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steadfastly ; and this the Church of England has done by ruling against a second marriage in church, where a former partner in matrimony is still alive. But our Lord never *legislated*. He declared *principle*, and entrusted to the Church the responsibility of legislating to uphold the principle in the best way possible under the contemporary circumstances of the time ; and for this the guidance of the Holy Spirit is promised. Therefore it is that God Who allowed divorce for " the hardness of men's hearts " (for Moses speaks with the voice of God), cannot but allow the same, as long as there are hard hearts in the world ; and we are called upon to legislate for the eternal welfare of men and women, and their children : recognizing that by the sin of one, or both partners in marriage, its personal relationship can be so completely destroyed as to be equivalent to the dissolution of the marriage bond by death. That being so it cannot be against the will of God that the possibility of divorce should exist, as the lesser of two evils.

Communicating the Gospel in a Secularized Society

By The Rev. Canon H. G. G. Herklots, M.A.

IN the England of our day, technological applications of scientific discoveries have made possible new pleasures and greater ease at a time when full employment and social planning have brought the products of this inventiveness within the reach of great numbers of people.

The *malaise* of disillusioned scientists has not reached the masses : there is a time-lag in these matters. Most people in England are giving themselves up to the *enjoyment* of living in a secularized society. They are not interested in ideological conflicts. What they are out for is a good time ; not a selfish good time, but one shared with others. Their operative faith is a generous hedonism. They do not want to be told about unpleasant things. The old fears of unemployment and of poverty in old age have largely been assuaged. The fear of death remains. Best to forget it : best not to name it. The anticipation of death is masked by such a phrase as " when anything happens to Mum ". It is well, however, to remember that one reason why the early Church won its way was because it had something clear to say about death. A Church speaking in the same terms to-day might also win its way. When people feel that they can expect nothing from it they turn readily to the sects and spiritualists. They know so little of Christianity that they cannot tell the genuine from the spurious ; nor judge what speaks with authority and what does not.

Behind the technological advances from whose achievements we profit—and whose benefits we quickly take for granted—there lie far greater changes than are apparent on the surface. We talk glibly of

the atomic age, without realizing either what it means for the present or portends for the future. Dean Inge used to warn people not to pay too much attention to the spirits of the age when their concern should be with the Spirit of the ages ; and a church which seeks modernity for its own sake is likely to fail. Nevertheless we must live in our own age ; and the Church of England worshipper, who knows his way round the Prayer Book, could use one printed in the time of Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen and not find it out of date.

When a complete break from the practice of religion has been made those who enter church life for the first time are not necessarily put off by archaic expressions. Indeed they seem to expect them. They know that they have to learn a new language ; and it is sufficient if they be told what it means. The use of Latin by the Roman Church in England has not prevented it making converts. It may have helped—with its suggestion of a hidden mystery, an age old secret into which the newcomer is being initiated. In France, however, questions are raised. The complete outsider is ready to start from the beginning. But the lapsed—and even the children of the lapsed—may feel that they know what it is all about ; that they have only to freshen their memory, not to learn a new language. As English people fancy they know what the Church of England is after, so the French are accustomed to the habits of the clergy and the faithful ; and think they know all about it. Both need to be shaken if they are to realize the modernity of the Gospel and the revolutionary intention of the Church. That is why, as the Abbé Michonneau has put it, " In a working-class parish you must use working-class language," and avoid words which are in the dictionary but not in their vocabulary.[1]

It should be added that though the language of the Prayer Book may seem out of date, as well as that of the Authorized Version, there is no such fundamental difficulty about the situation, at any rate of the early Church, which the New Testament depicts when it is made clear to people in language which they normally use. For the situation of the early Church is in some ways startlingly like that of the Church to-day. As Dr. Frank Bennett has put it, " It has become fashionable to describe the present age in the West as post-Christian. It would be more accurate, though cumbersome, to call it post-Constantinian."[2] Scientific discovery and technological progress have altered the situation in other ways : but politically the comparison between the Church to-day and that in the first centuries of its history is in many countries a close one. The present age may not look very like the sixteenth century : every now and then it has a way of looking surprisingly like the first.

