

# The Fraternal

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# THE COMMUNICATION OF BELIEF

A few weeks ago I heard on the car radio part of a programme in which David Attenborough, the creator of the much acclaimed television series *Life on Earth* was being interviewed. "Do you think of yourself as a teacher?" asked the interviewer. "No, not a teacher," Attenborough replied, "more a compulsive communicator." He went on, "I'm a sort of professional lapel-tugger. If I come on anything surprising, beautiful or fascinating, I have this irresistible urge to grab the next man I meet by the coat collar and say, 'Have you heard about this?'"

It occurred to me, as I was listening, that "compulsive communicator" is a description which would fit ministers of religion. We also have an irresistible urge to stop people and say, "Have you heard the good news?" What saddens us from time to time is that, even when people are willing to listen, we find it so hard to get what we want to say across. We sometimes feel that this lack of communication is the fault of our hearers. Sometimes, that it is our own fault. But, either way, it is frustrating. How tiresome to be a compulsive communicator who finds himself unable to communicate!

The expression which I have just used - "lack of communication" - is part of the jargon of our time. It is fashionable nowadays to attribute almost everything that goes wrong to this cause. Governments fall because of it. Industry grinds to a halt because of it. Children cannot get on with their parents because of it. Husbands leave their wives because of it. And so on. In all such cases people are prone to say "Ah, there was a lack of communication!" So, it is hardly surprising, if we put diminishing church attendance and declining interest in religion down to the same cause.

"Lack of communication" is a blanket phrase which covers a variety of phenomena. There are at least four different things which it can mean. First, and most obviously, that people are unable to hear what is said - there is a lack of communication, for instance, when you are too far away to catch someone's words. Secondly, the expression may mean that, although people can hear what is said, they cannot understand it - there is a failure in communication when you meet someone who does not know your language nor you his. Thirdly, the expression may mean that people have been told something but do not believe it. It is not that they cannot hear or understand what is said but simply that they do not think it true. Fourthly, communication may break down because those to whom one is speaking do not share one's scale of values. Suppose, for example, I were to say that Mrs Thatcher's economic policies, though they may put three million people out of work, are nevertheless morally right. You can hear and understand what I say and there is no disagreement between us about the relevant facts; but, even so, you may object to my opinion because there is a radical difference between us about what it is morally right to do to people in pursuit of an economic objective like bringing down inflation.

When there is any lack of communication between ministers and those with whom they wish to share the christian faith, it will presumably be due to some, or all, of these four types of failure. People may not be able to hear us; they may not understand us; they may not believe us; or they may simply not

evaluate things as we do. I shall not spend any time on the first of the four. If people cannot hear what we say, then we must find ways of saying it more loudly; but I do not feel that I have anything useful to say about how we can do that. However, the other three kinds of failure in communication will be in the forefront of my mind during the rest of this paper.

I cannot claim to have any slick or simple answers to the question - which seems to defeat so many better men than me - of how the christian faith can be effectively communicated to our generation. What I have to offer is some reflections on that question itself. In doing so, I comfort myself with the oft-repeated philosophical aphorism, which is at least as old as Socrates, that, once you have cleared your head as to what precisely is being asked by a question, you are more than half way to an answer.

There are two matters, to be specific, about which I shall have something to say - namely the *content* and the *method* of ministerial communication, the *what* and the *how*. *What exactly* is it which, as ministers, we exist to communicate? And, *how exactly* does it have to be communicated, if it is to be communicated at all?

### **The Content of Communication**

The answer to the former question is simple to state. We exist to communicate *belief*. But it is important to be clear what belief means. The concept is a complicated one. I shall only attempt to make a couple of main points about it; but I think they are the vital ones for our present purpose.

#### **(i)**

Belief must be carefully distinguished from *imagination* on the one hand and *knowledge* on the other. Let us take an example - some proposition  $p$  - and then let us consider the difference between saying respectively that someone imagines that  $p$ , believes that  $p$ , and knows that  $p$ . Suppose  $p$  is the following fanciful proposition: "The Area Superintendent walked round the room twelve inches above the ground with no visible means of support." Now, if I simply ask you to *imagine* this, you will have no difficulty in doing so. Should anyone object that he cannot do so because he cannot think how the Area Superintendent manages to stay up in the air with no visible means of support, I will be entitled to reply that I have not asked him to imagine *how* the Area Superintendent does it but simply *that* he does it. It is perfectly possible to imagine this sort of thing happening even though you think it could not happen - to imagine that  $p$  even while considering  $p$  to be false.

But now suppose I ask you to *believe* (and not simply imagine) that  $p$ . Retaining our fanciful example, suppose I tell you that, when last the Area Superintendent had lunch with me in Exeter, he walked out of the dining room twelve inches up in the air with no visible means of support. You will now be entitled to object and say, "Oh come off it! How could he possibly have done that?" No one expects you to believe something (as distinct from merely to imagine it) whilst thinking that it could not have happened - to believe that  $p$  whilst considering  $p$  to be false.

In the third place, suppose I claim to *know* that  $p$ . This time I am not simply asking you to imagine, or believe, it, but I am telling you that I know it. In order to see how knowledge differs from both imagination and belief, think what you would have to concede by implication, if you conceded my claim to know that  $p$ .

Firstly, and most obviously, you would have to concede that  $p$  is true. People can imagine or believe things that are not true; but they cannot *know* things that are not true. The sentence, "Hudson knows that the Area Superintendent walked out of the dining room twelve inches above the ground, but of course it isn't true that he did" would be a self-contradictory sentence. Once you concede my claim to know, you thereby commit yourself to the opinion that what I know is true.

Secondly, and not quite so obviously, once you concede that anybody else knows something, you necessarily imply that *you yourself* know it as well. I am thinking, of course, of specific propositions. You might indeed say that somebody else knows a lot about a subject (chemistry, physics, or whatever) whereas you yourself do not. But you could not say, for example, "He knows that water boils at 100°C but I don't." If you say that anyone else knows that  $p$  - where  $p$  is some specific, stated proposition - then you necessarily imply that you know it just as surely as he does.

