

# The Fraternal

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## EDITORIAL

This autumn issue of THE FRATERNAL draws attention to two important and inter-related aspects of our work—the Minister's message and method. The *content* of our message is of supreme importance and there can be little more that claims a greater place in our preaching than the person and work of Christ. Our opening article reminds us of some of the ways Christian thinkers have surveyed that 'wondrous Cross'. But this message has to be communicated and the remaining pages of this issue are devoted to some aspects of the problem of *communication*. In the early Church, Christian leaders in various centres rejoiced that people from all walks of life were accepting the faith. Celsus must have had some evidence for his claim that the poor and uneducated were trusting Christ. Yet the same message captivated some of the keenest minds in both East and West. Whatever the success of the early Christian preachers among people of all classes we, in Britain at least, confess to some kind of failure in our mission to the millions of people sometimes described as artisans or 'the working classes'. We have invited several writers to discuss this important theme. All of them have practical experience of ministry among working class people.

One further word. Economic pressures are affecting the B.M.F. adversely and we are finding it difficult to produce this journal at the present subscription. We hesitate to increase the cost to Ministers and so we shall probably have to reduce the number of issues to three in 1972. However many issues we have each year we want the magazine to be of maximum help to you. Please feel free to write to us with suggestions and ideas.

R.B.

## THE CROSS IN CHRISTIAN THINKING

It will be as well to begin by asking whether the Cross is a proper subject for Christian thinking. The contrary view has been held, on both speculative and practical grounds. There is a line of thought running through the works of the medieval Schoolmen which maintains that no grounds for the saving value of the work of Christ can be found except that God ordained it, and that He was content to accept it as a satisfaction for human sin. If this were the case, any attempt to find a meaning to the Cross would be idle, if not presumptuous. We are not aware that this view has any support today, but there are those who argue that men are saved through their

response to the presentation of the facts of Christ's death and resurrection, so that a theory of atonement is somewhat of an intellectual luxury. Readers of James Denney will remember his trenchant criticism of this distinction between the "fact" and "theory" of the Atonement.<sup>1</sup> It finds no support in the New Testament, where, as Denney says, "the work of Christ in relation to sin is not a naked fact" but "a luminous, interpretable, and interpreted fact".<sup>2</sup> New Testament scholarship is making it increasingly clear that even the passion narratives of the Synoptic Gospels are shaped to serve theological ends. Moreover, the distinction is not made in human experience. No-one is saved through the preaching of the Cross unless he sees how the work of Christ meets his need, that is, unless he has a doctrine of atonement, however rudimentary and unconscious.

We need not spend longer on this issue because the Cross has, in fact, occupied a prominent place in Christian thinking for the past nineteen hundred years. Indeed, the Atonement has received more attention than any other doctrine. From the beginning of the fourth century, when Athanasius wrote the *De Incarnatione*, until our own century, there has been a succession of books on the doctrine, many of which have been theological and devotional classics. The reasons for this interest in Soteriology would be worth exploring. During the first four centuries Christian thought was occupied with Christology, partly because it was here that the battle with heresy had to be joined, and partly because of the speculative turn of the Greek mind. These centuries produced the famous Chalcedonian definitions, which for good or ill, plotted the course of Christological thinking up to the present century. No parallel pronouncement has ever been made on the subject of the Atonement, with the result that here Christian thinking has had a much freer rein. Another factor was that the creative role in theology passed from the eastern to the western Church. The genius of the latter was empirical rather than speculative, and it found the problems of Soteriology more congenial than those of Christology. It is also probable that by this time thinkers realized that if they were to gain further insight into the mystery of Christ's divine sonship, it could only be as a result of the study of His work, and especially of His obedience to the will of His Father. If this was the case, their thinking was on sound biblical lines.

Before examining some of the interpretations of the work of Christ which are acceptable to Christians today, I propose to consider briefly three cardinal issues which Christian thought on this subject has to face. Like forks on a road, they are places where the directions of thought diverge.

### 1. *The Degree of Control accorded to the New Testament.*

We have no space to consider the influence of the Old Testament, but it is clear that our idea of atonement will be influenced by our views on such matters as the meaning of sacrifice in the religion of Israel, and the nature and work of her representative figures, especially of the Servant of the

Lord. When we turn to the New Testament several courses are open to us. We can treat it as authoritative and normative in all its parts; we can confine our attention to the Synoptic Gospels, on the ground that here alone we can be sure that we are in touch with the mind of Christ; or we can take a still more radical line and be selective in our use even of the Gospel material. Each of these courses will lead to a different doctrine of the Atonement. Even Christian thinkers who accept the unique authority of the entire New Testament differ in the extent to which they draw upon its teaching in practice. Some confine themselves almost entirely to the Synoptic records. G. S. Hendry, for example, in *The Gospel of the Incarnation*, may be taken as representative of these. His concern is to show the organic unity of the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the continuing work of the risen Christ. He draws attention to the fact that mercy and judgment were both present in all the dealings of Christ with sinners during His days in the flesh. This same mercy and judgment were blended in His passion, and they have been experienced ever since, wherever men have responded to the message of Christ crucified. This is a true and appealing presentation of the work of Christ, but it cannot be claimed that it comes to terms with all that is taught about His death in the New Testament Epistles. On the other hand, there are theories of the Atonement which lean heavily on passages in the Epistles, especially "Romans", but make no serious attempt to interpret the consciousness of Jesus, which is revealed, to some extent, in the Gospels. The best approach to a doctrine of the Atonement is by way of a study of the broad lines of agreement which run through the entire New Testament teaching on the subject. Few can have demonstrated this agreement better than the late Dr. Vincent Taylor in his well known trilogy on the Work of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

One further point deserves attention under this heading. Theories of atonement are influenced not only by the extent to which the New Testament is accepted as a controlling factor, but also by the way in which its language is understood. Where its phrases are given a more-or-less literal interpretation, theories of atonement tend to be clear-cut and rationalized. Where more weight is given to the pictorial quality of its language, the New Testament is regarded as offering a series of vivid metaphors, which partly illuminate the mystery of the Cross but do not disclose its rationale.

## 2. *The View taken of the Nature and Effects of Sin.*

All Christian thinkers agree that the divine love is a ground of the Atonement. As T. H. Hughes has written, "No single theory has entirely missed the vision of grace".<sup>4</sup> But there is no agreement as to whether, or in what way, Christ in His dying for men experienced the divine reaction to human sin. The differences here are crucial for theories of atonement, and they stem from different understandings of the nature of sin and its effects upon the divine-human relationship. Those who are unwilling to go beyond asserting that to sin is to wound the love of God formulate their doctrine of atonement on subjec-

tive and exemplarist lines. Those who go further than this and say that sin is an attitude of rebellion against God, an attitude which destroys fellowship with Him, will be satisfied only with some form of the objective, and probably penal, view.

Where does the evidence point? If we believe that our thinking must take account of the New Testament as a whole, the answer is in no doubt. We are compelled to come to terms with that divine reaction to sin which the Bible calls "the wrath of God". This is a difficult concept, and it is doubtful whether the phrase should be used in preaching. However carefully it is explained it is likely to convey the idea that God feels "the emotional reaction of an irritated self-concern", as Temple put it. But the fact to which the phrase points, God's inflexible antipathy towards everything which threatens His purpose of grace, is one of the profoundest realities in human experience. It appears in the nemesis of history, in the texture of the world's greatest literature, and in the findings of the human conscience. The themes of mercy and judgment are interwoven throughout the Scriptures. Sin is condemned in the very moment of its being forgiven. This is not a Pauline injection into a simple Galilean Gospel of love. We have already noticed Hendry's successful demonstration of the fact that mercy and judgment met in the words and deeds of the Christ of the Synoptic record. They are equally apparent in the Fourth Gospel, which, if it is the Gospel of light and love, is also the Gospel of darkness and wrath. Any theory of atonement which fails to take these realities into account exposes itself to the rebuke of Anselm's famous sentence: *nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum* (you have not yet considered how great is the weight of sin).

## 3. *The Presence of an Objective Element in the Atonement.*

This point calls for further discussion. It goes without saying that all doctrines of the Atonement have a place for the subjective response of men, but Christian thought has always been divided on the question of an objective element. It will be as well to clarify the issue. It is not a question of whether or not there is a change in the attitude of God towards sinners consequent upon their turning to Him in repentance and faith. That there is such a change is undeniable; Jesus spoke of "joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth". When we speak of an "objective" doctrine of atonement, however, we are referring to the belief that something happened in the death and resurrection of Christ which changed the relationship of God with sinners, prior to, and apart from, any response on their part.

The division on this point in Protestant theology was sharpened by the publication, in 1870, of Ritschl's two volumes entitled: *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*. A. B. Crabtree sums up as follows the aspect of Ritschl's thesis which concerns us at present: "God is love; love and wrath are incompatible; the wrath of God is therefore excluded; reconciliation in consequence cannot involve the

placation of the wrath of God; it signifies therefore not a change in attitude on the part of God, but only on the part of man.” This, of course, is a very popular view, and it is presented in sermons, commentaries, and other theological writings. On the other hand, many thinkers have held to the traditional view of the Church that reconciliation in some way involved a change in God Himself, a change which was prior to any human response.\*

Again, in what direction does the New Testament point? Can it be denied that the Epistles speak of a work of Christ which, from the divine side, is “finished”? We may not wish to go as far as Denney, who speaks of God being reconciled as well as men<sup>6</sup>; as J. S. Stewart remarks, this is to go beyond the findings of the New Testament and to use the language of reconciliation in two distinct senses.<sup>7</sup> But, language apart, passages like Romans 5.10, 2 Cor. 5.19, Eph. 2.13-16 can only mean that God in His Son was dealing with human sin in such a way that the barriers which it presented to the free outflowing of His pardon were removed. Moreover, the doctrine of an objective atonement can draw support from the Gospels: the “ransom” passage (Mark 10.45), the saying of Jesus concerning the New Covenant in His blood, the experience in Gethsemane, etc. It is not over-literalism which regards such passages, when read in the light of apostolic comment, as pointing to a finished atonement.

