

library of lives

The Pioneer Journal – Issue 1



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CHURCH IN THE THEATRE

THE THEATRE, LEATHERHEAD, SURREY



OPEN HEAVEN – a Christian celebration with the Open Heaven band and singers, news, stories, videos and teaching.

Fourth Sunday of the month.
Refreshments from 6.15pm.
7pm start. Bar open afterwards.

30th October	Jonathan Aitken
27th November	Jon & Olive Drane
22nd January	TBA
26th February	Sandy Millar

Entrance is free – everyone is welcome – including those of other faiths or no faith at all.



ENGAGE – every Sunday at 6.30pm.

A mixture of Christian teaching, music, reflection, prayer, food and fun.

Engage joins Open Heaven for the above dates.

Everybody welcome, from committed Christians to those who are developing their spirituality.

Entrance free.

A warm welcome to you!

At the Pioneer Leaders Conference, we handed out to all 500 present more than 3,000 copies of **Library Of Lives: The Broadsheet**. This document is a large, pictorial record of ordinary people doing extraordinary things, across the network of churches, training initiatives and leadership ministries.

I have used this publication with many leaders throughout the UK. They are astonished at the professional design. It has also been used with parents and young adults who wonder what this Pioneer Church is that their children have been caught up in. If you would like one, send us your address and stamps (£1.30) and we will send you two copies in a protective tube.

Now welcome to **Library Of Lives: The Pioneer Journal** – our new full colour bi-monthly publication. We will continue to tell of the extraordinary achievements of ordinary people, convey leadership messages, news from around the network and national/international news affecting Christians everywhere. Occasionally we'll also provide one or two surprises!

Pioneer is part of the New Church Movement, which has grown from virtually nothing 35 years ago – to well over a quarter of a million people, with over 2,000 churches planted. There are probably no more than ten large networks plus a number of equally effective but somewhat smaller 'streams'. Here are just some of the achievements of Pioneer's creative components:

- Pioneer is involved and committed to Fusion that has planted 300 cells in university campuses;
- the network has trained over 2,000 people in part or full-time courses such as DNA/Equipped to Lead:Favour/Re:Source;
- national and local church leaders are working with other Christians beyond Pioneer in the Aids initiative ACET, Spring Harvest, Crusaders, Tearfund, Soul Survivor and Christian Aid;
- others are at the heart of *Calling All Nations* at the Olympic Stadium, Berlin, July 15th next year;
- the prayer initiative 24-7 emerged from within Pioneer;
- quite literally hundreds of local social action initiatives, created and sustained by largely nameless/faceless people – but work that God takes note of and records.

In Pioneer we believe that God is not so much the book keeper of our sins, but of every 'cup of cold water' given in his name. If you are a part of the network, here you will meet and make friends old and new. If you are not, I hope you will feel that you can join us.

Gerald Coates
Executive Editor



libraryoflives

...pioneers cutting scriptural pathways through a challenging world

I'm motivated to show people they're worth including and that they are valuable.

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Executive Editor: Gerald Coates

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Design and Print:

Verité CM Ltd,
Worthing,
West Sussex BN11 5JG

Publisher:

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32 High Street, Great Bookham
Surrey KT23 4AG

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Pioneer is a registered charity (no 327160) and a member of the Evangelical Alliance.

WORSHIP SUMMIT

A SPECIAL conference is being organised as part of the build-up to Noel Richards' 'Calling All Nations' worship gathering at Berlin's Olympic Stadium on July 15th 2006.

Leaders, intercessors and lead worshippers are being invited to tour the Olympic Stadium this December – and then join a citywide worship event at another venue.

