

L. G. CHAMPION

THE
CHURCH
OF THE
NEW
TESTAMENT

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By

L. G. CHAMPION

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PREFACE

THE chapters of this book are based upon lectures delivered in June 1950 to a conference of European Baptist Ministers who had assembled at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rushlikon, Switzerland, and the book is an expression of gratitude for the fine Christian fellowship experienced at the conference. The diversity of languages, nationalities and cultures represented at the conference did not prevent a rich experience of unity in Christ. Thus the unity of spiritual experience in the New Testament Church, which is the theme of this book, manifests itself also in the modern world.

Both this book and those lectures were the outcome of several years reflection upon the New Testament. The demands of a busy pastorate have often interrupted those reflections, sometimes for long periods. But the enthusiasm of a group of people in the Rugby Baptist Church known as "The Classroom" who for several years met weekly to listen to courses of lectures and to share discussions on such themes as the Bible, Church History and Christian Faith compelled a measure of consistent study and so provided the foundation of these chapters. For the patient listening, the keen questioning and the warm fellowship of that group I shall always be grateful and I would offer this book especially to them as a token of gratitude.

To the reader I would like to say that I have tried to give a straightforward account, in plain language, of the life of the New Testament Church. I have abstained from footnotes, from references to other books and from quotations from other writers. This does not mean that other writers have not been read. Many authors might

P R E F A C E

have been quoted. I have preferred to take up what they have written into my own thinking so that instead of presenting a compendium of many different points of view upon the themes of the book, I might develop the whole theme in a coherent and unified manner. The book is an invitation to dwell imaginatively within the fellowship of the New Testament Church, to respond sensitively to the spiritual experiences from which its life flowed, and so to unite with the members of the New Testament Church in their witness to our Lord Jesus Christ.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT

THE Church exists to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to mediate His saving grace to mankind. This is being done by all the main branches of the Christian Church to-day, so that behind the infinite variety of worship, organisation, activity, which makes the life of the Church so complex and sometimes bewildering, there is this unity of function. In the faithful pursuance of this task and in the spiritual experiences which result from it, we find the most important aspect of the life of the Church. Buildings are a desirable asset to the Church, but the Church can exist without buildings. Organisation is a handmaid in the service of the Church, but the Church can live when that service fails. Liturgies, creeds and offices may minister to the life of the Church, but the Church lives on though these be interrupted or prevented. But the Church has no life if man's experience of the grace of Christ, of the love of God and of the communion of the Holy Spirit ceases to be. The real life of the Church is in the souls of men who know the divine forgiveness and rejoice in the reality of eternal life. These experiences not only represent the true unity of the Church, for they are known in all its sections, but they unite the Church of the generations. Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever. He who was manifest in time belongs to eternity. So our experiences of His grace come to us in time, yet also

belong to the eternal. Here we are one with Christians of all generations. We share the communion of saints. Since Christ is the Head of the Church and the Lord of all, He is the unity of His Church. Deeper than all the differences and variety of externals is the spiritual oneness in Jesus Christ.

This is true of the Church to-day and a growing number of Christians are aware of this fellowship in spiritual experience centred upon Christ. It has been true of the Church through the ages. It was true of the New Testament Church.

We are all aware of the variety of the New Testament literature. The New Testament is a compilation of many different documents. They are the writings of different authors. In content, style and purpose there is variety. The books are very different from one another—Romans from James, Mark from John, Acts from Revelation. The variety of the literature reflects the variety in the Church. These early years were an experimental period, for every living experience of God leads to spontaneity and experiment. The Christians had no precedent, no customs, but only the example of Christ to guide them and His Spirit within. Everything was fresh and novel. New spiritual powers had to be experienced; a new kind of fellowship had to be explored; new answers had to be applied to old problems. All this led to fresh and endless variety, like the life of a garden in early summer.

But the chief feature of the life of the New Testament Church is not its variety. There is a common life of which the variety is but the manifestation, and our concern is with that common life. We are to seek those spiritual experiences from which all the activities of the Church flow.

Jesus said that His Kingdom was like the planting of

a mustard seed which grew into a tree so that the birds could nest in the branches. He used this metaphor of growth on numerous occasions. In the upper room He said to His disciples, "I am the vine, ye are the branches". The Church was a living growth deriving from one root. The New Testament mentions by name a number of the people who shared the life of the Church; many hundreds of others are quite unknown to us. All these people were of different kinds—Jews and Gentiles, bond and free. Nearly all the differences found in the vast Roman Empire were to be found in the Church by the end of the first century, but all were linked in a living growth.

The source of this common life which flowed through every part of the growing Church was Jesus Christ. In the New Testament Christianity is a matter of personal faith. The Christian might be a wealthy citizen of Rome or Alexandria or Ephesus, or he might be a poor Jew in Palestine, he might be a scholarly inhabitant of Athens, a former devotee of some mystery religion in Asia Minor, or just a slave in a Roman household, but he had acknowledged Jesus as Lord. He had heard the good news of the gospel, he had listened to the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus, he had accepted the message for himself. He confessed the Lord Jesus Christ. He believed in his heart the love which God had shown in Jesus and he confessed with his mouth that Jesus was Lord; and so he became a Christian. He shared the common life which flowed through the Church. He belonged to the living vine.

Within the life of the Church, the convert found the variety of experiences which resulted from belief in the activity of the Holy Spirit and a personal inner response to Him. Forms of worship, organisation, service varied, but always the Spirit to whom obedience was given was

recognised as the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit, free as the wind, might produce unexpected results, but always where the converts were truly inspired by the Spirit, they bore the mark of Jesus. John is careful to say that the true work of the Spirit can be distinguished from the work of false spirits because it always leads a man to acknowledge that Jesus has come in the flesh (1 John iv, 2). The earthly life of Jesus is the visible standard with which the unseen work of the Spirit agrees. Paul emphasizes that the work of the Spirit is to be found supremely in the creating of certain spiritual characteristics—the “fruits of the Spirit” mentioned in Galatians v, 22, 23, and Ephesians v, 9, and these characteristics are clearly to be seen in the character of Jesus. So if the Spirit brings the infinite variety of life and growth, He is also a principle of unity.

This common life of the Church is to be found behind all its forms of outward activity, and this is the true and significant life of the Church. If we are to know this life at all we have to understand something of the spiritual experiences which were known by Christians of the New Testament Church; and we have to understand too, the message which gave birth to these experiences. That is the theme of this book. We shall be more concerned with the inner life of the Church than with the forms in which that life expressed itself. We shall not be much concerned with the development of organisation or with defining any New Testament doctrines of orders and of ministry, or with the aberrations which appeared here and there in the Church. Our concern is with this main stream of spiritual experience and life which, rising in Jesus, flowed steadily onwards—“a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. xxii, 1).

We shall have to look at the external features of the

Church, but we will let these indicate the inner life. We shall have to refer to incidents and activities, but we shall try to make them open doors through which we pass into the realm of spiritual experience. We shall try to understand what happened inside a man when he became a Christian and shared the fellowship of the Church.

We shall begin with the message of the Church. While it is true that Paul's proclamation of the message was not given in the same terms as John's or James' proclamation, it is not true that the message was fundamentally altered. The gospel proclaimed by the Church, like the Church itself, originated with Jesus. Jesus was a teacher bringing a message. He had His gospel, and that gospel was the beginning of the message of the Church. The apostles were compelled to apply the message to many different situations and seek its answer to many different problems, but it was essentially the same message. Throughout the different situations and circumstances in which the Church bore its witness, it was conscious of possessing and proclaiming a common gospel. This gospel shaped the life of the Church. We shall need to understand it, beginning with the message given by Jesus and then going on to the testimony of the apostles to Jesus.

That will bring us to a study of the nature of the Church. The acceptance of the message led to a new kind of life in the individual. Christian character became recognisable. The marks of the new life are the same whether we see them in a Stephen, a Barnabas, a Lydia, a Timothy, an Onesimus or any other. Just as the individual found his life directed into new channels by the acceptance of the message, so he found himself involved in new associations with his fellow believers. The new life was not an individual possession, it involved

fellowship. Consequently we have to study the nature of the Church because that is an expression of the inner experience to which the gospel led. Everywhere the Church manifested this common nature, so that this too is a means of knowing the inner life of the Church.

Thirdly we shall consider the activities of the Church. The inner life of the Church is to be seen in what Christians did. We see it in their worship with its ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We do not find any uniformity of worship or "orders of services". We find variety in worship and sometimes emotional extravagances, but these are not the most important features. We are concerned to find the spiritual experiences which were being expressed in worship. For whenever a Christian Church was established, the members met regularly for worship, and the worship followed broadly the same pattern with its centre in Jesus. This is the significant fact, and it is significant because it shows that worship belonged to the source of the Christian life, that something of that life is discerned in just the regular, normal features of worship.

Other activities too were common to the Church everywhere. There were forms of ministry and service as familiar in Antioch as in Rome and these reveal the inner life of the Church; they are an expression of the gospel to which the Church bore witness. And all the time the Church lived within the framework of human society so that it had to face the problems of its relationship with this society, and the answers which are given to those problems show us again something of the inner life of the Church.

The preoccupation of this book then is with the common life of the Church. It is readily acknowledged that there was an immense diversity and that there is value in studying this diversity of thought, expression,

organisation, practice, etc. But that is not our concern here; consequently much in the life of the New Testament Church may be overlooked or ignored. We shall not be concerned with the unusual features in the Church. We shall not digress to discuss the meaning of exceptional passages in the writings of the New Testament. We shall try to see the common life of the Church as it was shared both by the outstanding leaders and by the humblest member, and we shall look at the life from the different viewpoints denoted above.

When Jesus began His ministry in Galilee the seed of a new growth was planted. Its life developed with strength and rapidity. It grew in the souls of men, working from within outward. It changed their character and conduct, their relationship to God and to their fellow men, their ways of worship, their attitude to life, their motives. What is the nature of these changes? What are their significant marks? What is this new life and growth which began in Jesus and continues to the present day? We are concerned then with these spiritual aspects of the New Testament Church which not only form the living unity of that Church, but also represent the abiding significance of that Church. For outward forms and organisation may change, but inner needs and experiences remain. These are shared by all generations of men. The unity of the Church through the ages is a unity of inner life and experience. The hymn book of almost any denomination contains hymns from all denominations. The records of the inner experiences of Augustine, Luther, Loyola, Pascal, Bunyan, Wesley, Law, are read and understood by members of all sections of the Church. There is a common life. It derives from Jesus and is maintained by His Spirit. It manifests itself in common experiences and activities and beliefs. The explanation of the common life is of

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more importance than the maintenance of differences. So in our study of the New Testament Church we turn to the beginning of the Christian movement that we may discover there this common life.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS

AT the beginning of his gospel Mark tells us that Jesus "came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God" (i, 14). Later in the same chapter he quotes the words of Jesus, "Let us go into the next towns that I may preach there also for therefore came I forth" (i, 38). Here is the suggestion that Jesus regarded the communication of His message as the chief purpose of His ministry. Luke reminds us that early in His ministry Jesus entered the synagogue at Nazareth and read from Isaiah 61, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." The emphasis in the passage from Isaiah is upon the proclamation of a message whether by word or by deed, and this proclamation is regarded as an outstanding mark of the Messiah. Jesus adds to His reading of the passage, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (iv, 21). It is evident that Jesus regarded the communication of His gospel as a matter of supreme importance. The verse from Mark i, 38, is found also in Luke, but he makes the stress upon preaching as the main purpose of Jesus even more emphatic: "I must preach the Kingdom of God to other cities also, for therefore am I sent" (Luke iv, 43). It is possible to understand the verse in Mark to mean that Jesus had left Nazareth because He wanted to preach in other towns; but Luke puts a spiritual interpretation upon the word "come forth" and suggests that Jesus was sent by an inner awareness of the purpose of God to do the work of preaching. This agrees with other incidents in our

Lord's ministry and so we may accept Luke's clear interpretation.

Preaching, therefore, belonged to our Lord's main purpose. We misunderstand the gospel story when we make the teaching of Jesus subservient to His saving work, or regard His message as of less importance than His deeds, including His supreme act in dying on the cross. The different aspects of our Lord's ministry must not be separated from one another. They are parts of a whole and each part is necessary to the whole. Because the message of Jesus was an essential part of His saving work, it is also an essential part of Christian witness.

The fact that the Gospels were written during the second half of the first century shows that the Church of the New Testament did not overlook the importance of the message of Jesus. While it is true that the centre of the first apostolic preaching was the death and resurrection of Jesus, and a large proportion of Mark's Gospel is given to the story of the last days in Jerusalem, it is equally true that the Church soon realised the necessity for preserving the things that Jesus said and did. Indeed the emphasis upon His teaching was very quickly made, for it is generally agreed that behind the writing of the first and the third Gospels is at least one other document, Q, which was on the whole a collection of the sayings of Jesus; so that even before our Gospels were written, some individual or group in the New Testament Church was concerned to have an authentic record of the teaching of Jesus.

The disciples must have realised the importance which Jesus attached to His teaching, for the apparently simple forms in which that teaching is expressed were the result of much thought. Jesus deliberately expressed His message in forms which would present it most clearly.

The emphatic, clear sentences of the Sermon on the Mount, the attractive challenge of the parables, the profound simplicity of some of the sayings in the Fourth Gospel, indicate the measure of care which Jesus gave to the presentation of His message. The sharp clarity of many of His sayings was the result of much thought and meditation. These sayings were not thrown off casually or easily. Jesus gave Himself in His teaching. It is obvious that Jesus would not give His teaching this important place and devote so much care to it unless He wanted His disciples to remember it and to repeat it. He tells them that the work of the Spirit will be to bring to their remembrance His teaching (John xiv, 26). One of the manifestations of the work of the Spirit was the writing of the Gospels with their reminder that Jesus came preaching the gospel.

In the quotations from Mark's and Luke's Gospels which have been given, we are told, not only that Jesus came preaching the gospel, but also that the gospel which He preached was of the Kingdom of God. Mark follows this statement by giving a further summary of the preaching (i, 15): "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent ye and believe the gospel." This summary is of outstanding importance. The teaching of Jesus can be regarded and often is regarded as a series of isolated sayings and stories each of which illustrates some general religious truth and so is useful for the guidance of the spiritual life. It can also be regarded as a record of the manner in which Jesus replied to the problems of the people whom He met or faced the situations in which He was involved. This attitude has led to a strong interest in the background of the sayings and to an endeavour to place them in their original context. Much light has been thrown upon the sayings of Jesus by this method. But this way of regarding the

teaching of Jesus as a series of separated and isolated sayings is neither satisfactory nor true to the facts. It is most important to ask, what is the unity of the teaching? What is the good news which is being proclaimed in all the teaching? What is the theme which gives coherence and meaning to all the separate sayings and stories?

There can be little doubt about the answer to this question when we study the New Testament. The gospel of Jesus is essentially about the Kingdom of God. That is the theme constantly in the mind and on the lips of Jesus. He is always talking about the Kingdom of God, explaining it, bringing its challenge and invitation. The key to the whole message of Jesus is the phrase which Mark set at the beginning of his story, "The Kingdom of God." Jesus "went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God" (Luke viii, 1). One single theme runs through the whole ministry of Jesus. It is the link which binds all His sayings and parables. It explains His ministry of healing. It is illustrated both in His friendship with His disciples and in His opposition to the Pharisees. It involves His death and resurrection. Indeed the chapters of this book will try to show that the gospel of the Kingdom of God as it was proclaimed by Jesus is the foundation of the whole life and witness of the New Testament Church. All that happened in later years, all the experiences and discoveries of the apostles, all their experiments, their labours, their fellowship and their activities flowed out from the gospel of the Kingdom as inevitably as the waters of the sea of Galilee flow into the Jordan valley. When we understand the true nature of the gospel of the Kingdom of God we perceive the inevitability, or spiritual necessity, of the events which succeeded the earthly ministry of Jesus. It is

essential to our theme therefore, that we consider carefully the message of Jesus.

The phrase "The Kingdom of God" and its equivalent in Matthew's Gospel "the Kingdom of Heaven", appears in the four Gospels many times. It is the theme of the parables, many of which begin with the phrase "The Kingdom of God is like unto". It expresses the purpose behind the works of healing: "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the Kingdom of God is come upon you" (Luke xi, 20). It is the crucial issue at the trial of Jesus, "Art Thou the king of the Jews?" "My Kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John xviii, 36). This key phrase runs throughout the whole ministry of Jesus. The fundamental question therefore is, what did Jesus mean by this phrase?

It has been a real achievement of Biblical scholarship during the past fifty years both to demonstrate the significance of this phrase for an understanding of the Gospels and to explore its meaning. It is generally agreed that the phrase was used to denote the kingly rule of God rather than the realm over which God exercised His sovereignty. The fact that God does rule is all important. Of course, this fact implies many questions, e.g., What is the nature of God's rule? How is His sovereignty exercised? In what way is His kingly rule manifest? To these and other questions Jesus gave unexpected answers, but all His answers were based upon the fundamental fact of the rule of God.

It is in this way that Jesus uses the phrase "The Kingdom of God". He is not concerned to speak about some future realm over which the sovereignty of God may be fully exercised; He is concerned to make clear

present realities. The kingly rule of God is not what we hope for, but what we may experience now. The gospel of Jesus is good news, just because He talks about the basic realities of God and life. For these realities may be known and accepted and then have a saving quality. Jesus does not build His message upon the shifting sand of speculation and hope, but upon the rock of what really is. This gave His teaching that authority which so impressed the listeners. Jesus spoke of the inescapable realities of life and the fundamental reality is God's kingly rule.

In this sense our Lord's teaching is revelation. It is not an exposition of certain truths which the mind may reflect upon and make judgments about. It is not a series of arguments for God or about the good life. It is a demonstration of the inevitable, inescapable realities of every man's life. It is an exposure of the situation in which we really are; and this very exposure brings every one face to face with the kingly rule of God. Whatever we may assert about ourselves, the truth is proclaimed just in this situation. We may assert, as did the Pharisees, that "we see"—that we are aware of the realities of life and accept them, but the teaching of Jesus may place us in that position into which it brought the Pharisees where the truth about us is the very opposite of what we assert, so that because we say "we see" we prove ourselves to be blind. Teaching which brings us into the situation where we know the truth about ourselves and are moved to accept it is more than the verbal presentation of a doctrine, it is teaching which possesses a creative and redeeming power. It is akin to the creative mind of God "in the beginning". God said, "Let there be light, and there was light". The mind of God is a creative mind. So is the word of Jesus. It is

a word which changes, creates, renews. It possesses dynamic power.

In seeking now to discuss more clearly the elements of the gospel of the Kingdom of God, there is danger that we may lose the compelling wholeness of it, but for the sake of understanding, its different aspects must be mentioned. In discussing them, however, we remember that they belong together so that each element always belongs to the whole and the whole always gives meaning and life to each part. The basic elements of the message of Jesus can be presented in three simple assertions. Their simplicity must not conceal from us their profound meaning or wide reaching implications. It is a simplicity which confounded the complexities of the Pharisees as it does the complexities of religion in every age, so that in defence of our familiar complexities we sometimes call the simplicity superficiality. But true religion always dares to be simple. So we have to face these simplicities of Jesus.

The first simple assertion is that God is our Father. Jesus, of course, does not make this actual statement, because it is not His purpose to make statements about God. But this is the assumption upon which all His teaching is based and this is made explicit in many of His sayings. Again, Jesus does not set out to prove this truth, because He is not concerned with intellectual propositions about God which need to be proved. The awakening of faith does not come by proof, for faith is a new personal relationship and the introduction to it is through personal contacts. Jesus accepts as the basic fact of all existence that God is our Father. He speaks of material things and says, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things," (Matthew vi, 32). He speaks of prayer and says, "If ye then, be-

ing evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him" (Matthew vii, 11). He speaks about the fears which haunt the soul and says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father" (Matthew x, 29). When His disciples pray, they are to say, "Our Father which art in heaven." The parable in which the heart of the gospel is most fully revealed is a story about two sons and their father, and the story is not a tale of a prodigal son; it is a picture of the father in his unfailing and generous love. The Gospels do not record many of the prayers uttered by Jesus, but the word "father" occurs naturally there: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight" (Matthew xi, 25, 26). "Abba Father all things are possible unto Thee: take away the cup from me, nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt" (Mark xiv, 38). At the tomb of Lazarus, "Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me" (John xi, 41). The prayer in the upper room given in John xvii, may not be entirely the words actually uttered by Jesus, but the mind of Christ is evident throughout the prayer and we may well believe that John has recorded some of the phrases which Jesus often used in His prayers: "Father, the hour is come." "And now, O Father, glorify Thou me." "Holy Father." "O righteous Father." The word father was so natural on the lips of Jesus that even amid the agonies of the cross He continues to use it. "Father, forgive them." "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." When we consider these and other sayings of our Lord, it is clear that, although Jesus does not actually say that

God is our Father, this is the basic assumption of His entire message.

