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EDITORIAL

This issue of THE FRATERNAL reaches your homes when many of you are in the midst of a heavy round of meetings as various organisations get under way after some kind of summer recess. We take this opportunity to greet you at the beginning of "the winter's work" and trust that the months ahead will be encouraging and rewarding in many different aspects of your work.

What is your work? This is one of the problems. So many varied demands are made upon every Minister, whatever the size of his pastorate. Different auxiliaries in the Church's life hope for his active support and some leaders even forget the existence of other equally important auxiliaries. Happily, most of our people know that a man's pastoral responsibilities are a demanding priority and they also know that their Minister's best work is often done in the course of his day by day visitation. Nothing can replace this. But he is also a teacher. The congregation looks to him for positive help in the living of the Christian life, particularly in understanding their faith and in sharing that rich experience of Christ with others. John Stott's Pastoral Theology lectures, delivered in Durham University last year, have recently been published under the title *One People**. His theme is that of clergy-laity relationships and he reminds us that our Lord divided his time between preaching to multitudes, counselling individuals and training the twelve. "Most clergy are involved in the first two . . . it is the third which we tend to neglect. It is quite true that the training of the apostles was a unique ministry. Yet the principle of giving to a select group of potential leaders a more intensive course of instruction seems still to apply to-day". Stott refers to the conviction of Keith Miller (*The Taste of New Wine*) that "the parish priest must love Christ enough to die to the centrality of his role in the Church. He must become the coach, the teacher and pastor of laymen who will be the new focus of attention in the developing renewal movement".

What part of our work is given over to "coaching"? All of us owe an immense debt to men and women who shared the responsibility of coaching us and it is our privilege to continue that important aspect of ministry.

* Falcon Books, London. 8s. 32 Fleet St. E.C.4.

EUROPEAN BAPTIST CONFERENCE— VIENNA 1969

It is about three years since the decision was taken to hold the Conference of the European Baptist Federation in Vienna. All the work and the planning of the intervening days came to a most impressive climax in the period of conference itself. Under the able leadership of Dr. Rudolf Thaut, surely one of Germany's most charming Baptist leaders and President of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Hamburg, the Conference maintained a high level of inspiration and challenge.

As I prepare this report four hours after the close of the Conference, my mind is full of impressions which are a little difficult to systematise so soon after the conclusion of the meetings. Still vivid in the mind is the vast company of Baptists singing in their different languages in Vienna's beautiful Stadthalle, or mingling happily outside in Austria's generous sunshine. Still prominent in my mind, too, is a picture of the industrious Rev. Friedrich Eckert, who was Secretary of the Conference Organising Committee at Vienna and who seemed to cope with the many varying demands of his position with the elasticity of an India rubber ball, the attractiveness of a strong magnet, and the efficiency of a high powered business man.

Fellowship

Whatever else one may forget of the Conference at Vienna, the sense of fellowship with other Baptists will, I am sure, last a lifetime. The unity of spirit and mind which prevailed in all the Conference Sessions, the sense of intimate and real fellowship between people from many countries, who in most cases had no means of verbal communication with one another because of language difficulties, and the congregational singing in a variety of languages; all stand out as symbols of our oneness in Christ. From all over Europe they came; from 23 countries, from Norway in the north to Italy in the south and from the Soviet Union in the east to the United Kingdom in the west. Every Baptist group in Eastern Europe, with the exception of Bulgaria, was represented. One of the most impressive features was the presence of over 600 Czechoslovakian Baptists and many others from Hungary, Rumania, Poland, Yugoslavia, East Germany and the U.S.S.R. All of these had been invited and brought because of the generosity of Baptists in the West, in gifts gladly given to make their journey and accommodation possible and gratefully and joyously received. At the Executive Meeting just before the Conference began it was suddenly discovered that 300 Czechoslovakians had arrived 3 days earlier than expected. An hour or two earlier, a gift of money had been received, which almost exactly covered the additional expense involved, without the donor knowing anything of the emergency which was shortly to arise. The sense of fellowship was greatly helped too, by the decision to use two "official" languages at the Conference, namely German and English. A decision which, in itself, reflected all the way through something of the reconciling

power of the Gospel. Simultaneous translation work was carried out into a total of 6 major languages.

Inspiration

The uniqueness of the occasion in bringing together Baptists from various parts of a Europe so long deeply divided was in itself an immense inspiration. The programme itself, however, was inspiring in many ways. The theme chosen, "The People of God in a World in Turmoil", was developed by various speakers in a variety of ways which inspired a spirit of serious reflection combined with joyful optimism in the whole atmosphere of these days. Each day began with Bible Studies in English, French, German, Italian and Slavic languages, based on I Peter 2. These undoubtedly set the tone of the day for large numbers of delegates, many of whom in the English speaking group were grateful for the ministry of Dr. Raymond Brown.

A number of other things created this atmosphere of inspiration. The opening service, of course, under the Chairmanship of Dr. Ronald Goulding and with Dr. Rudolf Thaut, President of the Federation as speaker, was full of encouragement. The speaker's insistence on the sovereignty of God and His unchanging dependability in a world shaken by so many disturbing influences, inspired a great atmosphere of confidence and joy. At this meeting and at many others, the singing of Eastern European Choirs from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia combined with the contributions of the young choir from Sweden and the large mass choir from Germany, underlined for everyone the spirit of song that belongs to Christians everywhere. Who will ever forget the lady soprano from the Soviet Union, or the impact of the Dutch missionary from the Cameroons, Theo Van Der Veen, and his rendering of "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" Two other inspirational highlights must be mentioned. One was the address given by Rev. Jose Borrás, Professor at the Baptist Seminary in Barcelona, Spain, who spoke on "The Baptist Understanding of History: Not Slavery to Tradition, but Commitment to the Faith". This remarkable man, who was previously a Roman Catholic priest, became a Baptist 20 years ago after an experience of deep spiritual conflict, a man of great academic achievement and ability who captivated the Conference by his forthright and direct description of the commission Christ has given us and of the promise of God's adequacy for all our needs. He also bore testimony to his conversion experience and did so without any rancour or bitterness towards his previous church. He left us with this challenge, "As Christians, we Baptists have received the Lord's commission to go and transform the kingdom of the world into the kingdom of God. Like the first Christians we have also received the promise that we are not left alone."

The final day of the Conference was, of course, an experience of great inspiration. Under the leadership of Dr. Gunter Wieske and Dr. Rudolf Thaut, both of Germany, the Worship Services had as their climax addresses by Dr. Billy Graham. His presentation of the Gospel was as simple,

unapologetic and direct as it could possibly be without any attempt to defend, but simply with the intention of proclaiming the living power of Christ in our world. At both Services, the response of those seeking Christ was quite remarkable in a country where there are only 800 Baptists.

Leadership

Another of the real impressions made upon me by the Conference is the quite remarkable quality of leadership which is obviously arising in European Baptist life. Dr. Thaut, the President, who is also the Principal of Hamburg Theological Seminary, and Dr. Ronald Goulding, the Secretary, gave, as one would expect, the highest kind of leadership at every point. Supporting them in the programme, however, was a galaxy of relatively young leaders from various countries whose anticipated contribution to Baptist life over the next generation can only be outstanding. Included among those who seemed destined for significant leadership in years to come are T. Van Der Laan of the Netherlands, Michael Zhidkov, already an established leader in the U.S.S.R., J. Goncalves of Portugal, S. Ohm, the well-known Swede, G. Wieske and G. Claas, both of Germany, and Z. Pawlik, Poland. It seems perfectly clear to me that God is raising up in our Denomination throughout Europe the most impressive leadership for the days ahead.

Challenge

The programme of the Conference was obviously designed to disturb and challenge established and traditional Baptist attitudes. In this it was an eminent success.

In the challenge which came to ministers at the "Pastors' Conference", Dr. G. Beasley Murray reminded us forcibly of the ministry of the pastorate and the need for ministers to act as episkopoi, that is, as guardians and instructors. Pastors need to be masters of the Word of God, able to guide their people so as to help them relate their faith to the unbelief of our day. He challenged us to remember that preaching and service are not alternatives in the ministry. They are like two legs: we require both. Many suggestions arose as to the future development of Christian ministry in Evangelism through new forms, by means of the Christian home, Christian cells, activity in industry and commerce and other ways. At this same important Conference, Direktor A. Pohl, from East Germany, spoke of "The Pastor and the People of God". He reminded us of the danger of the pastorate being made a modern "graven image". He pointed to the fact that "God is the same everywhere. This time and place are given to us and to no-one else. We need to ask God for a prophetic vision". He said some disturbing things about the possible future development of the ministry and indicated his belief that the pattern of part-time pastorate developing in Poland is likely to be a sign of future directions in Christian ministry. In an atmosphere of change and endless questioning, the pastor must be seen to be in the midst of the world. The professional clergy have often been a barrier to effective communication.

This may mean pastors being employed in secular ways in the future so that the Gospel can be communicated in the context of Humanism and Marxism. Whatever the future, in all our ministry, it will depend on our "holding to the message of the Cross and of the Lamb".

In some ways the most challenging sessions were those in which questions were raised about the structures of the church. At one meeting, two speakers spoke of "A free Church in a changing Society—facing up to new opportunities and demands". Michael Zhidkov described the nature of Baptist witness in the Soviet Union and many of us felt challenged by the obvious dedication of Russian Baptists to personal witness and the seriousness with which the church regards commitment to discipleship, baptism and church membership. Th. Van Der Laan pleaded that Baptists should find new church structures and urged that more freedom should be given to our people and more experiments undertaken in our worship and church life. The address by Ernst Rodter, a pastor from Zurich, dealt with the church as "The Church for Others" and raised the question of church organisation to-day. In forceful terms he urged upon us the need for the church to be a serving community. Our task is to exist not for ourselves but for others and to bring Christ's reconciliation through a meaningful fellowship, working itself out in the context of a secular world, not simply by preaching at men. He believed that some churches were so keen to grow themselves that they were forgetting that like Christ they existed not to be served but to serve. The plea was made for witness through life as being more basic to winning the world than witness by dogma. Our people should not be judged simply on the grounds of doctrinal orthodoxy, but should be equipped as servants.

The Message

Throughout this Conference in which we met to discuss "The People of God in a World of Turmoil" we all drew benefit from various emphases. Most prominent among them, perhaps, were the need for confidence in God, the need for freedom from enslaving tradition, the need for openness to men and society in Christ's name, the need for a spirit of sacrificial service, the need for dependence on the Holy Spirit and the need to bring Christ's peace to men.

