

The Fraternal

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EDITORIAL.

This year we are hoping to return to four editions of Fraternal. Some of you may appreciate the new format, others be less enthusiastic. We hope that, in any case, you will feel that an extra edition each year is something in the way of a bonus.

Our three main contributors this month were asked to write 'off the top of their minds'. They have done so and engaged their subjects with liveliness and erudition.

We wish all our readers a happy new year. May we remind you that we are always happy to receive for consideration material that you may think to be of interest to our readers.

A WORD FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Often we approach a New Year as though it provides a turning point in life. Those who haven't had an enjoyable year from one standpoint or another, hope that the coming of a new year will change all that. But life is a whole; breaking it up into years is merely a way of marking the passing of time. Circumstances do not change overnight simply because tomorrow is the beginning of another year. The past still affects the present and the future. Nevertheless we all like to make new beginnings; turn over and start a fresh page and continue to wish each other a Happy New Year. So let me wish every reader a very Happy New Year.

What changes will 1977 bring? Changes there will be for all of us. Time doesn't stand still. Some of you will be starting or have recently started out in the ministry. Others will be reaching (or have reached) the time of retirement after years of service. In between will be those changing pastorates or facing the challenge of some other form of christian service. Families will grow up and bring changes in that respect. Yes, changes will be experienced. Already you will be aware of another change, namely the format of what you are reading. Before you make any comments, let me explain a little. We have been concerned about the future of the B.M.F. and in consequence tried to get in touch with the whole constituency. The continuance of the magazine would be dependent upon producing it at a cheaper rate (and most of those who opted for the continuance approved finding a cheaper method of production). The outcome of all the discussion was that the Executive recommended that the B.M.F. continue in its present form with a magazine. It also agreed that further research be carried out for a cheaper way of publishing. This was duly done and we are indebted to a small sub-committee (Secretary, Treasurer, Editor and Jim Clarke with power to consult) for all they did. The result is before you.

A change for the better? Personally, I admit that it may not compare favourably with the productions of the past; but economics force many changes that we might prefer not to make. We decided that a means of communication was important; that the contents of the Fraternal mattered more than the outward form. So we have done our best. We hope you will not find this change too much to bear. With the falling value of our money and the desire to maintain our Fellowship, this has been forced upon us.

you this year? The B.M.F. still shares in the Whitley Lectures; that is, in the planning of them. Space forbids a fuller explanation here, but if you are unaware of what is involved, why not make some enquiries? We are also allowed to retain a share in the preparation of the programmes for Probationers Conferences each year. Of course these may not have any place in your immediate experience, but it involves fellowship together. And this leads me to stress what was so important for me in the early days of my ministry... the sense of 'belonging' to the fellowship of brother ministers and being bound together in the 'Morning Watch'. However isolated one might be, you were not alone. And this has continued.

Perhaps I've been extremely fortunate in being involved in the working of the B.M.F. for almost all my ministry. It's been a joy and privilege to do what has fallen to my hands to do. It was a thrill as a younger man to meet with so many leaders of the past who are no longer with us. Obviously the passing of the years has seen changes in the 'officers', but all have served their brethren with their God-given gifts.

As intimated earlier the passing of the years is bound to bring change. Everything that is alive must change... we know this in the fellowship of our churches. We know it in the people of our acquaintance. We know it in the structures of life. So it is inevitable that the structure of the B.M.F. changes from time to time. This I do not fear. What I do fear is the loss of fellowship. This has meant so much to me through the passing years. My New Year wish for you is that the fellowship of the B.M.F. will mean as much to you as it has to me for over thirty six years. So what changes will 1977 bring? I don't know, save that they will come in almost every area of life. But in the midst of changes (not always for the better some of us would feel) we can remain confident because our trust is in God. God doesn't change alth-

At the beginning of this year may I remind you of a number of things involved within the B.M.F. First, the Library, possibly not such a necessity for men within reach of a good public library, but still offering a valuable service to many brethren. It is possible for you to have books sent to you even if your local fraternal doesn't participate. Having recently moved into a fraternal that uses a box of books, I have been greatly helped and challenged by reading a particular book that was available. There are fraternalists that like to do some serious study together but desire some guidance in planning their programme. Several schemes of study have been prepared for those who desire them. Could this be one of the changes for which our understanding of Him might (should, maybe, as we grow). Scripture reminds us of the unchanging Christ... the same yesterday, today and forever. May you find constant renewal in Christ and human help through fellowship with your brethren.

God bless you all.

Dick Rowsell.

STRANGE CALLING.

The ministry is a strange calling – perplexing, precarious and foolish. It is, at least, disconcerting to have the kind of job which once seemed to have universal validity but which now is regarded by many with suspicion and by some as absurd. Recently, in a train, I tried to tell a Hindu about my work and having drawn the sketch I leaned back waiting for his response. He looked at me for a while with oriental patience and eventually managed a bemused murmur, ' Well ! I suppose we must all do something to earn a living '. Thus undone, I found refuge in some words by Lord Darling who once said that hundreds of years ago in the old Law books it was decided that to call a lawyer a fool was actionable because if he was a fool he could not be a good lawyer. But to say of a minister that he was a fool was not actionable because the judges decided that he might still be a very good minister.

Now if it is a fool's job how are we to get on with it? Can we do it at all and retain integrity? I am thinking especially of Baptist Ministers in local churches and that is a unique world with trials, tensions and joys which are not readily found elsewhere. But it is the burden and unreality of these churches and the buildings which obsesses us now, so that Gwynfryn Thomas in the nationalist number of the Fraternal (June 1976) looks on half a dozen of them in any Welsh town and wonders how they may be sold and the money given for the elderly or to delight the people in their leisure. But why restrict the market to 'havens of rest' which are not so much in demand as luxury clubs? Of course in the large town and city you can get out to the suburbs where things are better. But there are many men fixed with a building and few people while they struggle to raise their own stipend and to fulfil the 'social contract' which the majority in society regard as a limitation but which in Baptist tradition is an extravagance! As one minister said to me recently out of heart-breaking devotion 'I can see the church falling down around me.'

Perhaps John Vincent, the Methodist minister, has the answer. He thinks that getting the Gospel wrong we have the Church wrong too. It is not 200 people, he says, sitting on hard forms listening to a professional within walls that have to be heated but 'smaller nuclear groups' who presumably do not need to be heated since they are also discouraged from meeting in homes, Vincent himself, however is very professional delivering his message to people, gathered by others in halls and churches he has already condemned and having spoken he makes it clear that they shouldn't be there at all. He then moves on to some other place, here or abroad, propelled by the power of his mission to set up nuclear groups – not, of course, nuclear families because that would be of blood not the spirit. It must be an expensive enterprise and if he can persuade Methodists to sell some of their buildings he could go round and round the world on the proceeds.

