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A table of contents for *The Fraternal / Baptist Ministers Journal* can be found here:

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CONTENTS

Politics and the Christian Vision	3
by The Revd. Paul Rowntree Clifford, M.A., Secretary of the Foundation for the Study of Christianity and Society	
From Melbourne to Britain	12
by the Revd. P. Clements-Jewry, M.A., B.D., Minister, Wigan Baptist Church	
Ministers' Holidays 1981	18
Music in Worship	19
by The Revd. Rodney G. Macann Minister, High Wycombe Baptist Church	
Of Interest to You	28

Politics and The Christian Vision

Most Christians would subscribe to the proposition that the gospel has social, if not political, implications. But their basis for doing so is by no means clear. In his controversial Reith Lectures¹ Dr Edward Norman stung a good many people by declaring that in recent years the pronouncements of Church leaders on social and political questions have reflected the prevailing fashions of the secular intelligentsia rather than being derived from the gospel. And there is more than a grain of truth in this. We have only to ask ourselves to spell out the theological basis of our own political commitment to see how uncomfortably near the bone Norman has struck home. Most Christians, I suspect, make up their minds politically for very much the same reasons as those who acknowledge no Christian profession at all, the only difference being that they believe that, as *Christians*, they have a responsibility to become involved and cast their votes at elections. It is one thing to believe that a Christian has social and political responsibilities; it is another to base a particular commitment on specifically Christian grounds.

The Theological Task

Perhaps Norman's most important contribution in the Reith Lectures was to make clear that there is an urgent theological task to be undertaken. While I disagree profoundly with his underlying assumptions and the conclusions he draws from them, I believe it to be imperative to answer his challenge by a radical reappraisal of the theological justification for social and political engagement. This is one of the stimuli that has led to the initiative of the British Council of Churches in establishing a Foundation for the Study of Christianity and Society with the formation of groups of academics and others drawn from various facets of public life in a number of university centres throughout the British Isles. But this could not have happened unless there had also been widespread concern about the state of our society and the desire to explore what contribution Christians have to make to its future shaping.

In this connection it is encouraging to observe that evangelicals who have had little to say in the past about the social and political implications of the gospel have begun to make their voices heard and have opened up a serious theological exploration of the biblical basis for social and political action. This was brought to focus at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974 which issued the following declaration:

We affirm that God is both the Creator and the Judge of all man. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually

exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expressions of our doctrine of God and man, our love for our neighbour and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without works is dead. (Acts 17:26, 31; Gen 18:25; Isa. 1:17, Psa. 45:7; Gen. 1:26,27; Jas 3:9; Lev. 19:18; Luke 6:27,35; Jas 2:14-26; John 3:3,5; Matt. 5:20; 6:33; 2 Cor. 3:18; Jas 2:20).

This is an important and a most welcome declaration. But, like all resolutions hammered out in the course of a large conference, it leaves a lot of questions unanswered, ambiguities to be clarified, and implications explored. Moreover, the appendage of a selection of biblical references gives the impression of having been designed to satisfy those who use the Scriptures for providing proof texts, whereas the whole biblical testimony has to be taken into account; and that opens up a range of difficult questions to which eschatology is central. The fact is that, whether we stand in the evangelical, liberal or catholic traditions, we shall not have our socio-political stance firmly grounded unless we have first wrestled with the very formidable case that can be made out against a distinctively Christian contribution to the shaping of earthly society². Out of this may emerge not necessarily a consensus on what particular policies should be advocated, but a firmer grasp of the essential basis for reaching practical conclusions. I turn, then, to the objections that have to be met if we are to take our stand as Christians for active socio-political engagement.

Individualism and the Gospel

Despite the Lausanne declaration and the pronouncements of main stream Church leaders, there is a widespread belief inside and outside the Churches that religion, and Christianity in particular, is a private concern of the individual and has nothing to do with the structures of society. For the committed Christian it has to do with his personal relationship with God and the church is the place where the means of grace are made available to him and his inner life nourished so that he may grow in spiritual stature and be the better prepared for eternal life beyond the grave after the short span of years given to him on earth. As far as the proverbial man-in-the-street is concerned, religion is a matter of personal predilection, of interest only to those so inclined and the churches are voluntary associations of the like-minded. It is perhaps not too much of a caricature to say that, in popular estimation, the practice of Christianity is on a par with such activities as bee-keeping and stamp collecting. The notion that it is essentially social and has to do with man as a social being does not cross the horizon of most

peoples'minds.

This is, of course, the obvious answer to thorough-going individualism. The idea of an isolated individual is an abstraction. Human beings are what they are in relation to one another. Babies are dependent on their mothers from birth and grow up in an expanding network of relationships which mould the shaping of character from day to day. Left alone, the baby would die. Isolated from all human contact, an adult would disintegrate. The Christian way of putting this is to say that man is made for fellowship and community. There is a sense in which Robinson Crusoe could not be a Christian on his desert island without the arrival of Man Friday. If, then, a person in the true sense of the word is a social being, it is artificial to drive a wedge between spiritual and political concerns. Decisions made about the structures of society affect the way in which we are related to one another day in and day out.

This of itself, however, is much too simplistic an answer to the contention that religion is a private, internal concern of a man's or a woman's relationship with God. There is a very real sense in which this is true, and there is a danger that those who concentrate on the social and political implications of the gospel will become obsessed with programmes and policies to the neglect of real people in their deepest needs, and in the end of making what the late Herbert Butterfield called "vast human sacrifices to abstract nouns". The Churches' ongoing mission of evangelism and ministering to individual need by word and sacrament is not to be downgraded in favour of structural change, however important that may be. The Lausanne declaration was justified in refusing a too simplistic equation of liberation and salvation. Whatever the structures of society, they will not guarantee the ultimate satisfaction of human need, the reconciliation of a man or a woman to God.

The oft-repeated critique of other-worldly religion as 'pie in the sky' can no less be brought to bear on those who place all their hopes on social and political change. What value is that to countless people who will never live to see the social transformation that is being advocated or who will find that structural change leaves their deepest needs untouched or simply produces another set of problems for them to face? In his commentary on the Lausanne declaration, Dr Klaus Bockmuehl questions the validity of using the quotation from Isaiah 61:1 by our Lord in the synagogue at Nazareth as the charter for Christian social ethics. "What he preached actually occurred, but, like all prophet's works, only in individual cases as a prophetic anticipation of the end of time Jesus did not empty the prisons".³ In other words, each individual has his own 'eschaton', and for many this is imminent in temporal terms; it cannot be resolved without remainder into a transformed state of society in the future.

