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EDITORIAL

The late novelist Richard Hughes remarked in a television interview, given before his death, that he felt compelled to write a novel dealing with the second world war, having lived through it, yet was unable to begin it until 1955. Only then did those momentous days begin to appear in anything like a true perspective. Time certainly does sharpen into focus events that, closer at hand, appear smudged and uncertain.

There are the signs that the time has come for us to begin to set the history of our own nation in perspective as we look at the years that followed the last war. They were the years of national demise. We lost an empire and seemed inclined to beat our breasts in repentance that we had ever possessed one. Patriotism was equated with jingoism. Love of one's native soil and respect for one's fellow countrymen were identified either with fascism or a bigoted xenophobia. Derision was more applauded than praise, cynicism more fashionable than commitment and under-graduate satire more sought after than sober appraisal.

Perhaps it was the only way in which we could deal with a succession of events that were, after all, traumatic. There are signs however, that the pendulum has reached the height of its swing and is beginning to drop back. The recent call of the Archbishop of Canterbury in which he asked us to consider the sort of society we wanted and the sort of people we needed to be to create such a society was not brushed aside in a way that might have been the case ten years ago. We are more ready now to ask ourselves what it is that we have inherited on "this sceptre'd isle", what is to be valued in our history and traditions and what is to be sought for the common weal of our people. A man can only love his neighbour if he has truly learned how to love himself. A nation can only serve and inspire others if it is itself inspired and motivated to serve.

In this edition we have asked four of our ministers, living in different parts of the United Kingdom, to write about the role of the church in our nation today and the contribution that Christian people can make in the re-discovery of national identity. One writes from Scotland, another from Wales, one from the north of England and another from the south. Some may resent our evasion of the Ulster dimension but we felt that was a question way beyond the resources of this publication.

Wally Wragg has also assessed the replies we received in response to our questionnaire. We hope you will trust us that we are making every effort to keep costs down. But it would be foolish if we were to think we could claim exemption from the harsh realities of inflation. In this, as in so many things, we are painfully aware that we are "one nation"! We would plead for a strong fight to keep alive both the B.M.F. and this magazine. Too many Christian publications have gone into extinction in recent years—it would be tragic if *Fraternal* were to join them. It is a place where our

minds can meet and we can speak to one another freely. Long may it remain so.

M.W.

WHITHER BRITAIN: A SCOTTISH PERSPECTIVE?

Scottishness is something that I discovered during a five-year exile at Rawdon College. As the Welsh Celts developed the romanticism of "the valleys" so this Scot was surprised by the depths of the cultural and spiritual roots which seemed to reach down further in the soul the more one's external life was lived out in another context. It was in Yorkshire that I became aware of St. Andrew's Day—not one of the high days I had ever celebrated at home. And the twenty-fifth of January found me sustaining the visionary and emotional side of life from the wells of the poetry of Robert Burns. All this might doubtless be regarded as a concession to nostalgia or an exhibition of petty patriotism—or worse it may even be susceptible of a psychological interpretation as a symptom of personal insecurity when separated from the cultural womb. Indeed these explanations all seem plausibly valid to me at this distance and yet what seemed to me, then and now, to be crassly disingenuous was the application of judgemental overtones to these feelings as if they were of no consequence. Nostalgia of this kind, for example, may indeed have stunting effect when it becomes the predominant emotion but in a personality equipped with an expansive apparatus of emotional sensitivity it can be interpreted as the spirit's call of home. It is a direction-finder to the cultural matrix of the human soul. Whether it operates most truly or distortedly against a background of geographical or cultural alienation is a matter of debate. Does a Scot or a Welshman discover his authentic cultural being in the Briggate of Leeds on a Saturday afternoon or is it simply a kailyard image that dissolves into illusory folk myth as soon as he crosses the border? Alastair McLean, the Ardnamurchan poet examines the nostalgia gap and concludes that the exile's thoughts from afar are very misleading and that home is how they live "when you are away".

The Political Dimension

The very disparity between the deep mystical Scottishness of the cultural matrix and the realities of life in Scotland

strengthens the current claims for recognition enshrined in the nationalist credo. Exiled in Samoa R. L. Stevenson "in vision saw the Hebrides" but what tends to stir the blood of nationalism is a tissue of social injustice that reaches back to the "clearances" of the 19th century and is perpetuated in the multiple deprivation of Glasgow described recently by Professor Gordon Stewart as "the worst slum of the western world". In Ian Crichton Smith's fascinating novel of the Highland Clearances *Consider the Lilies*, old Mrs Macdonald was never back in church again after she heard the parish minister justify in terms of the will of God the burning of entire clachans and the virtual banishing to exile of thousands of highlanders and their families to make way for the money-spinning flocks of sheep owned by English absentee landlords. You can stand on many a highland ben on a summer's night to watch the sun go down and around you are the ruins of villages that men did not leave voluntarily. The whole episode was such an unworthy act of economic rapacity that it is only now that the Highlands have begun to recover. It made many at the time reflect that the Union of the Crowns exacted a high price in human dignity and, in a different form, it is this that underlies the recrudescence of nationalism of our day.

Now I am not myself a member of the Nationalist party for reasons that are basically theological in that it seems to me that though nationalism always starts within a historical and pragmatic perspective, it has a built-in tendency to give occasion to sin through postures of superiority, racialism and pride. Yet I can understand why many Scots begin to see it as their economic and social salvation. Often the assumptions about Scotland of the southern English leave one reflecting deeply on the paradox that though we live in a world of satellite communication systems the gap of understanding between two fairly adjacent tribes can be wide and deep. I have had eloquently explained to me before now the thesis that the Highlands would make a splendid play-ground for the denizens of the Home Counties. Shouldn't two months of tourism be enough to satisfy anybody, the proceeds keeping the natives going on porridge for the remainder of the year! And when I was a member of the B.M.S. General Committee I used to reckon that men who were remarkably well-versed on Africa or India knew precious little about Scotland. The suspicion has grown in Scotland that these attitudes are echoed more urbanely, but equally disappointingly, at the level of London-centred institutions, organisations and government itself. It is not a matter of crude injustice or crass ignorance—much more subtle than that. It is the conniving in a system that has made the south-east of England an affluent conurbation and has left the west of Scotland with titanic problems of unemployment, housing, education and health that are all the inter-related symptoms of social neglect and economic rejection. The summons of the Nationalists used to be that a nation, though poor, still had its pride of nationhood—therefore let us order our own affairs like Holland, Luxem-

bourg and Denmark. Now the call seems to have less robust moral rigour to it. All this has been subordinated to the eye which sees the main chance. God may have been short of soil when he made rocky Ardnamurchan but He wasn't short of oil when he made the ocean bed off the Scottish coast. And we have folk-singers and politicians who speak and sing alluringly of "Scotland's Oil".

As I have already indicated the nationalist spirit can very easily be infiltrated by a pride of race that can take the movement in directions quite unforeseen by its devotees. Professor Murdo Ewen Macdonald has already charged the Scottish National Party with racialism and compared tendencies in it to the Fascism of the thirties. That, I believe to be extreme and misconceived in that there is neither a philosophy of Herrenvolk nor a racially negative impulse like anti-semitism powering it. Presently, nationalism is fed from two springs. One is that the evolution of Scotland's history—religious, educational, civil and cultural—adds up to a heritage that is only sustainable within the status of nationhood. And secondly: that Scotland has an accumulation of industrial and social problems that are curable only by a form of government with its power base in the Scottish economy and its energies directed towards the needs of Scotland.