The word "father" must have been deliberately chosen by Jesus. Both the Old Testament and the rabbinical teaching offered many other titles for God and Jesus could have used them. But He chose to use the simple human word "father". What then is the significance of this word?

It is worth while noticing that the word "father" denotes primarily a personal relationship. A man is not a father until he has begotten or adopted a child. The word denotes his relationship with another being. The word "father" does not describe any attribute of a man's personality. Men of all types from the highest to the lowest can become fathers, although a man of the highest character gives more meaning to his relationship as father than a man of low character who may not give any meaning at all and may virtually cease to be a father. But the word itself points to the relationship between a man and his child.

It is in this sense that Jesus uses it. Jesus is not concerned with the "attributes" of God. When He uses the word "father" he is not adding another attribute to the Divine character. He is not calling attention to an aspect of the Divine Being which previous generations had not perceived. The revelation of the Old Testament is not of a series of Divine characteristics, e.g., oneness, righteousness, holiness, mercy, to which Jesus added "fatherhood". Revelation is not the communication of a truth about God. It is God's self-communication. In all revelation God Himself is fully and completely present even though men do not perceive His fulness. Revelation means therefore that God, of His own will, stands in a relationship to His human creatures and chooses to make Himself known. This is the truth be-

hind the Old Testament experience of the Covenant, for it declares that God and His people are in a personal relationship with each other, that this relationship is the result of God's free choice, and that whether the people fulfil or neglect their obligations, God will remain faithful. Now it is this relationship between God and man, which is the chief theme of the Old Testament, to which Jesus particularly draws attention. Jesus is not primarily concerned to show that God is, He is primarily concerned to show what is God's attitude to man. That is why He chooses the word of relationship—the word “father”.

But the word is more than a word of relationship. It indicates the nature of the relationship. Jesus is not only saying that God as Father stands in personal relationship to us His human children, but also that this relationship is of a certain kind. Here we must remember that the word “father” in the time of Jesus and among the Jews stood for the finest relationship men could know. The word appears in the Old Testament to describe the relationship of God and His people at their best. But daily experience of family life in which the father was the trusted and responsible head of the family gave the word a warmth of emotion, a sense of intimate and personal experience. Jesus is suggesting then that God's relationship to us may be of this intimate and personal quality. God is One who knows and cares and loves. His kingly rule is of this nature. His sovereignty is just in His knowing and caring and loving.

This is the basic reality of life. God is “our Father” here and now and in all circumstances. Whatever we do, whatever life does to us, whatever our circumstances or our attitude to other people, God is always our Father. He is not our Father only when things are well with us. Prosperity or health are not the sign of His care. He is

the Father of all men at all times. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew vi, 45). God is always faithful to this relationship. Jesus exhibits this teaching in His own experience, for it has already been suggested that He used the word "father" not only during the sunny days of His popular ministry in Galilee, but also during those dark last days in Jerusalem.

The basic and profound assertion of the good news of the Kingdom of God is that God is our Father, that His kingly rule is manifested just in His knowing and caring and loving, and that nothing at all alters this relationship of God to us. God is always our Father.

The second simple assertion in the good news is that we may be God's children. Jesus approaches everyone with this possibility in mind. Every man may recognise his true relationship with God and enter into it. It is significant that Jesus speaks so much about "entering" the Kingdom. The Kingdom is not a future state which good people will achieve or create by their strenuous efforts and their fine ideals. The Kingdom of God is a relationship, or a life of relationships, into which we enter. "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark x, 15). "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God" (Mark x, 25). "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. vii, 21). This is a particularly significant saying, for it links the idea of "entering" with that of "doing" the will of God. We enter into the life of the Kingdom as we respond with personal trust and obedience to God. The same thought of entering the Kingdom of God is developed in the

hind the Old Testament experience of the Covenant, for it declares that God and His people are in a personal relationship with each other, that this relationship is the result of God's free choice, and that whether the people fulfil or neglect their obligations, God will remain faithful. Now it is this relationship between God and man, which is the chief theme of the Old Testament, to which Jesus particularly draws attention. Jesus is not primarily concerned to show that God is, He is primarily concerned to show what is God's attitude to man. That is why He chooses the word of relationship—the word “father”.

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This is the basic reality of life. God is “our Father” here and now and in all circumstances. Whatever we do, whatever life does to us, whatever our circumstances or our attitude to other people, God is always our Father. He is not our Father only when things are well with us. Prosperity or health are not the sign of His care. He is

the Father of all men at all times. "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew vi, 45). God is always faithful to this relationship. Jesus exhibits this teaching in His own experience, for it has already been suggested that He used the word "father" not only during the sunny days of His popular ministry in Galilee, but also during those dark last days in Jerusalem.

The basic and profound assertion of the good news of the Kingdom of God is that God is our Father, that His kingly rule is manifested just in His knowing and caring and loving, and that nothing at all alters this relationship of God to us. God is always our Father.

The second simple assertion in the good news is that we may be God's children. Jesus approaches everyone with this possibility in mind. Every man may recognise his true relationship with God and enter into it. It is significant that Jesus speaks so much about "entering" the Kingdom. The Kingdom is not a future state which good people will achieve or create by their strenuous efforts and their fine ideals. The Kingdom of God is a relationship, or a life of relationships, into which we enter. "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark x, 15). "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God" (Mark x, 25). "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. vii, 21). This is a particularly significant saying, for it links the idea of "entering" with that of "doing" the will of God. We enter into the life of the Kingdom as we respond with personal trust and obedience to God. The same thought of entering the Kingdom of God is developed in the

parables which picture a feast to which guests are invited. Perhaps also we might remember the saying recorded in John x, 9: "I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture."

Much of the message of Jesus is concerned with man's response to God. The good news that God is our Father is uttered to awaken response and personal acceptance. When we ask, what is the nature of this response, we are driven back to the familiar words "trust" and "obedience". Our response to God involves the trustful acceptance of His goodness. We live in and by the confidence that God is our Father who always purposes our good. But this conviction is no sentimental complacency, for it involves an obedience of mind and will to the purposes of God. Our conduct and our motives are conditioned by our conviction. Our behaviour is controlled by our inner acceptance of God's ways. It is just this response of trust and obedience which is the way out of the spiritual ills afflicting men. The anxieties and burdens created by undue attention to material things are ended by a real response to the Father. The fears engendered by selfish attachment to the physical are overcome by trust in the Father. The fixed and hard self-righteousness of Pharisaical religion with its concentration upon the external ceremonies and acts is broken down by personal reliance upon the love of the Father. The empty and frustrating pursuits inherent in the worldly life of the "publicans and sinners" no longer maintain their bondage when the soul rejoices in its fellowship with the Father. Jesus meets all these spiritual ills with His good news of the Father, whom all may know, in whom all may trust, whose will all may obey. He ignores all human distinctions about class or race. He talks with a Samaritan woman, with a Roman soldier,

with a woman from Tyre, with the "Greeks", as readily as He talks to any countryman, for all such distinctions are just irrelevant when God is the Father of all. Just as irrelevant is the distinction between religious and irreligious—between "Pharisee" and "Publican". The only thing that matters is what response a man is really making to God. Every man, whether he is aware of it or not, stands in relationship to God. The message of Jesus puts every man who hears it in the position of being responsible for his awareness or lack of awareness of this relationship. Then, in that situation, each man must make his response—will inevitably make his response to God. The response is deeper than the acceptance or rejection of religious customs and observances. They have value only in being the expression of the inner response. That inner response of trust and obedience is what Jesus is concerned to awaken, for it is just this inner response involving and committing a man's whole being which is a man's entering into the abundant life of the Kingdom.

The story which Luke records in chapter 15 may serve as an illustration, for the story is not only a picture of the father, it is also a description of the relationships which do and can exist between God and man. The two sons fail to respond to the love of the father. The younger son fails in wanting as much as possible for himself and then in using what he possesses solely as he pleases. The elder son fails in his satisfied self-righteousness, in his cold reliance upon doing his duty and in his unbrotherliness. The relationship of the father remains the same to both sons. When the younger son realises the love of the father and turns towards him, then the life of the home is immediately open to him and his homecoming is characterised by "music and dancing". In this way Jesus will show the basic relationships of life

and the joy which is ours when we enter into those relationships.

The words of the parable "they began to be merry" are surely the pictorial equivalent of the word "blessed" in the Sermon on the Mount. For what Jesus is doing in this collection of sayings is to describe the life which results when the father-child relationship is really recognised and accepted. The Sermon on the Mount is not a collection of Christian ideals. It sets before us the thrilling fact that we can trust God our Father and that when we do we begin to share a life of which the only adequate word is the word "blessed", with its suggestion of happiness, of joy, of "music and dancing". Later on Jesus said to His disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." Life under the kingly rule of our Father is life into which we may enter now, a life in which is found freedom from spiritual ills, bringing us peace and joy.

The third simple assertion of the good news is that men are all brethren. Life is fundamentally found in personal relationships and all our relationships belong together. We cannot separate the relationship of the vertical plane from the relationship of the horizontal plane. For all life is one. Consequently a new relationship with God immediately implies new relationships with our fellow men.

Jesus saw this unity of life with complete clarity. His good news about the constant relationship to men of God the Father and about man's possibility of recognising and entering into the relationship, is bound to include much about man's relationship to his fellow men. Jesus says so much about human relationships because that is an essential part of His good news.

"If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there remem-

berest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew v, 23, 24). The relationships of life all belong together. "Love your enemies . . . that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew v, 44, 45). This helps us to understand the saying of Jesus about being perfect as our Father is perfect, for the "perfection" of God is shown just in His love toward us, and if our response to that love is genuine it will express itself in a love to our brethren which is a reflection of the love of God towards us.

It is because all our relationships belong together that Jesus speaks so frequently about forgiveness. His severest condemnation is given to unbrotherliness in all its forms. For unbrotherliness is not just a rejection of the ties which bind us to one another, but is also a rejection of the ties which bind us to God. If we truly desire the forgiveness of God we have to be ready to forgive our brother, and it is only as we forgive our brother that we truly appropriate the forgiveness of God. Jesus is not trying to establish conditions to the forgiveness of God. But He will not ignore the fundamental oneness of life. It is just impossible in the face of that oneness to separate our reception of the freely offered forgiveness of God from our willingness to show a like forgiveness to our fellow men. This unity of all relationships necessitating a spirit of brotherliness and goodwill towards all men is most clearly expressed in the parable of Matthew xviii, 21, 22, which tells of the servant who, being forgiven a large sum by his master, refuses to forgive a fellow-servant the small sum which he owes, and so the forgiveness of the master is revoked. The parable ends with the stern words, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you if ye from your heart forgive not every

one his brother their trespasses." This is the stern inevitability inherent in the unity of life. If we would know God as our Father we must recognise men as our brethren. The abundant life of the Kingdom is characterised not only by personal peace and joy, but also by the brotherly spirit.

The good news which Jesus brings is therefore about the personal nature of life. The basic realities of life are our personal relationships. Jesus will show our true relationships and the abundant life which springs from them. This is good news because it is about realities which we may know and accept; because it does answer the deep problems of the human soul; because it breaks right into the complexities and falsifications in which the heart is so often imprisoned or stifled, and leads us into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Once we realise that the message of Jesus concerns the basic personal relationships which constitute true living, we recognise also that Jesus Himself exhibited these relationships perfectly. The power of His message derived in part from the fact that He embodied the message in Himself. The life of the Kingdom into which He invited people to enter was the life which He was actually living. People did not merely listen to a message. They saw a life. Since the message was about life and its relationships, they saw the message embodied, lived out on the practical level of normal human affairs. It is just this embodiment of the gospel in Jesus Himself that makes it more than a message and gives the message its creative and renewing power.

It is particularly, though not exclusively, the Fourth Gospel which bears testimony to the manner in which Jesus exhibits perfectly the relationships of the Kingdom. When the gospel of the Kingdom is properly understood, it is seen that the divergence between the teaching of the

Synoptic Gospels and that of the Fourth Gospel is not so great. Where the Synoptics lay emphasis upon the proclamation of the gospel of the Kingdom of God by Jesus, the Fourth Gospel lays emphasis upon the way in which the life of the Kingdom—eternal life—is manifest in Jesus. In view of the synoptic testimony to the personal nature of the life of the Kingdom, we need not doubt the substantial accuracy of the Fourth Gospel as it portrays what we might call the inner, personal aspect of the life of the Kingdom. When we read in the Synoptics that the disciples confessed Jesus to be the Messiah and Jesus accepted their confession although He still had much to teach them concerning the nature of His Messiahship, and when we remember that Jesus conceived His Messiahship in its most spiritual terms, we should expect to find in the New Testament some reference to the intimate spiritual fellowship between the Father and the Son which the term Messiah implies. What is implicit in the Synoptic account of Jesus, is made explicit in the Fourth Gospel. This close fellowship with the Father appears in more than one passage, e.g., “. . . as the Father hath taught Me, I speak these things. And He that sent Me is with me; the Father hath not left Me alone, for I do always those things that please Him” (John viii, 28, 29). “I and My Father are one” (John x, 20). “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me” (John xiv, 11). In similar manner Jesus can speak about His relationship with men, especially with His disciples and the relationship is so close and intimate that it is described as “abiding” in one another (John xv, 4). He can say “As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you, continue ye in my love” (John xv, 9). In this one sentence all the relationships of the Kingdom are mentioned. What is expressed so fully in the Fourth Gospel

is expressed also in the Synoptics, for in Matthew xi, 27 are the words, "All things are delivered unto Me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." This verse is immediately followed by the invitation of Jesus to His hearers to find in Him the peace and joy of the Kingdom. "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

The message proclaimed by Jesus is manifest in Jesus. He calls people to recognise the basic realities of life and He shows those realities in Himself. The life of the Kingdom is seen in Jesus. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth" (John i, 14).

This brings us to two further aspects of the gospel of the Kingdom.

From what has been written it will be clear that the gospel is good news about a present reality. The Kingdom has come. The whole nature of the Kingdom implies that it is already present. Since it is a life of relationships into which we are invited to enter, it belongs to the present. To call men to accept or to enter some future state is to indulge in vague dreams or wishful thinking. Jesus will not do that. He is a complete realist. He deals with things as they are, with people as they are, with life in its real nature. The gospel of the Kingdom is good news to men and women now, precisely because it is a life which can begin now.

Some passages have already been quoted which show how the Kingdom is a life into which people may enter and may enter immediately. These all suggest that the Kingdom—God's kingly rule—is a present reality. But there are other passages which bear this meaning: "And

He turned Him to His disciples and said privately : Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see ; for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see these things which ye see and have not seen them and to hear those things which ye have heard and have not heard them." The disciples are actually seeing in Jesus the fulfilment of the Messianic hopes and dreams which filled the mind of past generations. In reply to a question about the coming of the Kingdom, Jesus says, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, Lo here ! or lo, there ! for behold the Kingdom of God is within you." The exact meaning of this passage is notoriously difficult. It can refer to the spiritual nature of the Kingdom as a life within the individual, or it can refer to the embodiment of the gospel in Jesus so that therefore the Kingdom is among the hearers. Whatever meaning we may attach to the word translated " within " it is obvious that Jesus is referring to the present and not to the future. The Kingdom is a present reality whether in Jesus or in the lives of those who responded to Him. The ministry of healing was a demonstration of the reality of the Kingdom. The motive for healing could not have been merely compassion in the modern humanitarian sense. When Jesus said that He had compassion on the multitude because they were as sheep not having a shepherd, He was probably thinking of them as being exposed to the malign influence of evil spirits which operated like the wolf who scatters the sheep. So when He had compassion on sick folk and healed them, it was because they were subject to the attack of the evil spirits whose power was evident in the disease or physical deformity. This prevailing belief in the evil spirits who work harm both to body and soul is fundamental to our understanding of the ministry of Jesus, for when He proclaimed the reality of the kingly

rule of God and spoke of that sovereignty being manifest in God's knowing of and caring for His children, His good news was challenged by the prevalence of the work of evil spirits. Here was a kingdom of Satan over against the kingdom of God—and who was to know whether God really is sovereign? It was necessary that the “strong man” should be bound so that the greater power of God should be demonstrated. Jesus seems to have regarded His work of healing in this way. He healed because the life of the Kingdom is a reality and its power is greater than the power of disease. “If I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the Kingdom of God is come upon you.” His healing ministry is a demonstration of the life of the Kingdom in its present reality.

The Kingdom has come. The relationships of abundant life are fully manifest in Jesus and so men may enter them. The Son of Man is come that men might have life and have it more abundantly. Since the life is the life of the Kingdom of God, another term for it is the one used in the Fourth Gospel “eternal life”. The invitation to enter the Kingdom which we find in the Synoptic Gospels, is repeated in Johannine terms in this way, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand” (John x, 27, 28). “He that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation: but is passed from death to life” (John v, 24). The response of trust and obedience aroused by the hearing of the message, brings us into the eternal life of the Kingdom—and that happens here and now. The gospel of the Kingdom is good news of present realities.

But if the Kingdom has come in Jesus, it is equally

true that the Kingdom is still to come. The Kingdom is still in the future. This is not a puzzling paradox, but is immediately evident to all who understand the true nature of the Kingdom. Quite apart from religion, it is our common human experience that personal relationships develop. When two people are in love they begin at once to experience and explore a new kind of fellowship, but although they have the reality of fellowship, they know that they do not possess its fulness. That is still in the future. The fulness will not be different in kind from what is being experienced now, but it may be infinitely different in degree. All lovers know that their companionship is a present reality and a future certainty. So the lovers of God who have entered the life of the Kingdom know that that life is a glorious reality every day and yet its fulness is still to be experienced.

Hence Jesus can speak about growth and tell stories about the seed which gradually produces harvest, or the leaven which steadily permeates the whole lump. He can speak of the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. He can say that although "of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father," yet His disciples are to take heed "watch and pray" in anticipation (Mark xiii, 32, 33). Nothing is more obvious in our human experience than that the relationships of the Kingdom are not yet established among all men. Nothing is more obvious in the gospel story, for although the Son of Man demonstrated fully the relationships of love, He was despised and rejected of men. The kingly rule of God was by no means obvious when Jesus was crucified at Calvary. The consummation of the Kingdom is clearly in the future.

But even in His references to the consummation of the

Kingdom in the future, Jesus is more concerned about the attitude of people now. He prohibits speculation about the future. The point of His teaching is that the initiative rests with God. That means that the pattern of the fulfilment of the ages will be the same as the pattern of life revealed in Jesus. We do not know when the fulfilment will be; we do know the pattern of the fulfilment. We are prepared for its coming as we live now by the pattern which is revealed in Christ. The word "watch" resounds through these references to the future, as if the chief concern of Jesus is about the present attitude of His disciples. The spiritual vigilance which remains sensitive to the different forms of fellowship with God and with men is the essential, for by such spiritual vigilance we continue to share the eternal life of the Kingdom into which we have entered and we shall not be taken by surprise at its fulfilment.

There is much in the story of the Gospels that has not been discussed in this chapter. All that has been attempted has been an exposition of the message given in the words, in the deeds, and in the life of Jesus. This was the beginning of that glorious and adventurous experiment in the realm of the spirit which Luke calls "The Acts of the Apostles"; but before that venture stirred the many restless and seeking souls in that vast Roman Empire, it had to pass through dark and bewildering experiences. Since the good news of the Kingdom of God came through Jesus, the experiences of His cross and His resurrection preceded its wider proclamation. The gospel of the Kingdom was not complete until these events had taken place, for they were an integral part of the good news. The good news shines with its clearest light through the crowning deeds of the ministry of Jesus. That is why the cross and the resurrection are the central facts of the apostolic testimony, for in proclaiming Christ

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who died, whom God raised from the dead, the disciples were proclaiming in the most powerful way both the good news of the Kingdom of God and the means by which sinful people may enter the Kingdom.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLES

IN the last chapter of his gospel, Luke gives an apparent summary of the apostolic message (Luke xxiv, 46-48). This summary falls into two parts; first, the facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus together with proofs from the Old Testament; second, the call to repentance and the promise of remission of sin for all peoples through Christ. This is the substance of the apostolic message. The apostles are to be "witnesses of these things". In the opening chapter of Acts this is expressed in a more personal manner, for the apostles are described as witnesses not of "these things", but to Jesus (Acts i, 8). "Ye shall be witnesses unto me." The apostolic message always possessed this personal centre.