However that is not all there is to be said. Bockmuehl's exegesis of Luke 4:16-20 is not to be taken as definitive. Rather it opens up the most difficult and complex question of the Christian understanding of a person which must not be defined in purely individualistic or social terms and which must allow for spiritual depth as well as visible manifestation. Re-appraisal of the nature of human personality is a necessary foundation for a genuinely Christian contribution to social and political engagement.

The Perspective of the Apostolic Age

Although this may be admitted, the argument being conceded that man is a social being whose relationships have to be taken into account in any balanced assessment of his vocation, the case for specifically political involvement has not thereby been established. Indeed, there is a 'prima-facie' case for saying that this is ruled out by an appeal to the witness of the apostolic Church. It appears that Jesus himself and those who bore testimony to him had nothing directly to say about the structural organization of society, and it can be argued that modern political theology, such as that emanating from Latin America, seems to take its inspiration from the Old Testament rather than the New. Plainly the Hebrews were concerned with the ordering of the life of Israel and its relationship to the surrounding powers (according to the will of God), what we should today call home and foreign policy. But was not the proclamation of a kingdom "not of this world" a radical redefinition of the purpose of God and a repudiation of the relevance of economic, political and social change? The point was trenchantly made by Edward Norman when he said "A reading of the Gospels less indebted to present values will reveal the true Christ of history in the spiritual depiction of a man who directed others to turn away from the preoccupations of human society", adding "in the Gospels the teachings of the Saviour describe a personal rather than a social morality".⁴

Those who are inclined to take this view are not necessarily committed thereby to a purely individualistic interpretation of the gospel. They would be as ready as anyone else to insist on its social implications, but these would be spelt out in terms of inter-personal relations seen within the context of the Church: the new Israel, the divine society of committed believers where mutual love is the norm: a society defined by its separation from a dying world. The gospel is therefore directed to the saving of souls and their incorporation within the Christian fellowship, not towards the reformation of a world which lies under condemnation.

The challenge of this view needs to be taken seriously not only because of its manifest appeal to many Christians, but because it purports to be based on the gospel as originally given, and appears to be borne out by the lamentable failure of people throughout history to order their societies in such a way as to enshrine humane, let alone spiritual, values. Nevertheless, it rests, at least in part, on a lack of appreciation that the message of Jesus and its interpretation by the primitive Church have to be understood in the context of the first century A.D. Whatever the expectations of Jesus himself, the early Christians clearly believed that the end of the world was imminent. When the apocalyptic hope began to fade and they had to adjust to the indefinite continuance of the historical process, they needed to come to terms with the secular powers, and the way in which they should do so was formulated, for example, by St Paul in the opening verses of Romans 13. The Roman Empire provided the context within which the primitive Church had to find its vocation. There was nothing the early Christians could do about the imperial power as such; they just had to accept it; and in any case had not Jesus warned his hearers about the futility of taking on the might of Rome with the inevitable consequence of the destruction of Jerusalem

should such a policy be fanatically pursued? The reality of the situation was that the Pax Romana ensured a context of law and order within which the Church could be established and its mission to evangelize furthered. Thus, in the early days of the Church it would have been simply irrelevant to say or do anything about the structures of society. For one thing they were about to collapse anyway; and whilst the Empire survived there was nothing the Christians of the apostolic age could do about that. In any case the Roman imperium had its value as a temporary framework within which the coming kingdom of God could be proclaimed.

The essential point to grasp is that the historical context provided the hermeneutic principle for interpreting the gospel in the first century and the same has been so in every age. This applies to the sixteenth and twentieth centuries no less than the first, and an appeal to the Bible which does not take that into account is fundamentally mistaken. The gospel does not change, but its interpretation and application do in the light of a changing context. This is perhaps the most important exegetical thesis in Segundo's series of volumes on *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity*⁵. He argues that every historical context provides the opportunity for fresh insight into the meaning of the gospel and that, under the guidance of the Spirit, a progressively richer interpretation is available to succeeding generations. We must go back to the Bible for the revelation as originally given, but that does not involve going back to the apostolic age ourselves except with a view to understanding why the first Christians interpreted and applied the gospel as they did. We have our own task; and the modern state with its wide-ranging powers, set within a global context and impinging on society at every point, is entirely different from the Roman Empire which kept the peace in the first century of the Christian era.

Of course, if, like the first Christians, we believe that the world is coming to an end in the immediate future and that the Lord's return is imminent, we shall be unconcerned about political and social structures. But that is to take for granted that God has given up this world for lost, to turn our backs on the lesson of 2000 years of history and assume that we are in a different situation from many preceding generations. Surely the right attitude was illustrated by Colonel Davenport, the Speaker of the House of Representatives in Connecticut, when on May 19, 1790, the sky was darkened and many believed the end of the world had come. He is reported to have said, "The Day of Judgement is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish, therefore, that candles be brought".

The Politics of the Kingdom

This brings us to the heart of the problem: the most difficult question with which we have to wrestle if we are to get our perspective clear: the relation of a kingdom 'not of this world' to the realities of the contemporary political scene. Politics have been described as 'the art of the possible' and there is no point in theorising about what is inapplicable to the state of Society as we have it. The increasing use of the word 'theology' in popular discourse to denote a game played with ideas unrelated to the everyday world should be

sufficient warning of the unreality to which many people have come to believe Christians are addicted.

What, then, did Jesus mean by a kingdom not of this world? Clearly not a kingdom unrelated to this world. That would make nonsense of his coming amongst men, assuming our nature and living the life that he did. But the kingdom he proclaimed and the way he embodied it in his actions and teaching were in sharp contrast to the kingdoms of this world, not only of his own and preceding times, but of every human-built organization since. His kingdom was not of this world in the sense that it was a fundamental challenge to man-made kingdoms.

This can be spelt out under six heads. First, he proclaimed the kingdom of God; the reign of God over the whole creation and all human affairs. Second it was to be universal, transcending all national and racial boundaries. Third, Lordship in that kingdom was to be exercised in service, not by the acquisition of power over other people. Fourth, its purpose was the full realization of human potentiality, of every man, woman and child. St Paul expressed this as growing up into the stature of the fulness of Christ. Fifth, relationships within the kingdom were to be governed by mutual concern — love for one's neighbour was to be the fulfilment of the law. Sixth, the kingdom was to come into being through the initiative of God; it could not be the creation of men, though they could be the agents in the realization of the divine purpose.

