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EDITORIAL

At some time or other most of us have been impressed by the rather unusual historical note which introduces the Marcan account of Christ's ministry in Galilee. This earliest gospel records that, "*after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God.*" (Mk. I: 14). Is this not something more than an interesting item of Synoptic chronology? It indicates in the clearest possible terms that the Son of God began His ministry in difficult times. John the Baptist, Israel's most successful prophet for generations, had attracted large congregations to the Judean desert, and many had expressed a new-found faith in the baptism of repentance. But his fearless moral preaching had made Herod distinctly uncomfortable, so he tried to silence the message by imprisoning the preacher. John was obviously bewildered by this apparent triumph of evil over good, and the devout in Israel must have been bitterly disappointed, for at one time it had seemed as though they were on the brink of religious revival. Into this situation of religious despair and spiritual frustration came Christ Jesus with his radiant gospel for troubled times. At the beginning of what we sometimes call "the winter's work" we ought to remind ourselves of our responsibility to expound this gospel of God.

There are those among our congregations who, like John the Baptist, are *spiritually bewildered*. Things have not worked out quite as they imagined or hoped. Jowett once said that if he had his time over again he would preach more sermons to comfort those in trouble. There are *always* people before us who are looking to God for some word to strengthen them and enable them to face life again. We do well to remember that at a time when John was put in prison Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of *the faithfulness of God*. Our circumstances may change but He is always the same, and we can confidently rely upon Him; He will never disappoint us. There may be times when we, as Ministers, are baffled by our difficulties, our seeming failure, our frustrated ambitions, but part of this gospel is the certainty that God cares. In that lonely dungeon John the Baptist needed the same gospel as that which Jesus clearly preached in the towns and villages of Galilee: "Your heavenly Father knoweth . . . the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." This gospel of God demands a response—we must trust.

There are others who, like the devout Israelites who lamented the imprisonment of John, are *spiritually dejected*. They need to be reminded that when John was silenced, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of *the providence of God*. He cares, and He plans. We do not know everything. True, the Judean prophet could no longer be heard by the people, but his intense moral

seriousness had made a deep impression upon Herod's conscience (Mt. 14:2). The Voice could still be heard even after John was beheaded. The memory of some heart-searching interviews (Mk. 6:20) still haunted Herod. It is not easy to silence the Word of God. We must never be despondent over apparent lack of results; it is not God's purpose to reveal all things to us. He may still continue to work in the lives of those we can no longer influence. And this, after all, was part of the good news which Jesus preached after that John was put in prison: "One soweth and another reapeth . . . other men laboured and ye are entered into their labours." This gospel of God demands a response—we must endure.

And what of Herod? We are constantly in touch with people who, in their attitude to life, resemble the Galilean prince. Self-satisfaction and popularity among their friends appear to be more important than religious and moral truth. They are the *spiritually indifferent*. Herod was quite prepared to have interesting discussions with the Baptist but they did not seriously affect his private life. John Oman says somewhere that men are prepared to have everything in them spoken to except their consciences. Yet at a time when Herod was deliberately disobedient to the revealed will of God Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of *the judgment of God*. It called upon men of all types to repent and accept the forgiveness of God, and it asserted the eternal relevance of such an act of faith and commitment. Brunner has reminded us that this is one of the awful things about sin—it obliterates man's view of both his origin and his end. "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory." And all men must stand before the throne. This gospel of God demands a response—we must preach.

MINISTRY WITHOUT RELIGION

There is nothing particularly novel in the suggestion that the Christian ministry should preach the Gospel and administer its sacraments but go elsewhere to earn its keep. It is as old as St. Paul who, whilst acknowledging the dominical instruction "that those who preach the Gospel should earn their living by the Gospel", preferred "the satisfaction of preaching the Gospel without expense to anyone" working with his own hands.¹ George Every reminds us "that in the early Church the ministry was permanent, but not normally professional."² Two examples may suffice. In the 4th Century, Zeno of Gaza "by pursuing his own trade of weaving linen, continued to earn the means of supplying his own wants and of providing for the poor. He never deviated from this course of conduct till the close of his life, although he attained . . . a very advanced age, and though he presided over the richest and

greatest church of the province." Again, so late as the 6th Century, it is insisted "that all, including the learned clergy, should master a trade and earn their food and raiment by the labour of their own hands."³ In more recent times Thomas Arnold in his "Principles of Church Reform" of 1833 put forward the idea of a ministry engaged in secular professions; and if time and space permitted, plenty of illustrations could doubtless be dug out of our own Baptist history.⁴

At the present time secular work and Christian ministry are found together in a number of permutations. How many earn a little "on the side" in part-time teaching, adult-education, training colleges etc., whilst technically remaining within the so-called full-time ministry. Others have gone into teaching full-time but act as pastors to small churches or exercise a peripatetic ministry. Some would claim, with some confusion of thought, that their ministry is fulfilled and no longer frustrated, in say the class-room or probationary service. No-one denies that some hard economic facts, amongst others, lie behind the growing interest in not living entirely "by the Gospel". But there is nothing wrong with that as long as we take the hint, since the Old Testament encourages us to find God at work in historical situations and the changing pressures of the time. As John (Robinson, of course) says, "We assume too readily that God is in the rocks but not in the rapids. . . . God is in the history, addressing us and claiming us through it."⁵ Many ministers are being driven into secular employment, so we are apparently required by the "Jesus of history" not to find excuses for what we've done (they aren't necessary) nor to rationalise what many more will doubtless have to do, but at least to indulge in theological reflection in the hope of hearing a little of what God is wanting to say. To quote F. R. Barry, "New experiments may, as I hold, be called for. But, if so, they must reflect a thought-out policy which has come to terms with the theological issues—not only with practical expedients—and is ready to ask fundamental questions about the nature and function of the Ministry."⁶

Leaving on one side then questions of economics and the shortage of clergy, though never despising these things that make us stop and think, there are several lines of approach. Perhaps the most famous in recent years is that of the worker-priests in France. David Edwards suggests they may have something relevant to say to us: "More than a few Free Church ministers have taken secular employment (part-time or whole-time, e.g. in teaching) through economic necessity. Such men, pondering the spiritual and theological aspects of their jobs, may welcome an opportunity to reflect on the examples of the French worker priests."⁷ Their motives at the outset appear to have been twofold. First, theirs was a straightforward missionary endeavour, an "attempt to bridge the gulf between the Church and the working classes."⁸ "In the case of the worker-priests, manual work ceases to be an economic necessity, a secular temptation or an ascetic ideal, and becomes a

method of evangelism.” Secondly, they made an effort at identification. “The worker-priests of Limoges wrote to their bishop: To be one of them. If the proletariat is to express itself and really live in a Catholic, universal Church alive to its problems, then we, its priests, had to learn its life by living it. We had to live its aspirations so as to make them truly our own, along with its fatigues, its humiliations, its struggles, its oppressions, its splendours. . . . It was not just for fun, nor because we were told to, that we did this. It was in sober truth, and driven by the Spirit of God, that we repeated as we contemplated his face and his commands: He became flesh. In everything like unto men.”¹⁰ The two of course in the end are one. “The apostles of the workers must be the workers.”¹¹