Declaration

It is perhaps worthy of note that before the Conference ended, the Council of the E.B.F. presented a Declaration which, having been read in German and in English, was overwhelmingly welcomed by the spontaneous response of the delegates present. It was a Declaration both theological and practical. It perhaps spoke to the needs of our world with a united Baptist voice in a direct and unmistakable way, all the more remarkable when one considers the multi-national, multi-political, multi-cultural backgrounds of the delegates on this occasion. Part of it read as follows:

"We declare our faith in the Living God and in His Son, Jesus Christ, whom we acknowledge as Saviour of mankind and the Lord of all life. We believe that the Gospel

of the Living Christ with its message of reconciliation is the one sure hope for a world in turmoil. We urge upon all our Baptist people the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel in every situation with a view to winning men in every nation to faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord.

We call upon Baptists throughout Europe to demonstrate the spirit of peace and reconciliation which results from our faith in Christ. We also call upon our Baptist people to recognise and accept their ministry and task of reconciliation not only between God and man but also between man and man. We, together with all our fellow Christians in all the world, must work actively for peace and reconciliation in our world . . . we accept the responsibility of all nations to seek to establish a new unity in the place of strife and to work urgently:—for the end of warfare around the world—for the ending of tensions between men and between nations—for the recognition of the sovereignty of all states—for the abandonment of the way of armed force to settle differences—for the search for peace around the conference table."

It also pleaded for religious liberty, welcomed scientific and technological advances, declaring the need for Christian faith in the midst of such advances and urged upon Christians their responsibilities to share the sufferings of men. It ended:

"We call upon our Baptist people to serve men's needs whenever possible, and to co-operate sacrificially in meeting the suffering and needs of underprivileged and underdeveloped men and nations around the world. We must share our possessions as well as our Gospel and must urge our nations in this direction also."

So the Conference ended, but its inspiration and challenge live on.

ANDREW D. MacRAE

KARL BARTH:

A MINISTER'S APPRECIATION

The great Karl Barth is no longer with us. His passing, last December, must have stirred many hearts. No doubt various able writers are now at work preparing new appreciations of his thought and influence and we await with interest their considered judgements. The only possible justification for this article is that sometimes an ordinary working minister can say a helpful word to his fellows. In the realm of Barthian exploration I am merely an enthusiastic amateur, who may perhaps, should it be necessary, encourage others to seek a more experienced guide.

There can be no doubt that Barth has been the most influential theologian of the Century. Years ago H. R. Mackintosh spoke of him as "incontestably the greatest figure in Christian theology that has appeared for decades". R. S.

Franks speaks of “the Barthian Revolution” and more recently Paul Tillich declared “By far the most influential theologian up to now this Century is Karl Barth”. Such judgements could of course be multiplied. He has been described as a “superb theologian”, “a mount Everest”, “a theological Einstein”. There can be no doubt that with the publication in 1918 of his *Romerbrief*, that “bomb on the playground of the theologians”, theology entered a new era. It may well be premature to say that his influence is on the wane.

Yet one suspects that Barth’s influence on the average minister has been indirect rather than direct. He is a “theologian’s theologian”. This is due partly to the novelty and profundity of his thought, partly also to the obscurities of his style. Many bones lie bleaching on these lofty hillsides. I know from experience how easy it can be to read page after page of Barth in mystified incomprehension! Yet I believe that to leave Barth to his fellow theologians is a great mistake. I believe that he can be infinitely rewarding to the average minister and I believe that the average minister can climb much higher on these Himalayan heights than he might at first suppose. Let him follow two simple rules of mountaineering and he will go far. The first is—let him begin first on the easier slopes. And the second is — let him betake to himself an experienced guide .

The simplest work of Barth’s of which I have any knowledge is his *Deliverance to the Captives*—sermons preached in Basel Prison. Here is Barth in compassion, humility, and lucid simplicity, telling those who have fallen foul of society, of the grace of God. There is something symbolic here too, for here we have a reminder that the Barthian theology is not just remote theory-spinning but a gospel for sinners. His basic concern is pastoral, and incidentally I have found in these kindly sermons more than one suggestion for my own preaching. The average minister intending to tackle Barth for the first time would probably do well to start with his lectures on the Apostles Creed known as *Dogmatics in Outline*. These are relatively easy going, perhaps due to the fact that they were extemporarily delivered. A little perseverance here will lead one into considerable understanding of Barth’s central emphasis, and it gets easier as you go along.

These lectures were delivered in the summer of 1946 in the ruins of Bonn University, the very place from which Barth had been driven some years before by the Nazis. They had at any rate the sense to realise that Barth was a menace to their ideology. Doubtless Barth felt honoured and as, Tillich has said, “He really made Church history in his fight against the Nazis”.

Once we have mastered *Dogmatics in Outline* many possibilities await us, for Barth was a prolific writer. Baptists will naturally be interested in his little book *The Teaching of the Church regarding Baptism*, translated by Ernest Payne. Here of course he comes down against Infant Baptism. Then again, remembering that the “Epistle to the Romans” was to Barth what “Galatians” was to Luther, many will want to sit at his

feet as he expounds this great Epistle. I commend his *Shorter Commentary on Romans*. To this we may add his *Credo*, *Evangelical Theology*, and *The Faith of the Church*. But these are only the foothills; above us looms the great range of his *Church Dogmatics*. This, his “Magnum Opus”, has been described as “the most impressive theological work of modern times”. It was never completed but even so those twelve massive volumes make the mind boggle. By comparison Calvin’s “Institutes” is a theological “Readers Digest”! Several of these volumes are in our Fraternal Library. My own exploration here is confined to Part 4 (1) the first of his series of three books on Reconciliation, a volume which I surmise is the key to the whole. The going is difficult but the views are grand. “Excelsior!”

And now a few comments concerning reliable guides for would be Barthian explorers. Our own Birch-Hoyle in his day wrote an excellent book on the earlier Barthian theology. But one must remember that the Barth of the “Crisis Theology” developed and advanced very greatly with the passing of the years and only a reasonably up-to-date work is adequate. Hartwell’s *The Theology of Karl Barth* has been described as “lucid, concise and yet detailed”. But two books which I personally have found most illuminating are *Karl Barth and the Christian Message* by Colin Brown and *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* by G. C. Berkouwer. Both of these books are written from a conservative standpoint, and they unerringly point out those aspects of Barth’s theology which conservatives must find suspect. However they both avoid the snare which constantly dogs us, namely to give so much energy to the championing of orthodoxy that we see only the errors and miss the splendours. Colin Brown’s book seems to me to give an excellent “aerial survey”. It is just the book for the man who asks “What is Barth all about anyway?” “It is an attempt” he says “to get into Barth’s mind and see the main issues as he sees them”.

What is Barth all about? The answer can be given in a sentence—*Barth’s unflagging interest is in the great themes of the Bible*. His heart and mind dwell continually on the themes of God, The Trinity, Revelation, Creation, Incarnation, Atonement, Resurrection, Sin, the Holy Spirit, Election, Justification, The Church, Eternal Life, and Christian Ethics. His supreme concern is with soteriology with a most practical interest. He may conduct us to remote confines of thought and the outer rim of truth but his aim is always practical—to set forth a Gospel in the strength of which a man can both live and die.

There is one master key to unlock the labyrinthine corridors of Barth’s thought. *It is to realise that he is resolutely and radically concerned to understand and expound the whole truth about God, Man, and the World in the light of Christ Crucified and Risen*. Here is the Great Principle which is the underlying unity of all his work, the theme of his theological “Enigma Variations”. (See Colin Brown’s *Karl Barth and the Christian Message* page 150). If the question be asked “What

after all is so revolutionary here?"—the best answer is "Tolle Lege"—"take up and read". In the hands of the master the application of this principle leads to amazing new insights (and the rediscovery of many *old* ones!). And as Brown points out, once the central principle is grasped, one sees that behind the apparent complexity is simplicity and behind the apparent chaos symmetry. This does *not* mean that I find myself able to accept all Barth's teachings nor—for that matter—even to understand them all. To read Barth uncritically would be the very worst way to read him, but to the man who knows his Bible and reads with an alert mind there will come again and again a mighty stimulus to his own thinking and flashes of light which almost blind. As David Jenkins says in his *Guide to the Debate about God* Barth does indeed speak about God "in such a way that the spiritual fumblers among us are encouraged to believe that there is indeed a God to Speak of".

If I am asked what I myself find especially valuable in Barth I think I should say it is the emphasis on the "givenness" of the Gospel. Our fathers loved to speak of "the finished work of Christ" and former generations found immense consolation in the concept of Election. It is this same certainty of a sure foundation, this sense of the grip of a Mighty Hand, this assurance of Grace Triumphant, that so impresses me in Barth. "We joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by whom we have now received the Atonement". Barth is of course the modern counterpart of Calvin—"a kindred spirit of the great Genevan" (Arthur Dakin has some valuable pages on this in his book on Calvinism). But Barth's Calvinism is free of those elements which make Calvin's Calvinism, with all its greatness, suspect to us moderns. No longer is the face of God shadowed by ideas of "inscrutable will" and arbitrary choice—daunting and numbing our spirits. Barth's vision is of a God of vast, compelling and universal grace. Whilst we may well have hesitation in accepting the *form* of his doctrine, its *spirit* is surely the very spirit of the New Testament Gospel of redeeming grace. The heart is uplifted and "the ransomed of the Lord return to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads". That at least is my experience. Barth has done my soul good—and he who benefits one's soul is bound to benefit one's preaching. It is my conviction that whether we are conservatives, or liberals, or "middle-of-the-roaders" he has much of value for us. I much regret that I was slow in recognising his greatness.

A. G. MENDHAM

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THE PREPARATION OF THE SERMON

Whatever may have been written on this subject in the past, it merits reconsideration at present and that for many reasons. This is an age of satire and much of it is directed to what is called the Establishment. Thus many people think of the christian church more in terms of 'St Oggs' than of Coventry Cathedral or of progressive Free Church life. Such people would consider that the sermon is due for the museum and the only preparation required for it would be for its last rites and burial.

Today we also witness something of a liturgical revival. To some this seems to deprive the Bible of its centrality and the preaching from it of its utility. The day was when in Free Church circles the non-sermonic parts of the service were called the preliminaries and were considered of secondary importance. But by the justifiable increased interest in liturgy the sermon should not suffer in the least and preparation for it should be considered, as we shall see, but as part of the preparation for the whole service.