The Theological Dimension

When you press any problem back far enough you uncover the theological stratum within it—and it is so with nationalism. What are the theological insights that have a bearing on the issues to which nationalism is offered as a political form of answer? Undoubtedly one of these is humanness which, though an ugly modern word, contains a biblical idea. The question implicit in the idea may be posed like this: what structure of society helps man who was made "a little lower than the angels" to find the expression, freedom, fulfilment and dignity that is consistent with his spiritual origin and destiny as the crown of God's creation? Certainly—and this is the link with the biblical doctrine of man—any social or political structure that engenders a sense of remoteness, insignificance or neglect militates against this and if, for example, devolution brings more of a human face to the administration of Scotland it will be a political structure which, to that extent, fulfils a biblical emphasis. It is not for nothing that the Deuteronomic historiography of the Old Testament depicts the community as having direct access to Moses, the law-giver and administrator. It is part of the secret of the development of authentic community which is another concept germane to the contemporary political issue but also an idea than which hardly any other is more biblical. For what God seemed to be about if we can believe the overall biblical witness is the creation of a true

community. It is that rather than the aggregation of a number of separate saved souls.

So the promise is to Abraham and his seed. Then we have the election of Israel and her creation as a people with a covenant that related each man to his neighbour and to God. Finally, there is the promise of the New Covenant and the New Israel whose embryo is the disciple community. And to the last, scripture is loyal to the vision of the transfigured community: "And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them. . .". That vision of community is bettered only by a vision that shines out of Old Testament eschatology in the book of Zechariah: "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets". (Zechariah 8.4/5.) The creation of the social infrastructure for the development of true community must remain part of the political task. That good housing and a pleasant environment bring about paradise on earth may be a humanist myth but there is much evidence (and the appalling incidence of alcoholism in the Greater Glasgow area is an example of it) that the lack of that infrastructure and the destruction of the environment is such an enemy of true humanisation that the very possibility of community is perverted by its counterfeit, either in the form of the exclusiveness of the gang or the reclusiveness of the ghetto.

The failure of United Kingdom Government to provide this in Scotland does not necessarily set us on the highway to nationalism because almost by definition a Christian is an internationalist or a supra-nationalist. In Christ there is neither "Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free". And when Paul describes Christ as the Second Adam rather than, for example, the Second Abraham or Moses, he deliberately interprets Him as the progenitor of a supra-national humanity. This does not mean either that the Christian man is tribally rootless and the New Testament recollection that Jesus was "a Jew according to the flesh" is a sign that they were not unaware of the link between his lineage and his mission. Patriotism has its place in the hierarchy of human loyalties but it is not top of the league of our social affections. Since the church as the *arrabon* of the eschatological community is universal by nature so our Christian calling is to a primary commitment to the universal family of mankind. The Adamic Covenant has never been abrogated. Indeed it is renewed in the Second Adam and the partitions of our narrow nationalisms are unlikely to lead to its realisation. The day may come when the church in Scotland may be required to convert these biblical insights into a creative social exposition of her faith and gospel.

The Ecclesiastical Dimension

Any analysis of the Scottish scene in the overall United Kingdom context cannot overlook the religious dimension. And Protestantism in the Presbyterian form is the religion "by law established" in Scotland, though we may beg leave to ask whether the idea of any religion established on that basis is not ultimately something of a theological fiction. Be that as it may, the main ecclesiastical embodiment of the Christian religion is the Church of Scotland which, historically at any rate, is Calvinistic in doctrine and Presbyterianial in church order and government. I find the Church of Scotland is something of a mystery to most earnest English Baptists. Its great scholars are revered to the point of awe. They seem to dwell on Olympian heights to which our denominational principals and tutors seldom attain in English eyes. Similarly it is the case with the great tradition of Scottish preachers. The irreverent twinkle used to go out of David Russell's eyes when in the Homiletics Class at Rawdon he came to talk of such as A. J. Gossip, Alexander Whyte, James Black and James S. Stewart. This tradition of scholarship and preaching, together with George Macleod and the Iona Community, make up one part of the English understanding of the Scottish Church. The schizophrenia tends to set in when you hitch up your caravan and find yourself one Sabbath stranded by an immobile Highland ferry and betake yourself to the local "Presbyterian Kirk" as you try to pronounce it. Not always, but often, you may find a lack of these ingredients you had been led to expect to find in Scottish Presbyterianism: cogent proclamation, biblical exposition, prophetic preaching and an acute alertness of the relevance of the Living Word to the dilemmas of contemporary society. Conceivably you may find the representative of this Church with its great reputation for preaching to be rather a clueless communicator. And indeed the style of the service may either be so superficial and vacuous, or turgid and slow or Calvinistic and stern that your previous image of the Church of Scotland has to come in for drastic reappraisal!

Since I live a fairly rampant ecumenical existence and certainly number among some of my best friends ministers of the Kirk, it is with a little reluctance that I set down on paper a critical assessment of the Church of Scotland from the point of view of its spiritual contribution to the nation. Technically, she takes her duty very seriously indeed. Her voice is heard, albeit often a little pompously, through the deliverances of the General Assembly as, for example, as follows:

"In the final resort the duties of the Church are two and two only. One is so to declare the Word of God and interpret it for the times that men are brought to submit their lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. The second duty is like the first, and it is to open the hearts of men and to keep them open to the needs of their neighbours, whoever and whatever they be."

That particular deliverance related ultimately to the referendum about the European Economic Community and proceeded to speak in terms of national responsibility that I doubt if any other church would have the audacity to reproduce at this time of day:

“In the crisis of choice that will face the people of the United Kingdom when the final decision about entry into Europe has to be made, it remains the task of the Church to interpret to the nation her understanding of the will of God for his world and God’s call to his people to love their neighbours as themselves, so that whatever that decision may be, it may be one which is taken under the sovereign Lordship of Christ. . . .”

It sounds like the voice of a confident Church which still has the attentive, consenting ear of her people. But though it would be wrong to suggest that the Kirk in Scotland is as unrelated to the people at large as is the Church of England yet she is being forced reluctantly into the recognition of a missionary situation. The traditional religious premise of Scottish life is being eroded fast by “the acids of modernity” and the Church of Scotland has been losing more members in a year than the entire membership of the Baptist Union of Scotland. But the breakdown of the traditional religious institution could make way for the emergence of a radical church blending an authentic cultural understanding of the Scottish people with a cogent interpretation of the Gospel for our society. But to achieve this there would have to be increasing theological perception. It seems to me that many of the real problems that American and English theologians have been wrestling with in recent years have not been explored in Scotland. Apart from Ronald Gregor Smith (who made a distinguished contribution before his premature death) I doubt if any Scottish theologian has come to grips creatively with “secular theology” and if they had done perhaps the Church here would have been able to face more realistically the developing situation. And though historically the Church of Scotland has taken great pride in an educated ministry I would be prepared to make the charge that there is an uncomfortably large section of the ministry of the Church of Scotland characterised by a degree of theological illiteracy that makes them ill-equipped either for the task of lay education or Christian mission. To achieve the aim of a radical church there will also have to be a dismantling of the quasi-triumphalist aspect of the religious institution and the building up of the church as diakonia and koinonia. Surely too, it must live up to its theological basis becoming less clerically dominated and more truly a church where the diversity of the Spirit’s operations is expressed in the life and service of all her people. Maxwell Craig, Minister of the famous Wellington Church in Glasgow, has said recently that the biggest obstacle to the radical re-adjustment and re-deployment of men and resources in the Church of Scotland is the arrangement which gives the minister virtually unassailable tenure of office in a given parish until

he wishes to give up. Surely the ministry must be seen to be the servant of the Church rather than the other way around.

