

A MAINSTREAM RETROSPECTIVE from Paul Beasley-Murray, co-founder of Mainstream, for fifteen years a member of the Mainstream Executive (1978 - 1993) and the first editor of the Mainstream Newsletter (issues 1-9).

Mainstream Magazine 63 (September 1998) 10-12

I WAS THERE AT THE CONCEPTION

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

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

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

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

Mainstream actually was born on Tuesday 1st May 1998. On that day, Gunter Wieske, a good friend of mine from the German Baptist Union, flew into Heathrow to address an invited audience private room in the House of Commons. His theme was "Evangelism - a national priority". In my letter of invitation to Gunter I wrote: "*We do not expect you to have all the answers for us, but nonetheless we are very much hoping that what you will have to say will stimulate us to think in terms of bolder programmes of mission and church planting*". From the word 'go' Mainstream had a passion for evangelism. That launch was an incredibly exciting occasion - and all

the more as the division bells kept on sounding!

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

No doubt many of the memories which will be shared in this "retrospective" will focus on conferences and other public events. For me the highlight of my Mainstream involvement was turning up to our 24 hour executive meetings at Gorsley. In the early days, although a member of the Manchester Baptist fraternal, I felt very much on my own in Altrincham, with the result that the meetings of the Mainstream Executive became great opportunities for fellowship. But it was more than fellowship we shared. It was a place for learning and for growth. In those early days along with Ray Brown and Barrie White the members of our executive included people such as David Coffey, Peter Grange, Jack Ramsbottom, as also, of course, Douglas McBain. I am indeed grateful to God for the tremendous encouragement the members of the Mainstream executive contributed to my life and ministry..

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

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