A further point deserves notice before we pass on. The finished work of Christ is sometimes presented in such a way that the need for the conscious human response of repentance and faith is virtually eliminated. F. D. Maurice, for example, taught that in Christ “the true, sinless root of humanity” is revealed, and that in Him “men are already pardoned, reconciled, and redeemed, and need only a consciousness of this”. There is an echo here of the theology of the early Eastern Church, in which the Incarnation was regarded as the Atonement, salvation being conveyed to men by the constitution of the person of Christ. A similar soteriology appears to underlie the idea of the New Mankind as it appears in the writings of some contemporary theologians, Gibson Winter, for example, writes: “All men share in the reality of the New Mankind, for it is their essential manhood, the community to which they belong in Christ. They may, in fact, affirm this manhood without full assurance of its source . . .”<sup>8</sup> This appears to be saying that all men are “in Christ”, and, if so, it is a very questionable interpretation of the Pauline phrase. Does the Apostle know of any standing in Christ, whether individual or corporate, which is not the gift of grace accepted by faith? If he declares that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself”, he also pleads with men to be reconciled to God. Does this not accord with the consistent teaching of Scripture? We will now attempt an evaluation of four doctrines of the Atonement which commend themselves to Christian minds today, making use of the criteria which we have just examined.

\* Among the more recent exponents of this view are Denney, Forsyth, Dale, and Stauffer.

### (i) *Christ Revealing.*

Under this heading we include all doctrines which interpret the work of Christ as revelatory and persuasive. Common to the many varieties of the Moral Influence Theory is the belief that in the Cross of Christ God gave the supreme demonstration of His love for men, and that where this is allowed to make its due impression it moves them to repentance, faith, and love. Abelard was the first to formulate this doctrine, and the essence of his teaching is given in a line of his moving Passiontide hymn: “Love answers love’s appeal” (B.H. No. 139). The Moral View tends to be discounted in evangelical circles, for reasons which we shall consider, but justice must be done to its undoubted strength. It is better able than any of the other views to draw upon human experience for its interpretation of the ways of God. There is no human force so potent to transform character as a love which forgives wrongs, and we are encouraged by the *a fortiori* arguments of Jesus to see this as a pointer to the meaning of the Cross. Nor is it the case that revelatory views necessarily make light of sin. The human love which forgives wrongs is a searing and purging flame. Dr. G. B. Stevens, one of the ablest exponents of the view we are considering, strongly affirms the moral necessity of the Atonement, and recognizes wrath as an aspect of God’s love. As for biblical support, it needs no demonstration that both Testaments invite us to recognise the love of God seeking us through His saving work, and to submit to its claim.

For these reasons the Moral View must have a place in any doctrine of atonement. But its roots are not deep enough to enable it to stand alone. It does not do justice to the biblical passages which speak of an objective work of God in Christ. Nor does it trace convincingly the connection between the divine love and the needs of man as a sinner. Professor John Hick has put this objection clearly: “Love is not genuinely expressed in self-sacrificial actions whose purpose is simply to express love. It is expressed in costly action undertaken to accomplish something vitally important which love sees as necessary”.<sup>9</sup>

This is probably the best place to make brief reference to another interpretation of the Atonement which is very influential in some circles today, the one associated with the existentialist theology of Bultmann and his followers. This may be interpreted as follows. In the historical Cross of Christ, God manifested in time His condemnation of human sin. Yet the Cross is not in itself a saving event. It only becomes such when it is presented in the apostolic message, or *kerygma*, of the Church, and accepted by faith. It then becomes an eschatological event which ushers those who believe into “authentic existence”, or salvation. Clearly the Existentialists are here saying something vitally important about the Cross, and something which we—in different language!—are constantly saying in our pulpits. But it is also clear that this interpretation finds no intrinsic significance in the work done at Calvary. It was in no sense the achievement of human salvation; rather it was the inauguration of a saving process.

(ii) *Christ Victorious.*

This view of the Atonement attracts by its simplicity. It has been elaborated during the past fifty years by several Scandinavian scholars, and their work has been made known to English readers by the translation of Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor*. Aulén sees the Cross as Christ's confrontation with the forces which threaten God's purposes for men—sin, evil, and death. Christ gave Himself over to these forces and was slain by them. But He won a decisive victory over them in His resurrection, a victory which men share through faith in Him. Aulén calls this the "classic view", and maintains that it is the characteristic biblical view. He also claims that it is a demythologized version of the doctrine, widely held among the early Church Fathers, that God in His Son defeated the devil by a stratagem. There is no denying that the Christus Victor Theory commands wide scriptural support. It lays under contribution the Old Testament passages which depict Yahweh as engaged in truceless war against the forces of dissolution and death which threaten His creation. It shows that the miracles which Christ wrought, and the forgiveness of sins which He conveyed, during His incarnate life, were of a piece with His death and resurrection. "All these pointed to the central fact that evil had met its match, a new age had dawned, new hope was available to men". (W. Hordern). There are also passages in the Epistles which speak of the Passion in terms of victory: Col. 2.15, Eph. 2.14-16, etc. The theory is a thoroughly objective one: the work of Christ is everywhere a work of God. And it is eminently "preachable", as readers of the sermons of J. S. Stewart will remember.

But the theory has serious limitations. Aulén is weak in his treatment of those passages where the doctrine of the Atonement is presented at greatest depth: Romans 3.21-26, 2 Cor. 5.19-21 etc. He does not successfully rebut the charge that his book presents a doctrine of deliverance rather than of atonement. He has little to say of what the Atonement cost to God. And he does not demonstrate with sufficient clarity how the work of Christ bears upon the bitterest results of man's sin—his guilt and alienation from God. The Christus Victor View must certainly have its place in a comprehensive doctrine of atonement, but, like the Moral View, it cannot stand on its own feet. It purchases its simplicity at too high a price.

(iii) *Christ our Substitute.*

When we begin to examine the penal views of the Atonement we enter an area of bitter controversy. As we have noted, the biblical revelation shows that the work of God in redeeming sinners must include the judgment of their sin. This much is accepted by most thinkers, but differences appear when it is asked how the divine judgment took effect. Some insist that God's work had to include the punishment of sin. Others maintain that in His death Christ entered into the consequences of human sin. This we believe to be a crucial issue for penal theories. At the risk of oversimplifying we would say that the former view leads to a substitutionary doctrine, the latter to one or other of the doctrines of penal representation.

These doctrines have a very great deal in common. Both assert that in His death Christ endured the judgment of God upon human sin. The Substitutionary View, however, also asserts that Christ accepted in our place the divine punishment which our sins deserved. The sinner receives the benefits of Christ's passion—pardon, justification, peace with God—through repentance and faith. No one can deny that this doctrine safeguards the biblical estimate of the gravity of sin, and the cost to God of its forgiveness. It not only affirms the love of God, but also His holiness, and the moral values which He must conserve in His work of redeeming sinners. In a study of this kind, however, we are called upon to face the difficulties which many minds have found in the doctrine as here presented. Not all of these are cogent. C. Ryder Smith, for example, maintains that because "it seems quite arbitrary and unjust to punish one man instead of another", there would have been an injustice if Christ had borne punishment in the place of sinners.<sup>10</sup> But this is to forget the uniqueness of Christ's person. What one man cannot justly do for another, the Logos, who is the ground of man's being, may conceivably be able to do for the human race. It is objected, moreover, that the Substitutionary Theory is "transactional" in the sense that it implies contrasted attitudes and activities on the part of the Father and the Son. We shall have occasion to return to this, but it may be noted here that the same difficulty arises in connection with many other activities which involve God the Father and His incarnate Son. The prayer life of Jesus is an obvious example. It is impossible for the human mind to conceive of such unique relationships except in terms which are exposed to the charge of being transactional.

The chief difficulty which many find in the Substitutionary Theory is its insistence that there can be no forgiveness apart from punishment. Granted, the work of God's grace towards sinners had to be accompanied by the revelation of His wrath. But are we shut up to saying that God cannot forgive unless someone is punished? This is what the Substitutionary View in many of its forms appears to be saying. If our reading of Scripture leaves us no alternative, this is the conclusion we must reach, but many devout and thoughtful minds do not so understand their Bibles. It is true that the Pauline doctrine of justification is frequently described as forensic, but this should not lead us to think of God's justifying activity in terms of modern lawcourt procedure. His dealings with His children are not regulated by a legal code. They belong, par excellence, to the realm of personal and spiritual relationships, where forgiveness is conveyed, not apart from judgment, but certainly apart from punishment.

In spite of this, the Substitutionary View is more successful than any of the others in expressing a truth which lies at the very heart of the Atonement. This is, that in the supreme work by which He redeemed men, God fully satisfied His own nature of holy love. We can best express this by following the lead of passages like Romans 5.8 and 2 Cor. 5.19, where the transactional element of the Atonement practically disappears in

the close conjunction which is made between the work of Christ and the work of His Father. At the risk of patripassianism we must affirm with J. S. Whale that "God vindicated His own law by accepting and bearing its penalty in His own heart".<sup>11</sup> Such a statement, we feel, conserves the essentials of the Substitutionary View, whilst avoiding the objections to which its traditional presentation is exposed. If we continue to use the label "substitutionary"—and there is no other—we should be careful where we attach it.

(iv) *Christ our Sacrifice.*

The various forms of the Representative Theory of the Atonement fall for consideration under this heading. An illustration may help to make clear the essentials of this theory. A minister leading public worship is engaged in representative activity. The congregation have appointed him as their Godward representative by attending the service which he is conducting. He puts into words their gratitude, penitence, aspiration, etc. Yet he is only able to function effectively as their representative provided they identify themselves with his utterance. His is an objective work in that he does something for the congregation which they cannot do so well themselves. But his ministry avails only as they make it their own. It will be clear that Christ's entire work was representative in such a sense. His life of perfect submission to the will of God His Father, reaching its climax in death, was the fulfilment of the divine vocation for all mankind. When we identify ourselves with Christ by faith, His sacrifice becomes the vehicle for our own self-offering, and constitutes its abiding inspiration. This, in essence, is the sacrificial view of the Cross, which is developed in "Hebrews", and receives strong support from the more recent understanding of sacrifice in the Old Testament.

So stated, the Representative or Sacrificial Theory interprets a central element in the work of Christ. It will be noted, however, that so far we have said nothing explicitly about the bearing of Christ's sacrificial death on the problem presented by human sin. For this we must turn to the theories of penal representation. There are many varieties, but their gist can be stated as follows. Christ entered our race which, although created by God and for God, yet stands beneath God's righteous judgment. In His humanity He perfectly fulfilled man's vocation of obedience to God under the penal conditions which sin had introduced into human experience. He, the sinless One, bowed His head before the just judgment of God upon human sin, and entered into death which is its shadow. This He did as the servant of His Father's gracious will towards men, and because of His own love for them. He did for us what we dare not, and cannot, do for ourselves. Yet Christ is not our effective Representative until and unless we identify ourselves with Him by repentance and faith. Thus to be one with Him is to have accepted God's judgment upon our sin, and to have entered with Christ upon a life of righteousness. This form of the penal theory has attractions for many today. It deals at depth with those NT passages which support the

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penal interpretation, but also serves itself heir to a wider range of biblical teaching. It holds together the objective and subjective aspects of atonement. And it enables the continuity between the historical and the eternal work of Christ to appear. For Christ is our Representative in the present as well as in the past, in heaven as well as upon earth. Whenever and wherever we are accepted by God, it is because He looks on us "as found in Him".

