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The Fraternal

October, 1976

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EDITORIAL

The practice of the young people of the church going away for a weekend conference is now firmly established in the majority of our churches. It has proved an invaluable opportunity for them to grow in the faith and for the uncommitted to come to faith. Ministers too, have the opportunity to attend their association 'retreats' (conference would usually be the more accurate description) and find the experience heart-warming in fellowship as well as stimulating spiritually and intellectually. It is only in recent times that churches have begun to extend this sort of opportunity to the rest of their members.

The church conference or church retreat is now becoming a feature of the annual programme of many of our churches. As various fellowships begin to explore this type of activity so they are collecting a large measure of expertise and learning from experience what is, or is not, of value.

In this edition we have asked three of our members to share their insights with us. Ronald Ayres writes on retreats in the historic sense of that word. Our people have been more and more willing to explore new ways of spirituality and to venture into a milieu to which they are not necessarily accustomed, much to their enrichment.

Peter Pearmain writes on the organisation that needs to go into a conference that is rather more active and deliberative in its structure. Keith Lamdin steers us through the new, exciting and sometimes puzzling experience of the Small Group.

In a number of churches evening service was a casualty of 'The Forsyte Saga' among other things. Edwin Robertson takes a look at this service and what we can do with it in the changed circumstances of today.

At the Ministers' Session of this year's Assembly we heard a fine address from Lesslie Newbigin. Many asked that this be published in the pages of *Fraternal* and we are delighted that Bishop Newbigin has agreed to this request.

We value your prayers and continuing support as we change production of the magazine to a new format, beginning with the next edition. All of us who have been involved in producing *Fraternal* would want to add our thanks to the Greengate Press to those of Roger Poolman's elsewhere in the magazine.

FUTURE EDITIONS OF "FRATERNAL"

The successful production of a magazine like "The Fraternal" depends not only on the editor and contributors but also on the willing help and co-operation of the printers. For some years now we have enjoyed such co-operation from the Greengate Press Limited, of Saffron Walden, and we would like to express our gratitude to them for the way in which they have helped us not least in the difficult economic climate of the last year or two. Economics have however caught up with us and this will be the last issue of "The Fraternal" to appear in the present format. From January we shall switch to a different means of production which we

nope will not only save money but also enable us to revert to four issues per year.

ROGER G. POOLMAN

WAYS OF RETREAT

I sit to write this on holiday. An ordinary day but a holy day. A time for refreshment and recreation and renewal. It is Sunday, and this morning being free of duties I went to join the meeting for worship of the Society of Friends. At 10.45 the Meeting began in silence. Refreshing, recreating, renewing. The children shared it. A dropped goliwog added to it. The voices outside, and the light through the window, the flowers arranged simply and the wood of the table were highlighted by the silence. The faces in the circle became the faces of friends as the hour went on. The children went after a while to their own group.

There were words. Six people spoke,—saying thank you, confessing, praying, sharing insights and reading the Gospel. The silence deepened and enabled the words to be created, the words went into the silence, and did not overbear it. At the end of the hour, Meeting was over. Refreshed. Recreated. Renewed. A Holy Day.

Silence is the ground of a Quaker Meeting and silence is the ground too, of Retreat. Silence is a growth point, and the soil of growth. The deep rooting experience. Not the silence which is oppressive or empty, but the silence filled with life and energy. The silence beyond and behind the words. The deep stillness where God is. Most human beings recognise in themselves a need for silence, for quiet, and will seek it, and have quiet places and quiet relationships which heal. Silence makes pressures, but releases pressures—and one need for it can be seen in the increasing number of Retreat Houses.

The Quiet Place is a response to human need, in a world of tensions and demands. It is the desert experience seen in the life of Jesus and Paul, and in ourselves and our neighbours. The soul searching time. Refreshment. Recreation. Renewal.

As I began writing this I had the radio on—Elgar, some early works. I turned it off because quiet was necessary to write. Now, a few minutes later, some rooms away, another radio is on with an insistent melody. It calls my mind away. I must wait for silence to come again.

WHERE TO GO

The place of retreat is important. Best to get away from the too familiar. Private retreats and small groups can be accommodated in Community Houses, where you join in the worship and stillness of the Order. But mostly we shall want somewhere to create our own community. The natural world has so much place in healing. We go to sea and country, lakes and mountains for our recreation and refreshment. "He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul". So somewhere which offers gardens and views, the quiet of natural growth however small the area, is a blessing. The conduct of the house is important too, the atmosphere of caring and taking care. Beauty is a benediction. It may not be

possible to find a house, though there are many set aside for conferences and retreats. Then a hotel can provide a good setting. If this is not possible either then Church premises are obviously available. It is good to use some buildings other than your own and abandon the ties and pressures of familiar things. Wherever the retreat is to be, those leading it must know the place well and must see that the physical arrangements for meeting, worship, accommodation and meals are set out and right for the purpose. You cannot always dictate or find the ideal you look for, and so must share the event to some degree to fit the geography and feel. It is hard to attempt intimacy in a room which is full of noises, or too distracted by traffic, or which fights against you. There must be detailed planning and visits to arrange the retreat. Details of existing places and events can be had from the Association for Promoting Retreats, through their publication "Vision".

WHAT TO DO

To suit yourself. The Retreat arrangements will be fitted to meet the needs of the group and the individuals,—not too closely or there will be no room for growth. The emphasis will be on the individual, not on the Group identity, though obviously both are linked. It is personal renewal and growth which is centred on.

How long? The length of retreat is important. A Quiet Evening or half a day can be useful, but very limiting. Each time has its own rhythm and pace. A weekend is a better length, an extended weekend (e.g. a Bank Holiday) better still. Unwinding and rewinding cannot be done too quickly.

Follow my Leader. It is usual to have a retreat leader, rather than a panel or group. This gives a single creative drive to the meditation and cohesion to the pattern of thought. The wise leader can feel the needs and shape and spirit of the gathering and direct things accordingly. He will be alert to all that is happening, in consultation with others but chiefly in himself. For this reason it is best to have a leader from outside the group, if it is a group retreat. A congregation having someone other than their own Minister. The Leader will be helped by consultation before the event, beyond the usual list of times and outline plans. He should be made aware of the hopes and needs and nature of the people attending. We have all been asked as Leader and Speaker at special events, only on arrival to find the expectations and arrangements far from what we were led to believe. There must be planning and co-operation well beforehand. A retreat is a sensitive affair, and needs to be approached with care for its best use.

Programmes and Patterns. Like a kaleidoscope, pieces will be shaken about to make a balanced pattern. Some may be covered and not seen at all. Others will be the centre piece. Shake well. Here are ten different colours and shapes. You will find others for yourself.

(1) **Meditations.** Short addresses on a progressive theme. Using Scripture and other material. The Leader sharing his own gifts and insights. The theme may be the result of prior

consultation and planning or left to the Leader in the light of his knowledge of the retreat.

(2) **Discussions.** In small groups with or without a Leader. Directed perhaps by questions or a task. Or left free and open. The planners should know why the discussion groups are there, and what their purpose is in the plan of the whole retreat. Beware of some of the major traps—e.g. asking questions which folks see as needing an answer rather than being a spur to discussion. Few questions have Group answers.

(3) **Sharing Sessions.** Less formal than discussions, which tend to feel they have to arrive at some definite point. Sharing sessions are simply that—sessions in large or small groups (again the choice must be made deliberately, purposefully) where members can be open with each other and share thoughts and feelings and themselves, with honesty. Easy to say, but hard to do. Hard to do, but a great growing point. The joyful pain of growth.

(4) **Fellowship Times.** Deliberately placed times e.g. meals or evenings, when the pressures are relaxed and "ordinary" meeting takes place.

(5) **Communion.** Decide over its frequency and placing. Its mysteries will contain different blessings at the beginning of the retreat and the end. It may be right to make it the centre point each day. Early in the morning or at midday.

