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EDITORIAL

IT SEEMS highly probable that during 1965 and afterwards we shall be taking a good look at ourselves. The exercise is long overdue. We certainly need to take a 'long, cool look' and enquire, where are we going, what is our mission today and how best can we fulfil our purpose. The structure of the denomination is at three levels, the local church, the association and the Baptist Union. Each has its own history and tradition but all are engaged in a common purpose to extend the Kingdom of God through the Baptist communion. There is diversity of outlook, theological and otherwise, yet we sit happily together in the local church, the association and the Union. This is as it should be because we are Christians and Baptists. Our unity is more real than some would suppose.

There is, however, a holy discontent abroad expressed in many ways and not the least a concern to arrest our declining numbers. We discern a strong desire to focus our forces and our resources to ensure their maximum use for the increase of the church and the extension of the Kingdom. The claims of the homeland as a mission-field become more insistent. Geoffrey Haden's article in this issue on the LBA project for 'Inner London' is pertinent to the need not only of London but also of many other places. It reveals possibilities when Baptists work together rather than in isolation.

The debate which will engage the denomination this year and afterwards will arise from the Report of the Commission on the Associations. This carefully prepared and well documented Report deserves serious study by ministers, deacons and church members. The report looks at the denomination, its direction and the relationship between local church, association and the Union. It is controversial and in some ways revolutionary in its proposals. But if it engenders lively discussion, stimulates deeper interest in the life and work of the denomination, and if, in the final result, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it directs us into positive ways of advance, then its authors will not have laboured in vain. One thing is certain, its destination is not likely to be a pigeonhole.

'ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES'

ONE IS SO ACCUSTOMED to the conventional – often trite and irrelevant – questions asked about the Bible that one can be surprised by a straightforward one. I recall being asked once why preachers bothered with texts (possibly sometimes a well-founded point!). Why not, the questioner asked, get on with what you have to say? Why must you always hang it on a text?

The answer should be clear and unequivocal, but the fact that it could be seriously asked suggests that the connection is not always clear. Perhaps, with some complacency, I felt relieved that the questioner was not of my own congregation!

Our reply would surely be that our use of the Scripture passage as a starting point is an assurance to ourselves and our hearers that the

message we bring is not merely our own but is 'according to the Scriptures' and that it is our belief that the Bible bears witness to the continuing redemptive purpose of God which is our charter as messengers of His grace. We find there a pattern of Divine activity which is revealed at its clearest and most complete in Jesus Christ, Who for us is the centre of this activity. There is a long process of preparation before God's purpose reaches its climax in Him and through Him. It is this pattern of redemption which establishes for us the real unity of the Bible.

But we cannot merely study this objectively, as if it were a drama, especially a drama of long ago, wrought out with ourselves as spectators. It is not in contemplation of it but in the reception of it in faith that we find the truth of the Scriptures so that their 'inspiration' becomes a reality. We recall our Lord's own words to the Pharisees, 'Ye search the Scriptures because ye think that in them ye have eternal life, but ye will not come to Me that ye may have life'.

In the Gospels we see how Jesus regarded His ministry in the light of the Scripture. On occasions He cited particular passages; strictures of the prophets upon their own time are seen by Him as fulfilled afresh (cf also Mark xii, 10) upon those who were rejecting His message; again, words which expressed an ancient prophet's sense of Divine vocation and Divine help are applied by Him to His own mission (Luke iv, 18). But more important than the use of particular passages is the sense of fulfilment of the Divine activity of redemption in His own Person, His life of service, His Passion and Resurrection. In the story of the meeting with two disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke xxiv, 26f) and in the subsequent story of the appearance to the assembled disciples (Luke xxiv, 45ff) the interpretation of the Scriptures in relation to His mission is so described as to suggest that the fulfilment of Scripture is not a matter of finding precise parallels with particular passages so much as a deeper understanding of the whole tenor and pattern of the Divine purpose (verse 45). This is confirmed by the sovereign freedom with which our Lord deals with certain aspects of the Old Testament, and seeks to correct too rigid applications of Scripture and to emphasise the inward spirit in which the Divine purpose is most truly fulfilled. To many it seemed obvious that His words were often a denial, even a destruction of Scripture and of things precious to Judaism: to Him they were the expression of the true meaning of Scripture.

In respect of His own mission, Jesus seemed to appeal to concepts from different sources in the Old Testament and to give them a new significance. The result was no mere amalgam of prophecies literally fulfilled but a new and unique concept of mission, and one which was a full expression of God's purpose as God had been revealing it in the past. It seems, for instance, that a precise fulfilment of the concept of Messiahship fell short of Jesus' thought of the nature of His own mission. According to the Synoptic narrative He seems to have avoided direct reference to Messiahship, for immediately Peter

makes his confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus at once gives an interpretation of His mission which is much to Peter's distaste. It is clearly linked with Isaiah liii, which is not a 'Messianic' passage, but to Him it expressed the pattern of Divine action. His accord with the Scripture was something which gave difficulty, even offence, not only to opponents but even to friends, to a John the Baptist as well as the disciples. In His fulfilment something new emerged; this was no rigid parallel of prophecy and event, but the burgeoning of the purpose and spirit implicit in the Old Testament.

Incidentally, is it not a mistake to think that the validity of a prophecy is necessarily bound up with its literal fulfilment? The prophet was the man who by the Spirit sought to interpret the will of God and apply it to the situation with which he was faced. Of course his eyes were upon the future because the judgment of God for blessing or for condemnation lay in the future and because he was concerned with the ultimate victory of God's righteousness. But there was always the conditional element in prophecy. If the prophet holds out a vision of a happier future, though it will always be a work of Grace, it will be conditional upon repentance and return to God: else would his hearer be complacent with the idea that all will come out right anyway. Similarly an oracle of condemnation will contain the implication 'unless ye repent'. It will not be an unconditioned announcement of an event to come so much as a declaration of God's will and command. In this instance it may surely be said that the prophet would be the first to rejoice if his prophecy were not fulfilled. Then non-fulfilment would be a triumph of redeeming grace: it would be the true fulfilment.

As with His own vocation, so in other matters we find the same freedom in Jesus' idea of fulfilment. In His attitude to the Temple, to the Sabbath or to the Laws of Cleanness, a literal and formal interpretation led to the accusation that He was abrogating the Law; but for Him, as He unfolded the real meaning of the Law, His coming and His word was 'not to destroy but to fulfil'.