At this point we may briefly consider how far Christian thought generally has succeeded in integrating the work of Christ in time and His activity in eternity. The theme of the Gospel is Christ crucified and risen, but theologies vary in the relative emphasis which they place on these two sides of His work. This diversity appears in the writings of Paul and John, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and it is reproduced in the doctrines of the Atonement which we have been examining. The Classic View associated with Aulén is able to show how the risen Christ, having won the decisive battle in His warfare against evil, is now bringing it to triumphant conclusion. The Sacrificial View, following the lead of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, presents the present work of Christ as the fulfilment of His one great sacrifice on the altar of Calvary. Whilst the Moral View looks back to the historic death of Christ as the supreme demonstration of God's love, it finds that love interpreted and commended to us by the Holy Spirit, in whom Christ is now active. The Substitutionary View encounters more difficulty than the others in establishing a natural connection between the work of the incarnate and the risen Christ, because of its emphasis on the "finished" nature of that work. The systems of both Dale and Denney have been criticised as being weak in this respect. This is not to say that the difficulty is fatal for the Substitutionary View. However the Atonement is interpreted, its benefits are offered to men by the living Christ. As on the day of His resurrection, so to the end of time, He shows to His disciples His hands and His side.

We conclude this article with a few comments on the kind of thinking which is required of those who are called to preach the Cross. If there is any theme of Christian preaching which calls for careful preparation of mind and heart, it is surely this one. Yet familiarity can cheapen it, and we may find ourselves using the Cross as a hackneyed illustration of divine love. To preach Christ crucified is to preach a theology of atonement, and it lays upon us the duty of often re-thinking our doctrine, so that it retains its cogency and appeal. Few things are more bracing than to read from time to time one of the classic books on the Atonement, and to follow the working of a great Christian mind as it seeks to interpret the Cross in the light of Scripture and experience.

Our preaching also needs to reflect the variety which marks the interpretation of the work of Christ in the New Testament and in Christian thinking. Each of the great doctrines conserves an essential aspect of the truth. Their enduring appeal indicates that they correspond to perennial types of mind and needs of the human spirit. They are the colours into which the

light from Calvary dissolves when it enters the prism of human experience. We arrange these colours in accordance with our doctrinal convictions, and, as Baptists, we probably place the penal doctrine at the centre of our spectrum. But we neither preach the apostolic gospel, nor serve the needs of our hearers, if we fail to let the Cross appear in its many-splendoured grace.

Finally, it is our duty, not only to think about the Cross, but also to accept the limitations of the human mind when it is engaged on such a subject. Probably many of us will agree that we began our theological studies under the conviction that a rationale of the Atonement was somewhere to be found, and that, by dint of thought and reading, we should eventually discover it. Years later, we are still no nearer to our goal. Our experience is a microcosm of that of the Church. The history of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ is the story of a laborious and ever-renewed search for a key which has never been traced. Behind this search is the New Testament itself, which, for all the variety and brilliance of its illustrations, conceals from us the innermost secret of the Atonement. This will not surprise us if we remember the nature of the subject-matter which is under consideration. In his introduction to *The Fourth Gospel* Sir Edwyn Hoskyns writes: "Criticism has proceeded on the supposition that somewhere or other in human experience the Fourth Gospel could come to rest; . . . (it) has, however, not come to rest; . . . and this is not because the critic has failed to reach an adequate solution of the problem, but because the theme of the book is beyond human knowledge".<sup>1</sup> Do these words not illuminate our present subject? After nearly twenty centuries of Christian thought, the Cross, like the Fourth Gospel, remains "strange, restless, and unfamiliar".<sup>2</sup> It is where eternal justice and mercy outcrop in time, and it does not yield up all its elements to our analysis. We come nearest to the heart of the Cross when, thought having taken us as far as it can, we pass into the realm of its mystery, there to worship and make our submission.

DONALD MONKCOM

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- 9 Christianity at the Centre, reviewed Ex. Times, Vol. LXXX No. 7, p. 193.
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- 13 Hoskyns, op. cit., p. 20.

## COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL TO THE WORKING CLASS

It is an undisputed fact that since the Industrial Revolution the Church has largely lost touch with the working classes. There is a problem of estrangement on the part of the working class from the Church which has been given considerable attention in recent years in the hope that something might be done to relieve the situation. It must be clearly appreciated that if the task of communicating the Gospel is to meet with any success, then the problem of this estrangement must be carefully studied and steps taken to deal with the reasons for this problem. Thereafter, when an opening for the message has been gained, it needs to be presented in such a way that it shall be clearly understood and obtain a verdict.

### The size and challenge of the problem

For the purpose of this article the term "working class" will be used to embrace that major section of society which experts have estimated as up to 62% of the population. It is built up of wage earners engaged in industry, commerce, public services, manual occupations and those white collared workers below executive level. Within this term there is a wide variety of levels in education, income and intellectual ability. Within the 'class' there is an inevitable amount of movement, especially that of migration to upper levels and into middle class groupings as possibly ambition or some other influence may cause. The fact remains, and this is the problem to be faced by the Church, that only a very slight percentage of this large section of the community are practising Christians.

In whatever way figures are presented to describe the existing situation, the sombre fact of the estrangement is undeniable; added to which there is evidence that increased affluence and materialism is eroding those latent ideas of religion which have lingered in the minds of a large proportion of the non-churchgoing working class. Another disturbing feature is in the fewness of children and young people attending Sunday School; a fact to be noted is that younger parents who were formerly compelled to attend Sunday School have adopted a permissive or neutral attitude towards the attendance of their own children, and where their children are in attendance will not hesitate to keep them away when it conflicts with their own interests. There is every reason in the light of the situation which now faces the Church for her to regard the urban and industrial areas as mission territory, and plan her strategy accordingly.

### The estrangement in recent history

It is worth recalling that in the days of our Lord's ministry it was stated that "the common people heard Him gladly" and further, to remind ourselves that there have been times in the history of the Church when the artisan has responded eagerly to the call of Christ through the message of the Gospel. The successes of the early Methodists among the common people of our land were quite extraordinary, and it was not until Methodism became respectable dissent that it ceased to attract.

There were other factors too, such as the effects of industrialisation exercising pressures which the Church seemed both powerless and unwilling to counter. Across the years the baleful influence of the "dark satanic mills" was to drive the iron into the soul of the working class. The exploitation, hardship, hunger and unemployment furnished many good reasons for the working man to disregard the Church which appeared always on the side of the employers and secular authority. It did little good for the image of the Church in Sheffield for there to be five clergymen among the seven magistrates on the bench. Roger Lloyd in **The Church and the Artisan today** says "Subconscious inherited memories last long and are baffling. From the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution until 1939 the common lot of the artisan was a chronic economic insecurity, and in the last eight of those years this sense of immemorial injustice was intensified by widespread unemployment."

### The present gap

The turn of the wheel of fortune of the working class has tended to maintain rather than ameliorate the estrangement. Gregory Sieper in **The Church and Industrial Society** writes concerning the mission field among the French workers: "The chances of the Church do not become any better as social conditions of the working class improve—rather the reverse". Whatever action the official Church in England may take in the future to champion the needs and welfare of the working class it will find but poor response and more likely only cynicism from that class. It is a vain hope to expect the masses to respond to the proclamation of a "Social Gospel". The working class of the seventies has little interest in church based "do gooders" nor in "clergy politicians" for the simple reason it is presently aware of its own great and growing strength as a class in the land. Roger Lloyd says: "The working man is the arbiter of national destiny. He has not yet fully realised it but it is true. . . All productivity in the end depends on his willingness. They alone decide . . . So it is that no government can govern without the consent of the mass of the working class. It can propose nothing which it knows they will not accept, and therefore treats them with deference which it gives to no other class". Twenty years have passed since that was written and present day events provide ample evidence of the way in which the working class are dictating and getting their demands met. In addition, the establishment of the Welfare State insisted upon by the working class, wonderful in provision and compassion, has become a buttress to this spirit of independency and self-sufficiency which feels and sees no need for the Church. This new and swiftly emergent attitude is now an important psychological factor which must be considered in the business of communicating the Gospel to the working class.

Quite apart from the barrier raised by estrangement both historical and contemporary, there are other factors and attitudes which must be considered which bear considerably upon the problem of communication.



There are certain well-defined attitudes and patterns of behaviour common to this social group which have a determining influence upon each of its members. These have changed little over the past 100 years, but there are signs of present day amenities in dwellings, together with the many acquisitions made available through the more affluent status which may well bring changes in the near future.

### Some attitudes considered

Frequent discussions with the artisan ranging over more than 30 years starting on the shop floor, and in more recent years on the doorstep and occasionally in his home, have afforded the writer an opportunity to note many of these attitudes and ideas on many topics, not least on religion. These emerge in a stereotyped pattern with a certain amount of variation on the themes, but one underlying pattern is that of defence against any form of commitment to Christianity. From some will come a negative attitude which tries to decry the Bible, resists the supernatural and insists that nothing is provable in the unseen. Another line which is more positive, because its exponent makes some vague assent to the Christian claims, yet is used as part of a defence mechanism to parry an invitation to become involved, is to claim that one can be just as good a Christian without going to Church. This attitude is frequently supported by a description of the "true" Christian as "one who lends a helping hand" "is kind to dumb animals and old people" or "keeps the golden rule". One is constantly faced with obvious contradictions . . . A denial of the supernatural side by side with a belief in superstitions or magic. There are tensions present in most of these people, which in spite of their ambivalence over their beliefs such as disowning God and admitting to pray, show there is some area for contact and communication in most of them. Kweig in **The British Worker** says "I would hesitate to describe the bulk of the British workers as religious, but non-churchgoing and as believers in God or the Supreme Being, but not in Churchdom".

How are such attitudes arrived at? Roger Lloyd sets this out clearly in **The Church and Artisan Today**: "That the artisan forms his opinions by responding to his sense impressions and not by the use of his reason". He goes on to point out that we are all subject to sense impressions, but the thinker knowing this is careful to check them by reflection and reason. He continues "the artisan rarely knows how his opinions are formed, and so does not check them by reason".