If it is not presumptuous to question such a brave experiment, and recognising that we speak from a different situation, one detects a persistent confusion of the task of the ordained ministry with that of the laity. One wishes to protest again and again, “This is surely the job of the whole people of God!” The church must certainly be where people are, but the priest or minister is not the church; neither is he the church’s spearhead in society, but the backroom boy who helps the church to be more effective once she, and not he, is there. Experience of, and presence within the day-to-day life of the world are precisely the contributions which the laity have to make to the life of the church. The parson should not have to go out and get it by taking a job himself.¹² One is grateful for E. R. Wickham’s powerful plea along these lines, made out of his extensive knowledge of the English industrial landscape. The Christian laity—the priestly body of Christ dispersed into all their secular callings, “is the Church in the world, exercising the priestly, prophetic and ministerial work of Christ.”¹³

We must therefore investigate another line of approach. But first, two preparatory remarks. I assume here, without arguing the case, a somewhat “functional” view of the ministry. What is of prime importance is not that there should be ministers, but that the ministry of Word and Sacrament, both in worship and pastoral practice, should be maintained within the life of the church. Ministers, that is persons responsible for the administration of these things, may well be a necessity for reasons of church order on the one hand and for sacramental reasons on the other. They are the outward and visible sign of that which is of the esse of the church, but they are not to be identified with it. This may appear to be an argument in a circle or about nothing at all. But it seems helpful to make the distinction in order to see clearly that whilst we may not raise questions about the essential ministry of Word and Sacrament, it is legitimate to raise them about the minister, especially as presently understood. There is nothing sacrosanct about the latter provided that the former is adequately maintained.

Coupled with this “functional” view I would plead for a stricter

definition of the special task of the ordained minister, lack of which so often confuses conversation. Definitions of course exist¹⁴ but they need to be used. The minister may do many things as a member of the laos. He may evangelise, serve, visit the housebound or run a young people's group. But we must distinguish between that and his distinctive task of ministering to the church through Word and Sacrament in order that the church in turn may be equipped for ministry and enabled to carry out its mission, service and priesthood in the world.

Now let us add to these two points something of the current discussion about "religion". It was of course Bonhoeffer in his *Letters and Papers from Prison* who, at least in translation, provided us with the phrase "religionless Christianity"¹⁵ for use in our current theological jargon. It was partly a reaction against German Pietism, and it may have been too hurriedly shipped across to these shores and misapplied to a very different ethos. It may be true that the English Pelagian, with his "Christianity equals being good", needs more religion and not less. However the phrase has given rise to criticisms of the church when it creates around itself a "sphere of religion" by which is meant the multitude of organisations and meetings which clutter up the week and still fill many a predictable notice board, and which successfully keep us for far too long on the premises: "... religion so readily creates a world of its own which is neither the real world in which faith lives nor the mixed and confused world of everyday. This is what might be called the "Sunday" world, the world of the Church and its fellowship and of the institutions which express and support these." It is this world which can "absorb so much of the time and energy of ministers and members of the churches that they have little left for dealing with their real task in the world of today."¹⁶ Religionless Christianity in this sense then would be typified by a church which has kept only what is indispensable for nourishing the body of Christ and is marked "by a certain puritanism about its own institutional activity."¹⁷

But Bonhoeffer, and his argument is by now familiar enough, envisaged the end of religion in another more profound and difficult sense, and one with which many a humanist would agree.¹⁸ It is in this sense that he also speaks of man's "coming of age".¹⁹ This never meant that man is any better behaved than he has ever been. It does mean that he is growing out of the need to look at the world in a religious way, that is, by using God to explain things. "Man has learned to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis. In questions concerning science, art, and even ethics, this has become an understood thing which one scarcely dares to tilt at any more. But for the last hundred years or so it has been increasingly true of religious questions also: it is becoming evident that everything gets along without "God" and just as well as before . . . Christian apologetic has taken the most varying forms of opposition to this

self-assurance. Efforts are made to prove to a world thus come of age that it cannot live without the tutelage of "God". Even though there has been surrender on all secular problems, there still remain the so-called ultimate questions—death, guilt—on which only "God" can furnish an answer, and which are the reason why God and the Church and the pastor are needed . . . But what if one day they (these ultimate questions) no longer exist as such, if they too can be answered without 'God'?"²⁰ Again, "Religious people speak of God when human perception is (often just from laziness) at an end, or human resources fail: it is really always the DEUS EX MACHINA they call to their aid, either for the so-called solving of insoluble problems or as support in human failure—always, that is to say, helping out human weakness or on the borders of human existence. Of necessity, that can only go on until men can, by their own strength, push those borders a little further, so that God becomes superfluous, as a DEUS EX MACHINA. I have come to be doubtful even about talking of 'borders of human existence'. Is even death today, since men are scarcely afraid of it any more, and sin, which they scarcely understand any more, still a genuine borderline? It always seems to me that in talking thus we are only seeking frantically to make room for God."²¹

The question is this. Isn't much of our effort as "ministers of religion" devoted precisely to the kind of religion we are being challenged to do without, namely a surfeit of religious activities and organisations, plus the religious way of looking at the world with the attempts to find room for God and therefore the church and the minister, which Bonhoeffer describes: The first needs no further comment. The second is more difficult to appreciate but in the end hits the harder. Let me put it this way. We are ready, if we've any sense, to grant autonomy to the scientist or the politician, the artist and economist, even the industrialist. The minister is not sent for in a parliamentary row or a strike. This is not to say that the Christian faith has nothing to say to them. It does mean that they don't need "God" as one of the tools of their trade. We have also accepted the fact that many areas of life which once lived under the umbrella of the church no longer do so, whether we look for examples at the end of the church-centred, rural community, or at the universities or many of our welfare services. On the other hand we are not so ready to grant autonomy say to the medical profession (the inheritors in our time of the Gospel command to heal the sick) or the social worker, and in most cases, by ordinary folk, we are not expected to do so!

We spend a good deal of time bringing God in as a tool in sickness. He is somehow specially, and therefore mistakenly, relevant here to "religious" people. This is not to deny all our insights into psychosomatic disease and the need for the whole man to be made whole, but it is to suggest that this is already being achieved without God, and that ministers as his popularly regarded representatives have a special place here no more than anywhere else.

Bonhoeffer adds the examples of death and guilt. They deserve pondering. How much is achieved concerning guilt today without recourse to "religious" practitioners. To take but one social problem the work of the Marriage Guidance Council may well be an example of Christianity without religion. We tend to think that ministers have a special aptitude in such domestic matters. God is needed here. But are they noticeably more successful than those who do without Him? The insights of the Christian faith relate to the whole of life, but needing God and hence the minister in order to cope with or explain certain situations over against others is a remnant of immaturity, even of a kind of superstition²² belonging to the religious outlook out of which men will grow. The time will come when we shall regard God as equally relevant to coping with illness as he is to stopping the rain in favour of an open-air service, or making the workers give up their wage claim so that there can be industrial peace. But it is this God-of-the-gaps we tend to represent as ministers of religion when occupied with our sick visiting and a good deal of pastoral work.

