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**THE PRESENTATION OF THE CHRISTIAN
GOSPEL, AND ITS IMPACT ON THE
INDIVIDUAL TO-DAY**

By

JACK W. HANNAH

(Schofield Memorial Prize Essay, 1956)

THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE

22 DINGWALL ROAD, CROYDON, SURREY

THE PRESENTATION OF THE CHRISTIAN GOSPEL, AND ITS IMPACT ON THE INDIVIDUAL TO-DAY

BY JACK W. HANNAH

SYNOPSIS

This essay begins by developing a definition of the Gospel—the message that God through Christ Jesus seeks to establish a new relationship with man so personal that He wills to be known as Father.

Since the manner of effectively communicating a message depends on the nature of the message, it is necessary that Christians should embody their message. The love, or care, of God as Father is realized by the internal and external care shown by the Church. This care not only gives fellowship and meets physical needs, but satisfies mental needs as well.

The historical significance of Christianity is discussed, and its usefulness in presenting the Gospel.

The significance of the Paraclete is considered. God's manifest care and power are His Church.

The negative aspect of the Gospel, the wrath of God, shows how seriously God regards the new relationship. This aspect, therefore, has more relevance for Christians than for non-Christians.

THE very fact that we can entertain the prospect of writing on a subject that uses such words as "presentation", "impact" and "to-day" relative to the Christian gospel testifies that there is widespread opinion that the gospel is not, or at least historically has not shown itself to be, of the nature of a fixed dogma for every person in every generation. Whatever the basis of the church's "glad tidings" might be, it is certain that the message has undergone adaptation in its presentation to the world. Paul Tillich reviews the sweep of church history in terms of the changing emphasis of its message by pointing out that the early Greek church dealt primarily with death and doubt, the medieval church with the social and spiritual chaos which followed the decline of Roman power, the Reformation with guilt anxiety, and modern protestantism with religious cultural unity.¹ Another indication of the variability of the

¹ Paul Tillich, "Communicating the Gospel" in *Union Seminary Quar. Rev.* vol. vii (June 1952), p. 8.

gospel is the multitude of denominations, sects, and denominational subdivisions voicing messages which often bear but scant resemblance to one another. While doubtless this record of the church illustrates the adaptability of the gospel and the effort made on the part of the church to serve the everyday needs of its constituents, it also more than hints that there has always existed a general lack of understanding or agreement as to what the gospel is and why it should prove so readily adaptable. This means that we cannot begin to think about the presentation and impact of the gospel until first we have defined it, for the method by which any message is presented depends in large measure upon the nature of the message itself.

The simple phrase "Christian Gospel" is itself fraught with meaning. It tells us that we are concerned with the message of good worth resulting from the activity of Jesus the Christ. Whereas in the foregoing paragraph we have pointed to the variety of expression the gospel has undergone, this rudimentary definition of the gospel leads us, for its expansion, to the earliest church testimony to the activity and meaning of the Lord.

However, in the preaching of the early church, the *kerygma*, where we should surely expect to find the gospel, we find instead a multitude of ideas each of which has such potential that they have served as bases for whole later theological systems. While the gospel is in the *kerygma*, it is not as evident as we might wish. In Peter's Pentecostal speech allusion is made to the fulfilment of prophecy, to the Messiahship of Jesus, to the crucifixion, to the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord, and to remission of sins in His name. This pattern, in other examples of apostolic preaching, has been presented as a model of gospel preaching containing the essential elements which the church's message must deliver. But this is misleading, for it gives us the impression that the gospel is the doctrine of prophetic fulfilment, Messiahship, atonement, etc. Using Peter's Pentecostal message as an illustration, let us consider another possible interpretation. Keeping in mind that Peter is addressing a predominantly Jewish audience, let us imagine what might be in the mind of the average Jerusalemite listening to him. Such a Jew had doubtless heard rumours of the deeds of Jesus, and he well knew that but fifty days previously his city crucified the Man. Rumours and counter-stories of His resurrection were a topic of interest, as were the stories of strange earthquakes or of the tearing of the Temple veil at Jesus' death. The Jerusalemite happens on the peculiar gathering of disciples, joyous and speaking in all manner of tongues; we can scarcely imagine his perplexity. Peter speaks to just such a man. He explains the behaviour of his fellowmen; he announces to Jews the fulfilment of prophecy; he identifies Jesus as the promised Messiah; he clarifies their responsibility for the crucifixion; he proclaims the triumph of the resurrection and exaltation; he claims that what they now witness is evidence of God the Father pouring forth