While some men go on these airborne pilgrimages there is my Baptist minister friend stuck in Ramsbottom, Glusburn or Tonypandy . He is trying to work out in heavy meditation what he is meant to do. If he submits to secularizing frenzy he knows that he must achieve some success. Bureaucratic church leaders may

preside over wilting denominations; they may urge others to look to the future not the past; warn the rank and file minister that his church is not a museum and that he must live for tomorrow, yet they have security to indulge in this episcopal advice until retirement comes or death leaves them undone. But if the local minister fails to hold the congregation and level the budget his name is mud and he could swiftly land in it up to his neck. It is said that one minister, when the promise of an administrative job was delayed, cried out 'How long, O Lord, how long?'

It is this grievous floundering which can so easily dominate discussion about the ministry and were it not for working wives many would have difficulty in seeing any other issue. There is no doubt that the mushroom growth of chapels during Victorian prosperity has left a legacy of problems to the people of today. Shrinking numbers of Church members have been inclined to expect a full-time ministry wherever there is a building for worship. Yet it would seem that we shall not get very far simply by trying to assess ministry in sociological terms. We can provide ourselves with a wall of graphs and statistics and still not know what should be done simply because ministry has no reality apart from Christ and his Church, and the Holy Spirit has a disconcerting habit of coming and going in ways beyond our control.

Economic and sociological arguments can easily lead us into deceiving ourselves that only a voluntary part-time ministry is now able to serve churches which previously relied on a full-time ministry. There are exceptions which suggest that this may be achieved but it is not encouraging to the traditional Baptist minister if he is told repeatedly that some kind of work-assessment judges his ministry socially inadequate. I am not at all sure that ministers are meant to rush madly around like politicians wanting to secure their election. This is not the nature of the work and it can easily lead to a ministry where a man has time for no-one unless he can be squeezed painfully into a busy diary.

To mention voluntary ministry in a mildly critical vein immediately arouses antagonism. It can be one of those purist notions best suited to a perfect world and in defending it, even with no intention of fulfilling it, Christians and non-Christians feel that they are displaying the better side of their nature. Voluntary is opposed to compulsory and therefore it seems to imply a free response to a good work by people ill prepared for it. To be able to do this without being burdened by a fictitious call to the ministry simply illustrates the hunger for freedom and shows how noble people are being. I am not surprised that theological colleges are coming awake to the fact (e.g. the Northern College) that they had better present the call to the ministry in no uncertain terms. 'Evangelical Colleges' are having more success in attracting students but this is frequently sponsored by dubious means as though they alone have remained loyal to the truth. All this in no way diminishes the splendid educational

work encouraged by Kenneth King but it argues that diplomas are no substitute for the excellence at which our dissenting academies aimed. We need to be aware of the prevailing modern mood that it seems almost indecent to plead for selective, sustained theological education, so that the aim seems to be to lose any mark of distinction in the broader fields of university faculties and the study of humanities. The result of this admirable tolerance is that theology is equated with anthropology, sociology and geology, a way of life uncorrupted by belief, while energetic tutors struggle to find ways of doing theology.

There were, long ago, early General Baptists clinging to sect-type ways who were unwilling to respond to the need for an educated and separated ministry and this, in the judgment of some, hastened their decline. Yet the Confessions of Baptists in the 17th and 18th centuries fostered the view that the ministry was essential to the life of the Church and secular work of any kind was not intended to lower the standards of the ministry. Indeed during the 18th century when it was still necessary for ministers partly to support themselves by other work, it was made clear that this additional support was undertaken only to fulfill their calling and seemingly done with reluctance lest the ministry be maimed.

The attempt to evade the need for a paid ministry is also featured in the story of English Baptists. Paradoxically, for those who have a mind for nationalism, it appeared through 'Scotch Baptists' who owed their origin to Archibald McLean (1733-1812). There were a number of things in the movement which gave concern to Andrew Fuller but for our purpose we must note it combined a zeal for unpaid elders with some contempt for an educated ministry. Relying on a polity which could be dug out of the New Testament the members put much trust in 'simple faith'. Here lay their strength and weakness. Out of it grew an extreme independence which we are compelled to admire, yet in attempting to return solely to the New Testament they both despised theological discipline and fell into a wayward intellectualism of their own devising. In one of these chapels, well known to me since student days, I have looked with some awe at the impressive memorial board of austere elders and observed that they were unable to retain their original, fierce independence. In this particular church the members found it necessary to resort to a paid ministry and, having invited ordained men, eventually called a woman - an expedient which, in some quarters, could encourage further solemn thoughts.

Among Anglicans, excitement over the possibility of a voluntary ministry has found a lively modern source in the writings and example of Roland Allen who for 10 years was a missionary in China, a parish priest for five and a voluntary clergyman for 40 years. But Allen was much concerned about the limitations imposed on a growing church by a view of the ministry which required properly ordained clergymen to administer the sacraments. He was, in fact, struggling against clerical domination which 'at a distance, seemed to exercise a crippling control upon the

younger churches overseas. Yet Allen's stance is often supported by an appeal to 'congregational discernment' in the New Testament as though things would come right if only we were prepared to go back. It is a mood no more to be encouraged than the literal interpretations of Scotch Baptists. I have observed with sober amusement that Allen's crusade is frequently praised by those who are safely rooted in Anglican foundations. It is possible to recognise the wisdom of Allen's plea without surrendering the need for a ministry which is wholly devoted in time and energy to the work and witness of the Church. Indeed this is what must be done unless we are to be beguiled by the superficial claims of a voluntary ministry.

The laity in our tradition — though the seams lie much deeper — have no limits set to their ministry. It may be much or little, prominent or obscure. The central acts of the ministry are for the whole Church and we are not eager to make distinctions of status or to keep a holy place exclusively for clerics as with the High Priest on the day of Atonement. There are lay pastors, lay preachers and supplementary ministers; there are men not ordained to the ministry who have guided and inspired their fellowships through long years; there are men who while doing their daily work have given themselves to a disciplined theological training which would be to the credit of any minister and, above all, there has been the loyal service of devoted men and women who have sustained the work of the Church when no ordained minister has been available. This common ministry is always an offering. It is given to the Church and the world and to the Church in the world. It is, however, one thing to say that there are those who have fulfilled the ministry of Word and Sacraments while supporting themselves in trades or professions; it is quite another to sponsor part-time and leisure activities as the policy which must shape the ministry of the future.

We must not lose the universal implications of the 'laos' in an attempt to preserve a professional ministry. Being aware of the grievous historical gap between clerical and lay there is no need to demean the one in order to glorify the other. There is, as T.W. Manson used to argue so eloquently, some difference between ministers and laymen or there is not. Are ministers like Rugby League players who, having become professional, have lost their amateur status? The heart of the difficulty is to see the nature of ministry in the everyday world. In our search for primitive innocence we become distressed if we cannot take the New Testament teaching and simply apply it to the modern world. This, I think, is the reason for our acceptance of any programme which seems to say that anything a minister can do, a layman can do just as well. You thus feel compelled to make the step from the common ministry to the ministry of Word and Sacraments as simple as possible lest you appear to sponsor the clericalism you have been anxious to avoid. The only result I can see to this exercise is that part-time ministers will prove an expedient which will lower educational and other standards even while we protest the opposite. It seems clear that men engaged in trades and professions will owe loyalties to employers and families which it would be morally wrong to put in peril.

