciation of Mainstream's work in the past must be aimed at the future. Many times I recall the Executive discussing whether or not Mainstream should continue and, if so, in what form. Mainstream has always been concerned about the life of the churches and the ability that each has to grow and help people come to faith. It is still true today. If, in its present form, Mainstream continues to have a role, those principles must be uppermost. Twenty years on, with an approaching millennium celebration and all that that signifies for the churches today, Mainstream must continue to be forward thinking. As I view the future I think there are two things that will characterise the early years of the next century: If ecumenism was the key feature of church life in the early 20th century, a different form of it will be prominent soon. Churches and their leaders are becoming far less interested in denominational loyalties and far more concerned about working with Christians in their own locality. Candidly it makes far more sense than belonging to a national ecumenical instrument. In my view, churches will play down the denomination and play up effective co-operation and witness. Quite what consequence that will have for denominational structures is anyone's guess. What it represents is the easy way in which most Christians flow with life in the local church rather than the presupposition of denominational loyalty.

I think, too, that when revival comes to Britain, it will come predominantly through and among the youth of this country. There are many signs of young people being stirred by the Spirit of God. If so, then, Mainstream and the whole Union of churches will need to be ready for what God is doing in our land, and in the world at large.

*David Slater was for many years Mainstream's Secretary and ministers in and from Chippenham, Wiltshire.*

## Rob Warner

### Mainstream - a troublesome irritant?

It was several years ago now that Alpha magazine asked me to write an article about the history and impact of Mainstream. As they saw it, something potentially momentous had emerged that could bring about a thoroughgoing renewal of an historic denomination. The origins of Mainstream were twofold, doctrinal and missiological. The very name "Mainstream" - which to younger generations sounds stolid, dull and middle of the road - was an attempt to assert the centrality of biblical orthodoxy to Baptist life. This was no hole in the corner affair for fundamentalists, but rather a reassertion by contemporary evangelicals of the undeniable, objective reality that Baptists are essentially an evangelical denomination. That is not to say that we are a narrow church: many of the smaller denominations, old and new, have a high degree of conformity, by social background, personality type and details of secondary theological conviction. Baptists are comfortable with a much greater degree of diversity: indeed our concern for personal liberty positively encourages such diversity. However, unlike many other historic denominations, we are not in all honesty a broad church, since evangelical convictions are held by the overwhelming majority of our members and ministers. This is reflected in the fact that Baptists are one of the two largest groupings among attendees at Spring Harvest and members of the Evangelical Alliance.



The second decisive origin of Mainstream was missiological. Unable to stomach the defeatism of official denominational reports, that seemed resigned to a sustained pattern of numerical decline, Douglas MacBain and Paul Beasley-Murray led the charge. The annual Assembly became the forum for a plea to abandon lack-lustre pessimism and to recover a conviction that the Gospel had lost neither its relevance nor its power. Mainstream's strapline in the early years reflected this unshakable confidence in the Gospel - Baptists for life and growth.

Behind these two foundational principles we can detect two underlying influences and three particular concerns. The first influence was charismatic renewal, which was by now sweeping through all the denominations in the UK. With the passing of the years we can now identify several strands of charismatic renewal, that have proven to be not always compatible one with

another:

First there are existential charismatics, who, often unconsciously, have been shaped by our culture to place their primary emphasis upon subjective experiences. At worst, this sinks into anti-intellectual neo-gnosticism. At best, it entails a recovery of Wesleyan pietism.

Second, there are the pentecostalist charismatics, whose embrace of charismatic convictions leads to an immersion in the distinctive cultural style of Pentecostal Christianity. At worst, this is about high octane emotionalism. At best, it stands as a corrective to the safe, middle class predictability and control of western Christianity.

Third, there are the modernist charismatics, who look for a spirituality that provides instantaneous answers to every intractable personal problem - often speaking in tongues, inner healing or deliverance - and a blueprint for church structures that will guarantee success. At best, this encourages a "can-do" attitude, and a willingness to try new things in a positive way. At worst, it leads to unreality, triumphalism and separatism.

Fourth, there are charismatic evangelicals, who seek a recovery of rounded and balanced, biblical spirituality, including the need to be filled and to go on being filled with the Holy Spirit who continues to impart his fruit and gifts to the church. At worst, this leads to an arrogant attitude towards non-charismatics. At best, it results in setting specifically charismatic convictions within the Great Tradition of biblical orthodoxy, drawing on the insights, values and spirituality of the past, while finding fresh expression in a new cultural setting. This fourth approach led to Mainstream's more recent self-description -a Word and Spirit network.