The Prospect

To don the prophet’s mantle is very hazardous—as much history shows. But I believe the integrity and unity of the United Kingdom will be preserved through the devolution debate. The nation as a whole will not backtrack from the path of a pluralist society and this is also what Scotland is rapidly becoming. We are at the beginning of a period in which there will be a radical convergence of deep scepticism and renewed faith. One of the lights that the Church in Britain may have to keep burning is the kind of moral perception indispensable to decent life to which recently Alexander Solzhenitzin has been bearing witness. And by the beginning of the next century the main spearhead of all this may be the Roman Catholic Church under the continuing momentum of her own renewal and reformation. Pray God it may be so.

T. KERR SPIERS

THE GOSPEL IN WALES

There can be no doubt that with a name like Gwynfryn Thomas, I am a Welshman, albeit, a non-Welsh speaking one. This is stated at the start of this piece in order that readers will realize that in all that follows, I write as someone who is proud of being Welsh and thankful that God has called me, at this time, to minister in the Principality.

The Revd Dr John Huxtable said, in his Moderatorial Address to the Free Church Federal Council in Eastbourne in March, that “The Church must not behave as if it lives in a museum. It cannot simply go on carefully preserving and lovingly admiring priceless historic items whose usefulness has diminished during the years of their preservation. We do not live in the historic past nor do we live on it; we grow from it into today and towards tomorrow.” This is a timely reminder to Christians in general and to Christians in Wales in particular in my judgement. There is a great deal in our history of ecclesiastical affairs of which we can be proud and from which we can learn. Unfortunately, many are living in, and on, the past and the real cause of Christ and His Kingdom is not being enhanced. God’s ways in the nineteenth century are not necessarily His ways for His

Church in the last quarter of the twentieth. The Revival in Wales at the beginning of this century may, or may not, have been a good thing for the life of the country. But it is of little use thinking that this is the only way in which the Spirit of God is going to revive His work now. There is far too much weight placed on such an event, marvellous as it was. What is needed is an appreciation of the fact that God's power, manifest in the 1905-6 revival, is as strong today if only we will allow Him to act through the Church.

As one travels through many areas of our land, one sees a multiplicity of church buildings, often ugly in appearance, that are kept open by the few out of sentiment and reverence for the past. Emil Brunner wrote of "The Scandal of Christianity"; we should be talking in Wales of the scandal of retaining so many church buildings that have out-lived their usefulness. The few members who attend Sunday services in a large number of these buildings cannot possibly afford to keep them in good repair, and the money spent on heating and what little upkeep there is undertaken could be put to better use. It is to be hoped that through our scheme of Covenanting for Unity in Wales, something will be done in this respect. But, when one realizes that there are half a dozen or more Baptist Church buildings in one small town of approximately 6,000 inhabitants, one does tend to despair. Surely, this multiplicity of buildings cannot be in the purpose of God! The leaders of the various denominations must do even more than they have in the past to proclaim loud and clear that God's work can be executed far more effectively in local situations when redundant buildings are pulled down and the sites used for other purposes. For instance, by building flats for elderly people or little havens of peace amid the built-up areas of our towns and cities, setting out the sites as small gardens or parks with seats around. Worship of a building does little for the extension of God's work, or for the spiritual growth of the members.

This leads into the whole question of worship within our Churches. In Wales people set great store by the sermon and tend to think of it as being the predominant part of worship. If the sermon was disappointing, then the service as a whole was a waste of time. Now no one in his right mind would belittle the importance of preaching and the sermon in the context of worship. It has had and should have its place in one form or another, for, how can the people believe unless they hear the Gospel? However, the need for stressing the importance of the worship of God, and worship as a unified whole with prayers, readings, hymns, meditations with periods of silence, sermon, and Holy Communion, is perhaps nowhere greater than in "this land of song". People have to think of worship as being more than a "good sing and a good sermon". It does seem that the facts of the transcendence of God, and a sense of the nearness of God, need to be emphasized, and that we can experience this as we prepare ourselves for worship and as we open our hearts and minds in it to God Almighty our loving Father, through Jesus Christ. When we come to church prepared to worship God,

to give ourselves to God through it, then there is a reawakening and God can become real to us. The actual ordering and conduct of worship are in need of attention in our churches at this time.

The rationalising of church buildings and the new awareness of God at the centre of worship should lead us to see that Christians are the people of God and not the people of a building. This, in turn, should emanate into a fresh appreciation of the role of the Church in society. It is from this sound base that the Church can speak, in love, with authority and enthusiasm to the nation.

There are many areas in the social and national life of Wales where the Church must be involved. Like myself, 75% to 80% of the people of the country do not speak Welsh. This does not mean that the majority have no sympathy with those who speak the language. Neither does it mean that the majority of those who do speak Welsh are antagonistic towards those who do not. Far from it. There are, however, minorities of both sections of the population who are fanatical about the language, for and against. There are those who wish to see Welsh as the official tongue in all spheres of public life and for all in public office in the Principality. There are those who do not desire to have Welsh used anywhere.

Tied up with the language issue is that of nationalism. Pride in one's country is healthy enough as long as it does not lead to bitterness and bloodshed. Feelings do run high at times in Wales and tempers are lost, but really, no one wants another Ulster-like situation here. Devolution is another prevalent discussion point and, naturally, Christians as well as the politicians and others, are divided on it. The Church has something to say but has not given a sufficiently vocal lead in these respects. If, as we claim, the Church believes in proclaiming and working for love and tolerance, then we should be setting the pattern for reasonable discussion and argument. The Gospel of the unifying love of God is needed and must be preached in the highways and byways of Wales by those who know and love God and show it in their lives. We are told in the New Testament that, "Every kingdom divided against itself goes to ruin". The Welsh nation is in danger of being divided. Bitterness and intolerance will never achieve true unity. We believe that Christ can bring love, understanding, reasonableness and unity. The Church should be saying so unashamedly. The twelfth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans makes a good base upon which we can build our strategy.