Almost from the beginning of the ministry of Jesus His disciples must have realised that the teacher could not be separated from His teaching. It has been suggested in the previous chapter that Jesus Himself was an integral part of His gospel. The life of the Kingdom was seen in Him. He did not merely describe it in His words; He showed its reality in His life. The disciples realised this and expressed it at Caesarea Philippi when they acknowledged Jesus to be Messiah. All their understanding of the gospel of the Kingdom came through Jesus. He embodied the gospel so that their witness had to be to Him.

When they had gained this spiritual insight Jesus immediately explained to them the necessity of His suffering, death and resurrection (Mark viii, 31). The pattern of the Kingdom was clear to Jesus. He knew that His

gospel of the Kingdom of God implied this willingness to give all, together with the assurance that God would not be defeated. But to the disciples this was a strange pattern. The references to suffering were a shock and a scandal to them. Mark says that Peter took Him and began to rebuke Him (Mark viii, 32). Matthew makes it more forceful by quoting Peter's words, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee" (Matthew xvi, 22). To their minds the Son of Man and suffering were irreconcilable opposites. Their conception of the Kingdom did not yet include the cross.

But their experience of Jesus brought them inevitably to the cross. From Caesarea Philippi to Calvary the disciples refused to face or accept the idea of a suffering Messiah. The cross was simply an insoluble and heart-breaking mystery. They saw Jesus stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem and they followed Him, but as they followed they were afraid. Fear and bewilderment possessed them. When Jesus was arrested they all forsook Him and fled. The cross, if not foolishness, was certainly a stumbling block to them. Their experience of the cross in itself was just a denial of the gospel of the Kingdom. The kingly rule of God was hidden in the darkness which enshrouded Calvary.

But all that was changed by the resurrection. Whatever views we may hold about the mode of Christ's resurrection, or about the nature of His risen body, there can be no doubt about the change in His disciples. The simple narrative of the Gospels, reflecting so vividly the different emotions aroused by the news of the resurrection and the presence of the risen Christ bears faithful witness to the profound change among the disciples. Darkness and despair vanish from their minds. Their hopelessness is thrown off. Faith is renewed. What had appeared as a denial of the good news of the Kingdom,

is seen to be its affirmation and fulfilment. God had ruled the whole pattern of events. The words of Jesus became clear and the cross, far from being a denial of the good news, was seen to be an essential part of the pattern of the Kingdom. The power of God and the wisdom of God were now seen in the risen Christ.

These were the events to which the apostles bore testimony and all these events happened to and through Jesus. So they were witnesses of "these things", witnesses to Jesus. In their witness to Him the resurrection takes a central place. Whatever difficulties the modern mind may find in accepting the reality of the resurrection of Christ, there can be no doubt about its centrality in the apostolic message. That is already apparent in Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost. The introduction to the message is a word from the Old Testament. The centre of the message is Jesus Christ and here the emphasis is upon His resurrection. A summary of the life and death of Jesus leads to the emphatic statement, "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that He should be holden of it" (Acts ii, 2). This fact is reinforced by a quotation from the Psalms and a reference to David's foretelling of the resurrection, then the fact is repeated, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts ii, 32). It is the fact of resurrection that proves Jesus to be "both Lord and Christ", and this leads to the call of repentance. This centrality of the resurrection remains in the apostolic message. Paul's experience in Athens provides an illustration from a later period and a very different situation. Paul's approach to his Athenian audience is a marked contrast to Peter's approach to his Jewish audience, for Paul proceeds from a reference to the inscription about the unknown god, to the generally accepted truth of the

universal manifestation of the Divinity in nature and man, rounding this off with a quotation from a Greek writer. Then he exposes the falsehood of idolatry, and that brings him to a call for repentance in view of the judgment which God exercises. This judgment is exercised through "that man whom He hath ordained" and the proof that Jesus occupies this unique position among men is that God "hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts xvii, 22). Apparently the audience accepted much of what Paul said, but "when they heard of the resurrection of the dead", there was immediate division and discussion. The resurrection of Jesus was clearly the centre of Paul's message.

To these two illustrations we may add the words from 1 Cor. xv, where Paul is stating not only the message which he delivered, but the message given by the whole Church. It was proclaimed before he became a preacher of the gospel, so that he simply delivers what he has received. The substance of the message is that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and that He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. xv, 3, 4). The fact of the resurrection is then emphasized by the impressive list of eye-witnesses who can affirm the reality of the experience, and by the development of the theme throughout the whole chapter. For Paul is quite emphatic that "if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain and your faith is also vain" (14). No plainer assertion of the reality of the resurrection and of its centrality in the Christian gospel could be made. Not only is the resurrection central in the gospel but it is therefore the foundation fact of Christian living. Christ's resurrection from the dead with all its spiritual implications is the ground upon which the moral appeal can stand: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable,

always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (v. 58). Paul bases the possibility of Christian living and serving upon the fact of the resurrection of Christ.

In emphasizing the centrality of the resurrection in the apostolic message, it is not intended to suggest that the resurrection was ever regarded as an isolated event or treated as a separate incident. We misunderstand the whole testimony of the New Testament to Christ if we isolate either the cross or the resurrection and treat them as happenings by themselves. The whole life of Jesus is one. Jesus Himself pointed out to His disciples that His death and resurrection were inherent in the gospel of the Kingdom. His teaching, His ministry, His suffering, His resurrection belong together. It is Jesus Who teaches, ministers, suffers, is raised; and the life of the Kingdom of God is in Jesus. It is exhibited in all these different events, but its fulness is not in any one of them. Its fulness is in Jesus who does and experiences all these happenings. Furthermore, when we try to isolate any one of these happenings we are putting into the centre of Christianity an impersonal happening instead of the living Christ. The history of Christian doctrine particularly in regard to the atonement witnesses to this fallacy. The cross, in and by itself, can become an impersonal incident and the centre of mechanical, logical but very impersonal theories of the atonement. The dynamic creative life of the Kingdom which consists essentially of ever developing experiences of personal relationships is completely lost in these impersonal themes.

It is significant that the apostles' profoundest and most moving sayings are not expositions of any theory of the atonement, but expressions of their personal experiences of Christ. He is "the Son of God Who loved me and

gave Himself for me." He is the One "Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree." "We love Him because He first loved us." How personal all this is! The centre of it all is Jesus who lived and died and rose again!

It is in these personal terms that the disciples always speak of the gospel and bear their witness to it. When they speak of the central facts of their faith they do not use the terms "the cross" and "the resurrection" very frequently; they speak rather of Jesus who died, Jesus whom God raised from the dead. We do well to remember the manner in which the heart of the Christian message is expressed in Acts ii, 22-24. "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands, have crucified and slain; Whom God hath raised up."

Here is the wholeness of Christ. No part of His ministry is separated. Every part is included because it is all a part of the life of "Jesus of Nazareth."

It is in Jesus, not in any one happening, that the pattern of the Kingdom is fully revealed. The pattern of life through death is implicit in His teaching, in His deeds, in His friendships, and becomes explicit in His death and resurrection. The crowning events of the death and resurrection which become the centre of the apostolic message are not, therefore, additions to the gospel of the Kingdom. They are the profoundest experiences of that gospel. The resurrection is the complete vindication of the good news which Jesus had proclaimed. It is the full manifestation of its reality. Luke realises clearly the essential oneness of the whole movement of life in the events of the ministry of Jesus, in His

death and resurrection and in the development of the Church, for he begins his story of the Acts of the Apostles with a summary of the earthly life of Jesus in which he stresses the resurrection, and suggests that after the resurrection Jesus spoke with His disciples "of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (Acts i, 3). The power and glory of life in the Kingdom of God were already manifest in Jesus, but were completely demonstrated in the resurrection.

What the apostles are doing, therefore, in placing the resurrection in the centre of their message, is to keep in clear focus the fact that the gospel is a message of life. Its centre is life, not death. Its foundation is God's affirmation, not man's denial. When the apostles say that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, they immediately state that the purpose of God is that men should not perish, but by believing in Christ should have eternal life. Jesus Himself said, "I am the resurrection and the life." So the purpose of His coming is that men might have life and have it more abundantly. Life is the great word of the New Testament. Life is the great reality of the gospel. The testimony of the apostles centres upon One who lived and died and was raised from the dead, upon Jesus Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. The vitality of the Christian movement in its early days derives from this experience of life through Christ. The Christians had to accept many denials and face many hardships, but these were not central. The centre of their Christianity was life, the life of the Kingdom with its completely satisfying and ever challenging personal relationships, eternal life with its warm and stimulating fellowship in the present and its far distant horizons and hopes. Christianity was a new life. Being a Christian meant sharing this life. Proclaiming the Christian

message meant speaking about life and calling others to enter it. The experiences and message of life met the frustration, pessimism, despair, inertia of that ancient world as they can meet the situations of any age. For life is what men always desire. A message of life will always have its appeal. That is what the gospel is. Its foundation is that the love of God towards all men is now made manifest; its central fact is that this love is manifest in Jesus Christ; its purpose is that by our response to the manifest love of God in Christ we should enter into abundant life. The testimony of the apostles to Jesus Christ is given "that we might live through Him" (1 John iv, 9). It is a gospel of life.

But the purpose for which the gospel is proclaimed is not always fulfilled. The preaching of the good news arouses antagonistic forces. Not all who heard the message of Jesus accepted it; there were those who called Him madman, blasphemer or revolutionary. Jesus embodied in Himself the life of the Kingdom, but in spite of that He was despised and rejected of men. His disciples bore their testimony to Him, but again the testimony was rejected by many. This situation clearly raised questions. Why did the authorities reject Jesus? What causes men to be indifferent to the gospel of the Kingdom of God? What is the spiritual root of the rejection?

The apostles approached such questions from the angle of their new experiences. Their experience of Jesus gave them a new understanding of the wrongness in human nature. They had learned from Jesus to think of life in personal terms, to see the true nature of life in its personal relationships. They had heard Jesus describe the wrongness of human nature in a story which showed two sons turning away from their father. Consequently they were

able to interpret sin as fundamentally alienation from God.

This is the diagnosis of what is wrong in human life that Paul works out more elaborately in Rom. 1 and 2. As he surveys first the Gentile world and then the Jewish world, he perceives that they are alike in their fundamental turning away from God. The evidence for this in the Gentile world is particularly the worship of idols; the "glory of the uncorruptible God" is changed into an image made like to corruptible man, and this leads to many forms of immoral living. This whole process begins because the Gentiles, although they knew God, "glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful". That is the fundamental wrongness. The evidence for this alienation from God in the Jewish world is different. Paul convicts the Jewish world of self-righteousness. There is a boasting in the Law which truly presents the demands of God, but this boasting is not supported by living. Those who give lip service to the Law are guilty of breaking the Law in their lives. So Paul makes the assertion that the true Jew is not the one who is boastful about all the external obligations, but one who responds within to the demands of God. "He is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Romans ii, 29). Here again the fundamental wrongness is analysed as an inner alienation from God.

It was their experience of the relationships which constitute the life of the Kingdom that brought the apostles to the deeper interpretation of sin as alienation from the Father rather than as unlawful deeds or immoral practices. This experience made them aware also of the total nature of sin. For since all the relationships of life belong together, one cannot be affected without

all the others being influenced. Consequently, the alienation of a man from God affects the whole of that man's life and relationships. Alienation from God sets up disharmony within the personality, creating the inner tension which Paul so clearly describes in Romans vii; it distorts and injures the relationships existing between people causing the adultery, the hatred, the strife, the sedition and all the other troubles which Paul mentions in Galatians v, 19-21, as arising from the refusal to "be led of the Spirit." Sin affects everything, because life is always a whole. One member of the body cannot be injured without the whole body being affected. If the root of sin is in man's turning away from God, the growth of sin reaches out into every part of man's life.

The apostles therefore are insistent that man's fundamental need is for an ending of his alienation from God. His fundamental need is not for a better philosophy, not for a mere emotional or exotic religion, not for more strenuous effort to keep a moral code, but for a new relationship with God; or rather for a realisation and acceptance of his true relationship with God. The apostles' testimony to Jesus Christ involves this testimony to man's need; but this leads us immediately to a third element in the message.

The apostles' experience of the new life through Christ which brought them to their radical and penetrating diagnosis of the nature of sin, also gave them an assurance that the need of man has been met fully and completely in Christ. Paul well expresses the comprehensiveness of the salvation offered through Christ in his opening chapter of Ephesians: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: . . . in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His

grace . . . That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ " (Ephesians i, 3-10).

When we consider the testimony of the apostles to the grace of God we must remember that they did not work out a completely systematic exposition of the manner in which God meets the sin of man. They did not write theological lectures. They asserted the facts of their experience. They explored these facts as they met new situations and then expressed their discoveries. Their main concern was to communicate the realities of the new life into which they had entered so that others might also share them. But because their experience centred in Christ and derived from Him, certain elements in that experience became common themes which were frequently repeated and tended to become fixed in familiar phrases. But their testimony to the grace of God is not given in any systematic form. It is the expression of a living and growing experience. John says that the apostles declare that "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled", and the purpose of this declaration is that those who hear may come to share the fellowship which is essentially a "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." Their testimony to the grace of God was inspired with the purpose which is given in John xx, 31, as the purpose of the gospel, "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name." Life is awakened only by a living person and a living experience. The apostles were not expounding a doctrine, but sharing a life. Hence the unsystematic experimental nature of their testimony. We can but mention some of the themes which arise in their testimony.

God has revealed in Christ the unchanging nature of His love. "God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. v, 8). "In this was manifested the love of God toward us because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world" (1 John iv, 9). In many sentences the apostles dwell upon this theme of the revelation of God's love in Christ.

This goes back to the Old Testament experience of the Covenant which God established with His people. The essence of the Covenant relationship is not that two equal parties bargain with each other on level terms and then make a pact which is mutually binding as long as the partners so desire. The essence of the Covenant relationship is rather to be found in the Divine initiative. The wonder of it is that the eternal God, by His own choice as it were, enters into relationship with one people, the people of Israel. He binds Himself by His own declaration to them and reveals to them the way by which they can live in fellowship with Him. The Covenant is therefore the declaration of the gracious love of God, and God is always faithful to the Covenant relationship. He remains the same whatever is the attitude of His people. He does not abrogate the Covenant in spite of their unfaithfulness. When Jesus said in the Upper Room, "This is my blood of the New Covenant," He linked His ministry and death with the Old Testament experience of the Covenant and He set the seal upon the faith of the generations that God had not deserted the Covenant which He had established.

But whereas, in the Old Testament, the Covenant was felt to be between God and the nation, the apostolic experience is individual and personal; as Jeremiah in his words about the "new covenant which God will establish with every man," had foretold that it would be. The

Christian can speak of the "Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." That is a new, intensely personal experience of the love of God.

This certainty of the unchanging, unfailing love of God is the foundation of the gospel. "But God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ," cries Paul, and then goes on to his exposition of the Christian life and fellowship (Ephesians ii). The love of God is the groundwork of everything. That God "loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" is felt by John to be the basis of all Christian experience. The new life of the Kingdom with its realisation of true relationships depends upon the fact that God loves His human children unfailingly. If this last fact is not true, all the rest cannot be true. If the love of God alters, all the other relationships become impossible. If God does not love me in such a way as to warm and stir my heart and move my will to such response as I can make, then nothing can bring me into the abundant life of the Kingdom. But in Christ it is just this fact of the love of God that is seen so clearly. In Christ God Himself reveals His unchanging love. Man's alienation from Him with all the dreadful consequences which follow that alienation, has not altered God's love, for God has given the completest revelation of love in Jesus Christ.

But this raises at once another aspect of the apostles' testimony to the grace of God. It is that God has shown in Christ the disastrous evil of man's alienation. The blessings of the love of God are not accepted by some until they see and experience the disasters which follow the rejection of that love. Thus the preaching of Christ and Him crucified is not only a proclamation of the unchanging love of God but also a demonstration of the

evil of alienation from God. For it was just this alienation from God with its spiritual blindness, pride and self-will that made men crucify Jesus. The cross is a judgment. It is an exposure in pitiless terms of the evil of which men are capable. Before the cross one can have no illusion about the reality of sin. Its power and its horror are both made manifest. Just because the love of God is unchanging, whatever opposes or ignores that love is bound to meet disaster. By its very nature love exercises judgment. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord," says Paul in 2 Cor. v, "we persuade men." The Spirit, who for the disciples is a "Comforter" or an "Advocate", who stands with them to help them, will also "convince the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment." The preaching of the gospel therefore is an exposure of man's alienation from God so that realising his situation and his responsibility for it, he may "repent", may turn away from that in a new response to the unchanging love of God.

This is possible. For God has created in Christ a means of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. The apostles had already discovered in their own experience how through Christ they entered into fellowship with God and a new life with man. That had happened! It had happened in spite of themselves! They were led into this new life by Christ. They had glimpsed it during His ministry, but it was supremely His death and resurrection that had brought the fulness of the life. Their message is the communication of what they themselves had experienced. In that communication they use a great variety of metaphors. They describe man's alienation from God in rather legal terms as a hopeless attempt to fulfil the moral demands which a righteous God makes and they say that "what the Law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending

His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans viii, 3). Jesus Himself had fulfilled all the obligations of the Law and had shown that the whole meaning of the Law is in loving relationships and He had awakened the response of love. They describe man's alienation from God as a form of bondage, in which the soul is a slave to its passion, or to the "world", or to evil, and they say that we are redeemed from the bondage not with silver and gold but with the "precious blood of Christ". This release means that whereas the old life was one of slavery the new life is that of the family: "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father" (Romans viii, 15). Here the language is akin to that of Jesus Himself who so often describes the life of the Kingdom in terms of the family. Sometimes the apostles turn to the sacrificial and priestly system of the Temple, using its obvious analogy of the shedding of blood and its insistent truth that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." But here the contrast is made between a sacrificial system which was unsatisfactory inasmuch as the sacrifice had to be repeated continually, so that there was no certainty of the remission of sins, and the sacrifice which is made by Christ who "was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews, ix, 28), who "offered one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Hebrews x, 12), who "by one offering hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews x, 14). Again, the emphasis shifts from the offered sacrifice to the priest who offers it and Christ is seen as the priest who "by His own blood entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." So Christ remains as a "merciful and faithful high priest" who "makes reconciliation for the sins of the people."

Because we have this high priest who "was in all points tempted like as we are," we can draw near the throne of grace to "obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews iv, 16). At other times the relationship of man and God is seen to be one of hostility, so that what is needed is an act of reconciliation, and the act has been made by God in Christ: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. v, 19). Those who were far off are "made nigh by the blood of Christ", who is "our peace". Christ abolished in His flesh the enmity and reconciles all men "unto God in one body on the cross" (Ephesians ii, 13).

With the use of these and other metaphors the apostles try to make clear the meaning of their experiences. No metaphors can contain the whole truth. Indeed all this effort to expound and communicate can be misleading in itself, for it can direct our attention to the exposition rather than challenge the soul with the new experience. What is apparent behind all the metaphors are the new experiences given through Christ. That is what matters. Christ meant a new life, a new fellowship, new responses, new relationships. No metaphor can do justice to the soul's great experiences on the personal level. An eagle in a cage may be helpful to the study of ornithology, but the eagle is not really known until it is seen soaring in the free air above the high places. Every attempt to express the soaring experiences of the Christian faith encloses these experiences in a cage. Perhaps we have to do that! But as we read the testimony of the apostles we must not pay too much attention to the cages. We have to open the door and get into the high places where the fresh wind of the Spirit is blowing. The phrases and metaphors which the apostles use are but invitations to come and share these amazing relationships with God and man which are made possible in Christ and consti-

tute the gloriously free life of the children of God.

The last paragraph with its reference to the Spirit has brought us to another vital element in the apostles' testimony. More will be said about this in later sections of the book, in regard to the administration of the Church and the exercise of spiritual gifts. Meanwhile attention must at least be drawn to what might be described as the more important aspects of the apostles' experience of the Spirit.