These last remarks on the implications of conceding someone's claim to know something specific show why compulsive communicators often want to be regarded as authorities. In our own case, "the authority of the ministry" is something which we would hardly be human if we did not hanker after. For, an authority is one who knows. And as we have just been observing, once people concede that you are an authority - one who knows - they thereby imply (a) that what you say is true and (b) that they know it as well as you do. As compulsive communicators we naturally find it very irritating when people say, "What you are telling us isn't true" or, more politely but no less irritatingly, "Well, you may believe it but we don't." If only they would accept us as authorities - as men who know - how much easier life would be! Then they could not deny that what we say is true or that they know it just as well as we do.

But ministers are *not* authorities - not in the required sense. What we exist to communicate is not knowledge but belief. If anyone thinks that this downgrades our vocation I cannot see why he should do so. Sometimes, I suppose, every minister wishes people would think of him in the way they do of other professional men; that is, as an expert who has some special knowledge to communicate. But the fact remains that all we have to communicate is belief. So far from thinking of this as an impoverishment, I would say the very reverse - that the temptation against which ministers have always to be on guard is that of downgrading their vocation by claiming that it is knowledge, rather than belief, which they exist to communicate. Of course, there are some kinds of knowledge which ministers as such have. Three in particular: they know: (i) what Scripture says and some of the various interpretations which have been placed upon it, (ii) what holding christian beliefs has meant in their own experience and that of others, and (iii) how the case for christian belief can be stated clearly and persuasively. But all such matters are logically quite distinct from that which ministers exist to communicate. The belief, for example, that Christ died for our sins is logically distinct from: (i) the interpretations which have been placed upon it, (ii) the effect which it has had on those who hold it, and (iii) the arguments which can be deployed in support of it. It is this belief itself (amongst others) which we exist to communicate. If ministers fall into

the trap of thinking of it as something they know, rather than simply believe, they will almost certainly impair their communication of it with logical howlers and bad apologetics. But as communicators of belief rather than knowledge, we should not think ourselves as professionally down-market. On the contrary, what people believe is at least as important as what they know. In the last analysis, it is more important.

(ii)

Now, a second point about belief. So far I have spoken only of belief *that* something is the case and been concerned to distinguish it from imagination, or knowledge, *that*. The second thing I wish to say is this. Believing *that* is only one kind of belief. There is another - namely, believing *in*. And religious belief is essentially believing *in*.

Believing *that* is a cognitive attitude. Believing *in* is also an affective and conative one. By calling believing *that p* cognitive I do not, of course, intend to equate it with knowledge; all I mean is that if anyone holds this belief he will think of it as conveying accurate information. By calling believing *in* affective and conative, I mean that it amounts to more than belief *that*. When you believe *in* something or somebody, this involves your feelings and actions, as well as your thoughts. For example, a man may believe *that* his doctor passed certain qualifying examinations, has had experience of general practice for many years, and so on. But if he believes *in* his doctor, it will amount to more than this. It will mean that he *feels* confident (affective attitude) when he is in his doctor's hands and that he *does* (conative attitude) what his doctor advises him to do.

Now, it is significant that the Creed begins: "I believe *in* .." If anyone were to say he believes *that* God is our Father Almighty and then add that this belief does not make any difference to anything he feels or does, we should be entitled to reply, not simply that it ought to make a difference, but that, until it does, his belief is not a religious one at all. The point is not hortatory but semantic. Wittgenstein brought it out in his *Lectures on Religious Belief* in this way (see his *Lectures and Conversations*, Oxford, 1966, pp.54-6, 60). Take the example of someone who professes belief in a Last Judgment. Suppose this person predicts that the Last Judgment will take place on a certain date in the future. Suppose he has what we would consider good evidence for doing so. And suppose that the Last Judgment occurs just as he has predicted. None of this, says Wittgenstein, will suffice to make his belief religious in the ordinary meaning of the word "religious". Only if his belief in a Last Judgment is "constantly in the foreground" of his mind; if it is "constantly admonishing" him; if it regulates "for all in his life"; if it moves him to emotions of "terror" or "hope" - only then will it be "at all a religious belief".

So, what we exist to communicate is belief *in* God. A question which has been framing itself in my mind as I have been identifying what is meant by belief *in* is this: Must a communicator of belief *in* necessarily possess himself that which he tries to communicate to others? On the face of it, the obvious answer is yes. Does not the word itself - "communicator" - mean one who makes something he has common property, who shares it with others? Such a definition logically implies that what he passes on to others

is his own in the first place. But against this, it is conceivable - is it not? - that someone should pass something on without possessing it himself. Knowledge, for example. You can give somebody a book which you have not read yourself. And more than that - you can teach people things the implications of which they see more clearly than you do yourself (as university teachers sometimes discover when tutoring their clever pupils). The idea of communicating knowledge without actually possessing it seems to be conceivable and not in itself a repugnant idea. But now think of belief and particularly belief *in*. Would it not strike people as both odd and also repugnant if someone said that he was trying to communicate belief *in* something (a leader, a cause, etc.) in which he himself did not believe? Take for instance belief in a political party. The wife of one of my colleagues once confessed to me that, because everybody thinks she is a Liberal, she goes round canvassing for the Liberal Party at elections; but she does not really believe in the Liberal Party and when she goes to vote herself she votes Conservative. Now, why do we feel that what she does is not only mildly amusing but also rather reprehensible? Is it not because, when you set out to communicate belief to people, you are in a sense giving them your word? If it is only knowledge which you are trying to communicate, then you can say, as it were, "Well, here it is. But don't take my word for it. Look at the proofs for yourself!" But when it is belief - particularly belief *in* something - what you are saying is rather, "Here it is. I give you my word that I myself have found it worth believing - worth giving my heart and my will to as well as my mind." To put the point in a single word, communicators of belief *in* are expected to be *sincere*.

Where then do these reflections of mine upon the *content* - the *what* - of that which we exist to communicate leave us in the end? With a conclusion which is as important as it is familiar. Namely this - if the word 'authority' is at all appropriate to the minister, his authority consists, not in his knowledge, but in his sincerity. In his own commitment to that *in* which he advocates belief.