I find it not a little disturbing that ministers who in the past have been busily urging members to be active in the world, in politics and social work, now find themselves looking around for likely people to act as part-time ministers. If you once

accept responsibility for society and if the Church through the various local, national and international Councils spends much time on the affairs of the world, it does not seem rational to withdraw members, encouraging them, with excessive zeal to devote their spare time to Church activities. This is especially so at a time when Christian Members of Parliament and local councillors have shrunk to such small proportions that they are not easy to detect. The situation is made the more absurd when Ministers of the Word and Sacraments move too readily into highly paid positions in secular institutions of all kinds. Of course it will be objected that we should not separate the secular in this way on the plea that secular and sacred are one. If this be so then it still seems strange to put ministers into jobs which well could be filled by laymen and to be eager to take laymen and place them in positions for which ministers have been prepared. You ask 'Where are laymen to fulfil their ministry?' and I reply 'In the world of course. Where else would you suggest?' We must, I fear, draw the conclusion that it is the nature of ministry and the call to it which are in peril. This problem will not be solved by an expansive service offered to the world while the Word and Sacraments become occupations of leisure.

I hope that ministers, in spite of declining status, will not be as ready as the world in believing that their calling is finished. Some years ago you might have suspected that I was anxious only to preserve an occupation by which I have lived. But those years have gone. Although I have difficulty in believing it I can already see the end of the road as far as my own ministry is concerned and whatever bonus of years may be given to me does not alter the fact that I have much more behind me than before. So I must look to years beyond what I shall see. I suspect that indifference to the Church and its ministry will grow yet more. Ministers will be tempted to assume roles more recognised by society and they will want to play the games of success and promotion which so clearly mark our times. In this may they have some reward but in the end it will be in vain. The minister can never have a mind to status and ambition nor can he claim, as his fathers could, that he is the educated man of the town or village. He is not a solicitor, a doctor, a psychiatrist or even a social worker. If he attempts to adopt these roles the clothes will lie shabbily on him. The minister will live always in the realm of persons.

I do not believe that the ministry can serve merely by multiplying activities. Some men would give more if they did less. It is not the minister's way to be busier than others with a diary bulging with dates. He must not be lazy but neither need he be over anxious, preaching the Gospel of peace in a flurry. He will remain a lonely man who from this abyss understands the travail of the faceless multitude. Life at his calling, was revealed to him in the language of caring. Without caring, there is no ministry however impressive it may appear. It is the one thing that matters. It is celebrated in the life and dying of Jesus and here the theme will be renewed. There is no need for him to contrive ways of winning the people, for the Word is faithful and it will bring life from the grave and make known to men a world redeemed. That is the task of the ministry still - there is no other. But it takes patience and needs eternity in which to grow. 'Despise not the Ministry' said Goodwin of Harvard 'For God had but one Son and he was a minister'.

Howard Williams.

A SABBATH SOLILOQUY

I see that I last wrote an article for the Fraternal in 1953, so that I can hardly be accused of wearying my brethren. Perhaps, however, the fact that I am writing another one now may show how insidiously a habit sets in. If I were to write another one in 1990 it would have me in its grip.

Nevertheless, the temptation has been great. The editor has offered me a blank cheque - a metaphorical one - by inviting me to write on 'any subject of your choice'. This invitation happened to co-incide with a time when I did actually have a thought in my head. Such a rare confluence of constellations has spawned this article.

The idea came into my head through attending the autumn assembly of the Oxfordshire and East Gloucestershire Association, not an occasion when one would normally expect to be troubled by thoughts in the head. Under the genial presidency of Brian Butcher, however, and with an address from Frank Cooke which contained stimulus roughly equivalent to a pound of refined heroin, thoughts flew in all directions. Frank was my minister for a number of years and the experience has left its mark on him. Adversity of any kind deepens and ennobles a man.

Still reeling from the address, although caffeine was thoughtfully provided in the soluble form of coffee, we were herded into discussion groups. I am not a lover of discussion groups. I have every sympathy with old and square church members when bright and radical young ministers introduce them into worship time (I have just realised with a start that I am an old and square church member). It is not so much the discussion groups themselves perhaps, but those dreadful 'reporting back' sessions. I have seldom sat through any 'reporting back' session in any conference I have ever attended (and their name is Legion and there has never yet been a handy herd of pigs) which has failed to leave me, to quote Roget's Thesaurus, depressed, nervous, debilitated, irritated, bored and profoundly unenlightened.

The subject Frank had committed to our group was roughly this: 'How should churches encourage their members to use their Sundays?' And I suddenly realised I had never given the matter one thought. I am full of penetrating and original ideas on the semantic value of berith in Isa. 42:6 I may even write an article on it for the Fraternal in 1990. Yet all my ministry I have unthinkingly fallen into the pattern of church life in which I have grown up, that on Sunday we worship for one hour at 11.0 a.m. and another at 6.30 p.m., with perhaps an hour's hymn and ham-sandwich for the young people afterwards. It is graven on tablets of stone from Mount Sinai (or 'Southampton Row' as it is known in the Elohist and Deuteronomic sources).

Yet one only has to think about it for a minute (by the time our group got organized we thought about it for ten) to realise that, to say the least, it is not above criticism. We expect our people to rush around to get ready, prepare the dinner, leave it cooking, bath the baby, brush their boots and go to the now often considerable expense of getting to church, for one hour's activity. Then we dismiss them with our blessing. Later, we expect them to go through the whole process again for one more hour, an hour so inconveniently timed that it disrupts late afternoon and virtually

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To the Readers of the 'Fraternal'

Dear Friends

*'And who taught you to paint wind? There is a high gale
in that sky, and on this hilltop'.*

'Jane Eyre' - Charlotte Brontë.

An evening or so ago I switched on the T.V. set at about 10.30 to view a documentary on the impressionist painter Monet. It was a magnificent programme and brought vividly to my recollection my only visit to Paris where on a week's holiday I visited one morning the Impressionist galleries of the Louvre at the Jeu de Paume.

As we mounted a fine staircase we were arrested by a Manet painting so full of light that the capture of light seemed incredible. That was but a sample of what was to come in viewing paintings by Manet, Monet, Van Gogh and so on; a riot of colour but above all a feeling that one was being permitted to penetrate below the surface into another dimension of interpretation.

Germain Bazin in his 'Impressionist Paintings in the Louvre' writes 'Manet's art is in fact purely a problem of colour and not a problem of light as with Monet'. Problems.....!