Since the Copeck conference of 1924 the social conscience of the church and the community has been aroused, informed and activated in varying degrees and ways. The thought and energy of the minister now have many claims upon them that were not made half a century ago. The value of such claims should not be disputed but they often constitute a serious rival to the demands of the sermon for adequate preparation. These are but some of the issues that make the reconsideration of the preparation of the sermon relevant and necessary. In the preparation for the service the minister will have clearly in mind—

THE CONGREGATION

in all its diversity of age and background, of culture and occupation, of social status and the different states of religious belief and unbelief. We serve a generation accustomed to haste. To many the accelerator is more engaging than the brake. The World Health Organization says that nearly one half of the patients in the hospitals of Western Europe have mental trouble in varying measure. A Digest is a popular form of reading as is a tabloid form of a great work of a novelist or a dramatist on the radio. For decades science has studied to produce labour-saving devices and our Unions have fought for shorter working hours but many still admit, "We have not a minute to spare". Yet our task in the pulpit requires a congregation relaxed in body and in mind, ready to hear what the Lord their God will say to them.

Amid all these relevant considerations some requirements are general and important. In the preparation of our sermons we need to visualise the members of our congregation not only as we see them in the pews but as we have met them in their homes, occupations and pastimes and shared in their joys and sorrows, triumphs and defeats. That rapport between pastor and people invests the making of a sermon with direction,

tone and appeal. A friend of my student days settled in a pastorate in a prairie town in Canada and, soon after, heard two of his members discussing his merits. One summed up my friend as being, "Six days invisible and on the seventh, incomprehensible". I doubt the veracity of the remark but have no doubt about the connection between the invisible and the incomprehensible.

A sermon is a very different thing from an article for the press or a thesis for a board of examiners. Print is cold: speech is warm, especially when illumined by the facial expression of the speaker. Thus our manuscript should always be our servant and not our master. In so relegating it, we may be jeopardising the brilliance of a quotation or the tint of a purple patch. But we must be prepared to stand by the right priorities. Nevertheless, we have to recognise that on no occasion can we meet directly the need and requirement of every one in an average congregation. When a late Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Cosmo Gordon Lang, was a lad of 17 he visited London and on a Sunday decided to hear two distinguished preachers. In the afternoon he heard the famous Canon Liddon and was spellbound and here we will let him speak for himself. He says, "There was immediately in front of me a typical English lower middle-class family—father, mother, son and daughter. They were not spellbound: indeed they fidgeted and looked about; and Papa said to Mama: 'What's it all about?' That evening I went, again alone, to Spurgeon's Tabernacle. The mighty Puritan was in possession of his platform, sometimes colloquial, even vulgar some might think, sometimes breaking out into bursts of eloquence. Strangely the same family as at St Pauls was in front of me. It was they who were spellbound now. As the long sermon ended Papa said to Mama, 'Ah that's the stuff for me.'" What a mercy that we preachers are not a mass-produced, standardised product!

In the preparation of a sermon

THE MATERIAL

we use is of great importance. We are preachers of the Word. Our exposition, our illustration, our appeal should all be subordinate to the Word of God. Yet how wide a field opens before us. Jesus, our example, faithful to His religious heritage, drew heavily from many sources to establish an effective contact with His hearers and then to illumine and reinforce the lesson He was imparting. So from home-life, the daily labour, our recreations and the general world around us we may draw material to help to bring home the Word of God both to those who are committed to Christ and to those who are not.

Our longest and best training for the ministry can do no more than set the pattern for continued study and training till our day is done. We should read widely, wisely and well. Avoid plagiarism as the devil but share with others what has enriched your own mind and heart. Our salaries make a big library impossible for us but the modern public library can prove to be of immense service. Reviews of books can give

helpful guidance, providing one can discriminate between the reviewer who writes to boost sales and he who seeks to give a just appraisal of the book concerned.

Our use of the text should be our first concern. It is not a mere starting point or a peg to carry what we think it should, or what we would like it to say. We must remember that it was first given ages ago in a language and to a people not our own and we should make the greatest possible use of what the scholarship of those times and tongues can give.

Nevertheless the best material may fail if we cannot gain the attention of the hearer. Here we may learn much from the new work on education by Dr Goldman and others. This work was based upon close and prolonged psychological study of children to ascertain what gained their attention and how they reacted to what interested them. A famous American preacher made it a rule to start his sermon with a good story but he never let it get out of place otherwise an arresting and absorbing beginning may be like a pungent *hors-d'oeuvre* which protrudes itself into the flavours of all the following courses.

In the choice and the placing of our material we should see that we appeal to the whole of man's nature, the emotional, the cognitive and the volitional. To address only one side would limit the effect of our appeal and incidentally produce inattention and boredom. The maintenance of a good balance is seen in great art. Shakespeare in his tragic drama of *Macbeth* holds us spellbound with his description of the murderous cogitations of *Macbeth* and *Lady Macbeth* but before he carries us to the actual deed itself, he gives us pause and we relax as he describes King *Duncan's* arrival at *Macbeth's* castle and gives his peaceful observation,

"This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses."

A parallel to this is to be found in *Finlandia* the tone poem of *Sibelius*. Here we are given vast, tumultuous cadences of musical splendour, apt symbol of mountain torrents charging boisterously to the sea. But as we begin to feel overwhelmed with their force and beauty, they are strangely hushed and the silence that follows is broken by a sweet and soft melody which appears in our *Baptist Hymn Book* providing the tune for the hymn number 683, "still, still with Thee."

But when due regard has been given to the choice of material, its initial appeal, the balance and diversity, we have to consider

THE DESIGN

or goal. To what end is it all directed? The service is a unity with a definite aim to which all the parts should be

¹ *Macbeth*. Act I. Scene VI.

² It is significant that *Sibelius* composed *Finlandia* to rouse the national Spirit of Finland when under Russian oppression. It was so successful that Russia prohibited the playing of this tone-poem.

directed and so make their appropriate contribution. There should be balance in the parts. The illustrative should not overwhelm the didactic or vice versa. Here perhaps we need to watch our own unconscious, built-in tendencies, say, to argue or to generalise too freely, to be too biographical, doctrinal or historical. Neither should we be slaves to inherited patterns. Some division in the sermon helps to clarify and may be an aid to memory. But while the divisions are often useful, they should never be considered as inevitable or compulsory. The passage from one section of the sermon to another can at times be aided by the interposition of a hymn between them. Wisely chosen the hymn may afford a helpful introduction to what follows and it can also provide a beneficial pause in a sermon that demands close attention.

As we thus study the transition of the sermon from the beginning to the end, we should as carefully watch what precedes the beginning and what follows the end. A sermon constructed with complete disregard of its context is like a human being who has lost or neglected his friends and relatives and is thereby greatly impoverished. There is something in the old saw that a text without its context is only a pretext. It is to be regretted that in spite of the liturgical movement, the numbers of choirs are diminishing and sometimes, where there are still choirs, the chant or the anthem is falling into desuetude.

In thus reorganising the context of the sermon, we shall realize the opportunities for the active participation of the worshipper in the service. Our desire should be to engage heart, mind and will, to elicit their spoken request or response. Thus antiphonal reading of the word of God and responsive prayers are of great value. This relates to what follows as well as to what precedes the sermon. The close of the service may find the worshipper in a mood of thanksgiving or penitence: he may be incited to intercession or praise. An appropriate hymn or prayer may serve that purpose. The whole act or design of worship should be the determining factor. When that end has been served, the service should end whatever the time may be. In all this it is most obvious how very important is

THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

In the opening passages of the epic poem *Paradise Lost*, *Milton* breathes the prayer,

What is dark in me illumine
What is low raise and support.

These words could fittingly rise from the heart of any preacher as he begins the preparation of a sermon. Probably neither poet nor artist is so deeply involved in his work as is a preacher as he prepares his message, and that is no light comparison. One artist mixed his colours with his life-blood. *Keats* felt the bitter attack on his poem, *Endymion*, as a stab in the heart. This actually ended in a rupture of a blood vessel in the lungs, causing his death in his 24th year. *Endymion* was to him, as his own child, an extension of his per-

sonality. This deep involvement is a requirement of all high workmanship.

So however good our material, however wise our design, in our preparation it is ourselves that count the most. Says the Apostle Paul to his young follower, Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to your teaching". (1. Tim. 4, 16.)

Yet there are moments when one feels one is almost a stranger to oneself. We have our unconscious inclinations and preferences, prejudices and weaknesses, our subconscious motivations. No doubt we feel, too, that our inspirations are so intermittent and fugitive. Matthew Arnold certainly speaks for us when he says,

We cannot kindle when we will
The fire which in the heart resides
The spirit bloweth and is still,
In mystery our soul abides:

But it is not all mystery and mere chance for he continues
But tasks in hours of insight will'd
Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.

A light may surprise us while we sing: a saintly life may inspire us during a conversation. If occasion permitted, it would be good to take note of these and to hold them in store against the day when the wells of inspiration are dried up. The wise virgins met an emergency with requirements the occasion could not supply.

Our minds are not impervious to fashion in thought which can be seductive as fashions in attire. And we may even count as an oddity anyone not thus carried away. The distinguished theologian, Professor John Baillie, in an introduction to a devotional book of his, tells of an amusing incident between himself and his students. They had been under the Barthian influence prevailing at that time and were a little disconcerted that their professor was apparently not so enthusiastic. He had wider fields in view: was he more susceptible to other thinkers? Whatever may be the answer, one day the professor came unexpectedly upon his students and heard them singing a parody on the old popular song, "Daisy, Daisy," to the words,

Baillie, Baillie, give me your answer do,
Why ain't Plato found in the canon too?

Perhaps a graver danger than any intellectual bias is the all prevalent feeling of depression found in church life today. Instances of its absence, of course, can be quoted. New vision and new initiative do brighten some scenes of church life but honesty would compel us to admit that we are passing through lean years in the life of the church.

This has its parallel in other times and spheres. The poet Gray noted the paucity of great poetry in his own age as compared with that of the Shakespearian age. He felt a chilly east wind was blowing and wrote,

But not to one in this benighted age
Is that divine inspiration given,
That glows in Milton's and in Shakespeare's page
The pomp and prodigality of heaven.

