

*The
Growth and Progress
of the
Church of God*



CONFERENCE OF BRETHREN
AT SWANWICK

SEPTEMBER, 1958

The Growth and Progress of the Church of God

CONFERENCE OF BRETHREN

at

SWANWICK

September 1958

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
STANLEY L. HUNT (PRINTERS) LTD., GEORGE STREET, RUSHDEN, NORTHANTS

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FOREWORD

NEARLY two hundred brethren were drawn from assemblies in the British Isles to the 1958 Conference (the seventh of its kind) held for the second time at the commodious centre at "The Hayes", Swanwick, Derbyshire, from September 19th to 22nd.

It is impossible to convey by print the gracious spiritual atmosphere which God granted at all the sessions, doubtless in answer to much prayer. It was recognized on all sides that it was a memorable and uplifting season.

One of the most encouraging features was the large proportion of young men, who warmly expressed their appreciation of the open discussions, and the opportunities subsequently afforded of quietly talking over their problems with more experienced brethren. Many said that they had never before experienced such helpful fellowship.

On the Sunday morning a remarkable meeting for prayer was held in which more than fifty brethren took part. The observance of the Lord's Supper will long remain in the memory of those present as a time of hallowed fellowship with God, and of ministry of a high order.

The Conveners have carefully weighed the propriety of calling another Conference. Two considerations have prevailed with them: (1) a widespread desire which has been expressed for continuance, and (2) the appreciation of these Conferences which has been constantly conveyed by letters from overseas, where the reports have been regarded as helpful and timely. Accordingly, it has been decided to hold another Conference (D.V.) at Swanwick on September 18/21, 1959. Early application for accommodation should be made to:

S. F. WARREN,
112, ALLERTON ROAD,
BRADFORD, 8,
YORKSHIRE.

Details will be advertised in due course.

Meanwhile, the Conveners desire to put on record their profound sense of loss sustained through the home-call of Mr. Montague Goodman on October 31st. They desire to acknowledge, with thanksgiving to God, his outstanding leadership and grace, and his great contribution to these Conferences ; and, indeed, his influence in many parts of the world.

A. J. ASHWELL	F. N. MARTIN
A. J. ATKINS	PERCY O. RUOFF
REDENHAM GUYATT	J. J. STORDY
G. C. D. HOWLEY	S. F. WARREN
THEODORE I. WILSON (<i>Secretary</i>)	
(Conveners)	

EDITORIAL NOTE

IN exercising judgment on what is here printed, the reader is asked to bear the following in mind :

(1) This is a verbatim account of unrehearsed proceedings. Those who gave addresses had the opportunity to check the transcribed record ; but the majority of those who contributed have had no opportunity to see or correct what they said. (2) Whilst a questioner may have been reflecting for some time on a problem, those who gave answers had to do so without any interval for preparation. (3) With the exception of one or two narratives of personal experience, and chairmen's connecting comments, almost every contribution is here ; but, to keep the record within bounds, it has been necessary to exclude the turns of phrase which give emphasis and animation to conversation, and all repetition. (4) No attempt has been made to arrive at a uniform view : at two places an alternative has been referred to by footnote. (5) Each contributor's name and assembly town are given in full only on first mention. (6) Certain references to particular places and persons have been expressed impersonally.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE Conveners are greatly indebted to the following :
Miss B. L. Kesby, of Gravesend, who performed the clerical work preparatory to the conference.

Miss C. Tatum, of Sidcup, and Miss E. M. Bagnall, of Balham, who transcribed the record.

Mr. F. A. Adams, of 165 Newmarket Road, Norwich, Norfolk, who recorded the conference on tape, and without whose help this record could never have been so complete. Mr. Adams will gladly lend copies of the tapes of addresses given at this and previous conferences at the cost of postage only.

Mr. Milne, the Secretary of Christian Conference Centres, who gave every possible help at "The Hayes", Swanwick.

Messrs. Stanley Hunt for the rapid printing and issue of this report.

Mr. T. I. Wilson for general correspondence and for the postal distribution of this report. Copies from : T. I. Wilson, 705 Honeypot Lane, Stanmore, Middlesex, 3s. 6d., post free. Mr. Wilson also has copies of the 1955, 1956 and 1957 reports.

Friday, September 19th, 1958 (8.45 p.m.)

A CHURCH IN GOOD HEALTH

Address : MR. MONTAGUE GOODMAN

I WISH to call your attention to a passage in the Acts of the Apostles which, in a few words I suggest, presents to us the picture of a New Testament church in good health, as I think God intends it to be in every age. Turn then to the Acts of the Apostles and the ninth chapter, and read with me the thirty-first verse.

“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified : and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.” Let us look at the picture presented to us. It is that of a church tranquilized and edified and multiplied.

Their first short, sharp period of persecution had ended in the dramatic conversion of their arch-enemy, Saul of Tarsus, and a period of tranquility was granted to them. They could now function for the first time as local churches. They were a church at rest in the midst of a world in turmoil. They had found rest unto their souls as the Lord had promised them, and were enjoying sweet fellowship such as can be experienced nowhere else in the world. It was a tranquilized church. There is God's picture of a healthy church : it is a holy fellowship in which all are bound together in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace. It should be a place of the greatest harmony and mutual love—a church at rest.

And they were edified. They were none of them mature Christians in point of time and they no doubt represented every variety of spiritual experience ; and yet, here in their very infancy, they were all edified by one another. They discovered unsuspected gifts among them for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the Body of Christ, and so they were built up in their most holy faith. They found to their surprise that there were

gifted people among them. For, when Christ ascended up on high, He gave gifts to men, and these gifts manifested themselves increasingly in their midst to their mutual edification.

Of course, there were the Apostles ; they laid the foundation upon which the Church was built ; and there were prophets. A gift to be desired indeed. Did not Paul write : “ Covet earnestly the best gifts, but rather that you may prophesy ” ? Oh ! pray to be a prophet, for a prophet is one who is gifted to speak “ to edification and exhortation and comfort ”. That is what a prophet is. There were also to be in the Church teachers, whose province was to instruct the mind and understanding of their hearers. But oh ! for more prophets to address their souls and hearts, and to speak to edification, and to exhortation and to comfort, to the *building* up and the *stirring* up and to the *lifting* up of the saints. May God then give us prophets, and “ let the prophets speak ! ”

And there were pastors among them who were gifted of God to watch over the flock, and evangelists to recruit the Church, and many other lesser gifts—and so the churches were edified.

And they were multiplied ; multitudes, both of men and women, were attracted to them. Hungry and thirsty people, lost sheep having no shepherd, weary folk in search of rest, sinners longing for pardon and deliverance. They are to be found everywhere, at all times and in all ages, and they are round our doors. And such discovered here what they sought, in a warm and loving welcome for Christ’s sake, as should be the case with every healthy church.

For there is nothing so attractive as the Gospel and there is no company so alluring to the seeking soul as a group of happy believers. Make a note, for it is true, that the church, the church that is tranquilized, a place of rest, a church that is edified, will be a church that is multiplied.

Now, what was the secret that lay behind so desirable a Christian fellowship. It was, of course, *the character of the people composing it* ; for an assembly is what its members are, and nothing more. So then, see what their outstanding characteristics were, as stated here. They were a people who “ walked in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost ”. Those are the features that make both for a healthy church and for a healthy believer, two qualities

strikingly in contrast the one with the other. Fear and comfort. Fear on the one hand and comfort on the other. Qualities that would seem to be antagonistic but prove to be intimately and mutually complementary. And both equally requisite to a full and adequate personal Christian experience, and that of a Christian church.

The one is God taught : " Come ye children, hearken unto Me and I will teach you the fear of the Lord." And the other is Spirit-imparted by the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost. And the one is the direct result of the other : for the comfort of the Holy Ghost is the heritage that God has given to those that fear His name.

So the first outstanding mark of the early Church was that its members walked in the fear of the Lord. Great fear, it says, was upon them. Great fear. They were people who feared God. Fear is that quality which commends a man to the attention of God. " To this man will I look," said the Lord, " even to him that is of a poor and contrite spirit and that trembles at My word." It is the first indication of the work of God in the human soul. The moment a man begins to contact his God he begins to fear and tremble before Him. All nature trembles at the presence of God, save proud man alone. Sinai was all of a tremble when God came down upon it, while the children of Israel danced at the foot, round a golden calf. But regenerate man begins to fear God, and tremble before Him, and continues to do so, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. Saul of Tarsus fell down trembling when Christ first met him, and all his subsequent life was one of fear and trembling, coupled with the comfort of the Holy Ghost. He learned the secret of serving the Lord with fear, and rejoicing with trembling. " I was with you," says he, " in fear and much trembling " ; and he " worked out his own salvation with fear and trembling ". And the mark of every church in good health is that its members, one and all, are found walking in the fear of the Lord.