His Spirit upon them. Peter has answered the questions of his audience. As Jews they are interested in prophecy; they look for a Messiah; they sense guilt over the crucifixion of a righteous man; resurrection is a current hotly debated subject; and Jews have longed to see the mighty moving of the Spirit of God since the exploits of Mosaic and Davidic times. It seems far more conservative to regard such *kerygmatic* speeches as examples of the early church's attempt to adapt its message to the needs of listeners and inquirers rather than to say they constitute the doctrinal content of the early church's gospel. What Peter said was really good news, but only because it was understood by Jews in a particular situation.

However, we are not warranted in so briefly dismissing the *kerygma*. Historically the church has taken either the crucifixion or resurrection or both as the principal focus of its doctrinal formulations and of its preaching. Probably the majority have given attention primarily to the death on the cross. Over the centuries it has become considered as the perfect sacrifice, the victory over the forces of evil, and the epitome of God's love. Certainly these express truths, but are they the truth in an absolute sense, or reflections of what the event of the crucifixion has meant to the needs of men? Even for the early church we are left to doubt how far any consistent interpretation of the significance of the Master's death prevailed. In Heb. 2: 14, 15 is presented the idea that death is a weapon used by Satan to bring men in fearful subjection to himself. Jesus had to die to destroy him who has the power of death. In Heb. 9: 15, 17 the death of Jesus is necessary so that an inheritance could become effective. Then, of course, there is the concept that Jesus bore our sins in His body (1 Peter 2: 24), while in Ch. 3: 18 Peter states that Christ died for sins once for all. H. A. A. Kennedy says that three elements are clearly discernible in Peter's thoughts about Christ's death: Christ takes upon Himself the consequences of men's sins; He ransoms men from sin; He cleanses or covers sins so that men can enter a covenant with God.¹ Similar divergent ideas are found in 1 John 1: 7 and 2: 2. Paul presents the idea that the blood of Christ reconciles us to God. Christ, the mercy seat, is pre-eminently the place where man confronts God (Rom. 3: 25). From such scriptures as these the church has attempted to reconstruct what really happened on the cross. Perhaps these writers were attempting the same task, but it is far simpler to presume that the New Testament writers were pointing to the events of the crucifixion as God's answer to certain of their needs. Just how this was God's answer we shall discuss later.

The second event which the church has often emphasized as the core of its message is the resurrection. A consideration of the significance of this act of God calls to mind Paul's 15th chapter of the first Corinthian epistle.

¹ H. A. A. Kennedy, *Theology of the Epistles*, p. 178.

“ I preached to you the gospel . . . I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures . . . He appeared also to me . . . if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. . . . If in this life we who are in Christ have only hope, we are of all men most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead.” The resurrection certainly has profound meaning for Paul, and well might this be expected in light of the nature of his initial confrontation with Jesus as related thrice in Acts. In Galatians Paul says he received his gospel by revelation, not from men. If this refers to his conversion experience, as it very likely does, we can expect that for Paul the resurrection was of central importance for his gospel. We may even conjecture that as regards his gospel Paul gives more emphasis to the resurrection than to the cross. For instance, in Philippians, a letter not to Jews who might need an answer satisfying their religious problems concerning sacrifice but to Christian Gentiles, Paul hardly mentions the death of Christ. In this epistle he lauds the resurrection and exaltation of his Lord,¹ and in another place expresses the longing, “ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”² But although Paul placed great emphasis on the resurrection, the author of Hebrews made bare mention of it, as also the author of the Johannine epistles. There is also a wide range of interpretation given to the resurrection. For Paul the event confirms the exaltation and Lordship conferred upon Jesus by God. Ignatius avers it is an ensign set up for the saints and believers of all ages, giving the apostles confidence to despise even death.³ Clement of Rome thinks of it as proving the future resurrection of all and, also, as giving confidence to the apostles.⁴ However, as Weizsäcker and Emil Brünner, for instance, have concluded, the historical references to the resurrection in the New Testament cannot be correlated. The records of the Christophanies vary in nature, time and place. The accounts are inconsistent and indicative of later emendation.⁵ Justified as these criticisms may be, they certainly do not warrant a conclusion that the resurrection is unhistorical. What they do indicate is that the resurrection was not early witnessed abroad in detail as central to the gospel, but alluded to as an illustration of the gospel. After all, referring again to 1 Cor. 15, does not Paul use the resurrection as an illustration of the fulfilment of prophecy ? It gives courage to believers

¹ Phil. 2: 9. ² Phil. 3: 10, 11. ³ Ign. Smyr. I, III. ⁴ 1 Clem. 24-27, 42.