This Impressionist programme reminded me too of the quotation from 'Jane Eyre'. I read all that comes my way of the Brontës. Charlotte Brontë and indeed all the Brontë women were capable of exercising a sixth sense, of escaping from the surface of their lives into below surface experiences. I am not so sure now that I am in the mood for the 'commercial'. You may feel that I am shooting or overshooting a line when I say that this Company in its work in and for the denomination really does seek to find that indefinable something, those below surface experiences which establish a sympathetic understanding here of the insurance needs of the churches. I fear I have put all this rather badly but if this letter does no more than send you back to the Impressionists or to the Brontës then I shall have done well after all.

Yours sincerely

C.J.L. Colvin

General Manager

all the evening. A very large part of the day is thus encroached on for which the end product is exactly two hour's time in church. And yet we are uncertain about the relation to each other of those two separate hours. For most of us the one is a duplicate copy of the other. Some of us complain that we minister to two churches, the 'morning' one and the 'evening' one. Others wish they did. Many of us minister to a church at one service and to a 'remnant weak and small' at the other. Any time and motion expert would break into a sixty page report on it at the drop of a hat, or the payment of a fee.

One of the things I have learned from the innumerable conferences and reporting back sessions I have attended is that, in the face of any problem, we must start by 'defining our goals'. What exactly are our goals in our Sunday activities? I suggest that there are three: worship, teaching and fellowship.

Quite often, at the moment, in our two isolated hours of activity we have to seek an uneasy compromise between the three, and all too often we have the disconcerting experience of falling between three stools and getting impaled on three horns of a dilemma, both of which can be very painful. Our preaching hovers between instruction and inspiration, and mine often fails to be either. With Family Worship having now, like love, conquered all, many Sunday School teachers never hear a sermon and, if they have no training class, receive no teaching themselves at any time. People who have heard many sermons seem to know neither their Bibles or their faith, and fellowship has to be crowded into disconcerting chatter in the few minutes before worship and blocking the aisles afterwards while the caretaker turns off the lights one by one in a series of growingly exasperated hints. Those who need even this degree of fellowship must have slipped out before the minister has had time to take off his spectacles and put on his welcoming smile. In many churches the mid-week service caters only for a static minority.

Could these goals be achieved better and our use of time on Sunday made more effective? I suggest they could. Why not bring those two hours together and add to them the time thus saved in travelling to and from church twice? In that way we could use an uninterrupted block of two and a half to three hours. This could be done in the morning or the evening (or, come to that, in the afternoon) according to the local situation. Here are a few suggestions of how such time could be used, recognising that each local variation of them would be infinite in practice.

The first hour could be used for teaching at all levels of the church family. I confess (and I am about to lose quite a few friends at a stroke) that I have yet to be favourably impressed by such examples of 'All-age Sunday school' as I have seen in action, although (come back, all is forgiven) there are no doubt excellent instances of it which have managed without a visit from me so far. I think my hesitations arise from the fact that they tend to be based on American models as their pattern (although the Welsh thought of it half a century before the Americans) and, what is worse, use American literature as the basis of their teaching programme. Such literature is usually an affront to intelligence and an obstacle to faith. There is no need for that, however. Our own B.U. produces some excellent training material. Or, by combining the experience of minister and teachers within the

community, most churches should be able to produce their own. This hour could be the place for all-out teaching of the Bible, the faith, Christian ethics (please!) the pattern of our church's mission and our Christian discipleship in the secular world. This would be the place for all our visual- and audio-aids, the discussion group, and every technique of communication we can devise or afford.

Then a break for a time of table fellowship. It may have often to be only coffee and biscuits (although home-made cakes would taste better and say more). Rather than leave our people to stand about in cliques already formed, let that be the time for introducing new people, discussing pastoral problems and church matters. Church business could be discussed during this time in an informal atmosphere much better than in our dreadfully formal church meetings which will insist on apeing the method and formality of an I.C.I. shareholders' meeting. In the light of all that is heard during this time, a short period of informal prayer could lift the life of the whole fellowship to God as naturally as family prayers at the breakfast table.

After that we can go back for an act of worship. It need not last for a full hour, especially if the notices have gone down with the coffee and biscuits. True the children will still need to go out before the sermon. Activities for them can be arranged, producing plays, visiting people, such as children in wards in the local hospital, old people or shut-ins; they could make things or just enjoy themselves with games. Why shouldn't church and Sunday be associated for them with a happy family atmosphere like the sitting-room at home? This would all in fact make for much more truly 'family' worship than what we do at present and dignify with that name.

It is possible to imagine being even more daring than that. If we had the whole church together for such a period of time would it not be possible now and again, once a month, once a quarter, to make a real meal of it? Could not the whole local family of God (which in one real sense at least includes the children of believers, cp. the New Testament passim) sit down to lunch, or supper, together? And would it not be possible if it did to re-unite the Lord's Supper and the Agape? I am not sure if it really was the abuses of this practice by the church at Corinth which began to lead to their separation, but if it was, have we not allowed this to deter us for rather a long time? Could not at least some of our churches be trusted not to practise those same abuses? Think how exciting it could be to be part of a Christian fellowship where the Lord's Supper was observed at a meal as it was in the Upper Room.

Anyway, after all that (and 'that' could be just what any local fellowship determined it should be) the rest of the day would be our people's own. We should have spent little more time in total than we ask them for now, but we should have made much better use of it, much more exciting use of it and used it to greater point.

Yes, I know it's easy for someone not in pastoral charge of a church to talk generally and airily like this. But what is the fun of being a lecturer if you can't spend your time telling other people to do what you lack the courage and ability to do yourself?

Rex Mason.

Common Religion.

To be asked to write on a subject of one's own choice opens at first glance a wide vista of possibilities. It is an invitation to be self-indulgent and to choose a theme that will otherwise never find expression; so this article reflects some musings and frustrations born out of the two jobs I try to do, minister of a down town church in Edinburgh, a church with a very special flavour as the 'liberal' Baptist Church in the city, and lecturer in Old Testament in the Glasgow Baptist College. Reading the Old Testament and living and working in central Edinburgh have driven my thoughts in one direction. Is there a bridge between explicit faith, as demanded by our churches for membership, and the common religion, or the residual religion, of people on the edge of the church and outside it altogether?

We are taught to have, and our people expect us to have, a very clear idea of what we believe, and why. We in turn are concerned with the Christian education of our congregations, so that they can 'give a reason for the faith that is in them', and so that they can share our understanding of the scriptures and of basic theology. This is the common desire of evangelical and catholic Christians, even if the stress on intellectual apprehension has been more characteristic of the churches of the Reformed tradition. But we are all aware that in the churches there can exist a very low level of explicit Christian understanding. We deplore theological illiteracy, and respond with pleasure to those who have a studious bent. We are not always able to accept commitment on any other basis. We are frankly puzzled or offended by those who come to church once a month, and seem to think that they have done their duty and we are only too aware of those who never come at all.