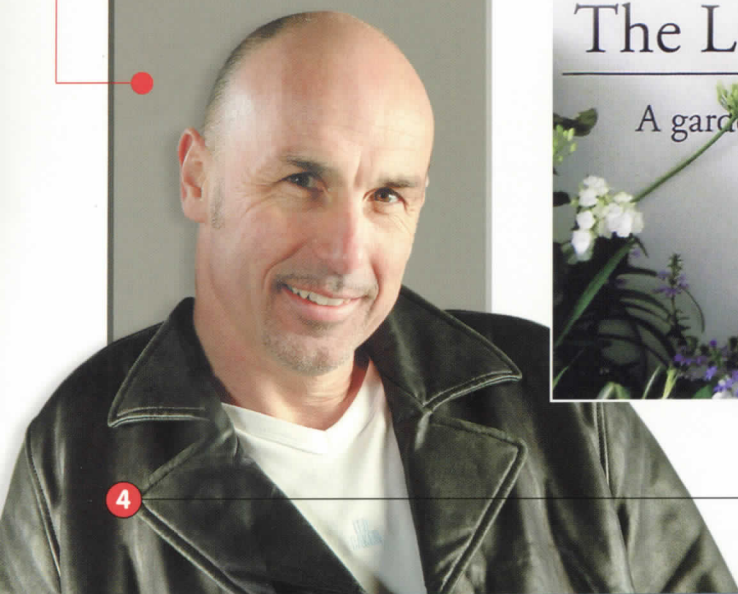
'For the stadium to be filled next year, we need leaders to communicate the vision to their churches and networks,' said Noel. 'We are counting on them to be "gatherers" and bring their "tribes."'

Noel and his team are calling 'the youth of the world and the young at heart' to attend the main 'Calling All Nations' gathering at the Berlin Olympic Stadium next summer. Interest is already running high, with nearly 5,000 ticket orders received. A contact in Hungary is reportedly planning to bring more than 500 people to the event.

'We are calling to fill that venue with worship and prayer. The event is not a concert, neither is it a music festival. There will be no "headline" acts. It is people coming together to fill one of the world's most significant cities with the sound of heaven.

'There have been great events in Berlin but nothing like this will have happened before.'

A promotional DVD for 'Calling All Nations' is now available, which can be used at events, conferences and church services. Narration is in both English and German with subtitles provided (www.callingallnations.com).



POVERTY PLEA

MEMBERS of Pioneer churches took part in the largest anti-poverty campaign event ever this summer.

Christian groups and individuals wrapped white bands around church buildings – and dozens of people from Pioneer churches took part in the peaceful G8 protests in Edinburgh and London.

Further Pioneer personnel took part in 'Make Poverty History' events organised by Christian Aid and Tearfund.

UK national evangelical leaders including Gerald Coates wrote to US President George W Bush, asking him to play his part in wiping out unfair trading rules and the huge interest rates being paid by the poorest nations.

Counter-terrorist prayer

PIONEER team leader Gerald Coates has been involved in co-ordinating urgent prayer as soon as terrorist bombings have hit parts of London.

His vital link in the chain of communication is a colleague whose historic roots are in Pioneer. He helps co-ordinate the emergency services response to a major disaster – and as soon as he is on site, phones Gerald with all the data.

'I then call around a dozen key leaders who are all attached to prayer networks,' said Gerald, 'giving them information, facts and statistics which are not immediately broadcast by the media.

'People are able to pray straightaway for the emergency services, the injured – and indeed the bombers themselves. It has been a strange experience receiving what my colleague/contact has told me and then waiting for this news to be broadcast.

'It is expected that there will be further terrorist strikes. So let's pray in our churches for the big issues – as well as those affecting our locality.'



The London Memorial Garden

A garden of remembrance for the victims of the terrorist attacks of 7th July 2005

Book of Condolence



WORLD STAGE

LEADERS, friends and associates of Pioneer played key roles in the Catholic Church's much-publicised World Youth Day at Cologne recently.

Pioneer team leader Gerald Coates was a special guest. And taking part in the programme were chart band Delirious?, veteran rocker Sir Cliff Richard, Irish singer-songwriter Moya Brennan and German worship leader Claas Jambor.

Well over one million young people had gathered to hear **Pope Benedict XVI** talk about the need to commit themselves afresh to Christ. He reminded his listeners that whenever Europe strayed from the Christian message, catastrophe followed.

Benedict announced that the next World Youth Day would be held in 2008 in Sydney, Australia. The event is described as 'a pilgrimage of young people and a festival of encounter and solidarity'.