⁵ C. von Weizsäcker, *Apostolic Age*, vol. i, pp. 3 ff., and E. Brünner, *Dogmatics*, vol. ii, pp. 363 ff.

by supplying a ground of faith for personal resurrection, and by vindicating the message of Jesus.

In reality the early church recognized the message of Jesus as the gospel even before the crucifixion and resurrection. In Mark's Gospel Jesus begins His mission, announcing, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel."¹ The parallelism of this statement, testifying to its Hebraic origin, informs us that in Mark's opinion the gospel is related closely to the message of the kingdom of God. The significance of this can best be apprehended from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus teaches concerning the new kingdom relations established by God. God's blessings have come upon those whom the world scorns; and if God has drawn near to the simple, ignored, and rejected, what reason have such to be unduly concerned with this world? In words such as, "Be not anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink . . . your heavenly Father knows that you need . . ." ring true and eternal good news, for they declare that God's reign is a new personal relationship in which He would have Himself known as a loving father.

In the Third Gospel, near its beginning, the mission and message of Jesus are welded and authorized through the quotation of Isaiah 61: 1, 2:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

The Synoptics truly demonstrate how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. He went to the neglected common people, the outcasts, the 'am-*ha-aretz*, healing their infirmities and declaring God forgives sins apart from law. The power exemplified in healing, raising the dead, feeding the multitudes, and teaching such things as that the Sabbath was made for man, testify that, through Jesus, God was establishing a new relationship, a covenant of personal Fatherhood with man. The old covenant became too easily a relationship to things; a trend which culminated in Judaism. Historically the Jews ultimately met God through proper sacrifices or over the Mercy Seat of the Ark in the Holy of Holies. Things! In such a religious framework it was natural to raise the law and word of God themselves to objects of veneration and to hedge them about with traditions. But Jesus called for a new relationship of man to His fellowman, and of man to God Who was personal, and Who was now drawing near to reign over men. The personal intervention of God had long been the Messianic hope, and Jesus claimed to fulfil that rôle. Laws arising from this new relationship could be summed up as loving God with the whole heart and your neighbour as

¹ Mark 1: 15.

yourself. For Jesus this was the essence even of the Mosaic commandments. Jesus was free to disobey the Sabbath, to eat without first cleansing Himself, to associate with publicans and sinners, because He knew God in a relationship quite different from that within the law; He knew God as His Father.

It was the mission of Jesus as it should be the mission of the church to bring men to understand just what it means to have new personal relationships with one another and with God. The New Testament uses the word *agape* to help express this relationship. Perhaps we have erred in trying to understand this word as undeserved love, or as love toward a worthless object. Certainly in such a definition we may be suspicious that we are reading our theology back into the word. Etymologically, little more can be said than that it is used to indicate a relationship between husband and wife, between siblings, between a charitable contributor and the benefactor, or between God and man. Jesus lived and taught the definition of *agape*, and from His life we should not be far off if we translate it as personal care. When the scribe asked Jesus who was His neighbour, our Lord's answer in the parable of the Good Samaritan became the epitome of care. The broken, robbed Jew of the story was not necessarily a worthless man, but he was suffering, near death and rejected. Only a Samaritan was personally interested enough to care for him. This parable not only tells us that our neighbour is anyone to whom we can give assistance, but, also, it is a vivid description of what Jesus means when he says, "Love (*agape*) your neighbour as yourself." *Agape* is not heartless, indirect care motivated by a sense of obligation, such as we often experience even when we lavishly support some charity; it is personal care motivated from a sense of appreciation and respect for life and the potentialities of life. This sense can only come through a high regard for our own life and its potentialities. This is just as Jesus said, "Love your neighbour as *yourself*." It is because God respects Himself and His creation that He respects man who is the image of Himself.