There is no need to expatiate on how this ideal of the kingdom of God radically challenges every political and social structure that men have ever devised. Given the fact of human sin, not even the universal acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God and the Lordship of Christ would guarantee its full realization on earth. And in any case to the end of time we have to reckon with pluralism in the sense that people will have different religious allegiances and none. Therefore the consummation of the kingdom inevitably lies beyond history. But that is not all. In his influential book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*⁶, Reinhold Niebuhr argued that theological liberals had failed to give due weight to the difference between personal and social ethics. All organizations and social groupings, he maintained, operate with lower moral standards than those to which many of their members subscribe. The gospel is essentially directed to individuals, and it is simply unrealistic to suppose that criteria applicable to them can be transferred without modification to the structures that are necessary for the cohesion of society. The most that can be asked of Christians is that they use personal influence within inherently defective structures to modify their worst features and ensure that a relative measure of justice is attained: justice which is understood as operated on a lower moral plane than the love of one's neighbour which is mandated for inter-personal behaviour. Thus apart from the universal down-drag of sin, there is an inevitable difference between the standards of personal and social ethics.

This is a formidable argument and the distinction Niebuhr draws is both important and valid. But it does not necessarily follow that the ideal of the kingdom is inapplicable to social and political structures. It simply means that we have to recognise a double relativity in what can be realistically

expected: relativized by human sin and relativized further by the nature of social and political structures. Nevertheless, we believe that God is at work in the world, not standing aloof and waiting till the end of time. This is decisively evidenced in the coming of Jesus, in what C.H. Dodd and others have called 'realized eschatology': the rooting of the kingdom to come in the relativities of a sinful world. We live in what one translator of St Paul called "the overlap of the ages"⁷. And that means taking the absolutes of the kingdom as the standard in the light of which we have to decide what it is practicable to advocate. In other words, we need a *vision* of the kingdom to provide a pole star to guide us in grappling with the practical problems we have to face. Relating that vision to earthly conditions will inevitably mean uncomfortable compromise as well as bringing Christians into conflict with those whose standards are based merely on human aspirations. But it is increasingly being recognised that spiritual values cannot be divorced from practical politics without man becoming lost in undirected pragmatism.

The theological task at this point is to wrestle with what have been called "the middle idioms": those questions of general principle which arise when the ethics of the kingdom are brought to bear on the realities of contemporary social and political problems. Their detailed discussion obviously lies beyond the scope of this paper. However, two examples may suffice to illustrate the sort of questions to which we have to give our minds.

One of the most pressing problems facing us today is the implications of the drive towards economic growth with its effect on the environment, the depletion of the earth's resources, the unbalanced distribution of its benefits, the kind of technology being developed, and the consequences for employment and the use of leisure. This raises a number of basic questions for Christians. What is the proper understanding of man's stewardship for nature? Do we have to think again about the implications of the opening chapters of Genesis? What is our understanding of wealth in the light of the gospel? How are we to interpret justice for the poor, the underprivileged and the exploited? Can any of these questions be answered except from an international perspective and within a global context? At a time when national self interest is increasingly taken for granted as the touchstone for practical politics, have not Christians a prophetic role, committed as we are to the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all mankind?

The second illustration has to do with the political process as such. Most people in the West at least pay lip service to democracy. But increasing numbers feel alienated from our so-called democratic institutions and the need for hard rethinking becomes more apparent every day. With all forms of authority being challenged and with the growing pressure of everyone to be his own master and do his own thing, what have Christians to say on the basis of our belief in the sovereignty of God, and the way in which he exercises his power in the form of the Suffering Servant?

These are but two illustrations from a number that could be chosen. Many will rightly say that the overarching concern is that of making peace and preventing war. But in grappling with all these questions we may well find that we have allies, sometimes in unexpected quarters, who make no profession of the faith that we hold. God does not use only those who openly acknowledge him. However, that simply enhances the importance of

Christians discerning the divine will and purpose.

The theological task of wrestling with the middle axioms is therefore an urgent one. Without it we have not means of effective engagement with political and social problems. But we must not stop there. Nothing has brought the Christian Church into more discredit than taking refuge in theoretical discussions and generalized principles which commit nobody to any specific action. Whilst it may not be possible to reach agreement amongst Christians about particular policies — for here we are entering into the realm of the controversial where judgements may legitimately differ — it does not follow that we are absolved from making up our own minds about the application of the principles we hold to the specific issues that present themselves. I have tried to spell out what this means for me in the final chapter of *The Death of the Dinosaur*⁸. But it is essential in such matters to recognize the relativity of one's own judgements and be prepared to admit that one may be wrong. The fact that particular policies are not strictly and incontrovertibly deducible from Christian premises does not absolve us from making the attempt to apply them, provided that we are properly tentative about our conclusions.

Christian Tolerance

One final rider needs to be added. People have reason to be suspicious of intervention in social and political affairs on the basis of religion. History affords ample evidence of the baneful effects that fanatical dogmatism has produced, and we need to look no further than Northern Ireland and the Ayatolla Khomeini for modern examples of the dangers inherent in the political involvement of those who purport to speak in the name of religion. But Christians have a clear responsibility to reject intolerance and to show that it is possible to hold deep convictions without seeking to impose them on other people. This is not simply the policy of 'live and let live' or indifference to truth. It is grounded in a conviction about God and his ways with men. As he does not impose his will on those whom he has created, so those who have learnt of Christ are not entitled to impose their will on other people. Respect for the convictions of others is a hallmark of genuine Christianity. Thus it is our calling to be socially and politically involved up to the hilt, while at the same time confessing the partiality of our insights and the relativity of our judgements.

Paul Rowntree Clifford

1. Edward Norman, *Christianity and the World Order* (O.U.P. 1979)
2. This equally applies to the radical left-wing stance taken by the contributors to the recent symposium, *Agenda for Prophets* (ed. David Haslam and Rex Ambler, Bowerdean Press, 1980), which begs as many theological questions as the Lausanne declaration.
3. Klaus Bockmuehl, *Evangelical and Social Ethics* (Paternoster Press, 1979).
4. Norman, *op. cit.*, pp78 and 80.
5. J.L. Segundo, *Artisans of a New Humanity*, 5 Vols. (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1973-4).
6. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (New York, Scribner, 1960)
7. 1 Cor. 10:11, as translated by Lionel Thornton in *The Common Life in the Body of Christ* (London, Dacre Press, 1944), p.334.
8. P.R. Clifford, *The Death of the Dinosaur* (London, SPCK, 1977).

WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

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Dear Fellow Ministers,

Just before I went into my study to write this letter, I was listening to the news. Still very much in the headlines was the earthquake disaster in Southern Italy. It is impossible to imagine the suffering and sorrow involved for so many people. I have never had to face anything remotely like it. All the more thrilling, then, to hear of the magnificent response of so many folk in this country, and to know that even in these days of financial stringency there is a vast reservoir of compassion and generosity towards those in such desperate need.

In a recent letter to the many friends of the West Ham Central Mission, I appealed for gifts and interest-free loans to pay for the construction and equipment of our new Home and Hospice. Are we justified in asking for yet more money from our already generous friends? What is our work in comparison with the work of relief among the earthquake victims? How insignificant are our efforts compared with the world's needs.