### **The Method of Communication**

I turn now from the *what* to the *how* of communication, from *content* to *method*. As I remarked earlier, I have no nostrums to offer; I know of no surefire methods of converting our generation to the Faith. All I hope to do is to make a little clearer what is involved in *any* method of communication. The question I shall try to answer is this: How must any method of communication necessarily proceed? If we can answer it, we shall not be at the end of all our frustrations; but we shall at least be at the beginning of any well directed efforts to overcome them.

The essence of the matter lies here. In order to communicate anything to any given individual at any given time, you have to do two things: namely (i) to *keep within* what he already believes and (ii) to *take him beyond* what he already believes. Let us consider these apparently conflicting requirements in turn.

Why do you have to keep within what he already believes? The answer is simple. Because only so can you make what you have to communicate meaningful and credible to his mind. In any age or society there are always certain beliefs which are generally accepted and which determine what - in that age or society - is considered reasonable to think or to do. They are

beliefs about (i) what *is the case* and (ii) what *ought to be done*. They are cast, that is to say, in either the indicative or the imperative moods. Sociologists sometimes call them "the norms of intelligibility." Such norms differ, of course, from one age to another, one community to another. But for any human being those of his own age and community are determinative of what he will find meaningful or believable.

To illustrate the point, think for a moment about the history of christian doctrine. I think it shows what is meant by my contention that anything which is communicated has to be fitted into the beliefs which people already hold. The theories of the Atonement, as they are called, will serve as a specific example. They were all attempts to make the belief that Christ died for our sins meaningful and believable. Origen, you will recall, said long ago that Christ died for our sins in the sense that God tricked the Devil into accepting Christ, whom he could not destroy, as a ransom for the release of mankind, which he could have destroyed. This made sense of Christ's death for people who believed: (i) that the Devil does in fact exist, and (ii) that what you ought to do with an enemy is to outsmart him if you can. Anselm, in a different age, explained Christ's death in terms of the *wergild* or 'honour price' - i.e. a feudal institution whereby the greater the person injured, the greater the penal satisfaction demanded. Only one who was both God and Man, said Anselm, could pay the *wergild* which had to be paid by man to God, against whom he had offended. This made sense of the Atonement for people who believed: (i) that God is related to man in a feudal manner, and (ii) that a *wergild* ought always to be paid when offences have been committed. Abelard in his turn wrote for people who could not see things altogether in penal terms. Christ died for our sins, according to Abelard, in the sense that the Cross provided such a moving demonstration of God's love for man, who had rejected Him, that it kindled a reciprocal love in men's hearts and thereby redeemed them from the will to sin. This makes sense for people who believe: (i) that it is psychologically possible for a hostile will to be changed by a demonstration of love, and (ii) that what ought to be done with people who have done wrong is to make them into better people and not simply punish them.

In all three of these instances, what was being attempted was the communication of the religious belief that Christ died for our sins by fitting it into beliefs which the people addressed *already held* about both (i) what is the case and (ii) what ought to be done. Only so could it become meaningful and credible for them.

But, of course, what I have just been saying is only half the story. You have not communicated a belief to people, if you have left them exactly where they were before you attempted to do so. Those whom Origen convinced that Christ had died for their sins still believed in the existence of the Devil and the appropriateness of outsmarting enemies; but now they also believed that the Devil had been outsmarted and so was *no longer to be feared*, and this was something new. Those whom Anselm convinced still believed, as they had done before, that there is always a *wergild* to be paid; but now they also believed that so far as their sins were concerned it *had been paid*, and that was something new. Those influenced by Abelard's

teaching still believed that hearts can be changed by love; but now they *felt in their own hearts* a love which bound them to God and their fellow-men, and that was something new. Christian beliefs never leave people where they were before. They always add something new to what there was there before - to what people think *is the case* or what they consider *ought to be done*.

What all this comes to is that there is a paradox in the idea of communication. If a belief is to be communicated to people, it must at one and the same time be shown to *conform* to what they already believe and to *transform* what they already believe - to keep within it and to go beyond it. These two logical necessities apply to the communication of any and every kind of belief - be it scientific, political, moral, or whatever. Unless people can fit the belief you want to communicate to them into what they already believe, it will have no significance or credibility in their minds; but unless what you want to communicate takes them beyond what they already believe and shows them something new concerning what is the case, or what ought to be done, then nothing will have passed from you to them and there will have been no communication.

This helps us to understand what happens when there is a lack of communication. If the gap between what people already believe and what you want them to believe is too wide, then they, for their part, will be unable to approach you sufficiently to understand or credit what you are saying; and you, for your part, will be unable to get close enough to persuade them to accept the belief which you want to communicate to them.

Nowadays it is often said that it is precisely this kind of gap which has opened up between the Church and the man in the street. Even Churchmen themselves have taken to calling ours the post-christian era. Our culture, they say, is deeply secular. Not only has there been a practical secularization which has made men care more for things than for values; but, more fundamentally, there has been an ideological, or theoretical, secularization which has made religion meaningless and unbelievable. It is not simply that the thought-forms of the *New Testament* - the three-storied universe, the belief in evil spirits, and so on - are outdated and need to be demythologized, as Bultmann contended. Secularization goes deeper than that. There has been an ontological contraction. People no longer believe in two orders of being but only one. They think of the material world as the only world there is; and of the moral and spiritual values realized in the activity and experience of human beings as the only such values that exist. Well, how do you fit christian belief into this contracted conception of reality? And how do you get people whose thinking is determined by it to move beyond it to the thought of God?

This is the question which confronts every minister who sits down to prepare a sermon, however far from intellectual he may take his congregation to be. His sermon must somehow take christian belief to where his people are in order to make it mean anything to them; but it must also bring them from where they are to a thought of God which will change their minds and hearts. There is no easy answer to how this can be done. But there are, I think, some very clear answers as to how it should *not* be done.