In the early Christian preaching we find a like emphasis upon the general pattern of revelation (Acts ii, 30f, iii, 13ff). Having received Jesus as God's Son, the fulfilment of His purpose, they naturally felt that in Him they had the key to the understanding of the Scripture. He had told them that there was much that they would not understand, of words and deeds, until they saw them again in the light of His risen glory. In the same way the ancient revelation shone with a new light when they beheld it through the life and person of the Master. Even the Cross itself – so hard to accept in the event and, as opponents would be quick to remind them, by the Law a manifestation of the Divine curse (Deuteronomy xxi, 23) – became an essential part of their Lord's fulfilling of the Divine purpose.

But for the Christian the matter did not end there. In the light of his faith in Christ he could look back and understand the revelation of God's way better; but, more than this, the incarnate ministry of the

Lord became a norm for Christian life and fellowship, so that ultimately the concept of accord with the Scripture came to have a much fuller significance. In the strict sense, it was some generations before the story of the ministry and its consequence in the development of the Church became 'Scripture'. Yet the living traditions of the Lord, mediated through the Apostles, were from the first the dominating influence in the Christian mission.

Already in the light of Christian faith the Jewish Bible had become a Christian book, just as the Church had become the true Israel. But the story of Preparation was not sufficient: the story of Fulfilment had to grow alongside. In this formative period the most vital aspect is the close connection between the tradition, both in oral and later written form, and the actual evangelical mission of the Church. Of the Epistles this must obviously be true, for their writers are concerned with the well-being and spiritual efficiency of the growing Church. In the growth of the Gospels, the process of selection from a much greater content of traditions – and to some degree the forms which the material took – were influenced by the practical needs of the Christian community as it sought to proclaim Christ as Lord and Saviour, not only by its message but equally by its own life. One can hardly lay too much emphasis on this connection between the living message and the written word. Already it is manifest in the Old Testament. The prophetic books, though freely edited, have their basis in the utterances of the prophets as they interpret the will of God and call the nation to faith and penitence. The association is still more evident in the New Testament. From Papias we have the tradition of the close kinship between Mark, the earliest evangelist, and Peter, upon whose preaching Mark's Gospel is said to be dependent. So often in reading Paul's words we can imagine him pacing the floor and delivering his soul to an unseen audience behind his amanuensis. But the 'Salvation' motif which must have largely influenced the survival of traditions is seen most clearly in the closing words of John xx, 'many other signs did Jesus . . . but these are written that ye may believe . . . and that believing ye may have life.'

To stress this one motive alone in the growth of the Gospels would, of course, be to simplify things unduly: clearly other motives operated – the guidance of Christian conduct and the development of Christian character, the direction of the life and work of the fellowship in its many problems – but these and other things are essentially subservient to the supreme task of the Church, to proclaim the Divine redemption mediated through Jesus Christ the Lord.

In the pursuit of this task the preacher would appeal to the Scripture and to the stories of the Lord which were to become Scripture, and this not chiefly to give information about the Lord but to bring men face to face with Him. What could be more truly described as 'according to the Scriptures' than the sight of the

continuing grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of men and women redeemed? It is generally not difficult to appreciate the 'homiletic' value of stories, parables or sayings recorded in the Gospels. They were not used merely as stories of the Lord, interested though men might be in them as such, but as revelations of Divine saving grace which was still operative. One wonders, for example, whether the story of Thomas's scepticism would have survived but for the conclusion 'Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed', a continuing challenge of the Lord. And what of a story like that of the Feeding of the Multitude? There would surely be no suggestion that there would be a literal repetition of this. The manner in which the Gospel of John deals with this story indicates the kind of use to which it was put in the Christian message, how the Lord had come as 'Bread from Heaven' to meet the deepest hunger of men's lives. 'This', they are saying, 'is the Lord we knew, Who gave us life. And this Lord comes to you too with His gift.' So, whether it be rebuke, judgment, promise, encouragement, whatever it be, here is the living word of God. And the richest fulfilment is when there is 'joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth'.

If one message to which we bear witness is 'according to the Scripture', it will have that same note, that the Spirit still takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto us, and so the Lord speaks His word to our time and challenges us to come face to face with Him. We must be concerned always to interpret Scripture so that on the one hand we declare to men the continuous redeeming act of God and on the other hand are helping men to meet this God in Christ.

No Christian surely would dispute this, and yet unhappily this true purpose seems to be obscured by other emphases, sometimes secondary, sometimes even false. Men are inclined to regard themselves as defenders of a Bible which needs no defence of ours, but which can manifest the power which lies behind it. Only recently one heard a clergyman approving the work of the Bible Societies in translating the Bible into many languages, but criticising their wide dispersal of it on the ground that without the guidance of the Church this led to the rise of many cranks and fanatics. He was quickly reminded that even with the teaching of the Church the same results often ensued. We can hedge the Scripture with our own conceptions and traditions as though the test of faith were some specific view of it rather than the receiving of the saving grace which God can bestow through it. Certain views of what Fulfilment means and what is 'according to the Scriptures' have led to the proliferation of sects within Protestantism and to an exclusiveness and censoriousness which deny the very Scripture which is being defended. As if the power of the Holy Spirit to use the Scripture to bring us face to face with God in Christ and the resultant allegiance to His Lordship must be set aside for some other test which men contrive!

If then our message is according to the Scripture, we shall see Fulfilment in terms of changed human life, the triumph of God's eternal gracious purpose, rather than in a programme of events precisely delineated in Scripture: we have seen to what expedients men can resort when, so to speak, the pieces of the puzzle do not fit.

It has sometimes been the habit to classify types of preaching with labels such as 'expository', 'topical', 'evangelical' and the like. But our true message will not endure such easy classification, for it will contain all these elements, and more. It is expository because its roots must be in God's word, especially His word in Christ: it must be topical in the sense that it is concerned with the present situations of men and that God is fulfilling His purpose now. And it must be evangelical because it is a gospel, that God comes to meet men in their needs and looks for their response. And it will be futurist, not with the presumption that one has a diary for all God's future action, but in the firm confidence that His purpose will be consummated - in His time and not in ours.

W. S. DAVIES.

CENTENARY OF THE LONDON BAPTIST ASSOCIATION 1965

THIS WILL BE the centenary of the LBA in its present form. Attempts to form an Association prior to 1865 had proved abortive, but the drive and vision of C. H. Spurgeon, supported by Dr Landells of Regent's Park and Dr Brock of Bloomsbury, set a pattern of co-operation among London Baptists in evangelism by church extension that has held as a constant theme for a century.

A centenary is a birthday that cannot lightly be passed over, and the officers of the Association were eager to mark the occasion in a worthwhile manner. After much discussion it was agreed to attempt something that was described as urgent twenty-five years ago - to seek to rehabilitate the churches of Inner London. For purposes of definition we accepted a circle with a four-mile radius from Charing Cross, within which circle there are fifty-two Baptist churches. At a Special Assembly the Association adopted two great purposes to celebrate the Centenary, to invite teams from other London Baptist churches to work with those in Inner London in a sustained effort for evangelism during the winter of 1965-66, and to raise a fund of £100,000 to support these churches in building improvements, helping to sustain ministers or deaconesses where gaps need to be filled, and to provide full-time trained Christian youth leaders in co-operation with the local authority.

