

A FOOTNOTE

We are grateful to a member for this report on a local conference at Parkstone, Dorset, on the subject of

The Provision of a Teaching Ministry

(Notes by Mr. H. A. Smith, C.B.E.)

A conference of brethren from the south and west was held to consider the important subject of the 'ministry of the Word' with particular reference to New Testament teaching on the matter, and the responsibilities of elders.

The guest speaker was Mr. Ward Gasque, a graduate from the U.S.A. who is at present doing post-graduate study at Manchester University under Professor F. F. Bruce. After each session there was time for questions and discussion. A great deal of what Mr. Gasque told us of the need in North America could be echoed in relation to the state of assemblies in this country. He described the pattern of assembly life in the United States and Canada, and underlined the following main trends as he sees the changing situation at the present time.

Conditions in North America

1. There is widespread concern lest the Bible teaching provided in the assemblies should be inadequate for the building up of the body of Christ, and for the proper equipment of God's people in these days. This concern is issuing in a greater emphasis upon systematic and solid bible ministry, of which in the past there has been a great lack.

2. There is also a growing desire in the assemblies for a more effective and less wasteful use of the Lord's gifts to His people, particularly as to whole-time workers. A very large proportion of these would welcome a more settled ministry, instead of the itinerant kind. Where such gifted men are led to help assemblies in a more definite and consecutive way, and not merely as occasional visitors, God is blessing His work, and enriching His people.

3. Much is being done in what is known as pioneer work. The churches have recognised that there is a vast mission field at home, and they are concerned to bring the gospel to these people. This work takes the form of long-term visitations, sustained evangelism, and bible-teaching by experienced whole-time workers. As in N.T. times, the end in view is the planting of new churches as God blesses His word. (In Britain our new housing estates may well present opportunities for work of a similar nature.)

In the U.S. there is a body known as the 'Stewards Foundation' which is a consultative body, available to give advice on the design and construction of new buildings, and to lend money. This is not the only body so

to do. Great stress is placed upon providing adequate buildings, which usually commence with accommodation for youth work, out of which the new church will grow.

4. There is growing concern in connection with the need to give to the rising generation sound and systematic bible teaching. Following the lead of the Emmaus courses, other schools are providing such training in these days of rising educational standards for the young, and the not-so-young. Approximately 54 per cent of those who finish school go on to further education, and of those who graduate a high proportion proceed to post-graduate study.

5. Evangelistic outreach, the problem of making contact with the unconverted, is receiving increasing attention. The approach of a growing number of churches is informal and friendly; making full use of opportunities in the domestic and social spheres; e.g., coffee mornings for the ladies, youth activities, and group discussions in the home.

6. It is coming to be recognised that a great responsibility rests upon Christian leaders to ensure that the succession referred to in 2 Tim. 2: 2, is provided for; in order that, as the Holy Spirit enables, the Truth may be faithfully transmitted from one generation to another.

Where the Lord has endowed His servants with the opportunity and capacity for scholarship at the higher levels, these gifts should receive every encouragement, and opportunity for development and fulfilment. This may mean, for a few, advanced studies at post-graduate level in order that faithful men may be able 'to teach others also', whether whole-time workers or part time; i.e. as 'pastori pastorum'—teachers of teachers.

In the second session of the conference Mr. Gasque presented a challenging analysis of the situation which faces many assemblies to-day due to failure to provide an adequate ministry of the word, and to feed the flock of God in the local church. Conditions vary widely, but Mr. Gasque was concerned to put forward constructive suggestions in reply to the question—"What is the remedy?" It is clear that the value of such proposals depends upon local circumstances, and that all, or none, may be relevant to a given case.

There are, nevertheless, lines of action which have already proved fruitful in America. It is suggested that elders

1. (a) Discourage ministry, none of which is of a consecutive character, or

(b) none of which is by members of the local church, and by persons who may know little or nothing of the spiritual needs of those they address.

2. Provide ministry from all scripture, so that an all-round understanding of the total scheme of revelation will produce the 'man of God perfect (all-round) thoroughly furnished unto all good works'.