Why is this? It is because of what the fear of the Lord effects in the life and walk of everyone who experiences it. First it has a *Cleansing effect*. For the " fear of the Lord is clean ", and " the fear of the Lord is to hate evil ". If you don't hate evil, then you don't fear the Lord. Do you

remember Nehemiah telling of the way the previous governors of Jerusalem had exploited their position to their own advantage, and then added, "but so did not I *because of the fear of God*"? Thus the fear of the Lord has a cleansing effect.

And it has a *Consecrating influence*, a positive effect in "perfecting holiness in the fear of God". And it imparts *Great confidence*, for "in the fear of the Lord is strong confidence", as in the boldness of the apostles after Pentecost.

And it is the foundation of a *holy Companionship*. "I am a companion of all those that fear Thee." "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one with another." It was those that *feared* the Lord that spake often one with another. Dear brethren, how often we hear about the love of the Lord, the joy we have in the Lord, all these other things, but how very seldom do we dwell together upon the holy fear of the Lord! Oh, that that might be the outstanding mark of every assembly of Christian brethren! An abiding fear of the Lord and yet no dread of Him at all. A filial fear, as a devoted son towards his much-loved and honoured father, lest anything should mar the perfect harmony that subsisted between them. That is the fear of the Lord.

Oh, how I fear Thee, living God,
With deepest, tenderest fears.
And worship Thee with trembling hope
And penitential tears!

Yes, and God has given "a heritage to those that fear His Name". There is a rich inheritance for the saints in light. It is "*the comfort of the Holy Ghost*". It is God the Holy Ghost in their midst. For the Christian Church is not only a God-fearing community, it is a Holy Ghost indwelt community. Another Comforter has come with all the rich heritage He brings to each and all.

What is the heritage of them that fear His name? Four things may be briefly named.

1. "*The mercy of the Lord* is on them that fear Him." Goodness and mercy follow them daily. They will always need it and always receive it. "Mercy shall compass them about." "His mercy is on them that fear Him throughout all generations." This is the comfort of the Holy Ghost in which they will walk.

2. "*The angel of the Lord* encampeth round about them that fear Him"; and "when the enemy comes in like a flood the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him". This is the comfort of the Holy Ghost; the peculiar heritage of them that fear His name: "The angel of the Lord".

3. "*The eye of the Lord* is upon them that fear Him." They are under His watchful eye all the time. As a mother watches over her child at play for sheer joy, so "the Lord taketh pleasure in His people". "He shall rest in his love." "He shall joy over it with singing." As "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one that repents", and comes into that holy fellowship, so their coming together to worship is a sheer joy to Him. This is the heritage of those that fear the name of the Lord: this is the comfort of the Holy Ghost—"The mercy of the Lord," "The angel of the Lord" and "The eye of the Lord".

4. "*The secret of the Lord* is with them that fear Him." "He shall show them His covenant." Here is the climax of those that fear the Lord: here is the comfort of the Holy Ghost—He takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto those that fear Him. Hidden from the wise and prudent, He makes them known to them. There is a mysterious secret about a company of Christians impossible of comprehension to any but a Christian. None can define it. What is it? What is the secret that makes a Christian church? What is the secret that binds it together? My dear friends—it is *the secret of the Lord in their midst*. And the secret of the Lord is the Lord Himself Whose name is Secret. He manifests Himself unto us, as not unto the world, and the glory of everyone who is walking in the fear of the Lord is this—"that He knoweth and understandeth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness and judgment and righteousness in the earth, for in those things I delight, saith the Lord". And the heritage of them that fear the Lord is that they delight in them too, and meditate on them—in company—as a church in good health.

Saturday, September 20th, 1958 (9.45 a.m.)

THE CHURCH IN THE GOSPELS

Chairman : MR. A. J. ATKINS

Address : DR. A. HANTON

Reading : Matthew 16. 13-19 ; Matthew 18. 15-20

By way of introduction, let us look at some words which we have to consider, that we might clear our definitions. Erich Sauer, in his *Triumph of the Crucified*, points out that the word "Ecclesia", in the Sept. translation of the Old Testament, is used to refer to Israel over one hundred times, for example, in Deut. 4. 10: "The Lord said unto me, Gather Me the people together, and I will make them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they live on the earth." And in the New Testament the word "Ecclesia" occurs also about the same number of times; about ten times referring to the whole Church, e.g., Matt. 16. 18: "Upon this rock I will build My Church"; and the remainder applying to the local church, e.g., Matt. 18. 17: "Tell it to the church"; or 1 Cor. 1. 2: "The church of God which is in Corinth". These two occasions cited in Matthew are the only use of the word in the Gospels, though there is strong reason for believing that the word actually used by the Lord was the Aramaic "Kenishta". See Prof. Bruce's paper to the 1954 Conference (p. 26). The idea behind the "Ecclesia" is simply that of calling the citizens of a Greek town out of their houses by a herald's trumpet to summon them to the legislative assembly. That is clearly the meaning as used at that time colloquially.

There are two other phrases—"The Kingdom of Heaven" and "The Kingdom of God". The kingdom of heaven—the place from which the power proceeds; the kingdom of God—the One Who exerts that power. These phrases are not synonymous with the Church. In Matt. 23. 13 we read:

“ Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” Indeed, Clement of Alexandria and Origen use both these phrases of the spiritual reign of God in the soul. In the first four centuries, the identification of the Church with the kingdom of God on earth is nowhere named, and the confusion of these terms, and looking upon them as identical, has led to great difficulty. The kingdom of heaven extends beyond all the various ages of time with their dispensational features : it was preached before the Church began and it will be again after the Church is gone.

As in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament, there is a progress of doctrine. Although the word is not used at all in the fourth Gospel, yet everyone would agree that one aim of that Gospel was the establishment of the nature of the true Church. The Gospel of Matthew is the only one that contains direct statements by Christ about His Church, but all that is taught in the rest of the New Testament, including the other Gospels, is in keeping with His statements.

Dr. Newton Flew in his book *Jesus and the Church* states : “ There were three decisive moments in the actions of Jesus in constituting the Church :

1. He called the disciples and taught them.
2. He sent them forth to proclaim the good news that the new era was about to dawn.
3. At the Last Supper He instituted the new covenant with them as representing the new people of God.”

Or, as Dr. F. J. A. Hort, in his excellent text-book on the subject “ The Christian Ecclesia ”, which Mr. C. F. Hogg recommended to me thirty years ago states : “ The twelve that evening sat as representatives of the ecclesia at large.” Or, if one might again quote Prof. Bruce : “ Christ’s first followers were the faithful remnant of the old Ecclesia, and the faithful nucleus of the new. The New Jerusalem has the names of the twelve apostles inscribed on the foundation stones of its walls, but it has also the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on its gates ” (Rev. 21. 12-14). So now, let us look in more detail at the passages in Matthew’s Gospel that have special reference to the Church, two of which we have already read :

the third being ch. 26, vs. 20-30 ; and the fourth ch. 28, vs. 17-20.

First I want to draw your attention to

A GREAT CONFESSION (Matt. 16. 16)

Some said that Jesus was John the Baptist ; some Elijah ; some Jeremiah, or some other prophet ; but never before from the lips of mortal man fell there any words so important, so far-reaching, so fundamental as these : “ Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” When others looked at Him they said, “ As for this man, we know that he is a sinner ” ; when others heard of Him they said, “ Can any good thing come out of Nazareth ! ” When those who opposed Him said, “ We will not have this man to reign over us,” to Peter there came that great revelation, and, as the light of heaven dawned on his soul by the special revelation of the Father, he acclaimed Him : “ Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” He saw that in Him was the Messiah, the fulfilment of God’s promises of the past : that He was no mere man, although He was man, but the very Son of the living God—God of very God. And so, with that grasp of His Messiahship, and His deity, it was only fitting that our Lord should say, “ Blessed art thou, flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father Who is in heaven ” ; and of that we have an echo in 1 Cor. 2. 14, where we are reminded that the “ natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God : for they are foolishness unto him : neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned ”. In John 6. 68, 69 Peter used somewhat similar words when our Lord said, “ Will ye also go away ? ” Quietly, but confidently, he replied, “ To whom shall we go, Lord ? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” It is this estimate of Christ that is the true touchstone of everything. “ No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost ” (1 Cor. 12. 3). Or, as 1 John 2. 22, puts it : “ Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ ? ” ; or 1 John 4. 2-3 : “ Hereby know ye the Spirit of God : Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.”