If there is a division between us and the past there is also a division between people trained in the different specialisms of to-day, or merely influenced by those who have been so trained. Theologians are much inclined nowadays to speak in a jargon imported from Germany, the land of long words, which makes them not easily understood even by those who had some theological training in earlier decades. The surprising thing is that when the language has been elucidated it is

[1] *Revolution in a City Parish* (Oxford, 1949), pp. 41 and 43.
[2] *The Church's Witness to God's Design* (London, 1948), p. 65.

often shown to be concerned with the very task of communication to which it provides so formidable a barrier. Perhaps theological novelties have always been difficult to understand. " I hardly make out what Puseyism is," Lord Melbourne told Lord Holland. " Either I am very dull or its apostles are very obscure. I have got one of their chief Newman's publications with an appendix of four hundred and forty-four pages. I have read fifty-seven and cannot say I understand a sentence, or any idea whatever."[1]

Our problem appears to be that of Babel, of the multiplicity of tongues ; the scientific languages and dialects, the humanist language, the working-class language, the theological language, the official language—the staccato headlines of the *Daily Sketch* and the sober periods of the *Times*. Obviously we need preachers of the Gospel who are at home in some at least of these different tongues ; who, through the very discipline of endeavouring to express the Gospel in them, come to a new understanding of the Gospel itself. We need people who are prepared to listen as well as to talk ; and perhaps, at first, to talk very little. Sir Richard Acland has criticized the opening words of a discussion pamphlet on evangelism issued by the Church Assembly so recently as 1945. " ' Tell me the old, old story of unseen things above, of Jesus and His glory, of Jesus and His love.' To do just that is, in essence, what the evangelist in any age sets out to do." Sir Richard comments : " Yes ; the evangelists tell the people the simple and magnificent truth ; and they ought to believe it—' just like that '. But somehow they don't. Then what has gone wrong ? What has gone wrong is that we have not taken sufficient account of the fact that our traditional method of proclamatory teaching is for the first time encountering a whole community whose minds are equipped with rough and ready tests by which they separate the ' almost obvious ' from the ' almost incredible '."[2]

There is something to be noted here ; but there are other things to be said. Popular education does not always give this power of discrimination : when it comes to reading the most popular newspapers, rough and ready tests are not always in action to separate the " almost obvious " from the " almost incredible ". It needs to be remembered that in this country " most people finish with organized education six years before they first obtain the vote ".[3] In the modern world unshakable dogmatism quickly wins support from those who are both uncritical and easily amenable to suggestion. In the past the power of public suggestion was largely on the side of religion : now it is largely against it. People have not ceased going to church for good reasons, because the whole thing is no longer credible. They have given it up because it is no longer the done thing. None of their friends go ; so why should they ?

Dr. Kathleen Bliss has written : " Humanists are inclined to argue (as for example did Margaret Knight in her broadcasts ' Morals with-

[1] Lord David Cecil, *Lord M.*, or the Later Life of Lord Melbourne (London, 1954), p. 140.

[2] *Nothing Left to Believe ?* (London, 1949), p. 17.

[3] T. Cauter and J. S. Downham, *The Communication of Ideas*, A Study of Contemporary Influences on Urban Life (London, 1954), p. 205.

out religion') that non-church-going is the result of rejection of the faith. This is certainly true of considerable numbers of people in the universities and in the teaching profession. But amongst ordinary people this is not so. If, as Mrs. Knight argued, the climate of thought of our day is incompatible with belief because it is scientific and faith must necessarily decline, then what we see around us in England should *a fortiori* be far more true of the United States, where science and technology are far more widespread. but over precisely the same period as church attendance and membership has declined in this country, it has increased in the United States, rising from thirty-five per cent of the nation in 1900 to sixty per cent in 1954, with the largest annual increases in the years since the Korean war. But as I do not believe that non-church-going is always a result of loss of belief, nor do I believe that American church-going is always the result of belief. Both countries have an enormous quasi-Christian fringe. In the United States it is just inside the church door; in this country it is at various distances outside the church door."[1]

From Sir Richard Acland's condemnation of proclamatory teaching it might appear that what we need to do is to go in for study groups on a large scale; with their clash of mind on mind, the patient examination of objections, the meeting of questions with counter questions. That is just what we should like to have, many clergy and leaders in the life of the parishes would say, but how on earth are we to go in for them on a large scale? You may lead a horse to the water but you can't make it drink. Our difficulty is to get it to the water, to make the animal aware that the water is there before we can even suggest that it is palatable. This is a problem which all purveyors of adult education have had to face, from the Pharisees in the first century to the organizers of the W.E.A. in our own.