WORLD SCENES: Pilgrims from Australia, Pope Benedict XVI, a girl with flags in her hair at the concluding mass, and a young couple – all celebrating in Cologne (Photos: Guido Karl, Markus Tschersich and David Boucherie)

DA VINCI DECODED

IF THE bestselling *Da Vinci Code* is right, the repercussions are huge. It means that the Christian Church is founded on a lie – and that the descendants of Christ are walking the earth today.

That was the message from popular TV celebrity Tony Robinson, when he presented the recent Channel 4 documentary *The Real Da Vinci Code*. But the programme was actually a sharp analysis of the book's foundational claims.

A separate website has emerged that offers a similar alternative view to the popular novel. For those who are fed up facing clever remarks from friends or colleagues who have read the bestseller, www.davinci-decoded.com is a helpful resource.



JEFF FOR BREAKFAST

PIONEER team member Jeff Lucas was the speaker at the annual national Prayer Breakfast held at London's Westminster Hall recently.

Jeff is currently dividing his time between being a preacher at a fast growing church in America and the UK – where he remains on the Pioneer Team, is at the heart of Spring Harvest, and writes *Lucas On Life* for CWR which has received a positive response in numerous nations.



Jeff Lucas shares a joke (and a taste in V-neck sweaters) with Steve Chalke.

Christ can use

While the rest of us demonise the mobile as it interrupts our church meetings and leadership conferences, Peter Willson blesses his phone

The sound of exhaled breath was audible as I left my seat in front of the speaker and moved swiftly to the door. It was one of those 'Hmmmph' sounds with the emphasis on the 'H', mixing irritation, incredulity and mild disgust with a tinge of self-righteousness. And it was meant to be heard.

After all, I remembered that Gerald had once said in a public meeting (but I can't remember where) that his personal and pet annoyance was the sound of a mobile phone going off in a meeting. This was the Pioneer Leaders Conference – in plenary session – with guest speaker in full flow.

As I strode self consciously towards the side exit from the hall, not daring to look back, I pressed the green icon, answered the call and whispered 'Peter Willson' into the handset. Then I was outside and free to speak at a comfortable volume.

Extra mile

It is not unreasonable to say that my mobile phone, together with the scalpel and laparoscope, is a tool of my trade. As a consultant surgeon, it says to my junior doctors, 'you can ask me for advice if you are worried', to my hospital it says 'I am available' – and over the years I had made it a principle that I would be just that.

In my work I have tried to think that the extra mile is important and reflects the attitude of the Saviour I love and try to imitate. I hope it speaks of my commitment to patients and to junior doctors at the coal face of the hospital when they need help – whether I am on call or not – and this weekend I was not on call.

Another colleague was covering, but this registrar wanted to speak to me. It was not my patient, but he felt I could provide the advice he needed. We spent ten minutes talking through the problem as I paced the service road beside the ballroom.

Through the picture windows I could see friends with their eyes fixed on the main speaker, willing out of him every last ounce of God's revelation. I was glad to be in the fresh, cool air.

As I flipped the grey receiver closed I thought about what it meant to make a difference in society and, more particularly, in my local community – a recurring theme of the conference. What would speak to others of the influence

of Christ in my life, that desire to serve and from there to open a door for the gospel?

It was at that point I realised that part of the answer lay in my hand. That device which has become trendy to mock, castigate and lambaste, especially when it goes off in enclosed but public places – the mobile phone.

Altitude sickness

I know it irritates when it rings in meetings but it seems ruder to leave it on silent mode and just walk out when someone calls. Surely if the speaker has not realised that the phone has driven me from the room, it simply leaves the sense that I have been offended by the message.

*'It was then
that my mobile
became the tool of
salvation once
again'*

A year later, I had even more cause to be thankful for the mobile phone. I was watching a friend and colleague struggling for life in a rudimentary, Tanzanian, (not very) high dependency hospital bed.

We had just descended Mt Kilimanjaro, with my friend on a stretcher (which had resembled a z-bed mounted on a unicycle) and me running behind. We had both succumbed to altitude sickness at 15,000 feet, some 4,000 feet short of the summit and had to turn back, leaving the other six in our party to head for the top.

I was bitterly disappointed at having to turn around. People had sponsored me to get to the top for a local cancer charity, and reaching this peak had been a dream since childhood.