Now a Christianity without religion in the senses all too briefly described would seem to imply a ministry without religion as well, that is, with its special role vastly reduced. That in its turn has one very practical result, especially when added to our own preparatory remarks concerning a "functional" view of the ministry and an austere definition of its task. The result is less need for the full-time ministry as we understand it today. Far more appropriate to the "secular" age is the man who earns his living by day and in his leisure time sees to it that the ministry of Word and Sacrament is maintained in the local church or group of little congregations, just as another may lead a youth club. It is not that the minister does a bit of teaching on the side, nor that he has left the one for the other, but that a local teacher happens to be the local minister. A number of other points may be regarded as either consequential upon or as contributing to this same conclusion. Space permits me to state six of them briefly:

(a) Would such a minister be noticeably different from what we now know as the lay-pastor? The answer is "Yes". The lay-pastor is a part-time minister of religion, not without it. Secondly there would be training²³ and of course, ordination.

(b) That the majority are no longer full-time ministers does not mean that none would be. The church needs her bishops, or overseers, or superintendents.

(c) That the special ministry of Word and Sacrament is no longer paid by the church does not mean that the church employs no one at all. Theologians and administrators are obvious examples; trained social and youth workers may be others.

(d) A great deal of our financial resources would be set free to promote the church's mission and service, and there would be an end to any special relationship between the ministry and poverty.

(e) One cause of dissatisfaction in the ranks of the ministry

would be uprooted, namely the sense of amateurism which arises from the undefined nature of a diffuse job. I agree with Martin Thornton: "Now the young man of true vocation is not interested in popularity, adulation, or even respect. He does not worry very much if his work is unknown to the populace or misunderstood by his friends; but he might possibly wish to know precisely what it is himself. The current idea of some chaotic admixture of preaching, teaching, evangelism, visiting, study, sociology, good works, tea parties, and youth work, just is not a job at all. I suggest that pastoral practice itself, or rather its lack of clear pattern, frustrates vocation more than any other circumstance."²⁴ We may add to this a sense of isolation from the community and of being a parasite upon it.

(f) Finally, a church served by the kind of ministry discussed, must be a layman's church or go to the wall. No longer could the church depend, in a bad sense, on the minister—like the rest his time is limited and he must concentrate on his particular role; nor would the minister be burdened with the wrong kind of responsibility for the church.²⁵

In short, I suggest that a good deal of our malaise springs from our being ministers of religion rather than more simply, ministers of Word and Sacrament; and that whilst the former has become identified with full-time employment by the church, the latter need not necessarily be so. The experience of French worker-priests, translated into our own terms, may yet be shared by Free Church ministers without religion: "Divested not only of the cassock, but also of all the jobs involved in parish work (such as maintaining the church fabric, running the clubs and pious guilds, multiplying Masses and other offices for a handful of devotees, and even having to beg for their own keep) they discovered as it were for the first time the real essence of their task."²⁶

Notes: ¹ 1 Cor. 9:14, 18 and 4:12. ² "Part-Time Priests?" ch. IV "Some Historical Considerations" p. 34; cf. Robinson's question, "Must the priesthood necessarily or normally be a profession?" and his discussion of "the professional line" in "The New Reformation?" p. 57f. ³ "Part-Time Priests?" p. 30, 32. ⁴ e.g. the number of men who, like Ryland, "supported himself by keeping a school"; cf. Underwood, p. 142; not to mention a cobbler of wide repute. ⁵ "Christian Morals Today" p. 18. ⁶ "Part-Time Priests?" ch. I "The Case for Part-Time Priests" p. 10. ⁷ "Priests and Workers" p. 7. ⁸ *ibid.* p. 24. ⁹ *ibid.* p. 92. ¹⁰ *ibid.* p. 51. ¹¹ *ibid.* p. 106. There is another and perhaps more profound approach in ch. VI concerning the priestly presence of the church. Similar points to those made above can be found in "Part-Time Priests", e.g. pp. 67, 109, 96, 126, 134. ¹² It must be remembered however that in France (and in Britain?) "by general admission there are very few workers who are Christians." "Priests and Workers" p. 108. ¹³ *ibid.* p. 144. ¹⁴ cf. the "taut" and stimulating view of Martin Thornton in "Pastoral Theology a Reorientation" and the straightforward and helpful chapter III in Hanson's "The Church of the Servant." ¹⁵ p. 123 of the 1953 edition. ¹⁶ Daniel Jenkins "Beyond Religion"

pp. 71 and 107. ¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 93. ¹⁸ cf. Julian Huxley's chapter in "The Humanist Frame". ¹⁹ apparently misunderstood by Werner Pelz in "God is no More" p. 11? ²⁰ Bonhoeffer p. 145 f. He discusses "religion" on pp. 122-7, 145-9, 162-4, 168-9. ²¹ *ibid.* p. 124. ²² cf. the writings of John Wren Lewis. ²³ a difficulty. cf. "Part-Time Priests?" p. 20f. etc. ²⁴ "Pastoral Theology: A Reorientation" p. 268. ²⁵ cf. "God's Frozen People" ch. III. ²⁶ "Priests and Workers" p.105.

M. H. TAYLOR

PARSONS AND POETS

There is no need to describe parsons to readers of this journal! But it may be worth while to consider briefly the poet's character and function. For parsons and poets have much in common, and the one calling may illuminate the other. In the first place, the poet is a *craftsman*, and his poems are his craftsmanship, as the Greek derivation of the word indicates. For this reason alone the poet deserves our respect in an age of mass production; and deserves our emulation too. With Robert Bridges we may say, "I too will something make, and joy in the making." Then the poet is an *idealist*. He does not see his function as simply to reflect what he sees around him. But because he believes in truth, beauty and goodness, he sets them forth in his poems. And in this way he appeals to all that is truest and best in human nature. A lively *imagination* is another of the poet's characteristics, along with the ability to put himself into the attitude and framework of another's life. F. W. H. Myers has done this excellently in "St. Paul". As we read it we seem to hear the apostle speaking rather than the poet, as this extract shows:—

Of when the Word is on me to deliver
Opens the heaven and the Lord is there;
Desert or throng, the city or the river,
Melt in a lucid Paradise of air,—

Only like souls I see the folk thereunder,
Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings,—
Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder,
Sadly contented in a show of things;—

Then with a rush the intolerable craving
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet-call,—
Oh to save these! to perish for their saving,
Die for their life, be offered for them all!

