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Editorial

Whatever the prospects for this bouncing baby of a New Year most, if not all, of our readership will be overwhelmingly concerned with the prospects for the Church. The majority, indeed, with the prospects for the local church which they lead and serve. There is an inevitability about this. Nevertheless we ignore at our peril the truth that the Church is functional and it is provisional. Significantly there is no doctrine of the Church in the New Testament; it is merely the via media for the gospel of the God of Christ. Living with this understanding is a constant corrective to regarding the Church as significant in its own right and an end in itself. "Building the Church", if understood institutionally, is not at all the same thing as "proclaiming the Kingdom". In 1988, as ever, the hardest word of all is "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit". It is easier to evangelise the world than to evangelise the Church with such a word.

Yet, in our generation the Church is nothing if not self-critical! We can hardly be accused of "fiddling while Rome burns". And the tensions and strains we know in our day, though painful, may well, in the providence of God, turn out to be creative and productive in terms of a more useful and serviceable Church.

But is there one model only? Church history suggests not and cultural differences and perspectives make it most unlikely. Perhaps we should be content to think in terms of one Church, but renewed in a variety of ways by the one Spirit.

In this connection our first and last articles deal with two different manifestations of renewal. Peter Price writes a guest article on "basic Christian groups" or "ecclesial communities" which have characterized the revolution in the Latin American Church and which, he argues, have important lessons for the Church in the West. It prompts the question, can an increasingly middle-class Church, which prizes individualism, learn real community and the meaning of sacrifice?

From another direction Derek Tidball concludes his examination of "Restorationism", offering both a critique of this renewal movement and its positive insights we would be foolish to ignore. Does not a passion for God's truth determine that we examine all things objectively and dispassionately.

Sandwiched between these two articles is "Towards the Bicentennial: An Australian Baptist's Reflections" in which Ken Manley puts his finger on the moral and spiritual pulse of his nation's life on its two hundredth birthday, and describes the growth and rich variety of Baptist life (Baptist monks?!) "down under". For us in the U.K. who are forced to see Australian life through the filter of "Crocodile Dundee", Paul Hogan and the "amber nectar", this article is especially welcome and valuable.

The Church — Communitarian, Prophetic, Liberating?

Several years ago now, I was invited by my then Bishop to live with my wife and family on a new housing estate where there was no church, and none within a radius of about 1½ miles. For 3 days a week I was to teach at the local comprehensive school; I was a qualified teacher of some years' experience. The rest of my time was to be spent looking at ways of making Church possible on this growing estate. The Church was described as 'a community church'. It felt better than calling it Anglican, Baptist, Methodist or whatever, though in reality the Anglicans put up the money for the house and the remainder of my salary once the education department had paid for my teaching contribution. However, the giving of the title 'community' to something doesn't necessarily mean that it is anything more than a convenience.

As the years went by, and people began to gather in the local school for worship, and in people's homes for groups to study the Bible, and to pray, as well as to look for ways of making the increasing number of new residents welcome, there grew a sense of 'community'. A sense of belonging: the beginning, perhaps, of a recognition that life is richer lived in the service of others, working for a neighbourhood where people could in some way be fulfilled, find hope and live without fear.

Now, little in life is perfect, and it would be deeply misleading to give the impression that this situation was, but it revealed both the possibility and the hope that people 'from the same street, the same part of town or the same place of work.. can come together, there we have a basic ecclesial community, a Church community'.(1) After our time in this neighbourhood we went to the north of England to become members of an intentional community running the conference centre at Scargill House. During our time there we learnt much about what community is and what it isn't, as well as getting a broader perspective on the Church throughout the world. It was at Scargill in 1980 that we first became interested in the phenomenon that is happening in Latin America, Asia. Africa and parts of Europe, known as Basic Ecclesial Communities.

These Basic Ecclesial Communities, or Neighbourhood Churches, have grown up largely among the poor, in environments on the periphery of big cities, in villages, in prisons, and work places. They have been described by Dom Helder Camara as 'the Church the people want'. By others they have been described more prosaically as 'a leaven and first fruit of an ecclesial model that is communitarian, prophetic and liberating. It is the Church at the basic level'.(2)

I have felt for some time that the model of Base Communities was one which we in the Western Church had something to learn from. It is in one sense not a foreign concept to us, after all they follow in the tradition of our Christian history. The Scottish Covenanters met in secret conventicles in the 17th Century. The Anabaptists, who believed the Reformation failed to

deal with the social problems of power and poverty, reacted against the Reformers and quickly became subject to hostility and persecution. Congregationalism was rooted in the radical politics of its day and was instrumental in the overthrow of the monarchy. Primitive Methodism took up the revolution, reacting against Anglican supremacy, and its 'class' system was one of the most radical forms of base community devised. Of course there are several other notable movements of the people, the Quakers, the Hutterites and the Moravians to name a few.

During the summer of 1987, I had the opportunity of visiting Nicaragua and Brazil as well as the USA to see at first hand this 'new way of being the Church', as it is frequently described. Although my wife and I went to Brazil last, it is appropriate to focus on the experience there. We spent the greater part of our time in Saõ Paulo and Rio; In Saõ Paulo living close to one of the 'favelas' — or slums of the city. It is almost impossible to believe that these 'towns' built of rubbish, wood, concrete, cardboard — whatever comes to hand, are permanent. The one we visited had been on site for some thirty years. Here people grow up, have their children, see them married and watch their grandchildren, and even their great-grandchildren, begin their lives.

In Rio we once again lived on the periphery of the city in a neighbourhood with somewhat better housing conditions, but starkly poor all the same. In both we were invited to visit base communities and to share in their life.

Our first visit happened at night. It was in a small hut on a muddy road. The only light in the street emanated from the doorway. Inside a dozen or so people, mainly women, gathered. The meeting began with prayers, and as the evening went on, so the men drifted in to participate in the meeting. Most of them had been to work in the city, an hour's bus journey away. Most would have been up since 4 am - now it was nearly 9 pm and some were just returning. A woman who lived in the neighbourhood had come to the community. She had no food or money. The community, poor in itself, promised her money the next day. They also promised her a visit, and a real assessment of her needs.

The chief topic of concern that evening was 'How can we be more effective in our neighbourhood in following the demands of the Gospel'. The weekly Gospel is usually read at such meetings and its implications for the community and neighbourhood discussed. Such discussion is preceded by some reflection on the action taken as a result of the previous week's readings and discussion. Various decisions were taken at the meeting we attended, the most significant being that baptism preparation was to be more thorough. A decision as to baptism being carried out by lay people was postponed. The priest wants the lay to baptise but this community was reticent, though in other communities in the neighbourhood it was happening. Throughout the meeting the priest who has several such communities under his pastoral care said little, only looking for clarification, or asking a question in such a way as to help the people make their decision better. We were watching de-clericalisation at work.