There are two ways in which the would-be communicator of christian



belief can try to escape from the trouble which secularization creates for him. I will call them pietistic dualism and monistic humanism respectively. By the former I mean putting religion into a separate compartment: by-passing the question of its significance and credibility by simply not asking how its beliefs and practices fit in with other ideas now widely held about what is the case or what ought to be done. Pietistic dualism is a sort of spiritual schizophrenia which, I am sure, some of you will have encountered in your own spheres of work. The other way of escape - humanistic monism - is more fashionable in intellectual circles. It is the view that you can reduce religion to human terms. Christ was a man (period). According to this view a belief such as "Christ died for our sins" really means that if we try to live as he lived, we shall be free, as he was, from the fear of death or deprivation; and an injunction such as "Love your neighbour" really means that we should support social and political movements for reform and liberation wherever they occur. Humanistic monism calls us to seek "the secular meaning of the Gospel" and somewhat less tendentiously, bids us ground our faith simply in "christian empiricism."

If I am sure of anything it is that these two escape-routes - pietistic dualism and humanistic monism - lead nowhere. They take the distinctive meaning out of Christianity; and if they make it credible, they do so by transforming it into something other than itself. There is no road but the hard road; no way to meet secularization but head on. Whether it be you in your pulpit preaching sermons to show your people that, given what they think it reasonable to do, the christian law of love makes sense; or me in my study writing books or papers which try to show that, given what contemporary philosophers say, the language used to express christian belief does not die by a thousand qualifications, as its detractors maintain. The paradox of communication defines the brief of the communicator. It is never to flee from the thought of his time nor yet to succumb to it. It is always to fit christian belief into what the people of his time find it meaningful and credible to believe in order to take them beyond that to what God has revealed for the salvation of men in all the ages through His Son.

I spoke a short time ago about sincerity. What I have had to say about the method of communication may have struck some readers as highly abstract, so let me conclude by returning to that former theme in brief, but exceedingly concrete, terms. One of my predecessors in the pastorate at Atherton was called Malins Johnson. I only met him a time or two when he was in retirement but he lives in my memory after all these years. And so he should. For, as an old church-member said one day, recalling his life and work, "Ah, Mr Johnson. Now, he was a good man. If you were only walking along Market Street and you saw him in the distance, it made you think of God." If I were a betting man, that is the *how* of ministerial communication on which I would put my money. And sometimes in the blue of the night I lie awake wishing I had been up to it.

W.D. Hudson

## **WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION**

409, Barking Road, Plaistow, London E13 8AL

Dear Fellow Ministers,

As I look back over the letters I have written for the Fraternal since I became Superintendent Minister at West Ham, I find (and this is not altogether surprising) that the subject of money has occurred with what to you might be monotonous regularity. I am not apologising for this. Our financial needs are very great, and in view of the diminishing resources available to local Government, are likely to become even greater. As our dependence upon statutory funds decreases, our appeal to our fellow Christians must inevitably increase.

You will be pleased to know that I decided not to talk about money in this issue! What I really want to share with you is the wonderful provision that God makes for all our needs. I am constantly encouraged by the quality and the dedication of those who come to work in the Mission. It is humbling to see the marriage of high technical ability with deep Christian commitment. Will you pray for all the members of the Mission staff, that in the routine of our day to day operations we may not lose sight of God's vision for our work. Please pray also for those who come to us for help. Their needs are often very great, and far beyond our ability to meet apart from the wisdom and the love that the Holy Spirit gives. I profoundly believe that the work of the Mission is part of the "ministry of reconciliation" that God has committed to us. It is a great privilege to see folk reconciled within themselves as their inner conflicts are resolved, and to see them reconciled to one another and to God by the power of the love of Jesus.

This ministry, which reaches to the deepest levels of human need, can only be sustained by prayer - ours and yours.

Brethren, pray for us.

May the Lord bless you in all your ministry and witness.

Yours sincerely,

Trevor W. Davis,  
Superintendent Minister

# **BAPTISMAL PREPARATION - Past, Present And .....?**

By the time the Church was becoming respectable, and gaining in esteem from its imperial patronage following the conversion of Constantine, the rite of baptism was being preceded by a long period of preparation in the catechumenate. The purpose of this was that those who were baptised should understand the meaning and implications of the faith which the Church professed, which they would affirm immediately prior to baptism, and into which they would be admitted by their baptism. This normally occupied a three year period but as the Apostolic Constitutions pointed out:

"Let him who is to be a catechumen be a catechumen for three years; but if anyone be diligent, earnest and shows good will let him be admitted: for it is not the length of time, but the kind of life, that is the criterion."<sup>1</sup>

It was during this three year period of general catechetical instruction that the catechumens were expected to demonstrate their good will and sincerity, and were appointed a sponsor to present them for enrolment for baptism.

The role of the sponsor seems to have been five fold - a) to introduce the catechumen to the Church, thus beginning to vouch for the genuineness of his intent, b) to stand as spiritual surety for the catechumen, c) to show paternal love, and to exercise pastoral care, d) to attend the catechetical classes with the catechumen and supplement these with personal instruction, and e) to receive the catechumen to his new life following his renunciation of Satan and his adherence to Christ at baptism. In one of his lectures John Chrysostom addressed the sponsors; warning them of the seriousness of their responsibilities and of the penalties which they could incur both if they failed themselves or if their catechumen should subsequently fall away.

"Let them not think that what takes place is a trifling thing, but let them see clearly that they share in the credit if by their admonition they lead those entrusted to them to the path of virtue. Again if those they sponsor become careless, the sponsors themselves will suffer great punishment. That is why it is customary to call the sponsors 'spiritual fathers', that they may learn by this very action how great an affection they must show to those they sponsor in the matter of spiritual instruction. If it is a noble thing to lead to a zeal for virtue those who are in no way related to us, much more should we fulfil this precept in the case of the one whom we receive as a spiritual son. You, the sponsors have learned that no slight danger hangs over your heads if you are remiss."<sup>2</sup>

The threat of the danger to those who fail in their sponsorship presumably comes from the accepted interpretation by the fourth century Church of Jesus' words in Matthew 18:6-9.