Following hard on this great confession, I want us now to consider :

A NEW CONCEPTION

A new conception announced by our Lord for the first time in Matt. 16. 18-19. " Upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Of this new conception we want to consider three things, as you will see from the syllabus :

1. " Upon this Rock " ... Its Foundation
2. " I will build " ... Its Builder and Maker
3. " My Church "... ... Its Lord and Master

" Upon this Rock "—its Foundation

This rock is not Peter, but Peter's confession. As Bishop Ryle puts it, " Thou art rightly called by the name Peter, a stone, for thou hast confessed that mighty truth on which, as on a rock, I will build My Church."

The late W. E. Vine in his *The Church and the Churches*—a book that I would very strongly recommend—states " Thou art Peter " could be translated " Thou hast said ", bearing in mind the similarity of the letters used ; and indeed St. Augustine in his Latin version translates it, " Thou hast said " ; and Jerome, in his writing, quotes it " Thou hast said ". There is an echo perhaps of this in Matt. 26. 64, when the question was asked by Caiaphas, " Tell us clearly whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God ? " Quietly, and with dignity, Jesus said : " Thou hast said."

The absurdity of Peter being the foundation is emphasized a few verses further on in the same chapter, vs. 22-23, when to the same one who had grasped so clearly Who He was, failing to grasp why He had come, Jesus had to say : " Get thee behind Me, Satan." It is true, as 1 Cor. 3. 11 puts it : " Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Or 1 Cor. 10. 4 : " . . . that rock was Christ ". The Church is " built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone " (Eph. 2. 20). And now the phrase

" I will build "—its Builder and Maker

Just as God as Creator alone could bring the world into being, so Christ, the Son of the Living God, alone could bring

the Church into being. Please note the future tense used : " I *will* build My Church." It was not yet in existence. We believe its beginning was at Pentecost. Christ is its foundation, and we are living stones. He is the Builder, we are only the agents : we are " workers together ", 2 Cor. 6. 1 : " Workers together with Him." He is the Builder ; this is its strength. It is not an earthly system, or organization of companies centralized in ecclesiastical headquarters. He is the Head, and He builds. He provides for the spiritual needs of each local church. As we were reminded last evening in Eph. 4. 11-16 : " . . . 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 ". " I will build " ; the emphasis is on Him :

In Rom. 1. 6. " Ye are the called of Jesus Christ. . . . "

John 5. 21. " The Son quickeneth whom He will."

Rev. 1. 5. " Unto Him that loved us, and loosed us from our sins."

John 10. 28. " I give unto My sheep eternal life and they shall never perish."

Acts 5. 31. He is raised to be a " Prince and a Saviour, to give remission of sins."

John 1. 12. " To them that received Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God."

Mark 16. 20. " The Lord working with them."

Acts 2. 47. " The Lord added daily such as should be saved."

Yes, indeed, He is the Author and Finisher : Heb. 12. 2. But, although it is true to say " I will build " and He is the Builder, yet, thank God, He uses human agencies, and so verse 19 goes on to say : " I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Let us be quite clear about this. This was no confirmation of the right of admitting souls to heaven—a preposterous idea indeed. All that it meant was that to Peter was entrusted the privilege of opening the door of faith to the Jews, as he did at Pentecost ; and to the Gentiles, as he did later in the house of Cornelius. In his message to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2. 22) we read—" Men of Israel " ; v. 29, " brethren " ; v. 36, " let all the House

of Israel know assuredly. . . .” Israel rejected Christ, and Israel rejected the Holy Ghost (Acts 7. 51) ; and so the door was open wide to the fulfilment of that great new conception announced by Jesus on this memorable occasion—the door was opened to the Gentiles ; and in Acts 10 that special vision was given to Peter three times to help him, the Jew, with a Jewish outlook, to overcome his scruples—the vision of the clean and the unclean. Here the middle wall of partition was about to be done away with historically, as well as in principle, with the result that, in the house of Cornelius, “ they heard, and believed, and the Holy Ghost came upon them ” ; as Peter in Acts 11. 17 so momentarily states it, “ . . . the like gift came upon them,” or, as is mentioned in Acts 15. 9, “ without distinction ”. Chrysostom has put it beautifully. “ It is just as if someone made two pillars, the one of silver and the other of lead, then melted them together and, by a miracle, they came out one golden pillar.” The Gentiles, with the Jews, were to become fellow-heirs, fellow-members, fellow-citizens with the saints. When to Peter was said “ whatsoever thou shalt bind ”, that only meant that to Peter was given the authority to teach and preach the way of salvation—an authority that God Himself endorsed ; and we should note, in passing, that in ch. 18, v. 18 the same words are used to the disciples as a whole. “ . . . Whatsoever ye shall bind . . . whatsoever ye shall loose. . . .”

“ My Church ”—He is its Lord and Master.

There is an organic union between Him, the head, and us the members, and we are indissolubly linked. Again, to quote Bishop Ryle, “ It is not the visible church of any one nation, country or place, but the whole body of believers of every age and tongue and people ; composed of all who are washed in Christ’s blood ; clothed in Christ’s righteousness ; renewed by Christ’s Spirit, and joined to Christ by faith ; those who are epistles of Christ in life.”

A VIRILE COMMISSION

“ *All* power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth ”—that is the power. “ Make disciples of *all* nations ”—that is the scope. “ Teaching them to observe *all* things whatsoever I have commanded you ”—that is the message. “ And lo !

I am with you *all* the days"—that is the encouragement. This commission was threefold :

1. Preaching ;
2. Baptizing ;
3. Teaching.

1. *Preaching*—" . . . make disciples of all nations ".

Justin Martyr in his *Apology* put it this way : " From Jerusalem twelve men went out into the world, and these uneducated, and without great ability in speech ; but by the power of God they proclaimed to every race of men that they were sent by Christ to teach all men the Word of God." And by their preaching, as we shall hear later on in this Conference, they " turned the world upside down ".

2. *Baptizing*

The word " baptizo " involves immersion, submersion and emergence, and was indeed used in the process of dyeing a garment when these three things took place (W. E. Vine, page 70). May I say that no other meaning was attached to this word until after the first century. In baptism we are associated with the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. " Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death ? Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Those who were baptized were those who believed (Acts 2. 41). They heard : they believed : they were baptized. Or in Samaria (Acts 8. 12) ; or the Ethiopian eunuch (8. 37) ; or the Philippian jailor and his household (16. 32-33). He preached to the household, the household heard, the household believed, and the household were baptized. There is no suggestion in these verses to substantiate the idea that infants were baptized, who were incapable of a voluntary act of faith in Jesus Christ. An unbaptized believer is just not contemplated in the New Testament, and that should search all our hearts as we know of many who are still unbaptized. Sprinkling was copied from pagan rites, is associated with the maintenance of priestcraft, and fosters superstition.

3. *Teaching*—" Teaching to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded "

This involves the surrender of the will, the conformity of the life. It means and brings about a change of character.

The fourth great truth is :

A HOLY COMMUNION (Matt. 18. 15-20)

I use this phrase, not in the commonly accepted sense, but in its wider sense, although the commonly accepted usage is involved.

We are members one of another, but wherever there is this gathering together of brethren in unity, the evil one will be making it his business to break that unity, to spoil that happy fellowship. In reference to this passage, there are two things I want us to look at—hindrances to communion, and helps to communion.

1. *Hindrances to Communion.* “ If thy brother shall trespass against thee ”

Personal problems and disputes are perhaps the greatest hindrances to communion. Our Lord foresaw this and prescribed how it was to be dealt with. Would that we should pay more attention to the instruction that He has given ! It is so clear. First, go and see him alone. How true it is that many a scandalous breach would be prevented if we were more ready to practise the rule “ between thee and him alone ”. Many differences would be extinguished at once. This means courage : it means discretion : it means wisdom : it means the fear of the Lord ; but, if we were to go as an individual to the individual with whom we have some difference, with prayer, and in the fear of the Lord, how much heart-break would be saved. How greatly would be preserved this holy communion into which we have been brought ! But, if that should fail, then says our Lord : “ Take one or two more ” ; and if that should fail “ Tell it to the Church ”. This verse infers discipline. “ Let him be as an heathen man and a publican.” That verse shows clearly the power to exclude, and in this connection in verse 18 we read : “ Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.” These words bespeak the authority of the Church, or its recognized representatives in its overseers ; but an authority which must not be made the excuse for the exercise of ecclesiastical tyranny.

But then He speaks of :

2. *Helps to Communion*

These are twofold—*prevailing prayer* (v. 19). “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask it shall be done unto you of My Father which is in heaven.” And then, *the promised Presence*. “For where two or three are, having been gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.” In the assembly for worship, for prayer, for praise, for missionary work, for Bible ministry, He is present, though the number may be small. Let us remember that this promised Presence is something He constantly and unfailingly fulfils.

