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PROSPECTS AND GREMLINS

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| PLEASE NOTE YOUR DIARY |  
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+ The FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the Fellowship +  
| will be held on SATURDAY, 27th June 1964, at the |  
| Waldegrave Hall, Duke St., London, W.1. (near |  
+ Selfridges). There will be a business meeting and +  
| open forum in the afternoon, and a public meeting |  
| and discussion in the evening under the title |  
+ INVOLVEMENT, NOT ENTANGLEMENT. Times and further +  
| details to be notified. |  
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The membership of the Fellowship passed the 500 mark some weeks ago, and is still increasing. For this we are grateful to God. At the moment, therefore, the Fellowship is financially viable; but the increasing interest and therefore the expansion of the journal mean heavily increased costs. In the meantime, investigation is proceeding into the possibility of producing the journal in a new and more attractive format for the commencement of its second year. Membership renewals will also be falling due shortly; the appropriate reminders will be sent to members at the correct time. Our anxiety is to serve: to that end we shall welcome suggestions and participation from all members.

It is hoped to put into train the first major study project in a few weeks' time, when we shall be inviting groups to co-operate in a survey of assembly life, for which suitably qualified members will be preparing an appropriate programme. If this survey proceeds well, we hope that it will be possible to publish its findings either in a future issue of the journal, or in a separate publication. Offers from groups or from members to participate in this survey will be welcomed.

Future issues of the journal in preparation include:-

Discipleship Today (planned for May 1964).  
Christian Service and the Home.

Modern Questionings - a Survey of recent publications.  
The Structure of Assembly Worship and Practice.  
Education and Christian Life.  
Liturgy and the Order of Services.

As we look back over the issues which have gone, we must wonder, as many an editor or author has wondered before, at the sheer temporality of the printed word. How many of our members, dazzled by the verbal dexterity of the referee's introduction, really studied that striking contribution by Mr. Galyer to the second issue? Read it again, and notice its deep understanding of the theology of the Gospel, its practical commonsense and its love of its subject. Mr. Ellison's splendid article in the same issue was reprinted by a leading Christian weekly. But to single out one issue is an ill compliment to the other contributors who have served us so well in all the issues. We are deeply grateful for their interest and their help to the new venture.

Turning again to the future we strain forward to seek more deeply for the knowledge of Him Who is the sum and substance of all our being. 'Great is the mystery of godliness ....'

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### Gremlins' Corner

We apologise -

1. For a double negative that made nonsense of the close of last time's introduction (it was corrected in most copies before despatch, but some members still had it).
2. That some members had three copies of the last issue (we hope they made good use of them!)
3. That 'The Bookshelf' described J.A.Thompson as an American scholar - for he hails from Australia. (This was not the fault of David Alexander).
4. All the other mistakes, foolishnesses and slips which you noticed.

Confession, they say, is good for the soul.

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## THE PERILS OF EXCLUSIVISM

### 1. Introduction

The vision that first stirred the hearts of such men of God as Anthony Norris Groves was one of true catholicity. His principles were reaffirmed in the well known letter he wrote to J.N.Darby from Milford Haven in 1836, which G.H.Lang described as 'the most authoritative statement of what were the original principles of fellowship of the Brethren, given by him who first suggested them.' The positive attitude of love for all Christians because they belonged to Christ, characterises the letter, as it characterised the early days of Brethren. It is always a tendency of the human heart, however, to settle down when the first flush of power of any movement is past: then everything must be tied up, formulated, and rules and regulations can all too easily take the place of the power of the Spirit of God.

The article by Professor F.F.Bruce is a masterly survey of the first Christian church after Pentecost. It reveals the way in which a community of believers can experience the powerful working of God, and yet, at some subsequent time suffer serious loss through the influence of adverse elements. Any of the mistakes that came to mark the Jerusalem Church can similarly affect local churches today: uniformity, conservatism, legalism, exclusivism, all came to have a place in Jerusalem. Yet this had been the community with a direct experience of the power of God made manifest in its midst! There is a parallel between the Jerusalem church and the Brethren movement in the way in which the early days of wide vision and spiritual power have so often given way to the very things among Brethren that came to mark Jerusalem.

This tendency to sectarianism came to a head in 1889 in the break-away movement of which Mr. C.A.Oxley writes. It is sad that churches, so few in number in the world, should arrogate to themselves names, promises and spiritual status that rightly belong to all the people of God. A recent issue of their young people's magazine said, in answer to a question, that the 'royal priesthood' of 1 Peter 2 was composed of those only who belonged to 'the churches of God' (by which term they meant themselves). Despite all the millions of Christians in the world as a whole, only these few are spiritually competent to serve God. That is a serious attitude to adopt. One wonders what conception these good people have of God? Mr.K.G.Hyland puts his finger on the right spot when he says: 'What mental image have we of Him?'

The Needed Truth movement is insular, and Brethren might have been saved from such influences, but for the fact that many who went with the break-away group afterwards returned without abandoning

everything of their sectarian views, which thus have influenced open assemblies. To this day there are places where those influences have prevailed through the years. This is partly reflected in the article by Mr. Hyland, though people can act in the way he describes, in restrictive practices, without necessarily knowing anything at all about the Needed Truth group, or without consciously wanting to propagate such doctrines.

The Separatist spirit is to blame for many of our ills. Extremists will tend to develop peculiarities if only because they have cut themselves off from the main current of spiritual life and thought in the Church of God. To regard every other community as engaging in 'human religion' is tragic. Here we have the positive help of K.G.Hyland in emphasizing the moral law and its place in Christian life. He rightly stresses the importance of the incident in Matt. 12:1-8, where human need took priority over ceremonial enactments.

Our responsibility today is to maintain the high ideals of Christian love and fellowship that are revealed in the New Testament. We are to beware of getting entangled in ecclesiastical technicalities or we may find our freshness of spirit choked and our communion with God broken. Professor Bruce shows us what happened in Jerusalem, and draws some lessons therefrom; Mr. Oxley shows how far men can go when dominated by a spirit of Separatism from other Christians; while Mr. Hyland warns us of the deadly effects of legalism in small details in church life, calling us to the more excellent way of life 'under law to Christ'.

G.C.D. HOWLEY.

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"In spite of their emphasis on Christian unity as a principle, the Plymouth Brethren tended from the first to split into separate groups, and within these groups there are several sub-divisions."

Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church.

. . . . .

"It takes very uncommon grace to write convincingly where one feels strongly, without seeming to lack in charity towards those who differ."

Arthur Rendle Short.

. . . . .

## 2. The Church of Jerusalem

by F.F. Bruce.

There was a period - it did not last very long - during which 'the holy church throughout all the world' was confined within the limits of one local church. That one local church was the church of Jerusalem, the first Christian church. (It may be asked whether there were not many disciples of Jesus left in Galilee during the period covered by the first five chapters of Acts, and whether they could not be regarded as constituting a Galilaean church in some sense. That is a separate question, the answer to which is beset by so many gaps in our knowledge that for our present purpose we must leave it on one side.)

The first Jerusalem church lasted for some forty years. It left the city and went into dispersion not long before A.D.70, and although even in dispersion it continued for long to call itself the church of Jerusalem, it had no more any direct association with the city. When Jerusalem was refounded as a Gentile city in A.D.135 a new church of Jerusalem came into being, but this was a completely Gentile Christian church and had no continuity with the church of Jerusalem of apostolic days.

The picture which we have of the early halcyon days of the first Jerusalem church, practising community of goods with glad and spontaneous abandon, 'praising God and having favour with all the people', is different from the picture which we have of it twenty-five to thirty years later, when its own leaders could describe the bulk of its members as 'zealots for the law' who viewed with grave suspicion the progress of the Gentile mission conducted by Paul and his colleagues. Although it was the mother-church of the Christian world, its contribution to the gospel throughout the world in its later years was much smaller than its status and origins might have led one to expect. It may be that a survey of its history will suggest one or two practical lessons which churches of the twentieth century could profitably take to heart.

### I. HISTORY OF THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

1. Its foundation. The birthday of the Jerusalem church was the birthday of the Christian Church as a whole. The one account of the occasion which we have is the one preserved in Acts 2. When the Holy Spirit came down in power on the apostles on the first Christian Pentecost, in accordance with the promise of Christ in Acts 1:8, they - or rather Peter, as their spokesman, - proclaimed the gospel so effectively to the crowds of Jews and proselytes from many lands who were present in Jerusalem for the festival that three thousand hearers were convicted of sin and responded to the call to repent and be

baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Those who thus responded received the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and were incorporated into the same Spirit-baptised fellowship as the apostles themselves. There was an organic continuity between the people of God in New Testament times and the people of God in Old Testament times, but the day of Pentecost marked a new beginning, for then the outpouring of the Spirit, predicted long before as a sign of the end-time, came true in experience. The church in the New Testament phrase is 'the fellowship of the Spirit'.

2. Its early character. The main features which characterised the early church of Jerusalem have provided an example for Christian churches ever since. 'All who believed were together' and devoted themselves to (a) the apostolic teaching, (b) the apostolic fellowship, (c) the breaking of bread, (d) the services of prayer, (e) mutual care and (f) gospel witness.

The apostolic teaching was the teaching which the apostles had received from Jesus in order that they might impart it to others - 'teaching them', as He said, 'to observe all that I have commanded you' (Matt.28:20). To this day the surest criterion of an apostolic church is its adherence to the apostolic teaching. An unimpeachable pedigree (not that any church can produce one which would satisfy the strictest historical scrutiny) is no substitute for adherence to the apostles' teaching - and fellowship. Much later in the first century John emphasizes that those who abandon the apostolic teaching, or advance beyond it in a direction which the apostles would not have countenanced, cannot claim to belong to the apostles' fellowship. The apostles' fellowship carries with it fellowship 'with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1:3), and is marked by faithfulness to that teaching which was given and received 'from the beginning' (1 John 1:1; 2:7; 2:24; 3:11).

The other features which have been enumerated were all aspects of the apostles' fellowship. 'The breaking of bread' might refer generally to their fellowship meals, but especially to the taking of bread and wine in remembrance of their Lord. This memorial act appears to have been a daily practice, taking place in the course of a fellowship meal, in the houses of various members of the church. So at least we may gather from Acts 2:46, every part of which describes something that took place 'day by day'. The 'prayers' would be those occasions on which they came together in manageable groups for united prayer. Many of them, like the apostles (Acts 3:1), would continue to attend the services of prayer in the temple, which accompanied the morning and evening sacrifice day by day; but the temple services could not take the place of prayer within their own community.

One has sometimes met people who professed to stand foursquare

on Acts 2 in the matter of church practice, but were a little less sure of their footing when it was pointed out that the community of goods was a prominent feature of the fellowship described in this chapter. There were other religious groups in Israel at this time which practised community of goods - the Essenes are the best known example - and to many of these new believers this no doubt seemed to be a natural and proper way of expressing their sense of fellowship one with another. Towards the end of the second century Tertullian can still say of Christians: 'We hold everything in common, except our wives' (this last remark being a refutation of the slanders about Christian behaviour that circulated among the pagans). The practice led to abuses, as is shown by the account of Ananias' and Sapphira's deceit, in contrast to Barnabas's generosity; but that simply reminds us that no community of human beings, not even such an apostolic church as this, can be perfect. The attempt to get credit for being a little more generous than one really is can be found in settings where no community of goods is practised; the story of Ananias and Sapphira is not told in order to suggest that the community of goods was itself a mistaken idea. Luke nowhere suggests that it was a mistake; probably he saw much to commend in it. It had certain practical drawbacks, indeed, and perhaps the chronic poverty which seems to have afflicted the Jerusalem church in later decades may not be unconnected with the exhaustion of the common pool into which the members placed their property; but the spirit that inspired the practice was wholly admirable.