The three year period of general catechetical instruction was followed by a period of intense baptismal preparation, normally during the Lenten period. In Jerusalem, an introductory lecture was given at the beginning of Lent, a course of eighteen lectures on the creed followed, probably in the early morning<sup>3</sup> and a series of five shorter lectures during Easter Week, following baptism, which explained the mysteries through which the newly-baptised passed. In Antioch there seem to have been three prebaptismal lectures given at ten day intervals preceding Holy Thursday when the third

lecture was given, the fourth took the form of a baptismal address, and then five lectures followed in Easter Week<sup>4</sup>, although John Chrysostom revealed details of the baptismal mysteries in his prebaptismal lectures, and devoted the subsequent lectures to aspects of Christian citizenship, especially on one day when it appears half of his potential congregation had gone to the races<sup>5</sup> In Mopsuestia, a small city some twenty five miles from Antioch, we have a similar series of sixteen lectures, using the creed, the rites of baptism and communion, and the Lord's Prayer as the syllabus,<sup>6</sup> although all these seem to be given prior to baptism, and we have no evidence of extant postbaptismal lectures. It may be that as the original series survive only in Syriac translation, the translators did not consider the postbaptismal series of sufficient worth theologically, or it may be that they have quite simply not survived the ravages of time. The purpose of this credal instruction was so that the candidate might learn the basic tenets of the Christian faith and from the lectures understand the reasons behind the credal formula. There is evidence to suggest that the lectures were based on the Armenian Lectionary for the Lenten period, and as such became part of the normal worship pattern of the Christian community<sup>7</sup>. Towards the close of the prebaptismal period, each candidate had to publicly face the examination of the Bishop concerning his faith, and as part of that examination he would be called upon to recite the creed.

During the prebaptismal period, the catechumens were regularly exorcised, and frequently encouraged to renounce Satan and all his works. Indeed Cyril of Jerusalem saw this as a vital part of the catechetical procedure<sup>8</sup>. He compared exorcism to the trial of gold in the furnace by the goldsmith, and said:

"so also, exorcizers, infusing fear by the Holy Ghost, and setting the soul on fire in the crucible of the body, make the evil spirit flee, who is our enemy, and salvation and the hope of eternal life abide; and henceforth the soul, cleansed from its sins, hath salvation."<sup>9</sup>

Exorcism seems to have been a symbolic gesture, assuring the candidate of his cleansing from sin, and from the temptation to do evil that was wrought by his new life in Christ. Although alien to our tradition, it has remained in the Roman Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults and is explained in 'A New Catechism' thus:

"Then the priest performs Jesus' paschal gesture<sup>10</sup>. He breathes upon the candidate, and orders the evil spirit to make way for the Holy Spirit.

This sort of 'exorcism' of the wicked spirit occurs frequently during the solemnities of baptism. The evil which threatens a man is told to go away, always addressed as a person - the devil. But the words envisage all evil, including the influence of the sins of others, the evil inclinations of the subject, and his previous errors as regards God... the ceremony, which is starkly uncompromising throughout, (shows) nothing but light against darkness.

And well that is so, because the ceremony is a brief and vigorous re-statement of a vital hour. The struggle for life, the conversion of the candidate, is summed up with nuances, with a biblical succinctness and profundity. We see the temptations, the dilemmas, the darkness, the despair which have presented themselves and will be there again; and we see over against them each time God's peace and goodness and joy. In a word it is the expulsion of the evil spirit and the coming of the good."<sup>11</sup>

Immediately prior to the baptismal ceremony itself in the fourth century this dramatic presentation of Matthew 16:19 was given a very distinct place in the renunciation of evil and adherence to Christ (apotaxis and syntaxis) by the candidate, which we have maintained today in our first question to candidate:

"A..... Do you turn to God in Christ, repent of your sins and renounce evil?"<sup>12</sup>

In the Churches of Antioch and Mopsuestia, this was followed by the anointing of the candidate with oil symbolising his suppleness - from the anointing of the athletes<sup>13</sup> and strength for the combat with the devil which Christ would give.

Having looked at these three elements of the fourth century baptismal instruction, we move on to consider the question of the practice of baptismal instruction within the denomination today. To supplement my own impressions I would welcome the guidance of others as to their practice for I am conscious that we are not dealing with three geographically defined situations but potentially as many different approaches as there are ministers and churches. Such guidance from others will be of immense value as I seek to consider the Baptist pattern today in comparison to the fourth century practice during the next few months whilst I continue my Research. The criticism is often made of the American Baptist Churches that they are very good at making disciples and very bad at keeping them. The *Signs of Hope* report quotes a London report which highlights this problem:

"In London a few years ago it was shown that almost a quarter of those baptised did not subsequently become Church Members, and 43% of those erased who still lived in the neighbourhood of the Church had enjoyed less than six years of membership."<sup>14</sup>

These figures indicate that we are not exempt from the blame which attaches to our American colleagues and add weight to the very real doubt regarding the adequacy of our baptismal preparation and of our discipleship classes following baptism. In purely simplistic terms, Jesus' temptation came immediately after his baptism<sup>15</sup> and Stephen Winward reminds us of the link between baptism and temptation<sup>16</sup>, and this factor surely raises the question of whether we are justified in leaving the newly-baptised to fend for themselves without ensuring as much support for them as possible in terms of assurance, of support groups, and supportive relationships to see them through the time when they are extremely vulnerable.

In May 1980, Dr Russell wrote to all ministers, following the discussion of "Call to Commitment" at the Nottingham Assembly. Among other things, he asked for copies of courses of baptismal instruction given by ministers to candidates for baptism, for the use of the Strategy Committee in their discussions. To judge from reported responses to Dr Russell's request, many of us do not feel our particular practice of sufficient value to share with others, although sales of the EMBA Church Membership Booklet<sup>17</sup> and *The Way of Christ*<sup>18</sup> suggest that we are always ready to consider the schemes of others and see what we can glean from them.

My own practice is to base my discipleship classes on *The Way of Christ*, covering section 1 - 3 before baptism viz. What Christ did on the Cross, Our Response to Christ, and Baptism and 4 - 12 viz. The Bible, Prayer, The Holy Spirit, The Church, Knowing God's Will, Stewardship, Christian Service, The Baptist Family and A Life of Commitment, following baptism when the newly baptised Christian has some initial experiences on which to build and occasionally some misconceptions to be corrected. This is supported by the requirement: to read the booklet *The New Testament Teaching on*

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In suitable cases Fire policies can be extended to include the risks of riot, civil commotion etc., and *malicious damage*. The Insured is responsible for paying the first amount of each and every loss. This figure may be as little as £10 but higher in many cases according to the risk. This is usually referred to as an “excess” and is payable for each occasion on which damage occurs. Glass breakage is often the result of malicious damage, and this extension of the fire policy will provide protection. However, it must be stressed that the cause has to be established as malicious damage, and the matter must be reported to the police. Sheer accidental breakage of glass is covered only under a Glass Policy.