Another important factor in the formation of ideas and attitudes is the serious limitation in the education of the working class. Rowntree and Lavers in their sociological survey **English Life and Leisure** discovered in 1951 that "there is still a large class of adults in Britain, possibly as many as 20% of the whole, who are unable to make any effective use of reading matter of any kind. The bulk of these are men". If this finding is true, then it means that nearly 11,000,000 of our population are in this unhappy condition. It could well be



Robert Denholm House, Nutfield, Redhill RH1 4HW

In the last issue I was able to draw your attention to the **1971-72 PARTNERS IN LEARNING** series, and by now many of you will have had the opportunity of seeing the new volumes—with the new attractive presentation—for yourself. The second issue of our new quarterly journal **LINK** was published in August—if you would like to receive a copy regularly (gratis!) please write to me. Your church fellowship is no doubt anxious to use all possible means of maintaining contact with its Children; one way is by sending a birthday card. Two new sets of attractive full-colour sets of cards have recently been published, both 5½" x 3½" (folded) with envelopes, and containing the greeting Happy Birthday and a Text. Set P (27p) for the 4 to 6 year olds contains nine cards (3 of each design), and Set J(31p) for the 7 to 10 year olds has ten cards (2 of each design). On the 1st October we published **DONALD SOPER—a biography**, by Douglas Thompson (£2.50 net). Donald Soper is a name known to millions; one which has numerous associations—Tower Hill and Hyde Park; pacificism; Methodism; socialism; Kingsway Hall, social work; the peerage . . . Donald Soper's 'call' was to persuade others to accept Christian discipleship—nothing has deflected him from this course. NCEC publications may be obtained through a local bookseller or direct from 'Robert Denholm House'. Mail orders should include 10% post and packing please.

Keith M. Crane,  
Sales.

that this "large class" is to be found very largely within the working class population, which would mean that two out of seven of this grouping are in a state of partial illiteracy. This statement was made 20 years ago, and recently some educational experts have expressed concern at evident signs of decline in the standards of literacy among school children.

It is this limitation of education which restricts the working man in the way he expresses his thoughts and ideas, and in an inverse manner places a restrictive influence on the communicator when endeavouring to use the spoken word or written word. Careful attention should be given to the vocabulary to be employed when conversing with the working class. It would be unthinkable for any missionary to plunge into a new field among an unknown people without first making a careful study of their language and culture. Similarly, an effective entry into the inner city area can only be made if the missionary knows something about the attitudes, culture and not least the language of that milieu. Similarly, a discipline is needed in respect of his own larger and prized vocabulary, much of which he must put into "cold storage" as he will discover its use will only baffle and annoy his listeners.

#### **Past and present experiments**

Under this heading it would be proper to examine the apparent success of the Roman Catholic Church so far as its past and present hold upon the working class has been achieved. In the writer's own area which is adjacent to dockland his records show there is a 17% adherence to the Roman Catholic faith. Some of these have apparently lapsed in their attendance, but it is likely that well over half of this Roman Catholic population are regular in their attendance at Mass. From this percentage, it can be seen that the services of the Mass at the local Churches will usually be overflowing with people and so give the impression of success. Nevertheless it must be recognised that there are few, very few, converts being won from the working class population by the Roman Catholic Church.

For any real impact upon the working class by the Church one must go back to the days prior to the Industrial Revolution when considerable advances were made by the Methodists during the period of the Evangelical Revival. In that connection, a more detailed study would throw up factors related to pre-urbanisation which would have obvious bearing upon the successes of Methodism but which must also be viewed in the light of a special work of the Holy Spirit. In passing, it is interesting to note that the strategy, structure and doctrine of the early Methodists exercised a special appeal for the common man, and secured his active involvement in the Christian faith and mission.

In the past, there have been two lines of communication to the working class which the Church, when awakened to her responsibility, has sought to work through. There was always the direct encounter of evangelism in Gospel ministry, and that which could be described as a more indirect communication

through Christian compassion to meet the needs of the miserable poor. Both approaches met with local success, but no great gains were made in the last 150 years. The years between 1800 and 1850 were some of the worst for the working man because of the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation, and were years when the Church in England was at a low ebb. These were barren years for the Church generally, but the next half-century between 1850 and 1900 were to be "boom years" as E. R. Wickham describes them. A growing sense of responsibility was felt and expressed toward the unreached masses. Beginning in 1859 there were seen the marks of a spiritual awakening throughout the British Isles. In his book **The Second Evangelical Awakening** Dr. Edwin Orr gives a very accurately documented description of its effects upon the churches and shows there to have been something in the order of a million accessions to evangelical churches during the decade of the revival. Unfortunately, there is no sociological classification of these accessions, but E. R. Wickham shows in **Church and People in an Industrial City** that so far as the city of Sheffield was concerned the "boom" made little impression upon the large working class population housed there. There is little doubt that this resurgence of spiritual and evangelistic activity did much toward the stimulation of great efforts in social action as well as attempts to convert the working man. The appearance of Mission Churches, City Missionary societies and University Settlements all bore testimony to this desire and intention. In 1865 the Salvation Army began as an experiment in Whitechapel as the result of a passionate desire on the part of William Booth to reach lost souls among the poorer and more down-trodden sections of the working class. The Salvation Army came into official existence in 1880 based largely on the vision which Mrs Booth had that "the poor could be made Christians by people of their own class".

Movements of mass evangelism during the latter part of the 19th Century and in the post-war era of the 20th Century have been marked by their failure to reach the working class. The Graham crusades achieved good results among the fringe adherents of the churches who were in the main brought to the meetings in organised parties. Few artisans went of their own volition to hear the evangelist, and only few were sufficiently in touch with the local churches to have been shepherded to the meetings.

The establishment of industrial chaplaincies in recent years may also be regarded as an attempt to meet the working man at the level of the shop floor. There is not space, nor has there been the experience in England to evaluate its contribution.

From the foregoing rather superficial examination of barriers to communication it would seem that we are faced with a threefold task. First, there is an urgent need to overcome the difficulty of alienation which we have seen is founded upon past grievances, present misconceptions and class solidarity. Friendship and love, bulwarks of practical Christianity must be seen to be shown by the Church to

counter these prevalent attitudes. Important as it is to admit of the existing estrangement, it would be untrue to assert that the British working class hold an implacably hostile attitude toward Church and clergy as it is known to exist among the French working class as well as in other Romanist dominated lands. On the credit side, it is true to say that clergy enjoy a certain amount of respect from the working class because of their tacit recognition that the minister of religion must preside over certain important functions in life, and that the Church does provide some care and comfort for the elderly and make certain facilities available to the young. Again, there is now no longer any disparity between the standard of living enjoyed by the minister as compared with that of the artisan whose wages today are usually considerably higher than the average minister's stipend. This factor may appear superficially trivial, but it makes for a wholesome impression on the mind of the working man who is ever willing to "give credit where credit is due" and because of this will recognise something unselfish in a minister's calling and be prepared to admire him for it.

It is the leader of the local Church who is the key figure in making effective contact through personal relationships. The total ministry of the church when deployed in house to house visitation, house meetings, or other forms of evangelism is only likely to succeed where there is an active, energetic, full-time leadership.

Again, the full-time minister by nature of his training and experience is qualified to operate a spiritual counselling service, which if regularly held on church premises can constitute another important link with people outside the Church fellowship. It is at this type of clinic where moral and spiritual ailments can be treated, so providing opportunity to communicate the remedy which is in Christ.

The second important aspect of the task of communication emerges at the point where people are receptive and prepared to listen, whether the point of contact be the home meeting, the doorstep call, or a normal Sunday service to which the newcomer has at last arrived. This is the aspect of verbalisation. Already, we have discussed the difficulties arising under such headings as thinking, education, and language, so that it is imperative the message is presented clearly and intelligibly. The "language of Zion" or the stylised speech which characterises our preaching can be a positive barrier to communication. Only recently the writer was asked by a newcomer to explain his use of the expression "on Calvary's tree". The questioner was a newly converted London fireman who found the expression among others quite mystifying. There is urgent need for enterprising method to achieve clarity in the presentation of the truth. The visual aid should not be limited to juvenile worshippers as so much of the modern method of communication is driven home through eyegate.

The third aspect of this three fold task is one of strategy. The other aspects in the task of communication may be regarded as tactical and practical, but no matter how good

our methods may be if employed only in remote isolation they will do little more than scratch at the surface of our mission field. Ideally a missionary strategy jointly supplied by the Baptist Union and the Baptist Missionary Society would do much to enhearten and to inspire the flagging witness of many churches in the working class areas. Such strategy could only be made effective by the supply of full-time men and women specially trained for the situation, who saw their call to the task as similar to that which gripped the worker priests of France who, in responding to the challenge of the pagan worker, were prepared to endure privation and hardship in order to make disciples of navvies, fitters, tool-makers, dustmen and firemen. A scheme of this sort inevitably demands drastic changes in such things as ministerial training, the structure of the local church, and of thinking generally within the denomination. But the recognition of a desperate situation demands drastic treatment; and now is the time, when many pastorless or aided churches in this missionfield are beginning to realise their future usefulness is linked with a more realistic co-operation with other churches and through stronger denominational ties.

E. R. Wickham summing up in **Church and People in an Industrial City** says . . . "in the working class areas since their very beginnings, the Church at large, planted out over the nation, has failed to devise a missionary structure". It is this as a priority that must ever be before our minds. The trained missionary will be making not only disciples, but potential lay workers "who will be able to teach others also" for the working man can be converted and fired toward involvement and participation in the Cause as was amply proved by John Wesley and William Booth. Let us hope for that goal.

H. F. SPARKS

## BATTLE FOR THE MIND

The battle to win the working man to Jesus Christ must be fought out 'in the kingdoms of the mind'. In fact, this applies to all people irrespective of so-called 'class'. The Gospel is the Word of Life to be declared to all men. The response required is that of repentance. God demands a change of mind. Nor does it end there. Growing in the Christian life is vitally bound up with the activity of the mind. The believer is to set his mind on 'things above' and to be progressively transformed by the renewing of his mind. But here is the crux. To identify the mind as the strategic citadel within the being of man is one thing; to capture this apparently impregnable fortress, within the working man, is another thing altogether.

Why is this so? Harold Sparks, in his article, has drawn our attention to a most fascinating and yet disturbing observation made by Canon Roger Lloyd concerning the activity of the mind in the working man.<sup>1</sup> Lloyd explains how a working man forms his opinions, attitudes and convictions, and what part the factors of 'reason' and 'impression' play in this process. He points out that we all respond to sense impressions but

only the man who is a "trained thinker" attempts to verify the opinions thus formed, by reason and reflection. With the working man it is otherwise and this raises a serious problem. "His opinions, once formed, are generally quite **impervious to rational demonstrations of their mistakenness**. They can only be changed by his coming under the influence of a contrary set of sense impressions from those which gave rise to his original opinions." The sting is in the tail of Lloyd's comment. The operation of reason and impression in the mind of the working man, he claims, "is a fact which advertisers and propagandists know perfectly well, and the Church either does not know it, or if it does, it takes far too little notice of it."