That leads naturally to thoughts on the *Lord's Supper*, where perhaps more than at any other gathering, we experience and enjoy His promised Presence, and so Matt. 26. 20-30 deals with this. That gathering should be characterized by simplicity, sincerity, spirituality. For the present—we remember the Lord; looking back over the past, we proclaim His death; and anticipating the future, we do it “till He come”. John 6. 53-55 has nothing¹ to do with the Lord's Supper: “Except ye shall eat My flesh and drink My blood ye have no life in you.” It is falsely used as a premise on which to raise the argument of the Mass, the partaking of the flesh and the blood, something that is not at all inherent in these words. These words refer to that personal appropriation of Jesus Christ as Saviour, as the result of which it is our joy, as our privilege, to remember the Lord; to proclaim His death till He come. In this gathering to remember Him, He is the centre, and if we “see the signs, but see not Him”, we fail in the object of our gathering.

Finally, A TRIUMPHANT CONSUMMATION

Said our Lord in Matt. 16. 18: “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The world hated Christ, and the world hates His Church. A local church may be suppressed, and may decay and disappear, but, praise God, the mystical body of Christ shall never perish or decay. The Church goes on from faith to faith, from strength to strength, from glory to glory, until that day when “He shall present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Ephes. 5. 27).

¹ But see page 59 of 1955 Report (Editors).

Saturday, September 20th, 1958 (10.15 a.m.)

THE CHURCH IN THE ACTS

Chairman : MR. A. J. ATKINS

Address : DR. STEPHEN S. SHORT

Reading : Acts 2. 1-4, 12-21

WE have seen somewhat how the Lord Jesus Christ envisaged His Church—His conception of it, His ideals for it, His purpose in establishing it. We proceed now from the prophecy to the fulfilment. Having observed from the record of the gospels how Christ foresaw His Church, we will observe from the record of Acts what the Church was actually like in the early days of its earthly existence. And we will do so from no mere antiquarian regard, but because we hold that the Church of apostolic times was intended by God as the model for all subsequent ages. The value of the record of these early chapters of Acts lies not so much in the interest which it affords to the student of Christian origins, as in its appeal to believers in all times and places to see to it that the truths therein disclosed are perpetually operative. A cry that is ever being raised in one quarter or another is: "What is wrong with the Church?" "Why isn't the Church the power it should be?" "Why is it so unsatisfactory in various respects?" And the correct answer is that it is deficient and disappointing because it lacks the marks that characterized it when it was originally established. And that reply drives us back to these early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles to enable us to discover the vital features of the Christian Church in the days of its pristine glory.

What were the essential marks of the Church of God as outlined in the book of Acts? The first, surely, and the most important, is that it was *a Spirit-filled Church*. The stark contrast between the disciples in the days of Christ's flesh and as they came to be in the days of the early Church,

has often received comment. What was the explanation? Undoubtedly it was that latterly they were indwelt, filled and anointed with the Holy Spirit, whereas formerly they were not. And I would maintain that incomparably the most vital fact about the Church in apostolic times was its profuse endowment with the Spirit of God. Prior to His ascension, our Lord had taken great pains to acquaint His apostles with this prospect. He showed them their responsibility—to preach repentance and remission of sins among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem; but as, maybe, they stirred to commence, He checked them, saying: “In your present state you are not fitted for this, not equipped; to embark on it immediately would be a débâcle. Tarry ye at the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high. You will be so endued for, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you, and ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” And, but a fortnight or so later, the event transpired, for “When the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.” And that marked the birth of the Christian Church. Before that moment, the Church existed only in thought, in intention. “I *will* build My Church,” said Jesus. Henceforth, it existed in fact, in reality, as an historical entity. The Church of God, let me stress, owed its very existence to the Holy Spirit. Without Him there would have been no such thing. The 120 disciples would have continued to live on, presumably, but they would not have constituted the Church as we understand it; for the Church is “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” and was a new creation on the day of Pentecost. For, just as in the beginning the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul, so at Pentecost He breathed on His disciples, breathed creatively, and the disciples became a living Church. And right throughout the book, the Church is portrayed as a Spirit-filled community, so that the mentions therein of the Holy Spirit number seventy or thereabouts. Thus, in Acts 4. 8 we find Peter “filled

with the Holy Ghost ” addressing the Jerusalem authorities. Acts 4. 31 describes an early prayer meeting, and it says of those present that “ they were all filled with the Holy Ghost ”. The end of chapter 7 recounts the martyrdom of Stephen, and 7. 55 says : “ But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven.” It was the same with Barnabas ; “ he was a good man,” states Acts 11. 24, “ and full of the Holy Ghost ”. And not least (Acts 13. 9) : “ Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Ghost ”, wrought and spake. The sum of the matter, according to the verse at which we were looking last night (Acts 9. 31) was that “ the churches . . . were edified and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied ”. I put to you this question : “ To what extent is the Church of God a Spirit-filled community to-day ? ” Think about that. There is a sense, doubtless, in which things can never be precisely as they were in pre-Pentecostal days ; the Spirit of God has entered into a relationship with believers which cannot possibly be dissolved. But experience shows, does it not, that there are times of the special unction of the Spirit upon His Church, and times when the Spirit seems grieved and quenched ; periods when, so to speak, the fleece is saturated, and periods when it is dry. Which is it now ? Is the Church at the present time functioning as a Church “ filled with the Holy Ghost ” ? Is there such a sense of God in her that, coming into her midst, people fall down on their faces, convinced of all, and confess that God is in her of a truth ? Are folk “ amazed ” on contacting her, saying one to the other, “ What meaneth this ? ” Is the reason why folk do not join in more, the reason why many of old did not join in with the apostles, because these were so divinely endued that they dare not ? (“ And of the rest,” says Acts 5. 13, “ durst no man join himself to them.”) Have you been approached by people who have said that they would love to apply to your church for membership, but they are scared to take the step because the presence of God is so manifest among you ? I won’t discuss these questions with you but simply ask you to ponder them.

We press on to consider the second mark of the Church of God as presented to us in the book of Acts. Not only was it a Spirit-filled Church, it was *an Authoritative Church*. No

community was this in which "every man did that which was right in his own eyes". The members did nothing of the kind. Far from its being a case of "every man for himself", they had, in the apostles, leaders to whom they yielded wholehearted allegiance. They regarded them as uniquely clothed with the authority of the Lord, a status which the apostles claimed, and the rest accepted. This claim was made by the apostles in their very preaching and teaching, a task different indeed from their former avocations, but one which they accepted without fear and without apology. They rose to their feet before the multitudes and addressed them. They believed they had a right so to do. Laymen though they were, from the point of view of the national religion, they regarded themselves as fully authorized to speak for God to their fellow countrymen whether to the priests, or to the rulers, or to the masses. So we read in Acts 2. 14 : " But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said to the people, Ye men of Judah, and all ye that dwell in Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words " ; in 4. 33 : " And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus " ; and in 5. 42 : " And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." I want you to notice that it was not just one of the apostles, or two or three, who did so, but the whole band—there is emphasis on that in these very passages. It was not just Peter who taught and preached ; the entire company did so, and together, therefore, they claimed unique authority. And, if the twelve by their preaching asserted their authority, their converts correspondingly accepted it ; for we read in Acts 2. 42 that " they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine ". What the twelve taught, their converts believed ; they did not query their teaching, did not try to alter it or adjust it ; they embraced it, surrendered themselves to it, were of the mind, doubtless, that it expressed the thought of Jesus, if not His very words, " and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine " .

Then, there were divine seals on this apostolic authority, one of which being that God blessed their witness beyond all human expectation. " They that gladly received Peter's words," says Acts 2. 41, " were baptized : and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

Acts 2. 47 : " The Lord added to the Church *daily* such as were being saved." Acts 4. 4 : " many of them which heard the word believed ; and the number of the men was about five thousand ". Acts 6. 7 : " And the word of God increased ; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly ; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." The significance of this lies not in the brilliance of the apostles' preaching, but in the divine purpose of confirming publicly the apostles' authority. The other way in which God set His seal on their authority was by His enabling them to perform miracles. Read Acts 2. 43, " and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles," an instance of which is minutely described at the beginning of the next chapter—the case of the impotent man. Realizing the value of such vindications, they prayed for more. " Grant unto Thy servants," they besought in Acts 4. 30, " that signs and wonders may be done in the name of Thy holy child Jesus." And the prayer was answered, for it says in Acts 5. 12 that " by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people ". And the purpose, again, was to ratify the apostles' authority in the newly-formed church.

I am prompted by that to ask : " Is there such an element of authority in the Church at the present time ? " Where do you think we should look for it ? Not in the apostles themselves, of course, for they are all dead ; nor in individuals who claim to have received grace from them by manual transmission ; nor even primarily in men of an apostolic spirit, but, obviously, in the apostolic writings, the New Testament scriptures. That is the Church's authority throughout the ages—not the vocal injunctions of the apostles which only lasted for a couple of generations, but their written injunctions ; and they should claim just the same allegiance as the first century disciples accorded to the apostles as persons. My question, therefore, resolves itself into whether or not the Word of God is the final arbiter of our church practices. When one voice suggests this and another that, do we retort : " To the law and to the testimony ! If they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them " ? That is the authority we want, not the authority of popes, not that of councils, not that of kirk ses-

sions, but that of the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever. God re-impress upon us the awful solemnity of the words : " It is written."

