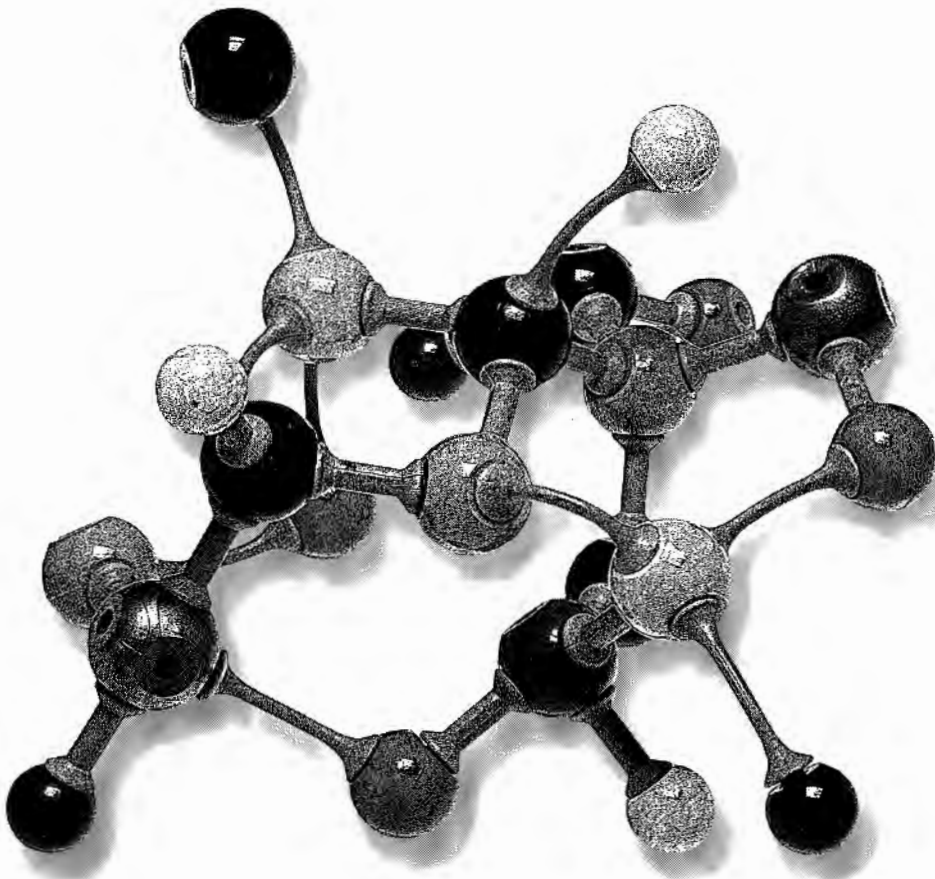


TALK

The Mainstream Magazine

Summer 2004



Connecting leaders

'The future of the people of God'

David Coffey
Paul Goodliff
Graham Sparkes
Derek Allan
Simon Perry
Roy Searle
Glen Marshall
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The temptation to parochialism

This edition breaks from the tradition I've imposed on *Talk*. Oh what power! No interview! No worship file! We're pushing the boat out because we have to receive the future; see Simon Perry's gem of an article. Increasingly as a denomination we will be thinking about our future. The fruit, an edition largely given over to those serving us at Didcot.



In a moment of jest floating the idea with David Coffey, I threatened to name the edition, 'The Empire Strikes Back', because it struck me those guys (de-gendered of course) have to put up with a lot of opinions from the chattering classes of ministers and leaders about what 'they' at Didcot ought to be doing. But as we're not much of an empire and as striking back is not the done thing in our tradition of 'turn the other cheek', I thought better of it. Anyway they may have many qualities but being Ewoks is not one of them.

In all the discernment and debate ahead, I hope the agenda set will not be parochial, obsessed with re-forming the organisation. There are signs a-plenty within the contributions that follow which show thinking on a broader canvas. But it's been confusing, when the outworking of Council policy decisions have seemed preoccupied with the infrastructure of associations, rather than addressing the concerns of local church leaderships. After all, we are meant to be a Union of 'Churches, Associations of Churches...' It's felt those entities have been reversed at times.

As a church leader I am looking for national leadership that helps re-position the tradition of which I'm a part, along with other historic and new churches, to express Christ's life within the post-Christendom context in which we live. I long for a more defined and focused message, calling us to be God's genuinely alternative people, a people showing the world there is an alternative way of human living; see Stanley Hauerwas' interview last time. This requires a far harder edged message and a cultivation of God's people to be a symbolic presence of what is genuinely new and distinctive, surely the genetic inheritance imparted by the man from Galilee, our resurrected Lord. In my own ministry I feel the pull of parochialism, a preoccupation with important but secondary matters when set against our primary calling and the scale of the task faced, and the ever-present danger of an individualistic gospel and discipleship within the evangelical-charismatic tradition. These hinder the growth of such a radical people. I need wise, loving and courageous leadership to cut this new track across the wasteland of post-modern individualism and relativism.

So to foster conversation, in the next edition, which prepares us for our conference on the theme of leadership, I invite your **brief responses of no more than 300 words**, on what emphases, initiatives, leadership you would value for the years ahead. Contributions by e-mail attachment to stephenibbotson@altrinchambaptist.org

Stephen Ibbotson is the Editor of *Talk*. He is also a member of the pastoral staff of Altrincham Baptist Church, Altrincham, Cheshire.

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David Coffey is General Secretary of the Baptist Union and took up this post having previously led the denomination in its evangelistic mission and following ministries in Leicestershire, South London and Devon.

I agree with William Abraham's observation that the Western Church is currently awash in a sea of renewal movements that she is in danger of drowning. Without shipping more water on the Baptist boat, I suggest that the main focus of thinking about the future of the people of God should be to recover something of the apostolic identity of the Church and receive from the Holy Spirit 'more than we had anticipated' of new life and direction. Given that what emerges in the future of Christianity is always configured out of the fragments of its past and God speaking to his Church in the present, I suggest there are some significant indicators to begin any reflection on future Church.

The first is that Christianity *does not seem to plant churches that last for ever* - so we must expect the death of some churches as well as the birth of new ones. Kenneth Scott Latourette in his magisterial work *A history of the expansion of Christianity* concludes that the story of Church through two thousand years is not one of steady progression; it's a story of advance and recession, not irreversible progress. Andrew Walls supports Latourette when he observes: 'The homelands of Tertullian and Augustine are no longer thriving Christian centres'. In our own country urban churches have become furniture stores and rural chapels are sold as holiday homes. It is a somber reminder that whilst the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church, the local and national expression of the community of Christ has no divine right to survival.

So you want to build a ship?

By David Coffey

The second indicator is that the *geographical centre of gravity for Christianity has always been shifting for two thousand years*. Philip Jenkins has chronicled that in our own life time there has been a massive shift of numerical influence from the northern to the southern hemisphere. The majority of Christians now live not in Europe and the United States but in the Southern hemisphere, with the largest number in Africa. In the global South huge and growing Christian populations now make up what the Catholic scholar Walbert Buhlmann has called the Third Church. We are experiencing an unprecedented cross-fertilization of the global church in many parts of the Baptist family, especially in London, where it is not unusual to have over twenty nationalities in a Sunday congregation. The Baptist World

'future Church' conferences in the UK make room for a growing diversity of people at the table.

The third indicator for the future of Christianity is *the formation of Christian disciples*. In every generation of the Church this is probably the most significant challenge to be faced and there are enough warning signs around to indicate that whilst we have been adding numerically to our congregations, we may have been neglecting the development of disciples who are equipped not only to serve people in the community but also share in the transformation of society. I am encouraged wherever there are lively local churches nurturing Christians in their faith and engaging meaningfully with their communities, but the lesson from history is that evangelicals have been in this position before and growth

Our calling is not to take the mission out, but to go and meet the mission already there

Congress in Birmingham 27-31 July 2005 offers us unparalleled opportunity to see what God is doing globally. It has been suggested that we need to learn from Asian Christians how to relate and witness to those who belong to other world religions; from South American Christians their courage and passion for justice; from African Christians new methods for reconciliation between people of different cultures and races. The future of the church will be global in ways we have not yet begun to grasp and it will be interesting to discover whether those planning

in church numbers has not always been translated into lasting results in society. The history of the 19th century saw a similar growth in evangelicalism but a combination of poor leadership, disunity and lack of theological clarity led eventually to numerical decline. The supreme lesson from the past for evangelicals is to keep in step with what God is doing *beyond* the church and the effective measure of a church is a commitment to Church *and* Kingdom growth. We need a generation of followers of Jesus who see the stark needs of our society.

This calls for a radical change of mindset and pastors should ponder Dallas Willard's question: 'Does the Gospel I teach and preach have a natural tendency to cause the people who hear it to become full time disciples of Jesus Christ?' The evangelistic imperative is not only to challenge people with the question: 'If you were to die tonight, can you be sure you would go to heaven?' but 'If

and for this God raises up apostolic leadership. The distinguishing mark of apostolic leadership is it refuses to domesticate the gospel. It should challenge the churches of our Union with the clarion call: 'Don't domesticate the ministry!'

To foster an apostolic church I suggest a modest change in our BUGB practice of ministerial settlement. When a minister

church has a commitment to practice the apostolic mission and it is the kiss of death for any community when the church domesticates the ministry and minimizes the apostolic calling.

As to the future of Christianity in our Western society, the numerical strength of the institution may go on declining; the global centre of the Church may bring shaping influences unforeseen; the presence and witness of vulnerable disciples in community will continue to be the sign and foretaste of God's eternal Kingdom; our reconstitution as an apostolic people should serve as the antidote to the domestication of the Church.

The French catholic Antoine de Saint Exupery once said 'If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.' The most encouraging development in the emerging Church conversations is the genuine openness to explore new insights in God's story. If we teach people to indwell this unique story that shapes our lives, then the Church will be well prepared for the

Apostolic leadership challenges churches with the clarion call: 'Don't domesticate the ministry!'

tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life, whom will you follow? What will you do differently?' We need stronger glue in local churches binding people to the Lord and to one another so that basic discipleship principles are lived out in each congregation. I welcome seeker friendly congregations but we must make it plain that discipleship is not an optional add-on, and that the communities to which we belong have a serious commitment to following Jesus.

Radical discipleship can only be fostered by the fourth indicator which is the emphasis on the *reconstitution of the Church as an apostolic people*. I applaud the initiatives Mainstream has taken to profile the apostolic calling and long for an increasing number of expressions of the apostolic church. Most Baptists have an understanding of the apostolic calling. In their best moments they know their calling is not to take the mission out, but to go and meet the mission already there. Our problem is we see so many changes in the world around that we become over-whelmed by the strangeness of the cultures growing up around us and lack the faith to believe that God is present in these alien cultures. History teaches us that when the world around us is changing, this constitutes a new calling from the missionary God because his loving heart for our needy world never changes. But we need help if we are going to reconstitute ourselves as an apostolic people

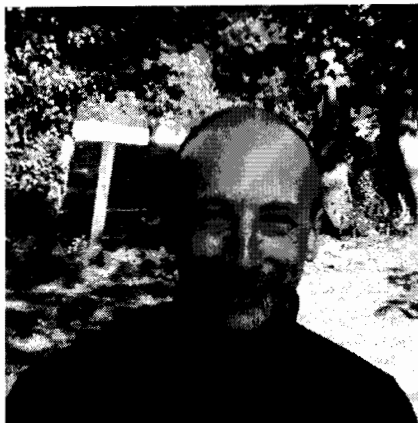
receives the call to a new church the start of their public ministry of preaching, leading and pastoring should be delayed by up to three months. During that time they are encouraged to immerse themselves in the community of the church. They walk the streets and meet people. They visit the statutory and voluntary agencies or potential partners of the church. They attend the meeting places where people gather in that community. They read, listen and observe. They note the languages and learn the traditions of this community. They soak themselves in the cultures of the community that is

If you want to build a ship teach people to yearn for the vast and endless sea.

to be their home for the years ahead. At the end of this period they are ready for the induction service. Invitations are sent to the community leaders visited in the preceding weeks, as well as to the usual ecumenical guests. For the first few weeks the pastor's sermons are based on sharing with the congregation the sights and sounds and experiences experienced in the community, making the point to the membership that this minister is not for domestication. The Baptist Union must break some of the moulds of ministerial practice that do everything to negate the formation of the missionary pastor. An apostolic

adventure of sailing in uncharted waters and building the ships of future church will emerge naturally out of a quest to journey on God's vast and endless sea.