Part of Shakespeare's greatness lies in his ability to portray vividly the affairs of ordinary life and the motives that make up human nature. And many of his phrases have passed into common speech, and are used without being recognised as his. The poet needs also

a measure of *inspiration* for the writing of his poems, as a parson does for the preparation of his sermons. It is difficult to write poetry to order. And for this reason the duties of Poet Laureate are hard to fulfil. Yet we have had a long succession of Poets Laureate who have worthily maintained their tradition. It was in this sphere that Tennyson excelled; his poems on national events shine, as for instance his "Charge of the Light Brigade" and "A Welcome to Alexandra." Finally, a poet achieves a certain *immortality* through rhyme and metre, and the fact that his work is written. This is denied to a parson, whose messages are spoken, and couched in less easily remembered prose. For example, there can be few who now read the sermons of Phillips Brooks, but thousands every Christmas sing his carol, "O little town of Bethlehem."

I

Parsons and poets both deal in words. Words are the tools of our trade, and deserve more attention than we usually give them. Poets encourage us to cultivate a healthy respect for them, and to study their *sound and association* in the conveying of truth. It is a good exercise to read Robert Southey's "How the water comes down at Lodore" and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Bells", which well illustrate the use of words whose sound echoes their sense. In the process of time words get worn down like dinner-knives, and do not always carry their original full flavour. Nevertheless the study of the *derivation* of words is fascinating and helps in their more significant use. Many dull words come to life in this adventure, as for instance the word "saunter" which comes from the Crusades (*à la sainte terre*). "Tribulation" carries the picture of the flail formerly used in threshing; while "caprice" brings to mind the unpredictable and impulsive antics of a goat. Again, the *conciseness of expression* which poets achieve calls forth the admiration of parsons. It may take several sentences to express in prose what a poet has seen and noted in three or four lines, and then the result does not convey the meaning so well. And further, poets give us much needed encouragement in the use of *simile and metaphor*. How drab are most of our sermons, because our speech is not as picturesque as it might be! The following, by Joseph Campbell, introduces three similes in as many couplets:—

As a white candle
In a holy place,
So is the beauty
Of an aged face.

As the spent radiance
Of the winter sun,
So is a woman
With her travail done;

Her brood gone from her,
And her thoughts as still
As the waters
Under a ruined mill.

II

Parsons and poets are both philosophers. Many think of a poet as just a manufacturer of rhyme and metre. But he is far more than this. He is a seer; with an eye for detail, he sees what others miss. Tennyson, for instance, is reputed to have seen the moon reflected in the eye of a nightingale. And what the poet writes can light up many a human situation. For he meditates on the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, and seeks to express his convictions. Parsons may well feel on familiar ground in Browning's use of the analogy of the potter's wheel in "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

Aye, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
"Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize today!"

Fool! All that is, at all
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops; Potter and clay endure.

He fixed thee mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

Francis Thompson's "In No Strange Land" and Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" both have for their theme the impinging of the spirit world upon this. And Whittier's "The Eternal Goodness" is an expression of simple piety and trust in God's providence, as the following lines show:—

I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies.

I know not where His islands lift
Their froned palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.

III

Parsons and poets are both crusaders against the evils of their day. The popular idea of a poet (as of a parson) is of one who dwells in an ivory tower, aloof from the world and its cares. Browning, for instance, has been severely criticised for his lines in "Pippa Passes": "God's in His heaven; All's right with the world." (In fact, it is only sublime faith that can make that assertion.) But poets have justified their existence by serving noble causes with mind and pen. They have written (as preachers have spoken) what they smartingly felt. They were in the forefront of the fight against *slavery*, as illustrated in Longfellow's "The Slave's Dream" and other poems. Whittier too used his pen for this purpose; he also wrote against *strong drink* in "The Brewing of Soma," which includes our hymn "Dear Lord and Father of mankind." Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children" may not be first-class poetry, but every verse of it is charged with indignation at the *exploitation of child labour*: —

"For all day the wheels are droning, turning,—
Their wind comes in our faces—
Till our hearts turn—our head, with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places.
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling,
Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling,
All are turning, all the day, and we with all.
And all day, the iron wheels are droning,
And sometimes we could pray,
'O ye wheels' (breaking out in a mad moaning),
'Stop! be silent for to-day!'"

They look up, with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in high places,
With eyes turned on Deity!
"How long," they say, "how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart—
Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
And your purple shows your path!
But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath."

Longfellow deals with the *tragedy of war* in "The Arsenal at Springfield" and "Christmas Bells". And the same theme is taken up by Hartley Coleridge, who urges continual prayer for peace: —

Far is the time, remote from human sight,
When war and discord on the earth shall cease;
Yet every prayer for universal peace
Avails the blessed time to expedite.

And another poet advocates the promotion of children's friendships: —

In hearts too young for enmity
There lies the way to make men free;
When children's friendships are world-wide
New ages will be glorified.
Let child love child, and strife will cease;
Disarm the heart, for that is peace.

The world is like a garden gay
Where we may work and we may play.
But if we quarrel and dispute
Our garden then will bear no fruit,
And every flower will fade away.
Come on and work! Come on and play!
Come, help to keep the garden gay!

IV

Parsons and poets are both concerned for sincerity in religion. Poets insist that true religion is in the deed, and not in the profession alone. We may refer to Whittier's "Worship" and "The Gift of Tritemius", and to Longfellow's "The Legend Beautiful". In the latter poem, a monk in meditation is visited by a vision of the Lord, and he kneels in rapture. But upon this holy scene the strident bell of the convent breaks, summoning the monk to distribute food to the poor at the gate. Shall he obey the call of duty, or stay to honour his Guest? He goes on his errand, and afterwards returns gladdened and humbled: —

For the Vision still was standing
As he left it there before,
When the convent bell appalling
From its belfry calling, calling,
Summoned him to feed the poor.
Through the long hour intervening
It had waited his return,
And he felt his bosom burn,
Comprehending all the meaning,
When the Blessed Vision said,
"Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled!"

G. K. Chesterton's "A Song of Gifts to God" puts the right emphasis and motive on giving. And Matthew Arnold's "The Good Shepherd with the Kid" describes how the early Christians tempered the rigid theology of Tertullian: —

"He saves the sheep, the goats He doth not save."
So rang Tertullian's sentence, on the side
Of that un pitying Phrygian sect which cried:
"Him can no fount of fresh forgiveness lave,
Who sins, once washed by the baptismal wave!"
So spake the fierce Tertullian. But she sighed,
The infant Church! of love she felt the tide
Stream on her from her Lord's yet recent grave.
And then she smiled; and in the Catacombs,
With eye suffused but heart inspired true,
On those walls subterranean, where she hid
Her head 'mid ignominy, death and tombs,
She her Good Shepherd's hasty image drew—
And on His shoulders, not a lamb, a kid.

(To be continued).

W. B. HARRIS

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF BAPTIST WITNESS IN LONDON

The purpose of history is that we should see ourselves against the pattern of the past. Not that we should live on history, for our task always is to endeavour to make history today. But we cannot escape from history, for its helpful and sometimes disturbing gleams shine out from the past to guide or to warn concerning the way ahead. The agenda we plan for this generation is already determined, at least in part, by our heritage.