The expansion in the past century has been largely at the expense of these fifty-two churches. They have given ungrudgingly men and money to plant churches in the suburbs. Especially was this true of the period during and immediately following the last war. Indeed, quite apart from members transferred to suburban churches from those buildings destroyed by enemy action, the sum of £100,000 was

'ported', by agreement with the War Damage Commission, to help build new churches on the outskirts. In the past twenty-eight years, twenty-six Baptist churches have been closed in this inner circle. The four main Free Church denominations have lost eighty-seven churches in the same period from this limited area, and this does not take into account the numerous mission halls and branch churches that have gone the same way. Harry Weston of Shoreditch Tabernacle reckons that during his seventeen years' ministry there, thirty churches of all denominations have closed in his neighbourhood.

Some would persuade us, they have tried, that Inner London is depopulating. In fact the population density is greater here than in any other part of London, and probably greater than in any other part of this country. The whole area is being rebuilt, and, significantly, skyscraper flats, 'streets on end', are being intermingled with office blocks. The speed of this transformation has to be seen to be believed, and gives added point to the urgency of our appeal, for unless we act soon some of our buildings will give the sort of impression conveyed by a weed-ridden and neglected garden in a suburb where the neighbours take pride in their gardens! Land is at a premium, and if we need to re-site a church building it must be done now or the opportunity will be gone for half a century more. The slums are being bull-dozed away, and, in their stead, bright, clean, modern flats upend themselves. The upheaval in the lives of families rooted in the old areas can be imagined. We are faced with new housing areas on the old land, and right at the heart of the city.

Our churches all report disappointments in their attempt to interest the occupants of these new flats. The very shabbiness of some of our buildings acts as a deterrent to people now in bright modern homes. But of course the causes of disappointment lie deeper than that alone. It would be so easy to listen to those who tell us, 'You will never get the people from these new flats to come to church'. There is so much evidence of failure. But a denomination that takes pride in William Carey - seven years' work for one convert - dare not pull out while the people are there, and they are there in millions.

Charles Johnson and I have spent many long evenings during the last eighteen months visiting one by one Deacons Boards of the fifty-two churches. It has been a most rewarding, if exhausting, exercise, not only for the fellowship with men and women often showing amazing courage and faith in face of adverse circumstances, but also in the pattern of opportunity that emerges. Over a very wide front there are opportunities for the church that could be seized forthwith if we had the money and the personnel. Here are some examples:

L. R. Barnard at St John's Wood found himself with a small though devoted congregation, and with little hope of expansion in this expensive neighbourhood. He was also confronted with the needs of overseas students. They are exploited shamelessly in this city. He began to help, adjusted the buildings so as to offer some

residential accommodation, and started a language school. The work grew rapidly, and there was need to appoint an Assistant Minister, John Bloice Smith. What these two and the church now long to do is to rebuild the whole of the premises so as to serve this special need more effectively. The British Council is very eager that we should attempt this and would offer a substantial grant, but we need at least £35,000 for our part as it appears at this moment. Denmark Place, Camberwell, has a similar idea of using a plot of land adjoining the church for a student and nurses hostel. Again, a grant would be available, but the sum we should need to find for our share is beyond us at the moment.

Bloomsbury has remodelled its auditorium, at a cost of £40,000, but Howard Williams is eating his heart out to get on with what, to him, is even more important – the alteration of the rest of the premises, so that the church can offer a Christian centre for students by day and night. The cost will be another £40,000. There can be no doubt that Bloomsbury has a unique opportunity to influence the leaders of the coming generations.

We have several areas in Inner London where West Indians predominate. A young West Indian minister, trained at Manchester College, Hubert Myrie, has just begun his work as Assistant Minister at Willesden Green and Kenyon, Brixton. He will be a brother among us in the full Ministerial sense of the word, but his special charge will be to West Indians in Inner London. The LBA felt the challenge of this so strongly that Mr Myrie has been appointed before ever the fund is launched. We shall need to find £600 per annum in addition to the grant generously promised by the Grants Executive of the Home Work Fund.

The Metropolitan Tabernacle, jointly with ten other Baptist churches in Southwark, began a shared ministry approach to the challenge of Southwark last October. Dennis Pascoe is known officially as Senior Minister, the leader of the group. Serving the eleven churches are two other men of experience, four fresh from college, four lay pastors, a deaconess and a full-time youth leader. 'Shared Ministry' is to be read in its widest sense. This is no gimmick to get a team of ministers to run the show. It is to be a ministry of the whole church. Deacons, leaders, members, all must be mobilised to get alongside the multitudes of Southwark. The pulpit must arm the pew, for it is the man in the pew who occupies the front line for God in London today. These churches know how hard it is to break through to the people in the flats: now they will experiment together. This fresh approach offers tremendous scope, and I ask your prayers for these adventurous people. We must take advantage of local authority support offered for full-time youth leaders. We need nine of these in Inner London churches, and the cost of each will be about £250 per annum.

In one or two instances churches ought to close their present buildings and join with another Baptist church. We found a greater

willingness to listen to this unpalatable truth than we had dared to hope. And some have accepted the advice with great courage. Yet in the main the churches we have are seen to be strategically placed in relation to the population.

Finally, how does one ask the churches for so large a sum? All we shall ask is that every member be given the opportunity to hear the story, and then we believe the response is inevitable. We shall not set targets, for this must be, in the deepest sense, an act of faith. You will have grasped that already, in 1964, the LBA is spending money for one clamant need and another, which is the expression of faith on the part of the LBA Council. We are living in a missionary situation, and rely on the ministers to see the vision and interpret to their folk.

GEOFFREY W. HADEN.

1980: MUST THEY INCLUDE US OUT?

THE FIRST TWO CLAUSES of a resolution passed at the First British Faith and Order Conference in Nottingham, September, 1964, read: 'United in our urgent desire for One Church Renewed for Mission, this Conference invites the member Churches of the British Council of Churches, in appropriate groupings, such as nations, to covenant together to work and pray for the inauguration of union by a date agreed amongst them.' And: 'We dare to hope that this date should not be later than Easter Day, 1980. We believe that we should offer obedience to God in a commitment as decisive as this.' Out of almost five hundred delegates, only five voted against the first clause and only fifty-three against the second.

I

Many Baptists are actively engaged in the work of the British Council of Churches, but, as a denomination, we tend to be out on a limb so far as Reunion schemes are concerned. The question which Nottingham thrusts upon us is: Does God will us to remain so?