Fantasies and dreams - ministry tomorrow

by Paul Goodliff

Paul Goodliff heads up the Department of Ministry of the Baptist Union. After pastorates in south London and Stevenage, he was Superintendent/Regional Minister for the Central Baptist Association. He is author of *Care in a Confused Climate - Pastoral Care and Postmodern Culture*, with a book on the theology and psychology of shame due to be published soon. He is married to Gill, a Lecturer at the Open University, and has three adult sons.

For five and a half years I worked with ministers in the Central Area and have left that post with an overwhelming sense of appreciation of the good work that most of the ministers in Central undertake. By contrast, as I take up the reins of Head of Ministry at the Baptist Union, I am already aware of very few ministers who bring the ministry of Christ into disrepute by their behaviour. So, it is important for me to remind myself what ministry is all about at its best, and actually how close many of our ministers come to exemplifying the best.

So, let me play a game with you. It's called 'fantasy pastor'. What would my ideal pastor look like? What do I hope for? What might the ideal be? We had better take a quick look at this before speculating on the shape of future ministry.

Fantasy Baptist Minister

I want my fantasy ministers to be confident in the gospel and its power to transform individuals and communities; to care for the people of God in all the changes and chances of life; to help each person to grow in Christ and in their true humanity; to be creative shapers and leaders of worship. They would need to be wise counsellors, clear-sighted leaders and enablers of others.

These Fantasy Ministers would be those who give themselves sacrificially to the service of Christ and his Church, yet without being exploited by the structures of the church. It is probably both unrealistic and unhelpful to expect ministers to work only a thirty-five-hour week. I personally find it hard to understand

ministers who regularly work a five-day week, when the standard terms of settlement prescribe only one day free from church responsibilities. Having said that, I also hope that ministers are flexible enough to participate in activities denied to those whose work is conducted on a nine-to-five, weekday pattern. There should be the flexibility to share in household chores, or child-care on Saturdays, rather than slavishly filling the diary with work, because it is a 'working day'. Also, Sunday afternoons may well be best spent with at least part of the time reading the papers, going for a walk or taking a nap!

Fantasy Ministers would keep their spiritual life keenly alive through observance of the disciplines of the Christian life, and out of that vibrant closeness to Christ would minister life to others. To do this they would be

in applying scripture to today's world. Let's have ministers who 'have a life'. Actually, that might be all I need to say, but what I mean is, ministers who have a life beyond their church and their work. Let's also have ministers who earn the respect of civil society, and sometimes so challenge the injustices they find that their prophetic voice angers the perpetrators of injustice and exploitation.

There is much else besides, and of course the Fantasy Minister does not exist. Even to suggest so might seem intimidating or unhelpful. Isn't this just the kind of omniscient super-person we intended to do away with in the celebration of team ministry and the ministry of every member? Perhaps. I do not think that every minister will or can be expert at everything, although I hope we might be competent at most things, while

We will see greater equality for both women and men in ministry

aware of the need to seek support from others, and so would be ready to use retreats, spiritual direction and soul-friends in order to maintain their spiritual vigour.

I want to celebrate ministers who are aware of the culture in which they live, but are neither indifferent to it nor enslaved by it; rather, with the whole church, they are participants in the transformation of it. Likewise, ministers who are faithful to scripture, imaginative preachers and careful expositors, but who understand the scale of the task

remaining a specialist in something perhaps pastoral theology or social regeneration, young people's work or marriage repair. Even if we lack competence in some aspect of the core tasks of ministry, a 'good enough' minister will need to know that this is so, and look for the help of others to create the rounded ministry offered by the leadership of the church.

Looking to the future

The golden rule of crystal-ball-gazing is that the future is almost guaranteed to look different from the one described. So, the

future of ministry will not be exactly like this, but here are some aspects of the future that may be discerned already.

Ministry will become increasingly demanding, and the range of skills necessary broader and more numerous. Who would have predicted in the mid-1980's that IT skills would become almost mandatory for ministers, or that the urgency of engaging

friends in the Independent Methodists bring to us as we journey together towards union at the end of the decade. Many more ministers will work in teams where most, if not all, the members have another job. If this became much more the norm, we might find that a number of churches at present without 'stipendiary ministry' would find ministry emerging. As is increasingly true of London

Our wealthier churches will increasingly add ministers for music and worship to their teams, working alongside pastors, evangelists, church planters, community workers and parish nurses. Not all will be accredited as ministers, nor do I believe that all those categories should be, but all will contribute their own disciplines and ministries to a rounded whole. The vast majority of churches will not have such an opportunity alone but might look for possibilities to diversify ministry through clusters of churches or congregations. However, I do fear that the old Baptist independence will hamper the development of these opportunities.

Wealthier churches will add ministers for music and worship to their teams

in mission to a multi-faith community would be quite so acute? The core tasks of the cure of souls remain the same: healing, faith development, guidance on the spiritual life, proclaiming the gospel to those who have yet to come to personal faith in Christ, and so forth, but to these core tasks we need to add so much else. For this reason, in-service training will become not so much a luxury as a necessity. The continual development of existing skills and the acquisition of new ones will determine in large part whether ministry remains fresh through to the later stages of life, or grows tired early on.

If those skills and that knowledge which need to be acquired in order to engage in competent ministry are an essential part of initial ministerial training, then developing those skills is a lifetime's calling. Into this context comes the value of regular appraisal an attempt to evaluate how sharp those skills are, and how adequate that knowledge is for a changing shape of ministry. I think appraisal will become the norm for ministers, not least as those who have benefited from mentoring during the initial years of ordained ministry continue to seek the kind of support which has so helpfully assisted their period as a newly accredited minister. Perhaps some churches will require it of their minister.

In the future, more and more ministers will be bi-vocational. This is one of the gifts that our

already, such people would be trained on the job, then recognised amongst us.

I long for, and believe we will see, greater equality of opportunity and similarity in numbers and postings for both women and men in ministry. As more churches experience the ministry of women, so more will welcome it and affirm it. In this context, more ministers will look for potential, not only among their young men, but also among their young women. I also hope that the excellent ministry of those ministers who are black or Asian will break out of any narrow context in which they minister only in minority ethnic congregations, and that it will become the norm for many to minister in predominantly white congregations at some time in their lives, if not throughout their ministerial experience. We should not

Ministers are the key agents for mission in many churches, and so the focus on pastoral and teaching gifts will need to be complemented by those of mission and apologetics. Will ministers in the future be any more enthusiastic about mission than those today? I am not sure, although they certainly will need to be if we are to rise to the mission challenges of both post-modernism and post-Christendom.

On the whole, I am still optimistic about ministry in Baptist settings. The God who has called women and men through the ages has not changed, and his grace is as effective and sufficient as it has ever been. With that confidence, how can we be anything but hopeful for the future of Baptist ministry?

The old Baptist independence will hamper the development of these opportunities

expect our black and Asian ministers to serve only in black majority congregations, any more than we might expect women ministers to serve only predominantly female congregations! The vibrancy of our black churches means that there will be a steady stream of black women and men candidating for ministry and serving in all kinds of settings.



Grahame Walker - twenty-four - is our youngest contributor this time and is Research Intern Assistant for two years to David Coffey the General Secretary. Along with travelling with David his research focus is on Church and society

What the caterpillar calls the end of the world

By Grahame Walker

I'm going to make a bold statement. You might not like it; you may say that this article is full of generalisations that don't apply to you, that are harsh or unfair. I don't care. It's time to stop writing books that we don't need and time to start shouting.

So, my bold statement: **The future of the people of God is to separate themselves from Christianity.**

Christianity in many of its forms is not what is taught in the Bible. In fact, organised religion is not taught in the Bible, neither are nice church buildings or pews or 'winning souls for Christ' or mission weeks or evangelistic meetings or crusades or many other things that we do as part of Christianity. Modern Christians seem to think about two things: how to expand the local church and how to 'win souls for Christ', and this is bad. Jesus commanded us to 'make disciples of all nations'.

Let's throw off this religion that so easily entangles and follow the Way

Nowhere there does he mention making large congregations or even making Christians. Christians go on and on about how it is not they who convert people, but God. But then they spend all their church time thinking how to convert people. Disciples are 'lifelong learners', not Christians, not churchgoers. They are people who are learning about God. We do not save people, we are not called to save people. We are called to let them know about God and what he is all about. God saves people; he's very good at it and we should leave him to it.

But we have to convert people, we have to convert them

into churchgoers, otherwise how will our church grow? We have to have a big church otherwise... What? Why are we all trying to pull people into church? That's not what Jesus commanded us, and yet, working in the Baptist Union, all I hear about is churches, how the church is doing, how to get more people in, how to reach out to people.

The future of the people of God is to separate themselves from Christianity

Jesus said that people will hate us because they first hated him, but it is interesting to note that very few people hate God. They hate the institutional church, they hate religion. And why not? The fact is that Christianity, a lot of the time, has very little to do with Christ, very little to do with grace and forgiveness; Christians are rarely anything like Jesus in their attitudes. In a top five of things that stop people meeting Jesus, I bet Christianity is there.

The people of God need to escape from this 'Christianity', this dying beast. The Christian religion was like a caterpillar going along having an eat, growing, learning, but now it is just a big fat caterpillar, cocooning itself in tradition and legalism. It needs to break out, to become the butterfly it is meant to be.

The writer to the Hebrews talks about throwing off the sin that so easily entangles. Well - people need to know about God, need to meet with this real, very groovy supreme being, but they do not need to meet with Christianity. So let's throw off this religion that so easily

entangles and follow the Way, follow God and let people be free to meet this fun, friendly, helpful, loving, talkative God that we know.

The future of the people of God? Let us not think that our future is in jeopardy; the Church is never going to die, it is God's bride. We do not have to worry.

Even if we fail to convert another person from now on, the church will continue to grow, because it is God who saves, not us. We as God's people have to concentrate on living our lives right, on being salt and light - not by sneaky evangelism, but by being friends with God. By being followers of Jesus, not of the church. The future? To have fun, to enjoy being God's people, to help others and to show them how great life is with God, and help them to meet with Him. To be free. As Richard Bach says in *Illusions*, 'What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the Master calls a butterfly.'

It's not the end of the world; it's just the beginning.

What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the Master calls a butterfly.

New tolerance or anything goes?

By Simon Hall

I've just watched the first instalment of *Big Brother 5*.

Well, if ever there was a definition of car crash TV - you can't stop watching, but you hate yourself for doing so - then that was it. Channel 4 don't care what I think; I'm now a year and nine months beyond their 'core demographic' of 16-35. But I wonder if their 'Big Brother gets nasty' gambit is really going to

hee hee!' Self-satisfied gits!

I realise that very few of my readers are likely to be committed *Big Brother* watchers, but let me remind you of the four winners so far: Craig, the mild-mannered builder who confronted the cheating 'Nasty Nick' with such naïveté that he melted a million hearts; Brian, a 21st-century Larry Grayson; Kate, a

Our nation's youth are not half as depraved, cynical and manipulative as their parents

pay off. By the time you have this article in your hand, gentle reader, you will know one way or the other. However, I'm going to make a prophecy: this freak show is a major misinterpretation of the *BB* audience.