Wales is desperate for new industry. Old industries are being run down because they are no longer viable propositions. The unemployment figures are higher here than in most parts of Britain. A great deal is expected from the exploration in the Celtic Sea for oil and gas. New factories have been and are being built. All this means that in time, we trust, there will be more jobs made available throughout the country, not only for the Welsh people themselves, but also for many others coming into it with their skills. Wales

has always been noted for its hospitality and warm welcome to strangers. The vast majority here still are. But there is the danger among some of making life difficult for new-comers. The churches too need to take a look at their traditional ways and outlook. People coming into Wales have different ways of doing things, of keeping Sunday perhaps, or of conducting their social life. They are not necessarily wrong or sinful. In areas where Welsh is the predominant language, it is no use expecting immigrants to learn it easily, and if they wish to, they cannot do so immediately. Therefore, provision should be made in the churches for at least one service each Sunday in English so that the non-Welsh speaking people, especially in rural areas where, it is hoped, the new industries will be introduced, can come together to worship God and have Christian fellowship with one another. In all areas, the Church needs to be in the forefront when it comes to helping new-comers to integrate into their communities. Christians have to go out of their way to welcome and help new neighbours feel at home in what is, at first, a foreign land. They must realize anew that "neighbour" means anyone in need, and in Christ there are no Welsh, English, Irish, Scots, whites or coloureds. All are one. This all means that there has to be a change on the part of many of us in the Church and a deeper appreciation of the universality of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A tremendous amount has been reported of late in the media about corruption and malpractice in local government in Great Britain as a whole. Wales is no exception. We too have our minority of officials and councillors who betray the trust which has been invested in them. It is easy to sit back in judgement and condemn those who have been caught and brought to book. Of course, Christians must never condone corruption in any department of public life. At the same time, we have to remember that we must not gloat over the weaknesses of men and women in public office. The pressures and temptations upon such people who bear responsibility are great. In Wales, there ought to be far more of the Bunyan spirit of "There but for the grace of God go I", than there is evident just now. There is so much hypocritical condemnation uttered. Yet, Jesus, while hanging from His cross, did not look down on those who had betrayed Him and who were laughing at Him with any bitterness nor condemnation. He looked upon them in love, and prayed that God would forgive them. Christians, I feel, should speak out against corrupt practices both in public life and private life, but always in love. And we must for ever be pointing to a better way, Christ's way. I am not sure about the rest of the United Kingdom, but here in Wales we are much too censorious from a position, not of love and understanding, but of smugness. We do not appear to have realized that although we hate the sin we should love the sinner. This can, and does, lead to pettiness inside and outside the churches. There is, therefore, a need for us to understand the doctrine of forgiveness and to say and show in action abhorrence of corruption, whilst loving, forgiving

and offering help for those who fall and who have been engaged in malpractice. Christians would do well to become more involved in local government and local affairs generally, so that Christ's influence can be felt in them. Standing on the touch-line criticizing will not do much good. We have to get out there on the field of play and get stuck into the rucks and mauls. Perhaps the message of a hymn such as Frank North's, "Where cross the crowded ways of life", can be taken to heart more in our land. I do not think the Church of the past decade or so has been involved enough in the ups and downs of everyday life outside its buildings. The Christian can meet with Christ in "the noise of selfish strife" and "among the haunts of wretchedness and need". So instead of being smug, petty and censorious, the Church should get out more into the life of the community in order that the small corrupting influences can, in time, be eradicated.

The Christian message is relevant to all the spheres mentioned above; it is desperately needed in all of them. Wales is a beautiful place in which to live, work and witness. It has a rich Christian heritage and culture. It can be made even more beautiful and happy if Christians will face Christ and the challenge of His Gospel now and break away from its "carefully preserved and lovingly admired priceless historic items", and go forward "towards tomorrow" which can be as great as, if not greater than, the past.

GWYNFRYN C. THOMAS

THE GOSPEL AND THE SOUTH

"Kent, sir? Everybody knows Kent" says Jingle in "The Pickwick Papers", "apples, cherries, hops and women." We are still blessed with those commodities in abundance, but in other respects Kent has changed a good deal since Dickens' day. There are industries such as coal-mining, the paper-

mills, chemical factories and cement works. We also have curious programmed creatures called "commuters" (mis-named "computers" in a famous BBC radio broadcast howler!) and there is a splendid modern University in Canterbury as well as an ancient Cathedral. Secularization has crept as far South as "the garden of England", and with it, a decline in church-going, Sunday School-sending, and a sharp increase in crime, vandalism and the divorce rate. At the present time, we are feeling the effects of the economic recession, unemployment is rife, many feel insecure in their jobs, and there is a high incidence of depressive illness.

Has the Christian Gospel anything to say to "men of Kent" and "Kentish men"? (It is important to know to which group you belong!) How do we relate our faith in Christ to the society in which we live, to the nation of which we are citizens? Certainly "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. . . ." Our message is cosmic, it is for all men everywhere. The text continues: "that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Our message is intensely personal; it emphasizes the value and significance of the necessity of his or her response to the gospel. But is there also an obligation not only upon Archbishops once or twice in a century, but upon humble Ministers of the Gospel from time to time, to issue a call to the nation, a warning to Kent, a stirring challenge to Canterbury?

In a very real sense of course the preacher sees the whole nation in microcosm as he faces his Sunday congregation: teachers, nurses, doctors, bosses, trades unionists, white collar and blue collar workers, house-wives, students, children, the old and the young, the believer and the half-believer, the right and left wing in politics, the conservative and radical in theology, and the "floating voter" in both latter spheres! As the prophet Ezekiel sat where some of the exiled Jews sat, by the river Chebar in far-off Babylon, and said: "O House of Israel, why will you die?" surely we address the nation when we announce our text. Even though Christians are members through grace of "Zion's City" and "the people of God", they are still citizens of earth, with the attendant privileges and responsibilities. I like to think that when an individual responds to Jesus Christ, repents of self-centredness and greed, and commits himself to seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice, it is our beloved nation beginning to repent and return to the Lord.

The message of the Gospel to Kent, Kentucky or Kenya is surely the same: "When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone, and a new order has already begun." (2 Corinthians 5: 17 N.E.B.) By word and deed, by sermon and service, God appeals to the world through us, the Church of Christ, "in Christ's name, be reconciled to God!" On the one hand, we must state "the case for a Christian social order" (sub-title of Sir Frederick Catherwood's latest book *A Better Way*); on the other hand, we must proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour so that sinful men and women putting their trust in Him may

experience a new order in their lives, which must surely be reflected in their human relationships and responsibilities.

The prophets of the Old Testament combined social concern with evangelical proclamation. Amos denounced the sins committed by other nations with the complicity of the Jews, and then denounced his own nation for neglecting God's love toward man. He warned of divine judgement upon social injustice, and in memorable terms pleaded: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream". He also said: "Thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: 'Seek me and live' . . . seek the Lord and live . . . seek good and not evil that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you. . . ." (Amos 5: 4, 6, 14, 24 RSV). Jose Grau in his address at the International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, in July 1974, *The Kingdom of God Among the Kingdoms of Earth*, said: "All this prophetic social comment is given not in the name of some ideology or system, but in the name of God". He states that prophets "never denounce a king in favour of another king, or a system in favour of another system, but always in God's name, because of the sins committed against God. For them faithfulness towards God is the only guarantee of human rights". (*Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, Official Reference Volume, pp. 1083f.)*

Through Jesus, God spoke to the Jewish nation; the parable of the vineyard and its owners, for instance, was spoken directly to the religious establishment, and must have been a "political hot potato" and incensed those who were already plotting His death: "Therefore, I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and given to a nation that yields the proper fruit" (Matthew 21: 43.). Our Lord has been called "the true patriot". There is a jingoistic patriotism which one hopes has gone for good: "My country, right or wrong", "For England, Harry and St George!" Jesus showed a deep love for His nation when He wept over Jerusalem: "Would that even today you knew the things that belong to your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes" (Luke 19: 41, 42.). When we speak of London, we often mean England; when we speak of Canterbury, we sometimes mean the Anglican Communion. When Jesus addressed Jerusalem, He meant the nation as a political entity and as a religious community: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (Matthew 23: 37, 38 R.S.V.). There, it seems to me, is our mandate, if we needed one, to speak to the nation that we love about its collective sin, and yet to invite her "children" to find their refuge and strength in Christ.