And then I think of the folk we serve in the Saviour's Name. I think of the elderly, who have worked long and hard and richly deserve the care and respect that we try to show them. I remember those who have come to Greenwoods over the years. I think of the healing power of Christ experienced by so many whose lives seemed to be in ruins, whose emotional and spiritual problems had all but overwhelmed them.

I think of our newly launched Family Centre. I imagine the men and women who will come for counselling and help. I think of the Ministers and leaders who will come to deepen their insight and sharpen their skills. I look forward to the reconciling work that God wants to do through David Gardener and his team. And when, in 1982, the Hospice is opened there will be so many who will find help and encouragement and peace at the last and, please God, many who will find Christ.

When I think of all that, I am not ashamed to seek the help and the prayers and the financial support of our many friends. I hope that you, too, will value the work we are trying to do, and as well as remembering us in your own prayers, continue to commend our cause to your people.

God bless you in all your work for Him.

Trevor W. Davis

From Melbourne to Britain

It is now six months since I returned to this country from attending the World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Melbourne, Australia. This was the first of three world mission conferences held this year, and certainly the one with the most radical stance. It was the one that stands in a line of world mission conferences that began in Edinburgh in 1910.

Readers of the *Fraternal* will have had the opportunity to read in other places various reports written by myself or by others. I particularly commend the July 1980 issue of the *International Review of Mission* and the BBC booklet by Martin Conway *Through the eyes of the poor*. What I hope to do in this article is to be not so much descriptive but analytical, to share some reflections about the theological insights of the Melbourne conference.

The overwhelming impression, which still remains with me, was of the strength of feelings held by the delegates from Third World churches about the injustices and oppression experienced by people in their countries. As one Melbourne document puts it: "We in Melbourne have had to face the fact that the churches' complicity with the colonial powers, so frequently condemned in the past, has been carried over and continues to the present day. In the consumer societies now flourishing in the rich centres in many lands good christian people and others are now with 'cruel innocence' eating up the whole world. A vast fertility cult expects a wild, egotistical, statistical increase, demanding human sacrifice as the price of building and sustaining our industrial cities in rich and poor countries alike, for the economic benefit of a minority of individuals. The cries of the hungry are lost among the pleasures of the rich. As representatives of the churches of all parts of the world, we stand accused by our own consciences in the presence of the crucified Christ, at our acquiescence in such suffering and our involvement in this shameful and continuing injustice".

This is strong language, to say the least; some will find it offensive. Nevertheless I believe that it is vitally important that we listen to what our fellow Christians in the Third World are saying to us. The good news *is* for the poor (Luke 4:16-21). This is a challenge which we must face up to in terms of our own ministries and evangelism, though I must confess that I am still trying to work it out for myself.

There will, of course, be a lot of discussion as to who exactly the "poor" are in scripture. Another of the Melbourne documents recognises the difficulty when it identifies three areas: poverty in the necessities of life, poverty amid material wealth, and voluntary poverty. The temptation to contrast material and spiritual poverty, and to opt for one or the other, is a strong one, but one that we resisted because it is an inadequate way to understand the situation. There is some truth in the ironic caricature: put together ten rich people to discuss who are the poor, and after a lot of discussion they'll produce a list of subtle distinctions; put ten poor people together, and in thirty seconds they'll tell you who the rich are!

Even so, we cannot evade the issue of material affluence and poverty in the church. Robert Thomas of the Overseas Ministries of the Disciples of Christ in the USA made the following contribution at Melbourne: "I am convinced ... that the New Testament poor are those who are *materially* poor. There may be other ways of using the word, but there is no question about the normative use. 'The Kingdom is for the poor.' Second, it is clear that the churches in the West, and many (perhaps most) in other parts of the world, are not churches of the rich, and my country is rich. It is clear, in addition, that we are all caught in a web of economic and social systems that are international in effect and that increasingly divide persons and nations and cause the gap between rich and poor to grow wider and deeper. Poverty is systemic. The fundamental question for us in the church is: can the rich and the poor stand together ... be together ... ever?"

This is, indeed, a fundamental question. How, in such a world as ours, can there be equal partnership in mission between rich and poor in one church? I believe that the Melbourne conference gave some clear hints how real solidarity between rich and poor in the church might be achieved.

There is, first of all, the suggestive and tantalising thought expressed in the following sentence from one of the reports: "Just as the rich churches are being asked to share the pain of the oppressed, so the oppressed Christians stand alongside the accused and share their pain. For we remain brothers and sisters in Christ. This is an expression not only of the unity of the church and the solidarity of the people of God, but also of the pain of realisation that we are all part of the oppressive world."

That is finely said. However, the most thoroughgoing theological think-through of this issue came in an address by Raymond Fung who works in industrial mission in Hong Kong. There is no doubting Fung's evangelistic passion; his paper is a case for a new missionary movement among the world's poor who, after all, make up the vast majority of the world's population. His concern is that in our approach to the poor with the gospel we should see them first of all not as sinners in need of forgiveness but as the sinned-against in need of liberation. Fung understands sin here in the full theological sense, and not in the looser sense (e.g. "he is more sinned against than sinning"). So Fung says: "Man is lost not only in the sins of his own heart but also in the sinning grasps of principalities and powers of the world, demonic forces which cast a bondage over human lives and human institutions and infiltrate their very textures."

Therefore, says Fung, "the Gospel should not only call on people to repent of their sins, but also must call upon them to resist the forces which sin against them". But the matter is not left there; "... in the community of the sinned-against something very important often happens — that, in the struggle against the forces of sin, the sinned-against soon comes to realise that he or she is also the sinner in a way he or she cannot respond with a 'so what?' ... together with the fact of being sinned against soon comes the stark naked fact of his or her own personal sinfulness, and the need for God ... To help a person become aware of his or her sinned-againstness does not absolve that person of personal responsibility. On the contrary, it makes that person see how he or she can be personally responsible, and must deal

with it, because the identity of the sinned-against is defined not only in terms of the exploiter, but also in terms of his or her fellow sinned-against, and in terms of God."

Fung goes on to claim that the good news to the poor is the good news to all, including the affluent. The not-so-poor are also the sinned-against, and in their struggle against the forces of sin, they too will come to realise that they are sinners. Fung continues: "On this understanding of human sinned-againstness is hope of genuine solidarity between the church of the poor and the more affluent. The forces of sin which sin against them may differ in form, definitely more naked and more brutal against the poor, may be more illusive and complex against the middle class (but) they are basically the same — they create suffering they create hunger, and they bring about hatred and despair. On the realisation of their own sinned-againstness, there is hope that those in affluent suburbs who are anxious, broken, hurt and lonely will come to a better appreciation and a more profound empathy for those who live in slums, who are anxious for their next meal, broken in their body by exploiters and torturers, hurt in their pride because they cannot provide for their families, and lonely in their crowdedness for want of anyone to turn to."