It would be churlish, and untrue to reality, to dismiss as unbelievers all those who did not find the same joy in the sanctuary as we do, or those who do not appreciate the finer points of Pauline theology. One of the challenges to evangelism in our time is to come to an understanding of minimal or residual faith, of what for the purposes of the title I have called common religion.

Let me illustrate what I mean. On Christmas Eve our church will have the biggest congregation of the year. At midnight there will be people in church who cannot come at the divinely appointed hours on Sunday. There will be neighbours from the large and opulent flats, and from the rooming houses that jostle each other in this fascinatingly varied corner of Edinburgh's New Town. (I should explain late eighteenth and early nineteenth century New Town!) There will be a scattering of our regulars, come in from the distant suburbs to cook the fellowship meal. There will be folks' friends and relatives. There will be bands of young people who appear to roam the streets looking for a church open and lighted. Not all the worshippers will be totally sober, and I am fairly sure to have a curious dialogue with one of the old boys from across the road. At midnight the candles are lit, and the congregation wish each other the compliments of the season with varying degrees of enthusiasm and physical contact. Then out into the frosty darkness with many a shout and the minister's wife well hugged by strange young men..... then the reflection as we

set out the presents in the Manse...was that a Christian service or some sort of Baalite orgy? And the answer, as always; this was an appropriate way to greet the birth of the Christ Child. But what a long way from the gospel Tea Meeting, or the straightforward evangelistic service! It is common religion, strongly laced with sentimentality, that has been touched.

Or take Remembrance Sunday, to which I react with perhaps less sympathy. The Boys' Brigade are on parade; and there in the back pews are the ex-members, genuinely glad to be in church, reverently keeping the silence, recalling the war and the days in the Brigade, and then, some of them, retiring from public worship for another year, no doubt muttering about captive audiences and abrasive ministers.

In more fertile areas of the city Baptist ministers are approached by total strangers to have their babies 'done' 'But we don't christen'. 'That doesn't matter, so long as the weans' done like its big brother'. What have we touched here? Is it base superstition, growing out of bastard Calvinism? If the baby is not christened it'll go to Hell, or at least it won't thrive, or possibly it won't have a name. Or is it that parents, however inarticulately, try to thank God for their children, and look for His help?

A young couple come to be married. It may be the girl's mother who has insisted on a minister performing the ceremony, but young folk who otherwise seem quite pagan soften towards the Christian faith when faced with marriage. Again is this a superstition - you are not properly married if there is no minister there - or is it a genuine, if unexpressed, desire to acknowledge divine help, and the need for grace? And there are very few funerals where there is no service.

At the crisis points of life the majority turn to the church, and feel they have the right to do so. The minister, and in Scotland, especially the Parish minister, refuses to perform a rite of passage at his peril. Theological and ecclesiastical stringency demand selective service, but there is a deep value placed on the most tenuous links with the church.

Listen to what unsophisticated people say when they talk seriously and stop trying to impress the ministry. Residual, and sometimes very curious religion, lies not far beneath the surface. Scotland, for good or ill, has a Calvinist heritage. Poor John Calvin and his follower, the alarming John Knox, are blamed for everything, from Edinburgh's lack of an Opera House to the licensing laws. But a predestinarian religion with a strong work ethic underlies much popular 'faith'. 'WE maun submit' says Scott's old fishwife. We must take what's coming to us. It is almost a summing up of the Scottish character. We are afraid of claiming success, or of saying that the children are well, or of boasting, in case that angry and jealous Calvinist deity punishes us for our hubris. 'Don't speak too soon'. On one level this is an explanation of national traits, and even the Roman Catholics claim that their faith is gloomy and scotticized, but at another it is a tribute to some sort of awe of the Almighty. It helps to prevent the articulation of the faith. 'I leave all these deep things to the ministers...' This curious humility is deep seated and probably ineradicable.

There are other traces of popular religion. Sunday is hardly kept as it used to be, but there is strong emotional resistance to the opening of pubs by many who are not explicitly Christians. Only brazen women hang out their washing on Sundays. In some places the swings in the parks are padlocked on the Lord's Day. The deplorable attitude to drink makes drunkenness almost a sacred ritual, and drives many Christians into extreme

WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION.

409 Barking Road, Plaistow, London E13 8AL

My dear Brother Minister,

It is a joy to be able to report that we have now entered on the first stage of our new building project on our Barking Road site.

We recently entered into an arrangement with the Baptist Men's Movement Housing Association, whereby they leased something like an acre of our land at Barking Road for the purpose of erecting flats and flatlets, mainly for 'supportive' housing for old people.

The first stage of the project is the alterations to the Church premises to enable us to bring our premises up to date and effective for modern needs. We are reducing the worship area of the church and making more space available for halls and smaller rooms, and putting in a completely new and sophisticated form of heating installation, which should keep us all warm for the next few years! The builders are in on the job now as I dictate this letter, and we hope that the work will be done by the end of April 1977.

When this job is finished we can pull down our large premises known as the Angas Institute and then the builders can start the foundations for the new flats. We shall have a little bit of chaos for the next year or two, but we feel that what we are doing is right and we are grateful for the prayers and interest of so many of our friends, and we would urge everybody to go on praying for us.

Alongside this new development we shall proceed with the usual work of the Mission. The Old Ladies Home in Rest-a-While continues to serve the older folk, and we have many testimonies of the worthwhileness of the work being done there. Marnham Hse Settlement is full of a very diverse assortment of young men and women who need our kind of hostel accommodation, and there is never any dearth of customers!

Greenwoods continues its tremendously varied forms of ministry to all kinds of people in need, and Ronald Messenger and his fine team of helpers are doing a magnificent job there.

We are sorry to have to report that our Warden at Orchard Hse, Mr. George Hickmore, has told us that he must resign at the end of July 1977 for family reasons. He has served us there with his wife for some ten years and this pending retirement will be a real milestone in the History of Orchard Hse. We are looking for an able and qualified man to follow him, and if anyone has any ideas on the subject, perhaps they would be kind enough to write to tell me about them.

So you see, we are still busy. We are grateful for the interest and concern of our friends in the churches, and if you would like to know more we have a very good Mission colour filmstrip, with tape or manuscript commentary. May God's blessing be on you and your loved ones, and ministry

Yours very Sincerely

Stanley Turl
Mission Superintendent.

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teetotalism. And small denominations like ours are looked on as somehow indecently enthusiastic.²

It is possible then to draw up the form of a 'national religion' and to formulate its beliefs. According to the sort of polls that the newspapers run, most of us believe in God, in an afterlife, and in a Christian morality. Religion should be taught in schools, partly because 'if it does no good it won't do any harm'. Ministers should believe what they preach and live out their teachings - and dress like ministers. Churches should have 'bright services', and prayer is useful in extreme cases of necessity. A creed, a code of ethics, a set-apart priesthood, and a pattern for personal practise are all present in this scant and rather caricatured account of the common religion of my country. It is also a rather exclusive religion. Protestants and Roman Catholics ought to be educated separately, although opinion varies widely on this, and intermarriage is fraught with difficulties. Other religions - except Judaism - are looked on as very strange and recent incomers.