The apostle Paul was passionately committed to winning the Gentile world for Christ, but retained his love for his own race. "I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not

* From LET THE EARTH HEAR HIS VOICE © 1975 by World Wide Publications. Used by permission.

lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen my race. . . . Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer for them is that they may be saved" (Romans 9: 1-3, and 10: 1.). Notice the two uses of the word "brethren"—for his brothers and sisters in Christ, and for his fellow-Jews. Do we have a similar anguish and sorrow, strong desire and prayer to see our fellow-countrymen, yes, our "brethren", converted to Christ? The great preachers and evangelists through the ages have shared something of Paul's distress and desire: Wyclif, Knox, George Fox, the Wesleys and Whitefield, Spurgeon, General Booth and John Clifford. They have preached for a verdict: "Be reconciled to God!" but they have also powerfully spoken out against injustice and for equal rights. They have managed to combine obedience to the State (a Christian duty according to Romans 13: 1f.) with "constructive criticism of society". Otherwise there would have been no reform of the prisons, no Act protecting children from exploitation, no emancipation of the slaves, no votes for women and no Welfare State. Streams of social reform have flowed from times of evangelical awakening. But one feels increasingly in these days that until we get what Sir Keith Joseph called a "re-moralization of society", the preaching of the gospel will be hindered or frustrated.

In his book *If my people* (a handbook for national intercession) Jimmy Owens writes: "We believe that the principles laid down in 2 Chronicles 7: 14 still give us God's requirements for the 'healing of our land'. We realize that this Scripture was given to Israel when they alone were the people of God. In their case, God could expect the entire nation to repent. It is not so with us. We do not expect the entire nations of Britain, France, the United States, or Holland, for instance, to pray and turn to the Lord. But the people of God are no longer of one nationality. The people of God are His Church; His holy nation within many nations. They can turn to the Lord and meet His conditions for answered prayer and then intercede for those who are walking in darkness . . . we believe the Scripture enjoins us to fast and pray for our government *so that we may have conditions in our nation which facilitate the preaching of the gospel*" (italics mine).*

It has been against the background of that kind of thinking that a group of Christians in Canterbury have met to consider the Church's responsibility toward our city and our nation. From this group, (which includes "mural" and "extra-mural" believers!) have emerged three approaches to the need and opportunity of this hour. In 1971/2 we took part in the Festival of Light programme, with a local beacon-lighting ceremony with three speeches from a Roman Catholic layman, the Dean of Canterbury representing

* Quoted by permission of WORD (U.K.).

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To the Readers of the "Fraternal"

Dear Friends,

"His Christian name was Gabriel, and on working days he was a young man of sound judgement. . . . On Sundays he was a man of misty views, rather given to postponing, and hampered by his best clothes and umbrella."

"Far From the Madding Crowd"—Thomas Hardy

Does this description strike a familiar chord? When did you last meet this man or perhaps in these days of deacons of both kinds and of legal emancipation I should say when did you last meet this person?

It would be nonsense to assert in general that business acumen flies out of the door when a diaconate enters. In particular however it is unhappily not untrue to say in terms of the insurance needs of a church that some diaconates appear to be unfortunately served by their business men colleagues. For that matter some business men are unfortunately frustrated by their fellow deacons.

I can recall deacons holding responsible business appointments saying "I thought our policies covered all aspects" when detailed letters from this Company indicating possibilities for widening the scope of policies have been ignored by those very deacons. I can think of business men with sound recommendations to their diaconates being shot down in flames by the false economy of "we can't afford it and anyway it won't happen here". But "it" does happen and a cause can be destroyed.

In Gray's Elegy, from which as you know Hardy borrowed his title, that particular verse refers to the "noiseless tenor of their way". That carries the implication of comfort in inaction but it will not do in these hectic inflationary days.

Insurance so often is the Cinderella of the Agenda—the item forgotten or postponed ad infinitum, sine die or what have you.

See that your diaconates keep on their working clothes and see to it your business men are appointed as a committee to look with us in depth at insurance needs—accept its recommendations.

Above all see to it that the committee reports at least annually.

Yours sincerely,

C. J. L. COLVIN
General Manager

Anglicans and the minister of the Independent Evangelical Church. We subsequently supported the great Trafalgar Square Demonstration. The following year (1972) we organized a "Festival for Jesus" with a March of Witness through the city to the football stadium, in which some 4,000 people took part. An "affirmation for Jesus" was made by all present:

"Exulting in the Holy Spirit;

We, who are gathered here, united with Jesus, say,

'We thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
because you have shown us the simple Way'.

We tell the world and all who live in this land,

that we have learnt from Jesus,

that happiness is to be found in sharing our belongings,

in being sad at His rejection by the world,

in being gentle when the world is brutal,

in longing for righteousness,

in forgiving others when they wound us,

in purity of mind and heart,

in making peace between enemies,

and that we don't mind who insults or ignores
us for His sake,

for we are telling the world,

now,

that He was slain,

and by His blood purchased for God,

men of every tribe and language,

people and nation . . .

and they shall reign upon earth.

We thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth,
because you have shown us the simple Way."

We were there to make a protest about pornography and moral pollution. But protest (pro-test) is a word with an honourable past. It means "testify on behalf of", rather than "object to" (hence Protestant). Our main concern was to bear witness to Jesus Christ and His standards and values, emphasizing that marriage is a God-given institution and that the family is "the bulwark of the nation".

The second approach has been through the presentations "Come Together" and "If my people" to capacity congregations in the Cathedral. There were many conversions and a good deal of publicity attended these "performances" which had the advantage of being both ecumenical and evangelical. But what has satisfied us most is the continuing prayer concern for the nation. Every Tuesday lunch-time the Baptist Church is the centre for fasting and prayer for the healing of our land. Young and old gather to "stand in the gap" as intercessors for Britain. Jimmy Owens' "Prayer List for National Intercession" is a helpful aid to topics for prayer: confess the sins of the nation; pray for Government at national and local level; pray for your city (Jeremiah 29: 7, 11—the Lord told His exiled people to pray for the peace and welfare of Babylon); pray for the Courts that justice will be done; pray for law enforcement agencies and against the spirits of violence in our society; pray that people of integrity

may be placed in the news media; pray concerning the economy, and those who influence it; pray for our schools and those who teach our children; pray for families and for reconciliation between husbands and wives, parents and children; pray for persecuted Christians in other lands, for areas of special need (where there are serious food or water shortages, for instance); pray for the hungry "as you would for your own family": fasting will help you to identify with them . . . ask God to show you how to help in practical ways. Pray for revival and renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ; pray against the principalities and powers that seek to rule in the affairs of our nation. Ask the Holy Spirit to "pray through you for the things you may not even know to pray about" that you may be used as a "vessel for intercession".