(6) **Devotions.** Taken by the Leader or others alongside the times for private prayer.

(7) **Shared Sermons.** A passage read within the context of communion or elsewhere when anyone who wishes adds his thoughts and insights, like adding a brick to a wall.

(8) **Consultation.** At certain times the Leader will be available for private interview. A list with half hour periods marked on it will be on display, and anyone who wishes to see him will tick one of the times.

(9) **Laying on of Hands.** If a request comes then this can be quietly or with the group. The Leader's wisdom will discern.

(10) **Silence.** Enfolding all the rest.

Help. Many aids are available and familiar.

(a) **A Book.** Recommended to all the retreatants and shared. Or a collection of books available for people to use during the retreat—Prayers, Anthologies, etc. Encouragement for people to make use of the time to read.

(b) **Music.** Not background, but specifically chosen and used, as part of devotions or by itself. This can be a breakthrough point for many people where words would not help.

(c) **Pictures.** From Great Masters to Photographs and Posters.

(d) **Objects.** A loaf, a candle, a photograph,—so many things can focus meditation, and be the beginnings of thought.

Many other things act also as discussion starters, or things through which sharing can take place.

A Word about Silence. Its quality varies and is hard to write about. Trust is the first thing. It is creative and freeing,

not oppressive or necessarily solemn. It will make you laugh and make you weep, and make you sigh with deep content as the strain drains from you and a peace comes in. It will act as a bond between you and others. You will speak with your eyes and your movements and your touch. It is a cloak for solitude if you need it. It will deepen until it is painful to break it. It will make you alert to many other things that are often drowned out, inside yourself and outside. It rids you of the need to speak or comment. We are rarely silent, and to rediscover silence is to rediscover a part of life and spirit which is unique. You will not want to escape from it in the end, but need to explore it further. To say "I can be quiet on my own" or "I live alone and have enough silence" or "I don't need to do that with other people" or "It's a waste of time", is to miss the truth. Some may go on feeling that, but when silence is truly shared and received there is a blessing, an active peace.

The silence may be imposed after the arrivals and introductions, to be broken at mealtimes or evenings for a while. It may be in devotions where silence is introduced after readings. It may be a period of silence after an address. Meditation will include silence. Silence can be led with thoughts and topics introduced at intervals (a need for careful and sensitive direction here). A silent mealtime may be accompanied by readings, as in the Monastic tradition, or music.

A discipline of silence is needed. Left only to feeling or expediency it will so easily be destroyed. We must plan it as we plan words, and be sensitive to its effects as we are with words.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Thy physical shape of the retreat will reflect the emotional and spiritual shape. You will have a group of people together. As in any group there will be an unknown range of needs and attitudes, personalities and tensions, including your own. Some may be in a crisis situation, expecting solutions or expecting nothing. Some will be outgoing. Some withdrawn. Some will respond, some will remain an enigma. Some will easily present themselves, others remain closed. Some will take and give nothing. Others will give but reject what is given. All will be assessing. Individuals unknown to each other previously will present a different feeling from those who come together.

During a retreat the senses will be alerted, the nerve ends will tingle, sensitivities will be exposed, the soul touched and entered into. The process will be helped and encouraged.

On arrival people will possibly be tired, and will certainly be carrying with them the situation they have just left. A time of relaxation and literal refreshment is valuable. A cup of coffee stimulates more than the taste buds. It is a passport.

Then when people are settled, fed, unpacked and ready it will be seen that the retreat has already begun, that things are happening.

However often the experience has come it is always fresh,

even as every day is a new day. Indeed the "I am an old hand at this" feeling is seen not as an advantage always, but often another crust to be broken through.

The retreat situation is one which will throw most people slightly—or more drastically—off balance. The atmosphere is not one which we are used to, and it will penetrate to thoughts and feelings which are often covered or controlled. The reaction to the retreat way is often described as being either Flight or Fight. There will be a tendency for some to escape into the situation. To use the silence and the depth as a real retreat in the sense of not doing battle any more. The dangers are evident, and this is by no means the object of the exercise. It is not an escape from reality, but a facing of reality; not an escape into religiosity but a meeting with life; not an escape from oneself but an acceptance of self. Another way of flight is to escape the pressures of retreat by by-passing them. Using the silence to catch up on correspondence (a favourite escape route) avoiding the depths by refusing to go into them. "Fight" is clear too. We have all done it and suffered from it. The Fighter (who may be the Flight man of yesterday) will mock the system, argue, try to destroy. Maybe anger and frustration will appear quickly. The retreat is doing its job.

What is its job? To give a soothing holiness, or to make everything easy and pleasant? To give answers to every question? No. We remember the Desert experiences, and that Jesus met the Devil in the wilderness.

If the beginning of the retreat is to relax and be still, then the second stage will be upheaval as truths are discovered. There will be agonies and tensions, but they will be contained and expressed. And if not they will test the Faith and Love and Peace. These things will be lifted into Christ.

After the upheaval, three things are to come. The first, to reach a still centre. The second to make whole, to heal. The third, to gather strength and joy to emerge and live tomorrow.

If retreat is to be a healing process, then for some it will hold the scalpel. The wounds cleaned.

Here perhaps two things begin to take on a new perspective—the silence, and the length of the retreat. The silences are special to both the purging and the healing. The length of time is vital to the full cycle of experiences. Too short and the depths may not be reached, or worse they will be reached but without time for the healing and emergence.

The value and effect of retreat will obviously differ. It cannot be seen in terms of Resolutions or Reports, but in terms of the inner life of individual and community. All that may happen is all that can happen when we are closely touched by the Love of God.

RONALD AYRES

ORGANIZING A CHURCH CONFERENCE

"Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man and writing an exact man". So said Francis Bacon. It was perhaps the sharing of such a belief that contributed to our determination to organise an opportunity for us to confer together as a Church, for it was our great hope that in conferring together we would be ready to take our place and play our part in the ongoing work of Christ's Church and Kingdom.

For the past twelve years our deacons have enjoyed the experience of an annual weekend retreat, and all who have attended have testified to its benefits. Recently we had begun to think seriously about the possibility of extending such benefits to a larger section of our membership, and slowly the prospects of a Day Conference began to emerge.

We decided to give ourselves a whole year for planning and a special Church Meeting was set aside to consider all the various aspects of the day. The following proposals were passed by that meeting:—

- i. To appoint a Working Group who would be responsible for planning.
- ii. To book a Conference Centre rather than use our own premises.
- iii. The day should combine the traditional sessions led by a Guest Speaker and discussion group work planned by ourselves.
- iv. To think in terms of Spring, 1976.

A number of problems were also raised by that Church Meeting, the major one concerning how best we could cater for the whole family. It was hoped that children would be able to join us for the day and that special activities be arranged for them. Unfortunately, as it turned out, the Centre eventually chosen, wasn't able to provide us with adequate room and our plans were not fully realized on this score. This proved disappointing for some of our members and any future Conference would certainly be arranged with greater emphasis on the family unit.

The Working Group first met in July, 1975, and was composed of a small but highly competent section of our membership. I was particularly anxious to keep in the background at this stage and was happy for the Group to appoint its own Chairman, thus allowing me the choice of attending its meetings when I thought it wise for me to do so. The very first question to be tackled by the Group concerned a title for the day. It had already been voiced at the Church Meeting that perhaps "Conference" sounded a bit daunting. Well, inspiration wasn't forthcoming and the Group hoped that good publicity would dispel any fears that the day would prove too "heavy" or too demanding for anyone.

Having chosen our day and booked a Conference Centre, timing and content of the day itself was now to command the Group's attention. Recognizing that it would take almost an hour to reach the Conference Centre in Northampton, it was decided that we should aim to begin at 10 a.m. and

finish at 7 p.m. But how much of the day should be allocated to a speaker and how many sessions should we plan? The Group eventually decided that the morning should be given over to the speaker (whoever that might be), whilst the afternoon should mainly consist of Group work.