We know the feeling. Few ministers preach in crowded churches; and we are human and, like nature, 'abhor a vacuum'. But this is not all that must be said. What is crucial is not the kind of age that is ours, but how we react to it. Hamlet felt that the times 'were out of joint' and deemed it a cursed spite that he was born to set them right. But Lowell shows us a more excellent way, when he writes,

Then to side with truth is noble when we share her
wretched crust, Ere the cause brings fame and profit
and 'tis prosperous to be just.

It is because of what nature does in the bitter dreariness of winter that spring has her beauty and summer her bounty. Future generations may reap good harvests from our present sowings and "God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love". (Hebrews 6, 10.)

This recognition of the pressure of the age on personal life and of its influence upon our work will enable us to realise the necessity of quiet times for spiritual recuperation and sermon preparation. In safeguarding these we need not fear that we have an exaggerated sense of self-importance or an inflated conception of our task. Jesus took His quiet retreats in the face of most urgent need and while He has set before us an open door, He also assures us that God has some good things that will not be ours till we have 'closed the door.'

But if the door be closed, the skylight must be left open. We must be susceptible to influences and responsive to voices from above, for our most urgent necessity in sermon preparation is to hear

THE VOICE OF GOD.

We have witnessed in the last decade or two a scientific renaissance bearing great likeness to and difference from the renaissance of the 15th century. It is not surprising that the changes in religious thought, outlook and action today in response to this has been called the "New Reformation" and there is something to justify the title. This description, however, needs qualification. The soul of the old reformation was not merely an intellectual readjustment in the light of new knowledge but a religious awakening due to the rediscovery of the Word of God. As the Renaissance scholar of the 15th century was reawakened, informed and enlightened by reading the classical literature of ancient Greece and Rome, so Luther by returning to the Word of God, found God anew, discovered that God had yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word. And what did so break forth did not exhaust the supply of truth in that word nor rigidly fix the patterns of truth for ever afterwards. So while we should welcome all new light the modern renaissance gives, it can only provide clues and pointers to the great Creator whose wonderful world is now known and utilised as never before. But the new reformation will arise from the discovery, not of the world of nature, but of the word of nature's God especially as it reveals the Word incarnate, Christ, the Saviour of the world. Thus our deep-seated religious malaise requires for

its remedy not mere modernity but the outpouring of the spirit of God which illumines the word which He gave to inspired men of old.

For in all real preaching there is something from above, what Rudolf Otto would call the touch of the 'luminous'. Mere scholarship or literary ability cannot guarantee it, much less should they antagonise it. It is that uplift and illumination, that conviction and apprehension, that constrains the admission, "Surely God was in this place".

One of the great preachers of the Scottish pulpit half a century ago was Dr. G. H. Morrison of the Wellington St. United Free church, Glasgow. In his first pastorate he preached in a church where the vestry was high above and behind the pulpit which was reached by a flight of steps visible to the congregation. One little boy described that vestry as the lofty place where God gave Dr. Morrison the sermon he was to preach. That was a boy's description of a regular Sunday incident and, were that literally true, then our subject, the preparation of the sermon, would be as sublime as it was simple. Yet to many a senior worshipper that boy's description was a parable of a glorious reality. They felt that from his pulpit Mr. Morrison had delivered to them something that he had received from the Lord Jesus. It is ever thus. Apart from that which is not of man, all that man of himself can bring to his pulpit may be but as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal and so the best of all preparation for the sermon is to utter the prayer—

Speak Lord for Thy servant heareth.

T. G. DUNNING

AUTHORITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

This article was originally produced when an uncertainty arose in the course of ordinary church life. It concerned the question: In a disputed issue, who has the last word? Is it the minister? the deacons? the church meeting? So these thoughts were put in order as an attempt to set down guide lines for the inter-relationships of the three.

The Question

We can assume that there is such a thing as final authority, and that this is the prerogative and possession of Him Whose the church is by virtue of purchase, namely, our Lord and Saviour: Eph. 5.25-7, John 14.15. Then the vital question is: How does the Lord of the church reveal His commands to a particular congregation at a particular time? How is the authority which He possesses conveyed to ourselves? It is noteworthy that this is by no means an exclusive Baptist question: in one form or another, it is an issue faced by ecumenical discussions far beyond our denominational borders.

Broadly speaking, the churches have answered the question about authority in three contrasting ways. It has been said, the Lord conveys His authority through *the autocratic individual* (this is the way of the great Catholic churches): or through *the autocratic group* (this is the way of the Presbyterian churches): or through *the deliberative congregation* (this is the way of the radical protestant churches). Whatever we may want to say about the first two, in approval or censure, there is no doubt that the third way is attested (and presumably commended) in the New Testament. In Acts 15.22 the whole church is consulted before the draft of the letter is sent to the Gentile converts at Antioch. In 1 Cor. 5:3-5 the whole church is seen to be the organ of excommunication.

But at the same time it is clear that there was in the primitive congregations a recognition of the principle of firm leadership and the duty of Christians to defer to it. 1 Thess 5: 12-13 is a firm exhortation to esteem and to love the congregation's leaders. Hebrews 13:17 brings us a command to obey the leaders of the congregation. The words are forceful.

There is obviously something of a contrast between the congregational democracy that is implied in certain texts, and the acceptance of leadership and authority which is commended in others. In view of this contrast, some scholars propose that in matters of the formal administrative arrangements of the churches, there was great dependence upon the social and political milieu in which the churches severally grew. So in Corinth, with the traditions of Greek political democracy, the church was naturally run on democratic lines, whereas in Jerusalem and amongst Hebrew Christians generally the autocratic traditions of the synagogue reproduced themselves in the churches. It has been possible for some to argue that matters of church organisation are therefore arbitrary and temporary, historically interesting but scarcely of greater moment to the churches in other periods and places.

But it can be questioned whether the conclusion is altogether justified. It is *prima facie* true that the social conditions from which the churches sprang affected their nature to some degree. Some would be more Jewish, some more Greek. Yet we find that it is in a Greek church, Thessalonica, where we read the exhortation to hold the leaders of the congregation in the highest regard: and it is in the Jerusalem church, where we would expect the most consistent autocracy, that there is the deliberate step of associating the rank and file members in a decision reached, as to its essentials, by the apostles and elders.

We are in a position to state the first major conclusion of this study. Different as they must have been, *the primitive churches seem to be making the deliberate attempt to combine the principle of congregational democracy with the principle of the acknowledgement of spiritual authority and deference to it.*

Our contemporary churches

We now pass to a consideration of the structure of a Baptist church today in the light of the general New Testament arrangements. Our churches comprise a minister (sometimes

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with an assistant, sometimes with the assistance of elders from the congregation), the deacons and the church members. All have their functions and parts to play. The arrangements are both alike to and different from the New Testament situation. Whereas it is assumed by us that ideally the church has "a minister" we look in vain for the single man ministry in the primitive congregations. It would appear that spiritual oversight of the earliest churches was given into the hands of a group of "bishops" or "elders". It is clear from Phil. 1:1 that the single community possessed more than one person in pastoral charge. (Wouldn't it be delightful to know how, following Paul's personal appointing of the elders in the churches he had founded, the successors to those elders were found!)

It would certainly seem to be the case that the primitive churches discovered the need for administrative officers; but at those points where they are mentioned it is rubbed home that these men are not to be considered as administrative functionaries alone: they are men of spiritual trust by virtue of their office. To put the matter differently, those members of the congregation who were to be administrative officers must also be seen to possess spiritual capabilities that would make them worthy of regard. Acts 6:1-4 and 1 Tim. 3:8-13 are eloquent on the point. It is however a truism to observe that our Baptist deacons today cannot be known exactly and in all points to be the successors of those who bore the name in Timothy's church. We haven't enough information on the primitive organisation to affirm that they are.

The Baptist church meeting, finally, has tended to become the body which at will can set aside the decisions and judgments of those who are its leaders. Of this there is not a trace in the New Testament. The apostles would have been surprised at the way in which some church meetings consider that all competence is given to them. There is no going back on the New Testament principle that the whole body of the membership is to be executively involved in the business of the church: but on what ground have we considered that "the church" in a given place is exclusively defined as the church meeting! We must represent matters in the form of an equation, thus:

local church = minister + deacons + church members and authority (whatever that may be) in the local church is given not to one alone, nor another alone, but to the whole church of which these are three constituent parts.

We can see therefore that our contemporary Baptist arrangements are both alike and different to the New Testament situation. On the one hand, there seems little warrant for, and little likelihood of our going back to the New Testament "golden age" to imitate in every last particular the administrative arrangements of the early churches: yet on the other hand we would not feel free to ride roughshod over the principles which it seems governed the structure of those churches. *Our task seems to be, not so much to revise our existing structures in the way of imitation, but to infuse into what we have the spiritual life and constraints of the early days.*

What is "authority" anyway?

Authority is a slippery term, and it is necessary to say something as to its meaning. Authority must be differently defined according to the person who may be said to possess it. When we speak of the "final authority" of the Lord, clearly this denotes His possession of an unquestioned right to rule and be obeyed. When we speak of the authority of the local church, we mean that the local body of Christian believers has the right, under Christ, to order its own affairs executively without the duty necessarily to consult outside bodies or persons. But what do we mean by the authority of the Minister? of the deacons? of the church meeting?

The important things about this matter seem to be contained in such passages as Mark 10:42-4, John 13:14-15, Phil. 2:1-4: the spirit of all these utterances is that, whatever can be said of the authority of particular individuals or groups in the Christian community, it is not precisely a *legislative* authority. On the contrary, the inter-relationships of parts of the Christian fellowship are defined in terms of service, deference to others, forbearance, kindness and generosity. If then the officers of the congregation do not impose their will legislatively or statutorily, what is the nature of their authority? *It can only be a moral and spiritual authority in view of their appointment.* These are men who take care to act in the spirit of the Scriptures mentioned in the previous sentences, and who can therefore be expected to be treated and regarded in accordance with the scriptures describing things at Thessalonica and the church of the "Hebrews".

It is worth pondering for a moment what we feel to be involved in the "election" of a minister and the "election" of deacons, for we can be misled by the obvious political analogy. In a national or local election to political office, it happens that those elected have derived their power from the expressed will of the electors. A General Election is a bestowing of authority. Reflection will suggest that this cannot be the case in an election to office in the congregation. On such an occasion, a church does not convey authority, but recognizes it and agrees to submit to it. Admittedly one cannot give chapter and verse for this way of seeing things, but it would seem to follow from the kind of thing that is said—for instance—of the kind of qualities and qualification of the "deacons" in Timothy's church. These qualifications are detected by the congregation, which then summons to office those who possess them. The congregation then places itself in a new relationship to those so summoned, a relationship described, as we have suggested, at 1 Thess 5:12-13 and Hebrews 13:17. Let it be immediately said that it is not only church members who are to hold the officers in high regard and defer to them. The relevant passages from Mark, John and Philipians indicate that officers have the plain duty to defer to the church members, and Peter makes it clear that the elders of the congregations to which he wrote are not to tyrannize "over those allotted to your care" 1 Peter 5:3.