Their fellowship was manifested in their gospel witness as well as in these other ways. If for certain purposes they enjoyed fellowship in their own homes, they carried on their gospel witness in as public a place as they could find, and a favourite spot for this appears to have been Solomon's colonnade, at the eastern end of the outer court of the temple (Acts 3:11; 5:12). So their activity advanced and their numbers increased by leaps and bounds. In a few weeks' time the three thousand had increased to five thousand, not counting women and children. (That only 'the number of the men' is given in Acts 4:4 is natural in a Jewish setting; it was not until later that the truth began to dawn that in a Christian community a woman counts for as much as a man.)

3. Its administration. In the earliest days of its existence the church of Jerusalem appears to have been administered by the apostles, who had charge not only of the teaching and preaching ministry but also of the receipt and distribution of the property placed by members in the common pool. Before long, however, this last responsibility threatened to encroach unwarrantably on the primary apostolic duties, and it was accordingly delegated to seven almoners selected for this purpose by the general membership of the church. Their appointment was evidently of short duration, for one of them, Stephen,



was martyred, and in the campaign of repression which immediately followed his martyrdom the others, with the Hellenistic group in the church to which they all seem to have belonged, were dispersed.

From the middle forties onwards we can discern a radical change in the pattern of church administration at Jerusalem. The leadership of the apostles is not set aside, but that leadership is exercised now over the expanding area of Christianity, and the local affairs of the Jerusalem church are handled by a body of elders. How many elders there were is nowhere stated, but if their institution was modelled on that of the Jewish Sanhedrin, there may well have been seventy of them. Seventy would not be too large a number for the effective administration of a community numbering tens of thousands (according to Acts 21:20). The body of elders carried out its responsibilities under the general superintendence of James, the Lord's brother. His position as primus inter pares is suggested in Acts 12:17; 15:13 ff.; 21:18 ff.; and it is noteworthy that when Paul in Gal.2:9 lists him along with Peter and John among the 'pillars' of the Jerusalem church, it is James who is named first.

No matter in whose hands the administration was, however, and no matter by what name the governing body might be called, regular government was recognised from the first to be requisite for the well-being of the church. The alternative to government, in church as in state, is anarchy.

4. Its development. At the beginning of Acts 6 we are introduced to a twofold grouping in the Jerusalem church for which the preceding chapters have not prepared us. The reason is, perhaps, that from Chapter 6 to Chapter 8, Luke is drawing upon a source of information which was not available to him for the earlier part of his narrative. That his informant for this section of his history was Philip is a suggestion that has commended itself to many. At any rate, here we are told that the Jerusalem church comprised both Hebrews and Hellenists. The precise significance of these two terms has been much disputed. It is probable, however, that the 'Hebrews' were those who belonged to Palestinian families and spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, while the 'Hellenists' ('Grecians' in A.V.) were related to the Jewish communities in the lands of the Greek-speaking dispersion and spoke Greek. (It was exceptional for Jews in the Greek-speaking lands to continue to live as 'Hebrews', as Paul and his parents evidently did, according to 2 Cor.11:22 and Phil.3:5; Paul's parents, Roman citizens though they were as well as residents in Tarsus, maintained their Palestinian associations and sent their son to be educated in Jerusalem.)

When tension developed between the two groups because of the impression that the Hebrew widows were receiving a larger slice of the communal cake than those of the Hellenists, it is noteworthy that the seven almoners appointed to take charge of the allocation of the daily

dole were all Hellenists, to judge by their names. Their gifts were not purely organisational, for one of them, Stephen, displayed exceptional ability as an Old Testament expositor, while another, Philip, was an effective evangelist. Stephen was put on trial before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem for blasphemy (on charges remarkably similar to those on which the same court, some three years previously, had attempted to procure a conviction against our Lord); his defence was judged to confirm the accusation rather than refute it, and he suffered the capital penalty. In the following persecution and dispersion of Jerusalem Christians, it was naturally the Hellenists, the group to which Stephen belonged, that suffered most.

Two things happened as a result of this persecution and dispersion. One was the vigorous propagation of the gospel in the provinces adjoining Judaea, and eventually the launching of a programme of active Gentile evangelisation. It was as a direct sequel to the persecution that some Hellenistic believers of Cypriot and Cyrenaean extraction came to Syrian Antioch and began to preach the gospel to Gentiles there. The church of Antioch was, almost from the outset, a predominantly Gentile church, and soon became the metropolis of the Gentile mission. For the cause of Christianity in general, the persecution which followed Stephen's death was an excellent thing. For the church of Jerusalem, it was not so good.

With the dispersion of its Hellenist members, the Jerusalem church was predominantly 'Hebrew' in its composition. Among those Hebrews were converts from the Pharisees, who (unlike Paul) took most of their Pharisaic outlook into the church. 'A great many of the priests were obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7), and they may have brought another kind of traditionalism with them into the new community. If the Gentile mission was a congenial task for the Hellenists, many of the Hebrews at home in Jerusalem viewed it with deep misgivings.

Even if we think the Hebrews were wrong, we should try to understand their point of view. They knew the depravity of the pagan world; the description which Paul gives of it in Rom.1:18-31 was a commonplace in Jewish polemic against paganism; if people from this corrupt environment were to be welcomed into the Christian brotherhood, they believed, the most stringent conditions must be imposed on them. Otherwise the time would speedily come when there would be more Gentile Christians than Jewish Christians, and there would be a steep decline in the ethical standards of Christianity. To welcome Gentiles who confessed Jesus as Lord and received baptism in His Name was not enough; they must be required to keep the Jewish law, and as a token of their sincere undertaking to keep it they must accept circumcision.

We who have learned the principles of Christian liberty from Paul understand at once that this attitude really undermined the foundation

of the gospel. But the people who adopted this attitude did not see it that way; they thought they were safeguarding the purity of the gospel. It says much for the wisdom of the leaders of a church in which this viewpoint had many supporters that, when the Council of Jerusalem was convened to consider the terms of Gentile admission to the Christian fellowship, it was the 'evangelical' view that prevailed. The conditions stipulated in the apostolic decree (Acts 15:28 f.) had to do, not with the basis of the gospel or the terms of church membership, but with the facilitating of social fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

It is very probable that James's moderating influence carried the verdict of many who tended to take a more legalist position. Indeed, with James's hand on the helm during the next fifteen years or thereby the Jerusalem church was guided very wisely. But even with James in that position of leadership, there were thorough-going legalists in the Jerusalem church who tried to undo the spirit of the apostolic decree by going to the Gentile mission-field themselves and imposing their viewpoint on the Gentile converts. How much trouble these self-commissioned messengers gave Paul may be gauged from his epistles - 'sham apostles', he calls them, 'crooked in all their practices, masquerading as apostles of Christ' (2 Cor. 11:13 NEB.)

James and Paul, however, maintained relations of mutual respect. James was one of the Jerusalem leaders who recognised Paul's call to evangelise the Gentiles, and when in A.D. 57 Paul and the delegates from the Gentile churches came to Jerusalem with gifts for the mother-church, they received a cordial welcome from James and his fellow-elders. But in order to conciliate the 'zealots for the law' in the Jerusalem church who were ready to believe the worst of Paul and all his activities, James and his colleagues made the well-intentioned but probably ill-conceived suggestion that Paul should take part publicly in a temple ceremony - a suggestion which led directly to his arrest and imprisonment, and ultimate despatch to Rome.

5. Its disappearance. It is not recorded that the Jerusalem church or its leaders exerted themselves in Paul's behalf when he was arrested. They probably thought that his removal from Jerusalem under armed guard was all to the good; there was usually trouble when Paul came to Jerusalem. In his absence they got along tolerably well with the authorities; James enjoyed such respect among the people because of his piety that the authorities dared not take action against him or his followers.

In A.D. 62, however, one high priest, more daring than most, seized the opportunity of an interregnum in the Roman procuratorship of Judaea following on the sudden death of Festus to prosecute a number of people of whom he disapproved. Among these was James, who was stoned to death. This action shocked many of the Jews of the city, who feared that disaster would befall it after the removal of one who had so constantly interceded

for its welfare. But if it shocked the populace at large, it demoralised the church which James had guided so judiciously. They could find no successor of comparable calibre.

When the Jewish revolt against Rome broke out four years later, the Jerusalem church left the city and went into dispersion. According to the fourth century historian Eusebius, they received an oracle some time before the fighting began charging them to leave the doomed city of Jerusalem and migrate to Pella. Pella beyond the Jordan was one of the cities of the Decapolis; it was probably not to the city of Pella itself that the Jerusalem church migrated, but to the surrounding countryside which belonged to that city, as well as to other parts of Transjordan, especially less frequented parts. The flight of the mother church to the wilderness and her preservation there may be reflected in the language of Rev.12:14.

In dispersion these believers continued to call themselves the church of Jerusalem, and their successive leaders were drawn for several decades from relatives of James, members of the holy family. They were disowned as apostates by orthodox Jews, and increasingly disowned as heretics by orthodox Christians, although they thought of themselves as forming a bridge between these two bodies, conserving all that was best in both. They lingered on in Transjordan and Egypt until the seventh century, when those who had not already been absorbed by Jewish or Christian orthodoxy lost their identity in the overflowing tide of Islam.

## II. LESSONS FROM THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

Why did a church which started with such unprecedented promise come to such an inglorious and ineffective end? And what lessons does its record contain for churches today? It is always a precarious undertaking to discern and apply the lessons of history, especially when we have to make a mental transference from the conditions of the Near East in the first century to those of the western world in the twentieth. We shall certainly learn nothing from the Jerusalem Christians if we sit in judgment on them from our detached vantage-point, enjoying as we do all the benefits of hindsight. If we try to sympathise with them in their situation we may more easily see how they went wrong and be preserved from the same mistakes ourselves.

(1) The danger of cultural uniformity. When the Jerusalem church embraced both Hebrews and Hellenists, as it did in its earliest days, its membership was diversified and it made an impact on the surrounding community. It is plain that Stephen's viewpoint did not coincide exactly with that of those members of the church who continued to attend the temple services. But there was room in one local fellowship for Stephen and those who thought like him, on the one hand, and for the stricter and more traditional Jewish Christians, on the other. After the dispersion

of the Hellenists the membership of the Jerusalem church tended to become increasingly uniform in character and outlook. Uniformity is not a healthy thing for any church, whether it be social or theological uniformity. Within the biblical limits of Christian faith and life there is room for a wide and vigorous diversity, which is good for the fellowship itself and good for its witness.

(2) The danger of 'safety first'. It was an odd occasion in the history of an adventurous people like the English when a prime minister went to the country on a slogan of 'safety first'. It is even odder when the spirit of this slogan manifests itself among the followers of One who announced that anyone who wished to be His disciple must be prepared to shoulder a cross. Yet it is a spirit that manifested itself in one way in the Jerusalem church, and has manifested itself in other ways in other churches. These Jerusalem Christians had a great heritage, and they were resolved to keep it pure. In order to do this, they thought it necessary to set up very strict conditions for admission to their fellowship. They deplored the laxity of a man like Paul - a man who, with his Pharisaic upbringing, ought to have known better - in making it so easy for Gentile sinners to become church members simply by confessing Jesus as Lord and accepting baptism in His name. And Paul's own correspondence makes it clear that they could point to the behaviour of some of those Gentile converts of his as awful warnings of the sort of thing they had in mind. The heritage and the fellowship must at all costs be kept pure; no risks could be allowed in this regard; and so their attitude to the Gentile mission became more and more aloof and suspicious, not to say positively hostile.

Yet Paul himself was a Jew, with a passionate concern for righteousness and purity. All the same, he saw that righteousness and purity could not be best conserved by setting a hedge around them, but rather by spreading them abroad in the preaching of the gospel and the inculcating of the law of Christ.

Is there in some places a present day counterpart to the attitude of the first-century Jerusalem church in the insistence on the necessity of 'preserving our distinctive testimony'? If the testimony is a good one, the best thing to do with it is not to 'preserve' it by hedging it around, but to bear witness to it far and wide.