Yours sincerely,  
M.E. Purver  
General Manager.

*Baptism* as daily readings prior to baptism. The EMBA booklet would also make this approach possible as its nine sections deal with God, Christian Conversion, Baptism, Church Membership a) the need for commitment, b) responsibility to a community, Christian Beliefs, Growing to Maturity, Our Christian Heritage, and Our Baptist Family.

However, I am aware that neither of these admirable booklets give as thorough an approach to the Christian faith in doctrinal terms as was given in the fourth century. Their authors would argue, and quite rightly, that this was not their purpose in writing, but rather to provide a stimulus for discussion and further thought, which is fine if further thought and deeper discussion to the level of the candidate's ability takes place. As its answer to the problem of material *Signs of Hope*<sup>19</sup> suggests the use of the Christian Training Programme courses although once again the onus for using the material at the right depth remains on the candidate and the tutor.

Whilst I would be unhappy with a formal credal approach to catechetical instruction, I would sincerely hope that our practice could ensure that every candidate who is baptised is able to express his own faith in his own way, is able to fully understand the implications of baptism and church membership, and is equipped to develop his faith in today's world through his experiences in the world. This is not a process which we can hurry or force, but which will only come if the idea of continued development through a supportive group is plainly seen and accepted.

The area of baptismal sponsorship is one which has also had a fairly chequered history. I noticed the other day the illuminating comment from the 1890s that the Church at Derby Road, Nottingham decided that the practice of visiting candidates for baptism was no longer necessary, and was to be discontinued forthwith. In other situations, visiting is for the purpose of assessing a person's suitability for Church Membership alone whilst in yet other situations it is used quite explicitly to check up that the minister has adequately fulfilled the task of Baptismal preparation. If one turns for guidance to the booklet *Church Membership - Suggestions for Visitors to Candidates*<sup>20</sup>, we look in vain for any hint of a continuing relationship until the last paragraph. If this is to be seen as the 'official' view of the role of the sponsors or visitors the purpose of the visit is defined early on, in the paragraph 'Duty to the Church':

"What is the duty of the visitors as far as the Church is concerned? It is to satisfy themselves that the candidate is a sincere believer in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that he has given his life into His keeping and is devoted to His service."<sup>21</sup>

When the hint of a continuing supportive relationship does come, it is not suggested in a particularly convincing manner, nor at this point can such a relationship be seen to arise naturally in every case. However, let the booklet speak for itself:

"One thing remains to be done, and it is of vital importance. Let the visitors decide which of them is to try to keep in touch with the candidate in the days ahead, to be a friend to him, to stimulate his interest in the Church, to encourage him to take up or continue service in it, and so to build up that new life in Christ upon which he has entered."<sup>22</sup>

It is my feeling that all these approaches to the situation of sponsorship, expedient though they may be, fail to realise the maximum potential from the situation.

As soon as a person expresses any form of commitment, he should be linked with a mature Christian whose specific task is to share in his nurture in the Christian faith, and to begin a lasting relationship which goes on beyond baptism. Every effort should be made to make a personal link which will be of value to, and valued by, both candidate and sponsor - perhaps using hobbies, interests, family background, or even neighbourliness as criteria in choosing the mature Christian Sponsor. It should then be both sponsor and candidate who come seeking the candidate's baptism of the minister, and seeking the candidate's membership of the Church. The discipleship classes should be arranged in consultation with both candidates and sponsors, and the sponsors encouraged to attend the classes to share in the discussion and so that they may better support the candidate. The sponsor should also be actively involved in the Baptismal Service, either by leading the candidate to the baptismal waters, or preferably receiving him into his new life on their emergence from the baptistry. He should also be at his side as he is received into Church Membership. It is all too easy for our Churches to develop a small nucleus of six or eight 'good' visitors, and neglect the potential of many other members of the Church who could serve just as well. The result is that the six or eight become so overloaded with candidates whom they have sponsored, who are young in the faith, that they fail to be as supportive as they should, and the system deteriorates into a rubber stamping procedure which ends at Baptism.

For the fourth century newly-baptised Christian there was a real certainty of knowing his forgiveness and transition to a new life. In our reaction against absolution from sins being an exclusively priestly function<sup>23</sup>, have we not thrown out the candidate's forgiveness with the baptistry water? The anonymous booklet *Why be Baptised*<sup>24</sup> does not mention forgiveness, and only contains a passing reference to the new life which comes to those who have committed their lives to Christ. Stephen Winward does stress the aspect of forgiveness, mediated by Christ through the inward identification of the candidate with the death of Christ, and demonstrated in the outward and visible sign of baptism, and among his several illustrations he suggests the cleansing of Naaman:

"As Naaman was baptised in the Jordan to be cleansed from leprosy, so we are baptised into Christ to be cleansed from all sin — the sin of the human race of which we are part, and our own personal sin, both remembered and forgotten. The baptised are cleansed, made to belong to God, and accepted by God. "You have been through the purifying waters; you have been dedicated to God and justified through the name of the Lord Jesus and the Spirit of our God' (1 Cor. 6:11)"<sup>25</sup>

Yet in reminding us how bright a jewel baptism is in the Baptist crown, Paul Beasley-Murray<sup>26</sup> fails to remind us that we are also assuring our candidates that they have renounced evil, and they are living as new creatures in Christ, and are truly forgiven men and women.

Similarly the whole concept of exorcism has a superstitious and ritualistic ring to it that appals many of us, but the binding of evil is part of the ministry of every Christian if we are going to take Matthew 16:19 with the same degree of enthusiasm as we take the preceding verse regarding the faith of Simon Peter. It did fulfil the purpose of assuring the candidate of his



forgiveness, and encouraging him to begin to live his new life confident that having confessed his sins to God, then 'He is faithful and just to forgive his sins' and these sins are completely washed away in baptism. It was Peter's only solution to the sin felt by his Pentecost congregation<sup>27</sup> and there are those who come to us as candidates for baptism, who are so guilt-ridden that they need the extra reassurance that a stress on forgiveness and the renunciation of evil can bring, especially within the context of the Service of Believer's Baptism. This service is a marvellous statement of the cleansing of the Christian from sin, the death and burial of the old self, and the emergence of the new man to a life in Christ. It was and is perhaps our most powerful visual aid of the events of the vital hour of conversion.