This must not be interpreted as an excuse to dilute the gospel's bias towards the poor, but it does underline the church's vocation to be present at the bleeding points of humanity, wherever and in whatever form those bleeding points are found.

The theological justification of this last point came in what must be regarded as the most original and the most stimulating contribution at the conference. The paper by Kosuke Koyame on "The crucified Christ challenges human power" is of the very highest quality. In it, amongst other good things, he speaks of the crucified Christ, who is the centre, being always in motion towards the periphery. I can not do better than quote:

"The church believes that Jesus Christ is the centre of all peoples and all things. 'He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made' (John 1:2-3). But he is the centre who is always in motion towards the periphery. In this he reveals the mind of God who is concerned about the people on the periphery (see e.g., Deut. 24:10-13). Jesus was the centre person laid in a 'manger' because there was no place for them in the inn' (Lk 2:7). He 'came not to call the righteous (respectable) but sinners (outcasts)' (Mk 2:17). Jesus Christ is the centre becoming periphery. He affirms his centrality by giving it up. That is what his designation 'crucified Lord' means. The Lord is supposed to be at the centre. But he is now affirming his Lordship by being crucified! 'Jesus also suffered outside the gate' (Heb: 13:12). His life moves towards the periphery. He expresses his centrality in the periphery by reaching the extreme periphery. Finally on the cross, he stops this movement. There he cannot move. He is nailed down. This is the point of ultimate periphery. 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Mk 15:34). He is the crucified Lord. 'Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself' (Phil 2:6-7). From this uttermost point of periphery he establishes his authority. This movement towards the periphery is called the love of God in Christ. In

the periphery his authority and love meet. They are one. His authority is substantiated by love. His love is authoritative. In the periphery this has taken place, as in the periphery the sincerity and reliability of Christ were demonstrated”.

It is interesting that, among other things, Koyama should apply these ideas to theological education. He says “Our thoughts on mission, evangelism and theological education must be examined in the light of the periphery-orientated authority of Jesus Christ”. Do we imagine, he says, that America and Europe must be the standard here? So often the theme of the periphery is discussed with full-blown centre language. Theological works are replete with the most difficult theological words and concepts, and their authors do their best to discourage people from reading them because it takes a Ph. D in theology to digest them. The sin of theologians is that they write books for fellow theologians and thus build up a special circle in which they admire each other. This is harmful to the living reality of the Church Universal. Much the same, I suspect, could be said about our sermons! There is, indeed, a distinction to be made between gossip and theology (how many of us would have said that gossip is the negation of theology?). But gossip is irresponsible talk. We may have our impressive theological systems with tremendous intellectual cohesion and abundant relevant information, yet it may be a gossip and not a theology. What makes the difference, according to Koyama, is the presence of a ‘contrite heart’, a heart shaken by the sincerity and reliability of the crucified Christ who judges our technological and bureaucratic gossips.

Above all, however, Koyama’s concept of Christ the centre person who moves to the periphery must be seen as a pointer to a strategy for mission. The sixth assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia meeting in 1977 said that the dominant reality of the Asian situation is that people are wasted. There is no doubt that those who are starved because of poverty are wasted. People who are wasted are on the periphery, and Jesus moves towards them. So, too, the church must dare to be present at the bleeding points of society, because that is where Christ is to be found.

Our first task, then, is to take steps to identify the bleeding points. We shall particularly be concerned to identify those marginalised groups in our communities without, of course, forgetting that there are bleeding points even in the most comfortable and affluent suburbs. Nor shall we neglect the matter of justice worldwide. To opt in favour of such people will mean nothing less than it meant for the Lord himself — compassion, not in the sickly, sentimental sense, but in the strong sense of identification and solidarity — suffering with. We must be prepared to be with the poor, in whatever sense we understand that word, to listen to them and learn from them. They must no longer be those to whom we condescend because they are the objects of our charity, because we have something they have not. We have to join them and work with them rather than for them.

I want to quote Koyama again, because what he says is so apposite here. “The church is a strange institution created by the crucified Lord. It is this image of the crucified Lord that must come out through the life of the institutional church. It is the life that accepts humiliation in order to save others from humiliation (the crucified Christ) asks his church to have a

crucified mind rather than a *crusading* mind (my emphasis — PC-J). The crucified mind is not a neurotic mind. It is a mind ready to accept humiliation in order to save others from humiliation. It is a strongly community-directed mind. It is a healthy mind. The church is inspired to come to the people with the crucified mind rather than the crusading mind. It is asked to follow the crucified Lord instead of running ahead of him." Such words ought to make us look at our evangelistic crusades in a new light!

I have discovered it to be an instructive and revealing exercise not only to ask who are the marginalised in the community I serve, but also to ask how far such groups are represented in my congregation. It is even more revealing when we consider how many of them are represented in the leadership of the church. If we seriously listen to Jesus' statement that he had come to proclaim good news to the poor then we will have to face the fact of our middle class ethos and our links with the establishment. I can't help feeling rather sad that although Baptists were once known as Dissenters (which is at least a more positive description than the later watering-down to Nonconformists) we are now simply known as one of the Free Churches. Do we not stand for anything anymore? How are the mighty fallen! Have we lost our cutting edge because we are too closely identified with the status quo? Are we so unwilling to bear the cross, which for us as for Jesus is the price of social non-conformity (or should I call it dissent?)

The kind of mission strategy to which the Melbourne conference points us is one that is likely to bring us into conflict with the powers-that-be. We shall certainly be accused, perhaps as much from within the church as outside, of mixing politics and religion, although how the two can be separated I do not know. A fellow member of the British delegation at Melbourne afterwards visited the church in Taiwan where Dr Kao, the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church has been imprisoned for harbouring a dissident. One of the agents of the Taiwanese government told him 'perhaps prison will teach you when you get out to confine yourself to the pursuit of heavenly bliss. If you do that there will be no further trouble!'. To see faith in terms of a heavenly spirituality unrelated to righteousness in human affairs is a temptation which we should strongly resist.

A renunciation, therefore, is asked of us. The gospel summons us all to renounce every kind of security, be it economic, social or religious, and to trust God alone, to find our security only in him and in his abundant mercy. That is the way to fulness of life, and the challenge will also intensify our search for new forms of christian community and worship.

For me, one of the most moving moments at Melbourne came in response to a question I voiced, a question which surfaced in my thinking when confronted with the vehement and passionate demands for justice by the delegates of Third World churches. "What are we rich christians to do?", I asked, "If we speak in favour of the poor we are told on one hand that we are being patronising, and on the other that we are confusing politics with the gospel." The answer to this question came from a most impressive young woman from Zimbabwe who said that the real question is "what does the word of God want us to do?".

