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..... IN EXPLANATION

A fact which is patent on the face of the New Testament is the flexibility in manner of association enjoyed by those who shared the common life of Christ. The Church was free, a living organism, inhibited from no order or arrangement which ministered to that common life, yet tied to no set pattern or form of procedure. As Henry Craik has observed: 'Organisation, ministry, discipline derived all their importance from their relation to that life and its healthy manifestation.'

It is to this fact that the founders of C-BREF now appeal. We live in an age which has cast aside our faith as superfluous: an age in which our high professions as evangelicals are openly mocked by the pitiable meanness of our achievement: an age in which we profess one thing, and do another, not because of any ingrained hypocrisy, but because the very facts and circumstances of life make empty the words which are on our lips.

C-BREF asks one thing only of those it associates together - the humility to be conscious of their inadequacy. Brethren commenced with high ideals and insights: ideals which are as important today as they were in 1830. Our 'research' must concern itself, therefore, with study and thought over the lessons of the movement's history. But we do not intend to remain there. Wherever there is a problem in the application and the life of our faith today, we have an object for our consideration and study.

Our vision is as broad as the life which is of God. We wish to draw from every one who is conscious of a word from God for today. To that end, we are glad to receive contributions and suggestions from any Christian who is willing to associate with us. We are glad to receive suggestions for enlarging our activities and interests, and wish particularly to encourage local groups who are prepared to study and to pray over the problems which press upon us. The ideals associated with Brethren have application in every part of human activity: we wish to cultivate and develop those ideals in the practical situations of life, and thus to enrich the whole witness of the Church of God.

This journal is only the first of the activities of the Fellowship, and we look forward to other activities developing, under the hand of God. This first issue deals with 'The Message of Brethren Today'. Later titles in preparation are:

- 'The World, the Flesh and the Devil'
- 'The Gospel and the Man in the Street'
- 'Perils of Exclusivism'
- 'Discipleship Today'

Each issue will contain a selection of correspondence and comment from members of the Fellowship on the subject matter of earlier issues: such contributions are warmly invited, and should be sent to the Secretary at

229 Village Way, Beckenham, Kent. It is to be hoped that the papers will be a stimulus to the formation of local discussion and study groups, and any such groups will be put in touch with each other through the Secretary. It is intended that the journal should provide a channel of free communication among members, and an encouragement to action in the things of God. May we emphasise that the objects of the Fellowship can only be attained by the fullest contribution from every member to its thought and activities. We are particularly anxious to receive stimulating papers, and especially papers bearing upon the practical application of our faith to our secular life.

It is hoped that it will be possible to arrange a day conference in central London, at which members may freely express their visions for the future of the Fellowship. Further details will be given at a later date.

In conclusion, may we emphasise that the Fellowship is based firmly on the four great ideals of the Brethren. Because the Bible is the wellspring of the living Word of God in our own experience, our studies will be Biblically grounded. We shall seek to express in our activities both the unity of all believers, and the freedom of every member of the body of Christ to contribute to its life according to the measure of the gift which God has given him, and irrespective of standing or position. Above all, we hope to express in some genuine manner the great ideal of true devotedness to Christ.

As we find in ourselves gifts of beauty or of laughter, let us develop them to the full for His glory Who gave them to us. If we have possessions or authority, let them be held as in trust from Him. Where there is learning or understanding, let them shine the brighter as jewels in His crown. Where there is compassion and love, let them be enriched and made fruitful from the warmth of His yearning for men. There is no aspect of life, no enjoyment of the human mind or body, no enrichment of the human personality, which is not completed and made whole in Him alone. The Fellowship will serve its purpose if through it we help each other to understand that -

'Something lives in every hue,  
Christless eyes have never seen.'

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January 1963

## EDITORIAL

Among other notable Christians, Martin Luther, especially, saw quite clearly the distinction which must be made between the ecclesia of the New Testament and the institutional Church. He employed the term 'congregation' as a suitable word for this purpose. This is, in some respects at least, a useful term. It denotes two aspects of the ecclesia which are all too easily forgotten. The ecclesia is a community which is most clearly expressed and understood as a local body; but more than that - it is a congregation of individuals who are, each one, to coin the expression used by Dr. Houston in this opening number, 'contrite reformers'.

In each of the papers of this issue the effectiveness of the local assemblies of believers called 'Brethren' is a question which has been taken very seriously. And this trilogy has stressed also the importance of personal discipleship. The first of the three discusses the question of Church unity, and its importance at local church level. Here we are challenged by 'absolute loyalty to the truths we treasure'. But what, we may ask, are these truths which distinguish us so clearly from other Christian churches? There is all the difference in the world between 'assembly truth' and truth as it is enshrined in the New Testament; and more often what we mean by 'the truths we treasure' is our interpretation of the truth, which we treasure. The World Council of Churches must be faced. There will probably not, it is admitted, be any such poster outside our churches which tell others that we belong to that worldwide organisation. We have been told herein that 'the pressure of ecumenicity hurts'. Why should it, and why does it hurt?

In the second paper the emphasis lies on the primacy of preaching, in the programme of activities in local churches of assemblies of people called 'brethren'. Revival must be Bible-based. Here is at once, perhaps, our strength and weakness. We have a Faith to proclaim. Is it really worth proclaiming? And if it is worth proclaiming, is it cast in language which is relevant to modern thinking? Many people who listen to our preaching from the outside feel that we are talking nonsense. And they are probably right. Training and encouragement are all too conspicuous by their absence. Probably in divesting the pulpit of one trained minister we have filled it, in some instances, with all kinds of rubbish.