As we descended I had improved but my colleague had worsened, collapsed and required rapid evacuation and hospitalisation. It took ten hours to get him to safety, back down the track that had taken four days to walk up.

Twice I thought he might die. As I looked on at the inadequate facilities, exhausted by the run down the mountain, upset and disappointed by the events of the day, I heard the Holy Spirit say, 'You weren't meant to reach the top this time – you were there to help save the life of your friend'.

the Crazy Frog

It was then that my mobile became the tool of salvation once again. Several long calls to London secured an air ambulance on his insurance and transfer to a modern intensive care unit in Nairobi. After five days, he regained consciousness and started on the road to a complete recovery.

Without my mobile and relying on Tanzanian land lines, which I knew of old, would have added another precious day or two to the process of communication – and time was of the essence. My mobile phone bill that month was the largest it had ever been, but my friend and colleague was safe.

Childhood dream

Two years later I was back in Tanzania and had cause to remember all of these things again. This time I stood on the summit of Kilimanjaro desperately trying to get my phone to



My mobile is still a tool for God to use in diverse circumstances. I am sorry it upsets some when it goes off. I do try and sit close to an exit so it causes minimal disturbance and I now have one that receives e-mail – quietly, to which I can reply using the silent taps of its QWERTY keyboard. However, being that available has led to opportunities for sharing Christ with my juniors – and I still pray for my previously sick colleague.

Pioneer has always encouraged its affiliates to think outside the box – away from stereotypes and into the real world. So the next time a mobile sounds and your hackles start to rise as that Crazy Frog crashes in on your thoughts, wonder if it is a need for help rather than a deliberate attempt to interrupt the talk you can always hear again on tape. Wonder if even carrying a mobile phone can speak of Christ.

'Pioneer has always encouraged its affiliates to think outside the box'

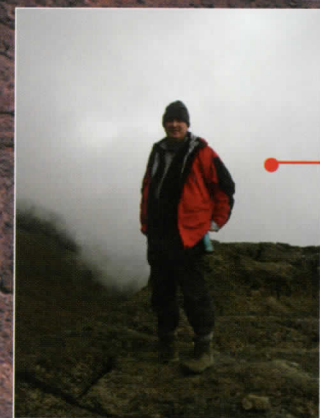
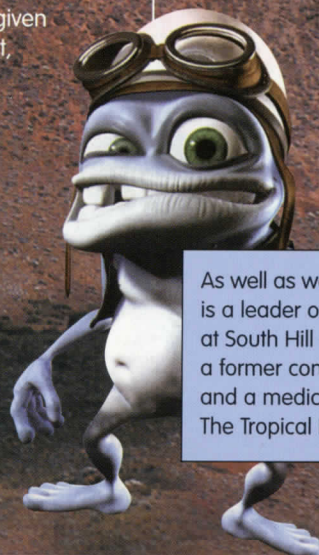
work, willing it to pick up a signal so I could call my wife and tell my family that this time I had made it to the highest point in Africa.

At 19,335 feet this was the highest I had ever climbed, and it felt fantastic. The views were spectacular, the walk was fantastic and the glaciers and barren volcanic ash were like nothing I had seen before.

I was breathing heavily in the thin, freezing cold atmosphere – but grateful that God had allowed me to fulfil that childhood dream. I adore Psalm 121. It had given some comfort after our previous abortive attempt, and I deliberately recalled its first few verses:

*I lift up my eyes to the hills
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

My heart said, 'Yes Lord you are my strength, my help, the creator of this fantastic place'. My phone kicked into life and I eventually got through to Janine, my wife, and shared that joy.



As well as working as a consultant surgeon, **Peter Willson** is a leader of Molesey Community Church and a trustee at South Hill Church, Hemel Hempstead. He is a speaker, a former contributor to Scripture Union's *Daily Notes*, and a medical educator for Links in South Africa and The Tropical Health and Education Trust in Uganda.