(3) The danger of legalism. By legalism is not necessarily meant the admixture of legal works with the gospel of grace, which makes the gospel no gospel at all. There was indeed an element of this sort of thing in the Jerusalem church, but it was disowned by the responsible leaders. What is meant rather is the tendency to make rules and regulations for people's lives, instead of enjoying the new freedom of the Spirit which is the birthright of all those who have come of age in Christ. Such rules and regulations may be explicit, and that is burden-

some enough; but when they are explicit they are available for consideration and criticism. More often they are unwritten, and all the more oppressive for that. It is easy to understand how many of the Jerusalem Christians, especially those who had associations with the Pharisees, would be inclined to develop a new 'tradition of the elders' to replace the old one. They did not have the New Testament alongside the Old in those days, but some of their successors in later generations have tended to treat the New Testament in a wooden and unimaginative way, much as the Pharisees treated the Old Testament - that is to say, they have treated it as a book of rules rather than as the living word of God. I am a little disturbed at times when I am invited to supply a straightforward exegesis of (say) Paul's observations on women's headgear because I suspect that my questioners will try to impose that exegesis as law on a situation vastly different from the cultural setting of the eastern Mediterranean in the first century A.D. It is more difficult to stop and ask (a) what is the fundamental principle involved in the passage in question, and (b) how that fundamental principle can best be applied to the changed situation of our day; more difficult, but absolutely necessary. Nor is it a revolutionary thing to say so. The Editors of Echoes of Service thirty-five years ago were men of impeccable orthodoxy (I do not mean that their successors today are any less so!) but they recorded their observation that in the twentieth century 'the missionary finds himself in circumstances very different from those disclosed in the New Testament' and drew certain practical conclusions from that undeniable fact. The principles of the New Testament are of abiding validity, but their application to changing situations may vary, and it is the duty of those who, being led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God, to discover how best they may be applied in this or that part of the world today.

(4) The danger of exclusivism. Many years ago I heard E.H. Broadbent speak on the fold and the flock in John 10. He pointed out that the sheep in the fold are kept together by the surrounding walls, while the sheep of a flock are kept together by the shepherd. Moreover, the number of sheep that any fold can contain is limited, while there was nothing to hinder the sheep which the good Shepherd led out of the fold having their number increased by the adherence of those 'other sheep' that had never belonged to the original fold. But, he went on, developing the parable, some of the sheep argued that in spite of the care and devotion of their Shepherd, they would feel safer if they had walls around them, and so they started to build some. But, said Mr. Broadbent, 'sheep are not good builders.' Some of the walls they built were effective enough in a way, but so restricted that they shut most of the flock out; there were other walls, on the contrary, which were comprehensive enough, but so badly constructed that they let several wolves in too, with predictable consequences. The moral is that the people of Christ need no walls to keep them together. We may learn valuable lessons from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, but Nehemiah's wall is not a model for churches to follow.

Many members of the Jerusalem church, however, imbued with the principles laid down by Ezra and Nehemiah, seem as time went on to have become increasingly concerned with ways and means of keeping wrong types out. It was not so in the beginning; then the presence of God's holiness among the believers was so manifest that 'none of the rest dared join them' (Acts 5:13). There is a certain plausibility about the affirmation that 'separation from evil is God's principle of unity', but it is not really so; God's principle of unity is positive, not negative; it is the principle of unity in Christ; and separation from evil is a corollary of the principle, not the principle itself. If, instead of harbouring suspicion of the Gentile mission those Jerusalem Christians had recognised that this was Israel's distinctive contribution to the world, and thrown themselves into it wholeheartedly, their latter end might have been different from what it was.

Whether the Epistle to the Hebrews was sent to the Jerusalem church or to some other company of Jewish believers, one of its closing admonitions is very relevant here. 'Therefore let us go forth to Him outside the camp, bearing abuse for Him' (Heb.13:13). To remain psychologically insulated within the 'camp', reluctant to sever the last links with the old order, was a natural reaction, but a fatal one. Outside lay the teeming Gentile world with its need; outside was Christ Himself, leading His servants forth into all the world. The future lay with those who left an old order which had outlived its usefulness and went out, not knowing whither they went, except that they knew themselves to be following Christ in His conquering advance.

New occasions teach new duties;  
Time makes ancient good uncouth:  
They must upward still and onward  
Who would keep abreast of truth.

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We are God's chosen few,  
All others will be damned;  
There is no room in heaven for you:  
We can't have heaven crammed.

Quoted by William Barclay.

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### 3. Restrictive Practices

by K.G. Hyland

Diotrephes and Barnabas were Christians of very different types. John, the apostle, had to write: 'Diotrephes .... receiveth us not.'

Barnabas was sent to investigate a new movement. It seems likely that the church at Jerusalem mistrusted sundry unaccustomed features of the work. They could not have sent a better man. He possessed the spiritual capacity for recognising the grace of God when he saw it, and was of the large-hearted company who are glad when they detect it. The Holy Spirit provides the explanation - 'For he was a good man.' What a name, Barnabas (Son of Consolation), and what a nature!

One Sunday morning a believer of another communion came to a Gospel Hall. Not knowing their ways she was without a head covering. A chair was moved for her, and set aside from the rest of the company, apart. At the end of the service she dissolved into tears at being so treated.

A graduate teacher, appointed to a school in a small market town had difficulty in finding true evangelical fellowship. She had, of course, been used to Christian fellowship in the Christian Union of her college, unrestricted by denominational considerations. She found her way, one Sunday morning, to the local Gospel Hall, and on her sole confession of faith received the Lord's Supper. During the ensuing week it was discovered that she had not received believer's baptism, and was required to abstain in future from the receiving of the Supper. A sensitive type, and unused to restrictive practices, she suffered a period of spiritual anguish, and nervous breakdown.

A group of tough teenagers had become really interested, and probably converted. They asked to come to the Sunday morning service and sit with their class-leader. A man in the company who realised that the offertory box would soon reach them, intervened to avoid the truly dreadful possibility that they might contribute something! Not long after youth work in that church ceased completely

A boy, congenitally deaf, spent from eight years of age to eighteen as a boarder in a special school. The recent unhappy events among our more restricted brethren, caused a major change in the management of a family business. The boy's father withdrew from the firm. As the boy was unable to hold down any normal job he chose to stay on in the firm. For this decision he lives, eats and sleeps in his own room in the family house. His former teacher comments: 'He desperately NEEDS normal communication.'



Would Barnabas have handled these cases thus? The writer doubts it. The list of restrictive practices could be greatly extended.

The problem is aggravated because people who act thus do so in all good faith, and because their conscience will not allow them to do otherwise. Conscience, however, is not an infallible guide, needing constantly to be adjusted by the whole of what the Bible teaches on any matter.

Does the Bible, therefore, provide guidance by which such issues may be decided? It is clear that detailed instructions for every conceivable situation cannot be found therein. A book of such rules would be an easy solution, but the method would involve no spiritual concern. God has chosen for us a more exacting task, by giving in Holy Scripture, principles to be applied rather than a pattern to be followed.

The thesis here developed, for examination and discussion, is that in the moral law of God are to be found the guiding principles for our relationships as Christians with one another, not only as individuals, but in church matters as well.

#### The Place of the Moral Law.

In the Old Testament. After the promulgation of the Decalogue in the Pentateuch, the former prophets - Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, recount God's ACTS relating to the obedience or disobedience of His people. Their disobedience ultimately led to the exile, first of the ten tribes, and later that of Judah.

The latter prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the rest, record God's WORDS through inspired messengers. These men sought to recall the people to obedience, relating the abiding principles of God's Holy Law to the moral and spiritual conditions of the times in which they ministered.

This aspect of their ministry was the prophetic message (1 Cor. 14:3). The predictive element in their writings falls roughly into three categories:

1. Prediction concerning Messiah.
2. Prediction concerning the Day of the Lord.
3. Prediction concerning the New Covenant.

It is to this last that attention must briefly be drawn.

The main references are two: Jer.31:31 ff. and Ezekiel 36:25 ff.

The Jeremiah passage is quoted twice in the epistle to the Hebrews, and concentrates attention upon a radical change of heart, whereby an

altered disposition towards God's law is implanted deeply within man's being.

The second quotation in Hebrews 10 draws attention to the sequence, first a change of heart; second the forgiveness of sins. Heb. 10:15-17 RV. v.15 'after that'. v.16 'then saith He'. The importance of this in practical terms is, that God not only forgives the man, but regenerates him. Many would probably be only too relieved to receive forgiveness of sins, who are not willing to be changed people. Here lies the point of the Baptist's words: 'Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.'

The Ezekiel passage adds the feature that, in regeneration, not only cleansing from sin and a change of heart result, but that there is available an enduement of the Spirit (v.27) which makes possible walking in God's statutes, keeping His judgments and doing them. Here is the germ, in the Old Testament, from which springs the New Testament use of the term 'fulfil'. Matt.5:17-18; Rom.8:4, 13; 8, 10.

The Place of the moral Law in the New Testament. To pass to the New Testament: our Lord early in His ministry made quite clear how He stood, and how His disciples ought to stand in relation to the moral law. Matt.5:17-20.

In the gospels moreover, the law is summarised in two commandments: love to God, and love to one's neighbour. Quite clearly the implications of these two commands need to be apprehended, and then applied to the circumstances of all aspects of life.

Paul further reduces the number to one, Rom.13:9, and supplies the implication in verse 10.

It seems, therefore, that the Law of God lies at the base of the developing revelation in the Scriptures, and that the end in view is expressed in these words: 'that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.' Rom.8:4.

The two main features of moral law. All would agree that God's law was designed to inculcate a life of righteousness. There is however another element, namely 'mercy' or kindness.

God requires kindness to be shown to - foreigners, widows, orphans, debtors, mortgagors, enemies, employees and slaves. Ex.22:21-27; 23:4; 23:12.

God declares Himself to be 'merciful and gracious', and this facet of His nature is referred to more than eighty times in the Psalms.

The Prophets take up the same theme: 'The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God.' Hos.4:1. 'For I desired mercy and not sacrifice.' Hos. 6:6. 'Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy.' Hos.10:12. 'Therefore turn thou to thy God; keep mercy and judgment.' Hos.12:6. 'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.' Mic.6:8.

Our Lord says 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' Matt.5:7, see also 18:32-33. He informs us that our Heavenly Father is kind to the unthankful and evil; 'Be ye therefore merciful, even as your Father is merciful.'

It is here suggested that the law of mercy is infringed by the sort of case instanced at the commencement of this paper. This brings us to the central issue under discussion - which has precedency? the moral law; or the law of God's house? To be illustrative - which must be regarded as of primary importance - the insistence upon what is conceived to be 'church truth', or the shewing of kindness and mercy?

To begin with a Psalm. In the space of only four verses David seems flatly to contradict himself. In Psa.51:16 he says 'For Thou delightest not in sacrifice, else would I give it; Thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering' yet in v.19 he adds 'Then shalt Thou delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, in offering and whole burnt offering.'

The operative word is, of course, the 'then' of v.19. The ritual and sacrifices are acceptable only, when conditions are right. From David in his backslidden and unrepentant state (Psa.32:3-4) no sacrifice was acceptable. When, however, the sacrifice springs from a righteous life v.19, then all is well.

Here then the moral law of righteousness takes precedence.