Why do I say that? Surely the ratings successes of other car crash shows such as *Wife Swap* and *I'm a Celebrity...* are a clear indicator that the people out there in TV-land want this stuff? Well, maybe, but the people who raved about *Wife Swap* were (a) middle-aged TV critics and TV execs and (b) middle-aged viewers. Same with *I'm a Celebrity...*

Take *Wife Swap*. They call it 'Reality TV', and then put two people together who are guaranteed to hate each other. Those watching at home and enjoying two women tearing each other to shreds (what the TV people call 'the payback': the reward for watching an hour of people cleaning someone else's house and moaning about it) are not the nation's youth, but their parents, a cup of tea resting on their paunches as they comment wistfully, 'There's always someone worse off than yourself. Hee

girl-next-door if ever there was one; Cameron, a Baptist youth leader from Orkney whose biggest confession was that he was a virgin. What does that tell you about the voters, the vast majority of whom are young? And what does it tell you about the middle-aged execs who declared Cameron's victory a failure? They must have been fed up with their audience for making the comedy Christian the winner. *Big Brother*, for all its failings, is a sign that our nation's youth are not half as depraved,

cynical and manipulative as their parents - they want the good guy to win!

You would hope that things might be different within the Christian community, but the truth is that perhaps the most pervasive flaw in the emerging church movement is cynicism. And this cynicism is often directed at those who are just plain nice. Ship of Fools (www.ship-of-fools.com), originally a Christian satire site but increasingly the home of left-leaning

Christians everywhere, showed a particularly skewed sense of this recently. In an article called 'The Unimportance of Being Earnest', Howard Ingham spent a week with Swansea University CU during mission week. Many of his comments are penetrating and wise, but what most gets Ingham's goat is how nice all the students are. They are no longer offended by the CU's offensive evangelism. Ingham mistakes their belief in an open and free society as belief in nothing. He suffers a strange nostalgia for the good old days when it really cost something (your self-esteem) to identify yourself as a Christian, because everyone 'really believed in something' (i.e. was nasty and judgemental).

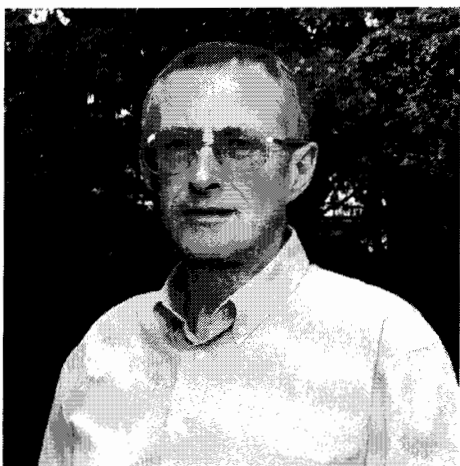
Young people may be terrifyingly self-centred and lacking in any political awareness, but they seem to have attained at least one thing that their parents aimed for: some semblance of an inclusive community. And they got there not by rallies, campaigns or even prayer meetings, but just by being nice.

Young people seem to have attained some semblance of an inclusive community

It frustrates me that so much TV is an argument for why such a community is impossible. Well, I want to side with the dreamers. Of course, we are left wondering where Jesus would be during mission week at Swansea University. Handing out tracts? Hiding from the Christians? Saying, 'If it makes you happy, that's lovely'? Or maybe something else completely different? One to think about...



Simon Hall is currently pastor of **revive**, a young-generation church ministering within the extensive youth culture of Leeds. He has been involved in the youth ministry scene for years now - sorry Simon! - and has become known as a writer and thinker about church, mission and youth culture.



The future of the people of God

By Derek Allan

Derek Allan served with BMS in Congo before pastorates in Harringey and Redcar and now heads up Department for Research and Training in Mission. His particular interests are in evangelism and church planting, both of which impinge on the issue of emerging forms of church.

The future is always practically upon us and therefore we can make some predictions with a large measure of certainty simply by tracking current trends and extrapolating from them. However, the story of the people of God would suggest that this approach can be of only limited value - given the tendency of God to step into his people's history, sometimes in judgement, sometimes in immense blessing. God has a habit of moving all the goalposts with sovereign impunity, a fact that should deter anyone foolish enough to make predictions.

Lies, damned lies and statistics?

However, to start with what is known and begin extrapolating: the size of the Christian Church in the UK is set to decline in the next ten years. Peter Brierley, of the Christian Research Association (CRA), has estimated that in the fifty-year period 1990-2040 the number of UK churches is likely to decline from 50,000 to 30,000; the number of UK ministers from 36,600 to 26,000; and the number of church members from 6.6 million to 1.4 million. Don't shoot the messenger: Peter Brierley is providing a valuable service to the Church in tracking trends, and we need to heed numbers such as these!

The huge drop in the numbers of children and young people in the British Church is a further serious cause for alarm. Historically, a high percentage of those drawn to Christ have been exposed to the gospel as children or young people, and with this

pool of people with early grounding in Christian teaching so much diminished, the flow of converts is also likely to diminish.

But figures do not tell a complete story. Some of the trends described also point to changes in the nature and quality of church life. For instance, although attendance figures at Baptist churches are more encouraging than the traditional figures for membership, the expectation that a 'regular attender' will be in church twice every Sunday is now gone. Many people who would call themselves regulars will be in church only once on a Sunday, or possibly there every second week or even less frequently. This is leading inexorably to a dislocation of church life. It is difficult for there to be meaningful fellowship between people who worship together sporadically instead of each week.

faith. This has exciting potential for the UK Church - if only it can welcome and embrace that diversity.

There is encouragement in the fact that substantial numbers of churches are actually growing both in size and health, demonstrating that growth is possible, and it would be reasonable to assume that it can happen more widely. Although the current climate may not be altogether favourable, there is massive evidence of people of all ages yearning for spiritual reality, and our task is to show them that the answer to their seeking is in Jesus.

Trends and trajectories

What other trends might be expected to continue? Again extrapolating from the current situation, the most obvious feature is churches' increasing level of **involvement with their communities**. They are coming

The number of church members is likely to decline from 6.6 million to 1.4 million by 2040

According to British Government statistics, over 200,000 non-British people come to Britain each year (and some 70,000 British people leave the country). This substantial net immigration is having a well-documented effect on our society, but also upon our churches. Many of those who come bring not only their Christian faith with them but also their own cultural expression of

to understand that isolation from the communities they are trying to reach makes no sense at all and that they need to be good news to the people around them as well as *preaching* it. The trend in this direction over the last fifteen or twenty years among evangelical churches - many of them Baptist - has been marked, and Steve Chalke's *faithworks* movement is one symptom of that.

Leadership has always been important in church life, and there has been considerable attention given to how different styles of leadership impact on churches. CRA recently published a study sponsored by the Salvation Army entitled *Leadership, Vision and Growing Churches*. From a survey of 1,100 churches, it concluded that there was one characteristic that distinguished growing churches: having a leader who is a driver, often a visionary, and able to make things happen, frequently by force of personality. Not every leader is in that mould - or could be, or should be - but at least the church is beginning to take the issue of leadership seriously. The realisation that a church needs leading as well as pastoring is a healthy one.

Several schemes that might be grouped under the term **consultancy** are already in evidence: for example, Natural Church Development, Building Bridges of Hope and the Baptist Union's own Consultancy programme. The aim of these and other movements is to promote healthy churches in the belief that healthy churches will also grow. Consultancy is well established within the Baptist Union of New Zealand and has been running long enough to be evaluated. Results show that churches that have engaged in consultancy are more likely to grow, and at a faster rate, than those that have not.

The expansion of the **cell church** model in the UK is likely to continue in the next ten years, and this brings a quality of church life with it, as well as offering opportunities for church planting. Cell can now claim to be more than a passing phase and looks set to be a significant growth factor in the next decade. Closely linked to this would be the emergence of new cells/churches which come out of Alpha courses and similar small group methods of evangelism. Often the unchurched person converted through Alpha discovers that moving into a traditional church setting is too great a leap, and therefore a

group/church, with similarities to Alpha, may be the solution. Allied to this is the movement to make church accessible and attractive to the non-Christian, and the dramatic expansion of Reaching the Unchurched Network (RUN) is an encouraging factor.

Church planting in the 1990s was most often on the mother/daughter model with daughters invariably resembling mothers. The picture is now more complex and imaginative. Small, often fragile, experimental expressions of church are appearing. Some will fail or disappear into error or obscurity, but many will prove to be authentic and long-lasting. So, for example, we find churches based around a workplace, an interest group or for a particular generation. The format of church may be café - or pub-style, and there is now even a virtual web-based church. George Lings, of the Church Army's Sheffield Centre, has done much work on describing new initiatives in church, and there is every hope that these non-traditional - sometimes called emerging - forms of church will not only prove fruitful for the gospel but also will challenge and reinvigorate traditional church.

There are some **radical young people** around. Rob Frost, himself no bland conformist, commented to me that some of the young people on the Share Jesus teams humbled and scared him by their degree of determination to live out and share the gospel. Praise God for the

tens of thousands of small churches in the UK - the 20,000 smallest would have an average congregation of around fifteen people - and if only these small groups could find a real identity and a viable mission strategy, they are sufficiently dispersed around the country to reach many thousands for Christ. The main message is that a small church is not a failed large church but has many factors in its favour, and a movement among our small churches could prove revolutionary.

At the time of writing, Mark Greene of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, with the aid of the Evangelical Alliance, is trying to draw together a coalition of denominations and agencies around his prophetic analysis entitled *Imagine*. The central thesis is that we have enough people to reach the UK for Christ, if only they were properly disciplined, briefed, trained, resourced and supported. Watch this space.

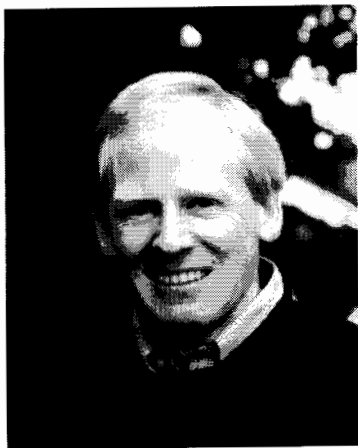
And finally, we have to mention hope of a **new Pentecost**. This is not to place all our eggs in the basket of revival, but simply to comment that God has a habit of renewing his Church by one means or another, from one generation to another. Each of these moves of God's Spirit has left some legacy with the Church and it may be that God has more surprises for us in the next ten years. I am convinced that the charismatic movement, which can be traced back some forty years in the UK, still has much energy, but

There is massive evidence of people of all ages yearning for spiritual reality

challenging initiatives of the BUGB Younger Leaders' Forum, which augurs well for the future.

Moving to less secure predictions that are further removed from current trends, I have a hope that **small churches** will begin to find their true identity and move forward. There are

it is not the only stream of God's blessing. We can hope for new ways for the Church to express the heart and love of God in the power of that Spirit.



Forward together?

By Graham Sparkes

After ministries in Bristol and Kings Langley, **Graham Sparkes** joined the staff of the Baptist Union. He has now been appointed to oversee the work of the Faith and Unity Department, and this links together a continuing involvement in issues of social justice with a concern to develop our ecumenical relations.

Talk of ecumenism does not always excite and inspire! Too often it is restricted to a rather narrow range of ideas and activities, most of which seem to have gone past their sell-by date. We are aware of an annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, of Lent courses designed for study groups made up from different churches, of a shared service in the evening whenever there is a fifth Sunday in the

But to marginalise ecumenism in this way ignores basic realities about the Church of today and tomorrow. The fact is that, whether we like it or not, just about all our churches today are examples of ecumenism - of growing Christian unity across any number of different traditions. As a result of the well-documented decline in denominational allegiance, we find ourselves worshipping and

creative challenges that go to make up our present ecumenical journey.