Waves of mercy

After the tsunami wreaked havoc across Asia, churches and ministries from the Pioneer network were among those offering help. Karen Dey of the Paalam Project reports on how they assisted many of the victims

We saw mass devastation. We also saw the great needs of families. That summed up our findings when Jenny Sinnadurai and I visited a 'tsunami camp' at Kaddaik Kaadu near Palai in January.

Moved by our experience, we began working alongside the TRO (Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation) to supply more than 400 families with clothing, bicycles and suitcases to keep their belongings in.

Badly damaged

We have also been assisting the school at the camp, which had been badly damaged by the disaster. All of the equipment and furniture had been washed out to sea.

We have been able to provide the schoolchildren with books, pens, pencils and other equipment, sports kit and much needed furniture.

In March a team from Rainbow Churches came with us to visit the camps. Apart from providing essential supplies to the school, we were also able to spend time with the children – teaching them songs and chatting to them.

About 70 children affected by the tsunami – who are now attending a school near the Paalam Children's Home, in Kopay, Jaffna – were presented with shoes and socks from the Paalam Project.

Paalam is a charity established by Jenny in Sri Lanka. Jenny has planted many churches – mostly among Sri Lankan people in France, Switzerland, Canada and Sri Lanka.

Mission churches

These are the mission churches of the Rainbow Church in North London, led by Adrian and Pauline Hawkes – and they are also associate churches of the Pioneer network. The Paalam Project works closely with Links International and JAE (Justice, Arts & Education).

Paalam assisted another camp at Sakkoddai Alvai, supplying more than 20 families with bicycles.

Most of the families at the camps were fisher people who lost their boats and so lost their livelihood. They are now living off ration cards, which they are finding very difficult.

Providing bicycles to these families gives them an opportunity to go out and find work – or to establish their own small businesses by selling goods from the bicycle.

The project has just purchased land in Wattala, near Colombo, to help three families who were affected by the tsunami. They can now be re-housed with the assistance of Habitat for Humanity.

Generous donations

We would like to thank all those churches and individuals from the Pioneer network who have supported the Paalam Project in all that we are doing in Sri Lanka.

It is thanks to generous donations from the United Kingdom and Switzerland, that the project has been able to help these two tsunami camps in the northeastern region of Sri Lanka.

All the equipment and furniture had been washed out to sea

For more information regarding the Paalam Project and New Living Ministries, you can visit our web page at www.newlivingministries.com or e-mail us at paalam@compuserve.com or paalamsl@yahoo.co.uk.



Most of the families were fisher people who lost their boats



LOVE GIFTS: Pushbikes and clothing were distributed among tsunami survivors at Kaddaik Kaadu

Wonder of the word

Revival fervour has been the hallmark of the charismatic movement in recent years. Ian Stackhouse calls for a retrieval of preaching – to keep us gripped by the gospel rather than by concerns about size and numbers

Recent publications surrounding the issue of postmodernity, and the ensuing relationship between church and culture, make the assertion that in a post-literate age preaching is obsolete.

The communication of truth in postmodernity most definitely requires us to be visual. But there are a number of things to be said in response. First, the sense of crisis for Christian faith that often comes in the wake of postmodern evaluations of the church may not be as serious as some claim.

We agree with Curtis Chang when he says that 'many existing treatments of the postmodern challenge manifest a certain historical tendency, as if this latest epochal challenge represents some threat unprecedented in the annals of Western Christianity' (Engaging Unbelief: A Captivating Strategy From Augustine And Aquinas).

Secondly, as Jacques Ellul reminds us, whatever the culture dictates to us regarding modes of communication has to be tempered by the overwhelming case that Christianity is essentially audio and not visual (The Humiliation Of The Word).

Power plays

Admittedly, this argument in itself does not justify preaching per se. As we shall see, there are other ways the church can commit itself to the notion of orality. Nor does it mean that we must jettison all forms of visual communication.

Ellul's brand of Reformed theology is iconoclastic in the extreme and is shot through with unnecessary anti-thesis. The rejection of the word is tantamount to a death wish, 'the key to the suicide wish and the real truth concerning the radical separation in a person's heart'.

But what Ellul does warn us against is the indiscriminating use of the visual, precisely because it fails so often, unlike the word, to confront. Whether it be the use of Christian television, or the prevalence of image in children's classes, 'by allying itself with images, Christianity gains efficacy, but destroys itself, its foundation, and its content. In reality nothing is left to say – not because the word is false, but because images have emptied it of meaning'.