The third approach is in response to the Archbishop's Call to the Nation. The Christian Council organized a "Community Day for Canterbury". Its sponsors included the Archbishop himself, the Dean, the Mayor, the Member of Parliament, the Medical Officer of Health, a Head teacher, an industrialist, a leading Trades Unionist and former England Cricket Captain, Mike Denness. The purpose was to provide a meeting place for those who live in and are concerned for the city. On the first Saturday in April we met in the College of Technology from 9.30 a.m. until 4.30 p.m. for certain key-note addresses and four work-shops covering the following themes: THE TIME WE LIVE IN? Workshop 1: Our Pressures; THE SOCIETY WE LIVE IN? Workshop 2: Our Challenges; THE NEW COMMUNITY? Workshop 3: Our Proposals; OUR VISION? Workshop 4: Our Story. SEND OUT! Some 200 people of different walks of life, committed Christians and non-churchgoers, shared concerns, insights, ideas and convictions to the end that we may address ourselves to the two questions: "What sort of society are we looking for?" and "What sort of people do we need in order to bring it about?" This Community Day came as the culmination to a series of house group studies and Cathedral lectures on "Christian Life-Style". At a time when the secular world is beginning to look to Christians for help and hope, this was a wonderful opportunity to see whether the "children of light" are wiser in this generation than the "children of this world"!

Reviewing these three approaches, one should make a protest sometimes, even of the negative sort (especially when 14-year-olds arrive at Youth Club drunk and incapable, and one is asked to counsel disturbed 15-year-old boys one year after they were admitted to a local cinema showing a film dealing with the occult).

Prayer should be made "for kings and all who are in authority over us, that we may live a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2: 1, 2). This is good and acceptable to God. Proclamation of the gospel in Church, the open air and through the media, should include a word to the nation: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people". But in addition to the foregoing, surely Christians should be involved through their daily

work, their example in home and family life, their social service and for some, political activity. We all need to do some hard thinking and some of us should answer God's call to write, to influence public opinion, to present the gospel in dramatic forms, with song and dance, to celebrate Christ's Resurrection, to tell our contemporaries: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord".

In all this we must remind ourselves, however, that "the time has come for judgement to begin with the household of God" (1 Peter 4: 17). To return to the questions raised at the beginning this article, it isn't just "men of Kent" that are needed to match this hour, but "men of God" who bring forth not only the fruits of the earth, "apples, cherries, hops" but the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience" and the rest. In W. C. Bryant's words:

"So may our land, renewed again,
Rejoice in all that's true and good,
Rich in its wealth of Christ-like men,
Strong in a noble brotherhood."

R. W. F. ARCHER

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A SONG FOR THE NATION

The song that nerves a nation's heart,
Is in itself a deed.

(Tennyson)

What are we doing here, *that* is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come—

(Samuel Beckett)

When the Jews were taken into Exile to Babylon, Jeremiah had a word for them from the Lord. It was, "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare". That was sound advice for those ancient Jews and it is sound advice for us today. It is all too easy to bemoan the state of the nation, weep for past days of paradise (which must be a laugh for people who lived from 1914-1945) and blame the government for it all. The value of that exercise adds up to zero. The welfare of Britain is tied up with my own welfare, the ethos of our country affects me. Even if I can rejoice as a Christian that there is a citizenship of heaven, I nonetheless remain a citizen of Britain now and as such I owe it some loyalty, if not absolute obedience.

With all her faults this is still a "green and pleasant land" in which to grow up and in turn raise one's children. For all our problems there remains much on the credit side of life in Britain to make us less dissatisfied than we often are. All is not well, but neither is all lost. There is so much good in our institutions, our social welfare and the skill, knowledge and goodwill of our people, that we ought to dwell on it sometimes, if only to counterbalance the pessimists. That may sound like the Queen's Christmas Day Speech or plain jingoism but I believe it to be true so I put that down at the outset.

What seems to have affected us all like blight is a dreary and debilitating pessimism. Everything is bad and the worst is yet to be. It has affected us so much that even good actions, good news and good men are regarded with scornful cynicism. "What's in it for him?" That is now a first question. There has to be an ulterior motive. It is an attitude illustrated by an article in *The Guardian* (28th January, 1976) which tells of the Kent Director of Social Services, Rev. Nicholas Stacey, drawing up a £50,000 a year scheme to get aid to old people living alone. Relatives and neighbours will be paid up to £35 per week to take care of these old folk. Stacey said, "*Nobody works for nothing nowadays*".

Is that true? Of course it isn't true. But sadly we are in a kind of desperate lethargy which almost wants it to be true. It is smart to be smug and cynical and adopt a sniggering attitude to everything and everybody. In a perverse way it is a barricade behind which we can withdraw. I have an individual in mind who seems to personify this outlook, he

believes nothing, commits himself to nothing, respects nothing. He is cold-water for every idea, the douche for every enthusiasm. He smiles constantly but only with his lips. At the risk of tedium, I suggest that television, and other mass-media to a lesser extent, have helped to perpetrate this pessimism. I don't mind a few saucy jokes, I revelled in Ken Russell's film, *Women in Love*, was in stitches over *Rising Damp* and I even like *Top of the Pops*, but I despair at the steady diet of misery dished up under the heading of "powerful adult viewing". Somehow the misery can get into the bones. If I am told often enough and long enough that I am a grovelling, perverted, useless and dispensable man I think I will tend to believe it, and if I am offered no solution to my situation to boot—well then, life is a tale told by an idiot and the end will be welcome.

Understandably, some parsons have been lost in the gloom as well, though for slightly different reasons. Faced by baffling social questions they have doubts about the ultimacy of traditional Christian answers, and, for instance, cannot berate homosexuality as passionately as a Paul or Spurgeon might have done. Some, aware of the relativity of modern knowledge, feel less confidence in the intellectual content of their faith and this has percolated through to the lay-man, leaving his faith more tenuous. Bryan Wilson has something when he writes:

"In the moral field, which was once the area in which the Church's judgement had complete sway, churchmen have become, as we have seen in the matter of birth control, much more aware of their own difficulties in making pronouncements on the moral issues, without the benefit of "scientific" information. . . . Thus before an Archbishop feels equipped to comment on the moral implications of television he calls for an inquiry into its effects. What is surrendered by the Church, then, is the claim of religion to guide the course of social policy, the decisions of statesmen, the operation of social institutions, and, latterly, even the everyday behaviour of the man-in-the-street."