Think for a moment of the common wealth of resources that we now share. Of the music and teaching found at Taizé, Spring Harvest and the Iona Community. Of the critical wisdom and social insight offered by the Evangelical Alliance, the Shaftesbury Society and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. Of the world perspectives gained from Christian Aid and Tearfund. I suggest that the worship and witness of every one of our churches has been touched by these examples of vibrant ecumenism, and that every one of our churches would be impoverished without their continuing influence. At all kinds of levels, we have learned that the Christian faith is broader and deeper than can be contained within one tradition, and that it is possible for Baptists to find stillness and beauty in an icon, to seek help from a spiritual director or to be able to say with mean-

Our churches are ecumenical experiments in process

month. Once upon a time these might have been daring and innovative, but now they fail to do much to stir the heart. They are left to those who are interested in that sort of thing!

Bypassed or embraced?

Of course, we know that there are those churches that take ecumenism very seriously. More than 225 Local Ecumenical Partnerships involve Baptists, whether as part of a single congregation worshipping together in one building, or as part of formal Churches Together groups. But that means there are many more who have not made that kind of commitment, and who perhaps struggle to see why it should matter. Isn't ecumenism just a distraction that consumes valuable resources of time and energy? Wouldn't it be better to concentrate on nurturing and sustaining vibrant Baptist congregations? Hasn't the great ecumenical vision of unity run into the sand? And so it is left to... those who are interested in that sort of thing!

witnessing alongside Methodists and Anglicans, Quakers and Congregationalists, all of whom have decided to make their home amongst Baptists. They may have done so because of changed convictions regarding the nature of the church and the significance of believers' baptism; more likely it is because the Baptist church happens to be the place that meets their spiritual needs. The truth is that our churches are ecumenical experi-

We do have distinctives that must not be lost

ments in process, and there is nothing to suggest the experiment is reversible.

It could be due to complacency about how far we have come and how much we have achieved, but I believe that when we pause to reflect, we are confronted with a whole range of exciting possibilities and

ing the Nicene Creed while still remaining Baptists.

That challenge to still be Baptists has also been a source of enrichment. It is a growing ecumenism that makes us ask questions about who we are and why we are, calling us to examine our roots and to hold on to that which can both nurture

our own identity and be a distinctive contribution to the wider Christian community. Both 'Five Core Values' and 'Covenant 21' are our attempts to do just that. We do have distinctives that must not be lost, not out of any fear for our future, but out of concern that the insights and understandings gained over the years are not lost to the wider church.

Past divisions over doctrinal statements can seem little more than anachronistic

'That all of them may be one'

So what of the future people of God and what shape will the ecumenical journey take? As I have suggested, we all find ourselves ecumenically engaged in ways that will undoubtedly continue to nurture and guide our Christian discipleship, but it is likely that the questions will be answered at different levels in different ways. It is clear, for example, that the national denominational ground is shifting. Conversations on structural unity between Methodists and Anglicans have the potential to significantly alter the church landscape, such that Baptists may increasingly find themselves representing the Free Church voice and have to reckon with what this means. At the same time, we ourselves have entered a covenant relationship with the Independent Methodist Connexion - a small group of about 90 churches - with a view to our two denominations becoming one by 2010. These are signs that, far from stagnating, ecumenical change is happening. It is perhaps the recognition that in this post-Christendom situation, we are all looking for new ways of being church - ways that will respond with authenticity to a culture in which church has been pushed to the margins - and that in this challenging task we need each other.

Many of us, however, will be asking the questions from a more local perspective, wanting to explore how as Baptists we

might fruitfully seek after unity with those who are our neighbours in Christ. There may be many variations, but I sense that growing unity will be found through three inter-connected emphases.

We will want, first of all, to give attention to *story rather than doctrine*. In today's world, where past divisions over doc-

trinal statements can seem little more than anachronistic, I believe that the story of Jesus still has power to transform lives. And it is this story that must be the focus of our unity. The joy is that it can be told in many different ways, attracting and inspiring precisely because it is not fixed in stone. Through our various traditions, there is opportunity to go on telling and hearing the unchanging, ever-changing story of Jesus. None of this is to minimise the importance of doctrine. We need those who will help us think with clarity about what we believe and why. But if we are to find a basis for the unity we seek, then I sense it will be in the recognition that we are held by a common story.

Secondly, we will want to emphasise *relationships rather than structures*. It is all too easy to tell the history of ecumenism in terms of structures - the decisions made by assemblies, the setting up of councils, the

formal signing of agreements. Yet whatever their value, these can never tell it how it really is, for the people of God only grow together when there is a depth of loving relationship inspired by the Spirit. It is relationships that overcome fear and suspicion, and in our search for unity we will increasingly want to do those things that provoke and sustain a

deep togetherness. As Baptists we know this better than most, with our strong sense of being held together by covenant commitment. We - and others with us - are aware of the ability of structures to become rigid in ways that squeeze out life and creativity, and so our ecumenical future lies in the direction of building patterns of trust and respect that reflect God's own faithful ways of relating to us.

Then, finally, we will want to find our shared identity in *mission rather than order*. We have in common the deep conviction that as God's people we are sent into the world as witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ, and our unity will find its most purposeful expression in this fundamental sense of who we are. Of course, there is important work to be done on questions of church order. I happen to believe that work currently being done by ourselves and the Church of England on the nature of baptism has great potential to bring our two very different traditions closer together. But in our journeying together, day by day, it will be the working out of our mission calling that overcomes division and transcends difference.

As Baptists we have unique gifts to offer to the challenge of being the church of the future. We have a history of dissent, a deep commitment to being a missionary people, and a flexibility and responsiveness that allows new forms of church to

Our ecumenical future lies in the direction of building patterns of trust and respect

emerge. Others need the gifts we can bring. But I am equally convinced our sisters and brothers in other traditions also have gifts to bring to us. The future people of God will need to journey towards unity if they are to find the future kingdom of God.



Glen is tutor in mission studies at Northern Baptist College. A former chair of Mainstream he was previously pastor in Altrincham, Ward Green and Wakefield.

Church frustration

By Glen Marshall

Please, before going any further, re-read Grahame Walker's piece (page 8). Done that? Good! Grahame speaks for thousands frustrated to their wits' end. So many people who are deeply committed to Christ are thoroughly brassed off with church.

We face a challenge that superficial tinkering with church will completely miss. If you haven't heard voices such as Grahame's, really listened to them, you are not ready to engage in the debate about the future of the people of God. You

Our communities are populated not by the dechurched, but by the never churchd

will miss the point. That's why I was encouraged by much in the other articles. They seem to have got the point. Here's my three.

Get back in touch with our inner missionary.

We are in post-christendom exile. There is no point calling people back to a dimly remembered Christian version of reality. As Eddie Gibbs points out in *Church Next*, the success of the seeker-church movement in the States is built on reaching de-churched boomers, but increasingly our communities are populated not by the de-churched, but by the never churchd. Forest Gump said it well:

Lieutenant Dan: Have you found Jesus yet Gump?

Gump: I didn't know we were supposed to be looking for him Lieutenant Dan.

Yes, let's learn from the vibrant African churches in our big cities. Yes, let's make sure that our ministerial formation has missionary thinking so woven into its fabric that it can't be unpicked. Yes, let's encourage, by increasingly adventurous home mission grant allocation, more imagin-

ative experiments in missionary forms of church. And yes, David, please go on saying what you are about missionary sabbaticals for the first three months in pastorate - don't let this one drop.

Embrace the call to deeper spirituality.

A missionary congregation that isn't also prayerful congregation has nothing to offer. A minister who is in touch with her community but out of touch with God is wasting her time. Love God and love other people. Seek the King then seek the kingdom. Graham Sparkes is right: other traditions have so much to teach

us. Both the Franciscans and the Celtic Saints got it right: monastery and mission.

Too often we are rubbish at witnessing to Christ not because we are scared that we won't have answers to hard questions but because we know that we have no up-to-date, deep-rooted

Diversity is deliciously attractive but hellishly difficult

knowledge of God to point to. The sad truth is that there are too many weeks when I spend more time at the gym than in prayer - and I'm supposed to be a specialist in God!

So Paul if you are serious about your fantasy minister, bust a gut to get our colleges to ensure that they are forming not just gifted leaders, skilled leaders or learned leaders but above all else deep leaders. And then get a grip of sabbaticals by writing into terms of settlement that no less than 1/3 of sabbatical time should be spent in retreat and make all financial grants dependent on this condition being fulfilled.

Serious attention to how we can embrace diversity.

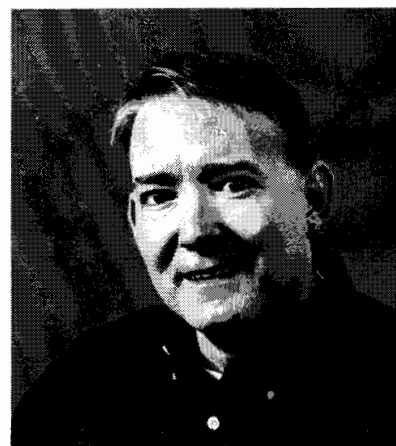
Take for instance the following conundrum. Churches of the like-minded are more effective at attracting people to follow Christ. The homogenous unit principle applies. But on the other hand diversity is meant to be a part of our spiritual DNA. There will be people of every tribe, tongue and no doubt musical taste in God's great city. How do you square the circle? What if, as I suspect, it will take a non-congregational form of church to pull this one off? Am I still allowed to be a Baptist?

I find diversity deliciously attractive but hellishly difficult. As an evangelical my doctrinal instinct is to define who's sound and who isn't. As a Baptist my churchmanship inclines me to draw lines between who's in and who's out. As a western child of modernity I find it hard not to read "different" as another word for inferior. And I hate all three tendencies. They are stupid, short sighted, seriously unchrist-like and damaging to the church

.Growing churches that maintain unity and embrace diversity is one of the most difficult challenges we face. It will take creative thinking, hard work and sustained experimentation. Let's put this right up there at the top of our agenda; let's put money into it; let's give time to it; let's hunt down examples of good practice and showcase them at every opportunity. Now go back and read Grahame's piece again; make sure it gets under your skin; allow it to irritate you into prayer, and argument, and action.

Yes, but what's it for?

By Simon Jones



In the course of a wide-ranging discussion about the state of the UK church I was involved in recently, someone said they'd never really got what Baptists were for. This statement is ambivalent: what do Baptists support? or what is the point of them? Reading these articles, I found myself asking 'what's BUGB for?' the same double-edged question. In part, it seems, it's there to deepen our spirituality, provide information, handle our pensions, dole out Home Mission money. It keeps an avuncular eye out for all its

It's possible BUGB doesn't have a plan

churches. It's a partner in a jolly good annual jamboree, the Assembly. And it's an umbrella that Baptists gather under to think and do theology. Yes, ok, but what's it for? What is it seeking to achieve through all this?

Pretty much everyone of the topics addressed in these papers has been the topic of a conversation in our church over the past few weeks: the role of ministers, social action, our ecumenical relationships, the changing nature of our society, the need for depth in our spirituality and a host of other things. It tells me that our denominational leaders have their finger on the pulse. But, in all our conversations in church, I can't think of one instance where someone said: 'I wonder what the Union has to say about this.' Though, in a conversation on membership I mentioned the recently published *Joined up thinking pack* on the topic. It's possible that this is just evidence of historic - and hugely harmful - Baptist independence. It's possible that it's confirmation of our culture's increasing post-denominationalism - something

Graham Sparkes notes in his contribution. It's also possible that BUGB doesn't have a plan.

Now I'm not looking for a blueprint for world domination or a strategy for planting new churches by end of the decade in the 100 least-churched communities in Britain. What I looked for in vain in these papers was a sense that BUGB is in the vanguard of renewal in mission; that it has seen the world and its challenges and discerned under God how it can envision and enable churches to rise to the

challenge of mission in 21st century Britain.