In His conversation with Nicodemus Jesus describes a man's entry into the life of the Kingdom as "being born again", or being born from above, or being born of the Spirit (John iii, 3, 5, 8). When Jesus speaks in the Upper Room about leaving His disciples He assures them that the Father will send "another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." The Spirit will remain with the disciples to "testify" of Christ, to lead them into all truth and to enable them to do the "greater works". What all this is saying is that the disciple's entry into the Christian life is not merely his decision, and that his continuance in faith is not merely the result of his effort and determination. God's Spirit exercises His influence in the human soul. Consequently the maintaining of a soul in the fellowship of the Kingdom is the operation of the Spirit: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God" (Romans viii, 14).

Life in the Kingdom, or eternal life, is then life under the direction of the Spirit. This teaching led to important consequences. Paul realised these consequences in a particularly clear way. He saw plainly enough that it is the operation of the Spirit to create in a man those moral and spiritual qualities which are seen perfectly in Jesus. The life of Jesus was a life under the Spirit. When He was baptized the "Holy Spirit descended in

bodily shape like a dove upon Him" (Luke iii, 22). After His baptism He was "led by the Spirit into the wilderness" (Luke iv, 1) and after the temptation He "returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (Luke iv, 14). But since the life of Jesus was the supreme manifestation of the work of the Spirit, it follows that the chief operation of the Spirit is to be found in the creating of Christlike character. Life in the Kingdom is not a disorderly life because it is not bound by law. It is life under the Spirit and the chief marks of the Spirit are not emotional excitement and excesses, but an inner discipline which makes the disciple more like the Master. Paul says quite emphatically, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Galatians v, 22). "The fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (Ephesians v, 9). It is the Spirit then who makes possible the Christian life.

So too it is the Spirit who makes possible the new fellowship. The gospel of the Kingdom of God, as Jesus proclaimed it, called men into a new relationship with God so that henceforth the man's life was consciously under the rule of God; but it is also made clear that this new relationship with God implied a new relationship with men. To enter the Kingdom of God is a personal decision and act, but it is not an individualistic act. Response to the gospel is realisation of our true nature as persons. A person is one who finds his true life in association with other persons. Perhaps the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is an endeavour to express in human language the truth that the Divine Person cannot be an isolated unit, but must in some way exist in fellowship. That is a conception which baffles profoundest minds; what is obvious however, in our human experience, is that human personality reaches

its fulness, its maturity, only in association with other personalities. Christ will make real persons. Hence fellowship with one another is an integral part of the life of the Kingdom. The new commandment is as much an essential part of the gospel of the Kingdom as the proclamation of the love of God, indeed the two are held together quite firmly by Jesus:—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbour as thyself." "This is my commandment that ye love one another as I have loved you" (John xv, 12).

It was a natural consequence and fulfilment of the message of Jesus that the coming of the Spirit to the apostles should lead immediately to a deeper fellowship among themselves. Their awareness of the new spiritual power given to them and of the close fellowship with God which that experience implied, brought them into new modes of association with their fellow men. Such an intimate experience of communion with God necessitated a mutual sharing on all levels. "All that believed were together and had all things in common." (Acts ii, 44.) That was the natural expression of their experience of the Spirit. They had entered fully into the life of the Kingdom and so experienced the power of that life as Jesus said they would, and that inevitably involved these new mutual relationships.

What is so significant about the Church of the New Testament is that wherever people entered into the life of the Kingdom, i.e., were "born of water and of the Spirit," they were led into a new kind of fellowship with one another. Sometimes, as in Corinth, matters went astray in the fellowship and, under the emotional stress of the freedom of the Christian life, members of the Church acted in foolish and indiscreet ways; but this is just an indication of the weaknesses of human nature and the need for that emphasis which Paul made upon the

work of the Spirit in creating Christlike character. Far more frequently the new experience led to a new fellowship which operated on all levels from the deepest spiritual level to that of physical need. And it was just this quality of fellowship which impressed the outsider. Considerable portions of the New Testament epistles are concerned with the fellowship, meeting disruption, explaining its nature, commending those who maintained it and always appealing for response to the Spirit which is the secret of fellowship. To "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called" means "forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians iv, 2,3.)

Thus to their testimony of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the love of God, the disciples were compelled by the facts of their experience to add their witness to the "communion of the Holy Spirit." Just as the "grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" means the sacrificial self-giving of Jesus at Calvary awakening in the disciple a corresponding willingness to give to the utmost, and "the love of God" means the love which God shows to us creating in us a responding love to Him, so the "communion of the Holy Spirit" means that inner fellowship with the unseen created by the Spirit, expressing itself in a similiar fellowship with the seen. The "communion" or "fellowship" of the Holy Spirit is not merely the invisible spiritual fellowship of the soul with the eternal; it is also the visible expression of this experience in the fellowship or community of the Church. That community is the result of the creative work of the Spirit and is maintained by the Spirit. This avoids all rigid and mechanical conceptions of the Church. It makes possible both variety and growth in its life. The Spirit, like the wind, bloweth where it

listeth, and the apostles learned that the unexpected can happen. Peter and his Jewish Christian friends are astonished when Cornelius the Gentile responds to their message, but they recognise that he has received the Holy Spirit and therefore belongs to the fellowship of the Church. "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?" (Acts x, 44.) Paul and his party wanted to evangelise the northern parts of Asia Minor, but an inner compulsion prevented them and brought a clear call to cross into Macedonia. It was not what they had planned, but they accepted the leading and in later years as Paul writes to the Christians in that region of Macedonia he thanks God "for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians i, 5.)

The communion of the Holy Spirit was an essential part of Christian experience and to it the apostles continually bear witness. In so doing, they emphasize that in their experience of fellowship, as in every other realm of life, the initiative is with God Who has made known His love and power in Christ.

What we have endeavoured to do in this chapter is to show how the good news of the Kingdom of God given by Jesus especially to His disciples became the foundation of all their testimony. They do not always use the terms which Jesus used, but there is a complete continuity of experience. The disciples were set by Jesus on an amazing journey of spiritual exploration. They had been brought into a new spiritual realm which constantly yielded fresh delights to them. Such a series of experiences cannot be confined within the channels of a system of theology. The apostles were witnesses. They recounted what had happened to them and they tried to communicate their experiences. They

linked it with the teaching of Scripture. They illustrated it from life around them. They were compelled to apply it to deep spiritual problems and sharp moral challenges. But always it is their personal experience of the new life in Christ and of the fellowship created by His Spirit which remains central. Through Christ they were led into the exploration of the relationships of the Kingdom and they found there a fulness of life and a peace of soul which men and women everywhere so sorely need. Out of that experience they spoke. To its realities they bore their testimony.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NEW LIFE

THE New Testament Church existed to bear witness to Jesus Christ. The substance of that witness has been explained. This brings us to the question, What happened when the message was accepted? What difference did the acceptance of the Christian gospel make? What occurred in the mind and heart of the individual, as well as in his conduct and relationships?

There is a sense in which we can answer these questions in a word, for the New Testament writers, especially John, use the word "life" to express what Christianity meant to the individual. Phrases from John's Gospel immediately come to the mind. "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" (John x, 10). "He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation : but is passed from death to life" (John v, 24). Here the response to the spoken word is clearly stated to bring the change from "death" to "life." There is no need to multiply quotations for it is well known that "life" or "eternal life" is one of the key phrases of the Fourth Gospel. The frequent use of the word is just another illustration of the insight of John into the true nature of the gospel and of man's response to Christ. But the word is not confined to the Gospel of John. When a scribe quoted the words of the Old Testament, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," Jesus answered, "This do and thou shalt live" (Luke x, 27, 28). The good tidings

brought by Jesus were about the life of the Kingdom of God so that, as has been pointed out, the Christian gospel centres in life. But we do not need actual quotations to state this truth, for the four Gospels contain many stories of people who actually experienced a new vitality. The new life was known by the people whom Jesus healed, by those like Zaccheus and Mary Magdalene whose motives and manner of living were radically changed, by the disciples who were awed and amazed and sometimes frightened by the splendour of the new life, yet, guided by their Lord, continued to explore it.

The message of Jesus led to a new quality of life. So did the testimony of the apostles. Both the Acts and the Epistles give abundant evidence of the new quality of life in those who accepted the message. People like Stephen, Barnabas, Paul, Silas, Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila, Lydia, John Mark and many others, show the new life. It is Paul who has given classic expression to the experience of the new life:—"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians ii, 20). It will be noticed that the dominant theme of this great sentence is life. That is the word which occurs most frequently. If being a Christian means being crucified with Christ the result of that experience is that "I live." That is the heart of Christianity. Just as the cross results in resurrection, so the self-surrender of the believer results in new life. The realm of the new life may continue to be "the flesh," but it is life with a different quality since it derives from faith in the Son of God. What Paul expresses in these words was known to great numbers of people in the New Testament Church.

In seeking to understand the new experiences given through testimony to Jesus Christ, we have clearly to do more than use the word "life." That is what we are able to do when, through the pages of the New Testament, we find a spiritual companionship with those who entered the new life. Perhaps their first outward expression of the inner change would be in the words of a simple confession such as are quoted in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts viii, 37). Paul equates a verbal confession of the Lord Jesus with an inner acceptance of the resurrection—"believing in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead" (Rom. x, 9). Here again is the centrality of the resurrection and the message of life. But what did the confession denote? It is not suggested, of course, that all converts had the same quality of spiritual experience, but for all, the words of confession had real meaning and denoted real experiences.

What those spiritual experiences were is apparent throughout the New Testament. That is what the New Testament is about. When the disciples were commissioned to "make disciples", they were called to the communication of these experiences. Perhaps we can understand these spiritual happenings within the convert, this quality of new life, most clearly by giving our attention to the New Testament account of Paul's initial Christian experience. In selecting the experience of the apostle, it is not implied that every "conversion" must follow this pattern or that here is the whole experience into which everyone must enter. But it is obvious that this experience was well known in the New Testament Church and was regarded as a particularly vivid and clear illustration of the kind of experience through which many converts had passed. It is always true that the

inner life of unusually sensitive souls, an Augustine, a Francis, a Luther, a Wesley, comprehends in a particularly vivid way the experiences through which many less sensitive souls pass and of which they are aware only in a limited and vague manner. The measure of a man's spiritual greatness is in his capacity to be aware of, to gather up in himself, and to give expression to the immense variety of feelings, emotions, desires, frustrations, despairs and hopes which move in the souls of his generation, or are common to every generation. Consequently when we study the inner experience of any great soul, we are not setting up that experience as a pattern into whose rigid mould all other men's experiences must be poured if it is to be regarded as "orthodox"; we are rather touching the infinite variety of man's response to God by means of the comprehensive response of one man. It is in this way that we approach the experiences by which Saul entered into the new life in Christ.

The New Testament offers numerous accounts of this experience. In the Acts of the Apostles we have three accounts; Acts ix, 14 is Luke's account of the experience given in words which are clearly a reflection of the apostle's own account; Acts xxii, 1-21 is Paul's account given to the crowd in Jerusalem and is substantially the same; Acts xxvi, 2-23 is Paul's account given to Agrippa. These three stories emphasize the externals of the experience—Paul's strict Jewish upbringing, his hatred and persecution of the Christians, the light and the voice, his blindness and the renewing of sight, his baptism and subsequent work among the Gentiles. We are, however, more concerned with the inner experience, and so it is better to turn to Paul's own writings with their biographical passages. The verse in Galatians ii, 20. has already been mentioned as an expression of Paul's inner experience. Rom. 7 reflects a period of spiritual struggle,

but it is more likely that the apostle is writing of the continuing struggle of the Christian life rather than the crisis which is solved by conversion. The passage in Rom. 7 may be a fuller exposition of the words in 2 Timothy iv, 7, "I have fought a good fight," or of those in Ephesians vi, 12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and against blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Paul's references to the element of conflict in the Christian life are frequent enough. The passage in Phil. iii, 4-14 is Paul's fullest and profoundest exposition of the meaning of conversion. It is akin to the account which he gave before Agrippa, but in Philippians the apostle is laying stress upon the inner meaning of the experience. He is setting out the elements of the new life which he has found in Christ and it is to perceive these elements that we give some thought to this passage.

It is evident at once that the whole experience of conversion centres in a personal response to Christ. Christ is the centre of the experience: "What things were gain unto me those I counted loss for Christ." (v. 7). That is the change, and it is occasioned by Christ. This personal response to Christ means "knowing" Christ (v. 10) and this personal knowledge of "Christ Jesus, my Lord" is of surpassing worth. The Christ whom Paul knew is the Christ who died and was raised, so that knowing Him means experiencing also the "power of His resurrection" and "the fellowship of His sufferings." This is not just knowledge on the intellectual level. This is the knowledge born of a personal relationship to which one commits oneself wholly. This is being apprehended by Christ (v. 12), taken by Christ into a new personal relationship. The American Revised Version catches the personal note as it translates the word given in the

Authorised Version as "apprehended" with the phrase "Christ Jesus has made me His own."

But this new relationship with Christ implies a wholly new relationship with God. The "righteousness which is of the law" is ended. That was a way of life in which a man lived before God as a servant before his master. The regulations were laid down and the servant tried to obey in order both to earn his wages and to keep his master's favour. Inherent in such a relationship is uncertainty and fear. But now Paul enters a new relationship which is characterised on his side by faith, i.e., the trustful response to the giving of God demonstrated in Christ. He no longer seeks to achieve a righteousness which consists in obeying an external code, for righteousness is being given to him through his response of trust. He stands before God not in the relationship of master and servant, but in the relationship of father and son. The old "bondage" with its "fear" is gone, for to be found in Christ means being "adopted as a son" i.e., entering into the relationship in which the soul is constantly saying "Abba, Father".

This new relationship with God made possible through Christ and our faith in Him implies changes within the disciple. It creates a new inner power. Paul calls this the "power of the resurrection" (v. 10). The resurrection of Christ was a demonstration of the power of God over forces which hitherto had appeared unconquerable. In Romans i, 4, Paul again refers to the resurrection of Christ from the dead as a work of the power of God. That objective demonstration of Divine power finds its subjective parallel in the soul which "knows" Christ, so that the new relationship becomes a source of inner vitality. The reality of the inner power is apparent in the whole of the apostle's activity, both in his amazing achievements and in his more amazing capacity for

triumphant endurance. "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us," is a spontaneous expression of this experience of "knowing" Christ in the power of His resurrection.

In addition to this new spiritual power, is a new scale of values. Paul counts as loss all the things for which formerly he had lived (v. 7). He is now made "conformable to Christ's death" (v. 10). He possesses and lives by a new interpretation of life. He sees life in a new pattern and it is the pattern of the cross. This gives new objectives, new judgments, new activities. Paul's subsequent career shows how real were his words about the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. The pattern of the cross became the pattern of his life.

In Philippians iii, then, Paul recalls his readers to the basic experiences of the Christian life and so makes his appeal in verse 15, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." When Paul wrote these words, was he thinking of the saying of Jesus in Matthew v, 45, "Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect"? Jesus calls men to enter into the perfect life of the Kingdom and so to receive into themselves something of that perfection. Paul relates his experience of entering this life through Christ, and uses the word "perfect", as Jesus does, of the new relationship with God which is the source of new life and conduct in men. Once again we become aware of the New Testament emphasis upon life. This passage in Philippians iii speaks of "forgetting the things which are behind", of "suffering the loss of all things", of "sharing the fellowship of Christ's sufferings", of "being made conformable to His death", yet in none of these phrases do we touch the centre of the experience. The self-giving, the surrender, the denial, is not for its own sake, but is only the inevitable condition by which is realised fulfil-

ment, renewal, life. All this happens so that a man may "win Christ", may "attain unto the resurrection of the dead", may "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ", may become "perfect". The New Testament Christian was deeply aware of all this and of the new life which he shared and experienced daily. When he made his confession, "Jesus is Lord", he was not simply uttering an embryo creed to which his mind had given assent, he was acknowledging his personal sharing of the wealth of inner experience, his personal entry into the new life whose source and centre was Jesus Christ.

Another way of studying the basic experiences which were the foundation of the New Testament Church is to turn to the act which symbolised these experiences, the act of baptism. It is generally agreed that in the New Testament Church baptism was the recognised symbolical act by which converts acknowledged their faith in Christ and entered the fellowship of the Church. The experience of the members of the Church followed the pattern which is outlined in Acts ii, 37. The people heard the message delivered by the apostles and "received" it (v. 41), i.e., they made a personal and inner response of understanding and acceptance. Then they were baptized (v. 41) and continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers (v. 42); i.e., they shared the life of the Church which centred in worship and in the Lord's Supper. It is further generally agreed that the only form of baptism known in the New Testament Church was the baptism of those who were mature enough to understand the gospel and to "believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts viii, 37). Arguments against this statement which are based upon such incidents as that of the baptism of the Philippian jailor, Acts xvi, 30,

in which we are told that the word of the Lord was spoken "to all that were in his house" and that "he and all his" were straightway baptized, so that it is assumed that children were among those baptized; or upon the fact that Jesus blessed the children; or upon the analogy of the Jewish rite of circumcision, are too flimsy to put against the frequent references in the New Testament to the experience of conversion followed by baptism, and the consistent way in which the New Testament holds together a personal confession of faith and its expression in baptism. The prevalence of baptism in the New Testament Church is an indication of the centrality of the new experiences of life in Christ and of the desire of the apostles to keep that experience of conversion in the centre. The significance of baptism in the New Testament is therefore worthy of our study.

The origin of baptism in the New Testament Church is plainly in the ministry of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. The whole work of Jesus was undoubtedly linked with John's stirring movement and this was a movement within Judaism. John apparently had no intention of founding a new sect in Judaism, although there was some danger that this might be the result of his effort, and years later some people were found in places far from Judea whose religion centred upon the message and baptism of John. (Acts xix, 1-5). The four Gospels make it clear that the Christian movement originated from the ministry of John the Baptist who was regarded not only as a prophet, but as the forerunner of Messiah. Neither the message nor the baptism of John was dispensed with by Jesus; but both were given fuller content. Jesus came to fulfil. In his acceptance of baptism at the hands of John, Jesus linked Himself with the spiritual awakening which had already commenced and with the concentration of attention upon

the Kingdom of God, and the four Gospels make it clear that for Jesus baptism was a profound spiritual experience and preparation for His ministry. It is not certain that all the disciples of Jesus were baptized and the Fourth Gospel is careful to remind us that Jesus Himself did not baptize (Ch. iv, 2), but it seems that at least in the early days of our Lord's ministry His disciples did baptize others, for we are told in John iii, 22, "After these things came Jesus and His disciples into the land of Judea and there He tarried with them and baptized." And in John iv, 2, "though Jesus Himself baptized not but His disciples." Certainly the disciples believed that their Lord commissioned them before His ascension not only to teach His message but also to baptize those who should accept (Matthew xxviii, 19). It was natural therefore that the Church from the beginning should practise the rite of baptism. As the Christian fellowship spread into other countries and came into contact with other religions, the Christian leaders must have become aware of the lustrations practised by pagan religions and of their outward similarity to baptism, but by that time both the Christian custom and its significance were firmly fixed. So it may well be doubted whether customs in the Mystery Religions had any real influence upon the New Testament interpretation of baptism. The guiding principles are already established in the practice of John the Baptist and in the teaching and example of Jesus.

Baptism was essentially a witness to personal faith. John preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," which is Mark's summary of the message and method of John, just as a few verses later, (Mark i, 14, 15), he gives a summary of the message and method of Jesus. The message of John seems to have been a call for personal repentance and acceptance of the demands of God. John breaks from the reliance

upon external habits which characterised the religion of his day. He knew the elaborate system of the Temple in Jerusalem, with its priests, its ceremonies and its sacrifices, and he knew the way in which many of the pilgrims who thronged into the city relied upon the performance of certain acts and the offering of certain sacrifices to bring freedom from sin and its penalties. John insisted upon the necessity for a change of the inner life, for a real turning to God, and he made baptism the outward sign of this repentance. The people were baptized "confessing their sins" (Mark i, 5). The meaning which John had given to baptism was interpreted by the Christian through his experience of Christ. For the Christian, repentance and forgiveness are made possible through Christ and the personal response of the believer to Him. Consequently the essence of baptism is in the believer's confession of Christ (Acts viii, 37, Acts ix, 20, xvi, 31, 32). It will be noticed that the public nature of the witness is not stressed, although it may be assumed that in all cases other people were present. The emphasis lies entirely upon the personal acknowledgement of Christ.