It would be simpler for the evangelist if the nation had reverted to heathenism. Very often he proceeds on this assumption, exhorting the congregation or the individual to turn from darkness to light, not to trust in membership of the church or in baptism in infancy but to come face to face with Christ. Such residual belief as the hearer has is described as the filthy rags of righteousness, or vague superstition. If the evangelist belongs to a sect, then such an approach, calling for a radical change and a completely new start, is quite correct, and one reason for the success of the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses may be that their emissaries build intelligently upon the desire for religion that remains in so many people, and that they say 'all you have been taught is wrong. This is the way the holy books must be read, and this is how to interpret the way of God'. The bridge between the worshipping and believing church, and the occasionally attending and partly believing majority is not going to be built for most people, on the old foundation of evangelism by proclamation.

The Roman Catholic Church, faced with the question of what to do about millions of nominal Christians in South America and many other places, has made a characteristically pastoral and wise statement in the document 'Evangelii Nuntiandi' Popular Diety, here we touch upon an aspect of evangelization which cannot leave us insensitive...One finds among the people particular expressions of the search for God and for faith, both in the regions where the Church has been established for centuries, and where she is in the course of being established. These expressions were for a long time regarded as less pure, and were sometimes despised, but today they are being almost everywhere rediscovered. Popular religiosity of course certainly has its limits. It is often subject to penetration by many distortions of religion and even superstition...But if it is well oriented, above all by a pedagogy of evangelization, it is rich in values. It manifests a thirst for God which only the simple and poor can know. It makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice... It involves an acute awareness of profound attributes of God: fatherhood, providence and loving and constant presence...when it is well oriented, this popular religiosity can be more and more for multitudes of our people a true encounter with God in

Jesus Christ.³ But how, to use the Vaticanese jargon, can we orient the religiosity which certainly exists amongst our people towards a true encounter with God in Christ? Here

the Old Testament provides insights and guidelines of great value. The Old Testament has become an embarrassment to Christians in all sorts of ways. I detect an impatience with it even among students with a conservative view of scripture. It is treated as a reservoir of illustrations for sermons about specifically Christian doctrines, or it is so spiritualized that its reality ceases to matter, and everything is subordinated to the intricacies of typology. The setting of the Old Testament stories, the depth of imagery and vision in the prophetic oracles, the cultic activities reflected in the Psalms, and the self-questioning of Ecclesiastes and Job do not seem to be adequately understood by literate Christians. The arguments about documentary hypotheses and authorship have not helped, when the focus of attention in the Book of Jonah is the evidence that is gathered proving that some forms of fish can swallow and spit out some forms of man, and the universalism of the mercy of God is overlooked. The Old Testament is rejected by the 'enlightened', who are offended at its apparent cruelty, spiritualized by the orthodox, and simply left alone as too difficult by most people.

The Old Testament stands before the New not only temporally, not only because it is fulfilled in the New, but because it can be an introduction to the Gospel, a link between the common religion and the explicit Christian profession. Writing from prison, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, 'My thoughts and feelings seem to be getting more and more like the Old Testament, and no wonder, I have been reading it much more than the New for the last few months. It is only when one knows the ineffability of the Name of God that one can utter the name of Jesus Christ. It is only when one loves life and the World so much that without them everything would be gone, that one can believe in the resurrection and a new world.⁴....

And how the men of the Old Testament love life! The vigour and enthusiasm of the heroes and the minor characters, the venom and invective of the prophets, the presuppositions of the Wisdom writers, the lack of an explicit doctrine of an after-life, and the consequent concentration on this world and the good life make our lives seem quite anaemic in comparison. There is a certain tradition in Christian spirituality that seems to have cut loose from the Old Testament reality and gives cause for Swinburne's line - 'Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean, the world has grown grey from thy breath'. The Old Testament, read as a book and not as a sort of secret code, recalls us to the values of this world and prepares us for the encounter with the new dimension which comes from Jesus.

Even the Baal-worship, so hated by the prophets, witnesses to the desire for life. For fertility rites, the celebration of the death and rebirth of Nature, the desire to appease the deities of the soil, while they produced debased practices, and encouraged an unrighteous religion, nevertheless bear witness to a search for unity with nature and its forces. Certainly the prophets and Deuteronomy were right to oppose a religion which thought it could manipulate the divine, and in the name of Yahweh to proclaim that God is righteous and is not at all impressed with elaborate sacrifices and immoral rites, with green trees and high places and the offering of first

born sons in the fire of Molech. But the common religion of the people could not be ignored, and the prophets were not afraid to take Baal-words and concepts and transfer them to Yahwism. Hosea talks of God's relationship to Israel in terms of sexual love and marriage which precisely mirror Baalite mythology, and the popular religion is transmuted into the purer and better concepts of Yahwism. It may be that there is an indication here of how seriously we must take common religion. If folk want something done to their baby, something said over the little one, then who are we to say 'Go away, you are not a member of my church'. Surely rather we have discovered common ground on which to build and explain the greater insights of the Christian faith.

Another strand in the Old Testament which is being much explored in scholarly work these days is Wisdom literature. Here is counsel for those who want to get on at court, and in ordinary life, and here are discussions of the still unsolved problems of evil and suffering, which arise as a sort of counterpoint within the movement, in Job and Ecclesiastes, and in some of the Psalms. It has been clearly shown that it is in Wisdom that Israel is most like her neighbours. Much of Proverbs can be paralleled in Egyptian sources, and the latter chapters may not even be from Israel. Here, in the practical teaching about life, there is less distinction between Israel and the nations. There is a whole area of life in which Christians do not differ from unbelievers. Good manners, polite behaviour, common decency, are part of the heritage of humanity. This is another common ground, on which Christian proclamation can build. That Wisdom becomes personified and is a precursor of the logos idea is important, but should not blind us to what goes before, the sheer good sense of Wisdom lore, distilled from experience of many ancient peoples.

It has often been pointed out that the Old Testament draws portraits; warts and all. Some very curious behaviour is simply chronicled and we are left to draw our own conclusions. 'Why is it', asks Bonhoeffer, 'that in the Old Testament men lie so frequently to the glory of God, that they commit trickery, robbery, adultery, and even whoredom (see the genealogy of Jesus), that they doubt, blaspheme and curse, whereas there is no sign of these things in the New Testament? It's easy to say that the Old Testament represents an earlier stage in religious evolution, but that is too naive, for after all it is the same God in both Testaments'⁵

The law and the Prophets make it quite plain that such behaviour as Jacob's cheating of his brother is not to become a pattern for the rest of us, yet the Old Testament can be very tolerant of the most aberrant behaviour. Have we become so theologically aware that we can no longer see people except as objects of divine wrath and mercy. The Old Testament will recall us to a realistic view of ourselves and others, and another piece of common ground is occupied.