Many of the people in these base communities have little formal education, and the innovative work of the Brazilian educationalist Paulo

Friere, has been revolutionary in enabling the most illiterate and ill educated to become competent and confident leaders. We were impressed at the way ordinary people planned to take on different authorities in order to achieve basic rights for their neighbourhood. In Sao Paolo we heard of how one group of people prepared to settle a piece of waste ground, and how they were resisted in this by the authorities. By dint of determination, and the network of protest organised through base communities, and organisations such as the Movement for the Defence of the Favelas, not only was land obtained by water and electricity too. Many favelas have no electricity or sewers. We visited one, where for years, the electricity had been pirated from the overhead cables, and the sewers took 7 years to build in an area little more than 30,000 square metres in size.

During our visit to Saõ Paulo we visited what might initially seem to be a contradiction in terms, namely 'a middle class base community'. The community, situated in an affluent area of the city, was founded 14 years ago following on a course given by Frei Gorgulho and Sister Anna Flora of the Dominican Centre in Saõ Paulo. The members of the existing community are some 13 families, while the influence of the community is to a much greater number of people. Many local people come to special events they organise within their neighbourhood.

Like their poorer counterparts they meditate and discuss the Gospel. In the discussion that follows, they endeavour to identify the pastoral priorities of the Church in Saõ Paulo. These priorities become commensurate with their own action and study. Now those priorities are — housing, communication and work.

As far as possible members of the community work in situations that favour the poor and oppressed. One member works in co-ordinating the base communities in the west region of the Diocese. Another couple work on the Brazilian constitutional reform which is currently in progress, while another works for the Human Rights Commission. As a group they are committed to regular financial support of a children's home, and this has a very practical dimension weekly, as they buy all the meat for 100 children.

Each week the group considers how it can find out what help people want, and what are the needs of the moment; these they then seek to meet. The aged and the sick in Brazil are a forgotten group, and visitation of the sick, and organising of meetings for the elderly is a major feature of their neighbourhood work.

As a group living among the affluent, they have made deliberate choices in favour of practical simplicity. New cars, new gadgets and clothes are seen as the fads of affluence, and in a neighbourhood of new Mercedes or Porsches, the testimony of a 10 year old VW Variant is eloquent!

The Base Community Movement is rooted in the milieu of the poor. In discussion with theologian Frei Gorgulho, he made three points about the future of the Church in Brazil, and he argued that in essence such principles could be applied to the Church in the West.

Firstly, Gorgulho saw the only hope for the Church as being its willingness to take root in the popular movements: the trade unions, the movements for human rights, the defence of the favelas and constitutional

rights. He believes such action is the only thing that would give credibility to the Church in Brazil. Secondly, the de-clericalisation of the Church is necessary and overdue. There has to be a distribution of ministries. Thirdly, the life and witness of the base communities needs to be perceived as a model of ecclesial living that with inevitable cultural differences is applicable world-wide.

In talking about the effects of such a movement in the UK, Gorgulho saw the need for the Church to disestablish itself and see its future with the poor. The need to identify with the material aspirations of the poor, unemployment, housing, drugs — or whatever — becomes paramount. He saw the task of the Church to be finding ways of touching the things that mobilise the dominant class. He believed that the Church must learn to make discord. In talking about ways in which this might happen, he saw the primary challenge to be finding ways of dealing with blatant individualism and the refusal of the middle class to look at the social dimension of the Gospel.

My own reflections lead me to the conclusion that for the Church in the West to re-discover its identity as of the people, rather than for the people, several matters need to be addressed. In the first place the recognition that individualism is a direct consequence of an economic system that encourages the private against the corporate. The Body of Christ is truly a strange model for Western Christians.

In the second place, it is important for theologians and ethicists in the Western Church to help develop a message to the middle class that has something to say about what liberation is, and how it can be used responsibly. The Bishop of Durham's recent challenges to the city and government in his lecture to the Industrial Society, in which he called for positive government and corporate planning, provide one such example of what is required. The development of a corporate ethic, rather than the ethics of individualism, which leave the Christian stranded in compromise, is necessary.

Thirdly, there has to be a consciousness-raising that recognises responsibility for oppression in the Third World by investors, legislators, government and voters alike. A recognition that through self-interest commodity markets have continued to be the chief means of oppression of the poor, together with the arms trade and support of repressive governments and ideologies.

There is a need to give hope to the poor together with the sense that the Church belongs to them. The Church needs to be humanised. Such a radical solution is possible, but it demands a faithfulness to the Gospel, and the priorities of Jesus for which the Western Church has so far shown little appetite. Current Western democracies enjoy leadership that eschew essentially privatist priorities, the achievement of the individual is lauded, and the failure of the jobless, homeless and poor is derided. There is little incentive for the substantially middle class church-goer to choose the Gospel imperative. It is too easy to compromise and remain essentially within existing structures and attitudes.

Part of the humanisation of the church is its urgent need for de-clericalisation. Our witness of the work of the priest in the base communities

gave us hope for this. In the West clerics are still a favoured, dominant class because they are 'those who know'. Clericalism prevents a truly evangelical church, because it appeals to a certain class as a means of sustenance and structure which prevents real responsibility being shared.

Whether the model is episcopalian or congregational, clericalism continues to be the means by which power is divided in the Church. Most of our church life, and this is particularly true of the Church of England, is lived a long way from where the people really live. The base communities remind of the incarnation, and the incarnate life of Jesus. The average rectory, prebytery or manse bears no such testimony to the 'one who had nowhere to lay his head', and the average Church building has little identity with the neighbourbood.

A further feature of de-clericalisation is to recognise that the Church is perceived by those outside it as a shell protected by clericalism, and by those inside with the notion that it is sacred. Because people perceive the Church in this way, they do not believe they can enter there. All our programmes, our campaigns, the hoops through which we make people jump, are all in vain. The church needs to undergo a biblical process of transformation which bears testimony to both incarnation and resurrection.

The base communities have learned how to take risks with the scriptures. Firstly it is read in common. People are not presented with the answer. The experience of the communities is that as the Word is exposed to the people, a rich spiritual experience of the Word and Spirit happens. The effect is to bring about a dealing with the real lives of people, beginning with those participating in the reading. It is read in such a way that real hope and vision is given to people. For such a process to develop in the church of the West, there needs to be a de-spiritualising process. For most Western Christians the Bible is seen as a spiritual fountain rather than a life-giving stream.

Our experience in Brazil, our discussions with theologians, led us into the challenges outlined above. By nature I am an optimist but I confess that I see little in the Church in the UK, be it Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, or Catholic to give me grounds for hope that a serious encounter with those who most deserve the love of God will get to see it, let alone experience it. The Brazilian Base Communities are a judgement upon us, and may yet prove to be the means of our hearing again the good news of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the World.

Peter Price

1. *Basic Ecclesial Community*, Jose Marino, Paulist Press .
2. *We drink from our own wells*, Gustavo Gutierrez, SCM.

Towards the Bicentennial: An Australian Baptist's Reflections

I.

Australia has been preparing for this birthday party for a long time, and not without controversy. There have been arguments about what were appropriate programmes for Bicentennial funds. Our sun-bleached apathy

has been challenged by television commercials with a repetitive jingle exhorting us all to join in the celebrations. But brooding over all this mounting anticipation has been an inescapable sense of guilt which sensitive souls cannot deny.