Then the Church of God in the period covered by Acts was *a Witnessing Church*. Said the Lord to His apostles, in Acts 1. 8 : " Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." And throughout the book, from beginning to end, we read of the way in which this word was fulfilled, initially in Jerusalem, and then in Judæa and Samaria, and finally, through the missionary journeys of Paul, to the uttermost bounds of the then-known world. But I want particularly to stress that such dissemination of the Gospel took place, not merely at the hands of the apostles, but at the hands of the rank and file of the members of the churches. To instance a couple of examples of this, I would recall your memory firstly to the early verses of Acts 8 and secondly to some verses in the middle of Acts 11. Acts 8. 1 relates that at the time in question " there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem ; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles " ; and 8. 4 continues that " they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word " ; —not preaching it formally but spreading the Gospel very *informally* (such is the force of the Greek), propagating the news because it was such good news. The tale is continued in Acts 11. 19-21 which says that " they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them : and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord." It warms one's heart to realize that the church of Syrian Antioch, which became of such strategic importance to Christianity, not only as being the base from which Paul's missionary journeys were conducted, but as a virile centre of Christian thought for some hundreds of years afterwards, was founded, not by some apostle or ecclesiastical dignitary, but by nameless disciples who were hounded from their homes by persecution. And it

only goes to show that the Church of God in those days was a witnessing Church, and that, not only as regards its chief office bearers, but throughout its entire membership. May God make the present-day Church a witnessing Church, the sort of church as was that of Thessalonica to which Paul could write, "for from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad ; so that we need not to speak any thing ". It is a boon to have great preachers and able leaders ; but it's a far greater boon to have churches each member of which is a witness to the Saviour. Oh, that dumb spirits might be cast out, mouths opened and tongues loosed, in the case of myriads of believers in our churches to-day !

My final point is that the church as depicted in Acts was a *Holy Church*. It was Spirit-filled, it was authoritative, it was witnessing and it was holy. "Ye are a holy nation," wrote Peter to the churches of Asia Minor. That does not just mean religiously separate ; it means pure, spotless, God-like. In a variety of religions you find "holy men ", so-called, but, while set apart for religious purposes, they are far (in many cases) from being God-like. Popes are called "His holiness-this" and "His holiness-that", but, morally, some of them have been anything but holy. The sense in which the apostolic Church was holy was in its stand against sin, its stand for righteousness, and we recall the shattering judgment which befell Ananias and Sapphira, when, for paltry gain, they endeavoured to deceive their fellow-believers. No wonder we read that "great fear fell upon the Church and as many as heard these things ". And the influence of the Church to-day would be enhanced beyond all computation were she more holy, more intolerant of sin, more partaking of the divine nature. There is not a big enough gulf between the morality of believers and the morality of unbelievers. This state of affairs should disturb us, it should be a concern to us, a shame, a disgrace. The atmosphere of the church, as compared with the atmosphere of the world, should be analogous to the atmosphere of a mountain-top, compared with the atmosphere in a city. But is it always so? Alas ! it is not. There's many a smut, many a defilement in present-day churches, generally speaking. The air's contaminated, polluted by

fumes, and ultimately people expect it, anticipate it, take it for granted. God forgive us, God cleanse us, God renew us, God re-impress us with the image of Christ ; and God make us to be “ blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom we shine as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of Life ! ”

DISCUSSION

Saturday, September 20th, 1958 (11.15 a.m.)

Chairman : MR. A. J. ATKINS

MR. J. R. CASSWELL (Leatherhead) : Would Dr. Short give a little help upon the points he made when he spoke of “ authority in the Church ”—“ a Spirit-filled Church ” and “ an authoritative Church ”. He spoke of the large number of conversions in the early days of the apostles’ preaching and the miracles and signs accrediting their authority, suggesting that, as we do not see this number of conversions, we have, perhaps, lost the authority. He spoke of the authority to-day as the Word of God. My difficulty is this : “ the assemblies ” are, I think I can say without contradiction, absolutely loyal to the Word of God—we take it without question as the basis of our authority—and yet we know that many assemblies are dead. We never see any conversions ; we don’t expect them ; and it seems to me that something needs to be said further upon authority, coupled with apostolic power.

Another aspect is that, if this principle is carried to its logical conclusion, we should land straight up in Romanism, because it would take away the Protestant principle of private interpretation. Dr. Short was trained in a College which is completely loyal to the Word of God, and yet other students have gone out of that College whose practices are not exactly similar to ours. They would say they are as loyal to the Word of God as we. There must be a measure of private interpretation. Would Dr. Short kindly elaborate.

DR. SHORT : It is certain that if the Church possessed a greater measure of authority, more blessing would attend its evangelistic activities. What is needed is not merely the

technical authority of "standing foursquare on the Word of God", but the moral and spiritual authority of being endued with the Holy Spirit. Whether or not, however, it is in the purposes of God for the Church to achieve the evangelistic success that was achieved through the Apostles, it is a matter on which we cannot be dogmatic. The viewpoint maintained in my address was that the extraordinarily large number of converts won through the ministry of the Apostles was a divine seal that the Apostles had been clothed with unique authority from the Lord.

With regard to the suggestion that to adopt this position might lead logically to Romanism. This might well be so were the line of authority (i) the Lord Jesus Christ ; (ii) the Apostles ; (iii) those who, in point of time, followed the Apostles, viz. the Church Fathers. But the line of authority for which we contend is (i) the Lord Jesus Christ ; (ii) the Apostles ; (iii) what the Apostles wrote (the New Testament) and recognized (the Old Testament). For ourselves, therefore, the Holy Scriptures are our final authority in all matters of faith and conduct, which is our great bulwark against Romanism.

MR. ATKINS : I think we ought to spend a little more time on the source of authority. Among evangelical Christians who are equal in allegiance to the Word of God there are many differences about truth ; there are real differences even among one group like ourselves. Where, then, is authority located ?

MR. G. C. D. HOWLEY (Purley) : Many people accept a twofold authority ; first the written Word of God of the first century, embodying the apostolic teaching and tradition ; and then, church life and government as developed in the second century. And when people take Scripture, plus the teaching of the Fathers and the later developments in church life, they are bound to be affected in their church conclusions. They are not accepting the sole authority of Scripture, though they would be affronted if you suggested that they were not. They are accepting Scripture *plus* something, and that "plus" is the teaching found in the post-apostolic days, the second century onwards ; that is evident when you come to such controversial subjects as bishops or baptism.

A Professor at Edinburgh University said, some years ago, to a friend of mine, that the "brethren movement" is Protestantism carried to its logical conclusion, i.e. going back to the sole authority of Holy Scripture. Mind you, we must always distinguish between what is found in Scripture, and so is authoritative, and what has grown up amongst us in the last 120 years, as a matter of custom, which we may have elevated to the level of divine authority, but which has no such authority.

DR. HANTON : We must always remember also that "The letter killeth, it is the Spirit that maketh alive". There is no room for ecclesiastic rectitude alone : it should be spiritual conformity ; and where the latter is lacking, the former can be tyrannical, oppressive and disastrous.

MR. GOODMAN : You know the old Pharisees were perfectly sincere ; they were rigid adherents to the law ; they believed every word of it ; they regulated their lives by it ; and yet Christ called them hypocrites. It is quite possible for us to find ourselves adopting very much that same position. A loyal, rigid, unswerving adherence to the very words of Holy Scripture and yet open to the charge of hypocrisy. Because it is not *real*, the result is not what the Scriptures intend they should produce. You see, the Word of God is given by the Holy Spirit. It is Spirit-given, it is Spirit-interpreted, and it is spiritually received ; it is spiritually discerned. "He that is spiritual discerneth all things" and it is not possible to handle the Word of God unless you are a spiritual man. You are bound—even with the very words before you—you are bound to go astray ; you are bound to mislead those whom you are teaching. It is spiritually illumined. And everything depends upon a man walking in the Spirit and being filled with the Spirit, that he may impart spiritual things to spiritual men, and I think that is the danger ; I think that is the thing we have got to guard against all the time, right through life ; it is very hard to resist the carnal appeal that is pressing upon us all. And the trouble with our assemblies is, not that we are not faithful to the Word of God, not that we are not loyal to it, but that we are not always maintaining that humble, spiritual walk with God which is the only means by which we may handle it aright.