St Cyril of Jerusalem and his contemporaries were quick to use every aspect of the ceremony in their day to illustrate the various stages of Christian's newness of life in Christ. Perhaps we need to follow their example and make more of our baptismal preparation and of baptism itself.

**R.F.G. Burnish**

### **Author's Note**

This article has been born of my research which covers the fourth century period and then the practice of the period 1960-1980 in three Church situations in which adults are baptised. Plainly the Baptist Churches in Britain are to be one such Church situation. As a result I would like to hear readers' views about their own practice, in relation to the areas mentioned above, and also in terms of current baptismal and catechetical practice.

#### **Notes**

- 1 Const. Apost. VIII.xxxii. 16. trans J. Donaldson: Edinburgh 1870 ANCL XVII p.495
- 2 John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instruction 11.16 trans. P.W. Harkins London 1963 ACW XXXI p.49
- 3 Peregr. Aeth. XLVI 3 trans. J. Wilkinson: Egeria's Travels. London 1971 p.144. See also Cyril of Jerusalem: Procatechesis, Catecheses 1.12. Washington 1969. FaCh 61
- 4 John Chrysostom: op. cit. p.12
- 5 John Chrysostom: op. cit. VI.1. p.93
- 6 Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on the Nicene Creed. trans. A Mungana Cambridge, 1932. Wood St.5; Commentary on the Lord's Prayer and the Sacraments. trans. A. Mingana Cambridge 1933, Wood St.6.
- 7 J. Wilkinson: Egeria's Travels. London 1971. p.276-7
- 8 Cyril of Jerusalem: Procat. IX p.77
- 9 Cyril of Jerusalem: op. cit. IX trans. F.L. Cross London 1951 p.45
- 10 John XX.22
- 11 A New Catechism (Revd. Edn.) London 1970 p.242-3
- 12 S.F. Winward: Your Baptism, London 1969. p.45
- 13 cf. John Chrysostom: op. cit. II 23 p.52; XI 27 p.169
- 14 Signs of Hope 5.2.4. Baptist Union 1979 p.26
- 15 Mark I. 12-13
- 16 S.F. Winward: The New Testament Teaching on Baptism. Baptist Union 1952 p.8
- 17 A revised edition will shortly be available from the East Midland Baptist Association.
- 18 D.F. Neil: The Way of Christ. London 1973.
- 19 op. cit. p.26
- 20 J.O. Barrett: Church Membership: Suggestions for Visitors to Candidates. Baptist Union 1970
- 21 op. cit. p.1. 22 op. cit. p.5.
- 23 A related question is whether or not we ought to remind ourselves more in our worship of the assurance of forgiveness which is ours. In Churches and denominations whose clergy fulfil a distinctly priestly function, absolution is part of the weekly liturgy. But what reminders of their forgiveness do our people receive?
- 24 Why Be Baptised? Baptist Union 1969
- 25 S.F. Winward: "Your Baptism" Baptist Union 1969 pp.21-22
- 26 Baptist Times Vol.CXXV No. 6859 (23.10.80) P. Beasley-Murray: Make the Most of Baptism p.12.
- 27 Acts II 37-38

# **I was never told about THAT at theological College .....**

Such a cry must frequently have been made in many a Manse during the first years of ministry. The first wedding, baptism, or funeral pose such questions as:

'How do I hold my book, take the ring and keep the service card all in two hands?'

'Where should the candidate stand and how do I hold him?'

'Who is in charge at the grave-side?'

A good senior friend, or a kind colleague add their help and advice, but through the years the colleges who train men for the ministry have had to face the charge from their recent graduates that 'no-one ever told me that'. Further, the churches have sometimes indicated that the approach and attitude of the new minister suggest that basic practical matters have not been attended to in his college course.

In the light of this, what is being done at Spurgeon's to help a man cope with the practicalities of the Ministry?

Let it be said, in the first place, that it has never in fact been the case that nothing has been taught about the practicalities of the Ministry but major developments have been made in recent years.

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The Course at Spurgeon's takes four years. It consists of three years of academic theological and biblical work as a basis, foundation and framework for a person's ministry. During those three years there is a structured course in practical matters which is an integral part of the Course for the award of Diploma in Pastoral Studies. The fourth year is entirely given to the completion of that Diploma.

## **CONTENT**

Dividing the material into its two basic constituents the Course is pursued as follows:

### **A. THE FIRST THREE YEARS**

During these a number of lecture courses in practical subjects are followed:

*Year 1* - includes a basic introduction to preaching and homiletics and an introduction to the principles and expressions of worship.

*Year 2* - includes a course concerned with the practicalities of the administration of the Ordinances and other special services (weddings, dedications, funerals, etc.).

*Year 3* - includes a course on pastoral visitation and an introduction to evangelism.

All these courses consist of two terms of lectures with one lecture a week in each subject.

In addition, practical activity is engaged in in the following areas:

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Write to: **Rev. A.S. Clement**  
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*Preaching:* Twice weekly the College assembles for Sermon Class and every first and third year student leads worship and preaches during the academic year. Criticism and video tape recordings are used to help improve a man's exegetical, homiletical, liturgical and communication skills. Students are available for preaching regularly. Whilst first year students are only 'out' occasionally, final year men need to book well in advance any Sundays they need 'off'.

*Missions:* Every student is required as part of his course to engage in at least one Evangelistic Mission. These are normally held in September and vary in their size and approach according to the needs of the sponsoring church. The College engages in Mission alongside a church as a catalyst in their ongoing work of Mission.