3. Be alert to the long-term needs of the churches, and able to recognise, therefore, early promise among those whom the Spirit of God

is gifting to be either whole or part time ministers of the word. These people should be encouraged to stir up the gift that is in them, and to undertake such study as will fit them worthily to answer the call of God. Just as the Lord can and does give discernment in the choice of missionary servants, is it not equally important that they exercise their responsibility in this field also?

Mr. Gasque pointed out that in order to provide a consecutive ministry in America a settled ministry is being used, which however is not by any means an exclusive ministry. He gave several good reasons in support. Where there is not sufficient gift in the local church it has been possible in some areas for two or more churches to invite a worker to give his whole time, and so help the local elders in their ministry of the word. This naturally raised the question of assembly responsibility for the adequate maintenance of the worker. Reference was made to the Accountant's letter in the June *Witness*.

Mr. Gasque pointed out that if but ten people tithed their income the result would be adequate to support one man *at their standard of living*.

Reflections of some of the Conveners

It seems to us that much of the import of the Pastoral Epistles has been overlooked in our churches. Some aspects of this are listed below.

1. That, in the nature of the case, teaching, to be teaching, must have in it an element of consecutiveness and continuity.

2. That upon the elders rests the duty of supplying this.

3. That ministry in a given area, as against an itinerant one, is needed to achieve this end.

4. That this is envisaged in 1 Tim. 5: 17, 18, where teaching elders are to be adequately remunerated.

5. That it follows that, not merely in an itinerant manner, but *locally*, the N.T. envisages men wholly given up to this ministry. Acts 6: 4; 1Tim. 4: 13-16. (note 'wholly', v. 15.)

6. That men such as Timothy and Titus seemed to have a ministry covering a number of churches, in some such manner as is suggested above. 1 Tim. 1: 3, 4; 2 Tim. 2: 2; Titus 1: 5.

With reference to a settled ministry there are current considerations:—

1. Those who are itinerant ministers would warmly welcome it, and with it the opportunity to be more with their families. It could be that the current system may have contributed to cases of family breakdown.

2. Such arrangements existed at the commencement of the movement in assemblies at Plymouth, Bristol and Beresford Chapel, London among others. It existed till very near our own day in Bristol, and Barnstaple. The present arrangements on the Blackdown Hills are of this nature.

3. We should have a real concern regarding those young men among us who feel the call of God to a settled teaching ministry, and who in

consequence are spending their time taking the necessary studies to fit themselves for this.

To sum up:—

1. The Lord, as Head of His church, gives the gift of 'teacher' to some persons, not all.

2. These are identifiable, should be publicly acknowledged, and opportunity given for the exercising of their gift. 1 Cor. 15: 15, 16.

3. These men were acknowledged by

(a) a form of laying on of hands,

(b) being regarded as set apart for their work. Acts 13: 3; 1 Tim. 4: 14; 2 Tim. 1: 6.

4. Existing responsible leaders, in this case Timothy, were regarded as having the duty of selecting upon the ground of (a) reliability (faithful men) and (b) competence (able to teach), and see to it that these men were adequately prepared for their task. 2 Tim. 2: 2.

5. Nothing has hindered the development of gift in the church of God so much as the system of a one-man ministry. It seems to us that a biblical mean between a one-man ministry, and an any-man ministry is needed.

6. Teaching needs to be other than amateurish, see 1 Tim. 4: 13-16 again. It demands time, study, patience, reading, labour and meditation to arrive at the ability to expound the sacred oracles. The end result should be ability to be generally understood. A solid background understanding of what lies behind the text is indispensable.

Paul's instructions to Timothy seem to imply a more responsible work of selection and training than is given to the ministry among us.

It may have been forgotten that the more prominent leaders of the early brethren were already trained scholars and theologians, and many were men of means, who were thereby able to 'wait on their ministry'.

Much more could be done in local areas to select and to train for the future those whom God is calling to His service.

Mr. Joseph adds the following:—

A. I feel that one of the most important tasks for elders, is to recognise and encourage the smallest stirrings of gift in the young, because as far as my knowledge goes there is lamentable failure in this, in some churches, and in others a total absence of such encouragement.