Since we conclude that the core of the gospel is the establishment of a new relationship, the reign of God as a Father, we must further become cognizant that it is a core that depends for its very existence on its communication. No cross was needed for God to forgive sins. Without man ever knowing it, God can forgive him his sins. Jesus forgave the paralytic his sins long before the cross (Mark 2: 5), and Paul writes that God passed over former sins (Rom. 3: 25). No resurrection was needed for God to resurrect us to eternal life. But for God to establish personal relationships, He had to act. The message of personal relationship had to be incarnated; the Word became flesh. Jesus Christ came to give men the message of the new personal relationship they could have with God, but God required of this messenger the actual performance of the message, the exemplification of *agape*. Thus, the manner of propagation of the

gospel is to be such that the individual experiences, not just acknowledges, something of the care of God for Himself personally; and within the individual a new self-respect because of his relationship to God and a consequent desire to enjoy fellowship and exemplary care are generated.

As we have said, the core of the gospel is a message on relationships, and, therefore, it is more experienced than explained. We experience our fellowship with God through our fellowship with one another. We reflect and represent the care of God through the care we give. The tendency is to think of care as providing for the physical welfare of another or of sympathizing with another. But care is really providing for the needs of another, and these needs, especially for the person to whom a message concerning relationships with God would have any appeal, are to a large degree questions about his being, his society, and God that he seeks to have answered. This deserves special consideration, for it is that root of the propagation of the gospel that keeps Christianity historically centred and serves as the basis of our theology.

Religion is notorious for the mythological answers it has given man over the centuries. For the honest thinker this is and seems always to have been repugnant. We can note in the rise of philosophy man's effort to answer his questions about his very being apart from the cant of religionists.¹ To accomplish this end man puts his trust in his own observations and introspections, attempting to integrate them. This attitude is specialized in the sciences, and this is the mind of the modern age. Not contrary to the philosophical trend of mind, but scarcely as well appreciated, is the realm of history. The very nature of history as the study of unrepeatable events makes it suspect. The modern mind often finds satisfaction difficult with the indefinite, remote and often uncertain events of the past. Since the Christian gospel has its ultimate source in the historical event of Jesus, the method of the gospel for answering questions must be that of historical interpretation. Our whole New Testament with the exception of some epistles is an illustration of this statement. Theology has risen as an attempt to interpret, integrate and apply the historical event to the current mind; this is its point of relationship with philosophy. Thus, while one aspect of propagating the gospel is to communicate oneself through care and fellowship as a representative of the Father, another aspect is to propagate the historical events initiating the gospel in such a way that they become pertinent for to-day's needs.

Outside of satisfying curiosity, there are three ways in which a man finds history useful. Since the church in propagating its message has the problem of applying history to the present, a study of these ways is warranted. First, Polybius expressed a very practical approach when he said, "It is history, and history alone, which without involving us in actual

¹ See W. H. V. Reade, *The Christian Challenge to Philosophy*.

danger, will mature our judgments and prepare us to right views. . . .” This is history studied for examples applicable to current problems. It helps us avoid mistakes; it spurs and guides us through appreciation of the hardships and achievements of others. This is the most popular approach to history. Second, some review history to help determine the trend of events, to discern the great purposes motivating certain trends. Here the historian displays the frame of mind of the philosopher in his quest for an integrated view of events, such as Hegel’s hypothesis of historical dialecticism or Marx’s dialectical materialism, or, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, eschatology. Third, we may look to history for its promises that still have present, personal application. The interest that has been shown toward the events surrounding the Magna Charta, the American Declaration of Independence or the Covenant of Sinai show how men cherish a promise. This is the realm of history in which we feel immediately related to the past. The conquests and decisions of our ancestors become more than mere embellishments to our education; they are grounds for many of our present hopes and actions and constitute the very soul of patriotism.

Without difficulty we can see how the church keyed its gospel presentation to these three historical approaches and answered men’s questions within each of them. The *didache* of the church was an ethic built upon the teachings of the Master and the example of His life. Peter writes, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.”¹ Jesus Himself taught, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example that you should also do as I have done to you.”² While there are many reasons for the Christian movement taking over the Jewish scriptures, Paul writes in reference to Jewish history, “Now these things are warnings for us. . . .”³ These illustrate the early church’s appeal to historical examples.