For we Europeans were not the first to live here. The figure of the aboriginal, homeless and oppressed in what was once his or her country, threatens to spoil the Bicentennial party. The aborigines' constant response is that they have nothing to celebrate. Rather, aborigines are prompted to mourn their losses during these two fateful centuries. Our party-organisers are nervous, fearing that an aboriginal demonstration in front of the world's television cameras will really spoil the party.

Nonetheless, we do have much to celebrate as a modern nation. Author Thomas Keneally recently said:

> "We have to celebrate our second birthday because, although we may have been slightly warty children in some ways, there are remarkable things that are worth celebrating. No mother would ever stop a slightly disreputable child from having a birthday; **no** mother.[1]

So we recall the coming of the British in 1788, establishing a gaol on the other side of the world from 'civilisation'. It was a barbaric concept and cruelly executed, as Robert Hughes has so graphically demonstrated.[2] Yet from such an impoverished vision has grown one of the leading smaller Western nations. There is much to celebrate. True, we must recognise the millenia of occupation before the white man came. We must confess our prejudice and crimes towards those first residents who were themselves migrants. Belatedly we now talk of a 'treaty' or 'compact' to return at least some of their land. Renewed effort must be brought to work for full justice for those many, including aborigines, pushed to the margins of our generally affluent society. Perhaps the party will be worthwhile if we can commence our third century with such larger visions more clearly formed.

And what of the churches across these two centuries? Again, there is much to celebrate but even more to prompt anxiety.

Of course we had a most unpromising beginning. Rev. Richard Johnson was an earnest evangelical chaplain but he really had an impossible task. A recent study has described the situation:

> "Transplant 700 convicts to an alien country, add 400 military men out for a quick quid, then add the problems of starvation and despair, spice the mixture with the arrival of 225 disorientated female convicts and a lack of any other entertaining diversion.
>
> Pour in one exhausted and supported clergyman. Shake for six years and you get a bewildered clergyman on the edge of physical and nervous collapse, and a little colony that's looking more and more like Sodom and Gomorrah every day, and a baby boom."[3]

As a consequence the clergy and the church generally were despised by most of the inhabitants. This came home to me recently when I visited the ruins of the prison at Port Arthur in Tasmania. Deep within the 'Model'

Penitentiary for recalcitrant convicts was a prison chapel. Solitary confinement prisoners were escorted with their heads covered so they could not see any other prisoner. Inside the chapel, the prisoner was placed in a wooden compartment. Hood removed, he could then only see the front of the chapel and the officiating clergyman.

This chapel is a parable of what religion was for these first Australians. The clergy were 'moral policemen' and the church was expected to achieve moral reform.[4] Moreover, religion was a matter for the private lives of isolated individuals. Thus the church was seen as preaching a moralising, individualistic message. Its concern was with moral order on earth and the individual's soul before God. Perhaps that is why today the church is attacked by the establishment when it dares move into areas where it has not been given social authority to act. Pleas for social justice seem to sit strangely on the church's traditional cultural role in Australia.

In fact this remains a serious problem for the church on the eve of the Bicentennial. As a leading Uniting Church theologian has stressed:

> "The church in the Australian experience has been inveigled into becoming a uniquely Australian form of Culture Christianity... It is not expected to relate nor to be relevant, nor is it anticipated that it would impinge on Australian society in any way that would penetrate. It is assumed that the Christian community will sit in judgement, loving to be hated and rejected."[5]

Inevitably a flurry of recent writings has sought to analyse the church's problems and point to a future. Baptists have not been leading in these reflections but have played some small part. They certainly are as desperate as other churches in trying to understand and fulfil their mission.

A variety of approaches has been adopted. Our concern has been for contextualisation, to develop an authentic 'gum-leaf' theology.[6] A highly successful ABC television series was presented by David Millikan in 1981 called "The Sunburnt Soul", Christianity in search of an Australian identity. Theologians have attempted more sophisticated but less popular interpretations. Millikan's main concern was the general irrelevance of the church, even for people with religious concerns.[7] Most interpreters agree that Christianity in Australia was always derived, denominations (including the Baptists) were simply transplanted from other lands.

Certainly only 24% of modern Australians attended church in the last month.52% have not attended for more than a year. Baptists had an attendance of 51% of their constituency in the last month, the highest group (Anglicans 14%, Catholic 44%, Uniting 26%) but then Baptists are only a small denomination. Church attendance is a minority pursuit in Australia.[8]

Reflecting on this phenomenon, and much else, Bishop Bruce Wilson in 1983 wrote a provocative study called *Can God Survive in Australia?*[9] His general argument is that the decline in church attendance has been an inevitable effect of industrialisation and secularisation processes found in modern urban societies. It is not only an Australian problem. He seemed to be right.

BHA Baptist Housing Association LTD

1987 saw the 21st anniversary of the founding of the Baptist Housing Association by the Baptist Mens Movement at its Conference at Swanwick in 1966. It was fitting then, that in June last year the 100th property opened its doors for the first time. The Association now has 103 properties and can house over 2,900 people.

This is not the whole picture. The Association is currently building on 9 other sites, from Falmouth to Preston, and many more schemes are being designed. The first Frail Elderly property is even now in the final planning stages in London, and the first leasehold scheme for the elderly for which the Association will provide management, is due to be opened in Southampton early this year.

We are as ever always on the lookout for pieces of land to build more properties. We believe that God's purpose for us is to provide homes with a Christian caring input from the local Church community. If you have surplus land, and your Church has a real mission to support a scheme, please write to:

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Baptist Housing Associaton Limited
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London
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But another important study in 1986 sought to demonstrate that there is a strong religious factor in Australian life and exposed what the writers called "the myth of secular Australia". Most Australians, for example, rate the importance of God in their lives as 6 or more on a scale of 1 (not at all important) to 10 (very important). 86% of Australians identify with some religious group. Two-thirds of Australians pray occasionally or more frequently.[10]

Perhaps we need here to listen to a perceptive essay entitled *Some Religious Stuff I know about Australia* by poet Les Murray. He writes:

> "With the decline of the normative position of Christianity in the West, we now live in a kind of spiritual supermarket, full of competing systems and brand names. This is partly the result of higher education, of course, and the technology of the paperback book, but that is not to sneer at it; it is also a visible manifestation of need, and quest, and even of pilgrimage."[11]

Again, he suggests that the religious tendency of what may be called majority Australia is best described as "Residual Christian", linked with themes such as Stoicism, luck, heroism, plus pieties of various kinds.

A recent important study had tackled this question by insisting on a careful study of local contexts within Australia.[12] In some communities the churches are growing as, say, among Baptists in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. In others they are declining. Urbanisation is a crucial factor along with various social changes.

Most significantly, and only now belatedly, the church has begun to do some serious thinking about the multiculturalism of Australia. Today our population of 15 million has 140 different ethnic peoples using over 90 languages (apart from the 300 extant Aboriginal languages) and practises an incredible variety of religious traditions.