Is this a fair assessment? Has the case been over-stated? Nothing in the present writer's experience would lead him to question the validity of Roger Lloyd's claims. They appear to rub true to life. Professor Richard Hoggart, in his study of working class life in Northern England, **The Uses of Literacy**, also confirms the accuracy of the observations made. He says that, "in general most working people are non-political and non-metaphysical in their outlook. The important things in life, so far as they can see, are other things. They may appear to have views on general matters—on religion, on politics, and so on—but these views usually prove to be a bundle of largely unexamined and orally-transmitted tags, enshrining generalisations, prejudices and half-truths, and elevated by epigrammatic phrasing into the status of maxims." This close and clear observation of the working class mind draws our attention to the minimal part played by logic and reason in the forming of the working man's attitudes and opinions.

To say that we have here stumbled upon a problem of communication would be a major under-statement. How are we to face it? As men whose business is primarily in the realm of communication, we are forced to think hard with the Scriptures open before us, and with a keen eye and ear on the society in which we live. In various areas of our ministerial and church life, review and reformation may be needed.

(a) **Preaching.** Presumably ministers of the Gospel would qualify for Lloyd's high-sounding designation—"trained thinkers". But just how trained are we if we do not understand the mental processes of the men and women whom we meet day by day? Any suggestion that we should abandon reason and logic in our preaching would be ridiculous and would do violence to the nature of Truth itself. The Lord God makes plain that He sees the creation made in His own image as a being to be reasoned with. "Come now and let us reason together, says the Lord." (Isaiah 1:18). Certainly the Apostle Paul was a trained thinker and constantly reasoned with his hearers. (Acts 17:2, 18:4, 19; 24:25) Apollos was exceptionally gifted in this method of communication (Acts 18:28). But what are we to do? Of what value is it if we are sure what to preach but not sure how to preach it? In the first place, our task will be to understand the mental processes of our hearers. If we have a ministry to a community of trained thinkers, or thinkers in training, we shall

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To the Members of the Baptist Ministers' Fraternal.

Dear Friends,

If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now;  
if it be not now, yet it will come."

Hamlet.

I have been reading Shakespeare and watching productions of Shakespeare's plays for more years than I care to remember, although all the profit and pleasure I have derived in this way throughout the years I gladly acknowledge.

My recollections range from visits as a schoolboy to the old Stratford Empire in the East End of London to later visits to the Old Vic, to Stratford-on-Avon, to the Open Air Theatre in Regents Park, to Middle Temple Hall (where Twelfth Night was first produced), and in one jewel of recollection to a Summer night production in the open air in the garden of Clare College Cambridge.

I thought I had gathered in those years something of Shakespeare in general and of Hamlet in particular.

But this year my eyes have been opened to a wealth of poetic imagery in Hamlet, for I have been engaged in a guided study of the text. I have also witnessed a work-shop production of the play in which the audience sat round the actors who after certain scenes discussed details of the play with the audience.

Since that last production the quotation at the head of this letter has haunted me (this is no pun on the ghost!) with its fatalistic ring and the acceptance of the inevitability of the sequence of events.

In my work I read many reports of the climax of events in terms of fires, thefts, accidents, and often in retrospect I can see the point at which a prudent or thoughtful action could have bent the sequence of events to the avoidance of an unfavourable climax.

A long hard prospective look at any subject makes good sense and good management control whether in business, private or Church life.

May I prompt you to suggest to your deacons that a fresh study in depth of your Church insurances is worthwhile. Ask them not to build on what has been done in the past, nor to accept the past as an inevitable pattern for the future, but to plan ab initio.

Yours sincerely,

C. J. L. COLVIN  
General Manager

not feel the problem so acutely. If, however, we are—or ought to be—communicating to the working man, then certain things should follow. We should be sparing in our use of propositional and conceptual terminology. Where it is used every effort should be made to illustrate this with concrete thought and pictorial imagery both Biblical and contemporary. Complex and lengthy reasoning processes should be avoided. Truth should be presented in 'slabs'—a brick at a time. It is significant that the homely and colourful parables of Jesus aim to present one major truth, usually with little or no reasoned application. The lesson does not need to be logically deduced: the impression is obvious! In our day when there is increasing competition for men's interest and attention through 'eye-gate', we dare not be found wanting. The vivid and topical imagery of the Hebrew prophets and of Jesus Himself have much to teach us about communicating to the working man.

(b) **Evangelism.** Perhaps we should have looked at this first.

Our problem is not just that we find it difficult to communicate to the working man but also that he does not come to church. He is not in a position to receive what we want to communicate to him. Do we then ask the question, "How can we get the working man to come to church?" But why should he come? Knowing his **impression** of the church, we should not normally expect him to come. In the opinion of L. G. Tyler (*A Christian Front in Industry*), "insofar as the working man thinks about the Church at all, he sees it on the other side of the fence from where he stands. It represents another class, not necessarily one he hates; his circle is outside; it is the done thing for his group not to go to church, and he is seldom prepared to break with the commonly accepted practices of his mates. He identifies the Church with the suburbs, with a different way of life, and a different kind of speech. He knows that the lay people who serve in the councils of the Church are not drawn from his class. If he remembers anything about religion at all, he thinks of it as a pious moralism, at the most all right for the wife and kids, but not really of much significance for the world in which his life is set."<sup>5</sup>

If this is the working man's impression of the church, and if Lloyd is right that these "opinions, once formed, are generally quite impervious to rational demonstrations of their mistakenness," then two courses of action seem to be open to us. We can either make some direct effort (and it will mean some effort!) to change the working man's impression of the church, in order to bring him under the sound of the gospel, or we can shift the focus of our evangelism away from the pulpit into the community, and more particularly on to the working man's home ground. The former alternative may appear more attractive. It involves less departure from what is conventional; it allows preservation of what is understood to be Biblical. But it also lays itself open to the temptation to use gimmickry. What **would** we do to change the working man's impression of the church? True, God still saves "by the foolishness of preaching" those that believe. But that refers to the

content of the preaching and not its context. The Scripture, at this point, is definite on **what** we are to preach; it is silent on **where** we are to preach it. It would seem both logically and theologically correct that the working man will not normally understand the meaning and purpose of the church until he becomes a Christian. The very concept of a Gospel Service seems to be somewhat Biblically back-to-front! We hope and pray that the people who are not Christians will be prepared to join in our Christian worship so that they can hear how to become Christians. How far should we expect people to accept the idea of church **before** they hear the Gospel and **in order** to hear the Gospel? It is a painful truth that certain groups within our society are much more ready to accept the idea of church than others and the reasons generally are sociological rather than spiritual. It would seem both Biblical and reasonable to expect the working man to come to church only when he has had occasion to change his **impression** of the church. If he has had continued contact with the local church over a good period of time; if he has seen the church in action in the lives of its members, then he will begin to form a new impression of it. Its significance and value will be seen in what it does for the lives of its members. The focus and the spadework of evangelism in a working class area need to be shifted from the pulpit to the natural and neutral meeting points in the community. Only where a working man has already begun to understand what it means to be a Christian, and what the church is for, could we normally expect him to share in our worship.

(c) **Personal witness.** The Apostle Peter tells the readers of his first letter that they should always be in a position to give a 'reason' ('Logical defence'—**Amplified Version**) for the hope that is within them. Undoubtedly, the heart of our faith is a matter of facts rather than feelings. These we must know; of these we must be equipped to speak. But impression is again important. It is the mobility and the complexity of modern industrial society which adversely affect the impact of Christian witness upon the working man. So often it is the case that a Christian will work with one group of people, live in neighbour contact with another group, and possibly even worship and witness among another group. His life is split up into parts: no one group of people sees the witness of his life as a whole. But it is vitally important in witness to the working man that he should see a Christian's life as well as hear his words. It is a sad fact that many churches located in working class areas are not truly local churches. Members have moved out to the more desirable residential areas but out of loyalty to the fellowship and concern for their old friends they 'come in' to worship and to witness. Former neighbours may continue to hear their words, but they do not **see** their lives. The logical defence is made; the matter of impression over-looked. There is a desperate need for Christians to stay in, or move into, working class areas so that local people can **see** what a Christian life really is.



(d) **Ministerial students.** Any long term and deep concern to increase the impact of the Gospel in working class areas must give serious thought to the training of theological students. The issue can be highlighted in this way. The training of the missionary for work overseas comprises Scriptural and related studies together with a study of the history, customs, culture and language of the people among whom he is to serve. He must study the Bible, and it is equally important that he study the people to whom he is sent. One without the other is not even half a training. Its value is greatly diminished. This dual aspect of missionary training we accept without question. But the predominantly working class areas of this country are no less a mission field than those overseas. It is also true that most ministerial candidates will not be native to these areas. They aspire to be trained thinkers and some will inevitably come to work amongst a people whose customs, culture and even language they may not know. It would betray an unfortunate ignorance to think that all British people are really alike. The nature of the operation of the working class mind is but one feature of the life of a people who form the largest sociological group within our British society. If ministerial students are to be adequately equipped to serve in urban and industrial areas of our land today then somewhere somehow in their training an insight into working class life past and present would appear to be a necessity.

Finally, we must ask the question, "Where is the work of the Holy Spirit to be seen in all this"? Have we left Him out of our reckoning? It may seem that we have focussed too much attention on the need for trained thinkers to think even more about people who don't think as they do! Could there be a reaction? Provided we preach the right message should we not rely on the work of the Holy Spirit rather than attempt to become specialists in sociology, experts in the functioning of the working class mind? It is accepted unreservedly that the Holy Spirit is the Ultimate Revealer of Truth: without His work ours is of no avail. But would we ask the question about work in, say, Borneo? It is obvious that the overseas missionary must understand **how** his hearers think. Can it be any less necessary in the mission field of Britain today?

ROY JOSLIN

- 1 Roger Lloyd *The Church and the Artisan Today*. p. 12, 13. Here he explains his reasons for preferring the term "Artisan" to that of working class or working man.
- 2 Op. cit. p. 85.
- 3 Op. cit. p. 85.
- 4 Richard Hoggart. *The Uses of Literacy*. p. 86.
- 5 L. G. Tyler. *A Christian Front in Industry*. 6.11.

Readers of THE FRATERNAL may be interested to know that the duplicated correspondence 'Christians in Industrial Areas' can be obtained from The Correspondence Editor, 19 Erskine Street, Liverpool, 6, England.