The suspicion exists – or so I am told – that some people are trying to use the Faith and Order department of the BCC to impose their own brand of churchmanship upon all the member Churches. Anyone who could believe that after being at Nottingham would have to be suffering from a degree of cynicism which is pathological. Every conceivable question concerning Faith and Order was discussed, but the one thing which was never questionable was the sincerity of the participants. Quakers, Salvationists, Free Churchmen, Anglicans of every hue, Romans, Orthodox – they were motivated only by the belief that unity is Christ's will for His Church and the conviction that we must learn from each other if we are ever to arrive at it.

There are many Baptists – again, so I am told – who believe that all this discussion about how the tradition of the Gospel is related to our varying traditions concerning liturgy, ministry, etc, diverts Christians from their proper task, namely evangelism. Well, nobody

was allowed to forget evangelism at Nottingham: the preparatory Conference booklet, by David Paton, and the keynote speech, by Oliver Tomkins, were both entitled *One Church Renewed for Mission*. But, as Paul Verghese, a priest of the Orthodox Syrian Church in India and on the staff of the WCC, reminded us in his incomparable Bible studies, what the Church has to *be* comes before what it has to *do*. It has to be One, because that is what the Lord prayed that it should be. We rushed our meals and lost our sleep preparing Reports and framing Resolutions at Nottingham, not because we don't care about conversions, but because we long to see the Church *being* the Church that the world may believe.

II

Baptists, like everybody else, will have to take the impact of the Ecumenical Movement at their most sensitive point, if they take it at all. The Report of the *Membership* section (the chairman of which was a distinguished Baptist) included amongst problems to be solved: 'the practice of some Baptists of baptising members of other denominations joining a Baptist Church'. Once you start thinking about that, it is disturbing. We take it amiss if anyone says that our Holy Communion is no Communion. They have no right to. Nottingham makes you wonder whether we have any more right to say that their Baptism is no Baptism. Is what many of us do, namely inviting to the Lord's Table those whose Baptism at the same time we deny, theologically defensible? Can you hold the sacraments of the Church apart in that way? And if not, what are we to do? Return to closed Communion? Or revise our assessment of Infant Baptism? We shall have to make up our minds whether reflections of this kind are a temptation to denominational disloyalty and so to be resisted, or an emerging awareness, where it hurts, that the truth of God is not in one tradition alone.

The *Faith* section at Nottingham concerned itself with the question: Should differences, which exist among the member Churches of the BCC, concerning such matters as the use of Creeds and the doctrine of Biblical inspiration, keep them from Unity'. The Conference's answer was 'No'. By a majority vote of over 90 per cent, the resolution was passed that 'while we affirm standards of belief to be an essential element in the life of the Church, our remaining differences concerning the use of these standards, and concerning Scripture and tradition, though important, are not sufficient to stand as barriers to unity. They do not separate us at the point of the central affirmation of our faith, and they can be better explored within a united Church'. The sort of thing in mind here was, for instance, the differences between Conservative Evangelicals and Radical Christians concerning the interpretation of Scripture. Trusted leaders of both schools of thought participated in the discussions out of which this resolution came. No one attempted to play the differences down. The resolution does not say that they do not matter. But both schools

agreed at Nottingham that since we agree in our fundamental faith in Christ and are united by One Call, One Scripture, One Spirit and One Mission, such differences are peripheral. We must, of course, continue to discuss them but such discussion can, and should, go on, *within* the faith of a united Church.

III

Every delegate would take his own impressions from Nottingham and his own, perhaps small, but cherished, memories. Among the latter for me will always be a snatch of conversation I caught in which an Anglo-Catholic priest was saying how moved he had been by the testimony and prayer at a Salvationist Act of Worship that morning. And the story of how, in one section, the lady chairman had ruled an Archbishop out of order on the subject of the ministry! And the loud exclamation, 'Allelujah!' from an Anglican baronet, sitting with some Salvationists, when a bishop said that he had decided overnight to vote *for*, and not against, the resolution quoted at the beginning of this article. But the overriding impression at Nottingham was that God is telling us to trust one another, as an expression of our trust in Him. Not to fan the old animosities and suspicions, but let them flicker out. Not to keep a record of concessions, always demanding *quid pro quo*. Not to be afraid of our yearning for unity or deem it unrealistic. We must turn our backs on all that and together face the questions which the world is asking us, and meet the demands it makes upon us, in these explosive times.

May I suggest that, amongst British Baptists, three things should be done?

1. Each Association should form a Church Relations committee. It should have an able and enthusiastic chairman who could fulfil in the Association the function which diocesan Ecumenical officers fulfil, that is promoting discussion of Reunion and forging close links with other denominations locally.

2. Each Fraternal should give time in its winter programme to study of the Report on Nottingham, to be published in November.

3. Each minister should ask himself whether he is giving to the work of the British Council of Churches in his own district the prayer, time and talent which he could.

The answer to my title-question is 'No'. They must include us *in*. Not because this is the latest bandwaggon and we had better be on it. But because the wind of change, blowing from Nottingham, is the breath of the Spirit.

W. DONALD HUDSON.

A PLEA FOR PROPHECY

A SHORTAGE OF PROPHETS has long been part of the malaise of our denomination in this country, and it has become fashionable to dismiss John Clifford, Hugh Price Hughes and Silvester Horne along with other outmoded Victoriana. One Manchester layman referred to this gallant trio in a meeting a year or so ago as 'the film stars of

the Victorian era? But where are their modern counterparts? As one looks round the denomination today one can see several theological scholars of distinction, at least one brilliant administrator and some classic upholders of the pastoral office. But what about prophets? The practice of 'debunking' a bygone generation ill befits us today in all our ideological barrenness, especially because so often it is done by those who have no radical thinking to bring to the Free Church situation.

Were the religious prophets really just outstanding personalities, and little more? And is it true, as we have been told, that their modern counterparts are the celebrities of TV and stage who reach an uneasy popularity overnight and are as rapidly consigned to the scrap-heap as soon as their particular gimmick is played out?

Or is there, perhaps, something about the nature of the times we live in which precludes prophecy? Does the present ambivalent age no longer need it? Everyone from Driver upwards (or downwards) assures us that the blacks and whites are gone for ever and that a carefully graded series of greys replaces them. Total abstainers have gone to be with Mrs Grundy. Chastity was seduced some weeks ago by Charity, and sex itself comes in three distinct varieties – sacred (if you're in Chapel), funny (ha! ha!) if you watch 'Palladium', and downright dirty if you read *Lady C*. And to crown all, like Damocles's sword, the Bomb!