MR. ATKINS: While we might be very clear about tradition in its technical and historical sense, every religious movement inevitably develops its own traditions after a few generations and it is easy to be governed by the Word of God plus that tradition. And it is perhaps that that we want to be very careful about.

MR. A. JONES (Warrington) : Should there not be a measure of charity in our church order, as to the time and place that we break bread, the question of music, and all those things which are subsidiary? Or when a man comes among us with a pastoral gift—utilising his services without his being the sole pastor?

DR. HANTON : Perhaps the lack of charity is the hallmark of the lack of being Spirit-filled. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty," and the charitable spirit is Spirit-begotten for love is part of the fruit of the Spirit. Let us hold to the truth and let us speak the truth, but speak it in love. Where we have a principle clearly laid down in Holy Scripture we can, in the fear of God, seek to apply that truth in a loving, kind spirit that will not drive away those who may not see as we do. If we seek to use whatever opportunity God gives us to instruct in that loving spirit, it is more likely to be fruitful in producing an alteration in the attitude of others than if we apply truth in a rigid, harsh manner.

MR. CASSWELL : At High Leigh Mr. Harold St. John summed up the whole thing in the remark : "In the Old Testament we get directions, in the New Testament we get direction."

DR. SHORT : One of the most striking contrasts between the Old Testament and the New is the meticulous detail with which the form of divine worship was worked out and presented under the Old Covenant (witness the book of Leviticus especially), whereas under the New Covenant there is very much less of that. Two ordinances are laid down—the breaking of bread and the baptism of believers by immersion—which are very clear. But, that apart, there is a much larger amount of liberty allowed in the New Testament church order than in Old Testament times.

MR. SPENCER THOMAS (Sheffield) : Could Dr. Short give us

a little further illumination on his remark that "there ought to be a great difference between the morality of believers and unbelievers"?

DR. SHORT: Is it not a fact that the morality and the ethical behaviour of us who belong to the Lord should be far away above that of those who have not come into the knowledge of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ? All I need do surely is just to read Matthew 5. 44-48. [Here Dr. Short read in full; and the reader of this report should so read.] May God write that challenge on all our hearts.

MR. H. E. CANTLEY (Manchester): Can those whom we would term "nominal Christians" gather together in the name of the Lord? What in fact is implied in "gathering together in My name"?

DR. HANTON: If by "nominal Christians" one means those who believe that they are Christians because they are born in a Christian country, but have never been born again, then I cannot think that they can gather "in the name of the Lord". But if by "nominal Christians" one means Christians other than those who "meet as we do"—and I am sorry to use that phrase because it makes a difference which I do not think is justified—but, if that is what is meant, then, if they are gathering according to the light that they have, I believe that the Lord in His graciousness will reveal Himself and presence Himself with them, as, in fact, history confirms.

"To whom much is given of him shall much be required," and if it be—and do not forget I said "if"—that we have more light in these matters, let us not forget there is a correspondingly greater responsibility upon us to see to it that in practice we know more of meeting in His name. That will mean self-examination, self-judgment, and conforming our ways to the will and purpose of God—saying, doing, and, if, by God's help, possibly thinking nothing that would be contrary to His name, and what His name stands for.

MR. ATKINS: I think you had in mind that the essential of a New Testament assembly would be a regenerate membership, but implied in this question is something we must pursue: could we get a little closer to a definition of what it is to be "gathered in (or unto) the name of the Lord Jesus Christ"?

MR. G. W. ROBSON (Streatham) : The question links with a question already in my mind. We build a great deal out of this phrase in Matthew 18. Now, in the Gospels, the only mentions of the word "church" are twice in this particular passage and once in the earlier passage, with which Dr. Hanton dealt fully this morning. If we were to read the Gospels afresh, without a pre-conceived notion about the people who are "gathered in the name of the Lord", or without a background of Church history, I wonder if we would really give to this particular passage the ecclesiastical bearing that has been drawn from, or put into, it?

Professor Bruce, in his 1954 paper, said that it is "worthy of consideration" that the church comes in Matthew only of the four Gospels; but did not enlarge on this verse. Hort's *Christian Ecclesia* suggests that the direct reference in Matthew 18 was to the Jewish local community to which offender and offended belonged.

In one respect, this chapter is linked with Matthew 5, as Dr. Short has read it to us: verse 20 is deeply embedded in a chapter wholly taken up with offences and forgiveness. We are ready enough to use this section for church discipline; but the chapter begins with "the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is as a little child"; proceeds to the solemn scriptures about "offending little ones"; goes on to little ones who have gone astray and the Shepherd seeking them; then to "thy brother in trespass"; proceeds, through the section we have touched on, to "seventy times seven" forgiveness; and ends with that solemn parable of the servant who would not forgive his fellow-servant. Perhaps we ought to put the section, and "gathered together in My name", back into context; and consider whether our peculiar emphasis has not taken the phrase quite out of its original proportion.

MR. H. J. BREAREY (Bexhill) : I would like to read a Scripture: Col. 3. 17: "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him." Seeing that is to characterize the whole life of the child of God, I have always failed to see why any special ecclesiastical significance should be given to the verse in Matthew 18.

MR. T. B. WATTAM (Sheffield) : The only other place in the

New Testament where you have the thought of gathering in the name of the Lord Jesus has again the thought of discipline : 1 Cor. 5. 4. We might also ask the question, " Why should the two or three in verse 20 of Matthew 18 be a figure of speech (2, 3, 23, or 223 !), whereas the " two or three witnesses " of verse 16 are literal? Could it not be a literal two or three praying for the man who is still a heathen man or a publican? [See also the " two " of verse 19.] I suggest that in 1 Cor. 5 and in Matt. 18 the context is not worship but discipline among God's people.

MR. ATKINS : In quoting that verse we so frequently leave out the conjunction—" *For* where two or three. . . ." The Lord enunciates a general principle, introduces it, and applies it in a particular connection. We want to get a little closer, I feel, to this very vital general principle.

MR. G. H. WILSON (Sheffield) : If a separate ecclesiastic position is deduced from Matthew 18. 20, how would the believers for 1,800 years have interpreted the quotation?

After a meeting on a Sunday night Mr. Harold Barker and a visiting Christian were walking along the sea front. The Christian said to Mr. Barker : " How many Christians are there, do you suppose, in Weymouth, gathered to the name of the Lord? " Mr. Barker looked at his watch. It was half past ten. " I should think there is none," he replied.

DR. SHORT : I think it is a very blessed realization to be meeting together in the name of the Lord Jesus, but what I think is much to be deplored is the use of the phrase to insinuate that other evangelical Christians are not meeting together in the name of the Lord Jesus.

MR. HOWLEY : So often we hear it said that Baptist Christians meet in the name of an ordinance, Methodists in the name of John Wesley, and so forth. That is not being fair to those Christians, theoretically or practically. It may be that some meet thinking principally of Luther's doctrines, or of Wesley; but it is not unknown for people to show considerable reverence for the name of J. N. Darby. I think we must be fair to our brethren with whom we may not be walking ecclesiastically. It is a tendency to ecclesiastical conceit that has sometimes given us a bad name. Surely one

of the great needs of our present generation of assemblies is so to live before God and His people that we may be delivered from a false reproach. The reproach of Christ is that which Christians receive from the world, but the fact is that we have earned a bad name at times from others because we have behaved unfortunately. This is not the reproach of Christ but reproach we have brought upon ourselves which we need to be humbled about.

Any godly Christian group who meet, shall we say, simply for a prayer meeting, would count it very strange to be told that they were not meeting "in the name of the Lord Jesus". Those words are words of challenge, that search our conscience, for to meet in the name of the Lord Jesus must mean some humble submission to Him, some significant likeness to His character; and if those things mark us, they will be moral rather than ecclesiastical marks—and that can be all-embracing.

MR. P. O. RUOFF (Waltham Cross) : It is most unChristlike to assign to a certain number of people that they, and they only, meet in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why shouldn't any group of people who are Christians calling upon the Name sincerely, truly, recognizing His power and His authority, do this? I remember hearing Dr. Campbell Morgan speak of going to a country district with another preacher. He said, "We leaned over the gate, just resting midway in the walk, and we called upon the Name, and I believe that was a fulfilment of the words. We recognized His name and His presence." So never let us make the fatal mistake of denying to other persons what we cherish ourselves, or perhaps we may be putting a forced interpretation on the words. If they say "we are gathering in the name of the Lord", do not deny it to them; otherwise we may be speaking against Christ.