B. On the part of young people there seems to be a reluctance to pay the price of solid systematic study. The reasons?

1. Lack of teaching as to its need by senior men.

2. Lack of opportunity to exercise gift.

3. A living for 'this life', with all that that means, a disinclination to get priorities right when career and income may suffer.

CORRESPONDENCE

DIVORCE AND THE CHRISTIAN

MR. K. N. S. COUNTER (618 Oxford St., Winnipeg 9, Canada) writes:—

I found Mr. Light's letter on this subject most interesting, especially as his arguments are so refreshingly free from presuppositions as to what can and cannot be done to solve problems.

There has been widespread argument in various legal systems in favour of divorce where a marriage has broken down. This is not of course the equivalent of divorce by consent, since it would enable one spouse (in Finland, even the spouse causing the breakdown may do so) to petition without the agreement of the other.

For myself, I cannot feel happy about the idea of divorce by consent, even where so-called safeguards are introduced. Admittedly, it has been accepted in one form or another in Belgium, Luxembourg, Japan, China, Mexico and the Scandinavian countries. But in many of these the formalities are so cumbersome that the 'consent' tends to disappear from the primary place. Perhaps the introduction of family courts would in fact tend to reduce the rate of divorce; if so, it may be that those who argue against easier divorce would have some of their arguments proved correct.

As the Royal Commission on Marriage and Divorce said of the breakdown view, 'it sets the court an impossible task. To determine whether or not a marriage has completely broken down is really not a triable issue'. Is the question *necessarily* answered if both partners *think* the marriage is effectually at an end? And if we are not going to allow divorce where both think the marriage is at an end, can we if they only *wish* it were? Or is the difference of substance?

Perhaps others could comment from more direct knowledge than I on the various private members' bills which have been introduced to effect supposed reforms.

I should perhaps briefly add one comment, I believe it to be the only view of the matter that a Christian can take, that he should support the present English law relating to nullity in its broad precept: that where there is no true marriage and can be none (for example, through wilful refusal to consummate) the Court is doing no more than declaring an already existing state of affairs when it declares the marriage a nullity.

TOWARDS RENEWAL

MR. G. H. KING (72 D'Arcy Gardens, Kenton, Middx.) writes:—

I should like to make a few comments upon Dr. J. K. Howard's article in CBRF xii, entitled *Towards Renewal*.

Dr. Howard states that, 'the authority of Scripture rests in its ability to speak to mankind in all conditions of life and at all periods of human

history'. Authority is here identified with an ability. I find this position unsatisfactory, first because the evidence for the particular ability spoken of is extraordinarily difficult to evaluate. Has the Bible spoken to mankind in all conditions of life and at all periods of human history? I am not sure that there is an easy answer to that question, but Dr. Howard assumes the affirmative and his view of the authority of the Bible rests upon it.

Secondly, this is not the Bible's view of its own authority. The authority of the prophetic writings did not rest upon the 'hearing response' of the people. The authority of their message was in no way diminished if the people refused to hear. Authority did not rest on ability to speak. Rather the authority of the Bible rests upon a Christ-validated claim to Divine origin. The authority of the Bible stems from Christ who sealed it with his own unique authority. The ability of Scripture is marvellous, but not in itself a sufficient guarantee of its authority.

More significant is Dr. Howard's attitude to the inspiration of Scripture which he says lie, 'not in the use of words but rather in the ideas which underlie these words'. He complains that a close adherence to the doctrines of verbal and plenary inspiration has led to 'a superstitious reverence for words'. At the back of these statements lies Dr. Howard's attitude to the significance of words, which, he says, 'are merely the cloaks for ideas'.

First, I should have thought that words were not merely 'cloaks for ideas' but essential to and definitive of ideas in as far as they are not merely private. For ideas to be meaningful they must be susceptible of communication, they must be public, they must be verbalised. Words are definitive of ideas in ordinary human communication. Secondly, God has purposefully chosen to reveal Himself in words. This is what is meant by the inspiration of Scripture. It is a specific theological concept built upon the teaching of Scripture which states that God is the origin of the words of Scripture. When we open the Bible we are reading God-breathed words. It is the task of systematic theology to state clearly the ideas behind the words. But Calvin's Institutes are not inspired. They point rather to the words of Scripture by which even Calvin is to be tested! For this is the miracle of Scripture, that God has given to us inspired words, If Dr. Howard wishes to point to the importance of the ideas they express, then he must find a word other than inspiration. Divine words are not merely 'cloaks', but powerful, life-giving communications from the Lord. We *ought* to have a reverence for the words of Scripture—not superstitious, of course, but obedient.