Is it surprising that young people are confused by it all? Can one wonder at their frustration when they are taught in church to espouse gentleness and later urged by one and all to jump on the Bandwaggon and collect the prizes? Or when they hear the healing of the demoniac commended and know that in their Sunday School a positive premium is set upon brains? Is it not natural that their uncertainty should find expression in the stridently clamorous, insistent tones of music which demands only that it should be heard? And is it any wonder that art itself should have become formless – and faceless?

It is heartening, amid the chaos and the confusion, to read a plea for prophecy in the secular press, and *The Times Educational Supplement* put us all in its debt a while ago with its New Year leader 'Waiting Time', reminding us of the many parallels and similarities between Britain today and the Britain of the early eighteenth century, to which John Wesley came. The *Guardian* had said much the same sort of thing on the Christmas Eve, as it contemplated the orgy of eating and drinking then getting under way, reviewed the growing commercialisation of the Feast, and recalled the abandonment of Christmas by the early Puritans for that very reason. Should we prepare to do the same? Certain it is that most pendulums have already swung very far – many undoubtedly too far – but whose is the hand that can steady them, and where is the prophetic voice we long to hear? For a prophet there must surely be: a new dynamic channel for the mighty grace and power that lies as yet with the eternal, untapped and unexploited: a new and visible embodiment

of the hopes and efforts and enthusiasms of all lesser men and women: an inspired teacher who will strip off the sealing wax, the brown paper and the string from the parcel in which the theologians have wrapped Jesus, and show Him afresh in all His simplicity and beauty to young people and little children.

Will he arise, this new prophet, from our ministerial number or from our laity? Or will he come from outside our ranks altogether, from Fleet Street, perhaps, or from ICI? It matters little. One thing is sure: many are waiting, spent and very restless for the trumpet voice!

‘And when Asa heard . . . the prophecy of Obed the prophet, he took courage . . . and they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul.’

God give us eyes to see, and ears to hear him when he comes.

DAVID PRINGLE.

THE MINISTER, THE ORGANIST AND THE CHOIR

WHY, OF ALL THE ARTS, has music been given so prominent a place in Christian worship? For two reasons, at least. Firstly because music can awaken the feelings as no other art can. ‘What passion cannot Music raise and quell?’ asks Dryden in his poem *St Cecilia’s Day*. And to the church musician, therefore, is entrusted this powerful ally of the Gospel whereby the highest feelings of devotion – whether of penitence or joy, adoration or humility – may be aroused. And secondly, because music has an expressive function also in worship, i.e. through it the worshipper can express his feelings so vividly. Mendelssohn said of Bach’s music that it turned every room in which it was performed into a church. Hence the high calling of church musicians – no less than that of the preacher who handles the Word of God. And since music is the language of worship, musician and minister are always engaged in a common task.

But this is often forgotten. Samuel Sebastian Wesley, the great cathedral organist who did so much to revive the condition of church music in the early nineteenth century, was notorious for his quarrels with the clergy. They mostly arose from his justifiable demands for much-needed reforms in cathedral music which at that time had sunk to a very low level. One day, as he was leaving Winchester Cathedral after playing for evensong, he was accosted by a fussy minor canon. ‘Dr Wesley,’ said the canon, ‘I think the anthem went very badly today. I also think it was taken too fast.’ The famous organist looked the daring critic up and down in a formidable silence. Then, drawing himself up to his full height, he exploded. ‘Sir, I am at the head of my profession. You, sir, are a nobody. I am amazed at your audacity. Good-day, sir.’

Fortunately not many of our churches have such explosive organists, nor, I trust, such audacious ministers. But the incident is a reminder that here are two fields of responsibility for Christian

worship in which there must be the closest co-operation, if church music is to be, in George Herbert's phrase, 'the way to heaven's doore'. Unfortunately only too often is this co-operation lacking. Sometimes it is the organist's or choirmaster's fault: he may never have been encouraged to see his work as part of the total ministry of the church, so that he forgets that even within his own kingdom he remains primarily a servant of God's people. Sometimes the minister is to blame: he may find himself so involved as preacher and pastor, counsellor and diplomat, administrator and financier, that he steers clear of any entanglement with music. Nevertheless, if the church is to realise the true greatness of worship and offer such worship week by week to the glory of God, there must be the closest collaboration and mutual confidence between minister and organist.

The initiative in promoting this must rest with the minister. Before there can be any satisfactory planning together of the church's worship, the minister must enlist his organist's spirit in his own exalted purpose, and help him to realise that he is a fellow-labourer in the ministry. As J. H. Jowett says in *The Preacher: his life and work*,

'Let the music be redeemed from being a human entertainment, and let it become a divine revelation. Let it never be an end in itself but a means of grace, something to be forgotten in the dawning of something grander. Let it never be regarded as an exhibition of human cleverness but rather as a transmitter of spiritual blessings: never as a terminus, but always as a thoroughfare. And therefore take counsel with your organist. Tell him what you want to do next Sunday. Do not be shy about leading him into the deeper things. Do not keep him in the outer courts: take him into the secret place.'

This means, among other things, that as ministers we must share with our organist much of our thinking about worship. He is, after all, the key layman in the service of the sanctuary, and unless he knows the first principles of Christian worship and the reasons why our liturgy takes the form it does, and the theology behind the pattern of our worship, we cannot expect him to contribute to the service a unity of purpose and thought which is so desirable. As far as possible, also, themes for worship according to the church's year, and sermon topics, should be discussed with him well in advance so that suitable anthems and voluntaries may be selected and rehearsed in good time. And while it must always remain the minister's prerogative to choose the hymns for each service, so that they are relevant to the theme and pattern of worship, it should not be overlooked that the choice of tunes also involves a concern not merely with musical standards but with theology. For when we say that the tune should fit the words, we mean that it should express and emphasise the particular doctrine embodied in any given hymn. By and large, hymn-book editors have shown this awareness in making their

selection of tunes, but the appropriateness of a chosen tune needs to be realised and understood afresh every time it is sung. And here the organist may well need the minister's help and co-operation.

From the point of view, therefore, of theology and of music, the music presented in our services ought to be something of which the minister and organist have a concordant opinion. If the congregation doesn't like it, it should be something which both minister and organist can defend together; the integrity of both of them is at stake. The organist must not be asked to play music which musically is indefensible. The minister must not be expected to defend any anthems or solos which, however brilliant they may be as music, are theologically objectionable or devotionally inappropriate. And never in any discussion of the hymns or tunes or anthems should the one be played off against the other.

The only way to achieve such understanding between minister and organist is for them to meet regularly to discuss not only the music for the forthcoming Sunday services but the long-term music programme and its relation to the whole life of the church. Then, provided agreement is reached on the general policy, there should be no dictation by the minister concerning specific music. Such regular meetings may sound like a council of perfection, and may indeed be difficult to arrange. But, having myself made the opportunity to spend an hour with my organist every Thursday for this purpose, I know how much both of us have benefited from it.