So the local shopping centre in Sydney or Melbourne may have three video shops. One is Greek, one Arabic, and one English. In the next suburb is an Indonesian one. Melbourne contains the second largest urban Greek community in the world, second only to Athens.The mission of the Church in this multicultural scene is only slowly being realised and tackled.

II.

And what about Baptists in this multicultural Australia about to celebrate its Bicentennial? All that can be attempted here is a set of random impressions. They can offer only a partial and personal introduction, like a collection of slides which a prospective tourist might be shown. Inevitably one will flash after the other but enough, it is hoped, to leave an accurate impression.

The first Baptist services were held in Sydney in 1831.[13] Today there are 732 churches and 67 "fellowships" with a total of 59,751 members. Many more "adherents" share activity in the life of the local churches.

Throughout their history Australian Baptists have been a minority church, indeed a perceptive essay has been written analysing our history from this perspective. Dr. J.D. Bollen has suggested that Baptists are "the measure of what evangical religion could accomplish unaided in colonial Australia".[14]

Baptists generally declined on principle to accept state aid from colonial governments and received minimal help from British churches.

The nineteenth century saw a slow, often painful growth. The churches reflected British Baptists' life and beliefs with the influence of C.H. Spurgeon an increasingly important factor. In each state the story is somewhat different as the churches reflected the fortunes of their environment. From the 1950s Baptists shared in what has been called "the Californication of Australia", although the Southern Baptist Convention has in fact had the greatest influence in more recent years. As a consequence Australian Baptists demonstrate an extraordinary diversity. There are some churches where an English visitor would feel "at home" with the architecture, hymnology (a majority of churches would use *The Baptist Hymn Book*) and general style of service. A growing charismatic influence has changed the worshipping "ethos" in many churches where choruses with a doubtful theological content have supplanted the more traditional hymns. The larger cities have a few "mega churches" where large parking-lots, team ministries and a variety of activities demonstrate a growing church. In Melbourne especially some excitingly creative inner-urban ministries are being developed. A vigorous Baptist Social Justice Group is also active in Melbourne. Victoria also includes a Baptist monastic-type community whose members wear a simple monk's garb. In other places, especially in some parts of Queensland, a more narrowly conservative, even fundamentalist, churchmanship is evidenced. One can assert therefore that Australian Baptists demonstrate a wide diversity.

And for most of the time that diversity is preserved in unity. More recently, however, some influences from "The Battle for the Bible" controversy in the U.S.A. have reached our shores. In New South Wales the Assembly debated the question of inerrancy insisting that this was their official position as Baptists. Appointments to the theological colleges have at times been controversial as some fundamentalist factions have opposed "official" nominations. There has been no schism but the tensions are real, much of it, it seems, imported from the debates presently convulsing the Southern Baptists.

In fact the establishment of five theological colleges in Australia is a testimony both to the generous giving of Australian Baptists and to the "tyranny of distance" which necessitated separate development in each state. The first College was founded in Melbourne in 1891 and is named after its founding Principal Dr. W.T. Whitley. Other Colleges have been formed in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. The present Principal of the Western Australian College Dr. Noel Vose is currently honoured as the first Australian to serve as President of the Baptist World Alliance.

The Australian Baptist Missionary Society maintains a vigorous programme with a current budget of $3 million per annum. Presently there are some 178 missionaries serving in 7 countries. Aboriginal work is also undertaken in Central Australia and the Northern Territory. Some significant cultural communication has been achieved in recent years.

Australian Baptist World Aid is an expanding ministry supported by Australian Baptists. In the last year some $2,076,818 was raised. One

significant feature is the support of 5,060 children through the "Support an Orphan"' programme.

Each State Union maintains an expansive range of homes for the elderly, children's hostels and social services. This dimension of ministry was only commenced since World War II and is now a distinctive feature of Baptist life in Australia.

Victorian Baptists earlier this century established three "private" schools which enjoy an enviable community esteem. In recent years the 'Christian Community Schools', founded by two Baptist pastors in Sydney, have made rapid advances. These schools are integrated with the ministry of a local church, many of them Baptist, and seek to provide an alternative "Christian" education to the state school system. Their rapid expansion is a commentary on the failure of the state system in the judgement of many Christians but is also an expression of the vigour of a more conservative theological emphasis in many churches

III.

Have Baptists really come to terms with the multi-cultural, urbanised, secular Australia of 1988? Certainly there are many vigorous ethnic churches. Innovative urban ministries are developing in Melbourne. But Baptists, with all Christians in Australia, are still struggling with the key issue of relevance.

We will mark the Bicentennial Year with our own Baptist Celebration in Sydney (9-17 January). Baptists from all over the Commonwealth will gather for Bible study, worship and fellowship. One special endeavour of the present hour is called "Crossover Australia", an attempt by Australian Baptists to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with every Australian in an authentic and meaningful way by the year 2000.

This is a reminder that one dominant strand throughout Australian Baptist history has been evangelistic concern. Various State Unions are planning, praying and working for Church Growth. Each State had adopted church-planting goals. There remain many questions to be faced. The question of identity is crucial. Many of us do not really know why we are "Baptists" and what it might mean. The role of women, not least the ordination of women (practised in only Victoria and South Australia) remains an urgent issue. Our concern for evangelism has yet to tackle, in a systematic way, the multicultural nature of our community. We are still evolving an authentic Australian Baptist style of churchmanship. It is one thing to throw off the "ecclesiastical cringe" (which is the church's equivalent of the "cultural cringe") which for so long belittled anything "Australian" as inferior to the British or American model but quite another to develop a mission which is relevant, vibrant and authentic.

Yes, Australian Baptists will gladly join in the Bicentennial celebrations. But like all Australians we will need to face with realism the shame and failure of our past. We will need to be open to the challenge of the future. We join with our Baptists throughout the world in praying that the Baptist World Alliance theme "Out of Darkness into the Light of Christ" will become a

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reality for all the world, including a young nation about to celebrate its bicentennial.

Ken R. Manley

Notes:

1. *The Age*, 16 October, 1987.
2. R. Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, Collins, London, 1987.
3. Fusion Australia, *Understanding and Reaching Australians*, 1986 as quoted by P. Kaldor, *Who goes where? Who Doesn't Care?*, Lancer, Sydney, 1987, p.16.
4. See Manning Clark, *Occasional Writings and Speeches*, Fontana/Collins, Melbourne, 1980, p.145.
5. G. Ferguson, "Social Cohesion in the Multicultural Society", in *The Cultured Pearl*, (ed. J. Houston) Victorian Council of Churches, Melbourne, 1986, p.94.
6. For example see V.C. Hayes (ed), *Toward Theology in an Australian Context*, A.S.A.R., Adelaide, 1979; V. Brady, *A Crucible of Prophets: Australians and the Question of God*, Sydney, 1981.
7. D. Millikan, *The Sunburnt Soul*, Lancer, Sydney, 1981.
8. See P. Kaldor, *op. cit.*, pp.15-27.
9. B. Wilson, *Can God Survive in Australia?*, Albatross, Sydney, 1983.
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The Challenge of Restoration: A Critique

What are the dangers?