This year London Baptists celebrate the Centenary of the present L.B.A. Centenary Year commenced in March at The Metropolitan Tabernacle under the presidency of Sir Cyril Black. In March also we had a civic welcome by the Lord Mayor at London's historic Guildhall. Shades of history, for in this same Hall in October 1649, John Lilburne a London Baptist was tried for treason and acquitted. The women of London celebrated at a packed Tabernacle meeting in April, and in May a Baptist Rally was held at Trafalgar Square. In September we meet at Upper Holloway, the first L.B.A. church, and November 10th is Commemoration Day. At all these occasions we salute the past and give thanks to God for its achievements, always remembering with the poet Shelley that "The One remains, the many change and pass". For our task is to shape the future witness of London Baptists in the Metropolis, confident that the arm of the Lord is not shortened in our time.

In the L.B.A. Centenary volume *Encounter in London* I endeavoured in the limited compass assigned to me to record the story of London Baptists as expressed in Association during one hundred years; a Century of Baptist witness in the greatest city in the world during a period of dramatic change, from the Hansom cab to the helicopter, the first underground trains to London's fantastic railways system, from early telephones to communications via Telstar, from travel which took months to world flights measured in hours, from the cannon to the atom bomb. A century which saw the economic and territorial expansion of Britain until she was supreme in the world. This in London, where the heartbeat of our national life is felt has also witnessed during a hundred years a rising tide of religious interest which filled the churches and produced a galaxy of great Victorian preachers and also years of decline which commenced soon after the beginning of the 20th century and continues today.

The story of London Baptists begins in 1612 with the formation of the first Baptist church in England by Thomas Helwys at Spitalfields, just beyond the walls of the City. The faith and fortitude of Helwys and others during the 16th and 17th centuries to maintain our Baptist witness is part of our heritage. So is the record of differences between Baptist groups and the rugged individualism which marked some churches and explains in some measure at least the erratic history of the several Associations which preceded the present L.B.A. Association life was at a very low ebb in the years immediately preceding 1865. *The Baptist Messenger* reporting the Association meeting of October 1855 said "The attendance consisted of nine persons, six ministers and three laymen. Who can wonder at the low state of the churches?"

The L.B.A. was founded on November 10th 1865 at The Metropolitan Tabernacle. Spurgeon had previously enlisted the support of Dr. W. Brock of Bloomsbury and Dr. W. Landels of Regents Park Chapel to found yet another London Association. This formidable trio assured the venture of success. Between them they commanded the confidence of most London ministers and churches. They resolved to bring London Baptists to a new unity based upon fellowship, evangelism and church extension. They deplored the disunity of previous years and gave to London a vision of programmed advance through co-operative action and witness. They built better than they knew because the L.B.A., which commenced with 59 churches and 19,293 members, is now an Association of 279 churches and over 41,000 members. What have been the outstanding marks of a century of Association witness?

I feel it is important to recognise the pre-eminence of London as the focus of the great ways of national life and as a Metropolis which contains one fifth of the population. One inevitable consequence has been that many London pulpits have attracted ministers of high gift, while the churches of London have always been blessed with a goodly number of laymen holding positions of high

responsibility in every walk of life. From this reservoir of talent London has been greatly blessed in its leadership. The names of L.B.A. leaders who have also been prominent in the B.U. and the B.M.S. is legion.

Then the L.B.A. began at a propitious time, on a rising tide of religious interest inspired by the Second Evangelical Revival and by the phenomenal impact of Spurgeon's ministry. For twenty years the Association centred on the Tabernacle and the resources of Spurgeon and his great church were given freely to advance the work of the L.B.A. Spurgeon was a man with a programme. He set before London Baptists a target for church building, at least one new church every year. This was often exceeded and in addition Spurgeon and the Tabernacle sponsored other new causes. Then Spurgeon's evangelistic outreach spread through London. It was a period of striking growth. Dr. Whitley says that at one time Baptists were increasing at a greater rate than the growth of population. Then came the Down Grade Controversy which cast a shadow over the denomination but did not deter the growth of Baptists.

Another significant period was in the 1890's when Dr. F. B. Meyer led the L.B.A. Forward Movement, a bold project which took the form of sustained evangelistic outreach and the establishment of social uplift projects. The Order of Deaconesses grew out of this Movement. These and the early years of the 20th Century were the years when Dr. John Clifford was the prophet of social reform and led the battle of the schools.

The peak year of L.B.A. membership was in 1906 when the Association had 199 churches and 57,331 members. Immediate steps were taken to arrest the decline which followed and twenty years later the L.B.A. was able to record 228 churches and 57,225 members. Then the influence of the First World War and of the generation that forgot God was felt, and with occasional breaks, the decline has continued. One wonders what the position would be today were it not for the extensive church extension programmes of the L.B.A. in the 1920's and 1930's and during the past ten years.

It is my conviction that one of the finest periods in the witness of London Baptists was during World War II and the years that followed. When war came we had 246 churches in London. Over 200 of them suffered destruction or damage by bombing. Many London churches had no permanent home for ten, even fifteen years. It was a miracle of grace that so many churches survived the desolation of the war years. Some of them which were decimated in strength are now among the strongest in London. During the same period London has seen great movement of population and London Baptists, with their gifts and resources, have strengthened Baptist churches in adjacent counties and along the South Coast. But the tide is turning and, with the rebuilding of London, more permanent populations will be housed within the reach of many London churches. A new opportunity is appearing and if we embrace it, under God, we may well stem the receding tide.

I have said little about organisation. The L.B.A. has grown with London and its organisation has been adapted from time to time to meet a changing situation. London is divided into Thirteen Groups each with its own Officers and Council. Some of them are larger than many County Associations. At the centre the Council, which meets monthly, is the business executive to which numerous committees report and recommend. Finally there is the L.B.A. Assembly. The policy of the L.B.A. has been to involve people in all its work and at every level, from the local church to the Assembly. And as I see the future this policy must be extended, for it is only as we have the interest of people that our hopes can be implemented. Central control fails when it becomes remote from the local church, indeed as Baptists we cannot and dare not move forward without the confidence of our churches.

My brethren in the ministry will not think me presumptuous in stressing the importance of London. I have ministered in a County Association and I know that what happens in London does affect other places. Certainly if the witness of London Baptists should decline it will have repercussions on the whole denomination. But we look forward, confident that under God it will be otherwise. To this end we focus our forces and resources to extend Christ's kingdom in London.

London is undergoing dramatic change, notably in Inner London. In the years ahead the L.B.A. will concentrate on the evangelising of the 1,800,000 people who live within four miles of Charing Cross. We will not relax our church extension programme in the suburbs, but the immediate task to which we have set ourselves is Inner London. This is our project for the second century of the L.B.A. which begins on November 10th. We are calling our churches to make great sacrifices in terms of money and personal help. The New Century Fund for Inner London, which was launched in March as the primary Centenary project, has made a good beginning. Doubtless there are those beyond London who owe something to a London church who will wish to share this enterprise, for it is the largest venture undertaken by the L.B.A. during its history. The vision of Inner London as a modern mission field for Baptists is a challenge and an opportunity which should engage the prayerful thought and interest of all who are concerned that at the very heart of our nation Christ shall be exalted and His kingdom extended. Our objective has been aptly indicated by W. D. Jackson who said—its purpose is to put Christ at the heart of London.