The joke about the devil getting into the church by the choir vestry is an old one. It has only worn thin as choirs themselves have diminished in numbers. But it still remains a fact that in conduct, attitude, spirituality and musicianship the choir will never rise above their choirmaster. He must therefore be more than a capable conductor or organist; he must be an inspiring leader. And this he can never be unless he has the friendship, confidence and moral support of the minister. If he has this, the likelihood is that the choir will be a united and dedicated body.

The minister can contribute directly to a high spiritual atmosphere in the choir. A visit to choir practice from time to time will give him the opportunity not only of expressing appreciation to the members of the choir for their work, but of reminding them that they are, like himself, equally servants of God, and of sharing future plans and hopes. Particularly when any changes in the order of service are being contemplated the minister himself should explain these to the choir, and the reasons for them, that as co-ministers in worship they may be familiar with all the details.

The minister can also set a good example to the congregation. They will be encouraged to share whole-heartedly in hymn singing if he himself sings the hymns with understanding. If, on the other hand, he sits during a hymn having a last look at his sermon notes, or spends the time gazing round the congregation and counting heads, he is indicating by his very attitude how little importance he

attaches to music in the church's worship; and it is no wonder if the congregation comes to think likewise.

One of the most helpful ways of securing co-operation between minister, organist, choir and congregation in the musical life of the church is through a church Music Committee. Such a committee will have first of all a clear understanding of the plan and purpose of music in worship and in the light of that will work as an advisory group with the minister and organist to promote the music activity of the church. It will include persons of sound musical judgment and also several who are not perhaps musicians, but are sensitive to the reactions of the congregation. It will help in the recruiting of new members for the choir, plan ways in which the musical education of the congregation can be promoted, and recommend to the deacons an adequate amount of money to be included each year in the church budget for church music (including the maintenance of the organ, replacement and upkeep of pianos, etc). It does not dictate to the organist in the details of the music programme, but strengthens his hands in his service to the church. Such a committee, which is invariably found in churches in America, has been formed in some churches in this country with great success.

To improve the standards of music in our worship, and to deepen the co-operation between minister and organist along the lines suggested, clearly demands a readiness on the part of both to recognise the authority of each other and to see their own functions in worship as only part of the total sacred ministry of the church. In this, education must play a big part. Every church, therefore, should encourage its organist and choirmaster to attend such courses and conferences as are from time to time arranged by the Baptist Music Society, the Free Church Choir Union, and the Royal School of Church Music. And since from his isolated position at the console, especially if it be directly attached to the organ, he can seldom properly hear his own playing or judge effectively the balance between choir and organ, he should be allowed a Sunday off now and again to sit in the congregation and hear some other competent organist.

Likewise every minister, even though untrained and unskilled in music, should be a constant student of his hymn-book. He should not only be familiar with the whole contents of it, but give time also to the study of the historical background of the hymns, their authors and composers. Fortunately there is no lack of authoritative books on these subjects; and every minister and organist should at least possess a copy of the *Baptist Hymn Book Companion*. It is deplorable that so little is taught in our theological colleges in the field of hymnology and the historical development of music in worship. The days are long since past when music was considered an educational luxury for the few. No longer can the church afford to look upon music as a delightful ornament and worship as a pleasant interlude each Sunday morning and evening. Just as worship is inextricably woven into the warp and woof of living, so music must be seen as

an integral design in the whole pattern of worship. And minister and musician together must combine to discover for themselves and to teach others that true worship which is, in the late Archbishop William Temple's words, 'to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination with the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God'.

ERIC P. SHARPE.

FEED THE MINDS

'WE MUST SHARE with the millions of newly literate people our rich heritage – the knowledge and teachings of the Bible . . .' With these words of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, the Archbishop of York's Campaign to Feed the Minds of the Millions was launched in St James's Palace on 27th October in the presence of the Prime Minister, the Archbishop of Canterbury and leaders of all denominations of the church in this country.

Supported and sustained by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, the United Society for Christian Literature, the British and Foreign Bible Society and the National Bible Society of Scotland, and with the co-operation through the Conference of British Missionary Societies of the major missionary societies, the Feed the Minds Campaign seeks to raise over the next three years a sum of £3,000,000 for all aspects of Christian literature work. It is seeking to present not only to men and women within the churches, but to all people of good will and with a concern for the well-being of the world in commerce, industry and in civic life, a challenge to do for the minds and souls of men what in recent years we have been found ready to do for their bodies – to provide healthy, wholesome and Christian food for thought.

The Campaign is a two-fold one. In the first place, the two Bible Societies, in their respective countries, are seeking to raise their income by a figure of some £500,000 a year in order that they may be able to play their part in the world-wide target of trebling the circulation of the Scriptures, but additionally, the Archbishop of York's Fund for Christian Literature is seeking a further sum of at least a £1,000,000 (and far more than this sum is really needed) to provide adequate resources on which the Christian Literature organisations and, indeed, any other body whose primary function is the written word, can draw to provide so urgently needed supplies of books, magazines, newspapers and pamphlets which must accompany the Bible if the message of the latter is to be clearly understood by those who read it. Additionally again, the Archbishop's Fund is intended to make available grants for the establishment and modernisation of publishing facilities, for the provision of bookshops and mobile means of distribution, and, most urgently, to provide facilities for the training of writers and journalists, particularly of nationals of the younger churches.

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To the Members of the Baptist Ministers' Fraternal

Dear Friends,

'Large streams from little fountains flow,
Tall oaks from little acorns grow.'

— DAVID EVERETT.

At 8.30 am on Wednesday, 22nd February, 1905, a meeting was held which in the opinion of those who attended so early in the morning would have special significance in the future denominational financial life.

The early years of the business enterprise begun before breakfast sixty years ago were carefully tended and its strength husbanded. During the last thirty years the former Sustentation Fund and now the Home Work Fund have benefited by some £100,000 from that work.

The Minutes of that 1905 meeting were brief:

Present: Mr G. White, MP (in the Chair); S. B. Burton; John Haslam; H. Knott; S. Vincent; John Wilson; H. Marnham; B. I. Greenwood and J. H. Shakespeare.

Chairman (1) Resolved that Mr G. White, MP, be elected to the Chairmanship of the Board.

Deputy Chairman (2) Resolved that Mr H. Ernest Wood be elected to the Deputy Chairmanship.

Registration of the Company (3) The Registration of the Company was duly reported.

And so The Baptist Insurance Company Ltd was founded and the fulfilment of the vision continues in our insurance service and in the grants from which £4,000 will benefit Baptist Funds in this our Diamond Jubilee Year.