Four areas of naïvety concern me.

(a) They are biblically naïve

There are three aspects to the concern regarding Scripture. Firstly, some, in an understandable reaction to dead orthodoxy, devalue Scripture and elevate experience as a source of authority. The question as to how one interprets that experience and whether one does not need a guide or tool, which one might find in Scripture, is not one which occupies many Restorationists. What they believe God to be doing through his Spirit in the immediate present is of more importance than any preoccupation with a past word.

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To the Readers of the Fraternal.

Dear Friends,
Looking back on my last three letters I find this has been an arduous year for Insurers. In April I commented on the damage caused by the severe weather in January, in July I referred to claims produced by the high winds of March and in October I mentioned the problems caused by the postal dispute.

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Yours sincerely,

M.E. PURVER
General Manager

Secondly, where Scripture is afforded a place it is often interpreted with naïve literalism. Modern biblical scholarship is written off completely as a destructive, even demonic, activity. Anti-intellectualism is exalted (in spite of the movement having some highly intelligent members). Even basic Conservative Evangelical principles of interpretation are ignored. No attempt is made to discover what the writers might have intended their readers to understand by what they wrote. Words are taken at face value and lifted across the cultural divide as if the intervening centuries did not occur. This has given rise, for example, to a strong teaching regarding the subordination of women, an outbreak of hat-wearing, and renewed vigour in the disciplining of children. To interpose any attempt to interpret Scripture other than in its most literal sense would be viewed by many as an attempt to side-step obeying it.

Thirdly, the foundation of all Restorationism lies in a particular method of interpreting prophecy. Old Testament prophecies regarding restoration of Israel and New Testament passages regarding the last days and the Kingdom, are applied willy-nilly. Many believe that they are taking Scripture more seriously than the mainline churches do in applying it to our own days. The claim is made that we are living through the fulfilment of these words. Although denying that they have any real hermeneutic, it is this interpretation of prophecy that leads to their views. If Old Testament restorationism applies first to Israel and then subsequently finds its chief expression in Christ; if the last days refers to the whole period between Pentecost and the second coming of Christ; if prophecy is capable of multiple fulfilment; if the New Testament doctrine of Christ's return is that it is always immanent but not necessarily imminent; then the foundations of Restorationism are less secure. Much may be claimed for what the Spirit of God is doing for his people today but the arrogance which says 'this is it' or worse 'we are it', whilst others in the mainline churches are missing out, is not justified.

(b) They are historically innocent

There are two aspects of concern regarding history. Firstly, to interpret church history as one of a nose-dive immediately after the apostolic period followed by a slow and gradual climb in altitude since the Reformation is superficial. Although it may appear to be true from where we stand, at the moment in the West, it does betray a cultural snobbery that other eyes and other areas of the world may not share. It assumes an ability to measure with accuracy the work of the Spirit. For example, is present-day South Africa more Christian than Reformation Germany or is the U.S.A. Bible belt more Christian than fourth century Antioch? It also makes big assumptions about having reached the climax of history and, to the extent that it believes Christ is engaged in the final preparation of His bride prior to the marriage supper of the lamb, it believes in a surprise-free future. God may yet have more in store to surprise us.

But, secondly, and more significantly, there is the a-historical way in which the movement views itself. It considers that it is different from any other movement which has previously been raised up by God and is exempt from the institutionalizing tendencies which they have all suffered. Whilst, given the passage of time, they have all become institutionally bound, motivationally mixed, lethargic and impure, they will somehow be able to maintain their

pristine purity. They will escape the downward drag of denominationalising temptations. The reality is that there are already signs that they are becoming a new denomination and that growth and the passing of time will force this direction on them. The vision of being a free and universal movement for all the people of God is not being fulfilled

History bears witness to the birth of many new religious movements raised up by God to do some new work in the generation — all of which in the end have suffered from institutionalization. Popularly put, we may say that the recurring process of history teaches us that we go from men to movements to machinery and thence to monuments. More precisely groups go through five stages of development: that of incipient organisation; maximum efficiency, institutionalization and decline. (Tidball pp123 - 136). I do not see any reason to suppose that the House Churches will escape what the rest of us have suffered. In fact, I see a good deal of evidence to suggest that the process is already advancing

(c) They are experientially dishonest

There is a divorce between what is claimed and what is experienced. The Restoration Movement is not unique in suffering from this problem but it is more acute for them in that the claims made are so unguarded and unqualified. The arguments which have occurred between leaders are tragic betrayals of the claim to be a fully spirit-led restored church which has discovered the key that others have lost with regard to leadership. If the claim were true, the broken relationships would either not have happened, or been handled differently. Claims with regard to expansion and growth are often based on self-deception, although not deliberately so. Claims with regard to deliverance and healing are often true only in the very short-term and a string of pastoral casualties exist where the promise has not been delivered. Many have found their way back to the mainline churches because the experience of the House Churches has not lived up to the promise over time. The claims, no doubt, issue from enthusiasm rather from any deliberate attempt to deceive, but there is a lack of wise discernment in seeing what actually is happening.

(d) They are socially irrelevant

There are two aspects to this charge. Firstly, in Bryan Wilson's devastating critique of new religions, he argued that they do not serve society but are almost irrelevant to it. Far from offering a genuine counter-culture he said that they are 'random anti-cultural assertions' (Wilson, 1976, p101 and 110). Prospects for survival cannot be strong where this is so. Only groups that are genuinely cultural or anti-cultural can survive to any significant degree. To the extent that the Restoration Movement is guilty as Wilson charges, their prospects for vigorous long-term survival cannot be great.

Secondly, and more practically, there is concern over the type of Christianity preached. It is intensely personal, subjective, experimental and privatized. It all has to do with 'me' and how I feel. It lacks any wider social concern. Like the Charismatic Movement from which it has in part sprung, it is in danger of projecting a God who is very concerned to provide me with my preferred fruit juice on a plane journey or a convenient parking space when it rains but is not bothered about the starving masses of Africa or the question of apartheid in

South Africa. Whilst religion remains privatized it is probable that secularization will continue apace. Thankfully recent developments suggest that this criticism has been heeded by some in the Movement.

What can we learn?

The frank criticisms which we have offered are not intended to dismiss the Restoration Movement. I believe that it offers a profound challenge to our denomination and one which we neglect at our peril. Our track record is not one which gives us any room for complacency. We must be open to being taught by the Spirit, through whichever messenger he chooses to use. No movement is pure. We only ever contain God's treasure in earthen vessels. I do not believe that we have it all right while they have it all wrong. Our denomination is a jar of clay as much as their movement is an earthenware pot.