THE BAPTIST INSURANCE COMPANY LIMITED
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To the Readers of the Fraternal.

Dear Friends,

“F” for Fire

A scheme of fire insurance had been designed even before the Great Fire of London in 1666 and it is obvious that when any body of people have placed in their trust the property of an enterprise, or business or indeed a Cause, fire insurance will be one of their first considerations. In the first of this series of letters I referred to the need for buildings to be insured for rebuilding cost because, although in the event of total destruction, they might be replaced by buildings of more modest dimensions and less costly materials, a serious fire could necessitate substantial re-building on the existing lines with the present type of materials. This is a point I made when writing on “A” for Average, although very few of our policies are subject to the average clause.

Writing today on the subject of Fire insurance, another “A” comes to mind — “A” for Arson. There has been a distressing increase during the last year in fires caused deliberately, and Churches have not escaped. The ever present risk of theft makes it essential that premises are made secure, but the possibility of arson is an equally strong reason for ensuring that windows and doors are adequately protected and properly secured when the premises are left. If premises are not in daily use, they should be visited and inspected at least at the beginning and end of each day to check that all is well. Although fire insurance can provide the money to make good the damage caused by the arsonist, the distress to the members and the dislocation of the work can be severe. Prevention is better than cure!

Yours sincerely,

M.E. PURVER

General Manager.

That word of God confronts us with the challenge of the kingdom. Our first priority is to seek that kingdom and its justice. We are faced in scripture with the revelation of a righteous God who demands righteousness in human society, a rightness in relationships, and who, therefore, is known as the champion of the poor. This prophetic witness is not set aside by the coming of Jesus, but is rather amplified and given more profound meaning.

As the conference message put it: "We stand under the judgment and hope of Jesus Christ. The prayer 'your kingdom come' brings us closer to Jesus Christ in today's world. We invite you to join us in commitment to the Lord for the coming of whose kingdom we pray — your kingdom come, O Lord!"

Philip Clements-Jewery
Minister, Wigan Baptist Church and member of British delegation at the
Melbourne conference.

MINISTERS' HOLIDAYS 1981

Baptist ministers and missionaries have had use of a holiday bungalow near the Kent coast for the past 14 years. "Leelands" at South Street, Whitstable, is a detached spacious bungalow which can accommodate seven people, and is centrally heated and well equipped. The owners provide and maintain the bungalow as a service to the ministry, and visitors make only a contribution to the cost.

Ministers come not only from England, but also from Scotland and Wales. But the facility should be universally known, as every year I get letters from ministers who write late in the season and say they were previously unaware of the opportunity.

"Leelands" will again be available every week during 1981 — with an unchanged contribution — a great offer in these inflationary days. We would wish the bungalow to be used every week of the year, for it provides a private family centre for relaxed holidays at all times.

I do the bookings as a service to the Ministry and start allocations at the beginning of the year. So ministers should write to me with possible alternative dates as soon as possible. New friends may secure further details. Always enclose a S.A.E. please.

For 1981 another Baptist family wishes their bungalow also to be used in this way. "Seacot" is about three miles from "Leelands", has good accommodation and is centrally heated and well equipped. It is not however, available during school holidays. But with this exception we could provide two holiday bungalows for Baptist ministers and missionaries throughout the whole of the year. I hope the generous offers will be taken up.

I think that in this first year of two bungalows it will be best if allocation between the two bungalows is left to me, having regard to dates and accommodation. We book from Wednesday to Wednesday. Please write as soon as possible.

Rev. Sydney Clark, "Westlands", The Street, Adisham, Canterbury CT3 3JN. (Nonington 840084).

(See also page 31)

Music in Worship

In his book *Worship in the Early Church* Ralph Martin writes "The Christian Church was born in song ... it is to be expected that the Christian Gospel should bring with it on the scene of history an outburst of hymnody and praise to God".

Two thousand years on and we're still singing, making a joyful noise. For some the expression of song is a duty to be grimly borne, for others an opportunity to stand and have some necessary exercise, indeed the bread of the sandwich, very much subsidiary to the main filling, and for others again it provides a vital, meaningful and enjoyable part of worship.

The Christian Church may indeed have been born in song but it didn't take too long for the song to become controversial. At times aspects of it were banned only to be revived again. Today it is still often controversial, something that most have an opinion about, a preference to be made known, and dare I say it, a prejudice to be pandered to.

In this article I see my role not as justifying music/song in worship. It needs no justification. It is a vital ingredient. Rather, within the limits of my own experience as a professional musician and latterly minister, my task is to consider its best use.

What is music? I could take most of this article discussing this question — I won't, but we shall consider it because I believe that most of us have a very limited view of music and thus of its potential in worship.

When I was a very young singer I was very interested in two aspects of music — its beauty and its grandeur. Most of my own efforts of self improvement were devoted to the attempt to make my own voice, larger, more majestic and more beautiful. At some stage I became aware that I was missing the point. The *human voice* is supremely a *wonderful vehicle for communication*. My horizons were enormously broadened. Music is not just for soothing and stirring us. It can express anger, grief, pity, joy, triumph, utter despair — the whole range of moods and emotions, and if you take note of little else that is written in this article I ask you to remember this, because when we are aware of all that music can express we begin to realise its tremendous potential in our worship.

Music in worship becomes exciting, not simply when it has enthusiastic participation but when we begin to see what it is really expressing and we sing or play with understanding and a desire to express the true emotions of the words to our Lord — to each other, in whichever direction our music takes us. It is always an act of communication and self expression — if not we should be content to receive and not always participate.

Take, for example, that beautiful hymn 143 Baptist Hymn-book — 'My song is love unknown': follow the emotions through the verses — v.1 wonder, v.2 gratitude, v.3/4 anger and guilt, v.5 amazement, v.6 devotion and more. One of the truly great hymns is 83 — 'O come, O come, Immanuel'. Not just a strong hymn but one that can be an experience because of the expressions of expectation, longing, hope, that are emerging from those who sing.

Don't just sing the words, but sing with feeling, express your own reaction to what the hymn writer has penned. That's how we can have a great experience of singing in worship.

Having considered the emotional breadth and expressiveness of music we now look at criteria — how do we choose, those of us with responsibility for preparation and leading of worship?

Today we are under assault from Christian commerce. Music is a major part of this assault. The number of records, cassettes and the amount of Christian music being published is enormous. I state this simply as a fact, not a complaint. My own awareness of the vastness of the Christian market came when I went to Filey as a member of the music team. What a market place it is, all the various stands, Christian publishers, record companies all trying to sell their wares. I had my records, too, so I was a part of it all.