Miskotte, after pointing out that the Calvinist nations have become aware of the Old Testament through generations of preaching it in a literal way, and have developed some good characteristics from this history, says 'The question, what do you think of the Christ? and the question how do you read the Old Testament? are closely related to each other.' The whole of his difficult book deals with the necessity in the post-Christian world of knowing the Old Testament as perception of

life.

That there is a great reservoir of remanent religion is undeniable. It is our attitude that is in question. In our laudable evangelistic endeavours can we afford to discard all the popular manifestations, all the syncretistic phenomena of today's Baalism, and go at once for a pure monotheistic Christianity?

Are there not signs of understanding that could be tolerable within our churches so that our tarnished image of the 'perfect community', which is at the same time 'full of hypocrites' could be repolished and we become indeed the company of God's people on the move towards understanding and goodness? Do we feel threatened by the slightly godly folk who appear to use the church and to make a convenience of God? We ought to be able to accept the slightest shade of interest as the operation of God's common grace expressing itself in common religion, and finding common ground, reach out for the uncommon, for the heroic trust that is faith in Jesus Christ.

Derek Murray.

Notes.

- 1/ Wean-wee-one-baby.
- 2/ But every Scot of a certain age can sing 'Running over' and thats the chorus that ought to be taught in Sunday School!
- 3/ Evangelization in the Modern World 1976 p. 59/60.
- 4/ D. Bonhoeffer letters, papers for prison p. 79.
- 5/ Ibid.
- 6/ K. Miskotte. When Gods are silent p. 334.

Study Programmes for Fraternalists.

Local fraternalists are sometimes uncertain how best to spend the time available to them at their meetings. To help use it profitably the B.M.F. has commissioned three ministers to write introductory notes to books that could well be used as a study basis. These notes are now available and obtainable from Wally Wragg. They are:

- 'The Faith of the People of God' by John Macquarrie (SCM)
-notes by Adrian Thatcher.
- 'St. Augustine, Pastoral Theologian' by Trevor Rowe (Epworth)
-notes by Maurice Williams.
- 'Life Together' by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (SCM)
-notes by George Neal.

ARTISANS OF A NEW HUMANITY

Convalescence, following an operation, gave me a longer vacation than usual this summer, and I was able to take away a fairly wide selection of books for reading. Among them were the five volumes entitled 'A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity' by Father Juan Luis Segundo and his colleagues at the Peter Faber Center of Montevideo (published by the Maryknoll Press in New York). This has proved to be the most exciting and stimulating theological exploration which I have encountered.

Segundo has the reputation of being the outstanding Roman Catholic theologian in Latin America. He and his colleagues are concerned to relate their thinking to the contemporary situation on that continent and to do it at a level which makes sense to the average layman. The five volumes, therefore have their origin in seminars for a cross-section of lay people, each lasting about four days. They take the form of a series of lectures, fully annotated, which the participants then discussed, returning at the end to pool their findings.

In the published series each lecture is followed by a longer section entitled 'Clarifications', which amplifies the theme expounded, and at the end of every volume there is a set of questions designed to stimulate discussion.

The results of this study are undoubtedly disturbing to Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants alike; for they direct attention to a way forward beyond all entrenched positions; and that is disturbing to anyone who thinks he has already arrived at final truth. As far as Segundo is concerned, we are always 'in via' learning to penetrate insights of the past.

The treatment is profoundly biblical, but the exegesis has a freshness and originality which stems from engagement with the contemporary situation in which the author finds himself. He holds that there can be no appeal to the Bible which does not recognise that interpretation is involved in the reading of it, and that is conditioned by the social milieu of the interpreter. Therefore, insights are available to us that were not available to our forefathers, and these in turn are provisional, awaiting depth and amplification which will be possible only for our successors. The promise of our Lord that the Spirit would guide his disciples into all truth is to be understood within the context of telling them that there were many things which they were not yet ready to hear. This is not relativism, but relativity which is a very different matter. Specifically, Segundo maintains that we have to recognize that the Bible has up to our time been interpreted from the standpoint of the occident, from the perspective of the wealthy and the privileged. All that is changing and now we have to learn to read the Bible through the eyes of the poor and oppressed.

This leads directly to what is central to Segundo's theology: the theme of salvation or liberation which he maintains is the activity of God for the sake of the whole of the world. It is not the preserve of the Church or the possession of an elect few. All are included in God's salvific purpose. Indeed, it is easier to discern the work of grace outside the Church than inside if Christians insist that this is

their prerogative.

What then happens to the doctrine of justification by faith alone? Here Segundo examines in depth the meaning of faith which, according to him, is always expressed in love. They are opposite sides of the same coin. Where there is faith there is love, and where there is love there is faith. The key passage is the parable of the sheep and the goats. Faith is giving yourself away to God and that happens when you give yourself to other people. The orthodox believer is not always the man of faith and faith may be exercised without orthodox belief. 'Not everyone that says unto me Lord, Lord shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but whoever does the will of my father which is in heaven'. Where then is the difference between the Church and the world? The former is the community of those who know of God's saving activity in Christ and the Church is intended to be a sign to the world of its salvation. It is truly the Church when it is engaged in loving other people in no sentimental sense, but in actively co-operating in man's liberation from everything that prevents him being fully human. That puts the Church on the side of the poor and the oppressed, those with whom Jesus so clearly identified himself.

If anyone should suppose that this is a rehash of justification through merit or a redressing of the old social gospel, he would be completely mistaken. Segundo cuts right across the controversies of the time of the reformation and takes us into new and profoundly biblical territory. For him salvation is by grace through faith expressed in love. But he is asking the penetrating question where this is to be found and whether Catholics and Protestants alike have retreated into a self-centred ghetto which God will not acknowledge.

The other major theme which Segundo expounds at length is that of liberty. Again he moves beyond the old controversy about freedom and determinism, insisting that creative liberty is the essential characteristic of God and His gift of grace to men. In pregnant sentences following a critique of Tillich, Robinson etc., he says 'God is not the depth or ground of man. He is a personal reality who summons us to a dialogue between his liberty and our own'. Liberty is essentially the creation of something new and its exercise is what counts in being fully human. It is impossible in the compass of this brief review to explore the richness of Segundo's treatment of the subject. It casts a new light on the problem of evil as well as on almost every major theme in Christian theology.

These five volumes, none of them very long and refreshingly readable would serve as an admirable basis for a series of studies in *Fraternalism*. While at many points they would lead to sharp disagreement and certainly to lively discussion, nobody could fail to profit from them by being compelled to think and think again about the faith we profess.