Only that preaching which is conveyed and supported by deep personal devotion to Christ will be effective. This is one of the great challenges brought us by the third paper in this number. But to live devotedly to Christ means to live dangerously. Devotion is not born out of the jelly-mould of our tradition, and especially if that tradition has been accepted uncritically. It is bad enough to assume that we enjoy Divine sanction for the way in which we are accustomed to doing things in the assemblies. But it is far worse to defend that way, as such.

In this issue we are challenged in respect of what is called 'fundamentalism'. This is not to be confined to certain typological and eschatological interpretations only. There are not a few who would have us believe that fundamentalism is synonymous with orthodoxy, that a conservative approach to the Bible is the only approach. In the Editor's opinion this is quite wrong. Our 'macademized roads' of interpretation are in bad need of repair. They do not always stand the test of modern Biblical research. But then even Biblical criticism has been associated, in the past, especially if it comes from a liberal school, with all that is suspicious.

Unity and Devotion. These seem to be key words. The word 'fellowship' has become hopelessly ambiguous. Yet in that word there lies the true essence of the New Testament Church. Perhaps this image has been blurred today by respect for tradition in the Church at large, by respect for 'apostolic succession' or 'the pattern' - according to the theological stratum in which one happens to move. But the New Testament obviously sanctions the idea of a continuity of the Church's life more than doctrinal maintenance. This is the life shared in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is a fellowship under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and herein is the secret of the Church's energy; here is the guarantee, indeed, of the preservation of her 'charter of salvation'.

Perhaps it may be said that where there is real Biblical unity there also is fellowship; and, where there is fellowship there is vitality. Unity and vitality, therefore, live close together. It is a mystical unity. For its basis is the unity of visible persons with an unseen, heavenly, and yet present Person, the Head, Jesus Christ. It is preferable to speak of a mystical Church rather than an 'invisible' Church. The Church is not invisible. Fellowship in Christ is not merely an object of faith. And it may well be visible to unbelievers. 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that ye have love one for another'. (John 13:35).

How do we understand fellowship? Dare we say that the fellowship of the ecclesia is just as much an end in itself as is the union of her members with Christ? St. Paul declares, 'To crown all, there must be love, to bind all together and complete the whole'. (Col. 3:14 N.E.B.)

The three articles in this first number represent three short addresses given at the Oxford Young Men's Bible Teaching Conference in September 1962. They provide an excellent birth for this Journal, for their joint challenge demands an answer.

David J. Ellis

THE MESSAGE OF BRETHREN IN THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

by F. Roy Coad

READ - JOHN 21: 17 - 22.

The subject of this paper is vast, and almost pretentious. For that reason, we should notice that the passage which has been cited contains four important pointers to the Will of God:-

First there is the only satisfactory foundation for obedience - personal devotion to Christ. 'Lovest thou Me? ... Thou knowest that I love Thee'.

Second there is the way obedience is expressed - in serving others. 'You love Me? ... Then, feed My sheep'.

Third there is the context of obedience. Changing circumstances are the opportunity for new aspects of obedience. We must work out our obedience and follow Him, even though others gird us and carry us whither we would not - even to death itself.

Fourth there is the simplicity of obedience. It does not criticise the path of another: but looks only to its own. 'If I will that he ... what is that to thee? Follow thou Me'.

Today there are two great issues before the Church: one internal and the other external. Internally, there is the issue of Christian Unity. Externally, there is that of the relevance of the Gospel. The first issue is highlighted by the increasing strength of the ecumenical movement, particularly since the World Council of Churches was formed in 1948. The second challenges us in the blatant success of secular materialism: whether in the triumphs of communism, the stridency of nationalism, or the self-indulgence of western society.

Unity and Relevance. In the face of those two immense issues, this paper examines the question as to whether we, as a movement, have any distinctive word for the present day.

We can focus our answer on something which Anthony Norris Groves wrote in 1834. 'I am so sure of the truth of those blessed principles the Lord has taught me, that I glory in their propagation. Simple obedience to Christ alone; recognition of Christ alone in my brother, as the Alpha and Omega of terms of communion; lastly, unreserved devotion to Christ alone'. Here, in general terms, is the germ of an answer. To Relevance - 'simple obedience to Christ alone': the Gospel worked out in daily, ordinary life, until men are compelled to acknowledge its relevance. To Unity - the grand simplicity of Christ - 'Recognition of Christ alone in my brother, as the Alpha and Omega of terms of communion'. And, to unite them, the basic principle of 'unreserved devotion to Christ alone'.

With those as the generalities - generalities, thank God, not peculiar to Brethren - let us look for a more detailed answer.

The Unity of all believers was one of the strongest principles of all schools of early Brethren. It has often been remarked that our Christian faith is full of paradoxes, and one of them is the tension which exists in practice between the ideal of the realised unity of all God's people, and the ideal of a pure Church. The disputes among early Brethren left the movement which had started with such a sense of the unity of God's people, with an even stronger emphasis on the importance of doctrine. In the result, the perpetual tragedy of Brethren has been to find their expression of church life at that very spot where the tension between the two conflicting ideals of unity and purity is felt the worst. In passing, we can notice that this very tension lies behind current attitudes toward the ecumenical movement, in which many evangelicals feel that a show of unity is being sought at the cost of far too much indifference to doctrine. For this very reason, we may have something to say to our brethren in Christ.