This work has been possible through the support of all those who insure through us. Are you and your church among those?

Yours sincerely,

C. J. L. COLVIN,
General Manager.

Incorporated also in this second aspect of the Appeal is the raising of the sum of £250,000 which is the British contribution to the Christian Literature Fund associated with the World Council of Churches. The Fund, which is in itself quite a separate but equally urgently needed operation, aims at raising a further £1,000,000 for expenditure on missionary literature projects over the next five years; the British contribution referred to will be one of the first charges on the Archbishop of York's Fund.

These seemingly complicated arrangements, stemming as they do from thinking and planning which has been going on over many months, are not easily explained to ordinary folk, anxious to help but easily confused by the intricacies of missionary strategy! For this reason, although opportunity will always be given to individuals or for churches to give or subscribe in terms of either Bible Society or Literature Society work, much of the appeal will be mounted under the Slogan 'FEED THE MINDS' – and it will be possible for gifts to be made under that heading. Such gifts, and probably they will be a majority, will then be divided between the Bible Society and the Archbishop of York's Fund in agreed proportions of sixty to forty.

The primary purpose of the launching ceremony at St James's Palace was to enlist the help and support of civic leaders throughout the British Isles and to encourage them to mount local campaigns in towns and cities somewhat along the lines of those mounted in connection with World Refugee Year and with the War on Want Campaign. The response to this appeal has already been most encouraging and local committees have already been set up in a large number of places. It is hoped indeed that a very considerable part of the sum required will be donated through commerce and industry, by trusts and foundations, and through such local civic efforts. At the same time, however, it cannot be stressed too much that this is a *Christian* effort – a spiritual challenge – and a logical step for us to take who believe 'that man does not live by bread alone'. We believe that we shall awaken very real concern and interest among men and women who cherish a longing that the world may be a better and more peaceful place and who, we believe also, will not be slow to realise that only in a Word from without men's minds will that peace and contentment come, but only from within the Christian Church can there come the spiritual concern, the prayer and the dedicated giving and sacrifice, that make for lasting success and which call down the blessing of God.

I know that I am addressing this to men who have too many calls on their time, too many appeals, too much that cries out to be done in too little time. I would, however, plead as urgently as I am able that you will give to the Feed the Minds Campaign all the prayer and the effort that you are able. I believe wholeheartedly that this will prove to be one of the greatest single campaigns to which the Christian Church has been called by God to put its hand, and one of the most urgent. Every minute of day and night another hundred people

learn to read, and the speed of this growth of literacy is being constantly accelerated. It is already almost too late for the Church to make an adequate contribution to ensure that they may find that to read which will turn their thoughts towards the ways of God, but it is not yet quite too late. This must be our answer.

You can help in very many ways. By serving, or finding someone who will represent your church, on local committees; by finding a space in your local church programme for a speaker about the campaign; by using the films or filmstrips which commend it; by distributing or placing on a church bookstall literature; above all, by your prayers and by your encouragement to your people to pray. Especially by arranging that at some time within Feed the Minds Week (27th March to 4th April, 1965) the whole project is brought to the forefront of your congregation's interest.

You will by now have received much information and you will certainly receive more, both directly and through the national and religious press, but please use either the Campaign Office, 146 Queen Victoria Street, EC4, or the services of any of the local secretaries of either the Literature or Bible Societies to find out more.

D. R. CHESTERTON.

THE INTERVIEWING OF CANDIDATES FOR BAPTISM AND MEMBERSHIP

WHEN A GROUP of candidates for baptism has been through the appropriate course of instruction their attention turns eagerly to the final preparations for the long-awaited service. But first there must come the interview by visitors appointed by the church and the formal acceptance of their reports by the church meeting.

In some churches the appointment of visitors is most carefully considered; interviews are thorough and meaningful; reports are frank and helpful. But in some instances a more casual approach seems to undermine the solemnity of what is being done.

Baptism is the rite of entry into the church. It carries with it all the joys, privileges and responsibilities of church membership. It follows that it can only be administered to those whom the church deems to be ready for it. The church, then, every single local Baptist fellowship, must know what conditions should be fulfilled before baptism can be administered. It must be prepared to face the awful responsibility of saying when, in its judgment, those conditions are not fulfilled.

Most ministers know at the end of a course of instruction which people, if any, give them cause for hesitation. It may be that a candidate has not given his mind as fully to the classes as he might have done. Can one be a true disciple and not make a determined effort to understand the faith and its implications? Perhaps someone has missed a number of classes, despite the fact that these are known to be obligatory and were specially arranged so that all could always

attend. Can such a person have grasped much of the idea of Christian responsibility? It may be that a very young candidate has shared the classes with enthusiasm, but is obviously not ready to enter into a life-long commitment.

Where there is any doubt the minister is well advised to discuss the question fully with the candidate concerned. Often the interview may then be deferred until the position becomes clearer. It is surely better to deal with the matter in this way than to proceed with the visitation of an obviously unsuitable candidate.

SELECTION OF VISITORS

Interviewing for baptism and membership is one of the most responsible tasks a member of the church can be asked to undertake. The selection of visitors is therefore a delicate task. No one should be appointed because 'he would like to be asked'. Visitors should be known to the candidate, but not too well. One of the visitors should be a deacon, who will find out from the minister a good deal about the candidate's background. The chief technical requirement of visitors is that they should be completely conversant with the course of instruction given by the minister. Unless they know this their task becomes very difficult and their questions lose a certain relevance. The personal qualities, which are even more important, are that visitors must be men and women of spiritual example to whom the church can look with confidence and in whom the candidates may see virtues to admire and emulate. In addition, visitors need to make those they interview feel at ease, and so natural friendliness is a great asset.

The deacons' meeting may appoint the visitors or suggest names to the church for appointment - certainly it should not be left for open and unguided discussion in a church meeting. The minister and deacons are in the best position to choose the visitors; provided that one of those invited to interview is usually a non-deacon it is unlikely that anyone will object that the church meeting is being by-passed.

PLANNING THE VISIT

When the two visitors have been appointed they will meet to discuss what kind of interview they propose to conduct. Their basic need is for sufficient questions to enable the candidate to reveal his convictions, his serious intent, and his fitness for baptism. So their attitude to the interview must be a searching one. There are too many young people who have studied the faith and their responsibilities most earnestly and have gone to the interview with keen anticipation (perhaps, quite properly, with some trepidation), only to find that no searching questions were asked, that they were accepted readily because their parents were well known in the church, and that they were forced to listen to an elderly deacon relating past church history in the form of personal reminiscences. The interview can be rigorous and searching and still kindly. Above all it can leave the candidate

with a clear impression of the finality and solemnity of the step he is about to take.