The prophets are insistent about this, Isa.1:10-17. In v.16 Judah is charged with unrighteousness, and with unmercifulness. Dr. G. Adam Smith renders v.13 'I cannot away with iniquity AND the solemn meeting.' All their religious observance was obnoxious to the Most High under those conditions. Isaiah provides another instance: 58:1-10. Jeremiah 6:13-15 describes the moral state of Judah, and v.20 speaks of their offerings being 'not acceptable'. In v.16 he bids them ask for the old paths. What did he mean? The context compels us to conclude that he means paths of righteousness and mercy, and this conclusion is confirmed by ch.7:1-15 and 21-24. The first section 1-15 teaches that the temple ceases to be God's house v.4, when they presume, as God's people, to condone sin. v.10. The clue to the 'old paths' is found in v.22 where the prophet reminds them that at the Exodus God laid down moral commandments before He turned to the details of tabernacle and sacrifice, v.23. It is only after the covenant has been ratified, Ex.24:1-8, that we

gradually hear details of the tabernacle, priesthood, and sacrifice. In the most literal sense Jeremiah's words are true: 'In the day that I brought thee out of the land of Egypt,' God had literally spoken of obedience, not cultic matters. Jeremiah is clearly indicating that the order of revelation is indicative of its relative value.' (H.L.Ellison, Evang. Quart. Jan-March 1962, p.23). The scathing words of 7:1-15 indicate that God's primary concern is with the moral values of life, and that where these are missing in sufficient degree, He is prepared to sweep away His house. v.12. (Heb.3:6; John 8:33-36).

One of the most vivid treatments of this theme is found in Mic. 6:6-8.

In each of these instances the moral law takes precedence. Samuel's words put it thus: 'To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.'

But - is this same relative standard of values carried on into the New Testament? There are four clear instances within our Lord's ministry.

In Mark 12:28-34 our Lord is asked: 'which is the first commandment of all?' and when He answered, the scribe replied 'Master, Thou hast well said ... and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.' Our Lord's response is striking: 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' The moral law takes precedence.

In Matt.15:1-9 the Pharisees charge the Lord with breach of tradition. His reply is important. Their tradition relates to the upkeep of the service of God by monetary contributions, and probably gifts in kind, as in the Old Testament. He charges them however with breach of the commandments of God. He places the fifth commandment above the giving to the needs of His house. Care of needy parents comes before the need of the temple. Again moral law takes precedence over ecclesiastical law.

Perhaps the most striking instance occurs in Matt.12. The Pharisees charge the disciples with breaking the sabbath; our Lord refers them to an incident in David's life. David and his men are in need of food, and received bread taken from the Holy Table, which act our Lord regards as unlawful on ecclesiastical grounds, v.4. But our Lord, on the ground of physical human need places higher the moral law of mercy, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice.' The ritual gives place to mercy. It is to be noted that our Lord here deals with two laws, one from the Decalogue, that of the sabbath; and one from the Levitical code, the law regarding the shewbread. He interprets the one in favour of mercy - the

sabbath was made for man (see E x.23:12) and not the reverse. He also interprets the second in the same sense. So astonishing must this have seemed to those who heard Him that He proceeds to deal with the question of His authority so to teach. In respect of Sabbath law He says: 'The Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath'; whilst in respect of ritual law He says 'One greater than the temple is here.'

There is no mistaking the last instance. In maintaining their fitness to proceed on temple service the priest and the Levite were not prepared to help a man in desperate need. In so acting they were in breach of the moral law: 'thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'(Luke 10:25 ff.) Many would still feel it more important to be at the Lord's table than to meet the physical need of some sick neighbour.

It is to be noted that each instance is concerned with physical need. If in our Master's view ecclesiastical law gives place to the meeting of physical need, what can be said of withholding spiritual succour on ecclesiastical, and worse, denominational grounds?

Would it be improper to say that the ordering of a New Testament church was made for man, and not man for the church? It could easily be demonstrated that a church which is closest to the New Testament is the church which is best for the free spiritual development of all the members. And yet it is possible to try to cut men down to fit a Procrustean bed of so-called 'church truth'. If they do not fit, then, so much the worse for them! The sum total of unmercifulness that has been perpetrated for ecclesiastical reasons must be staggering. Part of the obligation to mercy is because not one of us knows anything yet as he ought to know. We are all growing to maturity within the one family of God. God has given to each differing capacities, and to each the power of self-determination, or free-will. For one to impose his will over the light yet given to another is not only unmerciful; it is also trespassing upon God's territory in the individual and private responsibility of each separate human personality. Even a Paul would not override this. In Phil.3:14-16 he is virtually saying 'My mind is this - but if in anything ye be otherwise minded, even this shall God reveal unto you.'

One last point remains. What kind of God do we worship? The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is one Who is merciful. He is one who is prepared to set aside the laws of His house for the sake of all varieties of human need. His moral law of righteousness and mercy takes precedence.

Do we worship Bethel rather than the God of Bethel? What image of God have we in our minds? Is He one who is more interested in ecclesiastical order, or 'church truth'? His law says 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.' What mental image have we of Him? 'My little children guard yourselves from idols.' 'Ye shall have none other gods beside me.' - Not even the assembly.

#### 4. The "NEEDED TRUTH" Assemblies

A Summary of their  
Origin, Distinctive Tenets, Organisation and Practices.

by C.A.Oxley

##### Author's Note:

Having been brought up in the Needed Truth assemblies, I withdrew at the age of 35, when convinced that the party's exclusive position was contrary to the Lord's will. The withdrawal was effected without bitterness and the sole reason for accepting the kind invitation to write this article is to facilitate a study of the principles involved, a study which would, I believe, be of great benefit to all who are willing to undertake it honestly and diligently before the Lord.

##### ORIGIN

In the year 1882 a pamphlet was issued entitled "The Church and Churches of God: a suggestive outline of truth" by F.A.Banks, a young but respected minister of the Word among the assemblies. It dealt with the principles of assembly fellowship and, in the words of a recent Needed Truth publication 'was heralded by many godly and competent students of the New Testament as a great step forward in the understanding of the will of the Lord on this very important matter.' This pamphlet greatly influenced a godly Irishman who subsequently wrote a booklet called "The One Thing for God, or the Churches of the New Testament" in which he wrote of F.A.Banks' pamphlet, '...it may be quite possible to receive the teaching of that booklet and perhaps to be led out from lawless and 'loose' meetings, and yet, not having seen further light, stop short of deliverance unto the true pattern.' Reference is here made to Romans 6:17.

The Needed Truth party derives its name from a quarterly magazine first published in 1887 by four brethren who were among "Open Assemblies" some forty years after the Exclusives left the main stream of the Brethren movement. The magazine was intended to emphasise and spread what was felt to be needed truth regarding the principles of assembly gathering and fellowship. One of these four brethren, a Dr.C.M.Luxmoore, contributed to the magazine in 1890 as follows: 'Is not the fellowship in which are embraced the assemblies...almost unwallled today? Have we not therein a mixture of many whom God has never added together, of such as have never been really delivered from the system of human religion in which they have been brought up, and who are therefore a fruitful source of weakness in such fellowship? Indeed, there are those in

companies supposed to be assemblies of God to whom the very name of separation is as a sound of an unknown tongue, or as the tone of an enemy's speech, whose sympathy and whose intercourse with the sects of Christendom are as complete as are the sympathy and the intercourse of the sects with one another, and who confessedly have no thought of occupying a position of subjection to the Lord in any sense different from the vague and nominal submission which the lip-service of all so called Christian communities is accustomed to profess.'

Dr. Luxmoore was associated with "Open Assemblies" when he wrote the above and it is the "Open Assemblies" he is describing when he uses the terms 'fellowship' and 'assemblies of God'. These terms are restricted to the Needed Truth party by present day Needed Truth writers.

In articles and letters published in the Needed Truth magazine during the years 1888-1894, an attempt was made to trace a pattern for the assemblies from information regarding the early church in the Acts of the Apostles and in the Epistles, without reference to the way in which the early church developed subsequently. Emphasis was (and still is) laid on that period of Judah's history which deals with the Return of the Remnant from Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem. Nehemiah's wall is taken to teach separation from everyone not in 'fellowship', and the second temple justifies such expressions as 'the Place of the Name' as applied to Needed Truth assemblies.

The propagation of this teaching resulted in a small minority of brethren and sisters leaving their assemblies to form others, constituted on the lines advocated in the magazine.

It would be true to say therefore that the Needed Truth party originated to give expression to 'further light' believed to have been received and as a protestant movement against alleged 'looseness' among "Open Assemblies". It would be wrong to accept one reason without the other and it would be impossible to assess the relative importance of these two factors as they must have varied with the personalities concerned.

#### DISTINCTIVE TENETS, ORGANISATION and PRACTICES.

Although the Needed Truth party is of an exclusive character, it would be wrong to confuse Needed Truth assemblies with the Exclusives. The Needed Truth assemblies are quite separate from all other parties and denominations. Indeed, it is this separation which is their chief distinctive tenet.

Basically, Needed Truth assemblies are similar to Open Brethren assemblies, holding doctrines which are commonly called 'fundamental' and 'evangelical'. But, unlike Open Assemblies, they are closely linked

together in one corporate entity. The teaching that each assembly is responsible for itself directly to the Lord is regarded as false doctrine and repeatedly denounced. It is claimed that each assembly is 'The Church of God in (such and such a place).' In a city or town with more than one meeting, each meeting is called a 'company' and is regarded as only a part of the Church of God in that place. The overseers of each company together form one oversight over all the companies. This point is made in a recent booklet: "Churches of God in apostolic teaching"(p.7):

'One important fact we draw attention to is the unity of the Church of God in Jerusalem. In spite of its rapid increase in numbers it remained a unit. It is inconceivable that so many thousands of disciples could meet in one building, but no matter how many groups or companies there were, together they constituted the church of God in Jerusalem. The conception of a number of local autonomous assemblies in a city or town is without precedent in the New Testament. One church of God only was planted in a city, town or village.'

Each assembly or company has three or four overseers and most have about the same number of deacons, all officially recognised and functioning.

The assemblies - total number between sixty and seventy - are grouped in regional areas called "districts". The United Kingdom is divided into nine districts, while the dozen or so assemblies overseas are grouped in continents though still known as districts. Under the chapter headed "Divine Government through the Whole" in the booklet, "The One Thing for God" referred to above, we read:

'It appears evident from Scripture that God took up the Provinces of the vast Roman Empire as they were then found and made use of these Provinces for the grouping together of churches of God; the overseers or elders of these churches, men divinely appointed, formed a circle by which the churches were linked together... We find these men...caring for God's flock in the Provinces alluded to. Perhaps it is not always remembered that the Epistle to the Galatians is written to a group of churches in a Province, for indeed such is the style of the writing and import of the epistle that one might easily think that those addressed were together in one city and not in churches many miles apart. But more than this, we have in 1 Peter, four other Provinces linked with Galatia thus forming a vast area, larger than Great Britain and Ireland put together, and in the fifth chapter we have the elders in this vast area addressed and charged to be 'ensamples to the flock'. Again, the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 1:4) attest the same fact: 'What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches'. (Revelation 1:11). One book was to circulate throughout the whole. Now what is remarkable is



the fact that notwithstanding that some of these churches were in a very bad condition, there is not the slightest suggestion of a suspicion on the part of the writer that the letter would be rejected by any in a spirit of independency... In speaking of overseers and elders it is well to be put in remembrance of the fact that the business of such is not to legislate, but rather to search the Scriptures, and to arrive at oneness of mind as to the legislation of God contained therein, and accordingly to give effect thereto.'

The total of assemblies is referred to as 'the Fellowship'. In a Needed Truth publication entitled "Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures", we read:

'We note that the Fellowship or Community of which we read in Acts 2:42: 'They continued stedfastly in the Fellowship' (so the Greek), and 1 Corinthians 1:9: 'God is faithful through whom ye were called into the Fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord', must on no account be confused with that fellowship of which 1 John 1 speaks. For the latter is fellowship, that is communion (partnership or common possession), with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, first enjoyed by those who knew the Son of God in the days of His flesh, and then enjoyed by others to whom comes the declaration of what these had seen and heard. In other words the word 'fellowship' of 1 John 1 describes the fact of common possession and common enjoyment, whilst the previously quoted passages (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 1:9) describe as a Fellowship or Community those who enjoy and work in common, as a firm or partnership may do; but all under the headship and control of our one and only Lord.'