The Baptist Insurance Company Limited 4 Southampton Row, London, W.C.1

To the members of the Baptist Ministers' Fraternal

Dear Friends,

" should I go to church
And see the holy edifice of stone,
And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks
Which touching but my gentle vessel's side
Would scatter all her spices on the stream"

Merchant of Venice

Last Sunday evening my attention wandered too and I found myself looking up at the massive roof timbers of my church—I came to the conclusion that a fire in the right (or rather wrong) place would bring that roof crashing down.

So I suppose according to their particular bent the minds of others wander.

I have seen many churches in my time and stood, at inspections, in many pulpits. It is astonishing how those who are adrift from a service can be quickly detected; especially is this so in older buildings where the elevated pulpits afford a panoramic view of the congregation.

Before however you dismiss an inattention from your mind it could be worthwhile to enquire, tactfully of course, the trend of the wanderer's thoughts.

Those with professional skill or D.I.Y. ability may have been considering how this or that improvement might be effected or some defect remedied.

My own thoughts were destructive and hardly to be encouraged!

It could perhaps be worth your while to exploit a moment of inattention to the advantage of some project of voluntary work—a kind of penance in expertise. If so then please make sure your treasurer refers to us for the necessary Voluntary Workers insurance cover—it would be carrying penance too far to leave a volunteer without benefit!

Yours sincerely,

C. J. L. COLVIN,
General Manager

We come then to this answer: that *the term authority needs careful handling: it denotes a moral and spiritual, rather than a legislative and statutory relationship. The kinds of thing which are said lead to the conclusion that the relationships governing the threefold division of the congregation (minister, deacons and members) are to be characterised by service, mutual deference, mutual forbearance—exactly those things which the term "authority" tends to exclude in most human instances of its use.*

The practical life of our congregations

We are now in a position to draw together the various threads of the argument and to apply it to the actual life of our congregations when attempting to make decisions.

Since the source of authority is the local church as a whole, and not the minister alone, nor the deacons alone, nor the church meeting alone, it is the plainest duty of each party to be fully aware of the others and be prepared to defer to views expressed by the others. Any final decision can only be properly made in the light of such a comprehensive acceptance of opinions. This means, for instance, that the minister will not attempt to impose his view on a particular issue without the fullest consultation. It may be that, on occasion, he may feel it right to say—'although I have not convinced you that such and such a measure is right, nevertheless I want you to accept it for my sake'—and this would be to appeal to his peculiar position in the local church. Such an appeal is by no means out of character with what the New Testament has to say, as should by now be clear. In such an instance the congregation might well feel itself in the position of accepting a situation or proposal as handed down from their chosen minister and bearing the mark of his position. It goes without saying that such instances, however justified on New Testament grounds, are likely to be rare: but a congregation must expect them to occur from time to time, and must be taught to expect them.

The deacons are in a broadly similar position. They would be unwise, and out of the spirit of the New Testament, ever to impose a particular measure without consultation in the church meeting. Yet, by virtue of their position, by virtue of the kind of men their appointment presumes them to be, they are in the position of expecting that their views will be given more than ordinary weight, and it may be that on occasion they may feel it right to say that, although their point of view has not convinced the members, yet they must ask that the measure in question be accepted. What is important is that ordinary church members must not feel they have the right of ignoring deacons' decisions or riding rough shod over them. When a decision is handed down from the deacons' court to the church meeting, it ought to be possible for it to be made clear that there are some matters comparatively trivial which the deacons feel can be changed or modified at will by the members, but that some matters the deacons feel to be of such moment that, if the church meeting fails to accept decisions reached by them, they will expect them to be returned for

further consideration. It is quite improper for a church members' meeting to feel that each and every viewpoint of the deacons is merely material for the meeting to discard.

For its part, the church meeting has the right to expect that the plans, hopes, aspirations and intentions of both minister and deacons are of such a kind that they can freely be described in the course of business. They can expect that no measure which will affect their spiritual happiness, the accustomed forms of church life and worship and the like, will be put into effect without their having been consulted. They can expect that the minister and deacons will be receptive to comment concerning the life of the church at a particular time, so that nothing need be said critically in corners that cannot also be put to the church officers either privately or publicly. Yet for all this, the church meeting must recognize continually what is involved in the calling of a minister and the elections of deacons. It is the summons to exercise spiritual authority, and the volunteering of deference and regard in a new situation.

Clearly, everything that we have been saying will be radically tested at a time of serious disagreement about a fundamental measure. What happens when the officers on the one hand and the members on the other are at odds over, say, the expenditure of a large sum of money? A recommendation from the church officers that the members meeting cannot accept ought to be returned to the officers for maturer consideration: and in the event of continued inability to resolve the matter, after prayer and generous discussion, wise and spiritual men and members will doubtless feel that the matter ought to be left unresolved. But such instances will be few in a spiritual fellowship of people. Perhaps it will be plain that being a Baptist church imposes a strain upon our spiritual ability. There is no doubt at all that a Baptist church member, by virtue of the constitution of the church, of the part that the member plays in the most vital decisions, has to be spiritually "on his mettle" continually. By implication, to be member of a church of our kind, and much more, to be an officer in one, is a privilege and a challenge.

E. BRUCE HARDY

FISH—THE SIGN OF A CARING COMMUNITY

Nobody who sees "The Readers Digest" can now fail to know what the Fish Scheme is. "The sign that stands for Friendship", or "The Friendly Fish" in the American edition, has given the Fish Scheme some publicity. At the same time these two articles show marked differences of approach and illustrate the variety that is possible within the single 'Fish' idea.

The Scheme originated in Old Headington near Oxford in 1961. There the parish church, during a series of home visitations, became increasingly aware that our welfare services, however good they may be, are not able to meet all the ordinary needs and emergencies of the community. The question therefore was how the natural good neighbourly atmosphere of past settled communities could be recreated in our present estates, suburbs and cities. The Old Headington project was essentially parochial and it was through this that the Fish was adopted as its symbol for, as an early Christian symbol of recognition, it had the significance of being "Christian without being off-putting to non-church goers".

The Fish Scheme has now spread throughout the world. It is running in a number of places in Great Britain, in other parts of Europe, the United States, Japan and South Africa. One member in our own Scheme has just received a request for information about it from Natal.

In some circles it seems I have to justify my involvement as a minister of religion in the Scheme. Possibly this is partly because, as it spreads, it has grown away from its original church basis into something encouraged by local Councils of Social Service. In many areas the Scheme remains a parish scheme, in some it is ecumenically maintained, but here the initiative was taken by our local Council of Social Service which then invited the Councils of churches and local churches to establish it. Interestingly enough, especially among non-church people, this church involvement and my involvement as a minister are taken as right and proper. Concern and involvement in the community, for my part, is an inescapable concomitant of the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the fullness of His expression of it in word and deed.

Fish Schemes are concerned with a social problem which is perhaps not very dramatic. The problem can be illustrated by the loneliness often felt among people who move fairly frequently from place to place because of promotion or work. At a local mother and baby club 90% of the mothers, and presumably all the babies, had been in our district less than two years. It can be illustrated too by the problem of elderly folk living away from relatives, or again, by the problem of what to do and where to turn to in any domestic emergency when a person, either by choice or through circumstances, is isolated however many people live around.

In settled communities there was a more developed sense of community, sometimes too much so! Such communities had their unofficial newcomers, mid-wives, nurses and so forth and even the local nosey-parker had some value, if only that it meant that no one could be left dead for as long as three months before it was discovered, as has recently happened.

Perhaps the main feature of the Fish Scheme in our district, affluent and suburban, is to attempt to recover and encourage something of this former community. Rather than leaving domestic difficulties to chance, busy-bodies or do-gooders, we are attempting to create an atmosphere, the idea of a community that cares and spontaneously cares, in which 'I and my

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neighbour in our street' in a spirit of neighbourliness, are available to help each other out whenever this is necessary.

To do this we place a great deal of emphasis on the mutual nature of the Scheme with help being received at one time and given at another. Experience has shown us that when a person realises, in theory at least, that they too can offer help it is easier for them also to receive help. Those involved in the Scheme are not trained and certainly not paid although we do try to reimburse anyone for any larger out-of-pocket expenses; for example, for petrol when a car has been used any distance or for food when meals have been provided for somebody in circumstances where we do not wish to press matters of payment. There is a great deal of stress on simply being available, avoiding officiousness, patronage or do-gooding in the bad sense of that phrase. There is no attempt to do anything beyond the ability of those within the Scheme nor to invade privacy, for we advertise ourselves as an emergency first aid in time of social need. The help given is normally of a one-time-only nature although, of course, there are long term expressions of neighbourliness involved. We have, and try to keep, the best relationships with Doctors, Psychiatrists, statutory and voluntary welfare agencies and we find that this is possible because, as we say, "we are just being neighbours".

Some organisation is unavoidable and is of value, but we try to avoid the institutional emphasis as much as possible. It would be pleasant to think that even the gimmick of a Fish Scheme was unnecessary but we have found that the Scheme, the Fish badge and the organisation is important in order to ensure that no one is left out inadvertently, and to encourage older people to feel able to call on the Scheme without offending their pride and without the feeling that they are imposing on someone. The organisation that we have set up also enables Doctors, statutory and voluntary social welfare workers, etc. to use the Fish Scheme's spirit of neighbourliness.

The true hub of the Scheme is the Street Warden although very often she or he, for we have at least one retired man involved in this, may not be called on in any very obvious way. It is the Warden's task to relate need to helper in a stretch of about twenty houses, to welcome new people moving in and to keep an eye on old people though not in any sense of interference but simply through an occasional call and watching milk bottles etc.

A card in red, with the Fish symbol, is given to every home for use in any emergency where it is difficult to call for help. The card also gives telephone numbers and addresses where help is available. The advantage of the 'Fish' emergency card, as distinct from 'S.O.S.' or 'Help' cards, is that people feel that they are not inviting into their homes just anyone, but only someone they probably know already and who is in a sense vouched for.