Musically the choice is enormous, but how do we choose? Here we go right back to basics and being desperately tied to the tradition of the College I attended, I have three points :-

Firstly, The music must be a good vehicle for the words. (Here I'm making the assumption that most of our Christian music is song of one type or another). This assumes that in the case of music performed by a soloist or group in worship the music is going to enable words to come across with clarity. I make another basic assumption also and that is, that the words are worthy of use in worship. Like many of those involved in preparing worship, I frequently scan the whole of our hymn book and other sources of material trying to find the right hymns for one service, looking for clear, appropriate texts.

Even as the great interpretive performing musician will seek faithfully to serve the composer whose work he uses, so it is with music and words. The flair, beauty or strength of any music must enhance the words, not detract from them, because for us as Christians, word is so important. One always finds the great composer meticulous in his word setting, particularly so in the Baroque period, where even if you were listening to an unfamiliar language you would know whether it was Crucifixion or Resurrection or the birth of Jesus that is being sung of. The Baroque composer was expected to make it clear. Bach is full of brilliant examples. One of my favourites is in the St John Passion where he sets the final words of Jesus 'Es ist vollbracht', (It is finished'). He chooses a descending phrase set in the minor key, heavy and melancholy, but then surprises us by following immediately with two chords which seem almost certain again to be minor from the way the first starts, but in fact move to a brilliant major resolution of the phrase and here, as so often, we see Bach's faith and theological understanding at work. The Greek is *tetelestai*, which of course is not to do with ending but rather completion, and written into that phrase Bach has woven sacrifice and salvation and the music that follows this seemingly sad phrase leaves us in no doubt as to the triumph of the work of Christ, a phase of which has just been completed.

Now all songwriters are not Bachs and we wouldn't want them to be and often we will be doing the work of composer, maybe with assistance, as we look for the right tunes for hymns as we make this a criterion for our choice of music. (The music being an appropriate vehicle for the words).

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Never take an accepted good tune for granted, there may be a better way. Two immediate examples spring to mind. 440 Baptist Hymn-book — one of the lovely hymns normally sung to Constance Sullivan's fine tune. Have you ever looked at the first tune setting, one of the old German chorales that Bach used in his Christmas Oratorio setting? A tune of massive strength, not to be hurried, it hasn't the sweetness of Sullivan's tune, but then look at the last verse of the hymn — "so mighty a defender ... What power my soul can sever? Shall life, or death, or earth, or hell — No I am His for ever." It most probably needs to be conducted and explained to the congregation, because of their familiarity with the other tune, but this is in fact a much greater tune, much more at one with the words.

The other example is 203 Baptist Hymn-book, 'How sweet the name'. It is a hymn which has had various 'sweet tunes' written for it such as St Peter to which it is often sung, but again read on with the words. This hymn, as with so many of John Newton's, is a monumental statement of faith, calling for a tune of strength and elation. See verse 6 "And may the music of Thy name refresh my soul in death". The second tune 'Abergele' is in my opinion much more suitable because it has strength and elation and almost a surge and is generally in a more singable part of the voice.

We can very easily be slaves of fashion. The new tunes come along, they must be suitable for young people we think and, as they swing along more easily, we use them a lot; but is the Beaumont tune to 'Now Thank we all our God' really a better vehicle for the words than 'Nun Danket'? Not that I'm advocating that Bach and old is always best — far from it, but more of that in my second and third points.

Personally, by the criterion I've mentioned, I find no natural place in worship for the chanting of Psalms. The Chants such as those we find in the back of our own hymn-book are very pleasant musically. I sang many of them as part of a double quartet in my first professional singing job with the B.B.C. singers. We broadcast one each day as part of the daily service. It was for me an enjoyable exercise in disciplined chamber music, one that I didn't analyse at the time in terms of its contribution for Christian music. Certainly I felt it broadened my religious musical experience.

But honestly, they're too much like the Highway Code, miles removed from the outpouring of the Psalmist in their musical expression. There is no room in this form for passionate supplication, unbounded admiration of the Almighty, pain over the wicked neighbour that prospers, deep repentance or that intensely personal dialogue with the Lord. The Psalmist is direct and fervent, the chants by comparison are remote and contrived in their style — beautiful to listen to — yes, if well done, but is the Psalm just a thing of beauty? Really when talking about them I come back to the point about the sheer range of expression possible in music as much the music being the right vehicle for the words. Here I find myself writing not so much as a minister, or one from strong Free Church stock but a musician who believes in the communicative power of music.

And to the second criterion which is: simplicity.

Great music always has a wonderful directness about it, in fact, a basic simplicity, I suppose very much like great preaching. If it is essential that

great music should have this simplicity how much more should the music that we use to worship God and communicate with each other have simplicity? I must stress here that I believe that any musical style is acceptable in worship if it meets the criterion. Simplicity is vital because so much of the musical expression of our worship has been cluttered and undecipherable to many of our folk.

As already mentioned the greatest music always has essential simplicity which gives it the power to communicate. The simplicity was not always easily attained, but in some cases, came after a painful process of refinement, rejection of earlier ideas and revision. Beethoven, one of the most painstaking of craftsmen, master of large instrumental and vocal forces, is also a master of simplicity. In his violin concerto he takes us straight through a simple major scale. He starts the first movement on the major 3rd or Me (tonic solfa symbol) and we go up the scale to Doh and back to Soh, and in the 2nd movement he completes the scale, simple Doh, ray, me. Glorious music and this is just one of many, many examples.

One of our greatest heritages in Christian music is the Negro Spiritual. Born in such pain, like the Psalms in their depth of feeling and simplicity of utterance, they are never cluttered, either word and idea-wise or musically. Often the arrangements one hears of them are cluttered and wrong, depriving them of their essential simplicity, but the original is fresh and to the point.

What a breath of fresh air so many of the Scripture songs and Choruses have been in recent years, providing music that people can sing easily, and words very straight forward in their meaning, but with these as with all music we need to be discriminating, still applying our judgment as to what is good and what is not worthy of use in worship. Because they have a more simple musical form than much traditional Christian music it does not follow that they have this communicative simplicity that we're thinking about. Some will and some won't. They also need to be handled in the right way. I recently heard a broadcast service from a Church which was obviously enormously gifted musically. They sang some fine hymn arrangements accompanied by their own superb orchestra. Then they sang 'Seek ye first', that lovely song, but accompanied by the full orchestra and with the same heavy musical treatment as some of the very traditional hymns. It didn't work. 'Seek ye first' is a lovely uncluttered song that transmits the word with an easy clarity and needs very little embellishment. A piano, guitars, flutes, some percussion would have been quite adequate and retained the utter simplicity of this fine song.

Our criterion of simplicity needs to be applied carefully.

When making our choice — What really does come over with clarity and immediacy? What is going to be the best treatment of any particular type of music? Are there some situations where music that in one context has 'simplicity', in another will not? The answer to the last is — 'Yes'.