The last paragraph of the chapter on 'The Fellowship' in the "Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures" says:

'Nevertheless we nowhere find in Scripture any justification for children of God being elsewhere than with those that call on the Lord out of a pure heart, in the Fellowship which is of the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, careful consideration of the whole subject in the light of other passages of Scripture...leads us to the solemn conviction that to be in any other association of Christians is absolutely contrary to the word of God and the will of the Lord.'

The Needed Truth magazine is now published monthly and is the party's official journal. It describes itself as:

'A journal for the teaching of the Word of God, issued by the Churches of God in the Fellowship of the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:9).'

Another title which the Needed Truth party appropriates to itself is 'the House of God'. From the chapter on this subject in "Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures" we quote:

'The conditional character of the House of God as of a thing committed to human responsibility is clearly shown in Hebrews 3... 'Whose house are we' it is said to the Hebrews, 'if we hold fast our boldness and the glorying of our hope firm unto the end.'... The House of God is described in 1 Timothy 3:15 as 'Church of Living God, pillar and ground of the Truth.' That right behaviour in the House of God may be known the first letter to Timothy was written, and clearly such instruction as chapter 3 especially contains is only of use within the circle of the House of God which comprises (as Peter's letter shows) the saints of God who are gathered together.'

The term 'Kingdom of God' is also taken to mean the Needed Truth assemblies only. It is admitted that translation into the Kingdom of His dear Son (Colossians 1:13) takes place the moment a person puts faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But Acts 14:22 is used to emphasise the conditional character of the Kingdom of God. Then 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 is taken in conjunction with 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 to show that the wicked person, though a child of God and a member of the Body of Christ, 'could have no inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.' Reference is here made also to Ephesians 5:5-6. Again quoting from "Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures" (p.42):

'The result of preaching the Kingdom of God in the power of the Holy Spirit will be that the disciples made are gathered together with their hearts set on carrying out the will of God. The rule of God in the hearts of His gathered people finds expression in their corporate testimony to Him as His House.'

In addition to the demand for exclusive right to the titles 'The Fellowship' (as used in 1 Corinthians 1:9), 'the House of God', 'the Kingdom of God', and 'the Churches of God', the Needed Truth party also claims exclusively the term 'flock' and 'little flock'. Scriptures which use this metaphor are believed to support the doctrine of the organisational unity of the assemblies and the elderhood. To quote again from "Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures" which, incidentally, devotes one page each to God the Father, The Lord Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit and Eternal Salvation, yet has five pages on elders and overseers, and seven pages on Rule and Discipline within the Fellowship:

'This community of believing, baptised, and added ones is spoken of as a Flock, or a little Flock. The company around the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh was comforted by Him in the words: 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your

Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom' (Luke 12:32). The word here used for flock which is by some regarded as the diminutive of the word in John 10:16, is applied by Peter to the company of believers scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, who though thus found in many places were regarded as a united whole, to be cared for as one flock by the elders thereof (see 1 Peter 5:2). Again Paul in his parting words to the elders in Ephesus, speaks of the flock in the which the Holy Spirit had made or placed them as overseers... Though applied to a company together in a single town, yet the word 'flock' is never used in the plural when the gathered saints in different towns are referred to, the governing principle being that expressed by the Lord in John 10:16: One Flock,.. Though He has many sheep and many, alas! go astray beside the flocks of others, yet He Himself has but one flock, though indeed it be betimes but a little flock.' (p.25)

'The united action of overseers is especially important in connexion with the recognition of those whom God calls to public ministry of His Word and of those in whom He puts a heart to care for the Flock... But where difficulties arise, either from insufficient knowledge of the Word of God or because the guiding principles are not generally understood, of the overseers are not of one mind, it is clearly incumbent on them to recognise that they are in a fellowship or partnership with co-workers in neighbouring towns, and to seek counsel with their fellows. And the obligation rests on such overseers together in the district to be of one mind in the Lord in the given matter on hand; and to avoid the very appearance of independency.' (p.59 f.)

When the body of Needed Truth doctrines is referred to, it is called 'the Truth'. 1 Timothy 2:4 '...Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth,' 'the truth' here is taken to mean Needed Truth. The Scripture 'Buy the truth and sell it not' is an exhortation where the word 'truth' is also used in this way.

From its inception, the Needed Truth party has emphasised the difference between the Church composed of all believers in Christ and the churches located in cities and towns throughout the world. The former is usually referred to as 'the Church, which is His Body' after Ephesians 1:22-23. In the booklet "The One Thing for God", seven points of difference are listed: (1) Christ alone is the builder of His Church (Matthew 16:18) whereas man has a part in the building of local churches (1 Corinthians 3:9-10). (2) There is but one Body (Ephesians 4:4) but there are many churches of God (1 Thessalonians 2:14). (3) In the Church, which is His Body, there 'is neither male nor female' (Galatians 3:28) whereas a distinction is made in the local church in the injunction, 'Let

your women keep silence in the churches:' (1 Corinthians 14:34). (4) With regard to the Church, which is His Body, 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it', (Matthew 16:18) whereas in Acts 8:3 we read of Saul making havoc of the church and in Galatians 1:13, Paul writes 'I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:'. (5) Reference is made to Acts 1:15, 1 Corinthians 12:12 and Ephesians 5:27 to demonstrate the incompleteness of the Church, which is His Body, and the completeness of the local churches. To make this point the author states: '...each church of God is a complete unit in itself.' But this statement would have to be modified to agree with the title of the booklet: "The One Thing for God". (6) The unconditional character of membership of the Body (John 10:27-29) is contrasted with the conditional character of membership of the local church (1 Corinthians 5:12-13), and (7) the eternal character of the Church, which is His Body (Ephesians 5:27) with the temporary character of the local churches.

Needed Truth brethren agree that the Church, spoken of as the Body of Christ, is composed of all those who have experienced the New Birth, being 'thereupon baptised in one Spirit into one Body' (1 Corinthians 12:13), but they emphasise that a believer does not enter a church of God by means of the New Birth, nor does his regeneration alone qualify him for membership of a church of God, or even for reception at the breaking of bread: further steps are necessary.

Acts 2:41 is interpreted as giving the necessary steps and conditions before engaging in the activities of verse 42: i.e. receiving the word (unto salvation), baptism (by immersion), adding (to a Needed Truth assembly) are all necessary to the continuing stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.

Mention has already been made of the emphasis on separation. Not only is the emphasis on separation from the world but on separation from all other religious organisations. All other assemblies, churches and denominations, particularly Open Brethren (called 'O.B.'s') are spoken of as spiritual Babylon, in which God has no pleasure. The injunction of 2 Corinthians 6:14-18: 'Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers...Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate...' is applied with equal rigour to believers who are not in fellowship with them. To quote again from "Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures" (p.42 f.):

'In the House of God it is possible for God's will to be carried out as it cannot be in any of the sects of Christendom. The rule of these is diverse from one another in many cases, and is opposed to the rule of God in all; so that those whose spirits are stirred up to know and do the will of God need to maintain separation from each and all. For much as we love and esteem many Christians in the sects whose

personal lives are frequently very excellent, yet in connexion with those sects the will of God for His people collectively cannot be done, and we must therefore avoid all unequal yokes that would hinder our obedience to God's will. (1 Peter 3:15, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 10:5).'

Psalm 32:8 and 9a is printed in full at this point!

In a six-page chapter headed "Repentance and Separation" in "Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures", the writers recall the Return of the Remnant and the part played by Ezra and Nehemiah, then, referring to Malachi 4:4, state:

'The divine principle of returning to God's Word that has been neglected is further enforced in the final paragraph which closes the Old Testament writings.'

The question is then put:

'What word is now spoken for faithful ones who find themselves where teachers of false doctrine are pre-eminent and the mischief they are doing cannot be stopped, so that they overthrow the faith of some?'

The answer follows immediately:

'Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness... If a man therefore purge himself out from these (so the Greek)... follow righteousness, faith, love, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.' (2 Timothy 2:19-22). That is separation from all manner of association where the will of the Lord Christ is not paramount, and fellowship with all who are like-minded in seeking after Him and His will in a dark day.'

It is assumed that this scripture was an instruction to 'everyone that nameth the name of Christ' to withdraw from the church in which Hymenaeus and Philetus were saying that the resurrection was past already. The next paragraph states:

'Later on those who in response to the word of the Lord in 2 Timothy 2, came out and were found together are divinely addressed, as we read in the book of the Revelation, as the church in Ephesus, joined with six other churches in Asia...'

The conclusion is then drawn:

'An assembly of God is such not because it is 'a congregation of faithful men' but because they who constitute it are together at the call of God to contend earnestly for the Faith

which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). We are therefore no more reluctant to use the expression 'church' or 'assembly of God' for fallible and failing companies than to call fallible and failing persons saints and Christians. The names are of God, and the sole question is, To whom does He give them? The same principle applies to the use of the terms 'The House of God', 'The Fellowship' and so forth.\*

Their attitude to the 'separated brethren' (though they do not use the term) is shown in the final paragraph of this chapter:

'Having been brought out by God from the sects of Christendom, seeking from Him repentance and forgiveness for all share we have had in its works of human religion, we are now gathered into the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we can welcome all children of God who, turning their backs on Christendom in all its forms, come forth to the Name and Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, if...they...have been baptised...they are gladly received into the assemblies of God.'

The above quotations are not from the writings of a few extremists. They are from officially sponsored publications and find practical application. Any member of the Needed Truth party who attended a religious service not their own would be reprimanded; while a person who became engaged to be married to even a baptised believer not in fellowship with them would be excommunicated. Assembly prayer for the Billy Graham crusades was and is officially discouraged, as is the case with such organisations as the British and Foreign Bible Society. A believer, baptised or not, from an assembly not on the "Churches of God" list, would under no circumstances be allowed to break bread. Letters of Commendation are almost invariably used when a member of one assembly visits another even when the person concerned is very well known.

Acts 16:2 with 1 Timothy 4:14 are believed to show that Timothy was commended by the elders of the churches at Lystra and Iconium and this 'is itself proof positive that elders acted together as a corporate whole' ("Doctrines of the Holy Scriptures" p.47). It is at the monthly meeting of overseers in the district that arrangements for conferences and local gospel meetings are made. It would be out of order for a brother in one assembly to be invited to preach the gospel in another assembly unless his name were on the list of recognised speakers, though he may be invited to preach in his own assembly. The first Lord's Day in the month is the usual one for interchange between assemblies. It would be quite impossible for a brother to leave one assembly and to join another without the complete approval of both assemblies' oversight circles. Except in very special circumstances, a brother must be associated with the assembly in the same civil boundary as his residence.

Overseers representing the various districts at home and overseas meet annually, and it is this Conference (held in Liverpool in recent years) led by a dozen or so 'Leading Brethren' (officially appointed and recognised) which constitutes the executive body. In practice, these Leading Brethren, who are not necessarily fulltime servants of the Lord, do exercise certain executive powers. Scriptural authority for this Conference is claimed in Acts 15. In 'Churches of God in apostolic teaching' the question is asked and answered:

'What is the alternative to conference among elders? Independence, disruption and division. History abounds with sad examples of this, and there is abundant evidence of it today. Those who urge to the extreme the complete independence of each local church today are beset with a wide divergence of view on many matters of crucial importance, and this, in itself, is sufficient condemnation of the unsoundness of their position and a demonstration of the wisdom of conference among elders on the model of apostolic example.'

A full report of each Conference is circulated among overseers only and a brief summary sent with the official magazine. Over the years, these reports and the Needed Truth volumes have come to be regarded as an authority for the interpretation of scripture, for the conduct of assembly business, for the procedure to be followed in assembly meetings and in such matters as recognition of overseers and reception into fellowship.