This personal confession of Christ is the beginning of the new life in Christ. As we study the references to baptism in the Epistles, we realise how clearly the leaders of the New Testament Church saw this truth. For them the confession of faith which gave baptism its meaning was not just the verbal acknowledgement of a personal decision, the experience which the believer acknowledged was not merely a subjective experience. It was a personal response to the grace of God in Jesus Christ and this response possessed the pattern of the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism did not bear witness only to the believer's faith. It bore witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus which preceded the faith of the disciples and were the cause of that faith. The order

of Paul's words in Ephesians iv, 5, is deliberate and significant:—"One Lord, one faith, one baptism." First the fact of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; then the personal response to Christ, the acceptance of forgiveness, the surrender of self to Him; then the acknowledgement of His grace and of the personal response in baptism. Baptism says Paul is baptism "into Christ" (Galatians iii, 27). It has an objective centre. It is a proclamation of Christ. He reminds the Colossians that we are "buried with Him in baptism wherein also ye are risen with Him". The act of baptism is a portrayal of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This too, is the thought apparent in Romans vi, 24, where Paul clearly associates baptism with the death and resurrection of Jesus, making the act of descending into the water and rising up from it a portrayal of the central facts of the faith. All this is in line with the whole apostolic teaching in which any suggestion that being a Christian is merely a subjective religious experience is carefully avoided. The centre of the apostolic preaching is always Jesus Christ. The apostles constantly looked away from themselves and their own inner experiences and reactions, and set their minds upon the great acts of the love of God in Christ; and they taught their converts to do the same. Paul can be very introspective as in Romans 7; but he is never immersed in his own feelings. He is delivered by the centrality of Christ. So it was natural for the apostles to keep the centrality of Christ in the act of baptism. The act of immersion in water and rising up from the water suggested the symbol of the death and resurrection of Jesus simply because these facts were central to their experience. Their inner experiences come into the light in their teaching, and as we read their references to baptism as a symbolic proclamation of the central facts in the self-revealing of

God, we know that we are looking into their inner lives and perceiving the centrality of Christ there.

But since their inner experience centred upon Christ who died and rose again, that pattern is worked out in their lives. What was objective became subjective. The cross is not a spectacle from which the believer can stand back and at which he may gaze. It is just the unbeliever who does that, and it is just that which is the sign of his unbelief. The believer is made one with the Christ who died and rose again. The personal response of faith to the living Christ means, as Jesus says it would, taking up the cross in following Him. The outward pattern of the events which happened to Jesus became the inward pattern of the experience of the disciples. Consequently baptism is the beginning of a new life, a new character, new relationships. Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God because sharing the life of the Kingdom implies possessing in one's character and relationships the pattern of the Kingdom which is manifest in Jesus; then he amplifies the word "unrighteous" suggesting that some of his readers lived formerly in the manner he is describing; but now they are different:—"Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. vi, 11). The reference is clearly to baptism as the beginning of an entirely new way of life. Similarly the writer of the letter to the Hebrews in Chapter x, 22, speaks of "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water". In 1 Peter iii, 20, 21, the story of Noah's ark is used to illustrate the truth that a few people were "saved by water", and this is made a parallel to Christian baptism which saves because it implies having a "good conscience toward God" which is made possible "by the resurrec-

tion of Jesus Christ". The phrases here are a little involved, but they are obviously intended to reflect the same teaching that baptism is the beginning of a wholly new way of life made possible through Christ. The letter to Titus has the words in chapter iii, 5, 6. ". . . according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." The washing of regeneration is a descriptive phrase for baptism as a sign of the "rebirth" of being "born from above". In all these passages we see how baptism is the believer's acknowledgement that through Christ he is entering upon a life of new moral and spiritual quality, that this new life is the gradual working out in himself, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, of that pattern of self-giving love which is seen perfectly in Christ. "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians iii, 27). The Christian possesses a new character and it is a Christlike character. "We are buried with Him by baptism unto death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans vi, 4). It is in this passage in Romans 6, in which Paul works out most fully the significance of Christian baptism, that he emphasizes most strongly the moral and spiritual changes which occur in the believer, and he leaves us in no doubt at all that the changes which occur are a reflection of the pattern of life in Christ. That is the test of the reality of the change. That is a sign of the sincerity of the believer. Where the pattern of the cross and resurrection is seen, then, the Holy Spirit is truly at work. It is significant that although Paul felt that he was called particularly to preach the gospel and not to baptize (1 Cor. i, 17), yet he mentions baptism in his letter to

the Christians in Rome, in Corinth, in Ephesus, in Colosse and in Galatia and he consistently appeals to the experience of baptism as he encourages and challenges the members of the churches to be steadfast in the faith. He evidently feels that in the experience of baptism the central experiences of the gospel are so clearly and so simply expressed, that a constant recalling of their experiences will guide new converts amid the perplexing speculations of their day and strengthen them against the more dangerous moral temptations.

Such an appeal could have force only if baptism was the expression of a personal response to the love of God and an acceptance of the power demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus. This experience of spiritual power is sometimes conveyed by reference to the Holy Spirit in connection with baptism. Here we should be careful to remember that the New Testament writings are not systematic theology, but the communication of a message and an experience. Consequently we must not try to press the references to the Holy Spirit and baptism into any rigid theory. The new life of which faith and baptism is the beginning may be described as life "in Christ" or as life "in the Spirit". What is important is the new personal relationship between the believer and God and this, like every true personal relationship, is an experience so full and rich, that many different terms must be used to describe it, and yet the experience itself remains fuller than all the terms, and retains also the vitality of life which no terms can properly convey. It is not surprising therefore that as the New Testament writers remember the spiritual powers which are received in the Christian life, they should not be precise, but should speak variously of Christ or of the Spirit, of the gift of the Spirit following baptism (Acts ii, 38), or

preceding baptism and being communicated through the laying on of hands (Acts x, 47, Acts xix),

Again the laying on of hands which sometimes is associated with the gift of the Spirit as in Acts xix, 6, and viii, 17, is at other times associated with ordination to an office in the Church, e.g. the appointment of deacons, Acts vi, 6, and here it is evident that those appointed already possessed the gift of the Spirit; and again at other times is associated with the setting aside of members of the Church for some special activity, e.g. (Acts xiii, 3), where Paul and Barnabas, who already possess the Spirit and have been ordained as ministers, are dedicated to special missionary work. It is quite clear that the gift of the Holy Spirit was often associated with baptism, following the experience of Jesus Himself, (Mark i, 9, 10), but it is not intended that this should become a mechanical theory about baptism. There is nothing magical in the New Testament rite. It is the symbol of a new relationship and in that relationship the believer constantly receives new spiritual power. The symbols of this experience such as baptism, or of the fellowship of the Church such as laying on of hands, are but visible expressions of spiritual happenings and are not the means by which spiritual powers are mechanically conveyed.

Our discussion of baptism, like the preceding paragraphs on Paul's experience of conversion, has shown that the only real "happening" in the New Testament sense is the new relationship between God and the individual made possible by God's self-revealing, God's coming to man in Christ, and leading on to new relationships between men. This is the true happening and it is the result of the Divine initiative. It is all of God's grace—and that grace again is not the mechanical imparting of new life, but the gracious coming of our Father in

love and power to His human children. It is all on the personal level. It has no meaning at all apart from personal response. The "happenings" to which the New Testament bears witness are all essentially personal:—"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth" (John i, 14). "God commendeth His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans v, 8). "Follow me." But spiritual happenings require visible means of expression; such is baptism. It is a picture of inner experience. It is a symbol of the love of God in the death and resurrection of Christ. It is a visible communication of a new life. It is a token of a new power. And always the "happening", the new life, the new powers are more important.

The characteristic of a living organism is its ability to reproduce its own kind. That is as true of spiritual life as of physical life. Consequently when we perceive clearly that Christianity in the New Testament is essentially a new life "in Christ" we shall expect that the New Testament will record the growth of this new life. We shall perceive that this growth is an essential happening. We can look at the growth from the angle of the numerical and geographical expansion of the New Testament Church and we can denote it by speaking of missionary enterprise; or we can regard it from the angle of the method by which it occurred and our attention can be concentrated upon the apostolic preaching, upon the formation of Christian communities, upon the organisation of offices within the communities, and all this will help us to understand the life of the New Testament Church. But we must not miss the more fundamental truth that all this growth and the methods by which it was achieved are just witnesses to the reality of that

spiritual life which was not consciously concerned with method and plans but, just because it was real life, had to go on by the necessity of its own nature, reproducing itself. Evangelism was not then a method, or a campaign, or a strategy. It was the natural function of a living organism. It was the inevitable and spontaneous outcome of a new life. Because Christianity was a new life, it reproduced its life throughout the Roman Empire. Jesus came to "open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers". He set forth the life of the Kingdom in Himself and so opened the door by which all men might enter that new life. And that door could not be shut. To speak of Christ "the way" was to invite others to walk that way and so to find the life of the Kingdom. Nothing could be stronger evidence of the nature of Christianity as a new life than the manner in which the Christians of the New Testament spontaneously communicated their faith to others so that the record of the New Testament is the story of a constantly expanding fellowship.

When we try to discern the actual means by which the new life was communicated we find that they fall into two groups. There is the obvious impact of the new life and fellowship of the Church upon the non-Christians; and there is the actual presentation of the message in preaching and teaching.

The new life offered through Christ was communicated largely by the moral and spiritual quality of the life and fellowship of the Church. In the New Testament this still remains spontaneous and unselfconscious. The disciples do not set out to impress others by the quality of their living. That was the aim of the Pharisees and it creates a very unpleasant kind of religion. It is a danger to which religion is ever exposed, and just where the moral demands of the gospel are most emphasized the

danger is greatest. The New Testament Church appears on the whole to have been happily free from this kind of self-righteousness. That made the witness of its members all the more impressive. Their words, on the whole, were centred on Christ and they were intent upon understanding and living His way; consequently they were not fully aware of the impression they were making upon their non-Christian neighbours, but that impression was all the more effective because of their lack of awareness. Peter and John do not act before the Jewish Council in order to impress the Council with their faith, but they seize the opportunity of bearing witness to Christ and were probably unaware that the Council was impressed by their "boldness". Stephen, facing an angry mob and the stones which they flung at him with unmoved serenity and praying that God will not lay the sin to their charge, is quite unaware of impressing his enemies and is intent only upon being faithful to Christ; but years afterwards Paul recalls vividly this scene: "when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by and consenting unto his death and kept the raiment of them that slew him" (Acts xxii, 20), and it obviously left its deep mark upon his life. When Paul came to Thessalonica he was intent there, as in every place, upon preaching the gospel so that he spent some weeks taking opportunity in the local synagogue to reason with them out of the Scriptures opening and alleging that the Messiah must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead and that therefore the Jesus whom he was proclaiming was the Messiah (Acts xvii, 3, 7); yet, as a result of this intense proclamation of the message of Christ, his personal impact upon them was so violent that he and his companions were described as men that had "turned the world upside down" (Acts xvii, 6). The point which these illustrations will

make clear is that the leaders of the New Testament Church did not set out to impress others by their lives or by their fellowship; they set out to proclaim Christ, but their proclamation was effective because of the largely unconscious Christlike quality of their lives. It was the life within which reproduced itself in others. In this, as in so much else, the disciples were faithfully following their Lord, for Jesus too communicated His message by a life. It was Jesus Himself who made the impact upon His hearers. He spoke with authority because the life of the Kingdom which He described and into which He invited His hearers to enter was embodied in Himself. The audience not only heard about it; they saw it before them. As the disciples said, "We beheld His glory." With Jesus and with His disciples it was true that life created life. The communication of the gospel was an inevitable process.

But this does not mean that the verbal communication of the message was unimportant. Far from it. The spoken word was powerless apart from the new quality of life and fellowship which bore testimony to the reality of what was proclaimed; but the proclamation declared the secret of the new life and invited others to accept it. It was upon the spoken word that the New Testament Church chiefly relied for the propagation of its message. Preaching and teaching occupied a prominent place in its activities.

In this again the Church followed its Master. Jesus came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The place of preaching in His ministry has been made clear in a previous chapter. His commission to His disciples was that they too should preach:—"Go ye therefore and teach all nations" (Matthew xxviii, 19). The work of preaching and teaching was given a foremost place in the activity of the Church. It was not

long before the apostles found themselves getting involved in the work of administration, but perceiving the implications of this, they made a plain statement to their fellow disciples: "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables" (Acts vi, 2). This decision indicates the supreme importance attached to preaching. The reply of the Church to the persecution which followed the martyrdom of Stephen and the consequent scattering of the Church members, was that wherever the Christians were driven they took the opportunity of "preaching the word". The record of Paul's missionary work is a story of persistent efforts to preach the gospel. Paul might be quoting some of the unpleasant talk which went on among a section of the church at Corinth when he speaks of his bodily presence being weak and his speech contemptible (2 Cor. x, 10), but the facts of his career and of the remarkable results which followed his preaching do not bear out this judgment; and it is evident that the apostle himself did not entirely accept it, for he undoubtedly regarded preaching as his main function. He says that "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. i, 17), and he makes the claim that the preaching of the cross is the power of God unto those who are saved (1 Cor. i, 18). This is not an idle phrase, for he repeats it in his statement that "it pleased God by the 'foolishness of preaching' to save them that believe" (1 Cor. i, 21). Just as Jesus, early in His ministry, deliberately linked His work of preaching with the Messianic hopes of His people by reading in the synagogue at Nazareth from Isaiah 61, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke iv, 18), and then claiming the fulfilment of the words in Himself, so setting His ministry in direct line with God's purpose through the ages, Paul in these verses in 1 Cor.

i, claims that the preaching of the apostles belongs to the saving purpose of God revealed in Christ. Indeed in his account to Agrippa of his conversion Paul uses language akin to that in which the work of the prophets is described in the Old Testament and so suggests that he was sent by God, as were the prophets, "to open the eyes" of the Gentiles, "to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God" (Acts xxvi, 18). It is on this high spiritual level that the Apostles placed the work of preaching. It is not just one activity among many Christian activities which those who may possess a gift for public speaking should exercise. It is the means appointed by God, in spite of all its limitations and "foolishness", by which the gospel of His love in Christ should be made known and salvation brought to mankind. Consequently the Christian preacher is conscious of standing in the line of God's eternal purpose of redemption, of being called by God for the task, and of being equipped not necessarily with a capacity for public speaking, but with a personal experience of the good news of Christ and of the new life in Him. Paul shares the experience of the Old Testament prophets again when he is aware of the inner compulsion to preach. Jeremiah, telling of his determination not to speak any more a message which is making him so unpopular and yet conscious of a fire burning within his bones so that irresistibly the words flame from his lips, and Paul crying out "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me: yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Cor. ix, 16), are both driven by the same inner compulsion, by the compelling awareness that their message belongs to the eternal purposes of God's justice and mercy and that, therefore, they must proclaim it at whatever cost. Paul knows that the gospel which he

preaches is the means by which men are saved (1 Cor. xv, 1, 2), and so he gives a summary of the gospel with its centre in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and ends his summary with the words: "So we preached and so ye believed" (1 Cor. xv, 11). That is the high responsibility of the preacher. He must be a faithful witness to the facts of God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ, and when he is thus faithful, his preaching awakens faith in his hearers so that he is responsible for them as spiritual children. Preaching in the New Testament Church was not allowed to descend to the delivery of pleasant homilies upon moral topics; it possessed the high dignity and moral grandeur of a prophetic word. It had the strength and magnitude of the eternal purpose. It vibrated with both tender and challenging notes as it brought men face to face with the risen Christ, with the judgment of the cross upon all unrighteous living and with the forgiveness inherent in that judgment. It created in the soul of the preacher an urgency which difficulties and perils could not daunt. Paul tells the Corinthian Christians that he desires "to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you" (2 Cor. x, 16), and to the Christians at Rome he says that he is "ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also" (Romans i, 15). His is the urgency which strives "to preach the gospel not where Christ was named" and which is always looking for new opportunities, so that not even Rome will form the boundary of his hopes, but he desires to press on also into Spain (Romans xv, 24). So with this inner compulsion and sense of urgency the Christian preacher gave his message, seeing often that his was a creative word; a word which was like the word of His Master, possessing a creative power which brought new life to men.

So far we have been thinking of the spirit in which

the Christian preacher went forth. In the actual performance of his task two main forms of the verbal communication of the gospel were developed. There was first the proclamation to the non-Christian. The preacher stood before his audience as a herald announcing important news to them. The stress here is upon the central facts of the gospel and their universal relevance. The message was made personal so that individuals in the audience would be challenged to respond. But after the hearer was converted he needed to be taught, so that the preacher then had to become the teacher. The Epistles of the New Testament fall mainly into this category of the teaching, in which the gospel is expounded to instruct the faith of the believer and is related to the problems both of the individual and of the Church. Luke ends his story of the Acts of the Apostles with the mention of these two forms of the verbal communication of the gospel as he pictures Paul dwelling for two years in Rome "preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence no man forbidding him" (Acts xxviii, 31). The necessities of the work meant that gradually these different functions were taken over by people with different gifts so that when Ephesians is written there are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians iv, 11). But even the development of these different offices is in itself a testimony to the importance given to the spoken word. This importance was not the result of conscious thought or planning. It was the outcome of the Christian experience of new life. For what is living begets life. And Christianity is life! It began with the living man Jesus. Its nature was manifest in the resurrection, the life triumphant over death. Its acceptance brought to men a new quality of personal living and of fellowship

with one another. Consequently, like all forms of life, it had to find modes of expression; and so, following the example of Jesus, it found baptism as the most adequate, and it had to propagate itself and communicate its vitality. So this new life flowed out in preaching and its vitality awakened others. And all this derived from a new personal relationship with God the Father made possible through Jesus Christ, for true life is never just an individual awakening, but is always a real relationship. The wonder of this new relationship constantly filled the Christian soul:—"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John iii, 1); "Hereby perceive we the love of God because He laid down His life for us" (1 John iii, 16); "Scarcely for a righteous man would one die, but God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans v, 7, 8). That is the wonder of the new life. And because the new relationship with God has been established, it means a new relationship with men:—"If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John iv, 11). A new life and a new fellowship! "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar" (1 John iv, 20). With such irresistible clarity were the relationships of the new life perceived. With such simple words the disciples insisted that the new life is marked by obedience to the Spirit of Christ. Christianity is indeed abundant life.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

As soon as we begin to deal with the theme of this chapter we meet the difficulties caused by the fact that in many minds the word "Church" already possesses a fixed meaning. Consequently we must remember that in the New Testament the word has not the rigid, definite meanings which have become attached to it in succeeding centuries. Then, too, questions leap to the mind as we pass from our consideration of the new life of the individual to the theme of the Church; and so we remind ourselves that we have won a definite approach to such questions. We are following the spiritual experiences and experiments occasioned by the gospel of the Kingdom proclaimed in and through Jesus, and so we approach every real question not as an isolated problem, but from this point of view.

For example, the question is still sometimes asked: did Jesus intend to found the Church? Those who are members of the Church argue that this was the intention of Jesus and often their arguments are developed to show that their particular form of ecclesiastical organisation most clearly fulfils the intention of Jesus. Those who are not members of the Church, if they think about the question at all, tend to argue that Jesus did not purpose the Church because that in some ways justifies their own indifference to it. But both attitudes often miss the real answer to the question, because it is so easily assumed that the Church is something which commenced after the resurrection of Jesus as an instrument for the work of His disciples—or as an addition to the real gospel.

Again the question is often asked : in what way is the Church related to the Kingdom of God? It is pointed out that the Kingdom of God is the dominant theme of the message of Jesus, but the Church occupies much of the thought of the apostles where the Kingdom is mentioned only infrequently. Does this mean that interest in the Church displaced concern for the Kingdom? or that the work of the Church is of immediately practical import while the Kingdom is to be expected with the return of Christ? or is it that the Church is the instrument by which the Kingdom will be established, or by which mankind will be prepared for the coming of the Kingdom?

