

instance, the political and electoral processes, I suspect many of us will view this volume more as food for thought than as the prophetic indictment it clearly addresses to its American audience. But perhaps it will serve to warn us in advance of the perils attendant on the church growth for which we often pray. From this side of the 'pond' I cannot help but wonder if the easy relationship between American evangelicalism, the 'moral majority', and those power structures which are unhealthily and conservatively allied to big business and the exploitation of the poor is not at least as obnoxious to God as the liberalising of some areas of personal morality. Jesus' harshest words are addressed not to individual sinners but to representatives of a system that kept people in bondage. Dare we pray and work towards the growth of churches in Britain that will express his passion for such a radical manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Ronald Sider, I think, would essentially agree, but I am not sure that this book will be remembered for the best things it says, in particular Sider's concern that evangelicals need to rediscover what it means to 'be church' especially through being accountable to each other and watching over one another in small groups.

I turned to 'Treasure in Clay Jars' fearing it would be yet another parade of allegedly successful congregations having little or nothing in common with the British scene. The sub-title, 'Patterns in Missional Faithfulness', though unfamiliar in its wording, suggested a more sensitive and holistic approach and so it proved to be.

It offers sketches of eight churches and one cluster of churches that have embraced the concept of being mission-oriented. They cover an extraordinary spectrum of churchmanship and social context, from the downtown 'Holy Ghost Full Gospel Baptist Church of Detroit' to the glorious landscape on the doorstep of West Yellowstone Presbyterian Church; from Bellevue, Washington (Bill Gates' back yard) to the ethnic kaleidoscope of the Roman Catholic 'Transfiguration' parish in Brooklyn. The book goes on to analyse what unites these otherwise so disparate churches — elements such as discernment of missional vocation, biblical discipleship, risk taking, demonstrating God's intent for the world, the public witness of worship, dependence on the Holy Spirit, pointing to the reign of God, and missional authority, which is defined as church leadership committed to mission and able to echo Paul's words 'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ'.

To my surprise I found myself not only stirred and envisioned, but also enormously encouraged to see that in all sorts of ways God's people are really learning the very thing that Ronald Sider is calling for — what it means to 'be church'. You may feel that you would not necessarily want to be a part of any of these churches — or perhaps you will want to join them all! But that is not the point. What matters is that each has developed a unique response to the question 'What is God's specific missional vocation for this community and its members?'

For Holy Ghost Full Gospel Church that meant the church building moving to a new area, and most of its members moving with it. In a neighbourhood where 'despair had become the normal way of life', their vision was quite simply to 'love everybody'. If somebody crosses your path, love everybody; if someone stumbles half-drunk into your church service, love everybody; if violence is done to you by officials or non-officials, love everybody!

For the 'Transfiguration' parish in Brooklyn it meant constantly meditating in the Eucharist on a God who would leave behind his glory to become a peasant in a land of poverty, till they longed likewise to be 'present with Christ in the Eucharist and present with the poorest of the poor'.

For First Presbyterian Church in affluent Bellevue it began with a fervent call to prayer 'to hear the Lord's leading so we do not miss the thrilling adventure that stands before us' and has resulted in regular mission trips to Central America and Russia, and partnership with an African-American church in Seattle.

For Spring Garden Church in Toronto a local dispute between teachers and their employers resulted in a strike, and the church became a 'strike day school', making headlines in the press and featuring on nationwide television news. In this church the bible is expounded as a 'risky, provocative mandate'.

The members of Boulder Mennonite Church, confronted by serious student riots in their neighbourhood, left the safety of their four walls to walk among the police and the rioters to speak and to establish peace.

The IMPACT Cluster, seven churches in New Jersey, (IMPACT means Intentional Mission Process for Church Transformation), asked the question: 'How much time does it take to be the Church?' Listening to God and to one another became a priority of church life and pastoral care. They sought to live out Bonhoeffer's observation: 'we listen with the ears of God so that we may speak the word of God'.

Eastbrook Church in Milwaukee, an extraordinary non-denominational congregation including Catholics and Protestants all committed to local and international mission, runs neighbourhood picnics, English classes for immigrants, drug rehabilitation meetings, a multi-cultural network of Bible Study and care groups, has a worshipping community of over 1100 adults in which music, drama and dance play a full part — and when visited by the authors of the book wondered why anyone should take notice of them because they felt they were not yet a successful church!

'Treasure in Clay Jars' is not then a prescriptive formula for church growth, but an invitation to see what God is doing in a wide variety of churches, and to discover in your own faith community a unique expression of the unsearchable riches of Christ. Ronald Sider's warnings certainly need to be heeded; but this book inspires hope. In fact it really lives up to its title. It holds treasure — I urge you to discover it.

**Steve Weatherly-Barton**

### **Radical Christian with John Vincent at Sarum College 7-9th October 2005.**

What was the original lifestyle & mission of Jesus? Why did what he practised & taught represent such a challenge to his contemporaries? Why was his 'Kingdom of God' such a threat to people in power? This short weekend course at Sarum College in Salisbury is open to all and has residential and non-residential places.

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### **Prosperity with a purpose: Christians and the ethics of affluence CTBI Reader published by them 2005 ISBN 0 85169 310 5 £3.99 & Prosperity with a purpose: exploring the ethics of affluence. Essays edited by CTBI, and published by them in 2005**

**ISBN 0 851693091 £11.99**

These companion volumes are rather different in approach and style. The longer book of essays was part of the information that fed the thinking of the CBTI Churches' Representatives' Meeting. This discussion led to the writing of the shorter 'reader' that is the first collective 'social conscience' statement by the churches on wealth. It is designed for church discussion groups, which partly accounts for the more systematic approach that the shorter book takes. With its highlighted summary statements and clearly laid out sections covering the range of issues it leads through the major dilemmas of how to come to a substantiated and ethically based view of wealth and its creation. Although written in terms of general principles I suspect that not all can be translated directly into the contexts of other continents, so it is essentially, although not explicitly, a guide for the economy of the UK.

Given the subtitle of the longer book of essays, I had expected more in-depth exploration from a theological/ethical perspective, but although some of the contributors are theologically trained, it is more of an economic and structural critique, containing much useful information about the current situation, but less in depth analysis of the fundamental truths. Concrete suggestions are made for changes in government policy on global issues from Ian Linden, UK policy from Niall Cooper and environmental policy from Jennifer Potter, but little that challenges our own personal behaviour — perhaps because this is harder to stomach than statements about what 'they' in government should do. Yet if we are talking much of the time about the personalised effect of poverty on poorer people surely there is a reciprocal need to address the personal element of richer people's behaviour. Is there not an ethical dimension to treating both sets of people as individually as well as collectively responsible? There is also little to challenge Christians in their collective behaviour as churches: where is the call to look at the employment conditions of our cleaners, caretakers, church secretaries? the level of insulation of our buildings? our sourcing of tea, coffee for our committees? our lack of