W. CHARLES JOHNSON

THE BAPTIST INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED
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To the Members of the Baptist Ministers' Fraternal.

Dear Friends,

Yield not to temptation, for tempting is sin

I know . . . I know . . . tempting has crept into this line!

I first knew this hymn at a very tender age in a Band of Hope and much later sang it last at a Mission Hall holding a congregation of over 2,000. But all that was before the War so that it is not perhaps surprising that on the 8.9 a.m. to Town from Kent these words rattled into my mind in this telling way. For look at the following newspaper extracts:—

The Times "Nearly a third of all known offenders are less than 17 years old: and one in seven is under 14. Increasing awareness of the problem of juvenile delinquency has been accompanied by demands for new and more effective ways of dealing with it".

The Daily Telegraph "The directors of one department store actually changed their methods of display because the rate of pilfering was too low. They succeeded in raising it and were satisfied that their displays had become properly tempting."

Is it surprising tempting crept in?

But let us get a little nearer home. There has been a steep rise in thefts from Baptist Churches—thefts of tape recorders, record players, sound and silent film projectors, film-strip projectors, cash and indeed anything which can quickly be turned into cash and no questions asked.

Without a market there would be no incentive to theft; without temptation there could be less theft. Good husbandry and commonsense demand that light portable and cashable articles are kept locked carefully away, or much better still, kept away from the Church premises when they are unoccupied.

Who has keys to your Church premises and is cash or property in younger hands supervised? When were locks and bolts last checked and repaired?

A great deal of positive good could be done by tightening up your church organisation. Which comes first—tempting or yielding?

Yours sincerely,

C. J. L. COLVIN,
General Manager

THE MINISTRY OF HEALING: A PERSONAL COMMENT

“... another man, by the one spirit, is granted gifts of healing . . .”
(1 Cor. 12: 9)

We are commanded to “proclaim the message”—and we do. We are commanded to care for people—and we do. We are commanded to love one another—and we try to. We are called to “edify” the Church—and we endeavour to do that. All this, of course, in the power of the Spirit and by the grace of Christ.

But we are called also to heal the sick. “Jesus called the Twelve together and gave them power and authority to overcome all the devils and to cure diseases, and sent them to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal”. (Luke 9, 1f.). It is a *total* ministry geared to the physical and spiritual needs of man as an integrated personality. And we are told (v.6) that their ministry of healing was effective.

But we must be very careful to define our terms with precision and beware of over simplification. It is of course true that “salvation” in the New Testament means the well-being of the *whole* personality, of body, mind and spirit. Clearly, Jesus saw a person as a whole and always ministered to the whole person and not merely to a part.

Thus, a loving attitude, or a friendship, or a sermon, that conveys love and mercy and forgiveness, conveys also, in a very real sense, the “healing” of God and contributes to a person’s “health” physically, mentally and spiritually. And how many seemingly physical illnesses are in fact psychosomatic in these modern days of stress and strain. In such days, closer co-operation between doctors, psychiatrists and ministers is an obvious “must”.

However, we can also define healing in a far more limited way. Many of the New Testament case-histories clearly refer simply to *organic* illness, when Christ cured the incurable. In each and every case, the healing is remarkable in that it occurs instantly and without convalescence, this too in patients deemed incurable; most important, too, there is no deterioration and relapse. Such noteworthy healings were not restricted to our Lord. The disciples were endowed with this power, both the Twelve (Matt. 10.1) and the seventy-two (Luke 10: 8), and their healing was *effective*. After the Ascension, such miracles continue: the beggar at the Beautiful Gate, who was over 40 and had never walked in his life (*Acts* 3), was healed by Peter “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth”. And *Acts* contains details of several others. As with the healings by Christ Himself, the cure is instantaneous, without need for convalescence; the narrative gives no hint of any deterioration or relapse. Each miracle is well-documented, with details as of eye-witnesses.

The New Testament tells us that the prime gifts of the Spirit are love, joy and peace. We have found this to be true today. The New Testament mentions the gift of tongues. Apparently, "tongues" are still practised today, notably among Pentecostals. If Christians today can be enabled to do that, surely they can be enabled to practise healing to alleviate suffering. Dare we say that, of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit recorded in the New Testament, only the healing of organic illness is to be withheld from us completely? And yet as soon as some Christians today think of healing, they think at once of cranks and extremists crying for the moon.

When we examine the New Testament carefully, it becomes clear that not every Christian had the gift of healing. Far from it. According to 1 Cor. 12: 4-11 (compare v. 28), it is only one of several possible gifts. This is borne out to a remarkable degree when we examine *Acts*: it is seldom realised that of all the specific healing miracles recorded, all except one were the work of just two individuals; Paul and Peter. Clearly, Peter was well-known in this respect above all the others, for we are told that the sick were "carried out into the streets and laid there on beds and stretchers, so that even the shadow of Peter might fall on one or another as he passed by". (*Acts* 5: 15f.).

Thus, we would not expect every minister today to have the gift of healing, *but we would expect some to have it*. We would expect *some* to have received this specific gift. I firmly believe that many Christians today have the potential ability to heal, but it never occurs to most of us even to ask ourselves whether *we* have this gift or not. And like every gift it has to be developed. So we find this gift rarely available and rarely used within the main denominations today.

Yet there are men and women who claim to possess the gift of healing to a remarkable degree, but who work as individuals, apart from the fellowship of a Church. Of all these "spiritual healers", perhaps the best known is Harry Edwards, whose healing centre is near Guildford, Surrey. When I was preparing this article, I wrote to him, asking if he would send me two or three case-histories. He was good enough to send me one of his books,* containing dozens of amazing stories of healing, usually without relapse or subsequent deterioration. Mr. Edward claims that "consistent results show that eight out of ten people report easement and betterment, the symptoms are allayed, pain is eased and the general health tone is improved. Out of these eight people three will eventually report that they are completely cured," a remarkably high proportion when it is remembered that many of his patients have been pronounced incurable by orthodox medicine. He has original letters from several hundred different people who have received extraordinary healing and these letters are available for any *bona-fide* enquirer to inspect. Due allowance must be made for suggesta-

**The Power of Spiritual Healing* (1963), pub. by Herbert Jenkins Ltd.

bility in a few cases, but even so the results claimed are impressive to say the least. Illness certified by doctors as Tuberculosis, Schizophrenia, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Leukaemia, and other Cancers, have been healed without trace; and many years later there has been no recurrence of the symptoms.