Considerable effort goes into achieving an agreed interpretation of scripture and brethren agree not to minister on the subjects or scriptures which are for the time being under consideration. The Revised Version of 1881 is the officially recognised version and is always used. Over the past ten years there has been a drive for uniformity of practice throughout the assemblies, even in minor matters of procedure and order of services. For example: The partaking of the bread and the wine must always come first in the "morning meeting" which is usually called "the Remembrance" and never "the Lord's Supper". (The term "the Lord's Table" is not used). The brother who gives thanks for the loaf also must give thanks for the cup, and he holds the loaf in his hands while giving thanks, so as to follow the order of Luke 22:19; 'likewise also the cup' is held during the thanksgiving. Ministry on this occasion is rare, and the announcement must come before the closing prayer which is not regarded as part of the Holy Priesthood service. The offering is restricted to those in Fellowship and is collected in a box before the service.

The hymns used at the breaking of bread must be chosen from the 150 pre-selected hymns which form part 1 of their own hymn book - an exceptionally good one - entitled "Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs". Some of these hymns have been specially composed by Needed Truth brethren,

others have been 'amended', e.g. 'When we survey the wondrous cross...' All first person pronouns are made plural to indicate the unity of the company.

'The veil is rent: lo! Jesus sits  
Before the throne of grace;  
The incense which His name emits  
Fills all that glorious place.'

has been altered to agree with Hebrews 1:3. Hymns which imply that the basis of fellowship at the Remembrance is faith in Christ alone, are omitted altogether; also hymns which directly address the Lord Jesus are disqualified if they cannot be 'corrected'. Double condemnation therefore falls on 'Around Thy table, Holy Lord,' with its 'heretical' lines:

'Here everyone that loves Thy name,  
Our willing hearts embrace;'

The reputation of any aspiring young brother rash enough to suggest an organ or a piano to help the singing would suffer a serious set-back.

The annual Conference officially commends to the Lord's work, brethren who have obtained the approval of the local oversight, the district oversight and the Leading Brethren. They assert their direct responsibility to the Lord and resist any attempt to direct them. There are various committees which are responsible to the Conference: e.g. the Aggressive Work Committee, responsible for missionary workers and gospel campaigns. All the publishing is done by the Needed Truth Publishing Office, run by a committee consisting mainly of Leading Brethren. Nothing can appear in the Needed Truth magazine without the scrutiny of several Leading Brethren. The N.T.P.O. publishes an excellent young people's magazine called "Eagle's Wings", but even this contains the distinctive doctrines of the party.

Oversight rulings intrude into what may be considered to be the sphere of personal responsibility. For example, members must satisfy the overseers that they take no part in politics, Trade Unions, and would take no part in military service. Radio and television in the home is officially discouraged and an overseer or deacon is not allowed to have a television set in his home.

It would be both difficult and dangerous to generalise, but it would be fair comment to describe the Needed Truth party as a closely-knit, rather introspective community, whose members are inclined to be more concerned with defending and teaching their positional doctrines than with the preaching of the gospel. They reverence and study the Scriptures diligently, they respect and are subject to the elderhood, and though they vary widely in the matter of personal devotion to the Lord, they



are less open to a charge of worldliness than other assemblies of brethren. If 'Separation' is their chief distinctive tenet, then their chief characteristic is the tenacity with which they hold this doctrine and the zeal with which they propagate it.

Some may regard the Needed Truth party as too insignificant to warrant much consideration, but the recent troubles in the "Taylorite" party of Exclusives prompted an attempt on the part of the Needed Truth leaders to propagate their teaching among all assemblies of Brethren. Furthermore, some of the Needed Truth teaching is already held in some assemblies. But apart from these facts, it would seem to be wise to consider thoroughly in the light of Scripture, the various issues raised: principles of interpretation of Scripture, principles of assembly fellowship, sectarianism, interdenominationalism, principles of oversight, the sphere of personal liberty of conscience, and, most important, the effect of all these matters on our devotion to and service for the Lord Jesus Christ.

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'Two Scotch-Irish Psalm-singing Presbyterian churches became in America five bodies... The story of their formation is instructive. Two groups were brought from the old country before the Revolutionary War. In 1782 they made the highly sensible decision to unite... This merger, however, did not meet with unanimous approval. Some of the Associate churches at once seceded... The attempt at union thus resulted in three churches where only two had been before. In 1832 the newly organised Reformed Presbyterian divided on the issue of voting... The number of churches was increased to five when another merger, the United Presbyterian church, was formed and small groups...refused to acquiesce. This process was greatly reinforced by subconscious factors such as the desire for leadership and the repressed hostilities arising out of the stern discipline characteristic of many of these churches.'

Anton T. Boisen - "Religion in Crisis and Custom".

'Commonly it bringeth a man under suspicion either of favouring some heresy or abating his zeal, if he do but attempt a pacificatory work. As if there were no zeal necessary for the great fundamental verities of the Church's unity and peace, but only for parties and some particular truth.'

Richard Baxter 1655

'In a recent survey I found one small Southern body that had split over the issue of neckties, a group of perhaps fifteen hundred insisting that true religion forbade them. Two small Churches of Christ had split on the issue of communion cups: A traveling evangelist had discovered that they were using two cups, one for each deacon. This, he said, was unscriptural. The Lord had only used one.'

Anton T. Boisen.

MEMBERS' SECTION

Contributions and Correspondence on matters raised in the Journal should reach the Correspondence Editor, 229 Village Way, Beckenham, Kent, within four weeks of the Journal being received.

CONTRIBUTION

U N C T I O N

by E.T. Laycock

'Ye have an unction from the Holy One and know all things.'  
1 John 2:20.

I have come to see the paramount importance of 'unction' as referred to by John in his first Letter. I would say without hesitation that this is the 'one thing needful', and each Christian and group of Christians, must research into this vital 'life-force' and find out first if they have it, if not, how they can get it, and thirdly how they can keep it and use it. It would also be useful to know what it is. If we turned this verse in John's epistle inside out, we would see that if we have no unction from the Holy One, we will know nothing. Ignorance, then, is the result of a lack of unction. It is not ignorance of 'chapter and verse', because it is possible to know the Bible without any unction. The 'knowing of all things' that unction brings, must be a knowledge beyond head-knowledge; it must be a 'knowing' of the supernatural or mystical things. The unction that we receive is an initiation into the 'hidden wisdom' that Paul speaks of in 1 Cor.2:7.

It is this 'hidden wisdom', unlocked by an 'unction' received from the Holy One, that is so wonderful. Have you ever wondered what Jesus wrote with His finger on the ground, when He was faced with that tricky situation in the Temple courts? Have you ever wondered what the stones would cry out, if the Hosannas to the Son of David were not forthcoming? Have you ever seen the 'eye of God' by which He has promised to guide us? Have you ever pondered the meaning of those words in Psa.85:11 'Truth shall spring out of the earth? I believe that some of these questions are now being answered. Only an unction from the Holy One has made this possible. This unction has many facets, and ways, whereby it is seen, or discovered, or 'received'. The tragedy, in some circles, is to see people seeking this unction in a way by which others have received it. But I believe the Lord has reserved a special anointing for us Christians in the Brethren, just as those in the Jewish Faith had a special visitation of God at Pentecost. Watchman Nee points out that although Peter referred to that wonderful prophecy in Joel, yet the sun was not darkened nor the moon turned into blood. What actually happened at

Pentecost was not foretold. None of them knew that a rushing mighty wind would come, and the tongues of fire were completely unexpected.

All God's gifts are unusual, and the results of receiving an unction can be completely breath-taking and revolutionary. We cannot foretell what great things God will do for us. It is necessary that we enter the silence and fulfil the word that He has commanded us. The answer to every problem lies close at hand; just as the dock leaves grow near the stinging nettles. It may be that the cure of our diseases is in the very disease itself. This is exemplified in the practice of vaccination. But the answer can only be seen by unction. That is to say, it is beyond the realm of reason and lies in the realm of intuition. But it is not a natural intuition, but a supernatural one, which must be received. It is given by someone outside of our own limited range of vision. Is it possible that this unction was imparted to Paul and Barnabas by the laying on of hands? (Acts 13:3). What did Timothy receive when the presbytery laid their hands upon him? (1 Tim.4:14). It was a gift, and it came by a prophetic utterance. It was nothing less than this wonderful unction, by which Timothy would know all things, and by which he would understand the hidden wisdom of God.

Many have received the 'laying on of hands', but no unction has been imparted. This is not because it does not work, but because we have lost out somewhere along the line. An electrician does not abandon electricity because the light will not burn, but he searches until he finds the 'fault'. It may be a dirty contact or an 'earth', or a short-circuit, or a broken connection.

I am glad you have started a 'research' fellowship. You will discover many 'earths' and dirty contacts, and broken connections, but in the end, when these have been remedied, the light will burn and the unction will be received and we shall know all things.

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'I find it quite extraordinary that ordinary people should take seriously the opinions of these thinkers from Germany - a country noted historically for the silly over-elaboration of its cathedrals, and also, alas, for its evil ways.'

Letter in Encounter on the "Honest to God" debate.

'What is an honest, simple Christian to do amidst such a variety of sects and contentions? He is to keep his heart clean and sweet to all men, and hot and bitter only at himself.'

Alexander Whyte.

CORRESPONDENCE

A CHRISTIAN IN POLITICS, Dr. Maurice E.J. Packer,  
79 Hengistbury Rd., Southbourne, Bournemouth, writes :-

If one had been searching for a reason for a Christian to enter politics, one could hardly have done better than to be introduced to some of the slums of Bristol before 1914. A visitor could have seen signs of dire penury, with children sitting on doorsteps abutting on the pavement eating bread smeared with margarine or jam, wearing clothes passed on from others. Many of their bodies were deformed for life with rickets, caused by deficient diet and smoke-laden air. The faces and physique of a considerable proportion of the adults bore elequent testimony to the privations of previous years.

Charitable organisations sought to give all the help they could; a local assembly ran a soup kitchen near Bristol Royal Infirmary on Sunday mornings; Christians of very limited means took a special interest in a certain poor person each, etc., etc. But this was only scratching the surface; it left the problems almost untouched.

The solutions were obvious - higher wages, curtailment of the excessively long hours worked, decent houses, food adequate in quality and quantity and then to educate the people out of the old life into the new mode of life with its greater creature comforts, higher aspirations and culture, and, a Christian would add, the spread of the Gospel as well.

These circumstances deeply stirred a young man, and he was caught up with the wave of Radicalism that was then sweeping the country. It was a rebellion against 'the rich man in his castle' while the poor man could not stand 'at his gate' for he often did not have even that!

Thus began a routine of meetings at home and in public halls, even to three a night at election times, specially during the years that he was a local candidate.

But the time came when he was conscious of a critical challenge which called for much prayerful thought. The outcome was that after twenty years of party membership and a number of years as a local secretary he withdrew altogether from politics. Why? For the following reasons: 1. Time; 2. Effects of politics; 3. Barrenness; 4. Christianity.

Time

If one is going to be active in politics it will (or should) involve much time in (1) studying political economics; (2) organising; (3) attending meetings; (4) dealing with the problems of constituents.

These can easily occupy the whole of one's spare time, but should it do so in the case of a Christian? There was an urgent call in the words of our Lord when He said 'The fields are white already to harvest'. Was He referring to the need to do something speedily concerning the moral state of the woman at the well and her benighted companions, for there was a grave social problem here; or was He impressing upon the disciples that it is today that these troubles should be dealt with by attacking the roots, - i.e. by saving souls?

Our minds may naturally turn to George Müller of Bristol, but we should remember that

- (a) his primary motive in starting the work for orphans was not to found a social activity (although conditions a century ago were appalling in the extreme) but to demonstrate that God answers prayer.
- (b) all his co-workers were carefully chosen as Christians, and,
- (c) he kept absolutely clear of politics.

He never had any spare time (he did not neglect his home life). What might be spare time to us, he spent in prayer and Bible study, or in some aspect of the Lord's work. What a worthy example to follow!