It was interesting to read recently Hugh Gough's comments to the CEN when he was Bishop of Barking. He wrote:

> A remarkable feature of evangelism in our country in the post-war years had been the emergence of numerous gospel halls and pentecostal missions which reflected, in part at least, the failure of the organized church to preach the gospel. If we had been preaching the gospel fully and faithfully these conventicles would not have come into being. People have come to our churches and have heard nothing but pious platitudes and moral exhortations and have gone away deeply dissatisfied. (cited by Manwaring, p.93).

We might update the language and the movements referred to, but the point remains the same. So what can we learn?

(a) The need for renewal

I cannot understand why we are surprised at the emergence of Restorationism, although I can understand why we may be pained by it. It has been the recurring pattern of the history of the church, certainly since the Reformation, that God has raised up new movements, in almost every generation. Since the nineteenth century we have had the Catholic Apostolics, the Brethren, the Salvation Army and the Elim and Assemblies of God to name but a few. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries we had the numerous Methodist sects. An earlier century saw the Baptists and Independents among the radical new departures.

The emergence of these groups has never meant that God has written off existing groups. The new groups have most often provided a stimulus to the existing denominations as our own history demonstrates in relationship to the Evangelical Revival under Wesley. Every aged movement needs rejuvenation from time to time, if it is to do anything other than peter into obscurity. We have already referred to the process of institutionalization from which movements suffer. Perhaps the process can never be finally defeated but it can be delayed and its effect minimized by periodic renewal. So we should welcome the stimulus these new groups provide. Rather than being threatened by the claims

or over-anxious about the excesses, both of which will subside over time, we should ask what we can learn.

We must ask, if we were the radical alternative of yesteryear, why is it that we have settled down to such a placid respectability? Where is the radical dissent which is such a major part of our tradition? Why is it that our churches are so conservative and that undisturbed peaceful existence seems to be prized above all else?

Furthermore, we should admit that it is extraordinarily difficult to maintain the spontaneous freshness of the Spirit's work without it degenerating into a mechanical law or a mere ritual. So we should welcome every incentive to be renewed in the Spirit and to examine whether we have so tried to protect and preserve His life that it has long since left us.

(b) The need for commitment

We may profoundly disagree with how the Restoration Movement interprets what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ but we may still envy the commitment we find among them. We can surely be impressed by the seriousness with which they desire to make Jesus Christ Lord of every aspect of their lives, rather than allowing religion to be a separate and unintegrated segment of life. We can surely be impressed by the expectation that Christians should grow in the faith and the seriousness with which they structure their life to enable it to occur. We can surely be impressed by their sense of community and commitment to each other. We can surely be impressed by the enthusiasm with which they communicate what they have discovered to others. Perhaps we should admit that they have rediscovered something of what the old Baptists meant by being "covenanted together". For the most part we lack such commitments or our commitments lie elsewhere. We suffer from having been part of the scene for so long that there is a great deal of nominality, folk religion and social Christianity among us. They have yet to face the problems which inevitably arise when a second and third generation are on the scene, when motives become mixed, when zeal grows weary and when structures and traditions become fossilized. Even churches which pride themselves on being more evangelical and Bible-based suffer these problems. They are in reality often governed by lesser motives than a loyalty to Scripture. So, for example, a choir or any musical group, may start with a clear desire to offer praise to God. But over time the objective of performing good music becomes paramount and, when the voices can no longer even do that, the objective of meeting together, because it has always served a social function, takes over. The Church then becomes increasingly like any humanly-based fellowship-centred group and less and less like the living body of Christ.

We must frequently and frankly clarify our commitments and seek to revive commitment to what is of eternal importance among us.

(c) The need for reality

Worship, for the Restorationist, is an event in which God is going to work. It is approached with high expectation, with some degree of openness, with a belief

that God will speak a fresh word for today and in the certainty that God will meet with people and bring them physical, emotional and spiritual healing. It may lack dignity, order and balance, it may lead to unguarded things being said and done, but something happens.

Theologically, we would all want to say that when God speaks an event happens and when worship is conducted it should be eventful. In practice our worship is often anything but eventful. We spend our time seeking to control and to preserve dignity, balance and order. We refer to events in the past or elsewhere but do not expect them among us. We proclaim the Gospel and the promises and the gifts of God, but are surprised if they change lives immediately. We do not want people to experience anything immediately, lest it smacks of emotionalism. We ask people to believe regardless of what they feel. We major on the objective at the expense of the subjective.

Of course this picture is overdrawn, to our disadvantage. And I would certainly not want us to forsake the objective for the subjective. But if, in the secular barrenness of our world, people seek to discover the reality of God, we must seek greater reality in our worship. We can understand why people find it easier to resort to the House Church Movement than to us, in this respect, even if we have qualms about the validity of some of what they experience.

(d) The need for freedom

The greatest thing they have to teach us is the need to break free from our institutionalization and to discover life. This is not to ask that we abandon tradition but that we become part of a living tradition. Eileen Vincent has written:

> Many churches are like overgrown gardens, where the ground is fully covered but not very productive. Before there can be space to put in fresh fruitful plants some of the old ones must be dug up. Only as we continue to walk closely with the Holy Spirit can we see clearly what must go and what has to be cultivated. (Vincent, p154).

We are very much an overgrown garden. Our life seems to have got stuck back in the heyday of Victorian Nonconformity. Look at the organisation of our common life whether at local church or Association level. We are hung-up not on a scriptural but a business way of doing things. How much time do we spend each year listening to apologies for absence, minutes of preceding meetings, arguing over procedures, ensuring that elections are run properly? Returning more fully to Baptist Church circles, as I have done recently, I have been amazed at how many totally unproductive administrative meetings I am expected to sit through; at how we are stifled by bureaucratic procedures; at how we are hung up on constitutions; at how many presidential inductions I have attended (at all of which I have listened to the same speech by the retiring President thanking the churches for the year they have had but wishing that they had been invited to more places). I have experienced a culture shock. We smack of the small town politics of yesteryear. We crave to be a representative democracy but we suffer from the same failure to be truly representative as do most democratic institutions.

I seriously wonder if we swept away many of these organisational meetings whether anyone would notice. Most of the life in our churches does not find expression through such channels. And these channels, designed to move forward only where there is concensus, would quickly drain the life away if it were to get involved.

The Restoration Movement has not, as yet, had to encounter such encumbrances. It has a freedom and flexibility which permits it to be a Movement. Decisions can be taken, changes implemented and progress made because it has not succumbed to democratic procedures.

I lack the courage to propose that we sweep our current procedures away. Many of them, like Home Mission, do worthy work. Such radicalism would admit the danger of unaccountable leadership, which is certainly not to be welcomed. But it is time:

1. to breathe a new spirit into our local church, District and Association meetings
2. to resist the pull of the trivial politics which are involved
3. to prune our structures and activities of the lifeless branches
4. to seek to let our church, District and Association meetings to be channels of life

It can and is being done elsewhere and occasionally among us. Other movements and groups have no difficulty in getting an enthusiastic response from the people. Why do we? Maybe because while many are asking for bread we are insisting on giving them cake! People want to do things in a fresh way and we insist that they adopt the refined culture of yesterday. Gavin Reid has recently commented that the Church of England has 'a developing sense of being "quaint" and increasingly out-of-step with surrounding society' (Reid, p8). The same is certainly true of us. If we want to see growth among us, the vital Christian life which exists in our country flowing through us, and an impact being made on our pagan society, we must shed the cultural baggage of yesterday and get in touch with the culture of today. There are many aspects of it, with all its secularism, which we cannot and should not adopt. But there are many other aspects, mentioned above, which we can accept to our advantage.