The next item, and surely one of the most important, was the general theme for the day. After fairly lengthy deliberations it was decided that we should consider the Christian's responsibility in terms of personal discipleship, Church relationship and the world. It was recognized that our chosen speaker might not be prepared to fit into our proposed outline but it was felt that we should, nevertheless, take the initiative.

Now came the question of a suitable speaker for the day. I was consulted and my suggestion was received warmly. Our approaches to the suggested speaker were successful and we were relieved to know that he was prepared to work to the guidelines we proposed.

It was obvious that the afternoon Group Work would need careful preparation and planning. How should we allocate our members to the various groups? This we knew would prove a difficult question but a good compromise solution was discovered. It was suggested that we list the discussion subjects on the application forms and let the applicants themselves indicate their own personal preference. It would be necessary for us to point out that if too great an imbalance resulted we would have to direct some to the second Group of their choice. Over against these practical matters, much thought was being given to the subjects themselves. We wanted them to be as varied as possible and to take in the wide interests and areas of work and service of our membership. Eventually the following six subjects were selected:—

- i. The Christian's responsibility to EMPLOYMENT
- ii. The Christian's responsibility to our COMMUNITY
- iii. The Christian's responsibility to EVANGELISM
- iv. The Christian's responsibility to POLITICS
- v. The Christian's responsibility to EDUCATION
- vi. The Christian's responsibility to PERSONAL

CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Recognizing that it would be advisable to give some direction to the various Groups, we posed a number of questions under each heading and these were included in preparation notes for each Conference member. The Employment Group was asked to consider the whole question of work and vocation, to look seriously at attitudes to Trades Unions, colleagues and employers, and the value of Christian groups in industry. The Community Group was encouraged to look at the Church's role within the community in terms of caring and service and also to consider in depth attitudes to some of the more questionable trends in society. The Evangelism Group was asked to give some thought to the practical questions of training in evangelistic methods, techniques and activities most suitable to our own situation, and finally the development of our own involvement in the

work of foreign missions. So far as the Politics Group was concerned we were anxious that they investigate how far the Christian could express his personal convictions in the area of local politics and to what extent party affiliation would affect the Christian's influence and witness. The Education Group was encouraged to consider the place of Christian education in home, school and the local church, and to investigate the general changes in educational patterns and policies. The final Group's brief was Christian growth and development and here we were anxious to assess the Church's role in preparing candidates for baptism and church membership, the continuous process of "building-up" those in the Faith, and the place of the home for such purposes.

The leadership of these Groups was obviously supremely important and names of potential leaders were considered and invitations sent to some dozen or so of our members. One well qualified Working Group member was delegated to meet those who responded to the invitation and a very useful session was arranged designed to help those leading discussion groups. As one whose job it is to organise training conferences for civil servants, this particular member was able to give practical guidance and the notes he prepared seem a useful guide for all involved in leading such a group discussion and is worthy of study by us all.

Nature of Discussion Groups

The knowledge and experience present in the Group is not only shared by all the members but in applying their particular knowledge and experience to a specific problem or topic, members of the group add to the value of their knowledge because it can now be applied more effectively to live problems.

Role of the Discussion Group Leader

1. To help members to think through a particular topic, not to transmit new knowledge. Active and attentive listening, and a quick grasp of what is being said, is essential in fulfilling the role adequately.
2. To be a member of the group. He serves the group by asking questions to clarify members' understanding and to challenge assumptions.

Preparation

1. Decide objectives—in relation to the objectives of other sessions and the Conference as a whole. "What do I wish the members to take away from this session in terms of increased understanding?"
2. Analyse the topic—the logical sequence of aspects to create a framework and aid clarity.
3. Decide headings—how many can be dealt with in the time available, and in what depth. Pose headings in the form of questions (use of wall chart).
4. Plan introductions—consider existing level of members' knowledge and experience, and how this can be determined. The purpose of the introduction is to arouse interest and bring all members to a common starting

point, from which to launch discussions in the direction the leader has planned to go.

5. Prepare discussion outline—prepare suitable questions to aid thinking and development of topic.
6. Check facilities—room, furniture, aids, reporting back arrangements.

Leading the Discussion

Consider whether during the introduction the leader should:

- a. Disclose all the headings at one time.
- b. Disclose the headings one by one.

Once discussion has started, the leader is responsible for:

- a. Understanding the contribution made by each member.
- b. Ensuring that all members understand the contribution.
- c. Ensuring that the contribution relates to the heading.
- d. Summarising the discussion on each aspect of topic at appropriate time—for recording purposes.

The discussion leader has three fundamental tools in controlling the discussion:

- a. Questions—open ended, requiring thought, promoting understanding.
- b. Silence—avoid lecturing or "rushing-in".
- c. Summarise—timing, in order to make progress. Expressing a consensus of opinion, and recording agreement. (Consider the advantage of using a wall chart pad).

Seek a balanced contribution from each member by way of participation, interest and involvement.

To return to our own progress—the Group Leaders were eventually selected and allocated their subjects. In the meantime the Working Group was looking at the best ways of enrolling our members for the Conference. The decision to send an invitation, details of the Conference and an application form to all members of the Church and congregation was acted upon and this was subsequently done during January of this year. A deadline of the 29th February was decided, thus giving us almost a month to the Conference itself, Saturday, 27th March. The final programme was as follows:

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 10.00 a.m. | Coffee, Introduction and Opening Devotions. |
| 10.15 a.m. | First Session: "The Christian's Responsibility to Christ" |
| 10.45 a.m. | A period of private prayer, reflection and study. |
| 11.30 a.m. | Second Session: "The Christian's Responsibility to the Church"
General discussions and contributions. |
| 1.00 p.m. | Lunch and free time |
| 2.15 p.m. | Group leaders meet for prayer |
| 2.30 p.m. | Third Session: "The Christian's Responsibility in various spheres of life". Discussion groups. |

- 3.45 p.m. Break for tea or coffee
- 4.15 p.m. Relaxation and fellowship
- 5.15 p.m. Buffet tea
- 6.15 p.m. Closing service led by Minister and Conference Members

It was gratifying that some sixty of our people enrolled for the day and with the efficiency and co-operation of the Warden and Staff of Hereward the Wake House, the whole venture proved a great success. But what of those in our fellowship who did not attend? We were conscious that every opportunity should be given to them to at least be aware of what had been happening at the Conference itself. The speaker kindly produced outlines of his two sessions, and these—together with reports from each of the afternoon groups—were later published in booklet form and made available to all our people. This was quite an undertaking but has subsequently proved a very useful exercise. In addition to providing necessary information for those unable to attend, it has also made easier the work of those now given the responsibility for planning the overall work of “follow-up” to the Conference.

It is of course difficult to assess the value of such an event in the life of a local church, but results apart, the whole experience was one that will be cherished by almost all who were privileged to attend. We were stimulated by the sessions, encouraged by one another, made more aware of our fellowship, and I trust, motivated a little more to pursue the task our Lord has for us.

PETER F. PEARMAIN

GROUP ENCOUNTER

Imagine a deacon's meeting at which a very reliable deacon seems, quite unpredictably, to be raising difficulties in almost every item on the agenda. The meeting seems to go all wrong, quite unlike a normal meeting. It takes only a little common sense and a visit to discover that this unpredictable behaviour has been caused by some upset at home or work—maybe a threat of redundancy or the discovery that a teenage daughter is pregnant. What is clear is that the behaviour of one person can profoundly affect the life and functioning of any small group, and just think how many small groups there are in your church. I can think of a couple of dozen groups to which I belong, many of which I have to chair. The questions that nag at the back of my mind are: “What effect do I have on these groups and how is the group itself affecting me and the other individuals with me?”