We have divided our community of about 11,000 homes into six convenient, fairly well defined areas and have appointed an Area Organiser for each of these six areas. Their names and my own name as chairman of our district have been

handed to statutory and voluntary welfare workers, doctors, tradesmen and anyone else we think appropriate, to enable these to use the Scheme and to save them having to look through long lists of names in order to get in touch with the help available in a specific locality. Our standard, though not very serious, illustration of this is the problem of an elderly lady arriving in hospital after an accident and discovering to her dismay that she had left her false teeth in the bathroom and must receive the doctors in this denuded condition! It would be far too much, of course, for the hospital sister to try to decide which Street Warden covered the particular part of the old lady's road in order to arrange for her teeth to be brought to the hospital.

Now, what has it done? Our Scheme has been in operation for nearly two years. During that time the "bread and butter" type of help we have offered has been the fetching of prescriptions and shopping during flu and like epidemics. This in fact has become so commonplace that the Fish Scheme is no longer given credit for it, which we reckon a mark of success. We are in an area where there is more money to be gained from private 'charring', and the demand is such that home helps are in short supply. We have therefore been able to provide a stop-gap of this nature for people coming out of hospital or in some way suddenly handicapped.

An elderly lady with a hiatus hernia and chronic cardiac condition was taken by us in a car to an appointment with a specialist in town, 7 miles away, after a district nurse had brought her problem to us, stating that it was obviously not right for anyone in this condition to travel by bus.

Two particular examples are especially gratifying; the details are something as follows. Quite early on we had an appeal by a district nurse. She had been on duty all day, was to be on duty the whole of the next day also and faced the prospect of sitting up all night with an elderly lady who was far from well. Suddenly she thought that the Fish Scheme might be able to help, and within an hour of her request for night-sitters two people were settled with her patient, and I am sure that the district nurse was more efficient the next day as a result. The other example has just recently occurred. It concerned an active lady with terminal cancer. It had been arranged that she should go into a cancer nursing home, but she wanted to live at home 'normally' as long as possible before that final step to what she knew would be the end. Through simple help with shopping and in her home, our Scheme enabled her to live in her own house two weeks longer than it would otherwise have been possible. When finally she did go into the nursing home it was shortly before she slipped into a coma and only about five days before her death.

These two examples are of the more dramatic nature. It would be possible to add others of assistance given in taking visitors to hospitals, children to special schools, finding accommodation, looking after children, providing transport in special cases and so forth. In a sense to list examples of this nature is misleading. Very often the Scheme is there but com-

paratively little used. Its real value is in its availability rather than in its statistical successes. It is our conviction that the help that we give is the private affair of the person who receives it; it is a mutual matter between neighbours, and therefore we discourage anything but unofficial records, and these are not available in order to assess the efficiency of the Scheme nor for those who wish to research statistically into instances of need in a given area. Perhaps the essence of the Fish Scheme was summed up by one of our Street Wardens who said, "We have not done anything very much, but it is amazing what the Fish Scheme has done for us in our road in terms of friendship".

L. B. KEEBLE

THE SUNDAY EVENING SERVICE: AN EXPERIMENT

A quiet revolution in Sunday worship began with the adoption of the Lord's Supper as a weekly observance. The deacons led the church to see that it was Scriptural and would deepen the devotional life of the church. Some members, in the experimental months, were nervous that it would become commonplace and lose its spiritual impact: others were concerned about the length of the service. Neither of these fears were realised. The morning congregation increased and there was appreciation by many of the new depth to worship. Only a very few felt the need or desire to leave before Communion and an hour and ten minutes was found to be sufficient for a service that included a word to the children, preaching and the Lord's Table. The reading of notices was replaced by duplicating notice sheets for each worshipper, thus saving valuable time.

Six month's experiment and the new pattern became permanent. Once a month the minister and deacons sit together on the rostrum, sharing the Scripture readings and prayers and underlining the fact that the proclamation of the Gospel is not that of the minister alone but of the whole church. Largely the morning congregation is composed of committed Christians but no embarrassment is caused to any newcomers or visitors. The invitation to partake is given to "all who love Our Lord Jesus Christ" but all who come to the service are encouraged to remain to the end. The hymn after the sermon is always the communion hymn and those who leave do so then. The first Sunday in the month is always a Parade Service for uniformed organisations and Communion is observed in the evening. Exception to this practice is made only on two or three special occasions such as Sunday School Anniversary or Harvest Festival. To go back to former ways would be to deprive ourselves of rich spiritual food.

The break-through in evening worship came after the President's "Call to Evangelism" in 1968. The diaconate considered the challenge and decided one of the first moves must be a greater evangelistic thrust in the evenings. But had we

only got a hymn sandwich to offer those we desired to win for Christ?

For seven weeks we decided to experiment with our form of worship, being as varied and flexible as possible. Three congregational hymns were found to be adequate for any service (apart from Communion): vocal items by soloists and groups added interest and challenge and the guitar proved popular with old and young. We are fortunate in possessing talented young people. "Interviews" in place of testimonies are being widely tried out but we had no opportunity to cross-examine denominational leaders or ecumenical personalities. However, we went ahead with a "Face to Face" and had some surprising successes with local people who "came across". The sermon became a little more racy and relevant and the minister forsaking the pulpit for a stand microphone on the rostrum found he was more amongst his people and engaging their attention more readily.

The church meeting in the autumn of 1968 decided they wanted this pattern continued, especially appreciating the contrast with Communion. Our people have a legitimate criticism. We like them to be "Twicers" and then invite them to two very similar services. Most of them opt for one and who can blame them? It could be levelled at us that our way is the old fashioned "saints in the morning and sinners at night" but this judgement is only valid where we are missing the target! Gordon Hastings (*The Fraternal*, October 1968) suggests one service a day and the evening liberated for "other forms of fellowship study and prayer". This may be true for some churches but I think that with a "new look" at the content, the evening can still be a time for evangelistic outreach in a great number of fellowships.

A number of factors in the new approach are worth sifting. The move to the rostrum is no minimising of the preached message I abhor the "homely chat"! I benefited immensely from *The Fraternal* articles on "Preaching" by Mervyn Himbury and Ronald Armstrong, but by tradition we seem bound to our pulpits and today this can be a disadvantage. The declaration of the Gospel is not determined by the position or manner we adopt but by the content and aim. The pulpit "style" is a product of Victorian Christianity with its large congregations and rapt attention to the Word of God. Most of us minister not to hundreds of people but to scores, some of whom are sceptical or perplexed about the faith and who don't look upon the preacher with the awe of former generations. More importantly they are all conditioned to the person to person approach of television and have a built in resistance to anyone who tries to preach at them. My people have spoken gratefully to me about the times when I have vacated the pulpit "six feet above contradiction" and started talking to them—about God in their situation. The unconverted man will frequently close his mind to the preacher from the first sentence, but he will listen intently to someone who converses with him. Instead of sighing for the crowds we can speak in every service to the individual.

WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION
409 Barking Road, Plaistow, London. E.13

My dear Brother Minister,

We are just launching out on a new project at Orchard House—our Home for boys in need of care and protection.

It has been obvious to us for some time that we need at least one extra senior member of staff and the Church Council has now approved a scheme to build an extension to Orchard House.

The upper part of the extension will be a larger flat for the Warden of Orchard House and his family, and this accommodation will set free the present Warden's flat to enable us to house an assistant Warden. The downstairs part of the extension will consist of extra recreational and reading rooms for the boys. As a result of the extension, we hope to be in a position to increase the average number of boys resident in Orchard House to 25.

The cost of this extension will be at least £12,000, and I am appealing to our wide circle of friends in our Churches to contribute to this Extension Fund. In particular I am writing a special appeal to all Baptist Young People's Fellowship groups and Youth Clubs to ask them to consider embarking on a project to raise money for this extension work.

I believe there are many young people in our Churches who will be only too glad to lend a hand for such a worthy cause and I appeal to my brethren in the Ministry to speak a good word to their Youth Leaders about this scheme to encourage them to take a share by lending a helping hand to young people in distress. I shall value very much anything you can do to encourage your young people to take part in such a venture.

Our Bromley Young People's Fellowship recently sent me a cheque for £250 which shows what can be done by such a group. Of course, I realise that not everybody can do things on this scale, but I earnestly hope that many such groups up and down the country will decide to "have a go".

Let me also remind you that we are issuing, as from the 1st October next, a new coloured film strip which promises to be the best we have ever sent out. The film strip is accompanied by a manuscript commentary and it makes a very good programme item for Women's Meetings, Contact Clubs, Youth Groups etc., and is also valuable for a 'Church Night' programme.

We also find that many Sunday Schools are glad to show this film strip to their young people to illustrate the Christian social work done by the Mission.

There is no charge for the film strip although we are always glad to have a donation of course! Please commend this film strip to whoever may be interested.

All correspondence about the film strip should be sent to me, here at the Mission.

May God's blessing be on you and on your own ministry,

Yours very sincerely,

STANLEY TURL.
Superintendent of the Mission.

We discovered that we could not be too highbrow about what music and anthems ought to appeal to a congregation. Older people like the traditional anthems but for many young people they are pious songs that fall on deaf ears, creating an image of a church living in the past. The spirituals, gospel songs and ballads composed by the singers always go down well. Musically poor, compared with the diet loved by congregations in an age of faith, they can move the heart today and we should not shirk using them.

We have paid attention to sound. Our T.V. generation gets its sound as loud and clear as they want it. They expect the same when they come to church and will stay away if they don't get it. They will always assert they have heard a better preacher but we can ensure that they don't hear a preacher better! We have paid attention to lighting. A few pounds can transform a dingy sanctuary. A well-lit church is inviting, and a couple of spotlights judiciously used have highlighted to good effect a soloist, group, or baptismal pool.

The "Interviews" are well prepared beforehand but give the impression of spontaneity. They present the opportunity for humour and congregational involvement, an excellent preparation for the message. Over the months I have talked with a schoolmaster about sixth form attitudes to religion, a student about university life today, an ex-Salvation Army officer nearing ninety about her experiences seventy years ago, a foreman in a car factory, an evangelist on the E.A. Report "On the Other Side" and (during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity), a High Church vicar. This last one was fascinating as we discovered his origins in the Plymouth Brethren and his baptism as a believer in a well-known Baptist Church! The interview gives opportunity for people to see that Christianity is "earthed" in the everyday life and to show that testimony is not limited to a conversion experience decades in the past.