MR. GOODMAN : There was one thing that I think is relevant to what we have been speaking about. We have been talking about the church meeting together "in His name", and we need to look at the promise a little more closely. For He said: "Where two or three of *you* are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst." Now we, as brethren, meet together in His name. We are not a meeting "for public

worship", we are a meeting of those who love Him, and who are drawn together to Him, and in His holy name we are worshipping. I think that is our distinguishing feature. You may say, doesn't every church and chapel meet together in His name? Yes, many of them do; but it is surely not true of all of them, because many of them constitute admittedly a mixed company of people, many of whom are without the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ; they don't know Him, they don't love Him. It is a tradition with many people, and a mark of respectability that they should attend their church and that they should take part in its public worship. I apprehend that that is not quite what the Lord meant when He said "meet together in My name". I think He was referring to those who knew Him, those who loved Him, not to a mixed congregation. Of course, that is not to deny that some in every congregation may meet together in His name and He is with them. I remember Dr. Douglas Adam, a very outstanding light for many years in the Presbyterian body. When he was an old man I took him to a meeting of Christian Brethren for worship, at his request. It was his first experience and I never saw a man more deeply moved. It was only a small company—I suppose not more than twenty-five or thirty. I shall never forget when the cup came to him, the reverence with which he took it in his hand and raised it to his lips. Afterwards he said to me in his rather statesmanlike way, "Mr. Goodman, if you people only knew it, you have learned the true secret of worship. Our churches are not churches. The best that can be said is that there is a church within the church. But *you* are a church." I thought this a surprising perception of the distinctive character of a true church. When the Lord said: "When two or three of *you* are met together, those of you who are Mine, whom I know and I call by name and who follow Me"—when *they* are met together in My name—"there," He added "am I". And the answer to our question is that when a company of believers meet together in fellowship with their present Lord it is a company of the Church of God that are so meeting.

MR. A. T. GINNINGS (Liverpool) : I take it that Mr. Goodman would not suggest that what he has been saying would relate only to the "Morning Meeting", the "Worship Meeting".

MR. GOODMAN : Thank you. We have in Acts 2. 42 the exercises that engaged the early Church and worship is not mentioned ; but it is, of course, implied.

MR. R. J. WHITE (Enfield) : Is a " church meeting " when a number of believers gather together in the name of the Lord ? If not, what actually is a " church meeting " ?

MR. A. PICKERING (Stockport) : May I make the profound suggestion that a " church meeting " is a meeting of the church !

The late Mr. C. F. Hogg used to suggest that the account in the twentieth chapter of the Acts is a description of the one meeting of the apostolic church. It may be that we ought to think about the prayer meeting on Monday evening, and the Bible reading on Thursday evening, not as a separate meeting but as an adjournment of the meeting on Sunday morning—an adjournment only necessary out of respect to time and convenience of those who gather. But it does seem that, for a gathering of Christians to be called a " meeting of the church " or " a church meeting " it requires that it is a gathering related to something having continuity and permanence. The mere coming together of Christians in a private home, say, would not necessarily be a " church meeting ".

DR. SHORT : One of the safeguards by which we in " the assemblies " are able to preserve a church membership which is, as far as our fallible judgment can tell, entirely Christian, is the ordinance of believers' baptism. I feel that the type of church that observes the ordinance of infant baptism inevitably lays the way open for a flood of people who are not regenerate, by the Holy Spirit, coming into their church fellowship.

MR. C. J. HARTRIDGE (Harpenden) : What advice in these matters should be given to converts in a general Gospel campaign ? Can we direct them to specific passages where " it is written " in relation to their church fellowship ? What should be said to those who, after trial with us, prefer other fellowships ?

DR. SHORT : It would be unfortunate, immediately people have been converted at some campaign, to inform them that they must be " Brethren ", as though it were necessary for

them to come into a certain group, sect or denomination. It would be better to suggest to them that they should endeavour, with an open mind, and with a prayerful dependence on the Spirit of God, to examine for themselves the Word of God to find what His will and leading for them should be with regard to their corporate Christian life.

MR. ATKINS : The important point arises of loyalty on the part of members of assemblies. We have those who enjoy the fellowship and the spiritual amenities, but are not grounded in the principles of the fellowship. It calls for wisdom and patience on the part of elders to see that those who have recently joined us, and perhaps particularly our younger brethren and sisters do receive, in a wise and loving manner, a real grounding in what we stand for so that unhappy lapses, sometimes for small reasons, do not occur.

On the other hand, there is sometimes a restlessness and dissatisfaction and sooner or later it comes to a head and people leave. Someone has said that if a sheep goes astray the shepherd blames himself ; and, if we have the instinct of pastors, we ought in the Lord's grace to sense the beginning of such a process and deal with it in prayer and shepherd care so that it does not come to an unhappy end.

DR. HANTON : This question of " it is written " is very important. If we see certain principles laid down in the New Testament, it is our bounden spiritual duty to adhere to them. It is clearly taught that every believer is a priest ; that gatherings of believers in the New Testament did not have one bishop or one controlling person ; that they did not have State control ; that all members were baptized—with immersion, submersion and emergence—going down, under and coming up—and, if the practice of Christians does not conform to these clearly laid down spiritual principles, then we have the authority for saying it is unscriptural.

I would like moreover to say I am where I am because of conviction of the Spirit, through the Holy Scriptures. I believe that the gatherings, as we know them, conform to that pattern. Having said that, we must still be charitable to those who do not see as we do ; but, at the same time, be quite clear and definite that we believe that this is what is written in the New Testament for us to carry into effect. I stand

firmly as I see it on New Testament principles of gathering and wish that all Christians would gather like that, not because I do, but because, as I believe, the New Testament shows that that is the pattern. If we were to take a stronger stand along that line there would be less moving away from us.

But the real basis of discontent so often is that there are those in leadership who, according to the New Testament pattern, are not qualified for leadership. Face that fact : they are not qualified, perhaps either by character, or by conduct ; and these defects must be put right. If young people in our assemblies are dissatisfied, it is perhaps because we lay claim to principles which in practice we do not carry out, and because there is not that standard of spiritual instruction necessary for healthy, spiritual development.

MR. T. I. WILSON (Stanmore) : There have been two or three little publications recently which have been wrapped up in the form of our gatherings. It is not the form surely that we must seek after in order to worship God in spirit and in truth. I have read a good deal about the early gatherings of "brethren" and there would have been no power in those early days but for the character of the men who formed the gatherings. It was not the form—the meeting "with no visible leader"—and so on. One hundred and twenty years ago the movement would have gone nowhere but for men who stepped out from the world ; gentlemen of means rolled up their carpets and relaid with lino in order that their fellow-believers might not feel out of place when they came into their homes ; officers in the army resigned their commissions. They were a heavenly people and wanted to live like heavenly people. Lives were transformed on the pattern of Col. 3. 3 : "Ye are dead but your life is hid with Christ in God." If we live as heavenly people, others will be attracted to us. We have been taken out of the world and we must see that our lives conform to heavenly ways. Unhappily, as was pointed out in recent correspondence in a periodical, some Christians seem to be trying to get as near the world as they can. It is in these matters, rather than in the forms of the meetings, that we ought to be engaged.

Saturday, September 20th, 1958 (2.15 p.m.)

THE CHURCH IN THE CORINTHIAN EPISTLES

Chairman : MR. A. J. ASHWELL

Address : MR. F. N. MARTIN

THE epistles to the Corinthians were written in the very early days of Christianity to a cosmopolitan church in a large busy seaport, composed largely of Gentile Christians more or less recently converted from heathenism. It was a paganism that was none the better morally for being intellectual and philosophical and for existing side by side with the culture and refinement of a relatively advanced civilization. The life, conduct and thought of the Christians stood in glowing contrast to that of the people around—to that from which they themselves had been saved by the grace of God—but it took a high degree of single-hearted devotion to Christ to keep them immune from the corruption that had once enslaved them. Unfortunately there were basic weaknesses and failings both in their individual lives as Christians and in their corporate church life which kept them from maintaining this devotion. Some of these arose from ignorance and still more of them from defects of spiritual character, and it was to correct both of these that the two epistles were written. The first epistle consists largely of replies to specific questions of principle and practice that they had addressed in writing to the Apostle, to which he adds criticisms, rebukes and admonitions based on reports he has received from outside sources as to some patent evils in their church life: the second epistle followed fairly closely on the heels of the first because the Apostle was somewhat concerned that his first letter may have been rather too severe and may have done more harm than good.

It is about 57 A.D. and Paul is writing from Ephesus in the early days of the Christian Church, these two epistles being among the earliest of the writings which now compose the New Testament. In view of the occasion and purpose of the epistles we do not find in them any formal presentation of what is commonly known as "Church truth", but a good deal comes out incidentally as he deals with those matters with which their questions and his sense of their need call him to deal, notwithstanding that the matters themselves are largely matters of practice rather than doctrine. This may be summarized as follows :

1. The epistle is addressed to "the church of God which is at Corinth", and this consists of "those that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints". He does not call them the church of Corinth—there was no such thing. There is one universal Church consisting of all who by faith in Christ are set apart for God and are therefore called His holy ones : of this one universal Church there are many local expressions, each a miniature of the whole, and one such was at Corinth formed as a result of the Apostle's visit to preach the Gospel there and subsequent eighteen months' stay teaching the word of God—all as recorded in Acts 18. Paul calls it the Church of God because of the factions to which he will soon refer.