It has been these kind of questions that have led to an increasing awareness of the importance and consequently to a great deal of study of the Small Group¹. Soon after the Second World War the Massachusetts Institute of Tech-

nology, working on the idea of training in relationships, developed the Training Group (T Group), in which individuals, mainly drawn from the management side of industry, were taught to observe the nature of their interactions and the process of the life of the group. It was soon realised that this experience enabled them to understand what was happening in groups, to improve their ability to relate to others and to function better at work when dealing with difficult interpersonal problems.

At the same time, Dr Carl Rogers,² at the Counselling Centre at Chicago University was asked to train a large number of counsellors to deal with the many discharged American soldiers from the war. The programme he developed included intensive group experience in which the members met for several hours each day to learn about themselves and the kind of attitudes or behaviour patterns which could be helpful or harmful to a counselling relationship. The value of this experience proved to be so significant that “Encounter Groups”, so called because of their emphasis on the “encounter” between people, have been part of their programme ever since.

Meanwhile in England, Dr W. R. Bion,³ working with soldiers in psychiatric care, was developing some theories about the nature of Small Group life, and, under the auspices of the Tavistock Clinic, he ran Small Groups both for therapy, and as training for professional workers. It has been the Church of England that has most clearly recognised the value of the Small Group experience both for clergy and lay people. For some years now, the General Synod Board of Education⁴ has organised a series of residential institutes offering, in three stages, intensive Small Group, large group and inter-group experience. More recently the Church is in process of establishing area ecumenical training groups. The purpose of these is to bring together people with resources and skills in the field of relational training and personal growth, so that they might plan events locally and be available to the churches and institutions as consultants and staff members. These groups bring together people with skills in Group training, Encounter work, Gestalt therapy, Simulation and Growth Games, Transactional analysis, Re-evaluation Counselling and so on.

All these names mentioned above indicate that there has been a mushrooming of patterns, theories and centres, all of which have been recently documented in an Audenshaw paper reproduced by the Baptist Youth Theta file. The confusion of names and emphases is based on the way in which the skills have developed and seem to bridge rather different disciplines. The brief survey that I have given so far indicates that two rather separate concerns have existed from the beginning. On the one hand, the Small Group is seen as a laboratory exercise where the learning is about the process of the group as an institution, (what is happening here and now?)—the interplay of power and authority, of sexuality, of the needs of the individual as he comes into conflict with the task of the group and its need not to collapse. Often the

staff⁵ in this kind of group, who are responsible for the learning about process, may seem to leave the individual member to fend for himself⁶, even if in some distress. On the other hand, with therapy as a keyword, the task of the Small Group is to enable the individual to come to a more realistic understanding of himself and his behaviour, and to a greater acceptance or healing of himself. In this situation personal growth is the prior concern of the staff. Today, there is usually a combination of these two emphases—personal growth and training in human relational skills—in Small Group experience.

Consider for a moment the advertising material produced by the Board of Education for their first stage of the course, *Working in Groups*. "All of us have experience of groups. The vast majority of us are born into a family setting and from then on meet and work with other human beings in varying numbers. Living alongside others can pose problems of relationships that often evade resolution and prevent us from functioning as we would wish. This conference brings together a number of people who will live in a small community setting for four days. A number of experienced staff are invited . . . to enable the community to learn by becoming a secure environment in which individuals can take responsibility for their actions and their own learning. By participating in this conference, people can learn how to communicate more effectively with one another and thus facilitate the functioning of families, committees, organisations and other groups to which they belong.

A variety of group experience is offered and the central activity is the development of the Small Group. With no chairman and no agenda the Small Group can be bewildering, but it does provide a most effective arena in which participants can examine the forces which influence behaviour whenever human beings meet together. Two major factors in human behaviour, sensitivity to others and the ability to assess and understand individual reactions, form the primary focus of the group and the function of the staff member(s) is to enable the group to learn from what is happening by comment or by other reaction." Here is a sentence from a paper produced by the staff for a similar event. "Issues of leadership, authority, role and intimacy, amongst others, which are everyday concerns of people in their various life groups are often left unresolved, leaving people feeling dissatisfied and devalued and rendering them powerless".

There are certain quite clear characteristics which may serve to identify the Small Group. The number of members will be between 8 and 14, and the time at the group's disposal will be relatively unstructured, in that the group will be able to choose the direction and intensity of its interaction. The task of the staff will be to help the group to focus on its immediate experience and there will often be an emphasis on the "here and now". Put another way, the concentration is on the process and dynamics of the interactions of the group as they happen. So, when the group first meets, there

may be dismay and resentment that the "leader" is not going to tell people what to do nor how to do it. Gradually, however, there grows a willingness to be open to the other members of the group and a trust develops which allows people to be more honest than they might normally be. Feelings, whether they be positive or negative, towards other members can be expressed, and as defences are slowly removed there is the possibility of real learning and change taking place. Members can learn about themselves and the effect they have on other people. There is often surprise that the more honest people become the more they are valued and accepted, and that as they experience the pain of having to be open they also experience the warmth of growth.

There is another aspect of the Small Group that is worth emphasising. The environment of the group puts some pressure on the individual to conform, but at the same time offers a real freedom of choice. The nature of the openness means that members are free to participate as they choose, and this implies that responsibility is given and not taken away from them. Take the hypothetical case of our deacon who, when faced with some difficulty, reacts by "coming up fighting". It may be that he learnt a motto in his childhood which said that attack was the best form of defence, so that as a child he learnt to attack whenever under threat. So now under the threat to family life he slips unavoidably into the same pattern. It may be that in a Small Group, this lack of structure would re-activate this patterned response in such a way that the group could help him to understand how and why he has adopted this aggressive behaviour, and what effect it has on the rest of the members. This opens up new areas of freedom for there can be a change and he can take control of this part of his life. Indeed there is a real conviction underlying Small Group work that the truth is liberating and that the love and valuing of oneself is an essential ingredient to a fulfilled life. It is quite clear to me that the aims of Small Group work are thoroughly compatible with the life of the Christian Gospel.

The value of Small Group experience is significant when relating it to the life of the local Church. Most ministerial students in their weekly sermon class receive regular help in their ability to prepare and deliver sermons. But how many colleges offer specific training in Small Group work? With growing emphasis on group and team ministries and house groups, quite apart from all the small groups that a minister belongs to in any case, I would consider that Small Group training should be an essential part in every minister's training. The Small Group offers specific training in understanding what happens to me and to the group while I belong to it; it offers pastoral training, in that I can learn to be more sensitive and responsive to people; it offers the possibility of my own personal growth.

If the minister can benefit in this way from Small Group experience then so can the deacons, the youth club leaders, the Junior Church team, house group leaders, the caring committee, and so on. Not that the Church should be full of

Small Groups per se, but that many can benefit from training offered in this style. The Small Group, as I have described it, is designed as a training tool, but the basic assumptions behind the educational method, and the style of enabling can be developed in small groups which have other tasks. Part of the life mission of the Church can be to develop small groups with the task of personal growth, which might be beneficial to people facing life crises, such as bereavement, parenthood, marriage, student life or adolescence. Such a group could well take the place of the more traditional Church Membership classes. David Sheppard⁷ describes the use of Talking Groups at the Mayflower Centre, and links this with the placing of responsibility in the hands of the laity. The theological and educational questions posed by this are spelt out by Peter Selby,⁸ but this is a fascinating and important digression.

The Church often claims to be an open accepting fellowship which welcomes truth, openness, and the kind of change made available through the love of Christ; love which is so regularly mediated through the relationships offered by Christian people. It is in the residential setting that fellowship can most easily be encouraged by the skills made available through Small Group work. Imagine a weekend where an early session is given to people to work in pairs with time to answer the questions: "What do I care about? What makes me sad at the moment? What makes me happy at the moment?" In such a session people would be asked to commit themselves to attentive listening, without interrupting, and to a real valuing of the other person. The style of a session like this would set the agenda for the rest of the weekend, for the areas of real concern would be selected by the members themselves and the motivation for learning would be greatly increased. There could be real growth towards the kind of Christian community that would be appropriate.