The second underlying influence was church growth teaching. Mainstream has always been enthusiastic in commending the need for churches to aspire to a double growth: in quality of discipleship and in quantity of members. At the heart of this concern was the evangelical commitment to conversion growth, rather than simply recycling the saints. At its worst, church growth thinking was mechanistic and unrealistic. Some saw it as a fresh application into the ongoing life of the local church of Finney's widely discredited methodology for guaranteeing revival by human effort. At its best, the new thinking helpfully identified not so much the factors that would guarantee growth, but rather the self-limiting factors that successfully impede growth, or even promote decline in many churches. With the passing of time, those who looked to church growth theory for easy and instantaneous answers have been disappointed. While appropriate methods may maximize our effectiveness, they cannot ever guarantee substantial conversion growth.

Subsequent trends in church growth thinking have greatly influenced Baptist leaders in the UK. For some, but not all, charismatics, there is the Wimber model of power evangelism, which seemed to beg the question why the “experimental workshops” took place among the Christian delegates and not out on the streets. There is the Willow Creek model of seeker services, which seemed to beg the question whether the approach was relevant in churches that would only imitate part of the Hybels' methodology, in a cultural setting where non-christians are much more reluctant to attend church than in the States. There is the Challenge 2000 model of saturation church planting, but many found that the reality of church planting was much harder work and a much slower process than some of the hype suggested. And finally there is the spiritual warfare model, sometimes with elaborate theories and even charts of the workings of principalities and powers, which begs the question where to draw the line between biblical reality and fanciful speculation. More recent influences include Alpha and the Natural Church Growth School from Germany.

Speaking personally, I am sympathetic in some degree to most of these means for promoting effective growth, but in each case we can trace the same hazard: a naive idealism raises hopes too high, looks for instant results, and tends to look down upon any who cannot embrace the same pattern. The cynic is a disappointed idealist, and some who have been over-simplistic in their enthusiasm end up in reaction, dismissing out of hand anything that seems to echo even remotely an approach upon which they once leant too heavily.

As to the three underlying concerns, first Mainstream sought to be a corrective to separatism, emphasizing at a time when some were considering leaving the Union that those who embrace biblical orthodoxy stand at the very heart of the Baptist tradition. Second, Mainstream sought to provide an alternative to the new churches, at a time when some were abandoning the Union to join them - although not by denouncing them or suggesting that we have nothing to learn from newer denominations. Pat Goodland told me that some dismissed the founders of Mainstream as “charismatic confectioners”. At a later stage, one denominational leader declared his wish that a leading northern charismatic Baptist had “left us in peace and joined a house church”. While never being exclusively charismatic, Mainstream has always emphasized that charismatic convictions can find a full and rich expression within a Baptist context. Third, Mainstream sought to bring the Union back to its own evangelical roots, encouraging the appointment of national leaders, superintendents and Presidents who would take a vigorous, considered and envisioning stand for life and growth, by Word and Spirit.

As Mainstream continues to press for the reform and renewal of the Union, we do so from the double axis of mission centred evangelicalism. We look for continuing biblical reform, testing our traditional structures and potential excesses against the biblical data - for example, our tendencies to isolationism and prejudices against servant leadership. And we also look for contemporary renewal, commending and seeking to create new expressions of church life, local, regional and national, that will serve with maximum effectiveness beyond 2000.

So are "Mainstreamers" loyal Baptists? Mainstream has always faced a double complaint - "too radical" by the traditionalists, "too patient" by the young turks. True loyalty is measured by commitment not to the dry husk of a decaying institution but to the underlying, foundational convictions and values. Biblical reform and contemporary mission have always been at the very heart of Baptist spiritual vitality. The truly loyal Baptists of today are not those who wish to prop up yesterday's committees, but those who wish to mobilize our churches for effective mission among the generations of the new millennium.

*Rob Warner is the Southern chairperson of Mainstream and ministers at and from Wimbledon Baptist Church, London.*

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# John Weaver

## Mainstream Retrospective 1978-1998

It was my first BU assembly, less than six months into training for Baptist ministry, and here I was at a fringe meeting - a new organisation, or rather a gathering of people, called Mainstream - baptists for life and growth. Some 700 people had gathered in Westminster Central Hall that evening in April 1979; there was an air of expectancy, which ran through the drama, music, visual presentation and interviews. This culminated in the singing of "Jesus is Lord" (a new song!), which left us all convinced that a new work of God was beginning. From my own personal perspective, in the shaping of my life in ministry, this was certainly true.