In the context of postmodern deconstructionism, such a restatement of the commitment to the word seems outrageously outmoded. More surprisingly, it runs counter to the trend among Protestants who, despite the Reformation, seem to have reached an agreement concerning the word's uselessness.

'What eager agreement with the idea,' notes Ellul, 'that language is tyranny, that discourse is nothing but the expression of an undue, illegitimate superiority of the speaker over the person listening.'

This sentiment echoes throughout modern evangelicalism. Pearce's attack on the cult of the preacher speaks for a generation who are suspicious of the power plays behind preaching.

Yet it is the word that is heard that is crucial to the survival of faith. Anything less is entertainment, the mere gathering of a crowd, but not the delivery of truth, and as such represents the humiliation of the Word.

For this reason, argues Eugene Peterson, the Hebrews and the Christians, over and against the Greeks, preserved the word-ness of their faith from the visual stimuli of the nude and drama: 'They knew how easy it was for the ardour of obedient listening to be diluted into amused watching' (Working The Angles: The Shape Of Pastoral Integrity).

We may not want to go that far in distancing ourselves from the new technology. As we have already noted, Ellul is guilty of so demonising the culture that he himself could be accused of paranoia.

However, Ellul's theological vision, in which the word has been progressively humiliated, is invoked here to remind us that if the word, and preaching in particular, is to be retrieved for the church, it will require a re-education of the church regarding its historical place and biblical efficacy, over against the downplaying of language which is so much a feature of modern evangelism and its preference for the visual.

Quasi-Magical

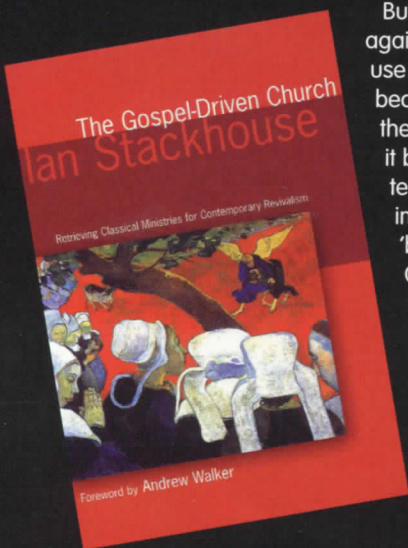
Of course the church needs to avail itself of every available means of communication as it seeks to contextualise the faith in today's world. As Jolyon Mitchell warns us, 'Even if preaching is sui generis it cannot afford to ignore an audio-visual context' (Preaching In An Audio-Visual Culture).

Nevertheless, 'to abandon now the pulpit's unfashionable and demanding mode of speech might be to stumble not over the cultural offence of an outdated medium but over the scandal of the gospel itself, of the crucified and buried Word' (Lewis, Between Cross And Resurrection).

Preaching is not just a medium for the gospel but is, in its very form and folly, an illustration of the gospel itself – a God who reveals himself and triumphs in the weakness of a crucified Messiah.

What we are proposing in this article, as a response to the present malaise in charismatic renewal, requires, admittedly,

The rejection of the word is tantamount to a death wish



a high view of preaching – further than many are prepared to go in their appreciation of this ministry.

Those who advocate it open themselves up to the quasi-magical charge that has often been levelled at the reformation view on preaching – a transference of power from the high altar to the pulpit.

In preaching the Word of God, however, the Spirit does not transfigure our words to the status of canon, nor can we claim for them an immediacy with the divine.

Rather, 'God adopts our words,' claims Hansen. 'He condescends, entering the congregation through the foolishness of our words, as we testify to Christ, expositing the scriptures, speaking the words which we must believe God provides, all the while knowing how profoundly flawed our best sermons are' (Preaching Cats And Dogs).

This is a necessary insight, introducing a note of modesty into the preacher's claims. But it also seems to make sense of the nature of sacrament, whereby through the event of preaching the receptive listener 'hears the words of God by not only attending to the preacher's claims and admonitions but also asking how in the mystery of providence these words may be the word of God for her' (Renewing Biblical Interpretation, Scripture And Hermeneutics).