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## REACHING THEM: SOME NOTES FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO TRY

You will face two facts. On one hand, the urban process stifles religion. Wherever industrialisation has created high-density living the Church wilts, then withers. On the other hand, the Church seems to have an in-built tendency to grow away from the working-classes in both social and geographical terms. Historians and sociologists concur—and even theologians are writing about it.

You will need to learn from the past. The Methodists, Salvation Army and some Pentecostalist groups have communicated the Gospel to the working-classes but have always been compelled to leave the established Church in doing so. In time all these movements have known 'the routinisation of charisma' (a sociological term with theological meaning) as organisation, hierarchy and intellectualism have carefully lifted the lively, local and emotional features on to the middle-class plane. Those who left the institutional Church to reach the working-class discover that they themselves become institutionalised and fail to reach out.

But you can take heart. There is a ferment of thought and experimentation. It ranges from the ecumenically-based Urban Training Centres to the evangelically inclined publication 'Christians in Industrial Areas'. It can be seen in some of our Churches but is often hidden away in small groups of committed Christians.

My own pilgrimage has taught me some lessons. Six years in market-life at Covent Garden Market, a pre-college year at Vernon, Kings Cross and ministries on a new estate on the outskirts of Birmingham, a central Church at Luton, and the complex of activities at West Ham Central Mission have all raised questions. All I have learnt can be summarised in two sections: a somewhat complicated list of points of tension which must be faced and a much shorter, simpler, positive affirmation of belief.

Real tension has arisen and 'Gospel-blockage' is shown along a series of dilemmas known to all of us who work in urban areas:

**1. Individual or Social.** We know salvation is personal, we expect individuals to make decisions but we forget the tenacity and the power of social groupings among working-class people. There is a cohesiveness in Trade Unions, football crowds, pubs and 'extended families' where the social mobility, professional initiative and sheer individualism of the middle-classes is not known. It takes more for a working-class adult to 'opt out' of his life-pattern and many working-class people joining our Churches are often individuals on their way up and out.

**2. Verbal or Visual.** A Biblical faith, worship with hymn-books, the importance of the sermon and the programme of study groups—all these demand a verbalism and the use of intellectual concepts that are often alien to the working-class

man. He reads the 'Daily Mirror' not the 'Guardian', watches ITV not BBC-2, thinks in pictures and dislikes abstractions. Somehow we must help him to 'see' the Gospel and not merely hear the words.

**3. Gathered or Local.** Too many of our congregations 'commute' for worship. They bring with them the ethos and attitudes of their own residential area and this is often several stages removed from the neighbourhood where the Church is set. No Church will grow until its homes and its leaders are known to, and work within, the neighbourhood around the Church building.

**4. Imposed or Indigenous.** Leadership has often come in from the outside, often in great strength. Many working-class Churches have known periods of unemployment and social distress which have drawn strong and able leaders to a place of great need. But this has often left a situation where staff (or their wives) run everything and local leadership is thwarted and therefore weak.

**5. Responsible or Dependent.** We stress the 'priesthood of all believers' and want to train our people to fulfil their own God-given ministry. Stewardship and responsibility go together. Yet an over-emphasis on the caring task of the Church has attracted many inadequate or dependent people into our congregations. This factor alone gives an image of the Church that is off-putting to the sturdy, independent working-class man.

**6. One Man or Team-Ministry.** Our Churches still expect to have 'our man' and our ministers still want 'my Church'. But the demands and the opportunities of urban ministry are too great for any single personality. The multi-layered life of urban society demands penetration at city, borough, neighbourhood, group and individual levels.

Others may add to the list from their own experience but those who want to try to communicate the Gospel of Christ to the working classes will not be able to avoid these questions. So what must a man do to communicate the Gospel in the urban setting that some of us face now and all of us will face in the future? Certain steps are essential:

**A. Recognise the magnitude of the task.** Others have charted the statistical decline of the Church or traced the drift of great sections of our population from the Christian Gospel. Some point out that this is now a world-wide phenomena affecting all religions and nations. Others forecast an inevitable growth of megapolis covering vast areas of land.

**B. Come to stay.** Christians must take the example of the Incarnation seriously. We are always pulling out. Buildings shut, ministers move on, able members move out. Working-class Christians should seriously consider whether their desire to 'live in a better place' is motivated by pagan or Christian springs. Others ought to ask themselves whether they should not move in to share the schools, amenities and shops of working-class areas.

**C. Become part of.** Jacques Ellul in his *Presence of the Kingdom* cries out "When we have really understood the actual plight of our contemporaries, when we have heard their cry of anguish, and when we have understood why they won't have anything to do with our 'disembodied' Gospel, when we have shared their sufferings, both physical and spiritual, in their despair and their desolation, when we have become one with the people of our own nation and of the universal Church, as Moses and Jeremiah were one with their own people, as Jesus identified Himself with the wandering crowds, 'sheep without a shepherd', THEN we shall be able to proclaim the Word of God—but not till then."

**D. Then proclaim** within real relationships. Proclaim the Gospel openly and boldly. Do it in homes and in friendships, do it in groups and in activities. Do it naturally and in words that are understood.

**E. And be a 'worker together with God'.** You will need to believe that it is God (and not the Devil) who is at work in the creation of the city. You will have to learn where His Spirit is at work in the structures that men build. You will need to listen carefully to others as you 'discern the signs of the times'. Above all you will be compelled to become yourself before God and before others.

Those who want to try to communicate the Gospel to the working-classes are invited to come. They will gain much and only lose those things which they need to lose. For in trying to communicate the Gospel to others they will find it is communicated to themselves.

COLIN MARCHANT

## IN PROCESS OF CHANGE

This is an account of what has happened to one Church in a working-class area. It had a good-sized congregation but drew in comparatively few local residents and a low proportion of young people. Then, within a few years it changed to a larger congregation of mostly local residents with a high proportion of young people. When this takes place without change of leadership, without compromising the Church's doctrinal tradition and without disturbance and upheaval among the existing membership, it seems worthwhile to examine the course of events to see if any underlying principles of wider application can be extracted.

There are factors which are indispensable if any Church is to make progress—a harmonious group united in prayerfulness and theological position. These essentials must be mentioned first, lest any reader thinks we underestimate the importance of them, but they are factors which are shared by many congregations which nevertheless do not experience the encouragement they long for.

Looking back, there seem to have been two major factors involved; one, a change of attitude among the congregation, the other a change in our approach to the neighbourhood with the Gospel. We will deal first with the former change, not only because it came first in order of time, but also because original experiments in out-reach end only in frustration if the Church does not give a welcome to those brought in by the out-reach.

Up to about 1962 our work was similar to that of many other Churches, with a fair degree of encouragement, but not so much that we did not feel the need to examine and try to apply to our own situation the various experiments in evangelism being tried elsewhere. But these did not prove the answer to our need. However, the first week-end of 1962 was observed by many Churches in our denomination as a Day of Prayer and Humiliation, and our Church took this call seriously and from the Thursday to the following Monday waited on God in confession and intercession. Those taking part had an unusual sense of having been heard and a sermon on Psalm 142:4, "No man cared for my soul", moved the congregation to a deeper compassion.

There followed, not an ingathering of conversions, but a rapid, almost overwhelming, increase both in the number of 'problem' people coming to us for help and in the complexity and intensity of the problems they brought so that over a few months we were confronted, and did our utmost to cope with, an accumulation of acute social situations such as most of us had only read about in books. Probably in most Churches the volume of such cases is not more than can be dealt with discreetly by the Minister or his wife, with the help of one or two experienced workers, and the congregation remains unaware of their existence, but the pressures imposed on us resulted in an increasing number of members of the congregation being drawn into this compassionate service. Within a short while an informal team of fifteen or twenty members were fully extended in such work on top of their part in the normal life of the Church.

The cost and strain of all this was heavy. There were Court attendances, calls on welfare officers, real risk of physical violence, calls far into the night, disturbances at regular meetings, a seemingly endless succession of demands for uncritical friendship and inexhaustible patience. This was where the value of the large team proved itself, providing a pool large enough to ensure that if one worker was over-taxed, there was another who could be called on. The team knew that when a particularly exacting 'client' had rejected the aid of most of our helpers, one could still be found to fill the breach, although at times the whole team was stretched almost beyond breaking point.

Such compassionate activity taught deep and abiding lessons not only to those directly involved, but also to their less deeply involved associates and other members of the congregation, who could not help observing what was occurring and drawing from it valuable conclusions about the importance of

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## WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

409 Barking Road, Plaistow, London, E13 8AL

My dear Brother Minister,

I have been writing these letters for so many years that at times it becomes difficult to keep fresh, as you may have noticed!

My mind has been running recently on the theme of "**THE COST OF CARING**" and I should need the whole of the issue of this "Fraternal" to illustrate this properly from our work in our various Homes.

For instance, we have a young Pakistani girl with two beautiful children in our care at Greenwoods. She and her husband were convicted of the manslaughter of a child of 10, the son of the husband by a previous marriage. When this woman came to us she was a child bride, and there is a good case for believing that she was dominated by her much older husband. Whilst she has been with us she has grown tremendously in all kinds of ways, and has obviously benefited tremendously from the care of our staff at Greenwoods. Every so often one of the staff has to give up a day to take this woman to see her husband in Maidstone prison, and this is only just one tiny item in the sum total of caring for her.

On a very different level, Sister Ethel Kime and her staff in **REST-A-WHILE** are finding the cost of caring for the residents a heavy one. More and more Rest-a-While seems to be turning into a Nursing Home, as it is our policy to look after our people, even when they get ill or too infirm to leave their rooms, and you can well imagine this makes tremendous demands on those responsible. Incidentally, we are glad to be in a position to look after Sister Eileen Mahood, one time Matron of our Rest-a-While Home, who is now herself a bedridden resident in Rest-a-While.

In **MARNHAM HOUSE SETTLEMENT** Sister Daphne Pearce has her problems too. She keeps a wary eye for instance on an ex-Borstal boy now living with us, who thank God seems to be making good. We have a youngster on probation who needs to be wooed from his bed, and demands patience. There is also a man with an alcoholic problem, who can produce crises at times.

I have no space to tell you of the problems of caring produced at **ORCHARD HOUSE**, but when you have 26 boys in care you can see a dozen problems every day.

Please ask your people to pray for all our magnificent staff who give unstintingly of their time, and energy, and love, to serve their fellows for Christ's dear sake.