Over the years Mainstream has been, for me, a catalyst and an inspiration for mission, and provided both challenge and support for ministry. The Dick Lucas preaching seminars at Gorsley encouraged me to ask questions of the text, in a way that brought scripture alive, and offered relevance for the congregation. Douglas McBain's work through Manna Ministries introduced me to a cluster/network group that provided spiritual support and encouragement. The Mainstream conferences provided opportunities for worship and inspiration, together with the formation of relationships that have lasted throughout the last 15-20 years. I remember significant speakers, whose messages have shaped my thinking: Barrie White's call to be the Church in the power of the Spirit; Alan Kreider's challenge to adopt a social holiness; Richard Foster's realism when considering the nature of ministry; John White's reminder that renewal begins with repentance; and Tony Campolo's encouragement to make a positive impact in the world. There were introductions to new forms of worship through the leadership of David Coffey, Douglas McBain, Graham Kendrick, and, especially for me, an introduction to Celtic worship and spirituality, through the ministry of Roy Searle.

Added to this has been the privilege of fellowship through Mainstream Council and Executive. I have fond memories of prayer, discussion, dreaming dreams, radical visions, prophetic voices, walks in the countryside, and good food at Gorsley Baptist Church. The hospitality and friendship of Beryl and Pat Goodland, together with the members of the fellowship at Gorsley was a real joy to share. Through Mainstream I have made many strong relationships, and I am especially grateful for the opportunity of meeting friends from Northern Ireland: Stephen Adams, Maurice Kinkead, and David McMillan.

Through them I have learned important lessons concerning Irish Baptist Church life, social action in Belfast, and a Christian witness in the political arena. I have, through their invitation, enjoyed never to be forgotten holidays, and numerous opportunities to minister in Northern Ireland.

I believed, when I recognised God's call to pastoral ministry in 1977/8 that the next decades were to be an exciting time in the life of the Church of Jesus Christ. During my training at Regent's Park College 1978-81, through the friendship of Jack Ramsbottom, the minister of the church we as a family attended, and Peter Grange, who had been the minister of our sending church, I was drawn into the beginnings of Mainstream. The vision and spiritual renewal that I found within Mainstream confirmed the feelings that I had had when God called me. But more important was the fact that through Mainstream I discovered the support and encouragement that I was to need as a new Baptist minister. Insightful teaching, when the Denomination seemed to be dull and predictable; inspiring worship, through which God was encountered; a depth of relationships in which honest sharing developed out of mutual trust; and encouragement to be the Church of Jesus Christ in and for the world. All of this so vital at a stage in my ministerial formation.

Now, Mainstream moves on, transformed as Word and Spirit Network, through conference, magazine, and regional groupings. I trust that ministers and church leaders will continue to find the real support; lasting friendships; honest prayer; and the spiritual renewing, that I have been grateful to have received over the last 20 years. But, most of all, I trust that the radical, prophetic voice, for which the world and Church long, will continue to be heard through Mainstream.....

*John Weaver is a former chairperson of Mainstream and ministers as a tutor in pastoral studies at Regent's Park College, Oxford.*

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## **Nigel Wright**

### **My life with Mainstream**

I think I can claim with some justification to be one of the few people still involved with Mainstream in an official capacity also to have been involved, albeit modestly, in its beginnings twenty years ago. Mainly this is to do with accidents of chronology. In my first year of training for the ministry in 1971, Michael Taylor gave his address to the Baptist Union Assembly on 'How much of a man was Jesus?'. I was there. In a negative sense this address gave rise



to some of the concerns out of which Mainstream was to emerge. Then in 1977 at the Nottingham assembly, at which I was recognised as a fully accredited minister and received the handshake from Ernest Payne, Douglas McBain and Paul Beasley-Murray made their timely interventions in the debates and set in train a period of denominational self-examination. I remember bumping into Douglas beforehand and intersecting the musings which were to lead him to speak out. Mainstream was a direct outcome of that intervention. Since then I have spoken at Mainstream conferences, chaired one of them, written in the newsletter, served on the executive, chaired the executive, spoken at regional conferences, been on the steering group of Mainstream North and (as now) served on the council of reference.