*Clinical Pastoral Training Courses* - these are arranged by the Hospital Chaplaincies Council during the long vacation. Every student has to attend one of these three/four week courses during his training. Commonly they are known as 'Hospital Chaplaincy Courses' but, though based at hospitals, they are aimed at training a person for pastoral work and counselling. Naturally there are the added advantages of learning about chaplaincy work, the hospital and health services and mental illnesses. Undertaken in a thoroughly ecumenical and multi-disciplinary scene the ultimate value of the courses is beyond question.

*Student Assistantships* - every student is assigned during his first year at the College. In this way a student learns some of the basics of the work of the Pastor in a living situation. His task is not so much that of an 'assistant minister' as an 'observer' - watching the Pastor at work, visiting with him, regularly observing his leadership of worship and preaching, discussing with him his devotional and spiritual life, his apportionment of time, his priorities, his leadership of 'special' services (weddings, funerals etc.), his preparation of candidates for baptism, membership, marriage, his counselling of the bereaved, his leadership of deacons, church and committee meetings and his involvement in the community.

*Student Pastorates:* In his second year a student normally has the charge of a pastorless church where he exercises a regular (alternate weeks) pulpit ministry and where he is the leader of deacons and church meetings. Within very definite limits he is responsible pastorally.

## **B. THE FOURTH YEAR**

The final year of a student's course is engaged entirely in Pastoral Studies. It is built on the foundation of the theological courses pursued in the first three years and develops all the material of the earlier practical courses.

Its AIM is to equip a student in a practical way for the Christian Ministry. It ASSUMES a basic theological knowledge.

It ATTEMPTS to cover at an introductory level seven areas of study:

(a) *Psychology and Pastoral Work*: Basic academic psychology is included in the degree and diploma courses, so applied psychology is the area discussed here. Naturally great stress is laid on pastoral counselling and care for all sorts and conditions of people (adolescence, marriage, parenthood, the single life, the stages of life, bereavement, retirement).

(b) *Sociology and Pastoral Work* - a basic Sociology Course is included in the first three years of training. The consequent implications of things learned in that Course are developed in the Pastoral Studies Course. Consideration is given to the family; urban, rural, twilight, new and redeveloped communities and their challenges; and multi-racial and pluralistic situations. This also includes information about the resources normally and statutorily available in our society.

(c) *Preaching and Communication*: in which a developed course in Biblical Hermeneutics, a very imaginative course on communication and introductions to Audio and Visual Aids in communication are given. Further, extra-mural courses are made available to students with particular interests (use of media, local radio etc.).

(d) *Christian Education* is looked at in two particular spheres:

(i) *Education within the Church* - this includes the total programme of learning, from Sunday School through catechetical classes, marriage preparation, to training for evangelism and the selection and training of leaders.

(ii) *Education in School* - The basic presuppositions behind Education Acts, syllabuses, the aims, and resources for religious education in schools, school assemblies and the part a pastor can play in helping head teachers, teachers, schools and parents in the State system. Time is spent discussing school assemblies and experience is gained through Missions and other opportunities.

(e) *Christian Worship and Spirituality*: Modules are included which reflect biblical principles, historical development and contemporary trends in worship. Music and drama in worship are also introduced. The maintaining of a devotional life is discussed and a very stimulating series of lectures on Christian Spirituality in the devotional Classics is used to enlarge vision and understanding and to encourage godliness in a secular world.

(f) *Mission* - Segments on the history and theology of Mission and Missions are included. Contemporary expressions and structures for Mission (such as Church Growth, One Step Forward etc.) are introduced. The class engages in a period of Mission just after Easter each year. (In 1981 teams are going to Ford, Plymouth; Boulevard, Hull; and The Vine Sevenoaks, for eight days). Planning and preparation for this is developed throughout the year.

(g) *Church Administration*: This section of the Course includes a host of matters relevant to Ministry, from Biblical principles regarding the Pastor, Elder, Deacon, through church order, the church and deacons meeting, office administration, retrieval systems, manse affairs and a pastor's finances, association, fraternal and ecumenical life. Legal matters relating to church, manse and marriage are also included.

## **COURSE PRESENTATION**

*LECTURES* - are given by every member of the Staff assisted by about fifty visiting lecturers each year. These latter are specialists in their own field, gifted and experienced people who not only teach but make themselves available as resource personnel. Some lecture for a single hour, others undertake a course of ten weeks giving two hours each week, and the remainder use whatever combination they need.

*SEMINARS* - led by course members themselves.

*SPECIAL COURSES* - which include workshop and real-life experiences, e.g. a week long course at a local psychiatric hospital; a day course at the Royal School of Church Music.

*VISITS* are made to situations/places which provide insight into ministry today, e.g. to Millmead, Guildford; to a local Inner City church; to an intensely multi-racial scene; to Baptist Church House; to the Salvation Army International Training College, to a Crematorium.

*PROJECTS* - Six pieces of written work are required during the Course. These include:

- (i) a baptismal class syllabus
- (ii) marriage preparation material
- (iii) an extended project (10,000 words) on a subject of a student's own choice. These have included:  
The Church Meeting in Baptist Life;  
Puritan Counselling Literature and Today;  
Healing in the Local Church;  
Pastoral Care of Homosexuals;  
Efficient Management for Ministers;  
The Theology and Practices of the Unification Church;  
Depression.
- (iv) a Mission assessment and report
- (v)&(vi) less ambitious projects of a student's own choice.

Work is not intended to be only of a written kind - some excellent practical, audio-visual and display materials have been included.

The Diploma is awarded bearing in mind the work that has been done in the overall work of the four years.

*COURSE DEVELOPMENT*: Throughout the Course the Tutor responsible as Course Director and Administrator, meets regularly with those engaged

in it to discuss the contents, and to listen to suggestions and criticisms. Further, Faculty recommendations, and suggestions from churches and individuals are considered, and assessed. After five years of implementation and experimentation the Course is developing into a regular pattern but it is constantly reviewed, assessed and new material is included, whilst less important or less satisfactory sections are removed. Overall, an attempt is made to produce a balanced programme which will serve to introduce a student to some of the basics of the Ministry. Resource information, and bibliographies are provided so that a student's ministry can be developed in the light of the demands of a particular interest or situation.

Suggestions for materials and personnel will always be welcome so that the Course may equip a student the better for the pastorate.

Peter D. Manson