Let me conclude with two unconnected but provocative comments. One comes from Tom Walker, Vicar of St John's, Harborne, and a leader in the Anglican Renewal Movement.

> I will prophesy that when 'pure' Restoration churches have destroyed themselves through leadership rivalry and have dissipated into multitudinous smaller groupings, the fuddy-duddy, old-fashioned, parish churches will still ring its bells on countless street corners of our land, issuing a free, unpressurized call to worship. I dare to say that second and third generation youngsters will not grow well on the diet of teaching that tends to characterize 'pure' churches with a programme of hyper-spirituality and with a defensive 'come out from among them' philosophy and ghetto mentality. Some, I forecast, will then drift back, even to the Church of England. (Reid, p121).

Secondly, a concluding reflection of my own. It seems to me that Restorationism suffers, as did Corinth, from over-realized eschatology They

live now a bit too much as if the Kingdom of God had been consummated. And yet, if that is their problem, I wonder if ours is that we suffer from under-realized eschatology and so often live as if the Kingdom of God had not been inaugurated and made its decisive breakthrough into our world as it did in Jesus Christ.

Derek J. Tidball

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Forgotten Father

by Thomas Smail (Hodder and Stoughton, 1987, 208 pp,£2.95)

This is a timely book. Its main concern, as the sub-title makes clear, is to re-establish effective belief in, and worship and obedience of, God as Father. However, running through the whole thesis is a deep concern for the state of the Charismatic or Renewal Movement at the present time. Thomas A. Smail was a founder member of the Movement and at one stage the Director of the Fountain Trust. Since those years he has thought long and hard on the Movement, experiencing its weakness and noticing its marked defects, as well as rejoicing in what it has done for the churches, but now deeply afraid that it is not only running out of steam, but that it is not fulfilling all the tremendous potential it had, and still could have, for renewing Christendom. He sees it as having failed to mature and, above all, of holding an unbalanced theology; and the imbalance is seen most starkly in its failure to hold an adequate view of the Trinity. This failure in turn is centred in a devaluing of the Father within the Godhead. Related to this is the error of not realising the dominant place of the Father in Christ's teaching and life, and the clear evidence of Christ's constant submission to the will of the Father.

The Movement, as the earlier Jesus Movement, has rightly reasserted a spiritual truth hitherto neglected — in this case the place of the Holy Spirit in the Christian experience. In the process of doing this it not only emphasised, one-sidedly, the more dramatic aspect (the signs and wonders) but also failed, on the whole, to see that the Spirit's supreme work is to assist Christians, through Christ's revelation and example, to worship and obey God the Father (Abba) in every area of life. This defect for Smail is fundamental and the main reason for the Movement's grave deficiencies!

In the process of this long discussion (the paper-back has two-hundred pages!) the author reviews most traditional Christian doctrines. Here is solid meat that will cause those who do not want a good meal a little indigestion; but those who work at it will have a fine theological and intellectual feast. He examines the doctrine of the Trinity and helps us to understand a little better the intrinsic and economic aspects of the Godhead. Christology is tackled and the Chalcedonian formula of the two natures restated and accepted, though I find his marked dependence of John's gospel a little disturbing! Soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology are all examined helpfully. The role of Christ in creation is looked at, so is His pre-existence and the brief excursion into the loving relation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is stimulating.

In this work there are many jewels to be mined — and I use this metaphor deliberately. It is not an easy read all through because it is dealing with big and deep themes, and the writer has to compact a lot into a small space. I had to read some of the pages more than once; but the effort was worth it! Brooding over the whole book is the experience, sometimes wistful, of a theologian who has a renewing experience of God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and who wants others to share this rich life-changing experience, but who is afraid that so many who walked with him down that road are losing their

way through faulty theology — and he sees this as an awful waste for the Kingdom of God.

I wholeheartedly recommend this book for all schools of Christian thought — all our ministries will be enhanced by a reading of it, and especially by trying to live by it.

George R. Neal

The Resurrection of Jesus *by Pinchas Lapide (SPCK, 1984, 160 pp, £5.50)*

Another book on the Resurrection? Why is this one so special? What is unusual about this book is not so much *what* it is about but *who* wrote it. It is subtitled 'A Jewish Perspective' and it is written by Dr. Lapide, a Jewish New Testament Professor. Dr. Lapide stands as one of the growing number of Jewish scholars in recent years who has concentrated his scholarly interests in a study of the historical person of Jesus. There has been a great movement among Jews and Christians to discover the authentic Jewish roots of the early Christian faith. We must never forget, Dr. Lapide tells us, that Christianity originally began as a Jewish sectarian movement. With regard to the question of the resurrection itself, Dr. Lapide goes so far as to unequivocally affirm the historical facticity of the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This seems to me to be an amazing irony when we consider how many Christian interpreters have retreated from such a bald affirmation and have performed all sorts of 'slight of hand' tricks to explain the resurrection (witness the recent debate centring around the Bishop of Durham in this country). Indeed, Lapide ridicules some of these interpretative efforts when he says: 'I cannot rid myself of the impression that some modern Christian theologians are ashamed of the material facticity of the resurrection.' (p 130)

For Lapide, however, it is important to distinguish between an affirmation of the resurrection of Jesus and belief in Jesus as the Messiah. It is this second point, he says, which constitutes the dividing line between Jews and Christians. Lapide argues that it is quite possible for a Jew to believe (as he does) in the historical facticity of the resurrection and yet *not* be a Christian. It is the understanding that Jesus' resurrection authenticates and validates Jesus' Messianic claims that Jews find they are unable to accept. To put it another way, it is this understanding of the resurrection, rather than the event itself, which identifies one as a Christian believer.

In the course of the book, Lapide subjects the New Testament accounts to a very thorough historical examination, an examination which readers will find a model in approaching the documents and asking the critical, but necessary, questions. Would that some of us Christians would be as concerned with taking our documents seriously in our pursuit of the truth! The book is clearly written with a popular audience in mind, and suffers only slightly by this approach. It explains Hebrew and Greek words and ideas carefully and does not make the reader feel inferior for not being a linguist. It should prove to be immensely valuable to anyone wishing to keep abreast of the Jewish/Christian dialogue presently going on in the scholarly world today. It also has a special place for any Jew who is interested in the person of Christ and who is seeking to discover what is distinctive about the Christian faith. An added bonus is the excellent

introduction to the book by Carl E. Braaten entitled *"The Resurrection in Jewish-Christian Dialogue"*. Well worth a read, especially if you have any contact with Jews who are asking questions about Christianity.