"News on Sunday" has proved popular and is a valuable media about once a month. Items are culled from the daily press and Christian newspapers that might have been overlooked and mention made of past and future events in the church and town. Matters that have a national significance but are locally relevant are good material. For instance some comment on England "going metric" can be particularised in its possible implications for church collections because of the "missing half crown"! The style is pithy and controversial subjects are avoided since this is not the place in the service to win a verdict!

But can we maintain over months or years an evening service that is not a gimmick but brings people with quickened step to share in the worship? My belief is that many of our members are bored with a service pattern that has no theological justification and it certainly sparks off no desire to come amongst Christ's 'other sheep'. We spend hours on our sermons but little on the environment and medium, and to some extent anyway, "The Medium is the Message" (Marshall McLuhan). The time has come to throw away our printed order sheets on which we fill in the hymn numbers, and plan

a service each week that appeals to tabloid and T.V. conditioned modern people. If we don't do this the next decade may see the end of evening worship up and down the country. No matter how good the preaching and how devout the congregation the hymn sandwich is just too stale and unappetising.

A relevant point is that these new patterns have not been achieved in a new church. We have, as most churches in seaside towns, a large number of retired people, mature in the Christian faith and seemingly set in their ways. But they have welcomed the innovations with enthusiasm, and when we have a Gospel Beat Group tap their feet with the rest!

Given a strong lead it would thus appear that people of all ages are ready for change. Obviously a minister can't row this boat alone: it is a team effort. I am grateful for forward looking deacons, prompting with new ideas, and thinking through the service patterns with me week by week. Together we have seen a traditional evening service revitalised with "fringe" people and parents of Sunday School children eager to come. We have had the joy of breaking new ground with the Gospel. We have not got all the answers but are prepared to "have a go". Our experience in a suburban situation is that care, prayer, and boldness pay rich dividends for the Kingdom.

PHILIP H. GATHERCOLE

A FRESH LOOK AT THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Many of the accepted foundations of life are being shaken today. People are as ships without anchors drifting on the seas of twentieth century turmoil. Confident that the Word of God has a message for this age as for every other, we venture to turn to a book of the Bible which has received less attention than many others, and try to find in "Proverbs" a word relevant to our need. In an undoubted over-simplification I suggest that in the realm of philosophy the prevailing mood is agnosticism, in the realm of culture the prevailing mood is secularism, in religion the mood is relativism, and in ethics antinomianism. This paper proceeds on the view that in each of these realms God has a relevant word to say to our present condition through the book of Proverbs.

I Philosophy. In the confused state of modern theology certain themes repeatedly receive attention. The interpretation of the Bible, the doctrine of God, and the resurrection of Christ are among the most common, and the most important. Yet, to quote from the preface to a book which scans the contemporary debate,

"One all important question stands over the whole of theology, and stands behind every passage here. That is the question "How do we know?" and it is on a successful answering of that question that the future of contemporary theology depends"

¹ *A Reader in Contemporary Theology.* (ed: J. Bowden and J. Richmond,—S.C.M. 1967).

Thus it is suggested that the current debate and the current demand for Christian apologetic is centred on epistemology, that is, the theory of knowledge.

It is significant for our purpose therefore to note that the opening paragraph of Proverbs states that the purpose of the book is concerned with the pursuit of knowledge (1:1-6—note the various synonyms for "know", viz. "discern", "receive instruction", "hear", "increase in learning", "understand", "attain unto sound counsel" etc.); and that the summary of this purpose is expressed in the words "the beginning of knowledge" (1:7). We note that the word "beginning" represents a Hebrew word which means the chief part, or the primary principle, or the essence. Thus, though the book of Proverbs surveys the whole gamut of life in an effort to describe what knowledge is, here at the beginning the essence of knowledge is made clear. It is found in the fear of Yahweh. It takes a start there.

But where does our contemporary world take its start in regard to knowledge? A variety of answers are given.

a) **With the reason.** Knowledge comes, it is believed, through storing the mind with facts. From the schoolboy who crams for exams to the modern tourist who fills his diary with the histories and stories of the places he visits, men have thought that knowledge consists in engaging the mind to acquire facts.

b) **With the wits.** There are those full of worldly wisdom who believe that knowledge has to do with cleverness. The knowledgeable person is the business man who by shrewd calculation knows how to get on in the world, or the executive who believes that by diplomacy he can win, or the wise guy who through his clever speaking, subtle dealing and calculated shrewdness comes out on top.

c) **With sense experience.** The empiricist is one who believes that our source of knowledge is in our experience of things that happen in space and time. Only what can be verified by our eyes or ears or touch is real. Any claims for truth beyond the verification of our senses is further than we can go. Any claim that there is a realm beyond or even a God is dubious.

d) **With the methods of science.** Scientism or scientific positivism holds that knowledge is attainable only by the methods of science. This is not to dispute the place of science as a method of discerning truth but scientism believes that no knowledge of reality can be discerned beyond what the methods of science can reveal.

e) **With the inner self.** Convinced that there is reality which can never be fully understood by the process of scientific knowing alone, many have turned away from this to insist that the starting point for knowledge is in man's inner self, his profoundest feelings, and inner awarenesses. These are the primary data with which we must work for a proper understanding of what is beyond sense perception. While this was a characteristic of the 19th century theology against which Barth reacted so strongly, it is also the basis of Hinduism.

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Vedantism claims that as Brahma is to be found in the human heart, any knowledge of the Absolute thus revolves around the human mind. "Know thyself" is the same as "Know the Truth". Thus revelation is rejected. There is no external standard of truth, and knowledge ends with the doubtful assurance of defining the Absolute by sheer negation ("Neti, neti".)

It is not surprising therefore that in view of so many contenders in the field the prevailing attitude should be agnosticism. For many are doubting whether we can ever find such certainty about the ultimate nature and destiny of things as we can about those things in which the empirical sciences yield knowledge.

To this situation the book of Proverbs speaks with a clear voice. The essence of knowledge is in the fear of the Lord. Some will say that they do fear God, and will point to their deep devotion, their sacrifices, worship and pilgrimages, the sincerity of which is obvious. Yet that is not the kind of godly fear that leads to knowledge, for it is not the LORD whom they fear. There is no question about the object of their devotion. To them that object may be Brahma or Allah or Buddha or any other god. Proverbs 1:7 says however, that the essence of knowledge is the fear of the Lord. And with the use of the word "Lord" (= Yahweh) we are in a different world. Yahweh is the God of creation, the God who reveals Himself in history, the God who is holy and judges evil, who is merciful, and who has once and for all declared Himself in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ according to the message of the Bible. This is the God who reveals Himself. Knowledge begins when the human mind ceases to try to know and holds itself in an attitude of faith and reverence before the One who has chosen to reveal Himself. Knowledge and wisdom in fact come from the mouth of Yahweh (Pr. 2:6), and any attempt to locate them in any other source than Him and what He has chosen to show of Himself, is to depart from the essence of knowledge.

The completely different milieu into which the Bible takes us becomes clear when we see how Proverbs spells out the meaning of the fear of the Lord in later chapters. For example 3:7 says "Be not wise in your own eyes: fear the Lord and depart from evil". To fear the Lord here means to come to the end of our own self sufficiency. In a quarrel a man will not think that God has given him all the truth, but seek to see what He has given his opponent also. When faced with a decision he will not think that he can make it with his own wisdom, but will count on the help of God. In business he will not think that it stands or falls by his own shrewdness, but will forsake all forms of evil, doing only what is right in the eyes of a Holy God.

And with equal assurance Proverbs spells out the type of character resulting from this fear of the Lord. He is a man of strong confidence (14:26). That is, there is no trial through which he may pass, no temptation which he may face, no decision he must make but that he knows where he is heading,

to whom he belongs and the real nature of his problem. He is unashamed to be confident. Again, he is a man who having drunk from the fountain of life (14:27) becomes in his own turn a fountain for others (10:11). The world is always looking for this fountain, and finds but a trickle here and there. But he who fears Yahweh KNOWS he has come to the heart of all reality, to the source of all life, and is privileged to be a means through which that knowledge may be conveyed to others.

A Biblical epistemology is thus not speculative nor empirical. It is rooted in faith in a God who reveals Himself, a faith which operates in the realm of the historical and ethical and results in quiet fruitful living. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge".

II Culture. It is a truism to say that modern culture has become secularised at an alarming rate. The strongholds of the established religions of the world are falling to the secular spirit which sees no reality beyond the things of this world and bows all its energies in the pursuit of these things. Christian theologians are also calling us to a "worldly Christianity" and remind us that the place of the Christian is out there in the world among men of the secularised culture. Whether we listen to the modern secular man or to the modern theologian we are driven to take a fresh look at "the world".

The book of Proverbs speaks to this situation. Consistent with the rest of the Scriptures as a "worldly" book with a message—concerned with secular events—Proverbs in particular urges this point and does it in several ways.

a) **The ordinary world is the concern of Proverbs.** Proverbs has many plain matter-of-fact statements about everyday life. 13:11 for example, is a word to the nouveaux riches, the families who have half their over-furnished houses on hire purchase: "Wealth gotten in haste shall be diminished, but he that gathereth by labour shall have increase". 12:10 is a word to the ruthless cart driver who flogs his exhausted animal. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel". 14:23 should be hung on the wall of every committee room—"In all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury", and 18:1 is addressed to that cursed individual who always chooses to be out of step with everyone else—"He that separateth himself seeketh his own desire, and rageth against all sound wisdom". The nagging wife, the social climber and many others in these pages familiar to us in common life show that true religion is concerned with the ordinary affairs of this world and can never be isolated in a world of its own.

b) **The ordinary world is the concern of our Heavenly Father.** If there is a tendency among some to relegate God and the Bible to one world called the "religious world", there is a tendency among others to forget about God, push Him out of His world, regard Him as irrelevant, or non-existent, and to believe that because we live in a secularised world, all that matters is this world. But in Proverbs this world is clearly

God's world. He is concerned with every detail of life, and all of life is lived before Him. In fact, apart from fearing Him, it is not possible to understand how this world operates. For example, the man who thinks he has the power to arrange his own future plans must learn that "a man's heart deviseth his way, but **the Lord** directeth his steps". (16:9). The man who sells vegetables in the market place has to provide honest weight for an honest sum of money not just because it is the thing to do, but because "divers weights and divers measures, both of them are alike an abomination unto **the Lord**" (20:10). Again, it is one thing for a father to advise his son to take the knocks of life and to keep a stiff upper lip if he wants to develop good character, but it is another thing to recognise that it is the Lord who forms the young man's character through the knocks of life—"My son, despise not the chastening of **the Lord**, for whom the Lord loveth He reproveth". (3:11).