Newly returned to the pastorate - except my role is not pastor but mission leader - I am finding out how my community ticks. I applaud David Coffey's suggestion that newly-appointed ministers immerse themselves in their new locations before they

immersed in church life, deepening his own walk with God, engaging in the

cure of souls, but not apparently involved in mission. Indeed I waited until paragraph nine of Paul's paper for the word mission to appear. Is it not vital that ministers lead their churches in mission as well equipping their members to live mission in their home, working and community life? It was encouraging to see Derek Allen talk warmly about Mark Greene's *Imagine* but if all BUGB is going to do is stick its logo on *Imagine*, why don't I throw my lot in with LICC and cut the middle man.

I remember the day I decided I was called to be a *Baptist* minister and seek accreditation. It was summer 1987 and I was helping to put together a Mainstream booklet on Baptist Identity. As I read the papers, I thought, 'Yes, this is what I want to be a part of. Here's a vision of church I can own and champion.'

There's nothing with a BUGB logo on it in my 'must-read' pile

get swamped by a church agenda. I was able to do it a bit. BUGB ought to make it mandatory for all ministers. I'm also looking for resources that will help me think about what shape our church has to be to engage effectively in mission in our neighbourhood. I've trawled the web. I've emptied the shelves of a number of Christian bookshops. I've talked to local colleagues and returning missionaries. But I've found nothing with a BUGB logo on it in my 'must-read' pile.

Worse, I found Paul Goodliff's fantasy minister a curiously dispiriting figure, a model

'I long for BUGB to rise to the challenge of leadership in such a movement. The new churches - so influential and such a blessing over the past generation - are pretty much a spent force. The new wave of urgent, vital African spirituality sweeping some of our communities, will not attract the bulk of British unchurched people to faith in Jesus. What about us? We could be a lean, flexible, responsive, all-member mission movement. All we lack is national co-ordination and leadership. Is BUGB up for it?'

All we lack is national co-ordination and leadership

Simon Jones is one of our regular columnists see *surfer's guide*, and so if you want more info about him, turn to that page. He has foolishly agreed to take over the editor's chair of *Talk* in the near future.



Craig Millward brings us information from the Christian world. Pastor at Ormsby in Norfolk, Craig is a member of the Mainstream leadership team.

Share the Light: Journey into the Bible

Regardless of how dynamic a preacher is or how powerful the service, one Sunday a year focussing on the Bible is unlikely to result in a sudden rush of people incorporating the Bible into their daily life.

Scripture Union's **Share the Light Journey** offers a more comprehensive approach. Phase One saw churches across the country challenging members to pray once a month for a year that people would rediscover the importance of God's word. Phase Two challenges people to go on a 40-day journey of Bible reading, which will provide them with an overview of the Bible, and

establish a pattern of daily Bible engagement.

There are three core elements: a comprehensive resource pack; a book of readings and notes; a small group resource, so churches can incorporate this into their home group programme.

For more information, call Andy Twilley on 01908 856029 or email andyt@scriptureunion.org.uk



Valuing trust

Following on from last year's focus on hope, the Evangelical Alliance is promoting another 'values initiative' for 2004, this time looking at 'trust'. It asks the questions: Do we trust? Can we trust? Should we trust? and will be encouraging debate around these questions in the areas of trust in the church, public life and in business. A number of events are planned for the coming year, and a range of published resources, including Bible study and sermon notes, will be available (plus others online). News of all of these will appear on the website at www.valuingtrust.org but at the time of writing were not yet online.

Evangelists break out

The Evangelists' Conference

outbreak

serving the evangelism epidemic

The Alliance is shaking up its annual Evangelists' Conference, entitled 'Outbreak - serving the evangelism epidemic', with a new format, new venue and new emphasis. It will focus on equipping people who are or who want to be active in evangelism in everyday life with neighbours and work colleagues, as well as those working in full-time evangelistic ministries.

Speakers will include: Joel Edwards; Mark Greene, author of the acclaimed *Imagine* essay; Phil Wall, leadership and personal development specialist, and Andy Flannagan, Youth for Christ's worship leader.

Dates will be 6-7 December 2004 and the venue is the Riverside Centre in Derby. Cost is £50 plus accommodation.

Brochure and printable booking form is now available from www.eauk.org/evangelism, email evanconf@eauk.org or telephone 020 7207 2131.

Caring for the environment: The John Ray Initiative

The fact that we produce just three magazines a year, for which articles have to be written at least a month before publication, means that certain events get missed. One such was Creation Care Sunday back in June. To make up for that I feature the following:

The John Ray Initiative (JRI) exists to develop and promote a Christian understanding of the environment. Through thinking, teaching and communication, JRI aims to inform Christians of their responsibility for God's earth, to encourage them to take action and to find ways to bring a Christian influence to bear on values, decisions and actions that affect the environment in a global context.

You can find out more by visiting www.jri.org.uk or contacting:

The John Ray Initiative,
University of Gloucestershire,
Francis Close Hall, Swindon Road,
Cheltenham GL50 4AZ
Tel: 01242 543580
Email: jri@glos.ac.uk

Evangelism by invitation (reaching post-moderns)

Evangelism has always been a difficult business. As we've moved into the post-modern world, it seems to have become even more complex. How does one 'do' evangelism in the post-modern world? Are there any principles that help us understand evangelism in this new context? Should we give up? Should we just try harder? Should we simply continue to evangelise using the same methods we've used for the last half-century? Ross Rohde, an American missionary in Spain, tries to respond to some of these questions from what he has been learning by experience, study and observation of effective ministry in post-modern Europe. You can get this article at <http://www.joelnews.org/rohde-evangelism-by-invitation.doc>, and the website <http://www.emergingchurch.info/> may also be of interest.

The search for intimacy

There has been a lot of interest in the issue of pornography recently particularly the Internet variety. The upcoming conference for church leaders and those concerned about Internet porn will give particular emphasis to practical help for individuals, families and the local church. Speakers will include Dr Trevor Stammers, David Partington and Dr Alice Swann. It is organised by CARE and will take place on 8 October.

For more details call 020 7233 0455 or email: communications@care.org.uk

Leadership for a Change
Embracing unchanging values in changing times
 At the Mainstream Conference 2005 we will be looking at Leadership issues

Some of the Main Sessions and Seminar Titles:

- Does anyone still want a leader?
- Leading like Jesus
- Leading like Paul
- Leadership and Gospel Values
- From Vision to Reality
Leaders as vision builders

- Living with Leadership
- Window on the World
Leadership lessons from the business world
- Emerging or Submerging
Establishing Leadership; a seminar aimed at 'younger leaders'
- Mobilising an entire congregation
- Running the marathon
Lasting the course of leadership

- Leaders and their spirituality
- Leading in partnership with others
- Leadership in the community

Booking Form

How to Pay

Please make cheques payable to: 'MAINSTREAM'
 £30.00 non-returnable deposit for each place booked.
 Balance due on **1st December 2004**.
 Full amount is due for any cancellation after 1st January 2005.

Please detach (or copy) and return this booking form to:

Ian Frith
 1 Kenilworth Close Sutton Coldfield
 West Midlands B74 2SE
 E-mail: ian.frith@clara.co.uk
 0121 323 2839

Accommodation

<u>Nos:</u>		<u>Total</u>
Standard:		
Double @	£100 pp	£
Single @	£115 pp	£
En suite:		
Single @	£130 pp	£
Double @	£130 pp	£

Total of Accommodation

People - Total Price £

Main Contact

Title: _____ Name: _____
 Address: _____

 Postcode: _____
 Telephone: _____
 E-mail: _____

Please enter further details of your party on a separate piece of paper

The Mainstream Conference
10th - 12th January 2005
The Hayes Conference Centre
Swanwick, Derbyshire
 Registration: Monday 10th from 2:00pm
 Ends after Lunch Wed 12th



Simon is a Baptist Minister working as the Chaplain of Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge where he is completing a PhD in Biblical Interpretation. He is married to Rachel and has three sons and a fourth baby on the way.

Future entry

by Simon Perry

Our society has a lot of assumptions about what the future really is, and those assumptions go largely unquestioned by the church. Even if we believe that Jesus Christ will return to draw history to its climactic fulfilment, we can still have a mistaken view of how the future affects our present day-to-day living.

For those for whom the ideal leader is an upbeat visionary mover-and-shaker, the future is symbolised by the great icon that stands as the central focal point in many of our churches. It is the projector screen. It eclipses the pulpit with a blank sheet of

hits the ground in the endless slurry of aims and objectives, ensuring the same old predictable futures. Thank God the future is not under human construction, and is not a realm into which godly visionaries march and conquer.

The future is nobody's birth-right, but a gracious gift that none of us deserves. It is not something that the people of God move towards, but a gift that moves graciously towards us. It is not to be conquered boldly, but to be received gratefully. The future is not something we enter, but something that enters us. It is

One of the consequences of being the body of Christ in this way is that we receive the future differently. Without believing in the myth of progress, without obsession with the latest technology, and with no compulsion to establish a vision for the future, the people of God are transformed from one degree of glory to another.

One of the great privileges of working with students in Cambridge is that many of them have seen that aims, objectives and visionary plans for the future are prone to override God's plans for our present. A new and exciting group called Fusion, now the largest Christian organisation in the university, is exploring ways of modelling Christian community that are having an astonishing impact. Here and now, unchurched students who have already heard the facts about Christianity and rejected them, look at these groups of Christians who are serious about building good relationships and they effectively say of them what the angels will one day declare: 'the dwelling place of God is with people'. That is the presence of the future.

It is an ancient way of life called 'church', and will always slip through the fingers of methodologies, models and strategies. So what *can* we say about God's people in ten years' time? They will still be the people whose relationships are shaped by the disturbing

The great icon of our churches is the projector screen

openness, begging us to project our image upon it. And this is how many of us have come to think of the future: as a vast, open expanse of unlimited possibilities, just waiting to be conquered by the crusading forces of Christian enterprise. An empty screen waiting to be filled with colour, a blank sheet waiting to be used, an unwritten history destined to be penned by those at the cutting edge of prophetic insight. But there is neither prophecy nor insight here. Only the monotonous ring of history repeating itself, as the very sin to which Adam gave way beats its rhythm through the centuries.

To see the future as a vast and empty space means that humans are tempted to create the present 'out of nothing' - *ex nihilo*. Like Adam and the builders of Babel, this is an attempt to 'be like God', the only one who truly can create 'out of nothing'. Today this Adamic sin has produced a deluge of purpose-driven diarrhoea that

the full presence of God with his people. *How* then, are the people of God to prepare for such a future?

It is by walking the painful and joyful journey of being in relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ. As we encourage and are encouraged by one another, challenge and are challenged by one another, our characters are transformed. This can be unpleasant, because it often means hearing things about me that I don't like, and wish I could change. Sometimes it means being vulnerable with people I would rather impress. Occasionally it means saying

Visionary plans for the future are prone to override God's plans for our present

things I would rather not say. But in these kinds of relationships God's voice grabs hold of me, scripture becomes three dimensional, and the Spirit's presence is gloriously obvious.

presence of Christ. If Christians shy away from that today, what happens tomorrow is irrelevant. God has given us no search-beam into the future, only a lamp unto our feet.

Race against time

By Wale Hudson Roberts



Research undertaken prior to the trial of O.J. Simpson indicated a curious difference in interpretation of the presented evidence. Of those polled, only 5% of whites believed Simpson was innocent, whilst 28% of blacks said they were certain that he was innocent of the brutal stabbings, which took place on the night of 12 June 1994 on the steps of Nicole Simpson's Brentwood apartment. Near the conclusion of the trial, a perverse symmetry emerged. Sixty-four per cent of the whites interview-

rants from the EU are coming to Britain every year compared with 6,000 in 2001. Then there's the rise and influence of the BNP, particularly in the north. With the race agenda now inadvertently charged with the power to win or lose local, national and even European elections, in due time Britain, like its American cousin, may become a nation divided by race. More than thirty years after the first legislation designed to reduce the effects of racism, we find ample proof of an increase in racism in many

ive and unique and if they remain suppressed and unheard, we fail to do the multicultural agenda justice. The future of the British church is authentic multiculturalism.'