While the romantic inclination of the ancient world, and even until to-day, tended to turn history related to religion into myth, it was the genius of the Hebrews to keep their history more pure and to see in it the activity of God. Thus there arose a philosophy of history in which they were convinced that God was working out a great purpose through them. Albert Schweitzer has done modern theology a great service in pointing out the eschatological conviction of Jesus himself. Jesus was convinced that God was really working out a purpose in the world and that He was the apex of that historical activity. The followers of Christ carried forth this conviction in teaching that in Jesus the eschatology of the Jews was realized. For the church the advent of Christ began a new era which would end with His return. If we are to give a gospel which speaks of a

¹ 1 Peter 2: 21.

² John 13: 14, 15.

³ 1 Cor. 10: 6.

personal relationship between God and man, we must assume almost of necessity that through history we can see evidence of God working out a purpose for the world. Our theology should be dedicated to discovering this purpose, and to proclaiming it to those who have need for guidance in ontological problems.

Closely related to the eschatological view of history, yet far more individualistic in application, is the assurance or promise view. The Old Testament is full of promises: Noah was guaranteed by the sign of the rainbow that man would not again suffer such a great deluge. Abraham cherished a promise through his progeny. The followers of a crucified Jesus went forward undaunted with their Master's promise of salvation. It is a promise that makes history really come alive to us. Eschatological viewpoints alone might readily lead us to a fatalistic attitude. The world with its inhabitants becomes easily regarded as but an act on the stage of time whose ultimate meaning exists only for the Divine Scenarist. But the Christian gospel promises that God has a sharing motive within His purpose for the creation.

There are three main events, celebrated throughout the church since its beginning, which carry in them answers within each historical quest that show forth the care of God for every person. In this way, these have served through the centuries as the church's principal vehicle for the presentation of its message.

Although the crucifixion has given men an example of the love of God, and for many it has been a promise of the forgiveness of sins, yet its greatest significance lies in its disclosure of God's purpose to close the old covenant and generate a new. When Christ died an era was being culminated. Jews could rarely be argued out of following a sacrificial system that had centuries of tradition and patriotic hope behind it. Their trust in the offerings served as a strong tie to Judaism, and this had to be broken. Jesus shows His care by becoming a willing sacrifice for the Jews. In Him the perfect immolation was realized, and, truly, all the laws and ordinances were nailed to the cross with Him. Now, for those interested in a new relationship with God as revealed by Jesus, the sacrificial system needed no longer to be a hindrance, for God had completed it in His Christ. Even for Gentile pagan religions, steeped in the sacrificial systems common to the world into which the new message came, the final self-giving of Christ opened a door of freedom to understand and live within the new relationship to be had with God. The cross really was necessary for preparing the ancient world for the gospel. But in another way it prepares us for fellowship with God by revealing an ultimate comparison between the purposes of God and the purposes of man. Jesus was crucified because He obstructed the scheme of things. Man accomplishes his purposes through force, while God accomplished His through sacrificial care.

With each Sunday Christians are proclaiming a promise in history which Jews could never give. However, not only the observance of this day rather than the Sabbath, but our whole lives should be a testimony to the resurrection. Ignatius said, "Therefore (seeing Jesus as resurrected) they (the apostles) despised even death, and were proved to be above death."¹ We can scarcely realize the despondency experienced by those who had lost their beloved Master; their source of hope. The resurrection showed them that the last enemy, death, had been conquered. Jesus had overcome the world! The resurrection can give to us who feel the futility of our lives, the anxiety of the world and the fear and awesomeness of death a vital hope even to-day, and it is the church alone that can proclaim this care which God has for man.

In the Lord's Supper we are proclaiming a historical example of communion which witnesses to the relationship now established between God and man. But this example is more than a mere copying of something which happened in history. The error of our sacramental and example views of the Eucharist is their rather impersonal witness to the sharing motive of God. It is significant that in the Fourth Gospel where we should expect to find the portrayal of the Eucharist we are given instead the story of the washing of the disciples' feet. Jesus' words should pierce our ears just as theirs when He said, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."² The Last Supper, whether described by Jesus' words of His body and blood or by His washing of feet, as a historical event commands us to exemplify in our own lives the self-giving care and communion expressed by our Lord, the first representative of the Father.