#### Affluence and Indifference

During the period from before the 1914 war to the occasion when the foregoing young man retired from politics, tremendous strides had been made. Corporation houses had been built, true wages had increased and likewise leisure, children were properly clothed and fed, educational opportunities had improved, etc., etc. But what of the spiritual result? Increase in material things and materialism coincided, and the winning of souls had become harder. People were further away from God (cf. prosperity and hardness of heart in Deut.8:13-14). In a measure, these social advances (accompanied by spiritual retreats) were due to political and trade union activities. So it seemed to the one in question that his political endeavours were having a boomerang effect in the spiritual life of the people - temporal prosperity and spiritual poverty.

#### Barrenness

Although he would not compromise where any issue had a religious slant, nevertheless he now realised that he could not point to a single soul that was won for Christ through all the time and energy spent in politics, whereas there had been just a little encouragement in definite Christian activities. Should he not have concentrated years ago upon the gardens that produced a little fruit for eternity?

The Master's Example

He felt that it was high time to review the 'social work' of Christ when He was on earth. Conditions then were calling out to be remedied. "His country" was overrun by a foreign foe resulting in bloodshed and religious interference. There was immorality in high places and slavery in heathen homes. What a wonderful opportunity - a far greater one than this century has seen - to establish a political party, to drive out the Romans and to establish a perfect government. To Him, all things are possible, but this line of political action He ruled out. Should not a Christian be a Christ-follower in this respect as well as in others?

On the positive side, Christ went about doing good, both by Himself and with the co-operation of His disciples, but He never joined an organisation of those who were not His Father's children to achieve political ends. Let us recognise that there is so much that we individually can do for those around us, and also perhaps with the help of other Christians, without being involved with political parties. 'It is the way the Master went; should not the servant tread it too?'

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SOCIAL ACTION - Dr. J.K. Howard,  
P.O. Box 44, Kasama, N. Rhodesia, writes :-

The appalling suffering of the world, the great sum of human misery, which has been so ably highlighted by Mr. Patterson, unquestionably brings to the fore the burning problem facing the Church today, the problem of to what extent should the Church be involved in the world and its problems, and, perhaps even more important, what should be understood by the term 'involvement' itself? While it is undeniably true that, as John Donne said, 'No man is an island in himself', it is important for the Church to be aware that there are, and indeed must be, limits to the extent of her involvement and commitment.

We can do no better than commence our study with the example of Jesus Himself. No one will deny that He was truly 'involved' with mankind and in mankind. He stood where we stood, He accepted our misery and pain, our trials and temptations, our sin and mortality, taking it all unto Himself, and through His victory effecting a radical and total deliverance, establishing in Himself, the Last Adam, a New Humanity, a transformed existence for those who were hopelessly bound by their involvement in the first Adam.

Yet, when we come to examine this involvement, we are confronted by the remarkable fact that Jesus did not come presenting a new ethic to mankind, least of all a new social ethic. Said Gerhard Gloege, 'Judged

from a modern standpoint Jesus' field of vision in the matter of social ethics was marked by a complete aimlessness!(1) Even His miracles were isolated acts of pity, they demonstrated a genuine involvement in mankind, but they formed no part of a programme of social action in Mr. Patterson's sense.

He saw that it is not enough to change circumstances: it is man himself that must be changed. A quotation from Gloege is again apposite: 'Circumstances cry out. But they do not call to heaven, as the saying goes. They call from heaven to earth. They cry out for the reformation of man himself. (2)Our Lord was not concerned with effecting change in man's environment, He was concerned in producing change in man himself. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer has pointed out:(3)Jesus was not really concerned with presenting a solution to the world's problems, His concern was to bring a universal salvation, not a panacea.

It is this concern which was also basic to the thinking of the apostles and the first century Church. There is no evidence, in fact, in the New Testament that the Church was ever expected to initiate expensive programmes of social aid. Slavery, the great evil of Graeco-Roman society, was accepted as part of the contemporary scene, it was not something against which the Church should expend her time and talent campaigning. This is not to say that the Church had no 'social responsibility', on the contrary we may find many evidences that there is a very real obligation laid on the Christian, in the words of Paul: 'Therefore as opportunity offers, let us work for the good of all, especially members of the household of the faith.' (Gal.6:10 NEB.) Or again there are the words of James with his consistent emphasis on a practical Christianity: "Suppose a brother or a sister is in rags with not enough food for the day, and one of you says, 'Good luck to you, keep yourselves warm and have plenty to eat', but does nothing to supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?" (James 2:15,16 NEB.) Finally we may quote John as he says, 'if a man has enough to live on, and yet when he sees his brother in need shuts up his heart against him, how can it be said that the divine love dwells in him?' (1 John 3:17 NEB.) In these reminders of the social responsibilities of the Church it is important to note that they are concerned primarily with the welfare of Christians. Our primary concern in the realm of social ethics is our Christian brother or sister. The little known 'Inasmuch' Relief Fund has already done much to discharge the Brethren's social debt in this New Testament fashion.

Further, we suggest that the Church would present a far greater impact on this disillusioned and sick world if we were to pay greater attention to personal morality. There is much talk of social justice, but first let there be personal justice, personal integrity in our outside contacts, whether business or otherwise. A prominent American Methodist has recently written: 'The Church has become so preoccupied

with social concerns that she is failing in her quest for personal righteousness... We are seeking to reform the world rather than convert the individual,' (4) It may perhaps be salutary to recall that in the midst of oppression, hunger and misery the prophets spoke not of social reform, but of a personal reform, of a return to the God of their fathers.

No one will gainsay that the Gospel is for the whole man, and that an unpractical pietism is of little use to God or man, but let it never be forgot that the essential task confronting the Church is not to seek to establish the Kingdom of God upon earth, not to attempt to set up some imaginary millennium of peace and plenty, the task of the Church is first and foremost to extend the reign of God in the lives of men. If various forms of social action will promote that primary purpose then by all means let us be involved in that action. This was the raison d'etre of mission schools and hospitals. However, all too often such action becomes an end in itself, no longer subordinated to the Church's main task, and there is adequate evidence in the Church of our day to demonstrate the utter ineffectiveness to which this leads. In the opinion of the present writer it has been the failure to recognise this that lies behind the failure of so much of our missionary effort.

In conclusion we would emphasise that in the present spiritual predicament of our world, the real direction which is required is not programmes of social action, but a truly orientated commitment to our fellowmen, demonstrated in a new urgency in our proclamation, a consistent personal righteousness, and a new awareness of the unity of Christ's Church, extending across our man-made barriers.

References:

- (1) G. Gloege, The Day of His Coming, p.199.
- (2) Ibid. p.202.
- (3) D. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p.319.
- (4) E.W. Robb, in Christianity Today. VIII. 2. p.67.

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'If a burgomaster does his duty, there will scarcely be four who will like him. If the father disciplines his son, the lad will be ugly. It is true everywhere. The prince has nothing for his pains. One is tempted to say, "Let the Devil be burgomaster. Let Lucifer preach. I will go to the desert and serve God there." It is no light task to love your neighbour as yourself.'

Martin Luther.



BOOK NEWS

THE BOOKSHELF

Commentaries - A Guide to Guides

It would be an impossible task within the limits of this 'Bookshelf' to attempt to list recent commentaries. But, as mentioned in this section of the last issue of the CBRF Journal, if we are really to understand the Bible afresh we must get to grips with what it actually says, and here a commentary is often invaluable.

But it is also almost impossible to assess the merits of recent commentaries without some guide. And here we are largely dependent on the judgments of the experts in book reviews. Apart from the well-known weeklies and monthlies, which frequently contain notices of new books, more extensive reviews may be found in such journals as The Evangelical Quarterly (15s 4d per year from the Paternoster Press, 3 Mount Radford Crescent, Exeter), The Theological Students' Fellowship Bulletin (2s 6d per year, termly, from the TSF Secretary, 39 Bedford Sq., London, WC1), and the American fortnightly Christianity Today (28s per year from 7 Wine Office Court, Fleet St., London, EC4). The Theological Study Group section of The Christian Graduate March '64 issue (1s. plus 4d. postage, or 5s. per year from the IVF, 39 Bedford Sq., London, WC1), contains a long and extremely valuable survey of recent commentaries by Dr. Leon Morris. The many other more specialised theological journals such as the Journal of Theological Studies (twice yearly, including over 150 pages of reviews by scholars of various convictions) and the bibliographical journals such as Biblica, are available in appropriate libraries. Incidentally, members within reach of London might consider membership of Dr. Williams's Library (14 Gordon Sq., WC1) or, for those who also enjoy superbly Edwardian surroundings, the Evangelical Library (78a Chiltern St., W.1.)

Browsing in library or bookshop is of course an indispensable way of getting to know of literature available, but a guide by an expert is extremely valuable. One such guide to Biblical Exposition has been provided by Dr. J.I. Packer as a duplicated list available on application to the Church Pastoral-Aid Society (Falcon Court, 32 Fleet St., London, EC4). It lists standard reference works and commentaries on all the books of the Bible, with some indication of their importance or quality. The author's own preferences are indicated by the books to which he gives his top category: a ~~£~~ mark signifies 'Sell your shirt to buy this', and has been awarded to Matthew Henry's Exposition, the Westminster Larger Catechism's questions on the Decalogue, and Spurgeon's Treasury of David.

Dr. Packer also evaluates the individual volumes of the various modern series, for many will prefer a more recent commentary which

relates the biblical book to its historical background. Here the help of expert reviewers is more than ever necessary, for so often commentaries are mere displays of erudition, ends in themselves rather than means to the end of explaining what Scripture says. As Prof. Bruce has written: 'It makes a great difference when a writer on Paul knows - in his bones as well as in his intellect - what the Apostle is really getting at.' It is hoped that some of the guides indicated above may be of help in finding such commentaries. For the result is no mere dreary and dutiful study, but - and here Prof. Bruce's own latest commentary on Romans (Tyndale Press, 12s.6d.) is a first-class example - a stimulating and exciting exploration of Scripture.

D.S. Alexander.

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CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN THE WORLD: TWO AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS

Young Life. By Emile Cailliet (New York: Harper & Row, 1963, 120pp., \$2.95.) Twenty-six years ago while a student at Dallas Theological Seminary, Jim Rayburn - the founder and executive director of what has come to be known as "Young Life" - was introduced by his pastor to the idea of reaching pagan teenagers who walk down the halls of the high schools in our country. (High school students are approximately 14-18 years old in the U.S.A.) Jim, who had been very successful in his work with church young people, found himself with the 'crowd of teenagers who stay away from church' entrusted to his care. He soon found out that reaching them with the gospel was a much bigger job than young people with the backgrounds of Sunday School and Christian homes. However, he received his task as a challenge to the Holy Spirit and these young people have been his parish ever since.

From the time in 1940 when Jim launched out on faith to begin "Young Life Campaign" (which, by the way, is related to the British group only in name), the movement has now grown to an organisation with a staff of 220 college-trained men and women, 500 volunteer workers (mostly college students) and 900 committee members (business men who give financial and spiritual support).

The history of the development written by the Stuart Professor of Christian Philosophy (Emeritus) at Princeton Seminary is extremely challenging. The chief lessons, I believe, are to be learned from the principles underlying the "YL approach". Basic to the whole approach is what is called "personal friendship evangelism". There is no tract distribution, open air preaching, or immediate and direct confrontation which may be all right at Hyde Park (one wonders!) but which would lead to a speedy rejection of the Christian worker by both the students and the school authorities. YL leaders first make friends with various

individuals in the "secular" atmosphere of the football field, the locker room, the hamburger joint (i.e. coffee house), the school dramatic or musical presentation, and so forth. This implies listening, learning, discovering. Thus the leader "wins the right to be heard" - to use a phrase coined by John A. Mackay. Only when he wins the confidence of the individual teenager will he be able to influence him for Christ.

YL does not attempt to compete with the churches; their field is an entirely different group of young people. The youth with whom they work have consciously or unconsciously rejected the church and, therefore, would never go near a church building. This being so YL never meets in a church but in private homes - usually the homes of teenagers who join the club. Converts are encouraged to join churches, but this comes afterwards.