So what is a multicultural church? And how can we develop such a church? A multicultural church, for all its ubiquity, is still without a coherent definition. What is clear, is its unequivocal rejection of cultural discrimination and insensitivity, and its commitment to cultural diversity and the celebration of difference. The challenge for any church attempting to 'do multiculturalism' is to find ways of reconciling the legitimate demands of unity and diversity, of achieving cultural unity and not cultural uniformity, of exemplifying a willingness to respect and cherish deep cultural differences.

Revelation has a vision of the City of God, with no temple, by whose light walk all the peoples. To it shall be brought 'the wealth and splendour of the nations'. Through it flows the 'river of the water of life', on each side of which stands the 'tree of life ... the leaves of the tree serve for the healing of the nations'. Should 'the river' be understood as the broad-based, celebratory, multicultural Christian tradition?

Racism is often found in so-called 'multicultural churches'

ed found the evidence against Simpson convincing, concluding that the evidence was incontrovertible; yet 59% of African Americans, when presented with the same evidence, opted for an acquittal. The difference in attitudes between white and African Americans was striking. However, whites saw a country where relations between blacks and themselves had dramatically improved; blacks saw the opposite.

If anything good came out of the O.J. Simpson drama it was this: it reinforced the reality that the United States was a two-nation country divided by race. The reasons for this division are multifaceted and complex. Segregation, enduring long after the end of slavery, had left an indelible imprint in the form of institutions, customs, beliefs, languages and cuisine. This was to be expected. Not expected was to find such a difference in consciousness and of outlook on the world through radically different prisms, which contributed to the nation divided by race.

Britain has recently experienced the accession of ten new states into the European Union - an instant population expansion of 75 million. Associated with this, an estimated 13,000 mig-

public and private spaces. According to a recently published official report, racial abuse is on the increase. Recent police figures show that violent incidents in which race was a motivating factor has risen by 25%, with most of the increases occurring in inner-city areas.

It is particularly sad to realise that racism is often found in so-called 'multicultural churches' - be it covertly. For example, a disproportionate number of guest preachers are white; church retreats are organised and facilitated by mainly white people; the youth activities are too frequently co-ordinated by a majority white

The future of the British church is authentic multiculturalism

team; and the leadership is too often 'bleached'. All this, and more, invalidates the gifts and experiences of a substantive black congregation and reinforces 'our' position as spectators not participants.

A colleague summed up the concern well when he said: 'If the British church is to have a future, it needs to give permission to black and Asian people to contribute to the growth of their church. Their voices are distinct-

And 'the tree' as the followers of Jesus offering shalom to different tribes, nations and cultures? This is not just for the end; it offers the 21st-century church a snapshot into God's multicultural heart a picture worth emulating by the church, so that it can speak into a 'nation divided by race'.

Wale Hudson

Roberts was minister at Stroud Green in inner London for 8 years and presently serves as the Baptist Union as the Racial Justice Co-ordinator. He's a regular writer for Third Way magazine. He's married with one child and enjoys cycling, cooking and swimming.

Apostolic or Apoplectic?

By Rob White



I'm not sure! One day I was Senior Minister of a reasonably large, thriving Baptist Church, deep in the cut-and-thrust of local church life; the next I was wondering where I belonged and whether anybody cared! Not like an upset, lost child looking for his parents, but certainly sensing that a massive change had taken

measured way, and that the person pursuing such should be well in control with the sort of ordered lifestyle that would leave an army regiment feeling jealous! One day I may get near that! Perhaps a few months' experience will inform more strategic planning.

The church decline business must be due to go into the hands of receivers

place! Now, this column is not meant to be a journal but, on this occasion, maybe a few recordings and observations could be of interest to readers of *Talk*. If I can be honest here perhaps it might be informative and encouraging.

My change from National Director of Youth For Christ to Poynton Baptist Church, some twelve years ago, opened my eyes to the challenges, joys (mainly) and sorrows (few) of leading a local church. I sensed at the beginning that it would be a very large family experience - and I wasn't wrong. So departing the family's bosom, if you will, is an experience of loss. However, I believe that God had been preparing me for the next phase of life, so I am not intending to paint a negative picture.

Apoplectic? Well, at the moment, perhaps more than apostolic! Or, as I sit here, do thoughts arise within that maybe another man on an apostolic mission, Paul, felt the same from time to time? Well, it helps me feel a little more spiritual, if nothing else! And he didn't have 120 e-mails waiting for him after coming back from holiday and another 60 or so after each journey - with no secretarial support!

I am sure apostolic ministry should be neatly planned, and executed in a dignified, calm and

At least I've got a car and don't have to go by foot, camel, donkey or ship - in danger from bandits or shipwreck! The main danger I am experiencing is the horror of hundreds of motorway miles and the tiredness that produces. Does anyone feel a prophetic word about a helicopter?

Let's get to the bit that's **apostolic!** Firstly, we've got some great churches. The church decline business must be due to go into the hands of receivers if the churches I've been privileged to see and hear about have got anything to do with it.

We need more 'godly, go-ahead daredevils'

People are becoming Christians, being baptised and filled with the Spirit, community projects springing up, grants being obtained for buildings and church planting taking place - these and more have encouraged me no end in the last three weeks or so. Secondly, it's great meeting church leaders who want to kick the independence thing in the teeth, join up with others and be of mutual help. Independence is a dirty word where the Kingdom is concerned.

We had a Mainstream Retreat with some younger-emerging leaders and had a profitable time praying, worshipping, listening to the Lord and sharing together. If these men and women can be

encouraged, and hold on to God and the vision, Baptist life will go from strength to strength. We need more 'godly, go-ahead daredevils', to use one of William Booth's favourite phrases. I think we should be looking for the next generation of leaders - teens and early twenties - and investing in them. That's something Mainstream could do.

On the other side of things I've encountered churches short on strategic vision, although strong on heart and general vision; leaders longing for meaningful relationships and churches in the same area which have not been urgent in pursuing cooperation. As Mainstream exists in part to help these things happen it is obvious that there is much to do.

As Mainstream, we are determined to give whatever help and encouragement we can

to churches and leaders to forge ahead in God-honouring, relevant mission. That's somewhat apostolic let's hope it gets a little less apoplectic!

An editorial word from Ibbo! If you would like to become a supporter of Mainstream and its vision to release ministry amongst us and support one another in effective mission, please contact Mark Owen on Mark@excelsis-consulting.co.uk or telephone him on 0845 345 7046

Rob White reflects on his first weeks of apostolic ministry amongst us. He also gives a day a week amongst Manchester churches. His wife Marion also shares in this ministry alongside him. Previously he was at Poynton Baptist and before that National Director of Youth For Christ. You can contact him on rob@pbcmanse.freeserve.co.uk

The People for the Future

By Roy Searle



Western culture is undergoing major transition and we find ourselves in a post Christendom 'exile' asking how we follow Christ and live out the kingdom in a time of opportunities and challenges.

Society's neglect of the Judeo-Christian tradition and modernity's flight from God has reaped a vacuum at the core of the Western soul. *The wages of spin is the death of trust*. The loss of trust that is a foundational building block in relationships threatens society's ability to build a cohesive social entity. The prevalent individualism that is fuelled by privatisation has resulted in a culture where we are consumers not citizens, bound by the fear of litigation we are trapped in an over cautious, anxious culture, where so easily pastors become project managers, programmes rule people and society's busy activism has invaded the church's way of life leaving many, not least its leadership weary, exhausted and driven.

The future of the world belongs to those who have hope

Perhaps as the people of God, we need to;

- **Reaffirm** that the essence of the gospel is relationship with God and that the greatest command is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbours as ourselves.
- **Remember** that the fruit of the gospel is the realisation of a reconciled relationship with God and the discovery of a redeemed community.
- **Remember** that the means of living and proclaiming the kingdom of God that Jesus evidenced with his disciples was community.

Communities of belonging where people are nourished and are able to discover their true humanity in Christ; where disciples find a *way for living* that expresses a kingdom lifestyle, where things like the power of love counters modernity's love of power; where authenticity, integrity and diversity counter the need of relevance, control, prescribing, marketing and governing; where values and ethos guide and inform rather than the latest idea, initiative and strategy, dressed up on some occasions as vision. A community that is marked by grace and generosity, humility, compassion and justice; where relationships matter more than reputation; where believers are prepared to take risks for the love of Christ; where the church recognises its apostolic and prophetic calling; where we hear the voice of the Lord speaking from the margins; where the fruit of our living the gospel is good news for the poor and justice for the oppressed; where, as disciples, we embrace and live out the gospel which is

nonconformist and subversive. Communities where people are renewed by the power of God's story, a narrative that gives wisdom to live what we believe in both the private, religious and public domain.

We need also to be reformed by the grace and goodness of God, who in his love and mercy is able to transform life. The **transformation** of individuals who grow in the knowledge and love of Christ and by the Spirit's work become Christ-like in character; where spiritual formation is not just another programme but is taken seriously and is able to serve the transform-

ation of people, communities and culture, something that 'consumer Christianity' simply cannot deliver despite its grand promises. Where there is less doing and more being, less activity and deeper spirituality, less driven and more led, less instant and more depth. Where people being formed in Christ do not simply seize opportunities but develop character. Where church leaders acquire not merely skills, gifts and qualifications, but Christ-like character and speak out of a living, growing, deepening relationship with God. Where leaders' security and identity is truly found in their relationship with God and who they are in Christ and not in what they do, achieve and the ministry they exercise. A transforming spirituality that "guards the heart" (Proverbs 4:23) has an awareness of the inner journey that leads to Christ-likeness and guards individuals and church regarding issues of money, sex and power that capture and cause many casualties. A spirituality that leads people away from dependency upon others, structures and 'ministry', to a true deepening dependency and relationship in God. Such a spirituality that is rooted in God won't stay within any religious sub-culture but will lead to a transformation of people, the renewal and reformation of the church, and the transformation of society, which is a sign of the kingdom of God.

The future of the world belongs to those who have hope (Teilhard de Chardin). It is hope, rooted in God and his kingdom, which gives a future for the people of God in a changing 21st century Western culture.

Roy is the Vice President of the Baptist Union, one of the leaders of the Northumbria Community and Director of Renovaré in Britain and Ireland

There is a vacuum at the core of the Western soul

Regional meeting in South London



Peter Nodding brings us news of the Mainstream network and other connections. Peter chairs the Mainstream Leadership team and is the Senior Pastor at Purley Baptist Church, Surrey.
Peter.nodding@purleybaptist.org

Derek Hills, Senior Minister at Tonbridge Baptist, Kent, spoke at the South London Mainstream meeting at Purley Baptist Church in May. Derek has been at Tonbridge for 17 years and is enjoying his most fruitful years there. In recent years, he has discovered what it means to be committed to the Kingdom of God which has broadened his vision of the local church. Here are some of the stories.

Derek leads a group of seven men all of whom have overcome some addiction in Christ. Although most of these are new to the Christian faith they are learning how to prophesy to one another in very natural/supernatural ways.

Years ago the church building suffered considerable vandalism, but all this changed when a local funeral was held at the church. Due to the care received at the funeral and by identifying with the local community, the vandalism stopped overnight. The church has become part of the

community with 55 different agencies using the church premises. Church members are encouraged to serve within these different groups so that meaningful and fruitful relationships can be established.

Tonbridge Baptist has four services on a Sunday and their largest service of the day is brooking the trend. The first evening service, which starts at 6:30pm has over 300 attending, and Derek says, 'the most exciting place I like to be is at the prayer meeting at 6:00pm which precedes it'.