Brethren have sought to solve the dilemma in two main ways. Darby, with his teaching that separation from evil is God's principal of unity, sought to find a solution in the holiness of God. Unity can be found, he taught, only if first there is a common renunciation of evil - in which term he included doctrinal error. Despite Darby's rejection of the visible Church as ruined, this solution worked out as something very similar to the attitude which extreme high churchmen still take. He opened his arms wide to all who would take his position, but felt bound to reject all those who, however sincerely, could not do so; and thus, in his view, compromised with evil. In brief: accept my views, or there can be no discussion between us. So Darby in practice reconciled the two ideals only by evacuating that of unity of all real meaning. We know how his extreme followers have reduced this position to an absurdity, which has offended many Christian consciences that are sensitive to their brother's needs.

The early leaders of Open Brethren found a very different answer. The clue to their answer is found in one obvious fact: that the blessing of God is plainly bestowed on different congregations of His people, with apparent disregard of their denominational labels or their forms of church order. Reading the New Testament in the light of this fact, men such as Groves and Craik came to the conclusion that there was one basic characteristic of a true local church: the experienced presence of God in a congregation of His people. Church order and denominational links might be important - and some such matters they considered very important indeed - but they are irrelevant to this matter of church-hood. In other words, these Brethren were simply taking up the classic principle of the gathered church, as Baptists and Congregationalists had also recognised it, and were making it their instrument of Christian unity. If the presence of Christ was plain in

a congregation of His people: there was a local church to be recognised as such. Other matters, such as denominational affiliation and forms of worship, were altogether secondary. To use a Latin expression - 'ubi Spiritus, ibi ecclesia' or, to go back to Ignatius, the father of episcopacy, himself - 'where Jesus may be, there is the catholic church'.

We do not claim that these brethren have said the last word. Indeed, Mr. H. L. Ellison's articles in the earlier 1962 issues of "The Witness" showed a radical development of this outlook, which has even more exciting implications for the subject of Unity. But so far as we have gone, we can begin to formulate the tentative answer to our problem.

It is tempting to follow the exclusives, and to charge these brethren with an error opposite to that of Darby's: with emphasising unity by deprecating purity. This would be to misrepresent their position. Purity was as important to these teachers as to Darby, and was to be safeguarded by a proper local discipline and government: but they realised that on their understanding of the gathered church, each individual could have no responsibility or mandate extending beyond the limit of the local church with which he associated himself. As Groves' widow preserves for us his characteristic teaching - 'People must come to my house if they wish to know the kind of discipline I adopt in my own family. No one would make another responsible for the evils in a house in which he was only a visitor'. On the other hand, in my public expression of unity with all the true people of God, Groves wrote in 1828, 'I therefore know no distinction, but am ready to break the bread and drink the cup of holy joy with all who love the Lord and will not lightly speak evil of His name. I feel every saint to be a holy person because Christ dwells in him, and manifests Himself where he worships; and though his faults be as many as the hairs of his head, my duty still is, with my Lord, to join him as a member of the mystical body, and to hold communion and fellowship with him in any work of the Lord in which he may be engaged'.

Let us go one step further, and apply this principle to the situation today. Around each local church are many other churches. Every such congregation in which Christ reveals Himself is thereby granted the imprimatur of Christ Himself. Each such congregation is the same concern to Him as is my own congregation. What must be my duty in relation to such a congregation?

We, as local independent churches, can only meet this problem at the local level. But what an opportunity and what freedom our very independence gives us! Provided that we in our own churches are absolutely loyal to the truths we treasure, we need not fear to go in and to bear witness to the practical outworking of Christian love and unity in every conceivable way, and to use for that purpose any instrument and association that does not require of us that we surrender some portion of our autonomy - which is not autonomy, but direct submission of



conscience to Christ alone.

The winds of change are blowing. Like it or not, the pressure of ecumenicity is growing: and its strength is just this, that the truth of the unity of all believers is a call which every one of us hears in his own conscience - and sometimes our consciences are uneasy.

Already posters are appearing on churches around us - 'Oikoumene: we belong to the World Council of Churches'. There will be no such poster outside our church building; and it is just here that the pressure of ecumenicity hurts. Yet what men think of us is in our own hands. Will we be regarded as an isolationist little group? Worse - as one of the strange cults? Or will they say - 'At least we know this about those folk - how they love Christ, and how warmhearted they are to all His people'. Other men are girding us, and perhaps they are carrying us whither we would not. Have we, in that situation, the courage to follow Him?

I have said little on the World Council of Churches itself, because it is really irrelevant to the points which I have been making. Evangelical misgivings are many and notorious: but it is for us to show that mere organisational union is irrelevant to unity. Whatever may be the position to which we are forced in other contexts, in the context of the local church we can have no answer but a local one. National and supra-national associations are meaningless: but at the local 'grass-roots' of unity we are free. Within our individual congregation there must be purity: but in our associations with all others we can only take to heart the maxim of Scripture - 'What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common'.

So we come to the second issue before the Church today - the external issue of the relevance in our modern world of the Gospel we preach. Here as Brethren we have one enormous advantage: our thinking is conditioned, not by the conception of a separate order of clergy, but by that of a church of men and women equal before God in their callings, secular and sacred. Other denominations have had this insight - but sometimes the pressures of professionalism tempt them so easily to let it slip. How we ought to show the Gospel living among men, working iteself out in the common life of men! We are all of us common or garden men and women, finding our place in a world where all men, to take the words of the author of 'The Gospel Blimp', 'work and play, raise children, buy automobiles and face the devil'.

What have we done with our special privilege? Let us face it: instead of showing the Gospel as a living force in all of life, secular as well as sacred, we have often tried to turn all Christians into pocket clergymen. We have turned our opportunities inside out. It is not without significance that the later ritualistic books of the Pentateuch have been prized reading among us - while the prophets, with

with out brother in Christ wherever he may be, and which allows the fullest scope to the gifts which Christ has given, in whomsoever they may be found.