There are not two worlds but one. Neither is God remote from the world; this is His world. He is concerned about it all, active in it, and directing it. Neither are there two standards of conduct, one secular and one religious; there is one standard for He rules over this one world.

c) **The ordinary world is the concern of the Church.** It follows from the above that true religion is to be lived "in the world". To use a modern catchword, the Church is to get "involved" in the world. We are to break out of our ghetto-like religious pre-occupations and manifest true religion in the market place, in politics, in education etc. Much modern discussion however pushes this concept too far. We are told that there is too much "religion". Worship deals only with the blessedness of the worshipper: prayer is concerned only with the other world: progress looks only to "pie in the sky". We are told to get so "involved" in the world that we should listen to what the world is saying and find God in the world, not in the traditional ways of worship. Lesslie Newbigin¹ reacts against this when he points out that true Christian worship directs our thoughts not away from the world but to Him who has come to the world, true Christian involvement is a life lived in the world in response to Him who is the Lord of the world, and true Christian service is concerned to act not just inwardly to the group of believers drawn out of the world, but to the world in all its need, the same world for which our Heavenly Father shows such concern in sending His Son to redeem it.

It is this concern that Proverbs makes so plain when it sets its many injunctions to a "worldly" religion in the context of a fear for the Lord who created and sustains and governs the world. Proverbs calls us indeed to a "secular religion" or a "worldly Christianity" if we understand it in this sense.

III Religion—Christology. Much can be said about "Christ in Proverbs". A glance at the margins of our Bibles shows how much of the teaching of Proverbs was incorporated by Jesus into His teaching. At a deeper level we find in Proverbs a

¹ *Honest religion for Secular man*, Lesslie Newbigin.

certain kind of character outlined, that of the wise man. This man is submissive to God (9:10), his mouth is a fountain of life (10:11), his love covers all transgressions (10:12), he cries out, offering his life to all men (8:1-5), in spite of their rejection of his offer (1:2, 3, 24). Such a character finds its fullest expression only in Christ. But at an even deeper level Proverbs portrays the eternal person of Christ in His uniqueness.

It is at this point that Proverbs touches the modern situation where the uniqueness of Christ is denied in a relativity that equates Him with other gods or other ways, all equally valid expressions of the one universal Truth. While we can hardly use Proverbs to prove the uniqueness of Christ, we can find here the patterns which later Christian reflection used in those great New Testament Christological statements which explain the phenomenon of the historic Person, Jesus Christ.

The crucial passage is Proverbs 8, where the person of Wisdom is described. Scholarly debate has long oscillated between the view that Wisdom here is a hypostasis, that is a real Person, and the view that Wisdom is a personification, that is Wisdom is a concept but is treated here for literary purposes as if it were a person. The question is not of great importance—at least we must note that Wisdom in this chapter (and in chapters 1 and 2) is regarded as a Person.

The chapter opens with Wisdom crying aloud in the streets inviting all men to listen to her (1-5). It proceeds by showing Wisdom as the source of all morality (6-13), the foundation of all worldly authority (14-16), the key to all riches (18-21), and the Principle of all creation, existing before the creation of the universe and instrumental in its creation (22-31). We understand from this magnificent passage that if God did nothing without wisdom then we must do nothing without it too; and that the wisdom by which this world is rightly used in daily life is the very wisdom by which it exists.

What is the purpose of such a passage? We might conclude that the author wanted to interest us in metaphysics. But there is none of this. The purpose is clearly stated in the final verses (32-36) “Now therefore, my sons, *hearken* unto me. . . .” The purpose is to lead men to a decision, that they may choose the ONE necessity of life. The reiteration of the pronouns “me” and “my” in this concluding section makes it plain that Wisdom makes claims and calls to an obedience which are quite exclusive of all else. Wisdom, being what she is, is unique, and calls for an allegiance that attaches to her alone.

One cannot read this passage without having Christ in mind. If Christ is the Wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24, 30), then the identification of Christ with Wisdom here is good Biblical interpretation. That the New Testament writers made this identification is clear also from John’s Prologue where the characteristics of the eternal Wisdom of Proverbs 8 are ascribed to the eternal Logos; from Colossians 1:15, 16 where the language used to describe the eternal Christ is practically lifted from Proverbs 8; and from the many claims to uniqueness and to exclusive loyalty which Jesus Himself made, con-

sistent with the ending of Proverbs 8 (compare Prov. 8:32-36 with Matt. 11:28, John 6:35, 14:6). That we too are intended to make this identification is clear from the New Testament. We are to acknowledge Christ as existing before all creation, to be the “master workman” at work in creation, and to be the one who having stepped out of eternity into time raises His voice in the streets of men, pressing His claims upon their undivided loyalty.

The majesty of His person, the uniqueness of His Being and the exclusiveness of His claims presented here are reminders in this age of relativity that Proverbs points us to the only Son and the only Saviour and so speaks to a current perplexity.

IV Ethics. The revolution in ethics is painfully obvious to the most casual observer. Modern ethics are characterised by anarchy which despises rule, by antinomianism which despises rules, and by existentialism which despises traditional rules in its pursuit of a ruling principle of conduct in existing situations. It is a small wonder therefore that Proverbs which lists numerous rules finds no serious place in modern life and thought.

a) **The Importance of rules.** There are radical thinkers who teach that the only principle of conduct is love. Rules have no place. Sex relations outside marriage may be wrong in one situation because it is not an expression of love, or may be right in another situation because it genuinely helps a person to fulfilment. The determining question in all ethical situations therefore must be “What would love do in this situation?” Such a position meets the need of a generation that shuns all external authority, whether the authority be that of state, church, Bible or parents.

The error in such thinking is that “love” is not properly defined. The Biblical view is that Love is the will of God, and the will of God is made clear to us in His laws. Follow out the laws of the book of Proverbs for example and we live a life of love. When Proverbs dictates to the young man to keep away from the adulterous woman (“Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths” 7:25), it dictates in absolute terms, but its dictates are those of love.

There are modern Christians also as there were Christians in Paul’s day, who want nothing to do with rules because they say we have been delivered from legalism. They despise what they call a “catholic” type of sanctity and insist that we are made holy not by following rules but by the finished work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in us. What they do not see is that Christ Himself expected His disciples to keep certain rules (“Love one another . . .” “Fear not”. “Do not worry”), and that the Holy Spirit’s work in us is to enable us to keep the rules, so many of which are laid down in the Scriptures. It is of course true that we are delivered from legalism; we are not saved by keeping laws. But the Bible teaches that we are saved in order that we may do God’s will

expressed in His laws, and many of these are found in Proverbs. Our regular attention to these would, by the Holy Spirit's help, enable us to walk more fully in the way of holiness.

b) **The Importance of old rules.** The antiquity of the Proverbs is marked. Although they were written by Solomon three thousand years ago, many of them come from a tradition much more ancient than Solomon. But we are living in the twentieth century when large sections of society despise the past and its traditions, where the prevailing mood is "The newest is the truest: the latest is the best", where "relevance" is the catchword, and progress is the atmosphere. Ours has been rightly called the "Now" generation. It is not surprising that at least in modern western society there is no love for a body of maxims which distil the wisdom of the past or that if they are used at all it is only in jest. What place then can a book of ancient proverbs have in modern society? These would appear to belong to an archaic and irrelevant order and tied to a conservatism that resists change.

Christianity however, is not against change. God is the one who makes all things new, who is concerned with the present and the future as well as the past. In fact it is of the essence of Christianity that with its coming, change takes place. "Behold", says the Lord, "I make all things new". But the "new" in the Bible is always something that arises out of the past, never does the new rebel against the past. The true Biblical perspective, however, is neither that of the old nor of the new, but the "will of God which abides for ever". The essential novelty of the Christian Gospel is that of the Spirit and of the new man whereby God's ageless will revealed in the past is able to become a transforming reality NOW.

Thus the Christian who seeks to follow the ethics of Proverbs is not perpetuating archaic tradition. He comes to the timeless will of God realising that here is the pattern of a new humanity which in him may become a new reality by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

c) **The importance of specific rules.** Charles Finney said: "The man who is convicted of one sin is convicted of every sin. But the man who is convicted of every sin is convicted of no sin". We shall never live more ethical lives, far less grow in holy living, so long as we think about sin in general. One of the weaknesses of modern preaching lies in its vague talk about sin, if it talks at all about sin. By contrast one of the characteristics of God's word is that it deals with sin specifically. Proverbs never talks about sin in general, neither does it talk even about sins in general. It speaks not of dishonesty, but of "divers weights and divers measures"; not of laziness but "as the door turns on its hinges so does the sluggard on his bed". The point at which Proverbs is most specific is the tongue. On page after page we read of "mouth", "tongue", "lips", "utter", "speak", "whisper", and at 21:23 "Whoso keepeth his mouth and tongue keepeth his soul from troubles". It is evident from Proverbs that the chief point at which sin must be attacked in our lives is at the point of our tongue. Who among us is guiltless in the light of what Proverbs says about the lying tongue (6:17, 19),

the flattering tongue (29:5), the hypocritical tongue (26:24, 25), the gossiping tongue (26:22)? Or who is not rebuked when Proverbs commends the will of God in the man of few words (17:27), the man of frank words (25:9), or the man who keeps a confidence (25:9b)? Who among us is not ashamed of himself on reading "a whisperer separateth chief friends" (16:28)?, and does not pray for the grace of God when he sees God's pattern portrayed in "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life" (15:4), or "a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in baskets of silver" (25:11)?

No one can read Proverbs seriously without being convicted of sin at various points of his life. Such conviction is the beginning of true-knowledge, the foundation of all ethical renewal and it becomes possible, because of the importance we give to the specific rules of God's Word.

In days gone by small pocket editions of Proverbs were published separately, designed to be carried about and frequently referred to at odd moments of the day. The recent publication of a paperback version of Proverbs for teenagers is a similar attempt at popularising the book. Billy Graham has stated that he reads one chapter of Proverbs daily. It is clear that Proverbs is a timely book wherein is not only to be found the way of holiness, but truth relevant to situations that confront our modern age, and it is to be hoped that its return to the pulpit and the home will be seen in our day.

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