We heard about a council of churches which is united in Christ in a way that most of ours aren't. It is only when a group of churches will embrace Kingdom principles and fosters the unity for which Jesus prayed that we will see the greatest transformation of our communities.

Word & Spirit Network

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Fasting in Sutton Coldfield

The Mainstream leadership Team and a few invited friends spent time fasting in an overnight stay at Sutton Coldfield in April. As Rob and Marion White were about to begin their new ministry we wanted to lay the best prayerful foundation as possible.

Whenever a group meets with the purpose to pray seriously, the Lord meets with us and speaks. Rob White, Graham Jefferson and Peter Nodding taught at each of the three sessions, otherwise the time was given to prayer, listening to the Lord and sharing prophetic words for some of those present.

So what did we hear?
Quite a lot actually and most

of it was for us as Mainstream leadership, but here are three general points which were for the movement as a whole.

- The Lord confirmed that he is with us.
- We need to articulate the vision more clearly in order to encourage people to come on board. What is the vision? In some ways it is very simple. We are committed to our three values of being passionate about God, real in relationships and getting stuck into God's mission. However, what we are giving ourselves to is helping/encouraging/leading fellow leaders and churches into evangelistic and community transforming mission in the power of the Holy

Spirit. You might say, well what's new about this? In some ways not a lot. However, those movements which give themselves to these things are the ones which really make the difference.

- We don't know all the details of what we will ultimately become, but sensed the Lord encouraging us to keep doing what we are doing and being ourselves in him, and we will find that he will shape us along the way.

Another time of fasting is planned for November when a larger group will be invited

Mainstream meeting at the Assembly

At this year's Assembly meeting in Cardiff we brought people up to date with 'what's happening in Mainstream'. As Rob and Marion White were in the USA, Rob made a short video answering questions about their new role. Peter Nodding fielded questions about the implications of what it will mean for Rob and others to work alongside, mainly Baptist churches.

Simon Jones, new to the Mainstream Leadership Team and senior Pastor at Bromley, challenged us about *transforming communities* using Acts 3-4 as a base.

What sort of churches

1. Outward looking - meeting and ministering in public, Kingdom blessings available to all
2. Clear theology - based in Isaiah 40-55, Jesus the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham; balance of word and spirit
3. Working together - believers met to learn and pray, ministered in teams
4. Making it up as they went along - open to the Holy Spirit's leading, bold and confident in the God who leads them

Energize Conference May 2004

➤ It's always good to get away from your local church and spend time with some Christians, isn't it? At the young leaders retreat on 25-26 May around 15 "young" "ministers" did just that, and it was worth every litre of diesel that got me from County Durham to the Cotswolds. From the moment I started a shared car journey it was obvious that these 24 hours were looked at as precious, and no one wanted to waste them.

This was a time for encouraging one another, praying for one another, challenging one another, enjoying one another's company, and generally being blessed by the Almighty One (that's God, not Graham Jefferson, though the white moustache is misleading). It was one of those times that, although many of us did not know each other particularly well, the sense of genuine solidarity and kinship was clearly present. As if this wasn't enough, the table fellowship wasn't bad either; if you didn't come back higher, you certainly came back heavier.

Having left this Conference I feel completely refreshed to return to the local church, not simply because of a mountain top fellowship experience, but convinced that I belong to a network of leaders who not only care about their own calling, but also one another's. This is important as it really combats any feelings of isolation that can be felt within ministry, particularly as a younger leader.

Graeme Fancourt
The Gateway Church,
Crook, County Durham

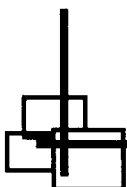
➤ I was first invited to a Mainstream Young Leaders Network nearly 3 years ago now. I turned up bright eyed and bushy tailed, the words of valediction still fresh in my ears. Three years on as we met in Childsickham I realise that *Energize* is both growing up and growing in. Growing up in the sense that we are not simply there to bemoan the pressures of ministry and the inadequacy of structures.

We are learning to live with the realities yet flourish and grow within them. *Energize* is an emerging structure - its aim to support, encourage and facilitate accountability between young leaders who are passionate to be about the things of God.

Although we may be growing up - our passion for God remains undiminished - and this year we heard God's call to 'grow in' - into a fuller relationship with him, into the deeper things he has for us. We challenged one another about our desire to see the glory of God in our lives, in our churches, in our country. I left not only having been cared for by my brothers and sisters but also renewed and reinvigorated for the challenges God has for me.

I sense God was with us in our time away and that others left in a similar spirit. I think we all returned home a little more excited about the God we love and a little more expectant of what he wants to achieve through us all.

William Ruddle
St. George's St Baptist
Church, Macclesfield





Daniel Pritchard

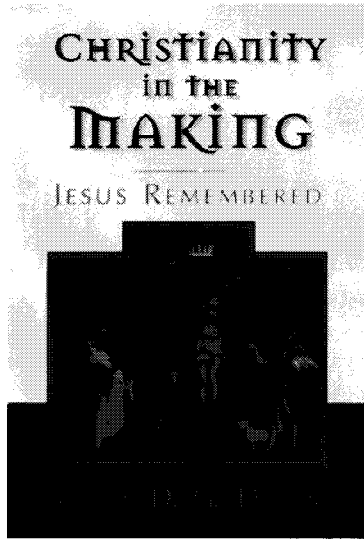
is a member of the pastoral staff at Battle in Sussex. He has an interest in theological studies and compiles reviews in each edition.

Reviews and suggestions for reviews can be submitted to: daniel@thepritchards.freeserve.co.uk

off the shelf

compiled by Daniel Pritchard

James D G Dunn, Christianity in the Making Vol 1 Jesus Remembered (Eedrmans, £26.94 1019 pages, ISBN 0-8028-3931-2)



We are spoilt for choice presently with major studies on Jesus. This heavy-weight contribution from the leading British academic is the first of a three volume series that rivals N T Wright's ambitious project. With Wright in the cathedral and Dunn at the university Durham should be a place of creative engagement! Their method and approach are so different they complement one another. This is an essential book for anyone engaging with the historical Jesus and which serious preacher shouldn't be?

Whereas Wright's approach in *Jesus and the Victory of God* is to construct a plausible narrative of how we get from an anxious exclusive Judaism to an effective missionary movement, Dunn handles the material foremost as a New Testament theologian. Where Wright is racy and cuts a swathe through the story, Dunn is cautious and builds slowly and relentlessly. The first excited me because the story weaved by its author gave you a feeling of access to the mind and purpose of Jesus, this impressed me by its weight of cautious but positive scholarship while leaving Jesus at some distance. With Wright his theory is in danger of swamping

the evidence whilst offering a focused picture of Jesus and convincing understanding of Christianity's rise, with Dunn the way is less clear on that larger question as the interpretation of evidence accumulated makes the portrait of Jesus somewhat fuzzy.

This is not a criticism because the book's title suggests precisely this. We do not have an objectively recoverable Jesus, but only a Jesus remembered by his followers. The controlling idea throughout the book is the way the tradition of Jesus was formed and passed on. Whereas generations of scholars built studies of Jesus on the assumption of various written sources, Dunn argues for the central place of oral tradition. This has two elements. The controlled core which is stable, and the performance that allows variation. The former was fixed across and by the control of the early Christian groups and churches providing insights about the impact made by Jesus. The latter permitted freedom of performance in re-telling the memories of Jesus. This is illustrated throughout with synoptic tables of the various stories/teachings for ease of comparison. As someone technically untrained in such analysis, I appreciated its common-sense approach.

The majority remainder of the book describes Jesus' mission, a portrait of how Jesus was understood by others and himself, and finally two chapters on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Dunn is on familiar ground as he expounds the mission of Jesus through the centrality of theme of the Kingdom. There is a helpful section that describes the various groups that were the focus of Jesus' message and a rich chapter on the character of discipleship, full of nuggets of preaching material. He never falls into the trap of a dominating idea controlling all others as Wright. Thus you are able to

appreciate the many tones and strands within Jesus' teaching. He invariably builds on the conclusions and studies of others.

The chapters on how Jesus was understood and understood himself again cover familiar ground with little that's fresh but with great clarity. He argues convincingly that whilst the designation 'Messiah' concerning Jesus was a live issue within his own ministry, it carried too much confusing baggage for Jesus to use it. Rather he invested it with new content, which the early Church developed. With the term 'son of God' we have insight into the relationship with God as Father that nurtured his mission. However for Jesus his favoured self designation is the ambivalent and mysterious 'Son of Man'. He outlines the mam-moth debate swirling around this theme with great clarity, nailing the myth beloved by much 20th century scholarship, that this was the creation of the early church. However his treatment for me fails to expound the potential of the corporate understanding that lies in this title, captured so effectively by Walter Wink in *The Human Being*. Western individualism may have deafened us to the strength of this nuance, which offers such potential for both gospel preaching and understanding in today's individualistic culture.

His sensitivity to post-holocaust nervousness prevalent in current scholarship, means he places more responsibility for the death of Jesus on the Romans and less on the Jewish leadership. Politically correct maybe, but not so astute to the politics of the time. For me he fails to accent sufficiently the political-cultural dimensions of Jesus' mission that made him such a threat. Perhaps here is the weight of his training as a theologian occupied with the world of ideas from which Jesus needs to be freed if we are to understand the nature of the early Jesus movement. The

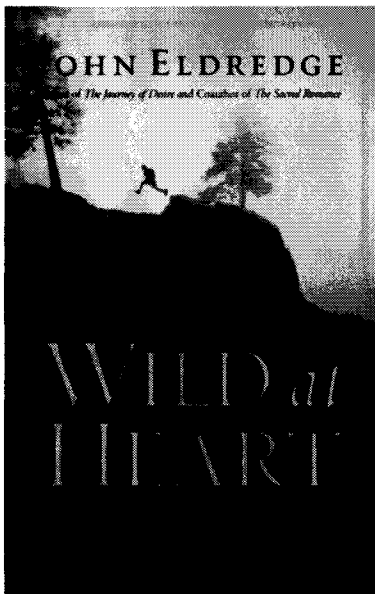
resurrection is examined because of its centrality in the making of Christianity, the overall concern of his project. The 50 plus pages cannot do justice to the theme as Wright's 700! The approach is different with Wright working from broad context and increasingly narrowing to text in the letters and only finally to gospel accounts, while Dunn jumps straight to the latter. However he provides useful summaries of the main issues while staying within his own methodology that we have access to the impact of Jesus resurrection upon the tradition, rather than direct access to an historical event. The distinction and emphasis may trouble some evangelicals. The final chapter is a brilliant summary of the whole book in fact a good starting place!

A book to be treasured and taken off the shelf often in any preparation of sermons based on the synoptic Gospels. Add to your library and await the next two volumes.

Stephen Ibbotson



John Eldredge *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* (Thomas Nelson £7.99 or £11.97 217 pages ISBN 0-7852-6883-9)



One day recently there was a knock on my office door at church and in came one of our young men clutching a book with the intriguing title of this review. Ever so politely - and somewhat gingerly - he asked me if I would read it and give him my opinion of it. He is one of those people who give you hope for the future; a thoroughly credible young man sold out for God and having significant impact in local schools and among our own young people - sadly an all too rare phenomenon in our churches today. It's in clear recognition of this latter sad

state of affairs that EA has devoted the latest edition of their IDEA magazine to the same issue: what have we in the church to say about the current crisis in masculine identity?

John Eldredge is quoted in the article and believes that today's church has failed to understand the very essence of men and, instead, offered them the wrong kind of incentives to belong, so there can be no surprise that they stay away and consequently leave our young women's hopes for Christian marriage distinctly forlorn - a major crisis indeed! To quote the article: *We often find it troublesome that God designed men and boys with lots of testosterone, and the church and Sunday School environment seems devoted to suppressing this God-given nature and life with passive pew-sitting for most men and boys. When, in fact, God has given us this testosterone-fuelled drive of men to help propel the Church and advance the gospel.* Eldredge adds pithily that all we seem to hold out for men in terms of achievement is to be 'nice', which only cuts ice with men distinctly in touch with their feminine side.