CHRISTIAN MISSIONS TODAY

MR. H. L. ELLISON (Moorlands Bible College, Holcombe, Dawlish, Devon) writes:—

It is admirable that CBRF should give us something on Christian Missions, and that that something should be up to date. But surely CBRF exists for something more than keeping us up to date; it is also to create a sense of balance.

I find it very hard to understand that in such a number there is no mention of any kind of the Christian message to the Jews. If Rom. 9 to 11 has any meaning at all, it is that the Jew holds a key position vis-à-vis the Church's proclamation.

It could, of course, be claimed that there was no suitable article available—was anyone asked to write one?—but in the Bibliography I find excellent works mentioned on Communism, Islam, Heathendom, Hinduism, Buddhism and Animism, also Roman Catholicism, but apart from one book giving a general introduction to non-Christian religions there is no mention of Judaism.

This is no biased grouse. It is a notorious fact that while there have been outstanding missionaries from the Assemblies among the Jews, there has been very little support as such for this work, and it is very rare for it to feature at the major missionary conferences, etc.

THE ANNUAL MEETING

MR. PETER JONES (52b Grange Park, Ealing, London, W.5) writes:—

The public meeting following the A.G.M. was most interesting and the discussion in particular very encouraging. It was manifest that there is a growing awareness of the desirability of consistent, consecutive, planned teaching and preaching. Indeed the impression was conveyed that this is taking place to a far greater extent than my observation has heretofore led me to believe. It still seems the aim in most places known to me personally to have almost as many preachers during the year as possible.

Sometimes it has been said, and more often implied, that it would somehow be wrong to ask any local brother to preach more often than someone from miles away. I wonder why. If the Holy Spirit has placed brethren who are gifted as preachers in a neighbourhood and church, should their gifts not be exercised largely in that same neighbourhood and church? It seems to be in accord with Scripture.

I believe that history as well as present-day experience shows that there are definite results from efforts rendered locally more often than from casual and fleeting visits to many places. In relation to the message of the Gospel which we seek to proclaim and our knowledge of it, the observable results from the present system of diffuse effort are ludicrously small. There may be many contributory factors to this state of affairs but is not one of them that we do not sufficiently apply the minds God has given us to the employment of the gifts entrusted to us?

Some places admittedly have little or no preaching gift amongst local brethren and, if the customary preaching services are to be held, such places must depend on help from elsewhere. Even so, is the best answer to have 26 or 52 different preachers in the course of the year? Several disadvantages of the practice could be advanced.

Those who believe that the better way is that of a more consecutive ministry can help to promote it by being very selective in the invitations we issue and those we accept. If the latter procedure were adopted and the appropriate explanation lovingly given by a number of able speakers

who now go almost anywhere they are asked and consequently spread their effort very thinly, we might quickly see a change in the general practice—to the great benefit of the church which Christ is building.

LOCAL GROUPS

MR. KINGSLEY MELLING (Tudorville, Bottom-oth-Moor, Chorley Old Rd., Bolton, Lancs.) writes:—

The first meeting of the CBRF members in the Manchester and South Lancashire area was held in the house of Mr. Robert Dent at Cheadle on Friday, May 20th.

Mr. Ward Gasque explained the purpose of the meeting—to discuss Dr. Short's pamphlet *The Ministry of the Word*. The discussion proved to be very profitable indeed and revealed a deep concern among those present about the problem of the teaching ministry in the Assemblies represented. The meeting also provided an excellent opportunity for members to meet each other since a number of them were previously unknown to each other. I am the Secretary of this Group and should be glad to hear from members.

MR. GRAHAM SPENCER (Gatesgarth, Rockland Road, Downend, Bristol) would be glad to make contact with local members with a view to forming a local group to discuss topics raised in the *Journal*.