I have continued to be an enthusiastic attender of Mainstream events. I owe it a lot and hold it in great affection. For me it provided a platform from which to address a wider world. But even more so, it has been a source of encouragement in times good and bad. Mainstream has been a good thing for the Baptist denomination and, as far as I am concerned, a good thing for me.

I have always cherished, however, the firm belief that essentially Mainstream is perceived to be more than it actually is. To believe some paranoid correspondents to the Baptist Times you might be forgiven for believing that it was a large, financially wealthy, strategically well-thought out organisation along the lines of *Opus Dei* or the *Society of Jesus*. Correspondents to the Baptist Times have of course been known to get things out of proportion, like the lady correspondent who was plainly so shocked by a holiday visit to a charismatic Baptist church that she wrote to suggest that the BU handbook devise a system for identifying those which went in for such obviously dangerous and un-Baptist styles. Perhaps she had in mind a 'starring' system using symbols of tambourines or overhead projectors? This would have enabled her not to repeat the experience in future, on holiday or otherwise. It is possible to forgive, even to sympathise with, those who have not kept pace with the changes in the churches, having been locked away in some traditionalist backwater somewhere. It comes as more of a surprise when a relatively young minister, newly ordained, makes claims in the BT, as one recently did, about the origins and intentions of Mainstream being to subvert the secretariat of the Union. Those of us who were there and have been part of the story don't recognise this as in any sense what it has been about.

The fact of the matter is that Mainstream has never amounted to very much: a newsletter, an annual conference, a mailing list, an executive that exists from time to time and has the good sense to reinvent itself at regular intervals; more recently networks of ministers and others coming together for mutual encouragement and common learning. Its essence has continued the same: friendships between people who have a heart for spiritual life and

growth, who find their home in the Baptist Union of Great Britain and are not going anywhere else, goodwill towards others and especially towards denominational leaders. Also and occasionally, the ability to put the cat among the pigeons (usually unintentionally and without knowing it) by somebody saying something that others have taken exception to, but that has soon been forgotten (except perhaps by the conspiracy theorists with whom our denomination seems to be particularly well endowed). Oh yes, there's that other valuable ingredient: the ability to give a leg-up to individuals of more than average ability who go on to achieve beyond Mainstream things that, just maybe, they would not have been able to achieve without Mainstream.

This is not a bad record. But at the end of the day it amounts to gradual increments in the quality of our life together achieved not by grand strategy but by persistent application by successive waves of leaders to the task of renewing our life together. The real strength of Mainstream has not been Mainstream itself but the fact that it was riding an incoming tide. It appeared at a time when, within this particular denomination, the mood for change was taking hold. Mainstream has not caused this so much as been the expression of it. It has never included within its ranks the full spectrum of those who have been on the side of the angels. Its philosophy has been that it is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness and by dint of lighting many candles it has helped to make a difference to the way things are. So much has this been the case that we could be on the verge of seeing something highly unusual, the effective renewal and reformation of an historic evangelical denomination with a largely honourable history, a faithful but open theology, an historic commitment to the believers' church and religious liberty, to evangelism and social action, led through example and wisdom, not by human power or engineering, to which it is good to belong as we enter the next millennium.

Occasionally Mainstream has pondered whether it was time to 'do a Fountain Trust' and go out of business. Occasionally others have urged just this on the grounds that 'things are fine now'. Others of us have been more dubious. There is still a long way to go. Certainly the time will come when the energy moves elsewhere and it is to be hoped that we will recognise this time when it really does appear. But it is good to dream of a day when Mainstream is no longer needed and our denomination as a whole has become a network of Word and Spirit and is full of the life and growth for which Mainstream has worked.

*Nigel G Wright has also chaired Mainstream and is the senior pastor of Altrincham Baptist Church.*

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*The Executive are always happy to include new names and groupings here. Please let the Editor know of these ...preferably in writing.*

(\*) Please note that not all these groups describe themselves as Word and Spirit Networks but *all* share similar aims.

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### **The Mainstream Council of Reference in 1998 are:**

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Ian Coffey - Plymouth	Andy Cowley - Bushey
Jeffrey Fewkes - Wales	Mike Fuller - Coventry
Ian Furlong - Warwick	Stephen Gaukroger - Gold Hill
Terry Griffith - Bexleyheath	Steven Hembery - Crawley
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Peter Swaffield - Berkhamsted	Jane Thorington-Hassell - Bow, London
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**The Council meets next at Swanwick on Monday January 11th 1999**

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