The best place for the interview will depend very much on circumstances. A young person may be visited at his home, so long as there is a quiet room available. The minister's vestry is also appropriate, especially as the candidate may have first spoken about a desire for baptism in that very place. If one is to interview a young parent or married couple with young children there is much to be said for providing a baby-sitter and meeting elsewhere. The sound of a child upstairs coughing or calling out immediately claims the mother's full attention and the thread of the discussion is broken.

An interview should not be squeezed in before another meeting or be held after a service where this is avoidable. If a whole evening is set aside for the task then an hour or perhaps slightly longer may be used without embarrassment.

THE INTERVIEW

The visitors will probably wish to meet beforehand and commend their task and themselves to God in prayer. They will visit with mixed feelings. 'Judge not, lest ye be judged' is an awful text, but it must be set over against the need to examine and 'speak the truth in love'. Who would wish to keep another person from membership of Christ's Church on earth? Yet interviews are held because the possibility of this exists; if the church stands for anything at all it has to be prepared to draw the line somewhere.

In the time at their disposal the visitors need to do four things: (i) they must put the candidate at ease, so that his answers and comments represent his true thoughts and natural reactions; (ii) they must (impossible task!) try to assure themselves that he is sincere; (iii) knowing the outline of the baptismal classes they will assure themselves that a serious attempt has been made to understand them; (iv) they will see if the candidate sees the implication of the Gospel for his own life.

(i) The visitors do well to begin with questions to which the candidate naturally knows the answer – about himself, his school or work, or plans. Apart from creating an atmosphere of ease and informality they furnish valuable information about a potential member. Perhaps for this reason it is sometimes better not to begin with prayer, but rather to let the meeting progress to the point of prayer and dedication.

(ii) No one can assess sincerity. The prompt answer, couched in the traditional evangelical language, or wrapped up in the current theological idiom, is no guarantee. The interviewers really want to see the *motives* behind the desire for baptism. The following questions, suitably phrased so as not to appear as blunt as they look in print, might be asked:

Why do you want to be baptised?

How would you sum up your faith?

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What circumstances or which people helped you to make up your mind?

Have you encountered any encouragement or opposition?

How many people have you told about your conversion, or your wish to join the church?

Questions into someone's personal experience must not exceed the bounds set by good manners, but it is important that the candidate be forced to get below the surface of things at this critical stage.

(iii) The third stage is easier if the visitors know what they are seeking, for they may then turn to the 'academic' aspect of the faith. Its importance should not be under-estimated as though sincerity alone were enough. All the great heretics, dictators and tyrants have been quite sincere – but about the wrong things! What is demanded of the candidate may vary – indeed will vary – according to his background and ability. Those who are engaged in full-time study ought to reveal some reading and thought on matters central to the faith. The following questions, expressed in a manner appropriate to the interview, are relevant and permissible:

What does being a disciple mean?

Why should we be baptised?

What is distinctive about the Baptist denomination?

What is the meaning of worship?

Why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper?

What are the responsibilities of membership?

What service do you hope to give in the church?

What plan do you have for the development of the devotional life?

It has been suggested that visitors should not make speeches; equally, they must not merely put questions. Very often one question leads to another and a discussion develops in which all share. All this only serves to underline the fact that visiting for church membership and baptism is not a task for anyone and everyone.

(iv) What difference has all this thinking and praying made to the candidate? Has the Christian experience remained enclosed and isolated, or has it resulted in a new attitude to teachers, parents, fellow students, office friends, workmates, children, etc? The application of the faith is the final theme, although it usually appears naturally at the other stages. Ideas of leisure, the use of money, the Christian home and so on, are all themes which might be introduced here.

At this point, if not before, a prayer may be offered by one or both of the visitors. In nearly every case they will have cause for joy and thanksgiving. They may wish, before leaving, to give some advice to the candidate. This is the time and place if the advice is relevant and brief; an interview is exhausting on both sides.

On no account should the person be told that he will be admitted to membership; this decision rests with the church. The visitors may express their pleasure at the conversation, but it is not within their province to go further than this.

THE REPORT

One of the visitors will write the report when they have agreed as to its contents. It need not be tediously long, but it should be borne in mind that the other deacons and members have not had the opportunity of personal discussion with the candidate in most cases. The report will give general impressions and summarise any important matters which have emerged – he has joined a Christian group at school or work; he is wondering about a call to the ministry; he is facing serious opposition at home . . . Often visitors can indicate in their report ways in which the church can help a new member over a special difficulty. The formal statement ‘that X be admitted to the fellowship of . . . church by believers’ baptism’ concludes the report.

At the deacons’ meeting more detail can be filled in verbally and some account of the interview given (this is an added reason why one visitor should always be a deacon). Discussion here can be completely frank and in the event of a recommendation that the candidate be asked to wait, the issue must be faced. In such a case it is better for the minister immediately to see the person concerned and explain the position. There is no need to have an adverse report read at a church meeting, and any questions which arise there are best answered by the minister himself.

Where the report is satisfactory it is read at the church meeting and both interviewers may speak to it. Once again, any special pastoral responsibility which the church may have can be stressed in this context.

It is only very rarely that difficulties arise over reports in church meetings. If it seems that a too personal note has crept into the discussion, or that insinuations are being made about the interview or the reports, the minister can always direct the discussion firmly to the resolution proposed and seconded.

The minister will derive great pleasure from his visits to the candidates and their families to convey the news of the church’s glad acceptance of the applications for membership.

AFTER CARE

‘Everybody’s job is nobody’s job.’ This is as true in church life as anywhere else. The church meeting will hear the report on the candidates with pleasure, the minister will exhort those who are present to care for those about to be baptised; everyone will intend to do something. In fact, because the members present are those who are already deeply committed to many things, and may live miles away from the candidate, it may well be that nothing is finally done.

A positive way to try to overcome this problem is to make those who recommend someone for membership after interview responsible for the after care of the new member after baptism. So there will be at least two people specifically responsible for each newcomer. They can maintain a close relationship and have the joy of playing a real part in someone’s spiritual pilgrimage.

There is a curious idea abroad that in church life some things should not be too 'organised'. This causes us a great deal of trouble and sometimes really hinders us in the performance of the pastoral ministry. The whole business of instructing, interviewing and admitting new members through baptism is an area of church life where we must reform and systematise if we are to do our work effectively. Often we face the muddle of a mass of traditions and practices and half-hearted reforms inherited from the past, and not sufficient for the present need.

A church conference or a deacons' meeting devoted to this specific issue could be of tremendous value. Our responsibility is to face honestly the ancient question 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

J. R. C. PERKIN.

Members of the Fellowship may like to be reminded of a useful Carey-Kingsgate pamphlet on this important subject by J. O. Barrett.