By contrast, as his sub-title - *Discovering the secret of a man's soul* - suggests, he claims to have identified the three things that really motivate men. They are to have: a battle to fight, an adventure to live and a beauty to rescue. If all of this sounds rather like Braveheart or backwoods Midwest America, then Eldredge makes no apology and would defend this association as entirely intentional.

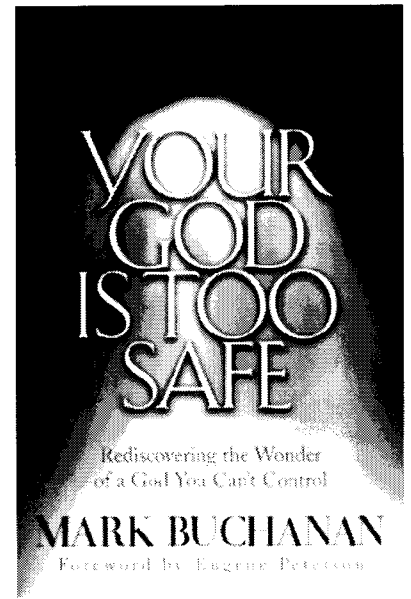
It may be time to redress the balance and focus on the male rather than the female of the species but Eldredge cannot neglect the latter either, so we are told that our ladies want to be fought for, share in the adventure and have their beauty unveiled. We may find Eldredge's approach somewhat lacking in subtlety, but, as an opening shot in a much-needed, long-overdue debate, it throws down an uncompromising gauntlet and challenges us to wrestle with just how we do provide men with attractive reasons to take us and our message seriously. If we take up the gauntlet, church could (and should?) look very different in the future.

Andrew Hardcastle



Mark Buchanan *Your God is too Safe: Rediscovering the wonder of a God you can't control* (Multnomah Publishers £7 pbk 258 pages ISBN 1-57673-774-8)

Mr Beaver replies to Lucy concerning Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*: 'Safe? Don't you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But



he's good. He's the King, I tell you.'

How easy it is to contain our God, to make him safe, or keep him at a safe distance. Mark Buchanan reminds us that God cannot be controlled and walking with him will take us away from safe places, away from the borderlands and into the Holy Wilds. As one who would walk with Jesus, I have found this a challenging book; as a preacher I have found in it many usable illustrations. And therein is a danger of taking a book like this and using it for illustrations instead of letting it deal with me, although I would still commend it to the preacher.

He looks at various Biblical characters who are familiar to all of us, including the likes of Jonah, Daniel and Cain, with fresh insight. The Bible, he argues, has become presented to many as too sickly-sweet - and this by evangelical Christians trying to make God attractive. The Holy Wilds are not, as they might sound, the place of extreme faith and world-wide mission, but we may be taken into prayer and confession in a new way, and also finding solitude and silence in our worship. He leads us into Christ-likeness, away from religious security. He does so with a very easy-to-read style, but which needs reading in short bursts to allow the 'jabbing insights' (J I Packer) to penetrate effectively and drive us closer to God. Our theological education, our preaching, our Christian life can be spent in the borderland. If you want challenging to leave the safe and follow the One who is not safe, but is good, then read this book.



Simon Jones is team leader at Bromley Baptist Church and author of *Why Bother with Church?* (IVP, 2001). Previously he was BMS World Mission Co-ordinator for London and the South-East.

Does the future have a church?

By Simon Jones

If you type the words 'church' and 'future' into a search engine, you get copious pages of American pre-millennial sites urging us to get ready for Jesus' return. Edifying though a very few of these are, they aren't much help in thinking about what the future might hold for the church in the coming years.

But there is help out there. www.christianfutures.com is a good place to start. Run by futurologist Jay Gary, it's heaving with articles on trends and how Christian leaders can make the most of futures thinking in their mission planning.

www.futurechurch.net is one of many sites run by an emerging church pundit in this case, Tom Hohstadt - that tend to be full of interesting thinking. Others worth checking out are www.theooze.com and www.emergingchurch.org. These are American. www.futurechurch.org.nz is antipodean. Lots of blogs, articles and contacts for post-church groups. It's a site heavily influenced by the work of New Zealand Baptist Alan Jamieson, whose book, *A Churchless Faith*, is a must-read for anyone interested in all our futures.

A good new portal is www.future-shape-of-church.org. This site brings together lots of links to churches and groups thinking about the future direction of church and mission. I thought it might be linked to Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch's book, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (a good read), but it isn't. Frost's material can be accessed at www.cegm.org.au where you'll find some articles as well as a guide to Morling College in Australia, where he teaches,

From different theological stables come www.tcpc.org and

www.elca.org. The former is the site of the Centre for Progressive Christianity, a liberal-leaning exploration of faith and post-modernity. There's some stimulating stuff here, but you have to do a fair amount of chaff-sifting. The latter is an online evangelical Lutheran magazine. Quite a few good articles, including a piece looking at the future of the church from a global perspective (www.elca.org/futchrch.html watch the spelling of that one!).

www.congregationalresources.org is the website of the Alban Institute. There's lots of excellent material here to help you think about your church - why it is as it is, and how you might move it from where it is to where you want it to be.

Two of the best sites I've come across recently are www.opensourcetheology.net and www.worshipcafe.co.uk. The open source theology site exists 'to assist the development of a transparent, community-driven theology for the emerging church'. It's a huge site full of excellent thinking, stimulating conversations and links and references to leading church thinkers, including Tom Wright. One of the best articles is by UK theologian Andrew Perriman, on why emerging church matters (you can find it at www.opensourcetheology.net/book/view/266).

www.worshipcafe.co.uk is lovely. Beautifully designed in a minimalist and smoothly navigable sort of a way, it boasts stimulating articles on worship and mission in contemporary culture. It challenges some of our most dearly held assumptions about why we do church the way we do. It has a very stimulating critique of Alpha and some great

alternative worship ideas that I intend to try out.

www.emu.asn.au/downloads/emu_agm_talk_2002.pdf is an address called 'Does the future of the church lie in post-denominational structures?' That speaks for itself. It's a thought-provoking, though inconclusive Australian contribution to the debate.

Blogs are increasingly the way ideas are being shared on the net. Many blogs are pointless exercises in vanity publishing. But there are some good ones. Brian McLaren, one of the most intelligent voices from the emerging church movement, can be found blogging at www.newkindofchristian.com. It's sane, wise, witty, pertinent.

One of McLaren's favourite theological thinkers is Andrew Jones and he has a fascinating and infuriating (in equal measure) site: www.tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com. Another blog worth checking out is Spencer Burke's. He's the author of *Making Sense of Church*. You can catch up on his thinking and download Chapter 3 at www.cavepainter.typepad.com.

An online community worth checking out is www.allelon.org. There's a good conversation going on here about the future of the church. You have to sign up to join in - but it's free.

And don't forget www.baptist.org.uk/resources/downloads/mf_thailandpaper.pdf - home of Darrell Jackson's excellent paper on trends in Baptist life at the turn of the millennium. The rest of the site is quite useful too.



Photo: Jackie Sheppard

Power to Change

By Nigel G Wright

In the grind of keeping the church going, it is easy to forget that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. When all of a sudden we come across someone whose life is being turned upside down by discovering Christ, it brings us up short and reminds us of what we are really all about. In the gospel there really is power to change a divine energy that takes hold of people and makes all things new. Whatever else the church has to give, this is the greatest gift of all. We don't see enough of it, and we should be asking God for more of it. When our churches are gently fizzing with the energy that changes lives and transforms communities, then we will know that God is on the move.

The time is ripe for the Baptist Union to think again about how it stimulates and focuses the evangelism of Baptist churches. Some years ago the decision was made that the Union's Department of Mission should become a Department of Research and Training in Mission. No arguments here. We need training, and that training needs to be based upon solid research. Arguably this department is doing what I am asking for: thinking carefully about how to stimulate and focus evangelism. But I have come to feel that this is not quite enough.

Evangelism is not about 'getting butts into heaven' but enabling people to discover what it means to follow Jesus now

For a start, for all the emphasis on holistic mission, which I fully applaud and have done my bit to advocate, it is certainly possible

for the evangelism to get lost in a concept of mission which is so broad it just becomes a synonym for 'what churches do'. The regeneration of communities and working for peace most certainly belong to the mission of those who follow the way of Christ. But it is also possible to do these things in human strength as part of a social impact programme, whereas the changing of lives is something God alone can do. When the power to change evaporates from among us, we console ourselves with all the other good things we are doing. We need both, but we need the

When it comes to evangelism the Baptist Union is not yet quite making it

power to change lives most. Equally, for all the need to resource local initiatives and to avoid top-down strategies, there is still the need for the local to be part of a movement and for a movement to provoke the local into action. When it comes to evangelism, the Baptist Union has that capacity but is not yet quite making it.

What would help?

Here are some ideas.

We need to recognise that whatever value there is in sharing in wider evangelistic endeavours, such as those initiated by the Evangelical Alliance, there is room for a distinctively Baptist initiative which our churches could embrace as their own. I am not talking here about a short-term burst but a long-term

sustainable approach. For this we need a well articulated and positive theology of evangelism which gives the Baptist take,

including believer's baptism, on how to become a Christian. A strategy needs not to replace but to harness the good things, such as Alpha, which are already taking place, and would do well to form links with cutting-edge agencies such as the Damaris Trust. This takes creative thinking and high quality published resources and media for associations, clusters and churches. It would require a dedicated website, probably linked to others like the Christian Enquiry Agency, setting out in clear and uncompromising ways what it means to be born from

above and become a follower of Jesus. It would make it clear that the point is not about 'getting butts into heaven' but enabling people to discover what it means to follow Jesus now. It would also put commitment within a community of disciples high on the list of priorities and would point people to where such communities can be found.

Here's something else: we need to release some of our most able communicators, train them even more, equip them with good resources and make them available as preaching evangelists to be available to churches for weekends, or weeks, of evangelistic mission. A dozen or two of these good people giving some time every year to this task would be a catalytic power among us.

How can this be done? Not by and large by individual churches. Possibly not yet even by associations. But the Baptist Union has the resources and the prestige to do it and to help us move into a new era of the power to change.

Dr Nigel Wright

is Principal of Spurgeon's College, London. He is well known for his many books, including *The Radical Evangelical* and *Challenge to Change*. His latest book is *A Theology of the Dark Side*. Nigel was the 2002 President of the Baptist Union..

What's Mainstream all about?

Mainstream is an informal network, mainly comprising Baptist leaders and churches. We are absolutely convinced that the authority of God's Word and the power of the Holy Spirit must always be brought together. It's only then that we can be fully under the Lord's control, direction and empowering and have any hope of doing properly the things he wants us to do.

- Local groups where leaders get together to talk, pray and encourage each other.
- Regional meetings where we encounter God and receive significant input to resource our ministries.
- A national leadership team drawn from those leading the local groups.
- A quality magazine that addresses the issues and concerns that matter to us.
- An annual conference for teaching, ministry, building relationships, and releasing gifts and ministries.

What do we hope to achieve?

- A network of leaders and churches with authentic relationships, sharing their experience and resources and committed to working together for the advance of God's Kingdom.
- A visible difference in leader's spiritual lives and in God's work through the things we do together.
- Our churches throbbing with spiritual life in their worship, outreach and ministry to the poor in Jesus' name.
- The recognition, mentoring and release of emerging ministries.
- A prophetic voice within the Baptist community.

Mainstream is committed to:

- Get passionate about knowing God.
- Get real in relationships.
- Get stuck into God's mission.