I am aware that words, carefully chosen to be signposts, often become obstructions on the road to understanding. Indeed any description of a relationship, and in this case the web of relationships in a group, is bound to be inadequate. The learning of one person in this way cannot be given to another, nor taught by traditional methods of education, such as reading books or listening to lectures. The overwhelming evidence of those who attend Small Groups is that they are very significant learning occasions in their lives, and that, in itself, places the Small Group firmly on the agenda for the Church.

KEITH H. LAMDIN

NOTES

1. Small Groups—I use this term on purpose to cover the range of groups which may be called T Groups, Encounter Groups, Gestalt Groups and so on. Each name indicates a clear difference in style and task, and a careful reading of any publicity material should make both tasks and methods of working quite clear.
2. Carl R. Rogers "Encounter Groups"—Pelican 60p.
3. W. R. Bion "Experiences in Groups"—Tavistock £1.75.

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To the Readers of the "Fraternal"

Dear Friends

"... here's an equivocator, that could swear in both
the scales against either scale"
"Macbeth"—Shakespeare

I searched my memory for a quotation involving law but found that all my recollections seemed to be critical of the legal profession. Dickens for instance was somewhat harsh in his attitudes and Shakespeare too displayed some antipathy (even in "The Merchant" a nice point was permitted by law to void a contract freely entered into by both parties!).

This particular quotation from Macbeth goes on to say that it is not possible "to equivocate to heaven" but in this journal I cannot possibly comment on that!

The exercise of rights at law for personal injury or damage to property is a costly process whether as defendant or claimant. If a claimant is successful or to put it another way if defence fails then the money consequences can be crippling.

The scales of justice can dip either way and lawyers will sit in either scale with their clients acting of course quite properly in the interests of those clients.

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But liability protection is not just a question for insurance—that is the second line of defence. The first line of defence must be prudent maintenance and supervision of activities at safety levels.

Money awarded in law to injured parties is at best only an attempt to equate injury to money values—it cannot of itself repair serious injury. All of us have an inherent obligation to avoid harming others.

Insure of course.

Ensure too that proper standards of maintenance and supervision are exercised.

Yours sincerely,

C. J. L. COLVIN
General Manager

4. Information about the Board of Education Training Programme and the Area Training Groups can be received from Revd C. Davison, Church House, Deans Yard, Westminster, London SW1P 3NZ.
5. Staff—There are various names for staff, such as facilitator, enabler, consultant, leader, therapist and so on.
6. Himself—may refer to human beings of either sex, and it should not be thought that only males can benefit from group experience. I hope that this convenient syntactic device will not be taken amiss by emancipated women.
7. David Sheppard "Built as a City"—Hodder & Stoughton, £1.00.
8. Peter Selby "Lay Training as a Point of Growth"—price 25p from 15 Chichele Road, Oxted, Surrey RH8 0AE.

THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20, 2:13-15.

These passages direct our attention to the centrality, the sovereignty, the finality of Christ. I think they first came vividly alive to me one day in Nagpur when Paul Devanandan was preaching to us—speaking within the context of that developing dialogue with Hinduism which he did so much to promote. I shall never forget the passion in his voice when he summarised these verses with the phrase: Christ, the cause and the cornerstone of the Universe.

But is this not taken for granted? Is it not the very starting point of all our ministry?

Yes; and yet, if we examine ourselves honestly, do we not find that—in fact, though not in intention—we are constantly drifting away from it, drifting with the powerful currents within which we must do our work if our ministry is to have any relevance? May I be forgiven if I raise this question today? I once heard the preaching of a Scottish divine described as 'the defiant proclamation of the obvious'. At the risk of falling into the same criticism I am going to ask you to consider the place of Christ in our thinking about three areas of our life—about theology, about the religions, and about society.

I

About theology. Is Jesus Christ central, sovereign, final, in our theology? I confess that one of the things that alarms me, coming back to this country after a working life spent in India, is to see the extent to which theology in accepting captivity to the University and to the academic world, has become captive to a set of presuppositions which do not arise from the Gospel itself. Obviously I am here making a very sweeping statement which could only be filled out in detail in a very long discussion. But I think that it cannot be questioned that academic work in our society is carried on within the presuppositions of what one may broadly call the modern scientific world view, and that its criteria of what is credible are drawn from that rather than from the figure of Jesus Christ. One effect of this encapsulation of theology within the academic world is that theologians are tempted

to devote their energies to those critical, historical and literary studies which can be pursued with great intellectual brilliance but without challenging the fundamental axioms on which their non-theological colleagues base their work. Or they can develop theological faculties into departments for the study of religion where all the phenomena of human religion in all its forms—preferably, of course, in the more exotic and interesting forms offered by Asia and Africa—without ever raising the uncomfortable question: what, in all this, is to be believed because it is true?

But the more serious effect is in the field of theology itself, by which I mean those studies in which we seek to clarify what ought to be believed about God because it is true. It would be hard to affirm, I think, that Jesus Christ is central, sovereign and final for most contemporary British theology. Rather it is clear that the fundamental axioms, the unquestioned assumptions are drawn from elsewhere and that Jesus—or shall we rather say, the legends regarding Jesus Christ—have to be sifted and interpreted in the light of these axioms. I am over and over again astounded by the way theologians write as if they had a secure basis for understanding human existence, and that from this basis they could coolly assess the evidence about Jesus contained in the Christian tradition and decide how much of it can be accepted and how much has to be rejected. I am over and over again tempted to ask the writer to come clean and tell us what is the real ground for his confidence about the things which he assumes to be certain, on the basis of which he decides what can or cannot be accepted in the Christian tradition concerning Jesus.

At the risk of being very controversial, let me take only one example, the distinction which Bultmann has made so popular, the distinction between *geschichte* and *historie*, between the kind of interpreted record of Jesus that we have in the NT and the kind of record that we expect as the result of scientific historical research. This is of enormous practical importance for the life of the Christian community, because it drives a wedge between the scholar and the believer, between the Jesus of historical research and the Christ of faith. And there is no place where this dichotomy hurts more than in the soul of an honest preacher who is trying to speak the truth about Jesus to his believing congregation.

But upon what does this dichotomy rest? It rests upon the assumption that the methods of science could, in principle, produce a kind of history which would consist simply of objective facts, free of all value judgments. About this assumption three things must be said.

First, it is part of the whole set of concepts which I have called "the scientific world view". The idea that the ultimate reality with which we have to deal is a set of so-called facts which can be known as they are apart from any relationship between them and the human mind which seeks to deal with them. It is this supposed set of facts which has become, in the modern popular western mind, the substitute for God. This is supposed to be the really real, and the scientist is the

high priest who can interpret it to us. And of course, in this view, Jesus has to be fitted into this picture of reality. But, and this is my first point, the scientists themselves are rejecting this picture. Granted that it is the physicists and the mathematicians who are doing so, and that the self-critical spirit is as yet much rarer among the social scientists; but what modern physics offers us is a picture of a dynamic mutual relationship between the observing subject and the objects of his observation. The kind of dogmatism that marked an older generation of scientists is gone. Indeed one may hazard the guess that the time may come when the Church will have to rescue science from a too strong reaction against its claims. It is already noticeable in most technically developed countries that the ablest students in the universities are refusing to go into the science faculties, preferring rather those kinds of study which enable them to come to grips with the ultimate questions about the meaning of human life. Witness, for example, the newly built but empty science laboratories in some of our colleges. In this context there is something pathetic in the spectacle of Christian theologians doing obeisance before a divinity which is already fading from the cultural history of the world.