If there is truth in what Wilson says, and I believe there is, then that is really bad news for the men in the streets of South Yorkshire. Surrounded by pessimism, a Church without the confidence to help them, many have the added disadvantage of having jobs which they dislike. Polly Toynbee in *A Working Life* says of workers in South Yorkshire,

"The workers are not miserable, but they are not happy. Most of the workers I spoke to were saying that they were bored with their work, that they would have liked to be different, that they hoped things would have changed for their children, or maybe for their grandchildren. They knew more or less that they had had a bad deal from society and that all the "good" and "worthwhile" things they had heard about in school were not really for the likes of them".

A semi-skilled electrician's mate expressed feelings for his job as follows:

"I work in a factory. For eight hours a day, five days a week. I'm the exception to the rule that life can't exist in a vacuum. Work to me is a void, and I begrudge every precious minute of my time that it takes. . . . Time is what the factory worker sells; not labour, not skill, but dreary time."

(Work, Twenty Personal Accounts, Fraser)

Now there is a fair old problem for a Christian who has a concern for Britain. Many people are unhappy with their jobs and get little satisfaction from their lives as a result. Perhaps that is why a Sheffield furnace-man dismissed, with a gesture, the remarks of the Archbishop of Canterbury about doing a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. That is easier to do if your job is enjoyable and rewarding, harder if it is a necessary evil.

It seems to me that Christians must believe in the value of individuals—even individuals who haven't much time for church. We all need to feel that we count for something, that we are more than objects. Deep down even the communist shop-steward believes he is more than an economic unit and worth more than his contribution to the Gross National Product. I am impressed by the people, from different avenues of life, who are insisting that men have to feel they count for something. Lord Robens has expressed concern that workers should have such a low estimate of themselves and their position and status; the novelist Arthur Hailey, has suggested in *Wheels*, that absenteeism and strikes are attempts to break from the monotony of labour; Arthur Miller in *Death of a Salesman* has poignantly painted the tragic picture of a man who will not accept that he is simply a "hard working drummer" destined for the ash-can; Albert Camus has told us plainly that men will rebel when they refuse to be treated as objects; Frederick Hertzberg, the management theorist, has emphasised that achievement, recognition and responsibility should be significant factors in any job and that workers respond well when their job contains them. What are they saying? Simply, that man does not live by bread alone, that he needs to feel that he is important. He needs to know that the hairs of his head are numbered.

Nobody can expect people to suddenly act less selfishly and more in the national interest because Harold Wilson, Margaret Thatcher or Lord Longford tell them they should. We all need to be motivated. Here surely the Archbishop of Canterbury was onto something when he stressed the importance of each man and woman, each vote, each voice. If we could but convince people of that then the conspiratorial stuff about "the enemy at the gates" would be unnecessary. But for years the drift of our national-life has been away from individuality and towards that "faceless, anonymous power" that Heidegger, Kiekegaard and other existentialists warned us about. Maybe all those individual

miners and furnacemen, those typists and housewives, are really sick to death of being taken for granted. They may not be good at articulating their feelings but they do suspect that there should be more to their lives than there is. Maybe, like the tramps in *Waiting for Godot*, they do occasionally cock an ear hopefully, half expecting a voice which will tell them and convince them that they really are children of God and they do matter.

If our people are ready to listen, have we anything to say to them? Is "Return to the Lord your God" or "Back to the old-time religion", good enough? Do Fred Novak and Bill Wilson from Orgreave Colliery understand our language at all? Confronted with aimless lives and sometimes aching hearts can we give them jargon? "Is there a man among you who will offer his son a stone when he asks for bread?" Fortunately the Church has no power to change peoples' lives by decree, but it could be and should be, a hope in the world—a promise for better things. Sadly much of what we do in our church-life today is influenced by other agencies and success in the church is really the same as success in the world. Thus a successful minister is the one with the largest congregation, and we arrange conferences to check on each other's theology because it is easier than thinking up new and compelling language for old good news. Still, if the Church has no word for the nation we are lost indeed.

To be more positive, that is the question. I assume that all the men and women I see on any working day in Sheffield or Rotherham, climbing on and off buses, clocking on and off at work, bustling through the decorous shops, sweating under great arc-furnaces, swigging their pints, gabbing in their clubs, squinting before television sets—all of them need to feel useful and fulfilled, just as I do. They need to feel that they count, that they are "irreplaceable" rather than "interchangeable". They need to feel that their views are worth hearing and considering, that they are more than a Friday pay-packet. In theological language, they need to know they are children of God. We make a start by proclaiming with all the passion we possess that individuals do count. Ten years ago Howard Williams said in his Presidential Address, "We offer no 'disembodied' gospel. When we have become one with the people in their suffering and need, knowing both their anguish and their joy, then we shall be able to proclaim the word of God—but not till then!" I thought that was well said ten years ago and still do. But it is so difficult to practice. It means *really* listening to people, to the things they say and nearly say, to forget those other pressures on our time and *really* give ourselves to others. Now I know what I say can hardly be construed as a message from the Church for the nation (the nation won't listen to any such disembodied word anyway) but if we could convince Mr Man-in-the-street that the Church is filled with Samaritans who care, we would have done much for many, if not all. It is a message the reverse of today's trend towards mass cover, big business, the insensitive, the hustlers and pushers. It is therapeutic and existential. Dr

S. H. Miller once said, "Only one kind of religion counts today, and that is the kind which is radical enough to engage in this world's basic troubles. . . . Religion which is interested only in itself, in its prestige and success, in its institution and ecclesiastical niceties, is worse than vanity, it is essentially incestuous."

A second comment concerns joy. When some colleagues of mine were discussing the Archbishop of Canterbury's Call to the Nation, most had more sympathy with the Bishop of Southwark because they felt he was striking at the root of our ills whereas Dr Coggan was too ready to equate economic prosperity with spiritual well-being. But no matter who makes the "religious" pronouncement there is an impression that the Church will somehow be "agin pleasure". So when Lord Longford, Malcolm Muggeridge, the Festival of Light or Mary Whitehouse protest about declining moral standards, corruptive B.B.C. programmes or the permissive society, it is only what we expect because "as everybody knows" the Church is against everything. Macaulay said of the Puritans—They protest about bear baiting not because of the pain it gives the bear but the pleasure it gives the onlookers. And somehow the Church is regarded as a kind of pleasure filterer. We know that Christians can be the happiest of companions but we haven't been very good at letting the joy burst into the world at large. Nonetheless, if our nation will listen to anything now it will be the sound of joy. Should a rumour go round that there is a joy which lasts longer and goes deeper than average fun, there will be ears to hear. The stodgy, repressive pharisaism may take some living down but a joy for the morning after as well as the evening before would be persuasive indeed. Actually, when the faith really comes alive joy is always present as it was with the early Methodists and the Franciscans and, I feel sure, it was with Jesus himself. One cannot imagine the disciples or the Pharisees bothering themselves with the emasculated Jesus that we sometimes offer to the world. "Turning God's laws into songs" as John Oman used to say, that's what it is all about, until the nation is joining in the refrains.