Bach's St Matthew Passion is a work of enormous power. Well performed it communicates the Passion of our Lord with unusual intensity and emotion, almost inevitably drawing some response. But there is very little from the 'Passion' that I would take out of context and use in Church even with a skilled choir and soloists (the chorales apart), because out of context

the music becomes cluttered and not really understood by many folk. The context and the orchestra are so important. I apply simplicity to all my own choice of music whether as a soloist, leading a choir or choosing congregational music. It means that, as a soloist, I choose very little of my favourite classical music. There are very few arias from oratorio that communicate well out of context, even the magnificent 'Trumpet shall sound' because, out of context, it's far too repetitive and really needs a superb trumpeter and extremely fine organist or preferably an orchestra.

Choral music is somewhat easier to choose and generally the music of the great composers is much safer than many of our cluttered Victorian and Edwardian anthems that churn on and on without strong musical ideas and making generally a poor vehicle for the word. But always be discriminating, look at every piece of music of all styles and periods — is it a good vehicle, has it communicative simplicity?

Simplicity, as already mentioned, applies as much to performance as well as choice. For choirs and soloists it is paramount that words be clear and texts easily understandable. It means that you walk before you run. If unison singing or two parts has more security, conviction and clarity than four parts it is infinitely preferable. Skilful, but not necessarily complicated use of instruments can greatly enhance our music without robbing it of simplicity. Complicated choral writing and a choir that is struggling or an over-ambitious soloist don't give anyone a chance satisfactorily to share the essential dialogue of worship.

I hope I've made my point about simplicity. It is very frustrating writing about it and not being able to demonstrate exactly what I mean, in the way that one can in a seminar or workshop. A perfect example was at the European Baptist Congress when Cliff Richard put aside his guitar and sang unaccompanied — 'When I survey'. Tremendous communication and great worship.

But on to the third point — *Variety is the spice of life* and very necessary in Christian music. We need variety at several levels. Different sounds, using, when possible, a variety of instruments. Different involvement from soloists, groups, instrumental and vocal to congregational. Thirdly and most vital — different types of music.

If you're still reading then no doubt you've been waiting for the moment when Psalm 150 would be mentioned. Well here it is. We are the body of Christ, the body has many parts, many different musical skills and there should be a place for all of them. Whilst one always aims for the highest standards I believe that in Christian music, joyful involvement comes before beautiful performance. I have been involved in enough beautiful performances of great Christian music without life or real understanding, even cynical, to know which for me is more important.

One of the chief tasks of those involved in the musical life of a Church should be to encourage maximum involvement. Concentrate first on the congregational singing. When singing for the whole congregation becomes meaningful folk will realise the potential and joy of music and new talents will emerge. The Psalmist encourages all instruments, except guitars. No, he didn't say that and he hasn't put organs on a pedestal either. I find no scriptural warrant for the dominating position of the organ. A quick plea! If

your fellowship is small and not flushed with money, fine instruments though they are, don't scrimp and save for an organ. They are enormously costly, unless superb and very expensive they depreciate in value and the good ones need a lot of maintenance. A good piano will appreciate in value, is much much cheaper to purchase, can be played by more folk, copes more easily with differing styles of music and is a better base instrument for using with other instruments. Variety of instruments brings freshness and again more involvement. Look to use them in all aspects of music in worship.

The second aspect of variety needs little 'amplification'. Mix up the musical involvement. Few churches these days have flourishing choirs. Many reasons contribute to this fact, one of them being the fact that we expected them to produce introit and anthem, week in, week out. A choir will both be more appreciated and experience more satisfaction if it is used as a special feature, along with other forms of music-making, from time to time on appropriate occasions. Keeping looking for different and fresh musical involvement.

Thirdly — we come to variety in musical style. I am at home in the classics; some of our youngsters, have a different preference and older people again may differ. As receivers some of us find some musical styles difficult to take. There must be a breadth of musical style in our worship. Often we steer a very safe and mediocre course musically. We must have variety and if we apply our criterion of 'vehicle for the words' and 'simplicity' and we really do want to share together and understand each other — all the differing musical styles should happily co-exist, because they are means to an end, aids to many people in worshipping in many different ways. We've found that classical and pop don't need to be kept away from each other, they exist very happily together, where there is a freshness, joy of expression and 'simplicity'. In fact we often find ourselves benefiting from 'alien' musical vehicles in a way that surprises us — Young people, 'really enjoyed that' after a classical piece and older ones beaming from ear to ear and tapping their feet to something a bit more 'up beat' simply because we want to worship together and offer the Lord our best.

A few final, practical words. So much depends on the way music is introduced. If you explain why you are including the music in worship and what its place is, people will be more receptive and thus benefit and participate more willingly.

As ministers we often have overall responsibility for planning of worship. See to it that there is a breadth musically. You know your people. Often those who control music, the musicians, in a church, have a very narrow sphere of interest, it is up to you to encourage it to be broadened.

I feel, much as I am reluctant to do so, that I must say a word or two about published song books etc., as I am often asked about this. Our own hymn book is a very fine one and gives a good core to our music. As mentioned before there have been so many publication of new songs in recent years, often overlapping and containing many 'golden oldies' that to single any out is difficult. We are doing what many other Churches have done and compiling our own song book. Two publications however are in my opinion, worthy of mention, one is the excellent *Psalm Praise* and the other is *Songs of Worship* published by Scripture Union. Even these overlap and if

choosing one I would opt for *Songs of Worship*. I'm afraid I can't personally recommend *Praise for Today* as it doesn't meet my own personal criteria, particularly on grounds of simplicity and variety of musical style.

At seminars on this subject, so often the most useful period has been the talk back and if you would like to contact me to discuss further please phone at High Wycombe 27498 or 38008

Rodney Macann

NOTES FROM B.M.F. COMMITTEE

10th November

A new Secretary for Europe — Welcome to Derek Keenan (see page 1 for address)

Call to Commitment: Geoffrey Rusling suggested that we ask local Fraternalists to include in their programmes some discussion of "The Theology of Worship". (see page 32)

Life Membership: Vic Sumner & Jim Clarke presented a detailed paper on this: among the recommendations accepted: that future life subs. be in ratio of 12.5/1 (i.e. £50 to £4 annual sub.): that half-rate life subs (£25) commence at 55 years instead of 59; that all life funds, already held and received in the future be subject to careful investment policy with re-investment of part of the interest as a hedge against inflation. All recommendations take effect from 1st January 1981.

Membership reports: Indicate a steadily growing circulation of the magazine particularly in the U.K.

Probationers' School 1981: to be held at St Edwards, Malvern.

Pastoral Session 1981: Wednesday 29th April: at BLOOMSBURY. Speaker: Lord Coggan.

Treasurership: Jim Clarke to succeed Roger Poolman from April 1981.