Second, it is surely obvious that every kind of history is history remembered and recorded because of some interest. A complete video tape of everything that ever happened in every corner of the universe would not be history. History is and can only be a way of grasping the past in terms of some understanding of its meaning. When it is proposed that we should seek to create a truly scientific history of Jesus, freed from the interests which prompted the NT writers to give us the records we have, it is obvious to the observer that this so-called scientific history would simply be an attempt to grasp the past from another point of view, from the point of view of another set of interests, those interests which dominate modern man in those parts of the world which like to call themselves modern and developed. The claim that this scientific history is interest-free is simply a confession of blindness to one's own interests. This is very obvious in much contemporary theological writing.

Third, at the risk of making myself still more unpopular, I am going to introduce a name which I think cannot be omitted in any serious theological discussion today—the name of Karl Marx. Since Marx, it has been impossible—or ought to have been impossible—to discuss theological ideas without being aware of the ideological element in them, without being aware—that is to say—of the fact that these ideas are shaped by the interests of those who hold them. Some of you have met my friend Orlando Costas, that redoubtable Baptist evangelist from Costa Rica who has been spending two terms with us at Selly Oak. Orlando is a soundly converted evangelical Christian, but like most Latin American Christians he has taken seriously the Marxist analysis of our situation. Seen through the eyes of a man like that, it is obvious that the *interest* of this so-called scientific view of history is the interest of a middle-class

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affluent society which is willing to accept the world as it is and does not take very seriously the possibility of a radically different kind of world. In such a view the resurrection of Jesus from the dead can have no meaning. It must be explained away. But in the sort of revolutionary situations that our Christian friends face in many parts of the third world the resurrection is precisely the starting point for a radically new and different understanding of the world. In that sort of situation one does not take the established order as ultimate, and then see how the stories about Jesus can be fitted into it; one takes the story of Jesus as the starting point for a radically new, revolutionary understanding of the world, and with this clue one sets out not merely to understand the world, but to change it.

This is exactly what most of our theologians cannot do. Jesus Christ is not the starting point but rather one of the pieces that have to be fitted into the total pattern of a philosophy of life. *But he cannot be so fitted.* He is only rightly known when he is honoured and obeyed as cause and corner stone of the universe, the one starting point from which we can begin to make sense of the whole of our baffling and perplexing world, and from which we can begin to *change* the world in the direction of God's promise. Real theology *begins* where that decision of faith has been made.

II

I come, secondly, to the place of Jesus Christ in our thinking about the religions.

This has come to us in Britain as a new question in the past 20 years. Till recently, Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims and Buddhists were merely the heathen people 10,000 miles away—without Christ, people to be pitied, to be rescued, and for that purpose to be ruled for their own good. No missionary—and I have spent all my life as a missionary—can deny that aroma of arrogance which has hung over the missionary enterprise. Now the heathen are among us in their hundreds of thousands. They are much like ourselves except that—on the whole—they are more godly, more disciplined, more pious than we are.

What are we to make of this? Let us admit that most Christian people in this country find themselves deeply puzzled. Some of our leading theologians have responded to the situation by deciding that the whole enterprise of missions was a mistake. Prof. John Macquarrie of Oxford says that the enterprise of seeking to bring all nations to the Christian faith was simply one of the colossal mistakes of Victorian imperialism. Prof. John Hick of Birmingham calls for a Copernican revolution in our theology. He likens our situation to that of the astronomers who tried to explain newly discovered facts within the terms of the old view that the sun and planets revolve around the earth, whose explanations became more and more complicated until Copernicus resolved the problem at one stroke by showing that it was the sun and not the earth that was the centre of the system. The older view was just an illusion of perspective. So, says Prof.

Hick, we must recognise that our religion is not the centre around which the others revolve. God is the centre, and ours is only one of the planets, one of the forms in which people of different cultures confess the one reality. Jesus is the name—to us a very precious name—by which we confess the one divine reality, but that name has no validity outside the cultural area of Christendom. In other cultures other names will continue to fulfil the same purpose. The hymn must be re-written to read “At the name of Jesus, Buddha, Krishna or Allah as the case may be, every knee shall bow”—and with that we should all be very happy.

What are we to say to this? First, to acknowledge the truth in it—that we have been arrogant because we were ignorant, that we have thought *our Christianity* was the ultimate truth, that we have need of a humble openness to what men and women of other faiths have to teach us.

But, second, we have to put some questions. Is there not an obvious logical fallacy? The objects with which Copernicus was concerned were all observable objects of the same class; God and the religions are not observable objects of the same class. The religions can be studied by ordinary methods of observation; God cannot. The religions are different ways of conceiving God; when John Hick says “God” he means, of course, “God as I conceive him”. The different religions are the planets; the central sun is not God, but Prof. Hick’s concept of God—which may not be the same thing. We have therefore to press the question: what are the grounds upon which Hick holds the beliefs he does about God? These grounds will be found to be open to debate—as all human arguments are. The appearance of neutrality and objectivity is an illusion. We have *no* neutral standpoint from which we can survey all the religions—including the revelation of God in Jesus Christ—and pronounce that they are all variants of one theme. There is no standpoint which is above all standpoints.

Hick takes it as axiomatic that Jesus could not both be truly a man and also believe himself to be the Son of God. Since he rightly believes that Jesus was truly a man, he concludes that the indications in the Gospels that Jesus believes himself to be the unique Son of God are the work of later Christian piety. The presupposition on which this argument rests is that we know—apart from Jesus—what the word God means, and what it would mean for a man to be the unique Son of God. We therefore have to press the question, what is the basis, what are the credentials of this knowledge of God which we have apart from Jesus Christ? Will they stand up to all the facts of human experience? Do they offer a more secure foundation for faith than the total fact of Jesus Christ—incarnate, crucified and risen?

There are obviously many more questions that could be asked. My point is that by suppressing the claim of Jesus to finality among the religions one does not bring about unity among the religions. Religion concerns men’s ultimate commitments, and every claim to unity among the religions itself rests upon some ultimate commitment. The important thing

is to bring this out into the open and examine its credentials. To confess Jesus as cause and cornerstone of the universe does not mean that Christians have any superiority, any greater claim upon God’s love and mercy than others. To confess Jesus as Lord makes one not the master of other men, but their servant. If, having lived most of my life in a culture dominated by other faiths, a culture that can produce men of the stature of Mahatma Gandhi, I am still bound to confess that I find no other place where the ultimate issues of my life and the world’s life are finally exposed and settled except in the dying and rising of Jesus, then that is no merit of mine, it is simply that he has by his own decision put me in the place where I can only make that confession—a confession which still makes me a learner, an admirer and a friend of men and women of other faiths.

III

Thirdly and finally I ask you to consider the place of Christ in our thinking about society. It is at this point that the Colossian letter speaks most directly to our situation. I refer to Paul’s teaching here about the entities which he describes by such words as principalities, powers, dominions, authorities and thrones. In the first passage which we read Paul says that these have all been created in Christ, through Christ and for Christ (1.20). In the second passage he says that Christ has disarmed these powers on his Cross and made a show of them openly. From a study of the use of these terms in his writings as a whole, it seems clear that Paul is speaking about those fundamental structures by which human life is ordered—first the structures of the physical world, represented by the stars and planets, and then the structures of society—the state and its apparatus. And if we are right in connecting with this group of words the word *stoicheia*, rudiments or elements, which he uses in the immediately following passage, then he is thinking also of such things as religion, law, custom and the other elements which form the structure of our social life. The point of the argument seems to be as follows: these things are all part of God’s good creation in and through and for Jesus Christ. But in Christ, above all in his cross, they were disarmed. They lost their claim to finality. In the crucifixion of Jesus law, state, religion, tradition were all brought face to face with the living God himself, and in their attempt to destroy him were themselves exposed, discredited and therefore disarmed. They still exist. They still have their role to play—for human life would be impossible without the support which these structures give it. But they can never again claim absolute authority. Neither the political order, nor the economic order, nor law, nor religion, nor custom can ever claim absolute authority again. Final authority, sovereignty, belongs to Jesus alone. This basic teaching is worked out in Galatians in relation to the Mosaic Law: here in Colossians it is applied to the whole range of the powers, and very specially to the prescriptions of pagan philosophy.