**FILMSTRIP:** Just a brief note to remind you that we have a **NEW COLOURED FILM STRIP** on the work of the Mission, which will be available from the 1st October 1971 and which promises to be a very good one. If you would like to show it at your **CHURCH NIGHT** or at any other Meeting, please write to me giving alternate dates.

May God's blessing be on you and your loved ones, and on your ministry.

Yours very sincerely,

STANLEY TURL  
Superintendent of the West Ham Central Mission

people and the need for tenderness and understanding. This broader impact was to prove important later, when the question of welcoming unconventional types into the congregation was to arise and formal decisions had to be considered for changing traditional patterns. The fruits of all this labour in terms of conversions were not great, the benefit was more to the Church itself. This benefit would have been lost if the Church had ducked the challenge when it came, if instead of trying to meet the needs of those who came to us, even if only in an amateur and inadequate way, we had fallen back upon the familiar excuses. It is all too easy to evade responsibility by suggesting that such people are not worth helping and that, like a certain Priest and Levite, we must not allow ourselves to be diverted from our proper religious tasks.

In the meantime some of our young people were experimenting with what proved to be a fruitful form of evangelism, house-groups. By such groups we mean not the transfer of meetings from chapel to house, nor the arranging of occasional house meetings for neighbours, but continuous open-house hospitality most nights of the week, week after week. Although older teenagers predominate, this work is not restricted to any age group and younger teenagers and adults have been included. Each group leader works to a pattern of his or her own preference, some concentrating on fellows, some on girls and some having mixed groups, but, whatever the pattern, flexibility and adaptability are essential. A frame-work evolved by day-school teachers based on the triangle of School-Home-Chapel has probably had the greatest numerical success and the large number of young people drawn into the Sunday congregation by this means have contributed to an atmosphere in which young people brought in by other means feel at home.

These house-groups are the responsibility of those arranging them and not constitutionally the responsibility of the Church, although they are regarded as part of the life of the Church and certainly of its prayerful concern. The groups are accordingly completely free from control by the Church leadership, although pastoral and practical assistance is available as required and it is accepted that the group leaders will be less free than other Church members to attend the traditional meetings of the Church programme.

The activities of each group are flexible, ranging from light conversation, record-playing and games, to long and searching Bible studies and personal counselling. A common experience is that some personal problem or current issue will afford an occasion for finding out what the Bible has to say on the subject and this leads to the group or the more serious part of it asking for regular Bible studies.

Probably because the groups are a substitute for formal clubs, the teenagers often persist in referring to their group as their 'club', but it is essential that the atmosphere of domestic hospitality rather than formal club be maintained. Such formalities as subscriptions, membership rolls and programmes, if introduced at all, are kept to a minimum and

emphasis on punctuality, regularity or loyalty is as inappropriate as in private hospitality.

It will be apparent that such a loose, informal pattern of work demands a high degree of responsibility and loyalty on the part of the leaders and a reciprocal trust and confidence on the part of the Church leadership. These have been forthcoming; the group leaders have remained steadfast in their objectives of leading the members of their groups to Christ and of seeing them established in the fellowship of the Church. It is a deep satisfaction to see those who have been won for Christ through this ministry spontaneously asking for baptism and Church membership and planning to use their own homes for similar work.

An obvious requirement of this house-group evangelism is that the homes should be within the district served by the Church and as our chapel is in an area where it is difficult to find accommodation, we have had to take active steps to provide it. As the converted fellows and girls are now pairing off and getting married we are also faced with the problem of finding accommodation for them and during the present year we hope to see at least five newly married Christian couples make their first homes within easy reach of our chapel.

It is well to underline one indirect advantage of the house-group method of work which might otherwise be overlooked. Clubwork conducted on Church premises often gives rise to vandalism because of the impersonal nature of the premises. Where an attempt is made to introduce the members of such clubs to Sunday services (and particularly if there is a rule requiring such attendance) their unruly behaviour, possibly arriving from over-familiarity with the place and people, may arouse opposition from traditional worshippers. In house groups the vandalism is much less, because to some extent the young people respect the premises as being the home of their group leader and can be reminded of it if they forget, and when the young people reach the Church services by way of the house groups, even if not already converted or enquiring they are already half-prepared to show consideration out of regard for their group leader, who commands their respect. Disturbance does not amount to much more than giggles arising from self-consciousness or genuine amusement at the comical ways of chapel folk. A sympathetic and welcoming congregation can learn to tolerate this. It is a fact that over many months now we have rarely had more than an acceptable level of restlessness, although there might be well over a hundred teenagers from local non-Christian homes in the congregation.

The introduction into the congregation of this element, making itself conspicuous by unconventional attire, late arrival and in other ways, coupled with an encouraging growth in the number of coloured immigrants attending our services, put to the test the changed attitude of Church members referred to earlier in these notes. Formal tests arose when it became necessary for the Church Meeting to decide whether to permit smoking on the Church premises and whether to

discontinue the collection at evening services and the evening observance of the Lord's Supper on account of the high proportion of non-Christians present and on each occasion the members, although not less conservative in their ways than most chapel groups, based their decisions on what they judged was best for those brought in, rather than on what they themselves would have preferred or were accustomed to. Apart from formal decisions, however, the Church members have responded well to the demands made upon them, many adopting a friendly, welcoming attitude to the newcomers and even those who have had predictable reservations have abstained from making difficulties. The young people naturally respond favourably to an accepting and understanding atmosphere and have reciprocated by maintaining friendly and considerate attitudes to the older people, so that both groups have become integrated into a united whole. This is fostered by the fact that few specifically young people's meetings are held on the Church premises. These might well provoke separatist attitudes, consequential criticism and dissension. Those young people who are ready to do so join in the regular adult meetings of the Church weekly programme.

Looking back, one can discern underlying principles apart from such tangible factors as the costly social concern and open hospitality we have mentioned. There is, for example, the impact of the direct evangelistic approach, the face-to-face confrontation with the claims of Christ, without the deadening paraphernalia of customary religious organisations. At a time when many are despondent over the lack of progress of the Gospel, it should be made more widely known how readily young people today will respond to the Gospel when faced directly with its message by someone they respect and in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. It is important that the sole driving motive of the evangelist is to introduce them to Christ, undiluted by secondary motives of filling chapel pews or building up statistics. The rising generation of young Christians is eager to engage in this direct form of witness if set free from heavy-handed control and conventional organisational patterns. It is a moving experience to see the life of the Spirit growing rapidly in seemingly unpromising material in a hostile environment and to be challenged by Christian insights and practical applications of the Gospel which long-established Christians from traditional backgrounds might miss. This encourages us to reaffirm our confidence in the power of the Gospel to continue to demonstrate its saving work and the power of the Word to build up and establish in the Church those being saved.

ROGER DOWLEY  
PAUL TUCKER

### **"PARDON ME! I'M LOOKING FOR THE CHURCH"**

Molly and I first arrived in Chelmsley Wood in July, 1969. Bulldozers and construction traffic were filling the scene with noise, movement and dust. We were the first to move into

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our road and we stood that day on our doorstep with a New Testament in our hands and Christ in our hearts and wondered what our future was to be.

We had felt compelled by God to leave the comfort and security of a large, prosperous and well-established church to go for the West Midlands Baptist Association to pioneer a cause in this vast new estate. That day we stood there with no church building and no church members—just ourselves and our three boys, a house, a faith in Jesus Christ and His purpose and a host of praying friends up and down the country.

### THE ESTATE:

Chelmsley Wood, nine miles East of the centre of Birmingham, is the biggest housing estate in Europe. It was planned to take over 60,000 people in five years. It would be called a new town except for the fact that it has virtually no industry of its own and is a dormitory area for the city. When we came it already contained 25,000 people and, apart from the facilities which lag painfully behind, it is now almost complete.

One quarter of the houses are privately owned and the rest rented from the Birmingham Corporation. The standard of housing is very good and the type varies from houses and maisonettes to blocks of flats and old people's bungalows.

The people come from all parts of Birmingham, a good number from property which is being replaced. They are working-class folk and a lot had been paying something like £1-£2 a week for their old homes. They now pay £6 more or less and have also to pay 'bus fares to and from work. Consequently many are in financial difficulty from the beginning and about 40% of our population are on Social Security. There is no colour problem: about 3% are coloured people and are integrated without great trouble. Further, the people are of all ages and there is no preponderance of young marrieds.

The upheaval of moving into a new and growing estate and the added financial difficulties are a psychological and social strain which often discovers and deepens other weaknesses, especially in home and family life.

Perhaps the hardest hit at first are the youngsters who, when their families move here, go back into Birmingham to their old haunts in the evenings. This is alright until the old haunts are knocked down for redevelopment. They then belong nowhere and trouble often starts at that point. There are some wonderful young people today, and there are some whose minds and souls are as dry and arid as a desert.

### THE FIRST YEAR'S WORK:

Soon after our arrival we distributed, with the help of young Baptists from Birmingham, leaflets and a series of letters to 4,000 homes on the estate (this was as big an area as we could cope with). Molly and I visited together every day and all day. We look back upon this now as the golden time when we were truly among the people but even then we were not able to keep up with folk as they moved in. At the peak 180

families were moving in each week through the winter mud and chaos. Someone at that time said of us "What you need here is faith, love and a pair of Wellington boots".

We found the people most friendly. Most asked us in and although this sadly cut down the number of people visited, we took every opportunity of personal contact and every natural opportunity of witness. The majority of people were "happy pagans". A surprising number were "private Christians" (they believe in God, sometimes or often pray, would call themselves Christians but see no need for church attendance). A majority patronise the churches for weddings and funerals but their religion is immature and superstitious. The Anglican clergy are kept busy with "christenings" and are deeply concerned because so few parents give it any truly Christian significance. One lady, for instance, told us that her little girl had not been christened "but it hasn't hurt her—she hasn't had any bad luck yet"!

Quite a number of our present congregation are people we visited in that first year and a story could be told of not a few of them; like that of the man who had turned his back on God and the Church. His wife had suffered a heart attack a few days before we knocked at the door. He says quite simply "When you came into my home that day, God came in with you".

No words of praise could adequately express what we owe to those who came to work with us in those early days. David Sheppard, writing of his work at the Mayflower Centre, said "Where the local church is strong I believe the Vicar should make a team out of his most loyal Christians, take them into his confidence, plan together with them and share the work with them. Where the local church is almost non-existent . . . a team has to be imported at the beginning if the church is to tackle its task in strength". I believed that if we could begin in Chelmsley Wood with such a team, deeply committed to Christ and to each other, then a committed church would grow around them. God answered our prayers and eight others have purposely moved home in order to join us in our work here, some at considerable risk of home and job. They feel themselves to be called by God to the apostolate in Chelmsley Wood just as I do. (Surely such commitment and obedience should be normal for all Christian people).