What might we have done with that freedom! What have we done with it? Too often we have made ourselves a byword. In the biography of Barnardo - 'Father of Nobody's Children', we can see how the freedom of his Brethren connections permitted him in the early days to go out into the slums and start a social revolution, firmly anchored to the preaching of the Gospel, at a time when the older churches were often ready only to restrict and discourage. Yet Barnardo, after seventeen years of his work, left Brethren for good. Consider others who have been lost. An independent and critical thinker like F. W. Newman, repelled first by the inflexibility of his 'Irish clergyman' as he calls Darby - and ending in an abyss of dismal disbelief. The gifted Edmund Gosse, revolting from a narrow minded restrictionism (of 'Open' Brethren) into the loose literary society of his day. An inspired mystic such as Andrew Jukes, turning, in revulsion from the harshness of judgment he found among Brethren, to the vagueness of speculation. Perhaps it is unfair to saddle such failures on Brethren: perhaps they went out from us, because they were not of us. Can we be so sure? How many have been lost to our witness - to any sort of witness - because our God was too small?

The winds of change are blowing. Other men are binding us, and carrying us whither we would not. Shall we pray that in this eleventh hour the Holy Spirit will yet embolden us to be large enough, and bold enough, and our vision clear enough, to grasp the will of our great God, and serve our fellow men? We bring to that service 'THE FOUR FREEDOMS OF THE BRETHERN' -

- The freedom of the Word of God in my thinking.
- The freedom of the Lord Christ in my living.
- The freedom of the Spirit in my worship and service.
- The freedom of the whole Church in my fellowship.

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their stirring calls to justice and righteousness in the common dealings of men with men, have remained as uncut pages of our Bibles (except where they add a recondite twist to our favourite piece of eschatology).

Let me quote from an unexpected source to show the importance of this. 'It is obvious that, if the Christian witness is to penetrate into all those areas where the work of the world is carried on, it must be carried there by laymen. They alone can bring Christian judgment to bear upon all the issues of life in the spheres of industry and commerce, scientific research and social organisation, and all the other activities which make up the work-a-day world. Their meeting points in the secular world can become real opportunities for the witness of a living Church in the midst of a busy world's life.

"To be truly effective, lay testimony must proceed from a thorough understanding of the Gospel, so that it may be clearly and forcefully articulated in language which the hearers can readily comprehend and which they will at once recognise to be relevant to their personal and social conditions. Only Laymen can speak to their fellows in terms of their common involvement in the work upon which they are engaged, and can demonstrate that the Gospel of Christ is highly relevant to this actual situation and not merely to some remote 'church' sphere or after-life".

"The Pastor and the layman must learn to work as a team, each recognising that the other has an essential ministry and gift of grace for his own special task in the one Body of Christ. There is an urgent need for all church members to recover the true meaning of certain words; to learn that the laity is really the Laos, that is, the whole people of God in the world, including of course those who have been ordained: to learn that ministry means any kind of service by which a Christian, exercising his particular skill and gift, however humble, helps his fellow-Christian or his fellow-men in the name of Christ".

The quotations are taken from 'New Delhi Speaks' - a report issued by the World Council of Churches itself: and their very source emphasises the importance of the contribution we can make to vital Christian witness.

We bring vital gifts to the service of the Church Universal. We bring a church outlook which historically took its first roots from the one foundation of deep personal devotedness to the Lord Jesus Christ. That means that we bring a witness which is absolutely loyal to His Word and His Gospel as that Word brings it to us. It ought to mean that we also bring the utmost compassion - His compassion - to all our fellow men. That devotedness should be fostered week by week by our unique form of communion service. Finally, we bring a form of church order which allows us the fullest freedom to recognise and co-operate

## THE NEED FOR REVIVAL - THE ASSEMBLIES IN AN AGE OF CRISIS

by G. C. D. Howley

It is clear that we live in an age of crisis, and that it is marked by speed, complexity, and inequality of life. Its demands are more clamant and pressing, and its whole atmosphere is one of materialism, such values having the chief place in the life and thought of the masses. Indeed it would be true to say that the whole climate of the age is against any change. Yet if there is to be any appreciation of spiritual values, revival is needed. We are faced with the apparent ineffectiveness of the Christian Church - yet such a renowned Church historian as Dr. Kenneth Latourette believes that there is much cause for encouragement among Christians, despite what seems to the contrary. The mighty impact upon the world of its day of the Spirit-filled Church at Pentecost and throughout that generation is a challenge that we dare not ignore.

### A Survey of Revivals

Revival is a spiritual awakening among God's people which powerfully affects the outside world. The Biblical usage of the word as something that is essentially to do with the people of God is sometimes lost sight of through the more popular use of 'revival' as denoting a time of considerable blessing in conversions, perhaps following on some special campaigns, as in the days of the Moody and Sankey evangelistic missions.

We can only mention some of the periods of revival without enlarging upon them, but in such a list reference must be made to the great period of spiritual awakening that we call the Reformation; the Evangelical Revival through the ministry of John Wesley; the 1859 Revival that began in Ulster; the Welsh Revival of 1904; the wave of blessing among fishermen in East Anglia that began with the preaching of the Rev. Douglas Brown, a Baptist Minister, in 1922; the great work of W.P. Nicholson in Belfast round about 1930; and the Revival in the Hebrides as recently as 1948. The New England Revival of the 18th century under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards is a chapter in the religious history of America, and one of absorbing interest. There are many occasions of special blessing in evangelism which we cannot consider, such as that in North East Scotland under the preaching of Donald Ross, Alexander Marshall and others, the Moody and Sankey period, and the awakening in Ruanda that went on over many years. Whatever list might be given it would be incomplete - the sovereign operation of the Holy Spirit has always transcended human powers of understanding, appropriating or interpreting it.