The relevance of this to practical life is obvious. By neglecting this teaching, Christians have again and again

become entangled in futile discussions about the relative importance of the individual and the social dimensions of the Church's mission. Social structures have been treated as if they were outside the sphere of the Gospel. Down the centuries Christians have defended such varied forms of structure as the feudal system, slavery, oligarchy and capitalism as if each of them was part of an unsuitable created order. We have been told that Christ can change individuals but that he does not change structures. A minority on the fringes of the Church have thought that the work of Jesus was to destroy the powers, and have drawn the logical conclusion and become anarchists. The majority have thought that the blood of Jesus applied only to the individual soul—thereby ignoring the plain teaching of these passages. (See esp 1:20). We have to learn, do we not, what these texts teach: that these structures—the state, the law, religion, morality, custom—have a real and God-given role, but that it is a relative and subordinate role. *Sovereignty* belongs to Christ alone. We can therefore never allow ourselves to get into the position where we think of the role of Jesus *within* these structures as though politics and economics and culture had a reality apart from and independent of Him. Not so. "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." We have to proclaim this sovereignty of Jesus with boldness over against all the false and futile claims that politics and economics and culture are autonomous realms in which the Gospel has no right to speak, against the false and futile attempt to imprison the Gospel within the small world of the individual and his family, within the world of private morals and private spirituality. Jesus is Lord of the Universe and his Cross is final for all things in heaven and earth.

I have the impression that this witness is particularly needed in Britain at this time. Christians are understandably frightened as they see the giant inroads that paganism is making into our traditionally Christian culture, the open flouting of long accepted standards of behaviour, the brazen worship of false gods in the media and among the so-called intellectuals. It is easy and tempting to cry for the old securities, to look to the past, to seek shelter in the old patterns of thought and behaviour. This is all human and natural. But militant paganism cannot be answered by any appeal to law or to tradition. It is a betrayal of our gospel when we appear as timid conservatives. This is a time for the bold and tireless preaching of Jesus Christ as Lord, central, sovereign, final, of the Cross as the one place in all human history where the full measure of evil has been taken, where sin, guilt and death have been met and mastered; of the resurrection as the first-fruit of a new creation, as the birthplace of a hope which nothing can destroy; of Jesus as one name given under heaven, the one in all the human story who could be obeyed and loved as king and head of the human race, as the one in whom alone all our thinking and all our acting in the world can find its starting point and its reward. This is a time to preach Christ.

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

THAT SUNDAY EVENING SERVICE

One of the constant problems of a small inner-London church is what to do with the evening service. The morning service has become in many cases, the service of the church and the strongest argument for the evening service remains that of providing worship and instruction for the Sunday School teachers. Almost all of us have gone over to the morning school and whatever method we use the teachers miss the sermon! In a larger suburban or country town church it is possible to arrange teacher training in such a way that teachers are instructed, or the Mid-Week service can provide what the evening service once provided. Then the evening service becomes a natural time of worship which can be judged on its own merits. If it is not needed, you can drop it. Some excellent suburban churches have followed the American pattern of concentrating their Sunday activities upon the morning service and an all-age Sunday School. The inner-London church both needs an evening service and finds it most difficult to maintain one.

For the past five years at Westbourne Park I have faced these problems of the evening service in an inner-London church for the first time. I am sure that many share my experiences, but they have struck me, because my previous pastorates—Luton, St Albans and Yeovil—posed quite different problems on a Sunday evening.

Let me state the problem and describe how we are trying to tackle it. Perhaps other churches can help us in our continual searching. I write as one who is striving, not as one who has achieved!

In 1971, Westbourne Park had behind it the lively ministry of Jamie Wallace, when I am sure there was never a dull moment. During his long ministry he battled against a declining tendency—people moving away from an area too expensive to be possible for the young marrieds. Despite considerable additions to the church the membership fell. His ministry was followed by a fairly long vacancy—longer than the church could really stand. They missed his constant flow of new ideas and the decline was evident when I visited the church in 1971. Later in that year, I became the pastor and enjoyed the usual flush of support for a new minister. Once we emerged from the euphoria and we both discovered that I could only be part time, the decline became clear again. Several staunch members left for other districts. My most frequent activity was saying farewell. Older members who were carrying substantial responsibilities in the church up to the time of their death, left serious gaps. All this is familiar stuff in all churches, but a small declining church faces every loss with the sense of disaster. I promised one church member never to use the words *small* or *declining* again. She was right. The obsession with size and growth is bad for any church.

After about a year of a varied ministry, sharing myself between church and the World Association for Christian Communication, and many other duties, the church was ticking over—a trickle of baptisms, a few new members by

transfer, enough to offset the loss. The morning service grew, but the evening service was depressing. My deacons at the annual retreat said, 'Preach to those who are actually there'. My sermons were difficult to prepare. The morning was easy. The regulars I knew and there was never a Sunday without visitors, either my own students of communication from all over the world or tourists, again from many parts of the world. I enjoyed those morning sermons more than I have enjoyed any preaching. But Sunday evenings became more and more difficult to prepare. One member, a Sunday School teacher who depended upon the evening service for her worship, said quite bluntly that she thought I had treated the evening as a second-best service. She was right. That led me to analyze what we were doing on Sunday evenings. There were not lacking those who said that we should close it down, it was dividing our limited energies. Yet, there were enough who could only come in the evening to prevent that. Although at one point we had as few as 15 people in the service, usually it was 20 with more for specials.

There were two problems: how to cater for those who came; how to persuade others to come. The two problems often confused each other but sometimes combined. I saw that there were four things to do: worship, instruct, create fellowship, open up new visions. We began to form a pattern for the Sunday evening service. First Sunday was Communion—that was the obvious Sunday for concentrating on worship. We made that service one where whoever came would join in a carefully prepared act of worship and learn something about what the Communion Service meant. I noticed that this brought a few who had not previously come to evening service. On the second Sunday, we dealt with some aspect of the world church. This provided a good slot for my students, with whom I could help build up their numbers! It also meant that we could handle AGRI, Christian Aid, UN Day, all kind of special appeals. It was more successful in planning than in effect! I remembered that I should be preaching to those who are actually there—and my congregation on a Sunday evening did not really share my interest in the world church. I persisted, but began to feel that it was more for my convenience than the congregation's. However, I persuaded myself that they should know about the world church and I had such unusual access to information, that whether they liked it or not, it was good for them. The second Sunday in the month noticeably declined! We held the 20 with great difficulty unless I imported students. The third Sunday in the month was an attempt at discussion. I preached a fairly controversial sermon in a shortened form of service. We broke and had coffee. Then returned to discuss. It varied in quality—both of preaching and discussion. However, one young man was converted during one of these discussion evenings—and I later baptized him. On the fourth Sunday, we concentrated on the devotional life of the church: perhaps the most successful of the pattern. There was a growing demand for

more 'spirituality'. We introduced a book of prayers, listing those who needed special prayers from the church. We experimented with forms of silent prayer, open prayer, participation. We set aside an hour during the week, first keeping the church open and then asking for 'prayer together' wherever we are. Several of our members began exploring relaxation sessions, and healing. When there was a fifth Sunday, we devoted that to music—learning new hymns (when 'Praise for Today' came out we found this a good occasion to learn the hymns in that supplement), a Sunday Half Hour format with short sermon. Later the Westbourne Singers, a group which developed outside the normal pattern of the church for other than church members, used this fifth Sunday to give us a performance, sometimes bordering on the secular. But, if there was a fifth Sunday, we gave our mind to music, in one form or another. The pattern was very good for the minister, but I think it did not help the congregation a lot, except that both pastor and people discovered new ways to worship on Sunday evening. I have since dropped the pattern, but retained most of the elements in one form or another. What I think the pattern taught us most clearly was that you had to have a definite idea as to why you were in church on Sunday evening. This meant, not a general theory of worship, but every Sunday a special. We have recently put up a rather attractive notice board and it challenges us every week to put on that board the special characteristics of each service. We have so far succeeded in showing every Sunday that next Sunday has a special reason why you should be there! We have been helped by a number of disconnected items—perhaps the Lord had something to do with this!