Larry Kreitzer

Martin Lloyd-Jones: Preacher

By John Peters (Paternoster, 1986, 160 pp, £2.95)

If you are one of the many people who have read volume one of Ian H. Murray's biography of "the Doctor" and are wondering what happened after 1939, then here is a book to keep you going until volume two arrives. The book was written with the aim of bringing to the notice of ordinary readers the importance and significance of the career of Lloyd-Jones; an aim which is well fulfilled. We are not only presented with a comprehensive survey of his life but with chapters dealing with areas of controversy, how other people saw him, and a concluding section assessing his life and ministry. The appendix includes a bibliography of Lloyd-Jones' works in English. Throughout the book there are apt and relevant quotations from the Doctor's sermons. The author is determined to paint the preacher 'warts and all', but has the unfortunate habit of making excuses for some of the warts, perhaps because he is a fellow Welshman! This is well illustrated by the meeting held in 1966 under the auspices of the Evangelical Alliance when 'the Doctor' issued a call to fellow evangelicals to join together and leave their compromised denominations. The author concludes 'It is obvious now that a number of resulting problems could have been avoided had people really understood what MLl-J had in mind. Nor were all able to appreciate that he was, above all, concerned with the truth, as he conceived it'! Despite the warts that remain, here is a book for preachers that will send us back to Scripture and into the pulpit with hearts on fire.

Jack Ramsbottom

Meaning in Madness

by John Foskett (SPCK, 1984, 194 pp, £3.95)

Some years ago our then General Secretary, David Russell, was encouraging us to explore and proclaim the 'wholeness' of the gospel, and for many this opened up new areas and greater depths in the mission of the Church. However, some aspects of life remain in which we find it difficult or even impossible to find room for the insights of faith, and for many of us one of these is the 'private world' of the mentally ill. Frequently this barrier is reinforced by the mutual suspicion between those responsible for the clinical care of the mentally ill and family and friends, particularly where there is a 'religious' dimension to the situation.

John Foskett's frank and sensitively-written introduction to the whole question of 'meaning in madness' should do much to help break down the barriers of suspicion and misunderstanding. Over half the book is taken up with case studies demonstrating the range of the problem and analysing the response of the pastor to the various situations encountered. This highlights not only the vulnerability of the patient, but also of the counsellor involved in the pastoral relationship. The author provides a commentary on each interview

recorded, exploring the dynamics of the particular pastoral relationship, and illustrating the problems and the possibilities within it.

One aspect which bears further reflection from the point of view of Christian ministry is the question of 'supervision', common in secular pastoral counselling, but less familiar in ministry where the screen of confidentiality is sometimes used to protect not only our 'clients' but also our own uncertain handling of a situation. It may be that those who are going to have counselling as a central feature of their ministry must take the whole question of supervision much more seriously. Such analysis of the counselling role makes this a useful book for anyone involved in pastoral ministry, whether or not they are counselling the mentally ill.

A later chapter classifies and defines the various categories of illness (psychosis, neurosis etc), many of which will be familiar to the experienced pastor, but which are very helpful to those of us new to ministry. The final chapter looks at the pattern of death and resurrection which is often experienced in the hurting and healing of mental illness.

One of the most profound questions raised by this book is whether we are prepared even to admit and recognise negative experience within our own life and that of our people:

> 'We have grown so used to equating our religion with good and positive feelings, that we can see no place in it for the bad and the negative...and yet the biblical witness, in the Psalms, Jeremiah and Job, the passion narratives and the epistles, is inclusive of the very worst in human experience. That too can be offered to God, and God found within it.' p94.

This book is another useful addition to the 'New Library of Pastoral Care', full of the reality of human life and full of hope.

Nicholas J. Wood

Preaching at the Lord's Table

by Michael Walker (London Baptist Preachers' Association, 1987, 16 pp £1.00)

This booklet represents the C.R. Batten lecture given before the London Baptist Preachers' Association in the autumn of last year. I find it interesting to observe that in the past fifteen years or so of the lectureship, this is the first to concentrate on "sacramental preaching". The result is a thoughtful, passionate and at times lyrical interpretation of the theology of the Lord's Table and the unique opportunities it presents as a context for preaching. As one who finds it all too easy to fall silent before this sacrament, I am glad to receive a contribution from a Baptist perspective, since there are comparatively so few of them!

The author approaches his subject through an examination of three key questions posed by the sacrament before moving on to indicate the implications these questions have for preaching. He prefaces this by suggesting that our Baptist forebears (pre nineteenth century) had a richer and more "sacramental" understanding of the Lord's Table than do we today: "that we might drink his sacred Blood and on his Flesh might feed", and that our understanding here has been somewhat impoverished by negative reactions in history to the sacramental theology of other traditions.

It must be said that the key questions addressed are the usual ones viz. the meaning of "sacrament", the relationship between the material and the spiritual and the mode of Christ's presence in the sacrament. What gives new life to old questions is Michael Walker's imaginative, spirited and creative exposition, rooted as it is in certain deeply held theological convictions. What comes over strongly is the belief that the Lord's Table is (a) a visual representation of how Christ is present in his broken-ness in all of life (b) a great incentive to hold together "flesh and spirit" and (c) a manifestation of Christ's "real presence" whereby forgiveness, acceptance, healing and the Lord himself may be experienced afresh. All through the lecture is illuminated by quotations from a rich diversity of writers: Robert Hall to Siegfried Sassoon; Charles Haddon Spurgeon to Carlo Carretto.

Especially in the case of the Lord's Supper, I wonder whether there is the danger that it can be made to mean anything, theologically. What are the theological parameters within which we must work? Certainly Michael Walker has indicated what they are for him in a deeply felt, committed address.

M.J.V.

Note: The above may be obtained from the Secretary, Mr H.J. Lawrence, 114 Ash Grove, Palmers Green, N.13 5AP. Past lectures (John Stott, Donald English, David Sheppard et al) may be purchased at 15p per copy or £1 for any eight, while stocks last, from the same address.

Ed.

Of Interest to You

The following members have recently accepted invitations to new spheres of service and we assure them of our prayers and good wishes, remembering especially those for whom it is a first pastorate:

Norman Amann to Abergavenny U.R.C. (retirement)
Charles Blizzard to Kilmington (full-time)
Peter Clarke to the Mildmay Hospital as Chaplain
Brian Cole to Fareham (associate)
Raymond Cowie to Lerwick
Kenneth Dafforn to Wellington
Christopher Doig to Bretton, Peterborough
Clifford Dunn to the West Bridgford Ministry Team, Nottingham
Robert Ellis to Tyndale, Bristol
Tom Glover to Airdrie
Peter Gordon-Roberts to Littlehampton
Stephen Gutman to Ashby-de-la-Zouch
Paul Hills to Winchester
David Holmwood to Romsey
Duncan Johnstone to Sutton & Glusburn
Andrew Jones to Avenue Road, Beckenham
Duncan Keys to Olney
Keith King to Hele Road, Torquay
Ian Livingstone to Orangefield, Greenock