### Marks of Revival

Duncan Campbell has said, in commenting on the 1948 Revival in the Hebrides, that it was accompanied by (a) a strong sense of God, and (b) a strong sense of sin. The fact and the power of God, and a dawning sense of His readiness to bless, seem to have marked every period of revival blessing. Along with this has gone an acute sense of conviction of sin, so that people have cried aloud in meetings, or when alone, that God may have mercy upon them. It is well to note, in addition, that spiritual awakenings appear to know no denominational boundaries: the divine blessing has fallen upon men and women irrespective of their background or of the denominational attachment of the preacher or the place of worship associated with his Ministry. Revivals are characterised by certain fundamental features as those mentioned, yet they

are not necessarily all cast in the same mould - there have been different emphases at times both in preaching and in the resultant issues of such work. Contrary to some popular thought, they have not all been cast in what might be termed the Moody and Sankey mould. Many movements back to the Bible have been clearly distinguished from other equally evident works of God - the Reformation and the Brethren Movements being two dissimilar examples of this fact.

### The Part Played by Brethren

We have said that the Brethren Movement itself was a revival. This can be seen from the simplicity of faith that marked its early days, the grasp of eternal realities that was seen in both leaders and assemblies as a whole. The tract by Anthony Norris Groves, Christian Devotedness, proved to be an epoch-making message to large numbers of Christians of the time. Their unworldly spirit was in harmony with the spiritual power that marked their witness, while a stream of light came from the Scriptures through the ministry of men who were obviously men of God. In general it can be fairly said that Brethren and their stand for the things of God acted as a powerful stimulant to many of the spiritual movements of the 19th century.

Writing in his book, 'Brethren: the Story of the Great Recovery', David J. Beattie refers to the Ulster Revival of 1859 as follows: 'That notable work of grace in the year 1859 began near Kells, County Antrim, through the exercise of several young brethren, amongst them being Jeremiah Meneely. The movement spread far and wide, one of the first districts to be reached being near the town of Randalstown, County Antrim, where many were saved through the ministry of the renowned C. H. Mackintosh and a brother called Moore' (p.281). It was by prayer and wholehearted Christian testimony that many Brethren helped forward such work. Perhaps their contribution has been more than that of indirect than direct help, or where it has been indirect it has more frequently been the work of individuals than of assemblies as such. Yet it has always been in evidence somewhere; and to this day there are few active interdenominational evangelistic bodies or associations where various representatives of Brethren have not been found participating for the progress of the gospel.

### What hinders Revival?

There are many things that hinder revival among God's people - apathy, complacency, unreality, prayerlessness, lack of consecration, sectarianism, encrusted traditionalism ... and perhaps even that sometimes we are looking for the wrong thing while talking of revival. This raises some pertinent questions. Are we suspicious of enthusiasm? People were in Wesley's day, though he lived to be regarded as 'respectable'. How much should we expect revival? If we sufficiently deplore our failures and sins, will revival come? Against such queries we may set some others, such as, How far is the Christian life one of steady discipline? Should we aim at devotion to Christ, making that our goal, instead of aiming at revival? The consequences of this might be far-reaching; perhaps God would then send revival.

### The Way of Revival

Revival will be seen in personal life, and in the church. The Lord's dealings with the churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 2:3) reveal the differences that can be found in Christian community life - some can reach high levels of

spiritual experience, while others can decline and fall, eventually losing their very existence as churches. If our church life is to be spiritually awake, we must honestly and quietly seek the will of God, remembering the importance of ascertaining what may be His present will for His Church. We must rise above and beyond our 'forms' even if they be the simpler forms of Nonconformist congregations. We must be ready to discard the dead wood of mere custom, that we may hold all the more firmly to what Holy Scripture really teaches.

The preaching of the Word needs to be given its rightful place. The Reformers placed the pulpit central in their churches, displacing the central place given in pre-Reformation days to the altar. This was a wise insight, for it was the preaching of the Word of God that established their doctrines, bringing back the truth of God into free circulation among His people. Have we not at times been in danger of displacing the preaching of the Word? Let this be restored, and our churches supplied with spiritual ministries - and we shall thus make a way for the Holy Spirit to act through the Scriptures.

Arising out of this comes the question of training and equipping those men who are plainly called of God to the ministry of His Word. We can merely mention this in passing as a matter that demands close attention, if the primacy of the preaching of the Word is to be realised among our churches, to any general extent.

We must get our thinking straight on many matters. The ever-present danger in an affluent society is that Christians will become tinged with the spirit of materialism, and cease to be useable for the furtherance of God's purposes. Souls will not be saved if an assembly is riddled with a materialistic outlook. This was the sin of Laodicea, with its consequent condemnation by our Lord. Complacency is perhaps the crowning sin of the Christian Church: may we be kept from it in the mercy of God.

The way of revival in personal life may prove very demanding. If we give the Word of God its rightful place in the church, that Word will be addressed to us individually. Will we receive it as God's Word? Will we let God deal with us privately and individually? If we are prepared for this, we shall come to a new sense of God ... and of sin. The hindrance is largely because often we are not prepared for God to deal with us as closely as that. The Psalmist cried, 'Quicken Thou me, according to Thy Word' (Psalm 119: 25). Most of the things we have referred to are found here in this verse - Prayer, humility, a sense of personal guilt and need, and all of it based upon the Word of God. Today we are hearing a call to more disciplined living. It will affect our time, our substance, our occupations, our outlook if we respond. Yet that is the way of blessing, in the quickening that God can bring to us all. In such spiritual reformation, according to God's Word we shall experience the awakening for ourselves, and for our churches.