Occasionally at my own church we have groups come to lead our worship and excellent they usually are. They breeze into the sanctuary with guitars, drums, cymbals, flutes and goodness knows what else, in an attempt to swing us along to a rendezvous with the Lord of the Dance. Two of these groups have become the kernels of house churches which meet regularly for prayer and worship. When I suggested to them that they should be rejuvenating the established churches instead of meeting alone both claimed that they had been frozen out of their local churches because they were wanting to disturb church patterns. Fancy that! Claiming that the descendants of Helwys and Smyth had frozen them out of fellowship for non-conformity! But we know it can happen. We know that the institution can become more important than the message. That way, glum dutiful church-going lies. But when we struggle with language and activities

which seek to express good news to today's men—ah! then—

“The fields, the floods, the heavens, with one consent
Did seeme to laugh on me, and favour mine intent.”

How could it be otherwise when a person loved for himself seeks to pass on his love-song to the world. The fact and the message will be tailored by irresistible joy. Bonhoeffer spoke about a time when there would be a new “language, which will horrify men, and yet overwhelm them by its power. It will be a language of a new righteousness and truth, a language which proclaims the peace of God with men and the advent of his kingdom”. Well, maybe he is right, *but* he forgot the singing and the laws of God will demand songs.

JACK SHAW

THE FUTURE OF THE B.M.F.

A circular letter sent out with our previous edition to every member asked for a reply on this topic. In all, less than four hundred letters came in, which in one sense was disappointing (for we had felt that the subject was a vital one for every Baptist minister). However, we realised that we could only be guided by those who took the trouble to write, and so we began the task of analysing the contents of the various letters—a task which presented some problems, because opinion within our ranks is widely diversified, but none the less an essential task. The result is the subject of this short report.

The most important result was that the conception of the B.M.F. as some kind of professional association was decisively rejected. Even among the minority who favoured such an association, a large number were of somewhat more moderate outlook than those who first conceived the idea of a kind of pressure group. The prevailing feeling was heavily against anything which would tend to divide churches from ministers in a kind of “them-and-us” confrontation; yet the majority asked for a continuation of the B.M.F. in some form or other, with the comment that it had *not* become superfluous since the formation of the Department of Ministry in the Baptist Union. This was said repeatedly, not with the suggestion that the Department was inadequate—quite the contrary—but with the feeling that we still needed an independent organisation which, though falling short of the professional association, could speak to the Union on behalf of ministers, and could co-operate with the Union for the good of us all. Surprisingly, we found very few in favour of a “two-tier” membership (in which the magazine would have been regarded as an “optional extra” for which a higher subscription would be charged).

From the above, it might be thought that the opinions of members were entirely in favour of the B.M.F. as at present constituted, but this was not entirely so. Sadly, we have to report that three or four local fraternalists decided to sever their connection with the B.M.F., and about two dozen individual members took the same line. These amounted to a small minority, it is true, but one which caused us some sadness nevertheless. In almost every case, the stated reason for this disenchantment was the rise in subscription; the objectors thought that £2.50 was too much to pay for what they considered to be too little. We shall return to this topic in a moment, but in the meantime let it be recorded that the majority expressed the desire to continue in membership.

Concerning “The Fraternal”, the general feeling was that we should fight to keep it in being. Despite a few who expressed little or no interest in it, most members seem to concur with the view that far too many religious periodicals have closed down in recent years, and that we should see our magazine as something worth preserving, not least because of its unique character—it comes midway between the status of a learned theological journal and a “house magazine”. From a careful study of the letters which arrived, it seems to us that the majority of members are saying, in effect, “Let us save it, even if we have to find a more economical method of producing it.” It so happens that various researches into the possibility of cheaper production had been going on for some time, but this verdict encouraged us to intensify the search, and through the good offices of Jim Clarke of Watford, along with others among our officers and members we believe we have found a way of easing the economic pressure on the production of the magazine. We are grateful to all who have been so helpful in this matter, and we think it possible that the new format, when it appears, may even enable us to return to four editions per year in place of the present three. We have the temerity to believe that this will be good news to our members!

Returning to the matter of the subscription, may we gently plead for the keeping of a sense of proportion? The rising costs of every commodity have, during the past few years, been accompanied by a rise in our stipends—not as much as we would have liked, perhaps, but a rise, nevertheless. Now this is the real question: when we were paying 7/6 to the B.M.F., what percentage of stipend did that represent? And what percentage of the present stipend does £2.50 represent? A detailed study of the figures would show that there is not so much difference as we may think from a bald statement of the *amount* itself. At a time when many of us are paying £3 or more for four gallons of petrol, it is not perhaps as ludicrous as it may seem for the B.M.F. to ask for less than that to cover a whole year. Of course, it is not easy to pay this subscription; it never was, was it?

And for what services do we pay? In addition to the magazine, we have the Pastoral Session; the Library; the reminders concerning the Sunday morning prayer-tryst,

WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

409 Barking Road, Plaistow, London, E13 8AL

My dear Brother Minister,

By the time you read this I shall be the ex-President of the Baptist Union, and I would like to think that life will be a little less hectic! Nevertheless I want it to go on record that I have thoroughly enjoyed my presidential year, and that I have been very grateful for the warm welcome I have received in all quarters from our Baptist people, and particularly from the ministers.

I must give you another interim report on the continuing saga of our new building project at the Barking Road, Plaistow, site, where we are hoping to provide flats or flatlets for roughly about 100 people. We have made several steps forward, and indeed all the formalities have been completed except the final go ahead by the Department of the Environment. We believe that this will come very soon now, but I personally am not going to believe that the scheme is viable until I see the builders on the site!

We are meanwhile continuing with the variegated work of the Mission in our various Homes. The cost of the work in Rest-a-While continues to increase year by year (like everything else!). We have a heavy demand from would-be residents in Marnham House Settlement, and of course, applications for places in Orchard House and Greenwoods continues to pile up.

I am glad to be in a position to tell you that we have had another record year so far as the finances of the Mission is concerned. This is wonderful and we praise God, but the fact is our costs last year were up by something like 20%, and our income up a little over 10%, so we are still engaged in that well-known enterprise known as "belt-tightening"! We rely almost exclusively on the Christian people in our Baptist Churches for the money which enables us to carry on, and I look forward with confidence to your loving support and the support of your church in practical ways.

May God's blessing be on you, and your people, and on your own fine work.

Yours very sincerely,

STANLEY TURL

Superintendent of the Mission

which from time to time needs to be brought to the attention of members; the fact that we are called into consultation by the Baptist Union when matters affecting the ministry are under discussion; the fact that we are represented on various committees, such as the planning committee for the annual Probationers' Summer Schools, the Whitley Lectures, etc.; and the maintenance of our links with other Baptist ministers in various parts of the world; not to mention the more confidential matters, such as the operation of our modest Benevolent Fund, and the new activities which are being investigated, e.g., that we should provide study material for local fraternal (the Ministry Dept. is exceedingly helpful here), and that we should act as clearing-house in the matter of cheap holiday accommodation. . . . Let me remind you that we also have a facility for purchasing sundry articles at virtually wholesale price from the Houndsditch Warehouse Company, just as something to round off the list—and even then there are other things which we do and which receive no publicity.

Perhaps when these things are fully understood we may see our solidarity as something worth making a sacrifice for; perhaps even some of those who have severed their connection with us may be led to consider re-entry into membership. . . ? At any rate, we intend to go on serving the ministers as long as we are needed. Who stands with us?

W. H. WRAGG