For us Baptists, the alarming feature is that Harry Edwards is a Spiritualist. He insists that he had no power of himself, that he is merely a human instrument and that all healing comes from God; but he does say too that he is "controlled" by the spirits of Lister and Pasteur, who now work through him.

What are we to make of this? The evidence that a "medium" can contact the "dead" seems to me to be indisputable, but we would all agree about its dangers and warn our people against it. We would agree too that such contact for guidance or advice is *totally unnecessary*: as Christians, we have been redeemed by the Jesus Christ Who died for our sin and rose again, and so we are in meaningful touch with the living God. Every Christian knows from experience *His* ability to guide and lead every step of the way.

But what about so-called spiritual *healing*? Dare we ignore that? Dare we dismiss it as satanic? When the orthodox Christian Church seems so helpless to deal with organic disease, is it possible that we have something to learn from a new direction? At very least, we should not condemn it out of hand. It is interesting and significant that arguments levelled against spiritual healers today were also levelled against Christ. He was accused of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub. "Can Satan cast out Satan?" was His reply. And when so much is being achieved today to ease suffering through this ministry, it is hard to see how such blessings can be rooted in the power of evil.

Some at least of the chronic invalids we pastors visit regularly could perhaps receive new strength and new hope and even freedom from besetting pain. Would that more Christians within the fellowship of the Church possessed the apostolic *charisma* of healing.

Wholly to be condemned is a "healing service" conducted publicly in a huge building, attended by all and sundry. In an atmosphere charged with emotion, "cures" can be claimed which are in fact temporary and lead within a week or two to a worsening of the condition. Public spectacles, sensation-seeking, applying a brief verbal formula to dozens of people in an afternoon, have done untold damage, not only to the physical condition of many, but to the reputation of others who shun the limelight and sincerely seek to heal in a responsible way. Our Lord unfailingly treated people as individuals and fully understood the true needs of a person before ever He gave healing.

Wholly to be condemned too are those healing missions where the onus is placed entirely on the faith of the patient: if you have enough faith, you will get better; if you haven't you will not. Not only is the sufferer almost invariably left with his complaint, but

he is made to feel a spiritual inadequacy which may be quite false.

One must recognise too the limitations of any healing method. Could even Jesus have healed the legless beggar I met a few years ago in Istanbul? Could even He have given arms and legs to a thalidomide baby born with none at all? Again, Paul was not healed of his "thorn in the flesh", whatever it was. Timothy is advised, not to receive the laying-on of hands, but to take a little wine to aid his digestion. (1 Tim. 5: 23). Very often, for reasons we do not understand, God in His wisdom did not heal and He does not heal. Again, very often we need to seek orthodox medical aid rather than appeal to the intervention of God. If we have toothache, it is not a Christian act to stay at home and pray for healing: we go to the dentist instead.

But while we are swift to condemn abuses and while we recognise certain limitations, surely the Church's ministry of healing presents a field of study neglected by many of us in the ministry, a field of study which has as sound a scriptural warrant as we could wish for. One of the chief difficulties is that there is not even one feature in common among the New Testament healing miracles. For some physical contact was necessary. For others it was not. For some the faith of the patient was essential. For others it was not even mentioned and does not appear to have been the big factor. Any slick formula, any shallow thinking that ignores the complexity of the human person and the diversity of the ways of God must be shunned at all cost. It is not easy to discern the way ahead in research and study other than to devote oneself ever more keenly to the love and service of God and to open one's life more and more to His influence and directing. It is not formulae we need so much as dedication. But for all that some simple practical points should be stressed.

Firstly, the *fellowship* of the Church is important. The famous passage in James 5 bids us not only to pray but, for some mysterious reason, to anoint with oil. Perhaps the most significant thing here is not that prayer and anointing are to be regarded as a panacea, but that the healing is to take place within the fellowship of the Church. No mass rally, but a small company of believers, gather ideally in the patient's own home. Payne and Winward's *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship* suggests suitable readings and prayers for a simple service of this kind.

Secondly, in the New Testament miracles we often find a clear reference to the laying-on of hands for healing (e.g. Acts 9: 17; 28: 8). What is the point? Mark 5: 30 suggests that the action is not merely symbolic but that a healing energy is passed to the sick person. Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, after considerable study, gives this energy the name "odic force".* Whether such an energy

*His arguments, which cannot adequately be condensed, and his conclusions may be found in his *Wounded Spirits* (a Hodder paperback, 1962), Chapters 3, 4 and 5. This book, most interesting for all concerned with healing, he describes as a "footnote" to his *Psychology, Religion and Healing*.

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actually exists or not, physical contact by the laying on of hands may well play a part in conveying the healing of God. More than that we cannot say, but it is certainly Scriptural. Added to the fellowship and the laying-on of hands, the power of prayer hardly needs to be mentioned. With this at least we are all familiar.

It is essential to prepare the patient beforehand:

- (1) Not holding out bright hopes of recovery,
- (2) Stressing that the patient is in a special way being commended to our God, Who cares and loves and understands,
- (3) Stressing that we are not merely *using* God, but sincerely asking that the outcome, whatever it may be, should be for His glory.

To which we must add *perseverance*. When we are praying for somebody's conversion, we don't pray once only. We pray regularly. Similarly, when we seek to bring bodily healing, a brief healing service held weekly over a period of time may well be necessary before "something happens". It would be remarkable if the patient was not given a deeper serenity and a deeper faith, whatever the physical outcome. To give up in despair after one attempt is no mark of a heart sincerely burdened for another's need.

About a year ago, the wife of a Baptist minister (now with the Unevangelised Fields Mission) was healed of a serious and potentially deadly cancer. There has been no relapse. The method used was the laying-on of hands (with anointing), within a small fellowship, coupled with much prayer and a dynamic faith in the healing power of God today.

Seemingly identical methods may be applied to somebody else and they fail. There are no easy formulae, obviously. Nonetheless, we are called "to heal the sick" as much as we are called to "proclaim the message", with the constant emphasis not on us and our methods, but on God our Father. We can but help our people to trust God the more, not as an inevitable alternative to healing, but as the basis of a life lived to His glory, come what may, over the very few years that we spend on this earth.

MICHAEL WOTTON

OUTREACH TO FRANCE

As early as 150 A.D. Christians were dying for their faith in France. From that time, in spite of the spiritual darkness that has generally prevailed, there have been those who have remained true to the gospel.

The history of the French Baptists goes back to the early part of the 19th century. The beginnings proved very difficult and it was not until the last decades of the century that real progress was made. Since then, two world wars in which France was overrun by foreign powers did not provide an ideal situation for growth

and development. However, since the end of the Second World War, there has been a definite forward movement in French Baptist life. This has brought great encouragement to those who have laboured faithfully through the years, with the firm conviction that in spite of all the difficulties they must persevere and maintain their distinctive evangelical testimony.

Those who have followed the development of the French Baptist Federation will have been impressed by the balanced way in which the work has gone forward in the last 20 years. Zealous evangelistic outreach has resulted in the creation of new churches and evangelistic outposts, not only in the north, where the majority of churches are still to be found, but in other areas further south as well. Youth work, Sunday School work and work among deprived and orphan children and the aged have all developed, and in November 1964 a Pastors' College was opened on the outskirts of Paris.