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## NEEDED - A THIRD FORCE

by J.M. Houston

Our modern age emphasises existence more than belief. It is concerned with the relevance of "things" rather than with philosophical or theological debates about truth. That is to say, pragmatic rather than metaphysical viewpoints are being emphasized. The consistency of such materialism shows up in bold relief the inconsistencies of those who dwell in two worlds. Faced by this contemporary mood, church life has become deeply suspect for a great proportion of our population. New trends of thought would seek to form a new faith from the best of many religious systems, or even to establish new "scientific" institutes for the understanding of altruism and peace. Implicit is the feeling that Christianity has failed; after two millenia of experimentation something else should take its place, in a post-Christian era. Christians, too, are deeply perturbed by the nonentity, complacency and blatant inconsistencies of much modern church life. Their dilemma is expressed in the following confession: "Christianity has no meaning for me whatsoever apart from the church, but I sometimes feel as though the church as it actually exists is the source of all my doubts and difficulties". - (J.M.Oldham, Life is Commitment).

With this background, we tend to form two distinct groups. One group consists of the community of the righteous who claim even to vindicate God by the fruits of their righteousness. Smugly satisfied with the status quo, they have "arrived" - a disastrous event in personal and deadening in corporate experience. They are Churchmen rather than Life Christians. Another group, often deeply dissatisfied and personally reactionary against this state of affairs, give up their role in the activities of the local church. Inter-denominational work seems a more effective and attractive sphere of service. It is significant that so rapidly has inter-denominational activity developed in the last few decades that it now represents about 40 per cent of all Christian missionary effort. A third and more recent outlook is beginning to recognize that inter-denominational activity can be just as denominationally minded, and suffering from the same bane of professionalism as the churches. Selecting its particular sphere of service, its specialized activity is its most effective and yet its weakest element. It can only be an incomplete form of service that needs to be complemented by the activities of a local church. For it is only the local church that presents the truly Christian challenge of the "I and my neighbour" relationship, with all the diversity of such social relations and obligations. Through local churches, the advance of Primitive Christianity was made possible, and we believe must still be made. A reformation movement within Christendom is needed today, as vitally as it was in the sixteenth century. Indeed, never since the first century A.D. has Christianity been in more peril.

If such a third force is needed to work from within our local churches, then at first sight the Brethren Movement appears to be placed advantageously. There is a marked trend everywhere to recognize the role that can be played by the laity to emphasize personal responsibility in a deepened church life, and to recognize the unity among all Christians. But the established churches that now advocate these very features, including the Roman Church, will find themselves in doctrinal difficulties. Where are the limits to be drawn between

(iii) The Scriptures make it clear that the fellowship of all saints is essential. Without it, we cannot understand the mystery of the Incarnation (Eph. 3:17,18), and without "all saints" we shall not come unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ". (Eph. 4:13). "It is a vain thing for Christian individuals or groups to imagine they can better attain to the fulness of spiritual maturity, if they isolate themselves from their fellow believers". (F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Ephesians, p.68). By such a fellowship, God used the word of Isaiah and the exposition of Philip to illuminate the understanding of the Ethiopian Eunuch. In a late day, Wm. Law's A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, was to challenge John Wesley and, through him, all England. And so as we re-read the writings of the past and share the convictions of our contemporaries, we experience the same deepening and understanding of Christ.

## 2. A Local Church is a Community of Sincere Believers:

- (i) We accept the Bible as our authority in all matters of faith and conduct. Yet many of our local churches are in grave danger today of becoming biblically illiterate. How many of our assemblies have serious Bible lectures, involving a sustained, systematic ministry by able teachers? Instead, we are tranquillized by pep talks, confused by disjointed addresses and afflicted with low standards of delivery. As we enjoy little serious theology, we now find that the congregation of a well-taught minister is often much better instructed. Moreover, we are often at a loss to know how to make full use of the gifts of a well-taught brother. This is surely a reversal of the early days of the Brethren Movement. Indeed, any effort to promote serious and systematic Bible Study is actually opposed by some Brethren, perhaps as a defence against their own ignorance.
- (ii) As so-called "fundamentalists", a term only coined at the beginning of this century, we, in common with others who have a highly systematic theology, tend to have a very superficial and flat view of the Scriptures. Like a character's interpretation of the book of Revelation, "instead of being the abyss of God's counsel with its dim outlines and broad shadows, it is ... a flat sunny plain, laid out with straight, macadamized roads". (J.H.Newman, Loss and Gain). The traveller on such a highway associates our Movement with three serious errors:
- a) we become identified in the minds of other Christians with a fantastic use of imagination in our emphasis on typology. This is a good servant but a bad master of Biblical exegesis. Its emphasis puts a premium on credulity. Those who use it most amongst us, seem to know least about its principles of usage.
  - b) There is a tendency to equate certain private - and they can only be private - interpretations of prophecy with the authority of Scripture. This undermines rather than sustains



clergy and laity, and why? Are churches communities of believers, or audiences from whom Christians can be made by the rites of the Church? Is the organization of churches within a common bureaucracy the same thing as the unity we have in Christ? Indeed, to what Scriptures and to what Christ are we obedient? We may purr gently as we see these dialectical dilemmas facing other denominations.

But there is a very real danger that some of us may think that all we need is to disassociate from the ill-repute of Exclusive Brethren and their tendencies, to raise our standards of the ministry of the Word, to be more efficient in the manner we handle our affairs generally, and to stop there. By all means let us clearly distinguish between our principles of church life and the undesirable practices that have been allowed to creep in. But if we clarify our Christian principles, we shall find each one of us involved in the major task of our personal lives. And whatever opposition we face from misguided brethren, we shall win not by argument but by ethics; by the insistence of a personal, practical Christianity that is loving and humble. We must respect all our brethren deeply for Christ has loved them infinitely. We dare not show any bitterness nor assert ourselves, for we have all been "be-graced in the Beloved". (Eph. 1:6.)