The appeal of YL is to teenagers as teenagers (not "little adults"), and, therefore, everything in the program is adapted to that end. The weekly club meeting for the larger group of contacts does not even remotely resemble a church service or a typical youth fellowship group. There is plenty of informal "fun" with a brief but straight-from-the-shoulder talk from the Bible at the end of the hour. The club meetings are not held during a time when nothing else will conflict. They are held in the evening on a "date night" so the young people will think it is really important.

A key principle in reaching youth is to recognise the fact that young people follow leaders. The leader may be an athlete, a scholar, a pretty girl, or a "hood" (teddy-boy) according to the group he is leading. The YL worker goes after these key young people and seeks to win their friendships; if they can be attracted to the club meetings, others will follow.

The weekly club meeting must not be allowed to degenerate into another "fellowship meeting" for Christian young people. The atmosphere is kept attractive to non-Christian youth. When various teenagers are converted, they are encouraged to attend a weekly meeting for "disciples" in addition; this is for Bible study and prayer.

Camp work is another important aspect of YL. Many of those who become interested in the gospel during the school year (and no pressure is put on the youth to make a decision) are soundly converted at one of the four YL camps; others who already have become Christians are strengthened in their Christian lives. In all, over 7000 young people spend a week at one of the four camps; many of these who would otherwise be unable to go are subsidized by adult Christians.

The reviewer could go on and on in commending the work of YL. Perhaps it would be better if each one bought the book and read it for himself!

God's Colony in Man's World. By George W. Webber (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1960, 155pp. \$2.75). In America - as in the rest of the world - people are moving to the cities. Protestant churches, however, are retreating to the suburbs along with their middle-class constituencies. This leaves the "inner city" (where Negro workers are settling after migrating from the southern states) virtually without a witness to the gospel. In answer to this great need, East Harlem Protestant Parish was begun as an experiment whereby the slums of New York City are invaded in a search for a new pattern for Christian witness in the twentieth century context.

The Parish includes one square mile of East Harlem - one square mile and 215,000 inhabitants. If the whole of the U.S.A. were populated to this density, the entire population of the country could be fitted into New York City! Here the whole range of social and moral problems created by modern urban life are seen intensified: race prejudice, juvenile delinquency, inferior schools, poor housing, breakdown in family life, loss of meaning in work, and - above all - depersonalisation, "the fearful trend in our society to make human beings into objects to be manipulated, exploited or organised." It was into this community that a handful of young men and women stepped fifteen years ago with only vague notions about how to go about their task of making the gospel relevant to these people - mostly Negroes and Puerto Ricans.

From the beginning the work has been characterised by several basic assumptions. First is the idea that the gospel must be adapted to the culture (as missionaries have learned - or ought to have learned - in foreign countries). This led to the use of store-front churches instead of traditional church buildings. The second assumption is the need for a group ministry, a group living and working together in love. The third assumption has to do with social action, the need for Christians to go into the world with the gospel. "The church that acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord must offer His love to those who stand in any kind of need. At the same time the church must join Christ in His battle against evil in the world. Its members must fight for justice, and in whatever ways are open, seek to overcome the problems that distort life in East Harlem." This has led to a clinic for drug addicts, a Credit Union, a remedial reading program for children whose parents were either unable or unwilling to help them at home, and an active participation of both the staff and communicants in the life of the community at large.

Although I doubt whether Mr. Webber and his associates have ever heard of the "Plymouth Brethren" I feel that they have recovered and applied several "Brethren" principles (should I say "Biblical"?) in this context; in fact, perhaps they have applied them better than many "Brethren". First, there is the importance of worship which centers around the Lord's Supper. This is a time when the Christian family withdraws from the battlefield in a hostile world to be refreshed and strengthened

for continued witness. To emphasise the family aspect, the whole congregation (if possible) stands around the Communion Table during the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup. One of the elders or deacons gives thanks.

A second lesson they have learned both through the study of the New Testament and through experience is the importance of the laity, the whole people of God, in Christian witness. The gospel is not preached by a select few who have been specially ordained but by the whole church scattered abroad in the world. Then, there is the centrality of the Scriptures. All the meetings of the church are eliminated with the exception of two: Wednesday night for Bible study (in homes) and Sunday morning for worship (in a central building); in these two contexts there is koinonia. The rest of the week is given to the congregation to spend as witnesses in the world.

I suggest that a careful study of God's Colony in Man's World would give us some insight into those basic elements which constitute a church as truly scriptural. We may find that much of what goes under that popular heading of "scriptural principles" consists merely of traditions which we have inherited from men who attempted to apply the New Testament to nineteenth century life. Perhaps, too, God will give us wisdom in applying these principles to the radically different time (in case you haven't noticed) in which we live.

N.B. Abingdon Press will publish a series of lectures given by Mr. Webber at Fuller Theological Seminary under the title: 'The Congregation and Mission' (June 8, 1964).

Ward Gasque.

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Another book on East Harlem is -

Come Out The Wilderness: Bruce Kenrick (London: Collins 25/-).

How can the Christian gospel speak today to the cast-offs, the neglected of today's affluent society: to the slum-dwellers, the drug addicts, the gang leaders? Can they and do they feel it has any relevance for them, living as they do where poverty and crime seem to have defeated hope and initiative?

This is a challenging book and should not be read by those who believe that Christ only died for the middle-class. We must recognise that today in many so called civilised countries the Christian gospel and message appears to be an emasculated, powerless shadow appealing mainly to the middle class, without any seeming relevance to the vast bulk of the working class population (if they may be so described) let alone to the down-and-outs.

Those who respond to the challenge of taking the gospel to the neglected of society have to steer between the Scylla of a purely social work on the one hand and the Charybdis of a rather condescending preaching of the gospel without getting to grips with the intense social problems which are entwined with the spiritual needs of such people.

The witness in the area was supposedly being carried on by three local forms of Christianity, all were irrelevant, and one was almost non-existent. The first was Pentecostalism ... 'rejected by the mass of men as utterly irrelevant to life. Their worship often had no apparent effect on their members' lives.' (p.37). The second of the three forms was Roman Catholicism. 'It was perhaps no wonder that scorn and suspicion were matched by an unveiled cynicism at what most local men believed to be the utter irrelevance of the Roman Catholic Church. If they had delved deeper they might well have changed their views. But they had no inclination to delve deeper.' (p.39). The third of the three forms was the Protestant Church. 'The Church Invisible: this was an almost exact description of the major Protestant churches in East Harlem. Except for one, open only for a few hours a week, and then to receive a congregation of about thirty of whom most came from outside the area.' Instead of accepting responsibility for the community in a given area the Protestant churches seemed fast bound to one class. But does it befit the Church of Jesus Christ to go leap-frogging through the city after the families who intend to send their sons to Yale?' (p.40).

Don Benedict and a number of other theological students from the Union Theological Seminary took up the challenge of East Harlem. They moved with their families into the area, they accepted social action and political pressure as being not only allowable but definitely to be adopted in the attempt to show the relevance of the gospel. 'Those residents who neither heard sermons nor read newsletters, began to see the church's concern for the whole of life in concrete action.' (p.54). 'Failure to participate in this way was to abandon the political realm to wholesale secularisation.' (p.95).

The work has been in existence since 1947 and thus has stood the test of time. Four strong congregations have taken root and that this is so is due to the fact that the initiative was taken by a group rather than by a lone minister. 'The fact that East Harlem's ministry was a group ministry gave the kind of assurance and continuity that was basic to the gospel that it preached. That continuity gave parishioners a sense of security.' (p.149). It also gave those engaged in the work the essential strength in being able to talk and pray things through together. It gave to the group freedom and direction and also instead of it being well-nigh impossible to find good, well trained men to work in such inner-city churches, it has inspired many to follow in their steps not only in Harlem, but also in Chicago, Cleveland, and also in this country in London and Glasgow.

This book has much to say to those concerned with the churches' problems in our cities today.

John Redfern.

FROM THE MONITORS

NEW SOCIETY

This Magazine, which celebrated its first anniversary at the beginning of October, is a weekly paper devoted to Sociology. It is an excellent production which deals with social problems in a sane, responsible manner. Its range of subjects is wide, discussing such topics as moral education; employment of ex-prisoners; living in caravans; services for the mentally subnormal; the emergence of leaders; immigration and drug addiction. It does not confine its research to this country but discusses the underdeveloped countries; Smouldering Vietnam where Buddhist monks commit suicide; Canada; America and South Africa.

'New Society' is neither political nor religious - that is, it does not adopt a particular 'party' or 'church' line. Its articles appear to be factual and informative rather than argumentative, and its writers are usually men of authority in their respective fields. This does not mean to say that we must accept all their conclusions, for the Society which they see and reflect in their writings is a society which, if not anti-God, is at least without God.

It is comparatively easy to read, for example, an article on drug addiction in which the ghastly effects of this horrible habit among young people are not only verbally described but pictorially illustrated, and say that this is the result of a life lived without Christ. This is only one aspect of a God-less society. Immorality, colour prejudice, crime, juvenile delinquency and starvation are still with us and by whatever names these are called, they still indicate a sinful society which has fallen short of the glory of God. 'New Society', therefore, teaches us that man doesn't change and the atomic, technical society is failing to keep spiritual and moral laws as much as the old society. However, the lesson should not end there with our condemnation of the moral shortcomings. It should stimulate discussion as to wherein we, as Christians, have failed (if, indeed, we have failed), and how we can counteract these social evils. Is our presentation of our Lord contacting these who need Him, or are we preaching only to the converted?

No doubt discussions along such lines will produce invaluable help to all of us in our endeavour to reach the unconverted.

TOPIC FOR DISCUSSION

How do we help a person who wrote to a journal as follows: 'I am one of those who has made an unsuccessful attempt at suicide and will, at some time, have to go to the trouble of making another... Why should one be coerced into living if one does not wish to?'

N.B. This is an actual quotation - I did not invent it!

H.S. Maybury.

## THE PERILS OF EXCLUSIVISM

### 1. Introduction

The vision that first stirred the hearts of such men of God as Anthony Norris Groves was one of true catholicity. His principles were reaffirmed in the well known letter he wrote to J.N.Darby from Milford Haven in 1836, which G.H.Lang described as 'the most authoritative statement of what were the original principles of fellowship of the Brethren, given by him who first suggested them.' The positive attitude of love for all Christians because they belonged to Christ, characterises the letter, as it characterised the early days of Brethren. It is always a tendency of the human heart, however, to settle down when the first flush of power of any movement is past: then everything must be tied up, formulated, and rules and regulations can all too easily take the place of the power of the Spirit of God.

The article by Professor F.F.Bruce is a masterly survey of the first Christian church after Pentecost. It reveals the way in which a community of believers can experience the powerful working of God, and yet, at some subsequent time suffer serious loss through the influence of adverse elements. Any of the mistakes that came to mark the Jerusalem Church can similarly affect local churches today: uniformity, conservatism, legalism, exclusivism, all came to have a place in Jerusalem. Yet this had been the community with a direct experience of the power of God made manifest in its midst! There is a parallel between the Jerusalem church and the Brethren movement in the way in which the early days of wide vision and spiritual power have so often given way to the very things among Brethren that came to mark Jerusalem.

This tendency to sectarianism came to a head in 1889 in the break-away movement of which Mr. C.A.Oxley writes. It is sad that churches, so few in number in the world, should arrogate to themselves names, promises and spiritual status that rightly belong to all the people of God. A recent issue of their young people's magazine said, in answer to a question, that the 'royal priesthood' of 1 Peter 2 was composed of those only who belonged to 'the churches of God' (by which term they meant themselves). Despite all the millions of Christians in the world as a whole, only these few are spiritually competent to serve God. That is a serious attitude to adopt. One wonders what conception these good people have of God? Mr.K.G.Hyland puts his finger on the right spot when he says: 'What mental image have we of Him?'

The Needed Truth movement is insular, and Brethren might have been saved from such influences, but for the fact that many who went with the break-away group afterwards returned without abandoning