Nowadays they are being increasingly driven to adopt informal methods; and we should be doing the same. I have always admired the man who was working among soldiers during the war and wanted to start a group on painting. He did not stick up a notice about this. He set up an easel in a place where lots of men passed, and began painting a picture. Soon a group collected around him and began asking questions. Some stayed for a time, and wanted to learn more; and the group acquired a stability which was genuine, even if the conditions of military life made it necessarily temporary. The method of beginning where people are has many applications. Even the "brains trust" may evoke keen listening on theological questions: because people's own questions anonymously sent in, are being answered: they are not having theology stuffed down their throats against their wills. Perhaps we have to do more of this: going where people are; listening, and asking questions which stimulate thought and discussion. It is a hazardous enterprise, which disciplines the mind and stretches the imagination. If we attempt it we may find that it is more like what Jesus did in Palestine than a good many of our better-known activities. And as we get to know people we may discover that a genuine I-Thou relationship becomes possible as never before.

[1] *Can We Teach Religion?* (Vaughan Memorial Lecture, Doncaster, 1955), p. 9.

In *The Communication of Ideas*, A Study of Contemporary Influences on Urban Life—based on a thorough survey of the inhabitants of Derby—the authors, T. Cauter and J. S. Downham, make a tantalizingly short reference to the function of those whom they call " gate-keepers ". These are " the people who are in a good position not only to receive ideas but to impart them to others ".[1] In most communities some at least of these gate-keepers are comparatively easily found. " You want to get hold of such and such a group? I can tell you the man to get in touch with. Mind you, you'll have to persuade him that you've got a good case, something that they'll be really interested in. But when you've got him on your side there won't be much trouble with the others." When a minister of religion has been in a community a little time he discovers a number of these men and women. But—if it is a large community—not all; and not necessarily the most widely influential. Indeed the middle class nature of most of our training and background makes us slow to discover those who are gate-keepers for large areas of life. It may be a shop steward; it may be the secretary of the N.U.T.; it may be the man from the Prudential; it may be the manager of a working men's club—of which there are three in this country for every four cinemas[2]—it may be a local licensee. Indeed, as the authors of *The Communication of Ideas* suggest, " It is probably the case that each stratum of the community has its own gate-keepers, who are very different from the gate-keepers to another stratum ".[3]

Here is a fascinating subject for study and an important field for discovery. Fundamentally, of course, the Christian minister must not regard any one person as more important than another. He must be prepared to give time to any person who needs him. But, in this matter of communication, he may well endeavour to be wise as a serpent as well as harmless as a dove. St. Paul seemed to have had something of the experience we are envisaging, which he recalled when he wrote: " For though I was free from all men, I brought myself under bondage to all, that I might gain the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, not being without law to God, but under law to Christ, that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak: I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the gospel's sake. . . ."[4] This was indeed a varied exercise in communicating the Gospel in a secularized society. Some people are obviously more influential than others; and it is well to use what time we have patiently and persistently where patience and persistence are likely, in the end, to produce the most widespread results. Sometimes we must go deep before we can go wide at all. And I emphasize *in the end*. This is not a method of quick results: and for this reason it requires a less erratically mobile ministry than that of the Church of England as we know it to-day, the steady growing into a community which enables gates to open of

[1] p. 228.
[2] ibid., p. 72.
[3] p. 286.
[4] 1 Cor. 10. 19-23.

themselves, which previously had been closed and looked as if they were locked.

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This leads to my main point. We speak often as if the task of communication were one of words and ideas; so we are very concerned with the translation of our words and ideas into the words and ideas of those to whom we come. All this is admirable in prospect, if difficult in practice, and perhaps, so far as the Gospel is concerned, though wholly necessary, ultimately impossible. As Professor Burnaby has put it, " No translation of the Bible into ' modern speech ' can modernize the thought of the Biblical writers; and that thought is not after all much more alien to the de-Christianized world of to-day than it was to the Graeco-Roman world of the first three centuries after Christ ".[1] A further weakness of this emphasis on words, is that it conceives of a Christian evangelist coming in from outside, getting to know his people and putting the stuff across. What is to be communicated is not words but life. " To confess that Jesus is Lord is not to admit the force of an argument, or even the justice of a claim, but to enter the service of a good Master."[2] In Jesus the word was made flesh.