Without hesitancy all true Christians accept the following basic principles of local church life. But their practical implications are so immense that very few ever seriously practise them. As our Lord challenged the Pharisees of His day refuting the rottenness of their outward observances and legality so He speaks to us today. Continually, we tend to substitute convenient practices for vital principles and thereby fail to practise our principles. In doing so, we become a self-perpetuating organization that finds divine sanction in what we are ... a dangerous, if not blasphemous situation. If the goal of the church is for itself and not for Christ alone, then it ceased to be Christian.

#### 1. A Local Church is the Reflection of the Church Universal:

- (i) This must imply that we have a genuine and practical fellowship with all other Christians. We can debar no-one from the sacraments, who is known as a committed Christian. Many of us practise this at the Lord's Supper, but why do we not project this into other forms of our church life? Is it consistent that we should use the writings of devout Evangelicals and yet deprive ourselves of the privilege of using such men on our own platforms? The argument that some of them might refuse to accept such an invitation, and that the matter is therefore an academic problem is not valid. The onus of such a refusal would rest with them and not on us.
- (ii) Behind our fears of being "too open", we must face this challenge. What are the deeper instincts within us? -
  - a) the fear of man or the fear of God:
  - b) the preservation of our own denominational identity or the single desire to serve Christ:
  - c) the pride of our own way of doing things, or the acceptance of the guidance of the Holy Spirit whose freedom surmounts all the obstacles of race, nation, society and localisms?

the Word of Truth. Certain vocal brethren have caused the "Brethren Movement" to be identified with distinctive school of prophecy. This is of course, equally true of certain inter-denominational groups especially in North America. It is everywhere tragic however if a premium is placed on prophetic interpretation rather than on Christian ethics. Because prophetic subjects may be controversial, to remain silent may be to suffer loss, so frank utterance is surely to be welcomed. But bitter controversy, dogmatism that is psychological and the exclusion of a speaker from a platform because of his views, are surely to be deplored.

- c) The century-old fashion to promote dispensationalism may provide convenient pigeon-holes for our interpretation of Scripture. But it is to be deplored when this emphasis makes the Sermon on the Mount irrelevant for Christians. The tendency of some dispensationalists to indulge in metaphysics rather than in ethics is surely false. Although dispensationalism is not necessarily a cause in the decline of personal ethics, we should reconsider the charges of antinomianism that have been made against us. (e.g. D.Steels, Antinomianism Revived; or the theology of the so-called "Plymouth Brethren" examined and refuted, 1887).

(iii) Along with other evangelicals today, our insistence upon belief has often emphasized the importance of mental assent with the absence of genuine repentance. In consequence, new birth means very little in the practical life of many Christians. We live like Charlie Chaplin from Monday to Saturday, and St. Francis of Assisi on Sunday. Basically, our instincts, ambitions, our quest for organization, our time-table and possessions remain secularized. This spurious doctrine of "Believism" is a cheap grace that is a disgrace to the Cross of Christ. Did Christ die so cruelly and utterly that we might only have a ready-made insurance policy for the after-life and an enjoyable compromise with the contemporary world? We need very seriously to re-examine our concepts of the theology of grace. (see D. Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship). The frank self-criticism amongst us in the last two decades does encourage us to hope that a forward movement has already commenced.

### 3. A Local Church is a Community of Contrite Reformers:

If we live consciously under the scrutiny of the "I am that I am", we shall realise the personal and continuous claims of His Word upon us. Every generation of believers needs reform, and the process is individual and continuous throughout life.

- (i) Nevertheless, the denominations tend to be relics of historic revivals, where they stick fast. We need, in our Movement, to heed the warning given by John Robinson as he bade farewell to the Puritans on their embarkation for the "New World" of 1620. - "Brethren ... I charge you before God ... that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveals anything to you by any other instrument of His,

be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry; for I am verily persuaded the Lord has more truth to break forth out of His Holy Word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the Reformed Churches, who are come to a period (i.e. full stop) in religion and will go at present no further than the instruments of their Reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of His Will our God has revealed to Calvin they will die rather than embrace it; and the Calvinists, you see are stuck fast where they were left by that great man of God who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented ... were they now living they would be as willing to receive further light as that which they first received". D. Neal, The History of the Puritans, II p.12). We are familiar with other names to insert alongside those of Luther and Calvin.

- (ii) The process of reformation is unsettling. Where will it all lead? What will be the consequences? Caution would suggest we continue as before, at least assured of the past, with its tangible results. This attitude betrays the tacit assumption that while "we walk by faith" as individual Christians, we walk by sight as local churches. Many of the Anabaptists were fiercely persecuted in the sixteenth century by both Lutherans and Calvinists, because apparently they carried the Reformation too far. Perhaps we should investigate the reasons.
- (iii) Idealism and frankness are two essential requisites of the reforming spirit. Youth is the age of idealism and great men of God have been those who most successfully grew up in their ideals. How close do our elders in the assemblies keep in touch sympathetically with the ideals of their young people? If our ideals do not transform us, then we destroy them in rationalism and compromise. Frankness (including self-criticism) is essential to Christian maturity. Yet the Protestant churches have failed signally to recognise the enormous potential in the act of confession. "Confess your sins one to another" has been a disobeyed injunction, because of our fear of the abuses others, such as the Roman Church and the Moral Re-Armament Movement, have made of the confessional. Confession is not something that we can organize into a technique. But used in personal, individual relationship, its genuine practice amongst us would deepen our concept of grace, strengthen our ethical practices and help to remove many of the disruptive tendencies of local church fellowship. It can be a God-given **therapy**, when used sincerely and humbly, in the recognition of Christ's saving grace. As confession calls for utmost secrecy, it may be more general than the writer thinks it is. We can only ask ourselves personally, "am I so close to Christ and His interests that I share the secret problems of many in need of His grace?"