The Fourth Evangelist carries this theme to its conclusion when he writes further in his pre-passion narrative the teaching of Jesus concerning the Holy Spirit. In the giving of the Comforter or Paraclete God expresses His continuous care for those who would relate themselves to Him. And as we study the functions of the Paraclete, it is clear that here is summarized the whole office of the spiritually endued church in presenting its gospel. What the Paraclete accomplishes are the things the church accomplishes through the care, comfort and fellowship it demonstrates within and without itself. While Jesus passes from the scene of world history as the direct witness and proclaimer of God, a new continuous witness, present even to-day, was established as God prepared the instrument of the church with the endowment of His Spirit. First, the Paraclete will teach and bring to remembrance what Jesus taught.³ Knowledge of

¹ Ign. Smyr. III.

² John 13: 13-15.

³ John 14: 25-27.

God is certainly the root idea here, and this is our ground for confidence through the present pilgrimage. But also, just after the Paraclete and His office are named, Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." The logical interpretation of this promise is in relationship to the Paraclete. It is the source of peace possessed by Jesus; it gave the Son's heart confidence in time of trouble and removed fear from Him. Here we draw close to the significance of Jesus' experience of the Spirit at His baptism by John. In the Spirit Jesus had peace of heart through His filial relationship with the Ground of all Being, God His Father. How often the church has thought that to experience the power of the Spirit of God means ability to work wonders, heal, or teach excellently, but these were the things Jesus did following His baptism. The author of the Fourth Gospel gives an insight into Jesus' true evaluation of the Spirit He possesses. It is His very peace and confidence, and this He gives to His church. If the Spirit Jesus gave were a spirit for works, healings and teachings, it would be a gift somewhat like the world gives, but the world has no remedy for anxiety arising from a feeling of loneliness and alienation, but the fellowship of God gives such peace.

In John 16: 8 the Paraclete will convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The confidence and peace each Christian has from his personal relationship with the Father and the knowledge that his Father cares for him are the things that can best convince the world. The world is convinced of sin when it realizes how it has spurned God's care. This is incomparably demonstrated in its crucifying of Jesus. He who comforted the poor, healed the lame, raised the dead, and fed the multitudes was hated by the religious leadership of His age who agitated the masses to call for His crucifixion. This is the meaning behind verse 16: 9, "The Paraclete will convince the world of sin, because they do not believe in Me." The world is convinced of righteousness because God has shown His care for His Son in raising Jesus from the dead, as in 16: 10. In the resurrection the Righteous One is vindicated. The Paraclete witnesses through the church to this event. The world is convinced of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. This world is the world of anxiety, guilt and meaninglessness, affording only life which ends in death. Consequently, this world depends on death for its very meaning. Legal systems retain their ultimate force because of the threat of death society places on its members. Power politics have their ultimate basis in the threat of destroying the lives of others. The system of life in this world is a picture of anxious, egocentric beings trying to expand and enlarge their "selves" against the forces of competition, sickness and finally death. The plight of man is that death always wins. Ironically, our lives can actually be symbolized by death; the realization of this paradox is the source of

meaninglessness man confronts in his own being. This world can only be overcome through a new relationship to the Father of life. We must be born again, i.e. attain a new relationship with a heavenly, eternal Father. The Paraclete gives us confidence of our relationship, and it is this relationship that breaks the power of this world, enabling Christians to speak of eternal life and to scoff at death. The world speaks of immortality, but this is only its dream. If an Epicurean had been resurrected, the world might have hope; but He Whom God raised from the dead was He Who could say, "Be not anxious about your life. . . ." ¹ Thus, this world is judged, for its ruler, Death, has been overcome; and the possession of eternal life as lived out by Christ's followers is the witness of the Paraclete to this judgment.

The gospel to this generation must carry out the mission of the Paraclete. In our witness we declare the personal care of God concerning this world. We evaluate this world for what it is, meaningless in itself, and man for what he is, a being anxiously desiring to expand his vitality against the inevitable consequence of total loss of vitality. We bear witness to the great historical actions of God in which He had demonstrated His care for the world. We demonstrate our faith in God's care for us by the care we show for one another; and in doing this, we, as the body of Christ, are also living instruments of God's tangible care toward the world.

It is this theme that predominates in the epistles. The epistles are hardly to be considered as "newsy", personal letters. They were written to help young, growing churches carry out their divine mission, and might be termed for their day "letters on the presentation of the Christian gospel". As we have shown before, in these letters no particular event predominates in the author's thinking; and while they did deal with various doctrinal subjects, they show more consistent concern for the ethics and practices of the churches. For practice being more difficult than belief, in the infant church as to-day, they had continuously to be reminded of the care they were to give one another. The Johannine epistles are classics of this theme: "For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. . . ." ² Peter writes of the exiles, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable. . . . That word is the *good news* which was preached to you." ³ Nor must we forget Paul's approbation of love in I Corinthians, chapter thirteen.