We must not minimize the importance of such questions. On the other hand we must not overlook the assumptions upon which such questions are based. For it is clear that these questions arise when we think of the "Kingdom" and the "Church" as two separate entities, each existing in and by itself and so creating a problem of relationship. But that is a misunderstanding of their true nature. We cannot properly set them over against each other. We are mistaking the whole witness of the New Testament if we picture Jesus proclaiming a definite state of society which is called the Kingdom of God and then devising an instrument which is called the Church to achieve it. When we are carried along by the flow of developing and living experiences which arise from the springs of the gospel, we know that we are not looking at little stagnant canals of thought and organisation each made according to some human pattern and linked together by human plans; we are conscious rather of the swift movement, the flowing continuity, the ever fresh aspects opening before us, the all embracing sweep of the current of the Spirit bearing us to the ocean of life's fulfilment in God. Within such a movement, can we

define how one part of the stream is related to another, how the spring is related to the ocean, how the flow of the stream is related to the fact that the stream is always there? This is no plea for us to avoid real questions. It is rather a plea that we shall approach them in a right way, for both the importance of the question and the answer we suggest to it depend so often upon the manner of our approach.

All this is relevant to questions about the nature of the Church. It should be obvious from what has been written in previous pages that the gospel proclaimed by and through Jesus implies the fellowship of His disciples. Fellowship is inherent in the good news of the Kingdom of God. It has been pointed out that the life of the Kingdom is a whole. The relationships of life belong together. Consequently the new relationship with God into which Christ leads those who accept Him implies at one and the same time a new relationship with one's fellow men. We cannot isolate our relationships; they belong together.

All this is simply saying that, for Jesus religion is personal, and not individual. There is no such thing as individual salvation. Jesus certainly offers His message to men one by one. He certainly tells the story of the shepherd who leaves the ninety and nine sheep in the fold in order to seek the one lost sheep. He certainly calls for an individual response to His message. But He never regards men as isolated units. They are separated from their brethren because they are separated from the Father, and they are separated from the Father because they are separated from their brethren. Jesus is not concerned merely with an individual's relationship to God, and the salvation He offers is not just saving an individual from sin and bringing him into fellowship with the Father, because that is an impossibility. Jesus

is concerned to bring people into their true life as persons, and we become persons only through our recognition and acceptance of other persons and of our relationships with them; and this is possible only through an acceptance of a personal relationship with the Divine Person, with God our Father. When the shepherd has found his one sheep and brought him back he puts him in the fold with the ninety and nine! Or to use another picture from the teaching of Jesus, when a man realises through the love of God that he is really a child of God, he realises too that he belongs to the family of God. The verses in John xv, 9-12, reflect this intermingling of relationships; but it is apparent in the whole teaching of Jesus, for it is of the nature of the Kingdom of God. The good news of the kingdom is an opening up of the world of personal relationships which is man's true life.

It is quite evident then that the gospel Jesus proclaimed implies fellowship among men. This is a significant point for our understanding of the nature of the Church and its place in the development of the Christian movement. It means that a fellowship on the human level, of actual people who would do things together, belongs to the life of the Kingdom of God and was inherent from the very beginning in the proclamation of the good news. Once we perceive this fact, we see very clearly why Jesus called twelve men "to be with Him". The appointment of the disciples was not a convenient way of extending His ministry or an embryo organisation by which His ministry might be carried on in the future. The calling together of a group of men to share with Him in this new life and work was a necessary implication of His message of personal relationships. Jesus had to create a fellowship of disciples because of the gospel which He proclaimed. He had also to centre the fellowship upon Himself. He could call them in no other

terms than "Follow Me"; for this personal response to Himself was the initiation and pattern of their response to God and of God's love to them. "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you". The personal relationship was the essential. Fellowship is inherent in the gospel and a denial of friendship is a denial of the gospel.

What we have striven to show, so far, is that the fellowship of the disciples was an essential part of the proclamation of the gospel, i.e., of Christ's saving work. But it is just this fellowship to which the word "Church" is given, so that the point we are making is really this: that the gospel decides the nature of the Church. We have to understand the nature of the Church in terms of the gospel of Christ. The apostles naturally spoke more about the Church in the later years of their experience, for it was just this fellowship among men which grew and presented many problems needing their attention, but they never lost their realisation that this expanding fellowship grew out of their inner fellowship with God. Yet they had to find terms in which to express this expanding life. We see something of their problem as they try to find a word which will express the power binding them to God and to one another. The normal words for "love", all had the wrong association and a rather modest word had to be baptized into Christian usage, and *agape* was used for this new power of love. In similar manner a word had to be found for the fellowship with one another which belonged to this new Christian life. The chosen word was the Greek word *ecclesia* with its literal sense of being called out and its association through the Septuagint with the community of Israel with whom God had originally established His Covenant. There was the word then! But what they meant by the word was suggested by the new

experiences into which Christ had led them. It was the gospel which delineated for them the nature of the Church

Consequently the New Testament Church is essentially a fellowship. It possesses the marks of true life—spontaneity, growth, experiment, warmth, vitality. The apostles, understanding the nature of the Church as a fellowship, are careful to keep a personal confession to Christ as the only condition of membership. We must remember, of course, that a confession of Christ implied an understanding response to the proclamation of the gospel, evidenced by some tokens of Christian character and of Christian fellowship. Inner spiritual changes were implied in confessing Christ, but when these had occurred the believer belonged to the fellowship of the Church. This apostolic insistence upon a personal confession of Christ, as well as their firm refusal to accept any external conditions, is clearest evidence of their understanding of the nature of the Church as a fellowship whose life one shares through being brought by Christ into new fellowship with the Father.

This position was not maintained without struggle. There are always those who fear to trust the Spirit of God and are shocked by the teaching that the Spirit possesses in His activity the freedom of the wind. Hence the persistent temptation to canalise the Spirit in methods, organisations and orders and to exalt these to an undue position, and regard them as the essence of the Church. It was not long before the apostles met this fear and were compelled to make decisions about conditions for belonging to the Church.

The experiences of leaders at Jerusalem, of which an account is given in Acts 15, is an illustration. A number of Jewish Christians wanted to make the Jewish rite of circumcision obligatory upon all Christians, so that

when a Gentile became a member of the Christian Church he would have to accept these Jewish rites as well. The assembled leaders completely refused to make any external conditions for membership of the Church and, confident that their decision "seemed good to the Holy Spirit" as well as to themselves, they demanded of the Gentile Christian "no greater burden" than certain moral stipulations. All that they emphasized was that being a Christian meant a complete break from paganism; but this, of course, was implicit in the confession, "Jesus is Lord", and was not the imposition of any external obligation.

Again Paul's letter to the Galatians was occasioned by a similar situation among the churches in that area. The members of the churches were being disturbed by certain teachers of the Jewish-Christian group who were demanding that Christians should keep all the regulations of the Jewish law. Paul will have nothing at all to do with this attitude which he regards as a complete denial of the Christian gospel. "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" he cries (Galatians iii, 1). He reminds them that being Christians means that they are no longer servants before God trying to obey a series of regulations, but they are sons who trust in the Father (Galatians iv, 6, 7). Consequently they live in the freedom of the family of God and must not place themselves again in spiritual bondage. All their talk about external obligations in addition to faith in Christ, their attempts to make observance of "days and months and times and years" a necessary part of Christianity, is really bringing themselves into bondage to the "weak and beggarly elements" from which they have been delivered. So Paul makes his appeal, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Galatians v, 1). Faith in

Christ is the only condition for sharing the fellowship of the Church and being counted as a member.

Again the situation arose in the church at Colosse. Here, however, the attempt to impose extraneous obligations upon the members of the church arose not from Jewish-Christian teachers, but from pagan teachers. There were those who wished to amalgamate pagan philosophies with Christian doctrine. For them Jesus was the supremely wise man who took His place among other wise teachers. Consequently the fullest religion is to be found in a syncretism of all philosophies. This was then extended to include pagan practices also. To practise asceticism, to be strict in what one ate and drank, to be careful about the observance of sacred seasons, appeared to indicate the reality of religion, and so those who did all this could regard themselves as on a higher spiritual level than their fellow-Christians who just trusted in Christ. But Paul will have none of it. He says bluntly, "Ye are complete in Him" (Colossians ii, 10). When a man places his trust in Christ and lets his life be controlled by the Spirit of Christ he needs nothing more to make him a real Christian. There are no different spiritual levels. There is no moral superiority. God has given in Christ all that is needful for a man to enter the life of His Kingdom. There may be a "show of wisdom" in trying to keep a lot of human "ordinances" about the religious life, but all "the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are really hid in Christ, so that to know Him and trust Him is all that is needful.

These illustrations are sufficient to show how strenuously and persistently the apostles resisted any attempt to impose upon people any external condition or obligation; and in this we may perceive how clearly the apostles understood the nature of the Church as the fellowship

of those who through Christ live as the sons of God. Everywhere in the New Testament the Church appears as a living organism which cannot be bound by any one form of organisation or system. It is a living fellowship deriving its life from personal and corporate communion with God the Father and expressing that life in brotherly love. Whoever has entered through Christ into the new life of fellowship with God and has shown the reality of that experience by a confession of the Lordship of Christ, by personal evidence of His Spirit in character and conduct and by being baptized is accepted as belonging to the fellowship which is the Church. These were the essentials—and only the essentials were required.

From these illustrations we will turn now to the New Testament letter which is most concerned with this theme of the nature of the Church, the Epistle to the Ephesians, and here we shall find the same emphasis upon fellowship.

The Church is described as the body of which Christ is the head (Ephesians i, 22, 23). This at once suggests the picture of a living organism. This living organism has been brought into being by God as the vehicle of His eternal and redemptive purposes. So Paul describes these purposes. He tells us that the purpose of God is that "we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (i, 4); that we should experience "the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself" (i, 5); and this purpose of bringing men and women into fellowship is not limited to any one people, it is universal. That leads Paul to remind his Gentile readers of the love of God shown to them personally and of the manner in which Christ has exercised a ministry of reconciliation both in bringing sinful man into fellowship with God and in bringing separated men into fellowship with one another:—"He is our peace who hath made both one" (ii, 14).

That means that through Him all men, both Jews and Gentiles, have "access unto the Father" (ii, 18), and are "therefore no more strangers and foreigners" but are "fellow citizens" and "of the household of God" (ii, 19). Here is the familiar picture of the family which seems inescapable in the New Testament teaching about the Church. The whole theme of the Epistle is this gracious purpose of God made known in Christ to bring all men into fellowship with Himself and with one another. God will "gather together in one all things in Christ" (i, 10). He will make the Gentiles "fellow heirs and of the same body" (iii, 6). He will work by His Spirit "till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man" (iv, 13). In every sentence is reflected Paul's consciousness of a spiritual fellowship. God is establishing a new and intimate relationship with Himself and that new relationship, made possible by the love revealed through Christ crucified and sustained by the power revealed in the resurrection, is breaking down barriers and healing divisions, so that new relationships are established among men. Here is the life of the Kingdom—the pattern of the ultimate destiny of mankind. This experience of fellowship is so much in the forefront of the apostle's mind that when he speaks of the relationship between husband and wife he thinks immediately of Christ and the Church, for the spiritual relationships which are the true nature of the Church, are essentially personal, like the relationship of husband and wife; and the relationships of marriage are truly guided by the pattern of fellowship in the Church.

The thought of the Epistle is then in line with the theme which we are developing. The language of Ephesians may be more complicated than the language of the Synoptic Gospels, but behind the language are the

same experiences and understanding of fellowship; and it is in these terms that the nature of the Church is conceived.

The nature of the Church is inherent in the gospel which the apostles received from their Master. That gospel is a declaration of the Kingdom of God, of the personal relationships which constitute the life of the Kingdom and of the possibility for every man of entering the Kingdom. Since the life of the Kingdom includes man's relationship with his fellow men, Jesus formed the fellowship of the disciples in order to exhibit that life. The reality of the Kingdom of God is found among the disciples. And as long as their lives continue to be controlled by the Spirit of God so that they fulfil the command of Jesus to love one another, so long is the life of the Kingdom to be found among them. Fellowship is, therefore, the essential nature of the Church and a demonstration of the life of the Kingdom. The fellowship of the Church is the place where the life of the Kingdom is to be found, where it is to be seen.

But the new relationships of the Kingdom are not to be limited to fellow believers. Nothing is more plain in the teaching of Jesus than the fact that these new relationships are unlimited. Jesus said, "Love your enemies". The relationship is no longer to be that of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Anyone in need becomes a man's neighbour with a claim upon him; and the claim of need is to take precedence of natural, racial or ecclesiastical claims. A man's attitude to Christ is truly indicated by his attitude to his fellowmen and his willingness to accept the claim of need. Where he does accept the claim and ministers to the hungry or the thirsty, he is doing it unto Christ. This principle was recognised in the New Testament Church. The fellowship of the Church was kept open to all and the principle

of caring for fellow members was preserved. The church at Antioch sent relief to the Christians in Jerusalem (Acts xi, 27-30). The churches of the Gentiles responded to Paul's appeal for gifts for the church as Jerusalem. The attitude of wealthy brethren in Corinth who disregarded the need of poorer brethren is sternly rebuked by Paul. The Philippian church sent gifts frequently to Paul to help him in difficult times. Paul writes to the Galatians, "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Galatians vi, 10). James gives his definition of "pure religion and undefiled" in the following significant terms, "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James i, 27). John puts love to one's fellow men in the forefront of his message, and by the word "love" he means caring in practical ways. "Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and truth" (1 John iii, 18). He quotes what he calls a "commandment": "That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John iv, 21). As if to emphasize the practical implication of love, he writes "Whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John iii, 17). When we examine the practice of the Church we see that these principles were put into effect as far as the Christian had personal opportunity. The endeavour to do good unto all men became characteristic of the life of the Church. The application of the principle to social problems was not of course attempted, for the Church was too small a minority in the Roman Empire, was too absorbed in the essential task of making Christ known and developing its own understanding of life in Christ, and was on the whole living in expectation of the return

of Christ. The social application of the new relationships of the Kingdom of God was a task which the Church faced at a later stage of its growth, and continues to face ; but in the New Testament Church the principle of caring for all men was fully grasped. It was seen that this caring was an essential expression of the new life in Christ, that being reconciled to God and living as a child of the Father meant regarding one's fellow men as brothers and treating them as such. This was an extension towards the non-Christian of that reality of fellowship which was known so much more fully within the Christian circles. Thus the attitude of members of the Church to those who were outside the Church shows also how they regarded the nature of the Church.

The gospel proclaimed by Jesus sets the pattern for the life of the Church. The Church is the communion of the Holy Spirit ; the fellowship of believing men and women, who through their new relationship with God the Father made possible by Jesus Christ, are living, worshipping and serving in new relationships with one another and, as far as in them lies, with all men.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

IT has been maintained in the previous chapter that the nature of the Church is established by the gospel given in and through Jesus. When we turn from a consideration of the nature of the Church to a survey of the function of the Church, the same basic principle holds good. The activities of the New Testament Church were, on the whole, controlled by the gospel. It is possible, of course, to find in the life of the Church traces of the influence of the environment in which the Church grew. The Church was not wholly separate from its surroundings, nor did members of the Church forget their past whether Jewish or pagan when they entered the Christian fellowship. But the activities of the Church were not a copy of the activities of religious bodies or social clubs around them. Their activities were distinctively Christian. In all their essentials the functions of the Church were an expression of the message which the Church proclaimed.

This does not mean that the apostles always directed the activities of the Church by a conscious reference to the gospel. The gospel was not regarded in that way at all. It was not a standard whereby lives or activities or organisations might be judged. It was not a pattern to which everything must be rigidly conformed. It was essentially a new life and new relationships. But all life must find its modes of expression; the more vigorous the life, the more definite will be its manner of expression. What happened in the New Testament Church was that the new life in Christ, experienced by a

constantly increasing number of people who came from very different ways of life and habits of personal and social behaviour, flowed out into certain functions and activities; and these had a common and recognisable pattern in spite of the infinite variety of people engaged in them. This common pattern was not the result of deliberate planning by the apostles and the strict imposition of orders decided upon by a supreme authority. The example of the conference of Christian leaders in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15, at which a decision was reached concerning the entry of the Gentiles into the Church, does not seem to have been repeated. The Church of the New Testament had no central organisation which decided the forms of worship for the whole Church or issued directions concerning the activities of the Church. The common pattern is rather the outward expression of common spiritual experiences. The new life in Christ was the same whoever experienced it and so it found similar modes of expression. Consequently when we study the worship of the Church, or its celebration of the Lord's Supper, or its practical activities of Christian service, or the administration of its fellowship, once again we are discerning the inner life of the Church. These are ways in which the life expressed itself. These are ways in which the central dynamic of the Christian fellowship, love for Christ, manifested its power. What holds our interest then is not so much the outward forms, and certainly not the aberrations which occurred here and there, but rather the common pattern of the Church's activities through which we may see the inner spiritual vitality of the fellowship.

It will be convenient to group the activities of the Church under the three themes: worship, service, administration. This does not include all the work of preaching and teaching which was one of the main

activities of the Church, for this has been dealt with in preceding pages.

1. *Worship*

Immediately after their experiences of the risen Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit the disciples of Jesus met for prayer and the breaking of bread. The account of the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 is followed by what appears to be a summary of the life of the Church during that initial period:—"They continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts ii, 42). The new life creates the new fellowship, and fellowship implies certain activities. Meeting together was an obvious thing to do. It was what the disciples of Jesus wanted to do. The intense experience of the love of God communicated through Jesus, the sense of release from doubt, from fear, from persecution, from frustration, the awareness of the meaning and purpose of life, made those who shared these things wish to associate with one another. Meeting together was the natural outcome of these experiences. When the disciples were together, it was inevitable that certain acts should take place. The desire to know more about Jesus was strong so that those who had known Him would be in the position of teachers, and this recounting of what Jesus had said and done and suffered, together with the significance of these happenings, would occupy a large part of the time of the gathering. But since all shared in this new life, the desire to take an active part in the fellowship was strong. Prayer takes a prominent place, for the awareness of spiritual powers available to believers is so intense.

These informal and intense meetings soon developed into more regular habits of worship. The decision to abandon the Jewish Sabbath must have been taken early,

if not from the beginning; perhaps no definite decision was ever taken. The disciples simply made the day of resurrection a special day so that it became inevitably the day for Christian worship and fellowship. The new life centred in the resurrection, and it was unquestioned that the "first day of the week" should be a particular day of remembrance and rejoicing. That in itself was an event of real significance for it marked the separation of Christianity from Judaism, as well as preserving the centrality of resurrection and life in the Christian fellowship.

But the emphasizing of a special day in the week and the development of regular habits of worship meant that the worship became rather less informal, though it retained its simplicity. There seems to have been no attempt whatsoever to repeat the sacrificial and priestly system of the Jewish Temple in Christian worship; that was a later stage in the development of the worship of the Church. The conviction that Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament dispensation, that He was the sacrifice offered "once for all", made any attempt to reproduce on Christian lines the Old Testament system of sacrifices unnecessary. If there was any imitation at all, it was rather of the Synagogue worship with its simple pattern of prayers, the reading of Scripture and its exposition. The forms of worship were not particularly important. It was the centre of worship that mattered; and the centre was Jesus Christ. That was something wholly new. From that new centre came a new spirit. Because Christianity was a new life and the new life was the gift of a gracious God, therefore, the spirit of worship is gratitude. There is some reason to believe that the Epistles reflect much of the atmosphere of Christian fellowship and worship. They were written, on the whole, to churches and were intended to be read to

them. Paul evidently regards his letters as a substitute for his actual presence, and as he writes them no doubt he imagined himself standing before the assembled church. Consequently his style became that of the preacher and pastor. He counsels, he teaches, he warns, he pleads, he challenges. His language is that of the speaker in contact with his audience. And sometimes he prays! We seem to move in the atmosphere of worship. We catch echoes of the Church at worship—of the passages of the Old Testament which were frequently quoted, of the prayers that were uttered, perhaps of the hymns that were sung, and of the benediction with which the worship closed. If it is true then that the Epistles do bring to us something of the spirit and atmosphere of the worship of the Church, the note of gratitude is very obvious. It sounds through every Epistle—even those which deal with difficult situations and problems. Whatever the failures and shortcomings of the Church might be, there is always the thought of the love of God in Jesus Christ, of the surpassing wonder of the cross and the resurrection, of the “unspeakable gift” of Jesus, of the joy of the eternal life given in Him. Gratitude to God is the dominant note of the Christian life and so of Christian worship. It may well be that Paul is quoting the lines of a Christian hymn in Ephesians v, 14 :—“Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light”, and so he goes on to speak about worship which is guided by the spirit of Christ. It means “speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord: giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians v. 19, 20). Similarly in his letter to the Colossians where the reference to worship seems even more direct :—“Let

the peace of God rule in your hearts to the which also ye are called in one body : and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom : teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him " (Colossians iii, 15-17). If these verses reflect the spirit of Christian worship in the New Testament there can be no doubt about the dominance of a joyful gratitude. But how could it be otherwise? When a man is brought from the " kingdom of darkness " into the kingdom of God's " dear Son ", when he is released from the " bondage of fear " and knows himself to be in fellowship with the Father, when he is sure that he has passed from death into life and will not again come under condemnation for now he is at peace with God, then whenever he thinks of this grace of God his soul is lifted up with thanksgiving. Christocentric worship is bound to let gratitude be the dominant note. Always the praises, which in the Book of Revelation are sung in heaven, sound in Christian worship. " Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof : for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation ; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests ; and we shall reign on the earth " (Rev. v, 9, 10). " Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing " (Rev. v, 12).