Paul Rowntree Clifford.

Authority; Baptism; Church; Ministry.

A series of four booklets published by Baptist Union Publications Department.
50p each.

One of the gains brought about by the ecumenical movement is that Church spokesmen are less concerned to beat their denominational drums and more inclined to present the positive contribution their traditions have to make in relationship to the experience and understanding of the whole people of God. These four books are the product of this improved environment and as a result are less self assertive than much denominational writing in previous generations. This is to be welcomed as it is a mark of maturity to be able to subject one's beliefs and those of one's church to honest self-appraisal. That is not to say, however, that the writers have torn down distinctive Baptist emphases or apologized for them. They present their subjects in the light of Baptist History and practice and its basis in our understanding of the will and purpose of God. This is not seen in isolation but set in the context of the work of God's spirit in the wider church and in the movements of history.

B.R.White deals with the most difficult subject, that of AUTHORITY. He reminds us that: 'The final source of all authority is the God whom we know in Jesus Christ... So the problem for every Christian is how he is rightly to discern what is God's truth and what is God's purpose' (p5) This is mediated through the Bible, tradition and the contemporary understanding of the fellowship of believers. Having outlined the approach to his subject, the writer traces the historical background. The early English Baptists are considered and Baptists seen in their ecumenical context. A chapter deals with tradition across the Christian centuries and another with what the writer calls the Classic Baptist views of Authority. An invigorating final chapter deals with authority among Baptists today, This last section may cause consternation to some, but one would ask that it be read with honesty and care. Anyone reading it in such a spirit will be less inclined to oversimplify the nature of authority although he will be given tried and tested guidelines to help him discern God's truth and purpose for Christian living today. On page 9 for Pope Pius VI read Paul VI, and for Col 1:8 read Col 2:8.

BAPTISM by John Matthews is a nugget of a book with much valuable material compressed into a very short space. The Biblical background is clearly sketched, the historical developments outlined, the questions posed by the Baptist understanding of Baptism fairly presented and the wider issues raised in current ecumenical discussion responded to positively. Fraternalists could have a profitable time considering the chapter headed: 'Sacraments or symbol?' If they cared to invite representatives of other traditions they could respond to the chapters on 'Baptism and re-baptism' 'Baptism and membership' 'Water and Spirit'. Those in our Churches who consider that there is only one kind of Baptist Church should study the section on Baptism and Fellowship to see the rich diversity there has been and is, in our tradition.

One issue he deals with helpfully, although all too briefly, is that of the

child and the Church. This subject needs to be considered at depth in the light of our more extensive knowledge of child development and in relationship to the practice of some American Baptists in baptizing at the early age of nine. Perhaps John Matthews could be encouraged to expand on the thoughts he produces here.

Gordon Martin writes on the CHURCH with balance and sound judgement. In his introduction he reminds us of a number of ways in which the nature and purpose of the Church is misunderstood. He then sets about correcting such misunderstandings by providing us with a high view of the Church. The rise of the Baptist churches is traced and the emphases which go to make up a Baptist understanding of the Church outlined. 'Baptists and the Church of the seventies' is the heading of the final section where the writer explores the nature of the Church as the community of believers, the body of Christ, and the people of God, discussing three basic functions of the Church - worship, education and fellowship. Although he mentions witness he confines it to that of the individual and the church's role in sustaining him. It would have been interesting to have had his ideas on the mission of the church as a corporate body in terms of evangelism, service and prophetic ministry. This, however, is not to detract from what he has given us in this book. A careful reading will enhance our view of the nature and function of the church.

John Nicholson deals with the MINISTRY and begins by reminding us of tensions which have existed in the Baptist understanding of the ministry, particularly that between a general and a special ministry, and he traces these from our beginnings to the present day. He discusses the ministry in the present and future and some pertinent questions are raised under the heading, 'The nature of the local Church.' A view of what the ecumenical church of the future might be is presented and we are encouraged to think of a more varied pattern for the ministry within an ecumenical context. Much thought-provoking material is contained in the chapter 'Who is a Baptist Minister?'. This is a stimulating book which should encourage us to explore different patterns of ministry from a position of relative strength before event overtake us and we have to do it from a position of weakness.

The books are attractively produced and the material clearly presented. Despite their length, thirty pages, they will be helpful guides to Baptists involved in ecumenical situations who are trying to present a positive and honest view, or useful as a basis for discussion groups. It is unfortunate that reading lists haven't been provided for those wishing to explore the subjects at more depth.

Robert S. Smart.

The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,
Volume 2, G-Pre.

Editor: Colin Brown. Paternoster Press. 1023 pp. £18.00.

Volume One of the above Dictionary was reviewed in the Fraternal for June 1976, and on the basis of a random sample of its contents was warmly recommended. Frequent consultation in the ensuing months has only led to a greater appreciation of its value; and now Volume Two can also be warmly welcomed. The format is the same as that of the first volume, except that the glossary of technical terms contained in the first volume, has naturally not been repeated in this present volume.

The articles are presented under English titles, and contain a clear, concise, but nevertheless thorough discussion of each New Testament word as it is used in Classical literature, the Old Testament and the New Testament, with much helpful cross-referencing to other articles, and finish with a full and up-to-date bibliography for those wishing to pursue a subject further. This volume contains 106 main articles, comprising in all 256 studies of Greek words or themes. The policy of adding to the articles translated from the German work, which has formed the basis for this English edition, has been continued, and among the list of contributors are a number of well-known and much respected scholars. In addition to a number of contributions from Colin Brown, there are articles from such as F.F. Bruce, J.D.G. Dunn, R.K. Harrison, D.Hill, R.P. Martin and L. Morris, Even a brief perusal of an article is bound to lead to illumination for the book is a mine of valuable information. The article on 'Gospel', for example, dealing with the nature and content of the Good News, would not only add to our understanding, but in providing such a comprehensive discussion would enrich our presentation of that Gospel; in just a few pages the whole subject of parables and their interpretation is dealt with in a way that can only stimulate our preaching and teaching; and an article like that on the Pharisees would remove some of our misunderstanding of them, and our subsequent dismissal of them as hypocrites! And so one could go on. Clearly in a work so large, with so many contributors, there will be areas where the conclusion reached may be thought less than satisfactory; but the discussion is always full and fair, the standard seeming to be uniformly high throughout the volume. The price of course is high (but note the special price of £14.00 until 30th April 1977) but it is an eminently worthwhile investment, guaranteed to be a constant source of information, enlightenment, and thus inspiration. In the Preface to this volume the editor says that 'the over-riding aim has been to present a concise and yet balanced guide to the theological vocabulary of the New Testament in the light of international contemporary scholarship', and 'to enable the reader to explore for himself the new avenues of discovery that have been opened up and to weigh for himself the views (of) scholars who have contributed to the modern study of the Bible'. This second volume demonstrates how successfully these goals have been attained.

John F. Maile.