In spite of these developments "there remains yet very much land to be possessed" (the theme of their 1965 Congress), and in particular there is the vast central part of the country which is still largely unevangelized. It is in order to help our French brethren in their great task that an Auxiliary Committee of the Home Mission Board of the French Baptist Federation has been formed in this country under the name "Outreach to France". Its purpose is to inform Baptists and other Christians of the work of the Federation with the view to deepening interest in the work, providing opportunities of practical service, and securing spiritual and eventually material support for the work, which we see as one of the most significant aspects of modern missionary outreach in France. The writers of this article are responsible for organising this new venture. One has worked in France for five years as a minister, the other has spent some time helping in the centre of France where he was challenged by the need. Both are now members of the Baptist Union Continental Committee.

At the recent Annual Congress of the Federation in Paris, the president, the Rev. André Thobois reviewed the present situation in France. He told the Congress that there were in the Federation some 2,500 baptised believers, meeting in 40 churches, half of which were self-supporting and which were responsible for regular services in approximately 40 other centres. France still had to be seen as a land to be evangelized. The church was still in a front line missionary situation. Evangelism was the primary task, and the importance of adequate buildings for this purpose had been brought home to the French leaders over the past few years. This had led the Council of the Federation to suggest a five year plan. Each year for the next five years it was proposed to open three new evangelistic posts and improve the premises of one existing church. Great things were being attempted by the Federation, but its resources were very limited. "We are rich in vision, but poor in material resources," said M. Thobois. The plan was approved

by the Congress, and part of the vision is evangelistic work in the great unevangelized centre whose "capital" is the important universal city of Clermont Ferrand.

Since the creation of "Outreach to France" was largely inspired by the need of this unevangelized central area, it is this particular challenge that we are anxious to present to the churches at the moment. There is much we can do in a variety of ways to help our brethren in France in their tremendous task, and we are convinced that as British Baptists and France's nearest neighbours, we should not remain unmoved by the challenge. It is indeed pathetic to find whole townships still in total ignorance of the saving power of Christ, older folk in the grip of superstition, young people with a completely materialistic outlook on life, concerned only to earn money and in the process ruining their health by devotion to the factory machine, and children being brought up in this sort of atmosphere without the opportunity to know Christ.

If, amidst the many demands made upon you by other worthy causes, you have been challenged by the situation we have briefly described and would like to know more, would you please get in touch with us and suggest a way in which we might present the need to your people. Write to R. A. B. Thompson, "Herga Hyll", Orsett, Grays, Essex, who is the secretary for "Outreach to France".

It is certainly true that in our own country "there remains yet very much land to be possessed", but it is equally true that the situation in France is even more desperate and urgent than our own. The call of the man of Macedonia to Paul and his companions to go over and help them, comes to us from our French brethren at the present time, and it comes with equal urgency.

D. J. WARNER, R. A. B. THOMPSON

THE CONTEMPORARY ECUMENICAL SITUATION: A COMMENT ON RECENT ARTICLES

The publication of J. D. Pawson's article in the recent issue of *The Fraternal* was encouraging in itself. To seek to answer that article by another will only lead to an interminable series of opinions, without the true dialogue which is necessary if any of us are to change or modify our opinions. Such dialogue is long overdue and could probably best be started by a conference or meeting of those interested, from whatever standpoint, who would be prepared to listen to each other without demanding an opportunity to engage in the old, old slanging match. We must now consider it very distressing that we are not engaged in such dialogue in our denomination, and we need to start by trying to understand what others are saying before proceeding to ask proper questions about what is said. A conference on "Revival and Renewal" would

surely be well attended and bring together those of us who are becoming so well-entrenched in our respective positions that soon we shall not want to move to "a better 'ole". Simply to listen to "prepared statements" will not suffice any longer. We need to study together at such a conference; some of the Biblical material relevant to both sides, and some of the doctrine and history as well to see if God has something to say to us if only we will wait upon Him.

Pawson's article is, in this respect, especially welcome because his clear enumeration of the fears of conservative evangelicals raises important issues; one imagines that a statement of hopes would have done the same. So too the hopes and fears on the ecumenical side, some of them raised by W. D. Hudson in an earlier article, would raise further questions. We now need to bring these statements into relationship with each other in an attempt to see what the questions are that are pressing. The prior question posed at Nottingham was "Have we the same faith in the same Christ?" It was because the conference felt able to say overwhelmingly "Yes" in answer to that question that it was able to say other things on the subjects of membership, ministry and service etc. Now it is just this question that is raised in Pawson's article; particularly in sections 1 and 2 on the faith of members and on doctrine. If we can give an affirmative answer to that question then at least we have some perspective in answering other questions.

It is of some importance to realise that we are not simply having a technical discussion about what to do and how. Calvin makes it clear in his Institutes that the question of "schismatics" leads inevitably to the question "Have we the same faith in the same Christ?" He devotes a long section in his Institutes to dealing with just this point, concluding that a certain "charitable judgment" was necessary because this side of the Parousia no-one really knows who is, and who is not a true member of Christ's body. In turn this raises the question of what criteria we are to use for practical purposes and Calvin again states his to be adherence to the ministry of word and sacraments. Those churches which faithfully minister in these things are to be considered part of the true Church and those members who avail themselves and partake of this ministry are to be accounted "brethren" even if we feel that they are not worthy of the name by our private standards. I raise this matter not to do battle with Pawson, nor out of any special love for the late Calvin but to show that the problems involved in this matter are basic. Until we are honest with each other on this matter of "the same faith in the same Christ" and until we share in dialogue we shall continue in our present spiritual dilemma of whether "the others" really are Christian or not.

I am given to understand that a meeting has already been held between the representatives of both sides. It now needs to be held between the many of us who are pressed to interpret the present situation in our churches. It is time that the whole matter was

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made a serious subject for the denomination as a whole. In addition to the dialogue, a concerted and directed study programme is vital because we must all be aware by now that nothing will be achieved without deep study of the scriptures, and as Dr. White has recently reminded us, of the true nature of our tradition, not to mention the contemporary need for mission in our country.

We might come to the conclusion that we cannot at this moment enter negotiations with other churches; it is equally possible that we might decide that it was within the will of God to divide the denomination and re-align our churchmanship. It is certain that we should be able to say what we are doing and why. I cannot conceive of this being achieved without a person who can devote a lot of time (in fact all his time) to directing such a project, relating the work of the various groups and seeking to bring their work into a form that can be discussed at the Assembly. We are called by 1980, at the very least to say on what conditions we can join the schemes for unity. The wheels of the machine grind slow and it will be ten years before we can say that, if we are to say anything together.

Unless we are frightened men unable to face the consequences of our waiting upon God there is no reason for delaying this honest encounter any longer. "If this plan or undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it be of God . . ."

J. F. MATTHEWS