It is not surprising that the intensity of these new experiences should sometimes lead to emotional excesses. Paul has to say to the Christians at Corinth. " Let all things be done decently and in order " (1 Corinthians xiv, 40). He makes a plea for the exercise of the

judgment, of what we call "common sense" in worship, so that the message shall be given in a manner intelligible to the non-Christian. The Christians are not to be "children in understanding but only in malice"; in understanding they are to be mature (1 Corinthians xiv, 22). "Let all things be done for edifying" is the principle which is to guide worship. The necessity for this principle to be stated so clearly and emphatically is itself an indication of the fervour of worship and of the eagerness of many to share vocally in the worship. Paul will not in any way restrain the intensity of Christian experience; he will not damp down the ardour of gratitude; nor will he allow it to run to extremes. But even as he writes to the Christians in Corinth about the externals of worship and how Christians should conduct themselves he begins to remember the gospel which is proclaimed in worship, so he turns from his discussion of external matters to an exposition of the message from which all worship flows. The note of joy begins to sound in his voice as he says "Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, and wherein ye stand" (1 Cor. xv, 1). Here is the heart of Christian worship. The forms are relatively unimportant as long as things are done "decently and in order"; with that mild statement which allows freedom and variety in form of worship, Paul turns eagerly to the message, to the experience of the risen Christ, to the glorious centre of the Christian faith. His spirit now begins to soar, as so often it did in the fellowship of the Church, as he recounts personal experiences of the risen Christ, then meets doubts about the resurrection and feels again the moral quickening to which the resurrection calls—"Awake to righteousness and sin not" (1 Cor. xv, 34), and so tries to grasp the nature of this eternal life until he is led from the personal

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to the universal and to the ultimate victory of God in which death itself shall disappear. And that brings him to his joyous cry, "Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ". There it is! That is the note of Christian worship. Christianity centres in the victory of Christ over pain and sin and death. Faith is a sharing of that victory. To be a Christian is to live in triumph: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John v, 4). "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John xvi, 33). Worship is the expressing and renewing of this experience. Within the Christian fellowship at prayer and worship the disciple of Christ felt again the certainty of this victory and rejoiced in the love of God from which "neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth" could ever separate him. Whatever difficulties he encountered in his daily living, and often they were very real; whatever doubts assailed him, in worship he was renewed in his faith, he found again the certainty of the love of God, and he rejoiced in the salvation wrought for him by Christ.

It was natural that this Christocentric worship should find its climax in the observance of the Lord's Supper. Here was an act which united the disciples with the events of the earthly ministry of Jesus. It is in the Lord's Supper that we notice an apparent emphasis upon the form of the service, for it is evident that in the majority of the churches the service followed the same order, and the same words were used. In 1 Corinthians xi, verses 23-26, Paul seems to be quoting words which had already acquired this set form and he himself says that he delivered to the churches what he had received; just as

in his summary of the gospel in 1 Cor. xv, 34, he says that he has delivered what he had first received. But it may well be that the form of words used at the Lord's Supper was fixed, not because importance was attached to the ordering of the service, but because the words were so frequently repeated, and enshrined the words which Jesus Himself had used in the Upper Room. It was natural that the strong love for Christ which was the centre of worship should desire to hear His actual words when His actual deed of breaking bread and pouring wine was being repeated. This emphasis upon the use of the same words is therefore an indication of the delight of the disciples in remembering Jesus, in having before them a clear, definite picture of Him in the Upper Room.

But this remembrance of Him was no looking back into the past. Their remembrances of His earthly ministry and suffering increased their anticipation of His return. They were sharing the Lord's death "until He come". Here is a true echo of the Upper Room where Jesus had said, "I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the Kingdom of God" (Mark xiv, 25). Jesus associated His death and resurrection with the coming of His Kingdom. He was opening the door into the Kingdom. He was the door. Consequently every thought of Him is a thought of His kingdom—a reminder of its eternal life and an awakening of anticipation, of sharing completely in that eternal life.

The remembrance of the past cannot therefore be separated from anticipation of the future. Yet both these directions of thought gained their reality from a realisation of the presence of Christ in the act of worship. The breaking of bread and the pouring of wine was repeated not only because the Lord had said, "This do in remembrance of me," but also because the disciples

found that in this act Christ was in the midst. His first disciples had experienced His risen presence in the Upper Room. They could never forget that moment when they were assembled in Jerusalem after the death and burial of Jesus. It was the evening of the first day of the week and the bewildering news of an empty tomb and a risen Presence was still perplexing their minds; then Jesus stood in the midst and said, "Peace be unto you". These experiences of the presence of the living Christ became inextricably mingled with the breaking of bread and the pouring of wine. They were all experiences of Jesus in the Upper Room. So it became easy for the disciples to think of Jesus whenever bread was broken or a meal shared. The two who walked to Emmaus remembered the stranger who shared the walk, and the meal at the end of it, when the stranger who sat at meat with them "took bread and blessed it and brake and gave to them" (Luke xxiv, 30). Almost unconsciously the familiar language of the Lord's Supper is used. They remembered how in the breaking of bread "their eyes were opened and they knew Him". That happened so often! At the Lord's Supper the disciples realised afresh the presence of their living Lord and they told one another "how He was known of them in the breaking of bread" (Luke xxiv, 35).

Consequently the Lord's Supper was a renewing of faith. To remember the Lord, to anticipate His return in glory, to realise His presence, meant the dispelling of shadows and fears, the reinvigorating of faith. Just as physical strength is renewed when hunger is satisfied by a good meal, so spiritual strength comes again when the hunger of the soul is satisfied with "the living bread". John accurately describes the thoughts and experiences of the Communion Service in the words in John vi, 51 :—
 "I am the living bread which came down from heaven ;

if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever and the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world." Christ came to give life, and as the disciples experienced His Presence, their awareness of life within deepened. They were conscious in themselves of the vitality of Christ. "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in Me, and I in him" (John vi, 56). The act of eating and drinking brought this intimate, personal fellowship, and within this fellowship the disciples felt the reality of eternal life. The Lord's Supper brought this renewing of faith.

Whether we consider the worship with its emphasis upon preaching and teaching, or the Lord's Supper, we find that there is no attempt to make fixed and rigid forms, but all the emphasis is upon the inner experiences of the presence of Christ. When the disciples pray or sing, speak or listen, break the bread and share the cup, their minds are centring upon Christ who died and rose again; they are conscious of the warm, personal, living fellowship which they have with the unseen and with one another. They gather in the name of Christ—and He is in the midst. Whatever they do it is "that God in all things, may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever" (1 Peter iv, 11).

2. *Service*

The gospel brings a man into a twofold relationship. Consequently the Christian fellowship maintains the opportunity of worship, for thus the relationship with God develops; but it also creates ways of service, for thus the relationship with man is expressed. When we study the forms of service in the New Testament Church we realise how consistently this new relationship among men was expressed. The activities of the Church are not the organised meetings and projects of many a

modern church; they are far more spontaneous activities suggested by personal needs and the awareness of opportunities to do good to men and women. When the New Testament Church seeks to express its faith in deeds it begins to care for actual people, to meet real needs in a real, personal manner. All this personal work of caring happens because of the gospel of the Kingdom committed to the church by Jesus.

In the teaching of Jesus Himself the work of caring for one's fellow men is constantly urged as the inevitable corollary of trust in God. The word "love" as Jesus uses it always has this personal and practical element. The word of Jesus quoted in Luke vi, 27, 28, indicates the practical nature of love: "Love your enemies; do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you". Here are two parallel series of words; one set of words indicating the people who show the wrong relationship and the other set suggesting the reaction which Jesus expects His disciples to make to such people. It is illuminating to put the words of this series together: "love—do good—bless—pray for". At once the practical nature of "love" is evident. In the parable of the Good Samaritan the word "love" is not mentioned, but the whole parable illustrates the word. It is obvious that here "love" means the recognition of human need and the willingness to care for anyone in need. Love is caring for others and caring for them without any other motive than that of a desire to minister to their need. The whole ministry of Jesus with its deeds of healing is an illustration of this caring. Such activities are an integral part of the gospel. In them the life of the Kingdom is being expressed and experienced.

We must not overlook, therefore, the importance of such activities in the life of the New Testament Church.

Where this work of caring receives its proper place, the gospel is really understood and accepted. Where this work of caring is displaced or ignored for the sake of ecclesiastical politics or questions of order and authority in the organisation of the Church, then the gospel is not properly accepted, the life of the Kingdom is not being experienced. So we must not take for granted the humanitarian impulse of the New Testament Church. We must not attribute this to a naive and unformed Christianity which as it grew more mature would pay more attention to the theological formulation of the faith and the ecclesiastical organisation of the fellowship. On the contrary it may well be that these tasks, although important for the life of the Church, have at times been allowed undue prominence so that the fundamental truth has been overlooked that caring for one's fellow men is an essential of the gospel, that just as worship is the expression of our relationship to God, so deeds of caring are the expression of our relationship with our fellow men.

The New Testament Church did not forget this truth. It did not allow it to be subordinated or submerged. It directed its activities into ways and deeds of personal caring because that is the gospel. It is in this way that we must interpret the sharing of material possessions in the Jerusalem church. The members cared for one another and were concerned that none should want. When the administration of the common property became too cumbersome for the apostles to deal with, they chose seven deacons; they did not suggest that the work of the deacons was of less importance than their work. They simply, and wisely, recognised that as eye-witnesses of the resurrection their function in the Church was that of proclaiming the message; but since that message involved caring for one's fellow men, this growing burden

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of work could not be avoided by bidding each member look after his own affairs, but must be accepted as a proper part of the fellowship of the church. Therefore, other members of the church must be appointed to give oversight to this work of mutual caring. It is significant that the young church in Antioch which consisted so largely of non-Jewish members (Acts xi, 20, 21) resolves to send relief to the Christians in Jerusalem as soon as news of the famine there is received (Acts xi, 27-30). To care for others in spite of racial and cultural differences, was the natural thing for a Christian church to do; but the fact that a Gentile church so young in the faith as the church in Antioch should have responded so wholeheartedly to the need of others, shows how clearly the truth was grasped that caring for one's fellow men is an integral part of the gospel. Again Paul considered it part of his apostolic work to organise among the Gentile churches a vast collection for the brethren in Judea, and the churches evidently responded to his appeal. He had himself experienced the practical generosity of the church at Philippi which, he says, did well to "communicate with my affliction" (Phil. iv, 14). Apparently they sent frequently to the apostle, "Ye sent once and again to my necessity" (Phil. iv, 16). So in writing to the Christians at Corinth, Paul is able to mention the practical generosity of the Christians in Macedonia who were eager to show the reality of Christian fellowship by ministering to the needs of others and to urge that the Christians at Corinth shall show a like generosity; and the apostle feels no difficulty in passing from this appeal for help to needy brethren to a reminder of the self-giving of Jesus, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty, might become rich" (2 Cor. viii, 9). All the

relationships of the Kingdom are intermingled so that it is possible to pass immediately from relief to the brethren to the grace of God in Christ, for both belong to the life of the Kingdom. Paul gives emphatic expression to this aspect of the abundant life when he organises his relief for the Christians in Judea.

The spirit of brotherliness is the true Christian spirit. Jesus leaves us in no doubt about that. He was most stern in his condemnation of unbrotherliness, because blindness to or rejection of the claims of human need implies insensitiveness also to God our Father. The apostles copy the teaching of their Master. The disciple of Christ is one who distributes to the necessity of saints, who is given to hospitality, who rejoices with them that do rejoice and weeps with them that weep (Romans xii, 13-15). The sustained theological argument of the letter to the Galatians leads on to the injunction, "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (chap. vi, 2). "As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (chap. vi, 10). The theme of the letter to the Hebrews would seem to be far removed from the practical work of mutual caring yet, as the writer in conclusion bids his readers to offer the sacrifice of praise to God, he remembers that there is another sacrifice God desires and that is "to do good" and to share with others. This is "letting brotherly love continue". Peters bids his readers "use hospitality one to another without grudging" (1 Peter iv, 9). John makes brotherly love one of his main themes and he means love in "deed and in truth".

Through all these illustrations and injunctions, we perceive a fellowship of Christian people in which this practical work of caring had its proper place. Christian service was interpreted in these personal terms. The

work of the Church did not lie in the arranging of a multitude of social functions in order to bring people together. The life of the Church was not allowed to flow into the shallow channel of committees and assemblies and endless meetings. The service of Christ meant largely either communicating the gospel of Christ by preaching and teaching or expressing the Spirit of Christ by personal deeds of caring. The Church had a sensitive awareness of the needs of its own members and was ready to minister to them. Perhaps the loveliest expression of this work of caring is afforded in the story of Paul and Onesimus, for it is evident that the apostle did more than proclaim the gospel to this runaway slave. He must have looked after him, perhaps fed and clothed him, given him shelter and friendship. The bonds which made Onesimus a "brother beloved" were secured on all levels of life. Paul is not content to rescue the slave, win him for Christ and make him a member of the Church. Paul cares for his future too and so makes sure that he will be received by Philemon into his house and be recognised there as a Christian brother although he is still a slave. In such incidents as these we see one of the main functions of the Church. The gospel which proclaims the love of God in Christ commits those who respond to practical deeds of caring for their fellow men, for "if a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen".

3. *Administration*

It is obvious that a rapidly growing fellowship will need a measure of organisation and that the organisation will have to be guided. There is nothing in the New Testament which would give support to disorderliness in the Church. When it is maintained that the Church is essentially a fellowship in which the relationships of the Kingdom are experienced and explored, it is not

implied that this fellowship was unregulated and hazardous. A living organism has its principles of growth and conduct. So with the living organism of the Church. The freedom of the Spirit and of the believer's response to the Spirit did not mean confusion, for the Spirit has recognisable ways of working. What the Church did was to endeavour to learn the Spirit's ways of working so that the life and activities of the fellowship might conform to them. The life of the Church is, therefore, not without pattern, but the pattern is that of the Spirit. It is the pattern made known in Jesus, in His death and resurrection, in His principle of life through death, of fulfilment through denial; it is the pattern of the Kingdom of God. This pattern is capable of being reproduced in endless forms, just as a musical theme is capable of many variations; and as in all the variations the same theme may be recognised, so in all the forms of the Church's activity and organisation the pattern of the Kingdom may be discerned. Wherever that pattern cannot be distinguished, the form of activity or organisation may not be called Christian. The organisation of the Church is, therefore, like the nature and activities of the Church, controlled by the gospel.

The necessity for some form of administration quickly shows itself in the New Testament Church. It is not long before deacons are appointed, and this appointment occurred because further implications of the life of the Kingdom were being realised. The appointment was a proper concern of fellowship. Later on, as the Christian witness spread and met with response in places increasingly distant from Jerusalem, the sense of fellowship demanded that closer links should be established. Philip went to Samaria preaching Christ so effectively that many accepted "the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts viii, 12); then

the apostles at Jerusalem sent Peter and John through whose ministry the gift of the Spirit was received (Acts viii, 17). They encouraged the work, "preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans" and returned to Jerusalem. Again the growth of Christian work in Antioch and reports that the Gentiles were accepting the gospel and entering the Church, caused the church at Jerusalem to send Barnabas; and his ministry at Antioch was clearly one of guidance and encouragement (Acts xi, 22). Then the church at Antioch, under the guiding of the Spirit, called Barnabas and Paul to special missionary work and, after a period of fasting and prayer, the two were ordained by the laying on of hands and sent on their journey. These incidents show how gifted members of the Church were commissioned for specific tasks relating to the fellowship of the Church as the need and opportunity for these tasks arose.

The growth of Christian churches which were often separated by some distance from other churches made it inevitable that one or more members of the local church should come to occupy a leading position and should be particularly responsible for the guiding of the worship and witness of that church. The necessity for this form of leadership was clearly recognised by Barnabas and Paul, so that on their first tour through Asia Minor they not only established churches but also ordained elders in each church (Acts xiv, 23). It is noticeable that the apostles took this action on their return journey, so that the churches had been established some months, and already it would have become evident which members were gifted for the work of leadership. Later on Paul called together the elders of the Church at Ephesus, for he thought it likely that his visit to Jerusalem might terminate fatally so that he would not see them again (Acts xx, 17). This suggests that in all the Gentile

churches Paul was accustomed to appoint members as leaders of the church.

In addition to these leaders of the local churches it is evident that some gifted brethren exercised wider ministries. The apostles travelled about and had a special place in the life of the Church. We read too of "prophets" who may have exercised their ministries in many churches. Then there are "evangelists" and "teachers" who probably kept more to one locality in their labours.

In the later literature of the New Testament bishops are mentioned, often with elders, and it would seem that the main burden of responsibility for the life of the Church was carried by bishops, elders and deacons. Much has been written about the respective functions of these offices in the Church and about the extent and sphere of the authority which was attributed to those who held these offices. But it is very doubtful whether in the New Testament Church these questions would have been answered at all closely, or whether indeed they would have been raised. What is perhaps more important is to discern the essentials for all officers in the Church and the manner in which these appointments were regarded.

It is evident that the Church took great care to ensure that all who served the fellowship should be men of sound Christian character. There is no thought that office is a position to be desired or that it is a reward for faithful service to the Church. It is viewed rather as an opportunity of serving the Church and those who are called to special forms of service are those whose spiritual quality is already marked. The evidence of love of Christ and an experience of His Spirit supplied by life and conduct is the necessary condition of any service in the Church. The deacons are to be "men of honest

report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom " (Acts vi, 3). The emphasis immediately is upon the quality of spiritual life and character. When Simon offers money in order to acquire the ability to communicate the power of the Spirit, the apostles are very sharp in their reaction against such a suggestion (Acts viii, 18). They recognise most emphatically that the communication of the power of the Spirit cannot be separated from a life controlled itself by the Spirit. Simon's suggestion indicates that he "is not right with God", and a man must be right with God in order to serve the Church and to bring spiritual power to others. All the men who held leading positions in the New Testament Church are men of proved Christian experience and character, for in the New Testament Church it is impossible to separate office and character. So we find, in the Pastoral Epistles, exhortations to Timothy and to Titus to be examples in moral and spiritual living to the churches to which they ministered. "Be then an example to the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy iv, 12). "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy ii, 15). "In all things show thyself a pattern of good works" (Titus ii, 7). We may also examine the passages which suggest the essential qualifications for bishops, elders or deacons, e.g., 1 Timothy iii, Titus 1, verses 7-9, 1 Peter v, verses 1-4, and we find that the emphasis is always upon the reality of faith expressing itself in Christian character. What makes a man qualified for office in the Church is fundamentally his own spiritual quality, the evidence of the grace of God in him. It is inconceivable that one who is not in a true personal relationship to Christ should in any way minister to the fellowship of the Church.

In the second place, it was recognised in the New Testament Church that all the gifts which make a member suitable for some service in the fellowship are from God and are to be used under the guiding of His Spirit. A man's gifts are not his possessions which he may use to gain reputation for himself; they are the "talents" entrusted to him and he is a "steward" responsible to his Lord. Consequently the possession of spiritual gifts is an indication of the way in which a member may serve the Church and he is responsible before God for using and so enriching his gift in that way.

Paul enunciates these principles clearly in 1 Cor. xii, when he discusses the use of spiritual gifts. He writes, "now there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit" (verse 4). "To one is given by the Spirit, the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; and to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the same Spirit, but all these worketh that one and the self same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will" (verses 8-11). Here it is clearly stated that all gifts to be used in the service of the Church are derived from the Spirit and therefore are to be used under His guiding. It is God through His Spirit who sets in the Church those that serve the Church and Paul goes on to suggest that the one gift which imparts worth to all others, is the supreme gift of love. Without love nothing is of worth, nothing can be achieved in the work of God. All other gifts are temporary and will "vanish away". It is faith, hope and love that abide and "the greatest of these is love".