Sixty years ago the young Forbes Robinson in Cambridge was writing to a friend about the need for getting the right kind of men as country clergy: " Kingsley shews it is not enough to give alms or other social benefits—we must do more than that, we must raise the villagers' whole life and condition. I believe myself this can only be done *from inside.* Thus, when God wished to redeem man, He did it from inside. Man himself fought and conquered. Deity entered into humanity. It is not merely that we must live simply, think simply, work as they do. That is well, but we must do more. If we want to look at them from the inside I know only one way—the old, old way which God Himself adopts. We must love them, love the Christ, the Spirit in them—not the beast, the devil in them. Like attracts like. To love and to detect that, we must have some of that Spirit, that Christ."[3]

There lies the secret, not only for the apparently simple life of the Victorian village, but for the obviously complicated life of the Elizabethan subtopia. We shall not really have influence with the gatekeepers if we meet them only across a committee table. The ideal of the Christian minister is that he should pass from group to group, in each of which he is recognized as " one of us ", yet not that only, but one of Christ's also, the representative of His Lordship. If we are to communicate, not Christian ideas only, but the Christian life, there must be an identification with the people to whom we go. The common people heard Jesus gladly; not because they understood all that He was saying; but because they realized that He cared for them, that He understood them, that He was on their side. He loved the unlovable, He trusted the untrustworthy. He carried the burden of their sins on a cross. If we are to communicate His life it will best be done by adopting His methods.

[1] *Christian Words and Christian Meanings* (London, 1955), p. 10.
[2] ibid., p. 20.
[3] *Letters to His Friends,* April 20th, 1892.

Something of this has been realized by the Church in our day ; and many have been the attempts to get alongside people in different walks of life, to learn their language until one speaks it instinctively, to think as they think, to feel as they feel. The best work of industrial chaplains has not been done by direct assault but through the discussion of matters of common concern, and showing how they are illuminated by the insights of the Bible and of Christ. Here the slow building up of confidence, the respect gained for the man who only talks when he has something to say, and knows what he is talking about, achieves no quick results, but may have effects which are lasting. Better to dig foundations deeply and to build slowly than to erect a showy construction which is temporary and insecure.

There has come a realization also that the task of communication is not to be left to the clergy. To quote Professor Burnaby again, " The preacher can do nothing without an audience ; and our present trouble is not merely that the world cannot understand the Church, but that the world is not disposed to listen to anything that the Church, at any rate in the persons of its official representatives, may have to say. This means that we must look for our point of contact not to sermons in churches which only believers enter, not to the publication of literature, whether learned or popular, which only believers will read, not even to the facilities provided by a friendly public Corporation for the broadcasting of talks on religion, for which the sanguine estimates of audiences running into millions must be received with a prudent scepticism—but to the readiness of the ordinary Christian believer, in his conversation with friends, to bear witness to the faith that is in him. Our need is for a Christian laity equipped and ready for the work of the Gospel, aware of the part which they and they only can play in the furtherance of understanding."[1] The committee on evangelism which reported in 1945, coined the phrase " the apostolate of the whole Church " and quoted Archbishop Temple as saying that " the main duty of the clergy must be to train the lay members in their work of witness ".[2] This is important. There must be unity in what is being said. Nor is it enough to say to lay people : " Here is the teaching of the Church. It is for you to translate it and apply it." When a man has to be interpreted into another language it is best for him to spend a good long time with his interpreter to make clear that they really understand one another. In English Church life there is probably needed a good deal of searching of the Scriptures by clergy and laymen together, in which both are learners together. It is the people who are learning who communicate best : for what they are saying is fresh to themselves. The emphasis on the old, old story is really false. Once that story has come alive it is no longer old. It is astonishingly new. We endeavour to proclaim the same truth as did the Apostles ; but it is truth about One Who is alive.

Though the widest opportunities are for the laity there are great opportunities for the clergy ; opportunities which I believe are increasing. In a time of uncertainty some, at least, are turning to them. On a recent railway journey I was approached, as a clergyman, by two men. The first—a national service man—asked whether, on Christian

[1] *op. cit.*, p. 11. [2] *Towards the Conversion of England*, p. 36.

principles, he would be right to disobey orders, declare himself a pacifist, and go to prison. From what he told me I expect that is where he is now. The second—a dining-car attendant—asked whether he should allow his wife to divorce him, and whether there was any guidance in the Bible on the matter, for, he assured me, she was a deeply religious woman. The success of the Roman Catholic enquiry centre indicates that a need exists; that there is a sense of enquiry in the country; that people want their questions answered. This does not mean that they are ready to commit themselves. But it is significant none the less. A student of the Bible regards with respect clouds which seem no bigger than a man's hand.