Other churches who have similar difficulties with us began to seek co-operation in united services. We began to link up with a black church which has its services 1-5pm in a local parish church, and is therefore free occasionally to join us. The Westbourne Singers became more ambitious with a brilliant young choir master and took an increasing interest in church music. He helped devise special services with music provided by the choir—a choral communion service, a festival of praise, lessons and carols, etc. About the same time we began to see the advantage of looking at the Sunday as a whole. It started with Christmas. We decided upon a Christmas dinner sort of meal for the older people, provided by the children. The 'turkey dinner' it was known as. The children entertained and also gave presents to the older people. That was the Sunday before Christmas, 1974. It has become a tradition and Christmas can no longer be thought of without it. But it did more. It showed us that in inner-London, Sunday is the day to get people out.

We moved our church meeting from its usual weekday place where it was so badly attended and placed it on the third Sunday afternoon. The attendance shot up at once and has stayed there. We added a tea, provided each month by a different two members. We put a prayer meeting at 6pm and some began to see Sunday as a complete day. It

WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION
409 Barking Road, Plaistow, London E13 8AL

My dear Brother Minister,

AGENDA

Does your heart sink when you see this title? I should not be at all surprised if it did, but I hope you will read on!

Being a Latin scholar you will know that agenda means "The things which must be done", and all of us have got a fairly full list of these kind of things!

At the Mission our main preoccupation at the moment seems to be with the new building scheme of flats and flatlets for old people and young couples, and the occasional middle-aged spinster or bachelor. The Government recently introduced a moratorium on all such building schemes and we are still waiting to know whether we can go ahead. We have our own very tight time schedule linked up with this scheme as we have certain work to be done in the Church before we pull down the Angas Institute and start to build the flats. We hope that it will not be too long before we are given the green light, but I have got to the stage when I really shall not believe that the scheme is going forward until I see the bulldozers on the site and the trenches being dug!

Amongst many other smaller items on our Agenda is the drainage of a large field on our farm at Greenwoods. There is "never a dull moment" as they say, and I and my colleagues have learned a lot about agriculture since my stay here at the Mission.

Of course, the main item on our Agenda is really one that never goes down on paper. It can be summed up as the continuance of the work in our various Homes, because the work is never done! A constant stream of people, about 120 residents every week, are cared for in our Homes, and of course, there is a ministry to all kinds of people who are not residents.

We believe that this continuing work of ours is being blessed of God and we are grateful to Him for His provision of our needs, and not least, for His provision of such a stalwart band of supporters. We want to keep in touch with our friends, and if there is any way in which you can help to do this in your own Church, then I should be glad to hear from you. You know of course, that there is a very good Mission Filmstrip, with tape recording if required, for use in all kinds of meetings, and we should welcome enquiries for dates for the use of this filmstrip.

Meanwhile may God's richest blessing be on your own ministry as you preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Yours very sincerely,

STANLEY TURL
Superintendent of the Mission

also gathered momentum during the day and the evening served as a climax to the day.

This was never more evident than the weekend when we had a 'get together' and all lived at the church for the weekend. That Sunday evening service had a powerful meaning for us all. We knew why we were there. Every third Sunday in the month it is the same. In the morning, communion and the children being taught in their classes, joining us for the communion. We should have lunch at the church then, but we do not yet! At 3.15pm we now have our Bible seminar, summing up the studies of our mid-week services, with the use of cassettes. That leads straight in to the church meeting, tea, the evening service and we try to make it a special. In fact most evening services are now becoming specials. Let me illustrate from the Sundays since Easter.

Easter was a marvellous time to start. We had a baptismal service in the morning, which was preceded by our traditional early morning communion and breakfast. In the evening we had a communion service too and received in four new members, including the two who had been baptized that morning. We had the black church visit us to join in our rejoicing. Mount Zion Spiritual Baptist Church swelled our congregation almost to full capacity. A wonderful and unforgettable evening service. We took a little time to recover and we learnt why the Anglicans call the Sunday after Easter, *Low Sunday*. By the first Sunday in May, we were structuring the whole day: a Sunday School opening, a morning service, the students from the Christian Training Programme in the afternoon, an evening service of Communion. The magic of that wonderful Easter was still upon us, but we had to see that it did not fade away.

Sunday May 9 had many of our young people doing a sponsored walk for Christian Aid. I noted that that was the Sunday I looked at the world church (second Sunday) and felt that the pattern had not quite died!

Sunday May 16 was our Missionary Deputation: an interesting speaker from Nepal and that was followed by Communion. Then, Bible Seminar, Church Meeting, and the Evening Service was a climax to the day, of which the tea after church meeting had been an important part.

Sunday May 23 was our special Christian Aid day and we used the special order of service provided, supplementing it with a choir piece prepared by the Westbourne Singers.

Sunday May 30 was a united service with Mount Zion and although we held this in our church, Pastor Noel of Mount Zion preached and we grew together. We listened to Mount Zion's way of singing this time—in four items they revealed their range, quite different from our way of singing. But the old familiar hymns we sang together.

Sunday June 6, the old Whit Sunday was a structured day, including a conference on healing which followed on a recent visit by the church to Burrswood. It included also a tea and another united service with the Notting Hill Ecumenical Centre, Lancaster Road Methodist and Bayswater United Reformed.

Sunday June 13 was our Family Festival. The Sunday School planned only the morning. We decided that the evening should be a service of witness. Those who were baptized and received into membership on Easter Day should witness to their faith on the Sunday after Whitsun, near enough to the biblical timetable. We actually planned that service at an informal coffee drinking and singing session that we now have with the young people after the first and third Sunday evening services. We saw the hopes of a youth choir then and recognised the strong faith of those who had so recently been baptized.

Sunday June 20 was a structured Sunday with Bible Seminar, Church meeting, tea and then evening service. I was pleased to find one visitor—a man from Botswana—came to us because he saw Bible Class advertised at 3.15pm.

Sunday June 27 was a magnificent Service of Praise for Summer. It started with the Westbourne Singers who had prepared some ambitious church music. Then someone thought of decorating the church with all the flowers we could find. We had not reckoned with the heat and it was not easy to keep the flowers from fading. But the church looked lovely and we let our choir master have his head, providing him also with two instrumentalists—flute and oboe. The Mount Zion church joined us in smaller numbers, but we had a good congregation for a superb service—music of a high quality, readings from Milton and John Henry Newman, a heat that could almost be heard on the recording and no one talked of closing the evening service after that.

A few things have become clear to me about the evening service in a small inner-London church: we need an evening service, we should try to structure it within a total pattern for the Sunday, we must know the special purpose of each service and we must make efforts to see that they are special! My old pattern for communication still holds good: you must have information, entertainment, education and persuasion in every service and you must know your audience. WE're trying.

E. H. ROBERTSON

OF INTEREST TO YOU

Again we record the passing to higher service of brethren much respected by the people they served in their churches. All but one had retired. They are much missed, and we sympathise with those who were nearest to them. Their names are C. W. B. Baldwin; B. Inglis Evans; A. J. Gregory; L. Johnson; R. G. Ramsey; H. Roderick; and in Canada, G. Downing.

Let us remember in our prayers S. J. Dewhurst, A. W. Francis, W. C. Henson and J. B. Middlebrook, whose wives have died.

Changes of pastorate noted are: R. W. F. Archer to Worcester Park; A. J. Barker, Selkirk, Ontario; R. C. Bolton, Hastings; P. Broughton, North Balwyn, Victoria; R. E. Bullen, Tauranga, New Zealand; R. K. Candy, South Crawley; P. Clements-Jewry, Wigan; Dr S. L. Edgar to be