That charismatics fail to exploit this understanding of preaching as encounter is surprising, for it comes out of the pietistic tradition – the notion that through the aesthetic sense the affective and the numinous element in religion might unite.

This makes the preacher not just the interpreter of scripture – correctly exegeting scripture is only the foundation of preaching, as charismatics have been keen to point out to evangelicals.

Instead, it makes the preacher the one who enables, in the actual event of preaching, the encounter to take place. The possibilities of this in a charismatic setting ought to be manifold, but apart from one or two exceptions, hardly any time has been given to reflect on this.

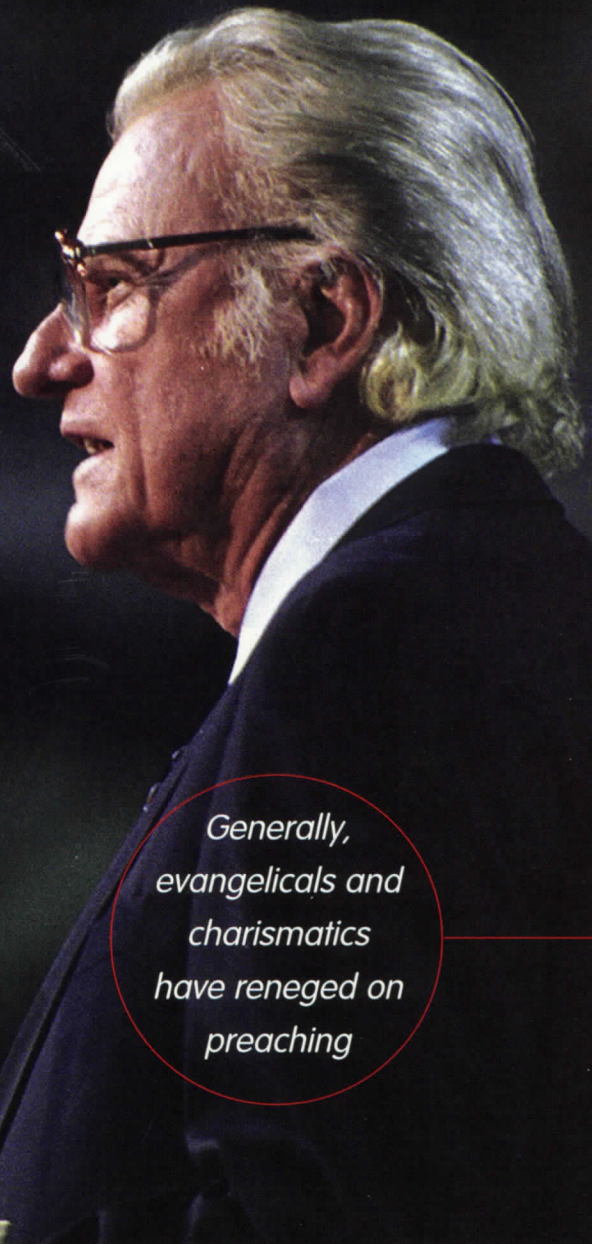
R T Kendall makes a helpful conjunction between the charismatic utterance of tongues in Acts 2:4 and the charismatic utterance of preaching in Acts 2:14. In an attempt to marry the Spirit and the Word, Kendall makes the point that 'what one hundred and twenty could do as the Spirit enabled them to utter – words in other languages – is what lay behind Peter preaching in his own language on the Day of Pentecost' (The Word And The Spirit).

Church's mission

Generally, however, evangelicals and charismatics have reneged on preaching. One of the reasons for this is the loss of what we are calling the sacramental dimension.

Because encounter can only be understood as an immediate phenomenon (which is why the medium of music is so adaptable to this notion), the potentiality of traditional means, such as preaching, are overlooked.

Preaching is perceived as a mode of ministry connected with an overall philosophy of ministry that is obsolete. Preaching the gospel, however, ought to be at the vanguard of the church's mission – the means by which the church is evangelised by its own gospel.