The changes and chances of this mortal life also provide opportunities for communicating the Gospel at a time when people are caught for a moment out of the dominance of a secular society and are ready to welcome an approach which respects them as individual persons. People turn to the parish clergy when they want their children baptized—as they still do—when they want to be married, when death strikes the family. There is no need for me to indicate ways in which these opportunities may be used; but they are opportunities for a *personal* ministry, for communicating the Gospel. There may be great need for explanation. There is not always need for translation. Familiar words sometimes come alive in a time of personal need; and people feel that they were written specially for them. This is only to remind ourselves that the One who really communicates the Gospel is not us but God. We are naturally conscious that we have this treasure in earthen vessels. It is a treasure none the less; and it has its own radio-active powers.

A further realization which has grown in our day is that the Church, the body of Christ, is itself part of the Gospel; that any local church has a vocation to be the body of Christ for the people of the locality; that its very existence should be a continual communication of the Gospel in a secularized society. There are parishes which are being organized with this in view, their members alerted to a conscious missionary task. Thus in a report on children's work in one parish I read recently:

"Children's work begins with preparation for marriage when the importance of family worship is stressed. Each year there is a Renewal of Vows for all recently married in our Church in company with our own married people, held at one of the public services and followed by a reception in the parish hall.

"All parents bringing children to be baptized have to attend three preparation classes before the Baptism. At these classes they are welcomed and given refreshments by the parents of our congregation. All baptisms are held at a monthly public service with hymns and an address, to which choir and congregation come in full strength. An annual service of renewal of vows is held for the parents and godparents, followed by a reception at which they meet our own folk. The homes of baptized children are visited regularly, so that at least by the age of five they can be brought into the Sunday School. . . .

"The parish is divided into forty streets or sections of streets with a communicant household in each street acting as street wardens.

These wardens are supplied, among other things, with a complete list, kept under constant revision, of couples married in the Parish Church, children baptized, children in the Sunday School, besides all on the communicants' roll living in the street. In this way our regular worshippers keep in touch with all those 'on the fringe'."

Something of this sort is being developed in a number of parishes, especially in newly built areas. It creates a Church family, given to hospitality, watching as well as praying. The sense of division, however, between "those recently married in church" and "our own married folk", and the parents and god-parents who come to a service at which they have an opportunity to "meet our own folk" needs to be watched. From the parish priest's point of view all these should be "our own folk". Yet the distinction is natural; and makes one wonder whether there ought not to be, in the Church of England, as there is in Protestant Church in France, a distinction between those who are members by baptism and those who are "responsible members", having undertaken the obligations to which baptism really commits them. It is a constant complaint from the Church in Canada that English people who settle there have little sense of the responsibilities to which membership of the Church should commit them. I do not fancy that complaint would come should any of "our own folk" referred to in my excerpt from a parish report decide to emigrate. In England, however, the tension remains unresolved between being the Church of the nation and being the local embodiment of Christ. That is one reason why we are constantly reminded of this fringe, not yet completely secularized, greatly needing the Gospel, yet sometimes most resistant to it, because its members think that they know all about it.

The problem is partly overcome if the people at the heart of any Church's life are a body of friendly men and women, closely knit together, yet always outward-looking, speaking the truth in love to one another, courageous and imaginative. It may be a considerable travail to bring such a fellowship to birth, but no travail could be more worth while. Nothing communicates itself more readily than sincerity—even the fateful sincerity of a Hitler. My thesis is that our task is not one of translation but of identification; of incarnation even. The qualities needed are set out in exact terms by Saint Paul: "In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another; in honour preferring one another; in diligence not slothful; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing stedfastly in prayer; communicating to the necessities of the saints; given to hospitality. Bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep." The continuing process of identification makes the rejoicing and the weeping genuine; and, indeed, Christ-like. Epicurus once warned his disciples that when they sympathized with another in sorrow they must take care that the groan did not come from the heart. The Christian's calling is the very opposite of this: and it is by discipleship and apostleship to the living Christ that he is empowered, through His grace, to communicate His Gospel in a secularized society.