4. The Local Church is a Community of Redeemed Persons Gathered Only to the Person of Christ:

The Brethren Movement more than most denominations has stripped away many of the conventional trappings of much institutionalism. This helps to emphasize that Christianity is a way of living, a total involvement of

one's personality. Along with other evangelicals, we are gravely challenged by two vital matters, however, in the realm of personality.

- (i) A remarkable revolution in psychological thought is in progress and many theologians are unaware of it. Psycho-analysis has failed and a crisis, of what are the moral values, faces psychiatry. It is sadly ironical that when liberal theologians in a desperate attempt to clothe themselves in modernity, betray the Gospel, many psychologists should be using such symbols as original sin, the uniqueness of man, the need of redemption and new birth. But the evangelical is faced today by a vital challenge in this realm. Do we really believe that Christ solves all our personal problems? If so, why do we not take the time and trouble to enter deeply into the personal problems of our neighbours and brethren? Is it possible that the preacher who says on Sunday that Christ solves all our personal needs, and then himself consults a secular psychiatrist on Monday morning, is betraying Christianity disastrously? The increasing neurosis of this atomic age, may take more toll of human life and happiness than the bomb. If we confess as Christians we can do nothing for the spiritually distressed, then the world will recognize that Christianity has wholly failed in this generation. We cannot all be amateurs in psycho-therapy, but we must do something drastically and immediately about it. The "souls" we pray for in our prayer-meetings are clamouring for our help in the psychic needs of our age. Our greatest opportunity and challenge today, is to preach the Gospel of the integration of the whole personality in Christ, and to demonstrate in our own lives its efficacy. If we do not, then there are already signs of "a chemical Christianity", that may become perhaps the most formidable anti-Christ of all time. Some of us are becoming increasingly convinced that personal work is far more effective than the endless time-table of meetings.
- (ii) Mass-mindedness is the mark of our urbanised society, a tendency which will increase with the explosive growth of world population and city life. Its effects on Christianity today are baneful and numerous. In the history of the Church there has been constant confusion between the validity of the collective creed and the individual faith. Emphasis on the former has always tended to destroy the personal responsibility and so to degenerate into conventional morality. Such adherence to a creed is often only a social convention of family upbringing and identity with a community. The social stratification of much church life, and the exodus of churches to the suburbs reflect this feature, though Christian contact with the world's leaders, usually suburbanites, is to be welcome. Moreover, the modern trends of mass organization, the cult of stardom and the superficial, personal convictions, all indicate how secularized the average Christian has become. Mass evangelism - for whose genuine results we can thank God - is not the evidence of a vital reformation of the Church - but the tragic reflection on the lack of personal witness among Christians. Indeed, stunt efforts introduced into some forms of modern evangelism are as worldly as any other malpractice of the Church.

## 5. The Local Church is a Community of Worshipers and Witnesses:

The two sacraments of the Church, The Lord's Supper and Baptism, involve a personal response within a collective experience, and seek to balance belief with action. There is moreover, the recognition of the interdependence of worship and witness. We make much of our worship but how vital and real is our witness? In two realms we need to think much more realistically:

- (i) Our prayer meetings are very often a substitute for action. And it is far easier to win public applause with "amens" to pious sentiment than to win Christ's approval for sacrificial service.
- (ii) Our missionary enterprise overseas tends to become the substitute for ineffective evangelism at home. In the glamour to evangelize the two per cent of the world's population that have no Scriptures, we have forgotten the lost frontier of the city, in which more than half the world's population will live during our generation. Our missionary outlook and strategy need fundamental changes in numerous directions.

In the light of much apathy, inanity, mediocrity, worldliness and exclusivism in our assemblies today, we may ask despairingly, "What can we do?" Social history reveals that real changes are made by individuals, not by a society. We are not in the grip of vast, social forces about which we can do nothing. It is as individuals when we face up to the moral issues of self-centredness and the psychological inhibitions of fears that we can begin to make reforms corporately, in a spirit of love. Only when a church talks of failure and accepts it, has it failed indeed. But it is not enough to expend our money on new halls, to be open to changes commensurate with modern times, to raise the standards of a Biblical ministry, and generally handle our church affairs more competently. Primarily, our dominant desire should only be to live more like Christ. Today we face three alternatives: we can maintain the status quo in our assemblies, not seeing and not desiring any reforms; or we may allow ourselves to become so discouraged that we leave the Brethren Movement to serve in other spheres that we think will be more effective; or we can be determined by God's help to remain where we are and seek by personal realism and truly sacrificial service to help in reviving and establishing local churches that they may be effective in witness and worship.

Examination of the lives of great men of God who have served Him in their generation, reveals their personal hunger after God, their deep unrest for a more consistent, Christ-like life. All Christians today need, as never before, to hear the call to personal discipleship to live and to act in the light of a personal experience of our Lord, and to walk under the constant gaze of the contemporary Christ. For according to the measure of personal conviction of the indwelling presence of Christ, so will be the evident expression of our Christianity. To paraphrase Paul's experience, we have to ask ourselves, "Have I not been sent to serve Christ? Am I not free from all personal ambition, covetousness, the fear of man, indeed all the self-life? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor.9:1.)