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PRINCE OF PREACHING: Billy Graham has led the way for years by communicating the Gospel in layman's terms (Photo: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association)

Ian Stackhouse is Pastoral Leader of Guildford Baptist Church. His article is taken, with permission, from his new book *The Gospel-Driven Church*, published by Paternoster Press (www.authenticmedia.co.uk/paternoster).

River crossing

Can you make a smooth leadership change amid fast-flowing currents? River Church managed to do it – and have seen positive results

River Church is a multi-congregational church in the Berkshire/South Buckinghamshire area. First emerging as a fellowship of mostly young people in the mid 1970s, the church has been a part of the Pioneer network pretty much as long as there has been a network to belong to – though there have been significant changes along the way.

For around 14 years of that history the church has been led through those many changes by Alistair Bullen – who took the key leadership on at a time of quite considerable turbulence for the church.

Despite also directing his own, growing design agency throughout this period, Alistair headed up an evolving leadership team and saw the church grow in both size and areas of fruitful life.

Drop-in café

Locally, new congregations were planted and congregational leadership teams established. The church grew to around 350. Community involvement was taken to a new level, first with the establishment of a house for single young men at risk of homelessness.

Hand in hand with this was the launch of a new charitable body, which has subsequently established a drop-in café and support work for young parents and teenagers in Maidenhead.

Tribe Enterprises – a nationally influential company specialising in skate-park solutions – was launched out of the church youth work. Internationally, significant mission involvement grew – importantly through the development of links with Bishop Michael Kolisang's church network and ministry in Lesotho, but also through the release of resource and people into China, Cambodia and Nepal.

In these projects, Alistair has been a central figure – initiating, mentoring and encouraging. So, when around six-and-a-half years ago, he put it to the team that he believed he should be working towards passing the key leadership on, this was not a strategy born out of a sense of defeat or desperation.

However, all on the leadership agreed that this was the way forward and that the church had grown as far as it could with the existing structure. A time scale of about five years was set for transition to take place.

Potential attack

Obviously much took place in those years to work towards this goal. By the early summer of 2003 it was time to decide who everyone agreed should take on Alistair's role as team and church leader.

At this point the leadership team once more drew on the experience and gifting of Pioneer Team member Steve Clifford, who had in fact been closely involved throughout the process.

The team recognised that this external point of reference was vital in the mix, and also

recognised Steve's anointing in team situations. It should also be noted that the team were aware that transition of leadership was a point of potential attack and conflict, with several notable situations known to them where things had not gone smoothly.

As part of the process, Steve spoke at length with each team member in person. At the end of this set of conversations one name had unanimously been put forward – that fairly new arrival on the team, Chris Forster – perhaps known to many from groundbreaking work with Challenge 2000.

Chris, Judith and family had been with River for about seven years and obviously brought much leadership experience – and different experience to that of much of the team. Chris' own reaction was one of feeling humbled by the unanimous endorsement – but he recognised that this was something God had also placed upon his own heart.

A process was initiated, putting this strong proposal forward to the church as a whole, inviting feedback and requesting prayer. Soon it became apparent that this move resonated in people's hearts. Both those who had already experienced Chris' leadership at a congregational level, and those from other areas, recognised that God had spoken.

Student congregation

At the end of 2003, in a context of honouring all that had gone before, and specifically Alistair's role, Chris was commissioned, along with his team, to lead River Church forward.

The months since then have proved the wisdom of these decisions, in terms of timing and personnel. At a recent review meeting one congregational leader said, 'It's great. This still feels like River – but it also feels different and fresh'.

Numerically the church has grown by around 150. Existing projects have continued, but it has not been 'business as usual'. A new student congregation has started in Englefield Green, linked to Royal Holloway College. New structures for growth have been initiated. All in all there is a general atmosphere of faith and anticipation for what lies ahead.

Alistair and family continue to be active, participating members of River, with Al being regularly invited into leadership gatherings for consultation and perspectives.

The foundations he has laid have been consistently honoured, and he in turn has consistently honoured

the new leadership in both public and private. A baton has been successfully passed and is being run with.

This was not a strategy born out of a sense of defeat or desperation



Chris (left) and Alistair (right) – brothers in arms.