#### **OTHER CHURCHES:**

The Roman Catholics are to have three worship centres here, one attached to a social centre they have built and two attached to schools. The Anglicans and Methodists work together. The Vicar was here in a caravan before the first brick of the estate was laid and there is now a team of five clergy and a full-time youth worker. They have a school and a fine large youth centre and are now in process of building a magnificently-planned worship centre. Our relationships with them are of the happiest. In time there will also be an Evangelical Free Church about a mile and a half from our building. Four churches for a town of 60,000 people: "what are they among so many?"

#### **OUR BUILDING:**

The Baptist Church Centre (so called because we want it clearly understood that the church is the believing and obedient people, not the building) opened on May 30th, 1970. It is always a busy place. If you had entered the main doors this morning you would have seen the Play Group in the hall alive with little ones of between three and five years old. This runs morning and afternoon, five days a week.

Further on, in the lounge, you would have found the Coffee Bar serving a steady variety of customers. This is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. six days a week.

In the kitchen you would have found my wife and her helpers preparing meals for our Senior Citizens Lunch Club, for the Play Group children who stay, for the staff and for anyone else who has ordered a lunch. The largest number of meals we have served in any one day so far is 87. The old folk pay only 8p for a full lunch but a subsidy of another 10p is received from the local council.

So people are in and out of the building every day. We have avoided the usual church organisations. We do not want men's and women's missionary meetings. We want men and women engaged in mission. Instead of organisations we have adopted this "open plan" of church activity in which anyone and everyone can feel free to come in. (I think we seriously underestimate how difficult it is for the non-churchgoer to enter into the ordinary church building). Our open pattern keeps us very busy but it means that we are constantly meeting and serving people who would not otherwise be found inside a church building and our Christian witness is more natural and more simple within this context. We are attempting to make the love of Christ visible in a church life which is genuinely in the midst of the world, seeking to be as yeast in the barrel of meal, and not cut off from it.

One of the most humbling things is the large number of people from the estate who work in the coffee bar, kitchens and play group. It is over 50 people each week. All the work is voluntary and much of it done by people who would count themselves as of little importance but they "can just do the floors", "just peel potatoes", "do the washing up" and they come and work their hearts out from some quiet and often inarticulate desire to serve the Lord. One girl who works in a shop asked if she could help serve in the coffee bar. "But why?", I asked, "You are on your feet all day as it is". And she replied "Just for once I would like to feel that I had done something worthwhile".

The building itself is multi-purpose and infinitely adaptable. The main hall is dominated by a large wooden Cross and, either side of it, are the open baptistry and the Communion table. The architect provided curtains to be drawn across what he called "the worship area". We keep them always open. If we drew them we would be saying that Sunday is the religious part of life and other activities are secular. Whatever goes on in the hall, these symbols stand there bearing silent witness



that all life belongs to God and that God's word and man's hope are for us centred in this empty Cross.

For all this it is difficult to say whether the building is a greater help or hindrance to the mission of Christ here. We had hoped to pioneer a church without a building. This would have been a bit "way out" for a working-class estate, where views are extremely conservative and unadventurous, and to meet on a Sunday in a public building or a school is so often to meet in the smell of the Saturday night bottle party or to find a caretaker unwilling to be pressed into extra duties on Sunday. On the other hand the building, excellent and well-used as it is, has fixed us very firmly in one spot and keeps us all so terribly busy that other kinds of outreach and service in the estate are limited. The building was paid for by money ported from the sale of another church building in Birmingham and this saves us from the familiar position where the mission of the church is to raise enough money to keep abreast of its debts and to keep the routine going. Nevertheless Molly and I look back with some nostalgia on the first year when we had all our time to visit the people in their homes and just be there among folk. At the moment we try to get the best of both worlds by using the building fully and well but at the same time avoiding the institutional mentality which majors on organisation, meetings, committees, money and structures rather than on listening and responding to God, genuine meeting, mission, the search to find the meanings and purposes of God in our life and situation and the flexibility to obey what the Spirit is saying to the church.

#### **SUNDAY:**

Sunday begins with breakfast together in the lounge at 10 a.m. and the meal ends, while we are still sitting at the tables, with Communion with the broken loaf and one cup passed around, each serving his neighbour. This takes us back simply and clearly to the Last Supper and to the early Love Feast and Communion.

The worship Service is at 11 a.m. and lasts about 50 minutes. Each Service is planned by a group although the final drawing up of the order and a sermon is in my hands. The worship is free and flexible and this enables us to take a Bible theme, explore it and enable it to come alive and speak in our situation and for the people to make their own genuine response to the Lord about this theme. Such a Service requires much more study, prayer, thought and planning than a formal Service (just as a free and flexible church structure calls for a much greater inherent discipline).

There is much congregational participation—and I don't mean just reading set responses. The Scripture may be read by several voices, or from two versions, or by the whole congregation, or placed in contrast with a newspaper cutting or broken into by another voice with (prepared) comments which make it alive in our situation.

The sermon is often in several parts and sometimes one or more parts will be testimonies or pieces of daily experience given by members on the theme for the day. One of our most

moving times was when I had spoken briefly on "What is Christianity?", giving Bible answers in simple language, and then asked (without prior warning) anyone in the congregation to stand and say what difference Christ had made in their daily living. One man said he had lost his faith in God years ago but had found it again springing in his heart through our fellowship. A young married man, who had been attending church only since the Centre opened, spoke of how Christ had claimed him through our Services and how his whole life and home had been changed. It was a time we shall never forget.

Prayers are sometimes open sessions, sometimes by one voice, sometimes more (asked beforehand each to take one part of prayer or one specific matter), sometimes using a great old prayer, sometimes Barclay or Quoist and sometimes we have our 'glad about, sad about' prayers. This means five minutes at one point in which we ask members of the congregation to offer praise, in one short sentence, for anything they are glad about. After each sentence, as an act of sharing the joy and together offering it to God, we all say "Thank you, Lord" or some similar phrase. During another five minutes, at a later point, members say to God, again in one sentence, anything they are sad or concerned about and we share the burden and together bring it to our heavenly Father with a phrase such as "Lord, please help". From the very first time we had 'glad about, sad about' prayers people have joined in who would never have become vocal in prayer in any other way, certainly not in a church building. These are truly the prayers of the congregation and are a great thrill to share. Further, every prayer in the Service will always have a firm and clear 'Amen' from the whole congregation!

We do not include discussions in the Service although there is plenty of discussion in our home meetings. Our emphasis in the Service is on putting over clearly and intelligibly some part of the Word of God (the themes are prepared in series months beforehand) and on enabling the congregation to make their genuine response to God about it. We abhor gimmicks. We do nothing for the sake of novelty any more than we do anything because it is traditional. All forms and methods are simply for the sake of their usefulness in this situation to Christ and the Gospel. We strive for genuine encounter in which the Lord speaks and we respond.

We have no pulpit. We have no choir. We have one lady whose sweet voice sings Sankey type solos. We have John Bayes whose deep voice puts over modern Sydney Carter type songs. We have one young lady who as often as not writes her own songs for the occasion and sings to her own guitar playing. We have a group of five young people who sing together to guitars. I ask whoever I want for each particular theme and occasion.

At the conclusion of each Service each person present receives a quarto duplicated sheet which sums up what we have been trying to put over so that after each series (elementary things of the Christian life, doctrine, etc.—remember we are in a new and therefore a teaching situation)

the people have a small booklet of papers on that subject.

In August, 1969, we held our first Service of worship here when five of us met in a home. We now have a lively fellowship of about 30 to breakfast and Communion and about 80 adults and 20 children to the morning service. We have no evening service. There are three home groups for training in Christian witness and two groups for Bible study meeting on Sunday evening. The whole cause continues to grow quietly and steadily.

On Sunday mornings we take only the children of parents who attend. "Sunday School" for all other children under 12 is on Wednesdays. In this way we avoid the difficulty common in new causes where hundreds of children are taught poorly by a few frantic adults and a strong adult worshipping body is never built up. This just adds weight to the opinion that 'religion is for children'. Our method also enables us to concentrate on worship in which the whole family shares an experience together. Children receive their lessons separately from the adults and at their own level of understanding but on the same theme as the rest. There is also a creche.

#### **MEMBERSHIP:**

For some time we were fairly divided on whether to have a membership roll or not. It would divide a happy fellowship. However after a long study of the New Testament and a sharing of our understandings we felt that there must be a committal at the heart of the church. In June we covenanted together to become a visible church and began with 36 members. We could probably have had sixty had we not put the conditions of membership high. New members serve a two-year apprenticeship and are expected during that time to attend a weekly training class. Each member is to be helped to discover his own gifts, to train them and use them for Christ. Tithing is regarded as normal giving. Members sign on afresh each year and are asked not to sign unless they take the conditions of membership seriously. We hope to build a fellowship in which all are ever moving on in the adventure of committal to Christ, His People and His work.

We have now had our first Members' Meeting and have elected 7 Elders, responsible for the spiritual care, guidance, training and growth of the fellowship, and 4 Deacons, responsible for the daily running and business of the church and Church Centre.

The Revd. John Bayes and his wife have been with us for a year now. They felt called to join us and he obtained a teaching post on the estate. The Home Mission Fund will now aid in supporting him full time and the Association are buying a house on the estate for them. For this we thank God. It will allow us to develop our opportunities of contact and counselling work at the Centre without neglecting our visiting out in the estate. The stress we place on lay training and the lay ministry certainly does not lessen the need for ordained men. Rather the opposite.

#### **IN CONCLUSION...**

The presence and word of Christ have been sweet to us through the tough going of two years now. We have had the thrill of mission and over half our congregation had no church affiliation before coming to Chelmsley Wood. We have rejoiced in lives changed by the grace of Christ and have had nine baptisms recently, two of whom were people first contacted through the coffee bar and two through door to door visitation. At every point in our building we have been driven back to the New Testament and to Christ, saying "Lord, what do you want us to do?" and, whether this has been familiar to us or unfamiliar, we have sought to do it and to do it as clearly and as well as we are able.

#### **FINALLY, MY BRETHREN...**

When we first moved to Chelmsley Wood, the bulldozers were stirring the dust about us and we remembered how God took of the dust of the earth and formed Man for Himself. Later we looked out upon the mud and chaos and remembered how the Spirit of God brooded upon the waters to bring His creation out of chaos. Please God we shall see His new creation in the midst of the turmoil of the birth of this vast new estate and men formed after God's own image.

Brothers and sisters, bear us in your hearts and in your prayers in the Lord while we go forward.

LEWIS MISSELBROOK