How empty the Christian mission enterprise of this present day seems. We have organized boards to direct our mission cause. We have spent vast sums to send volunteers forth, but the very body that makes this possible does not show internal, personal care. It seems better to remain a heathen

¹ Matt. 6: 25.

² I John 3: 11.

³ I Peter 1: 22-25.

and receive Christian care than to become a Christian and receive none. Nor is missionary zeal a satisfactory substitute for *personal* care. It has become the deception of our age of materialism that "things" can adequately express the gospel. This is wholly false; the message communicated in the gospel is highly personal, and its vital realization must also be personal. The Communist ideology has shaken the world with the idea that they will care for their own. The Christian Church has lost its impact by slipping into the practice of each member for himself. Our best witness is not the missionary, but the church fellowship.

But the gospel as we have limned it seems to emphasize only the care of God in His personal relationship. There is, however, another aspect to the presentation of the gospel, of judgment and wrath because of the imperative, serious nature of its subject. The gospel speaks of the personal involvement of God in human affairs which is no nonchalant activity of God. He takes Himself seriously in this matter. No better illustration of this fact can be given than the cross of His Son. The epistles to Hebrews and of 2 Peter and Jude, all regarding apostasy, firmly claim that God intends man to take hold of his Christian relationship with unshakable constancy. Jesus will not tolerate men who lightly call him "Lord". However, we are mistaken if we think this serious aspect of the gospel is to be interpreted as giving us license to call all "non-believers" or "non-Christians", etc., eternally rejected men in order to "show them" just how seriously God takes this matter. Such judgment is not given to us. Paul writes most passionately when he nears this question. In Romans 2 he begins, "You are without excuse, O Man, whoever you are, when you judge another. . . ." In Romans 11: 25, 28 Paul expresses himself warmly, "Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren. . . . As regards the gospel Israel are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers." We may conclude cautiously with E. Stauffer and H. A. A. Kennedy that Paul does not discuss clearly the fate of those rejecting the gospel.¹ Even such a ruthlessly clear passage as John 3: 36 becomes debateable when we recognize that the author writes that *believing* on the Son gives eternal life but that *disobeying* the Son means rejection. What is disobedience?

On the other hand, the wrath of God is nowhere more clearly expressed than toward those who have claimed the fellowship but have shown no care for the fellowship. The apostates previously mentioned were those who left the community in its time of need. In the parable of the sheep and goats,² the goats are those who have shown no care, given no drink, offered no food or clothing. To show care is to obey the Son and to do the

¹ E. Stauffer, *New Testament Theology*, chapter 57, and H. A. A. Kennedy, *The Theology of the Epistles*, p. 140.

² Matt. 25: 31-46.

will of the Father. Perhaps no story in the Bible comes upon us so unexpectedly and shockingly as that concerning Ananias and Sapphira in Acts. Their hoarding showed their lack of care for the fellowship, and was called a lie to the Holy Spirit. There is no need to pile up here examples of the seriousness with which the early church looked upon the unity of the fellowship, but this attitude had its roots in their realization that their very gospel depended for its impact as well as its abiding reality upon the care that the believers showed one for another and for the whole of the world. This behaviour was now God's way of witnessing to the care He had for men.

If we now ask ourselves how shall the gospel be presented to-day, how shall we expect an individual to-day to respond, the answer cannot be specific, but must be derived along broad principles. The goal of this essay has been to delineate these principles, and what shall we conclude? First, we must say that we have the task of convincing men that God *really* does desire fellowship with a person as a father to his child. To communicate this fact Jesus was sent forth and a church was established. Secondly, we must realize that the best way to nurture and to communicate the type of relationship God wishes to establish is through the exemplification of fellowship and care. This includes the example of the church's internal fellowship and care as well as exemplification of this without the church. And by care, we broadly include the meeting of intellectual needs pertaining to our basic purpose of being as well as physical needs. Thirdly, we must be ever aware of the seriousness of the relationship we advance. The church carries a grave responsibility in being the very essence of God's relationship here on earth. Last, we must realize that the church exercises this function only so far as each member is willing to give as well as receive—both are necessary—care and fellowship.