Similarly in Ephesians iv, Paul begins with the central unity of the Christian faith—"One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (chap. iv, 5, 6).

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Then he mentions the different spiritual gifts and the offices in the Church for which these gifts qualify members, but all this is a gift and a responsibility before God. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (chap. iv, 7).

What this surely means is that in the New Testament Church no office is regarded as possessing authority in itself. The only authority in the life of the Church is the Spirit. The whole fellowship is under the control of the Spirit and all its life must conform to His ways, i.e., to the pattern manifest in Christ. Consequently the authority of anyone holding office in the Church is the authority of the Holy Spirit within that individual, and the evidence for the Holy Spirit is to be found first in personal holiness and devotion to Christ, and secondly in ability to perform effectively the service indicated by the office. Where this evidence cannot be found a man has no claim to office in the Church and his ministry in the office will be barren and unfruitful. He has no "authority" in the Church, for the only authority is that of the Holy Spirit working through those personally obedient to Him.

Thirdly, it is maintained in the New Testament that the exercise of all ministries is for the edifying of the Church. "He gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. iv, 11, 12). The building up of the Church is the purpose of all offices. Paul will not definitely prohibit the speaking with tongues, but he is clearly of the opinion that the gift of tongues is to be rated lower than other gifts because it does not obviously serve to edify the Church. "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification and exhortation and comfort. He that

speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself ; but he that prophesieth edifieth the Church ” (1 Cor. xiv, 3, 4). In two passages Paul speaks of the power or authority given to him by the Lord not for destruction but for edification (2 Cor. x, 8, chap. xiii, 10). “ Let all things be done for edifying ” (1 Cor. xiv, 26), is clearly the principle guiding the exercise of all gifts.

This emphasis upon serving the fellowship is characteristic of the New Testament Church and an expression of the gospel. Office within the Church is not an opportunity for serving private ends, or gaining personal influence, or increasing individual reputation. The exercise of gifts is not to be a demonstration of personal ability or knowledge or skill. The chief purpose of every form of service in the Christian fellowship is the edifying of the Church. What does not edify the Church, i.e., extend and deepen its spiritual fellowship, is not a proper and worthy exercise of any office. All service in the Church is for the sake of the Church and of Christ, the Head of the Church.

With such principles underlying their conception of office in the Church, it is obvious that the members of the New Testament Church could not have spared much attention for questions concerning the relative importance and authority of different offices. For all forms of ministry were for the sake of the Church, not the Church for the sake of the ministries. Since the Church is essentially a spiritual fellowship, all different ministries must serve the fellowship, otherwise they are not truly Christian ministries ; that is why love is the supreme gift which imparts worth to every other gift. All the administration of the Church is but the way by which the love of Christ may flow through clear channels into the life of His Church.

We have discussed the different activities of the New

Testament Church—its worship, its observance of the Lord's Supper, its works of caring, its forms of administration. It will be seen that these varied activities find their coherence in the life of the spiritual organism which is the Church. Although it is possible to find aberrations of all these activities, yet on the whole it is evident that all the activities of the Church derived from its faith in Christ and were an expression of the personal relationships of His Kingdom. The Church was the place where the life of the Kingdom was known and experienced and through which that life was communicated. The fellowship of the Church grew out of the proclamation of the Kingdom by Jesus and was an essential result of that proclamation. Consequently, the whole life of the Church is to be related to the eternal life of the Kingdom which was manifest in Jesus. We cannot say that this happened perfectly in the New Testament Church; far from it. The sinful elements in human nature are all too obvious. But we can perceive the pattern of the Kingdom in the life of the Church, as many, both Jews and Gentiles in the Roman Empire, perceived it and learned to share it and to rejoice in it. We can see how the gospel controlled the varied functions of the Church so that in some way they all served to edify the fellowship, to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and so to glorify God.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CHURCH AND HUMAN SOCIETY

THE fellowship of the Church is the place where the life of the Kingdom of God is realised and experienced. Jesus said that His Kingdom is "not of this world": that is, only those who are "born from above" can enter the Kingdom. The life of the Kingdom can also be described as "eternal life". But this life has to be experienced within the framework of human society. The fellowship of the Church may possess a different pattern from that of the society around it, but it is nevertheless a part of that society, and it stands always in a relationship with that society. The question of this relationship has been important from the beginning and is still one of the crucial issues facing the Church. It was an issue known to the New Testament Church, for it reaches back to the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus had laid down the principle that a man's primary obedience is to God. If it is our duty to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, it is also our obligation to render unto God what properly belong to Him, and Jesus makes it clear that our wholehearted obedience is what properly belong to God. The first commandment is always, "Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind." So Jesus can bid his followers, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew vi, 33). But more forceful than any precept was the example of Jesus, for in all His actions He made obedience to the will of God the primary concern. What was uttered in the Garden of Gethsem-

ane had been His prayer throughout His entire ministry. He would obey the will of God at whatever cost. The apostles well understood this primary importance of obedience to God and they were ready to acknowledge the supreme and comprehensive claim of God upon them. Peter and John soon gave evidence for this conviction in their reply to the injunction of the Sanhedrin that they should cease speaking in the name of Jesus, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts iv, 19, 20). Or again, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts v, 29). The claim of God takes precedence over every other claim. It is like the claim which Jesus made upon His first disciples:—"If any man come to Me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv, 26). In such sayings, as in the example of Jesus, the primacy of obedience to God was kept before the Church.

Since the Christian has entered a life which is based wholly upon this new relationship with God, he will be under obligation to moral and spiritual standards very different from those prevailing in the society about him. Although the life of the Kingdom is essentially found in new personal relationships, yet it has its characteristic ways of behaviour. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, Jesus expresses the principles of conduct which are illustrated in the behaviour of those who share the life of the Kingdom. They do not strive deliberately to observe these standards, expecting due reward for their efforts, but living in and responding to the new relationships, these are, as a matter of fact, the laws of their behaviour. They act like this! Their conduct gives illustration of their principles.

The apostles found it necessary to remind the members of the Church of these principles, not again in order to set up ideals of conduct to which the Christian might aspire, but to indicate the channels into which the life of the Kingdom flows. The letters of the New Testament are full of such injunctions. Peter calls the Christian to a life of personal holiness because God is holy and He is the source of this new life. It takes its pattern from Him (1 Peter i, 15). Paul calls the Christians in Rome to serve one another and in a spirit of humility to share one another's lives and to show goodwill and forgiveness to all as far as it is possible (Romans xii). James stresses the necessity for good work, for practical caring for those in distress as well as the discipline of one's self; and John, too, will have all followers of Christ show His practical love to their fellowmen.

All this was not easy. The moral and spiritual standards regarded in the Church were different from those held in secular society, and consequently many problems and many difficulties arose. It is evident that some members of the Church did not fully appreciate these differences, so that pagan practices occurred in the Church causing confusion and strife. The church at Corinth reflects such a situation and much of Paul's appeal to the church there is for a clear recognition that "in Christ" there are different judgments and standards and He intends His followers to accept them and to live by them. John puts this distinction with the utmost clarity and simplicity, as he does so many other issues of the Christian life. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof; but

he that doeth the will of God shall abide for ever" (1 John ii, 15-17). Here we must remember that in the Johannine vocabulary the word "world" denotes the life of men as it is in opposition to God. John does not maintain the position that the physical universe in itself is contrary to the will of God, he is not denying that there is beauty and goodness in the world and in life. He is thinking rather of the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" of which he could have found so many illustrations in the civilization about him. This is what he means by the "world". So he maintains that there is a fundamental difference between the life of the world and the life of the Kingdom of God. They are different in their origin and in their nature; and the essential difference is that the one is contrary to the will of God and so is temporal, but the other is according to the will of God and so is eternal. Here is the clear recognition of the fundamental differences between the life which is governed by the values and standards of human society, and the life of the Kingdom which the Christian shares.

But this distinction was responsible for different attitudes. There were some Christians who adopted a rigid attitude so that they shunned all the ways of the world and tried to develop a completely separated life. They had many scruples about what food might be eaten, what pleasures indulged in, what society a man might keep. They held firmly to the belief that a Christian now lives the life of the Kingdom and must separate himself from the world. Other members of the Church took a very different attitude, arguing that since a Christian shares the eternal life of the Kingdom what he does in the temporal, secular society is unimportant. He is now free from the law and therefore if he so

chooses, he can indulge the pleasures of this passing world.

The leaders of the New Testament Church apparently did not accept either of these extremes. They were certainly emphatic that the second position was not Christian; it was using liberty as a cloak for licentiousness. Christian freedom is the freedom of a new personal relationship in which the love of Christ is the controlling factor, so that though a Christian "may be free from all men" yet should he make "himself servant to all" (1 Cor. ix, 19). The strong have to bear the burdens of the weak and not to please themselves "for even Christ pleased not Himself" (Romans xv, 1, 3). Thus in bearing one another's burdens the Christian "fulfils the law of Christ" (Galatians vi, 2). If the antinomian position is not accepted, neither is that of asceticism. The apostles do not advocate extremes. Paul is against making unnecessary distinctions about food and drink and being too nice in one's scruples about the meat which had come to the market through the pagan temples. "Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no questions for conscience sake" (1 Cor. x, 25). The distinction which the apostles seek to enforce is not on the level of food and drink and common customs at all; it is on the much deeper and much more important level of spiritual attitudes and motives. The righteousness of the disciples is to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, not in doing more religious works or observing more religious customs or being more scrupulous about what is to be avoided or what is to be accepted, but in having a new centre to all activity and behaviour, and the new centre is a personal love to God and to man. Similarly the apostles sought to guide the life of the Church. Certain distinctions in behaviour were desirable. For example the worship of idols must

cease; the immoral practices associated with idol worship must no longer be accepted by the Christian; there must be a clean break from paganism. Even the more worthy practices of paganism, e.g., its asceticisms, are not necessary for the Christian. But the fundamental difference is spiritual. The Christian must show new attitudes, enter into new relationships because now Christ is in the centre of his life. Paul sees quite clearly that the "Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans xiv, 17). A saying like this, thrown out in a discussion upon how the Church member is to behave in his attitude to secular society, shows how closely the apostles were keeping to the mind of their Master. A similar thought is in the words "whether therefore ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x, 31). The apostles will not be rigidly or unduly scrupulous. They will not let the life of the Church drift into the channels of spiritual legalism. They will not deny the glorious liberty of the sons of God to live the life of the Kingdom, and allow that life to harden into regulations and codes of conduct. They insist always upon the living heart of the new life which is personal fellowship with "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". That is what makes the Christian different. Without that, all of the distinctions are void and empty. The difference is one of relationships.

It is because the life of the Christian is found in new personal relationships that another element enters into the attitude of the Christian to the standards of society around him. Whatever his personal attitude might be, it must be influenced by consideration for other members of the Church. The Christian cannot act as if he were an isolated unit for that is a denial of the fellowship which is the essence of the Church. The "strong"

member has to consider the brother who is "weak in the faith" and order his conduct so that he will not unnecessarily offend his brother. The principle of Christian relationships in these questions is clearly expressed in Romans xiv, 13:—"Let us therefore not judge one another any more; but judge this rather that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." To these words are added the words in verse 19, "Let us follow after the things which make for peace and things wherewith one may edify another". Here is a characteristic judgment. The actions of members of the Church should be such that they "edify" the Church, i.e., they promote the real fellowship of the members of the Church with God and with one another.

But the new relationships into which the Christian enters are not restricted to his "fellow Christians"; they are to be extended to all men. Consequently the Christian's attitude to the society in which he lives is not to be defined merely by reference to the moral values upheld or rejected by that society and by his relationship with other members of the Church. For that can easily lead the Christian into showing an exclusive or a superior spirit. The danger of Pharisaism is ever present. The example of Jesus was ever before the eyes of His disciples and they saw how He upheld the highest moral standards and yet mingled with complete friendliness with "the publicans and sinners" who did not personally accept these standards. Jesus condemned adultery and upheld the highest ideals of marriage, but He also forgave the adulteress and showed her a sensitive understanding when the Pharisees, for the sake of their moral standards, would have condemned her. Jesus spoke often enough against the greedy spirit which accumulates riches at the expense of other people, but He associated with Zaccheus

to the extent of going to his house and accepting his hospitality. For Jesus people were always more important than standards. He knew how useless it is to try to maintain moral standards by condemning the faults of human nature and losing the confidence and response of people. Jesus maintained the standards of the Kingdom in loving and friendly association with everyone. The whole history of religion proves how difficult this is, for it is indeed the way of love. We cannot imagine that the members of the New Testament Church always succeeded where later generations have so often failed, but it is evident that often this way of love was followed, and it was certainly upheld by the apostles. Perhaps this is what Paul means in 1 Cor. ix, when he speaks of "becoming all things to all men". To the Jew he behaved as a Jew; to those without the law as being himself without the law; to the weak as himself weak—and possibly in this last phrase we catch most of all the Spirit of Christ. For the apostle was a strong man—strong in his convictions and his faith; it is not easy for strong men to admit weakness. It is a measure of Paul's spiritual greatness that he is willing to admit his failures, that he will call himself the least of all the Apostles. He has no sense of moral superiority, for he is so absorbed in what God by His love in Christ has done in releasing him from his moral impotence. So to people who are weak, who know moral failure and spiritual breakdown, the apostle comes as one who himself is weak. His whole career shows how he could associate with all kinds of people in the friendliest manner, yet without betraying any of the standards of Christ. Indeed in this passage in which he reveals his friendliness with all, he speaks of his personal efforts at self-discipline. "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep

under my body and bring it into subjection : lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway " (1 Cor. ix, 26, 27). The emphasis of John upon brotherly love reflects this same attitude. However strongly the Christian may judge the ways of the world, the people of the world are those for whom Christ died. Many parts of the New Testament are severe in their condemnation of the practices which were common among men, e.g., the early chapters of Romans reflect Paul's judgment of society, the whole Book of the Revelation echoes the severest condemnation ; but all this was an incentive to evangelism. It exposed the need of the gospel, and the Church sought to bring the gospel. The judgment of Jesus that people matter more than standards, that personal relationships are more important than rules and regulations, was never wholly lost. The disciples of Jesus found themselves committed to the way of caring.

But life does not always run in these entirely personal channels, for human society is organised into institutions and authorities, and these are impersonal. A man has many loyalties for he belongs to many different groups, e.g., his family, his work, his nation. These are the natural groupings of every form of society, and the more civilised the society, the more orderly are these groupings, i.e., the more effective is the exercise of government. The Christian movement could not escape the question raised by its relationship with these other loyalties, for it claimed that the Christian life is rooted in an obedience to God which takes precedence over every other obedience. That claim created a tension from the beginning which is apparent in the life of the New Testament Church.

The Church accepted the natural ordering of life with the necessity for civil government. Jesus did not question

the rightfulness of human authorities :—"Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." Jesus did not lead a movement of rebellion. Although He called His twelve disciples away from their homes and work, He did not make the same demand upon all His disciples. Many remained in their homes, followed their normal work, fulfilled their duties as citizens and yet were loyal disciples. Jesus Himself delighted in the home at Bethany and the young Church was greatly indebted to the homes of people like Prisca and Aquila. The whole Christian movement found its work helped by the order and good communications maintained by the Roman authorities. Apart from the Book of the Revelation which comes from a time of persecution, all the writings of the New Testament show an acceptance of the necessity for forms of government and of human authorities. Paul maintained good relations with the Roman magistrates, as far as possible, wherever he went, and appealed to the Roman law as well as to his privileges as a Roman citizen for protection. His letter to the church at Rome includes counsel about respecting the civil authority and fulfilling one's obligations as a citizen : "Render therefore to all their dues" (Romans xiii, 7). Peter tells the Christians : "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake : whether it be to the king as supreme or unto governors as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well" (1 Peter ii, 13, 14).

The root of this acceptance of the natural ordering of human society is the Christian belief in the sovereignty of God, which is the foundation of the good news of the Kingdom. If this belief is taken seriously it implies that all human activities occur and all human authorities are held within the supreme power and wisdom of God. Nothing happens outside the scope of God's sovereignty.

Jesus is illustrating one aspect of the message of the Kingdom when He says to Pilate, "Thou couldest have no power against me except it were given thee from above" (John xix, 11). Here already is the germ of the conception that every human authority is an ordinance of God, i.e., that the authority is exercised under the Divine sovereignty. Romans xiii is the passage where this conviction comes to clearest expression:—"There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." Just as God has ordained different ministries in the life of the Church, so He allows different functions and authorities in society.

The civil ordering of society is therefore an ordinance of God with its proper and limited scope; consequently it was the aim of the New Testament Church to live peaceably with all men as far as that was possible. But it was never recognised that the civil government may make claims of any and every kind upon the individual. It cannot claim sovereignty over the whole of a man's life because there are other proper claims which a man must accept; and the civil authority itself has a responsibility to God. When the New Testament says that the civil authority is an ordinance of God, it does not mean that therefore complete and unquestioning obedience must be given to it, for a man's absolute obedience is to God alone. The New Testament means rather that since the human authority is an ordinance of God, it owes a responsibility to God to exercise its authority according to His ordering of life. The civil authority is to be a "minister . . . for good" (Romans xiii, 4). It has to uphold the distinction between right and wrong, and to support the right by giving protection to it and to restrain the wrong by punishing it. On the whole Paul seems to have taken the view that the Roman authorities were fulfilling this responsibility, so he counsels the

members of the Church to fulfil their duties as citizens.

At the same time, the experience of the New Testament Church showed that the civil authority does not always act in such a way as to fulfil its responsibility before God. When the soldiers came to Gethsemane to take Jesus captive He said, "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke xxii, 53). According to this statement the authorities are failing in their responsibility to God and are letting themselves be used by the power of evil, and yet this is no denial of the sovereignty of God, for what the human power does in its subjection to evil, is yet made a part of God's redeeming purpose. So the Apostles, although they recognise the civil authorities as an ordinance of God, do not hesitate to regard the condemnation of Jesus as a wicked act. Jesus was taken "by wicked hands" and crucified, yet even this was according to the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts ii, 23). But it is in the Book of the Revelation that the evil capacities of human authority are most fully recognised and condemned. Here is no quiet acceptance of an ordinance of God, but a violent condemnation of a power which has caused suffering and bloodshed. The civil government is now like a great beast who "opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle and them that dwell in heaven" (Rev. xiii, 7). This power makes war with the saints and overcomes them; it is "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth", "drunken with the blood of the saints".

The Church which regarded the civil government as the ordinance of God knew what it was to be persecuted by that authority. But whatever the attitude of the civil authorities, the Church always held as its supreme task that of bearing its witness to Christ and His Kingdom. When the civil administration was favourable

the witness was advanced as much as possible and the Church took every opportunity of preaching the gospel. When the civil authority was oppressive, then the Church maintained its witness by martyrdom. Stephen proclaimed the gospel as long as he could and then proclaimed it by his dying. So did James, and Peter, and Paul and others in the New Testament Church. They endured to the end as seeing Him Who is invisible, showing always the way of the Kingdom.

For that was the primary task of the Church, and its supremacy was never forgotten. The Church existed to experience the life of the Kingdom and to share that life with others. The situation in which the Church was placed might be favourable or unfavourable; but the life of the Kingdom is not dependent upon the nature of circumstances. It derives from God and depends upon fellowship with Him, and that fellowship is always possible. Paul and Silas knew that fellowship as at midnight they sang hymns in the prison at Philippi just as truly as they realised it at worship or during the Lord's Supper. The life of the Kingdom is independent of circumstances just because it lives in personal relationships which are spiritual and enduring. "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst". That is the life of fellowship, the life of the Kingdom, and it is dependent only upon the realised presence of the living Christ. To know this life, to explore it, to communicate it was the main task of the New Testament Church and a task which could be pursued whatever circumstances might be. This is the source of the vitality and confidence which thrilled in the life of the New Testament Church, for its members knew that they achieved victory over the world just through their faith. For faith was the venture into a new relationship and once that new relationship was

established no human power could break it. "I am persuaded that neither death nor life . . . can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans viii, 38). The life of the Kingdom is eternal life. So the faith which is a sharing of the life is a real victory over a temporal, changing and uncertain world. Whatever its circumstances and whatever its own limitations and failures, the New Testament Church knew that in its fellowship it was experiencing the eternal life of the Kingdom and that this life alone could satisfy the needs of the human race. So it continued with all confidence preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