2. These divisions among them were a serious source of weakness in the church at Corinth as they must ever be. Whatever would Paul say if the members of some present-day house of Chloe were to report to him about the divisions, the schisms, the "denominations" in the Church to-day. "No wonder," he would say, "your influence is waning, your witness so ineffective. You are denying the first principle of Church truth, that we are 'all one in Christ Jesus'." The people called Brethren first came into existence largely as a reaction from the many divisions of Protestantism, but they were not themselves proof against the divisive activity of the Evil One and they are to-day divided in a way with which we are only too sadly familiar, with the inevitable weakening of their spiritual life and testimony.

3. This sectarian or schismatic division in the Church, the Apostle says in chapter 3, is evidence of carnality, a lack of spirituality, an absence of the unity of the Spirit. His remedy is to stress the fundamental organic unity of the Church, and

to teach that the one universal Church is the temple of God, the shrine in which He dwells among men. He states with great solemnity that whoever "destroys" that temple, whoever breaks up its essential unity either by false teaching or by schismatic faction, must himself be destroyed, must come under the judgment of God.

4. Another serious defect in a church, as in any community, is lax discipline—resulting in indiscipline on the part of its members. In the Corinthian church there had been a very serious case of incest for which the obvious punishment was excommunication. Not only had the church and its leaders completely failed to deal with the matter, but in their lax indifference they had actually been self-satisfied, complacent, and even elated with pride, and showed no sign of grief or shame that it had occurred in their midst. The moral degradation of the heathen city was notorious but this that had happened in the church was so bad as to outweigh anything known among these decadent pagans. And the church had remained smugly indifferent! The fountain of the Church's authority in matters of discipline, Paul by implication reminds them, is in the charter given them by the Lord of the Church—that when they met as a church in His Name and under His authority they could count on His presence among them not only to guide their counsels but solemnly to ratify and validate their judgments (Matt. 18. 18-20). Thus there is seen to be no hierarchy for government or discipline in the Church: each local church is given an authority and competence to act in these matters as the agent of the Lord of the Church, in humble dependence upon Him, being answerable to no one but Him and having no jurisdiction in any other church.

5. In the next, the sixth, chapter, this matter of competence in judging moral and spiritual issues is carried further—into the settling of what we should call civil disputes. The Lord of the Church invests each local church with the right and responsibility (and therefore with the ability) to act for Him, humbly seeking His direction and guidance and with a quiet confidence that He is among them to give it. If then, says Paul, you are given this power in deciding spiritual matters, and moreover are destined one day to sit with Christ in His judgment of the world and even of angels, can you not settle in the same way your disputes in earthly and temporal

matters, instead of taking them before heathen tribunals? *Dare* you, he says, wash your dirty linen in the public heathen courts instead of finding a godly brother, in whom both parties have confidence, to arbitrate between you? No doubt there are intricate and technical matters that require professional skill to decide them, but quarrels and disputes will yield to the wise counsel and spiritual wisdom of a mature and experienced Christian whose integrity is unassailable. We may not be litigious like the Corinthians were, but we might derive great benefit from following the Apostle's advice.

So much for Paul's own strictures on their manifest failures and weaknesses: he now deals seriatim with the specific questions they have raised with him, finding in each of them a fresh occasion for teaching "church truth".

In the questions they addressed to Paul, the Corinthian Christians showed concern not only regarding matters of individual conduct and practice in relation to the world around them, but also as regards their corporate life as a Christian community, as a local church. Their community of interest in Christ and His teachings and in the worship and service of God naturally brought them together for what we would now call "meetings"—Paul calls it "coming together in one place", or "coming together in the church". This obviously does not mean coming together in a building called a church, but coming together *as* a church. They would more or less regularly assemble for prayer, for teaching, for exhortation from the word of God, for mutual help and encouragement and fellowship, and for partaking of the Lord's supper, according to His command: and it appears that they sought guidance from the Apostle as to the will of God for the conduct of these gatherings. We, too, are interested in this question, particularly if we have a desire to follow the apostolic pattern rather than the historical "developments", which represent in greater or less measure a departure from it.

The Apostle takes occasion to reprimand them very sharply for what are, to us, quite incredible abuses that had become established even in their observance of the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper. He is able to correct these, in a most effective and positive way, by telling them what he had received, by direct personal revelation from the Lord Himself, as to the initiation by Him of this ordinance, adding thereto

his own brief inspired comment. The Lord had made it clear that the purpose of the ordinance was to promote a "remembrance" of Him—a focussing of regard upon Him in His sacrificial love, His sufferings and His dying on the cross for them—and, by the simple symbolism of the Supper, to interpret to their hearts something of the deep meaning of His incarnation, His life among men, and His atoning death for men. To keep all this alive in their remembrance, the Apostle added, until His return.

In coming to this simple feast each participant was responsible to examine his own (not others') heart and life to ensure that he entered into this sacred experience in a condition and manner worthy of it. This was important for, as Paul explains in chapter ten, the Supper is pre-eminently a declaration of personal fellowship with Christ both in His humanity and in His death; and it was unthinkable that they should, by personal participation in His Supper, declare their intimate relationship and association with Him, while at the same time their lives declared an equally intimate association with things that were competitive, unsympathetic or directly hostile to Him.

In explaining thus the purpose of the Lord's Supper the Apostle wisely refrained from laying down any rules or procedure. He prescribed no celebrant, or formal order of service, and contented himself with enunciating principles, so that they might observe the ordinance in the way best calculated to secure the object the Lord had in view in instituting it. In this connection it is important to decide whether the directions given in chapter 14 for the regulation of their church gatherings were intended to apply to their celebration of the Lord's Supper. It would appear that they do. In speaking of the Lord's Supper Paul uses the expression (in 11. 20): "When ye come together into one place." In giving directions concerning the conduct of church meetings in chapter 14. 23 he says: "If the whole church be come together into one place." Clearly he regards the observance of the Lord's Supper as a church meeting. If this be so, the Apostle's principles may be summarized as follows:

1. There is to be no presiding official, no one who by reason of office, training, ordination or vocation has a special or exclusive prerogative to "administer the sacraments".

In a purely worldly community the effect of this would be chaotic, but this danger is removed when all are trustfully submissive to the Holy Spirit, and experience shows that this is so.

2. This "open" character of the communion service necessitates self-control, spiritual sensitivity, and an unselfish mutual deference in those taking audible part.

3. Audible taking part is confined to the men.* To *any* man? So far as audible expressions of worship are concerned, to any man who has the spiritual insight to discern the leading of the Spirit and the ability to express the praises and worship of all present—*they* must feel that he has done this. As regards a ministry of the word of God calculated to promote true corporate worship, "any man" will not do—it must be those gifted by God for this ministry.

4. All this must produce "decency and order"—there must be reverence, a spiritual fitness, a harmony of the Spirit, a complete subjugation of any fleshly desire for prominence or commendation, or display of personal abilities.

5. This is an activity of the Church, and every member of the one universal Church who is walking with God has a right to be there and participate—such membership being a *spiritual* membership based on personal union with Christ by the Spirit. No one has any right to exclude from the Lord's Table any true believer not openly living in unconfessed sin—his personal spiritual fitness is otherwise his own affair, with God.

6. On such occasions every believer present exercises a personal spiritual priesthood, offering to God and to the Exalted Lord his spiritual sacrifice of praise and worship. In this he does not need any human intermediary, no human priest to act towards God on his behalf or to mediate to him the heavenly grace. There seems to be no justification in Scripture for the division of Christians into clergy and laity or their equivalents, and it really does seem necessary to be emphatic and even dogmatic on this basic assertion.

7. The same principle applies as regards the presence and exercise of spiritual gifts in the Church. This epistle, taken with Ephesians 4, clearly teaches that the Ascended Lord, on taking His place in glory at the right hand of God, gave gifts

* But see also page 23 (1954); pages 37, 38, 40, 41, 55 (1955). (Editors).

to men. Pre-eminent among these was the Holy Spirit, to be the personal representative of Christ in the world and among His people. Then He gave to His Church certain whom the Sovereign Spirit had endued with those spiritual gifts and capacities necessary for the development, establishment, building-up, instruction and leadership of the Church, and these the Sovereign Spirit distributed (and continues to distribute) in the local churches as He sees necessary. Such Christians gifted in this way are responsible to the Lord of the Church for the development and exercise of their gift, or gifts, in the Church for the glory of Christ, for the building up of the Church and for the blessing of their fellow Christians, and not at all for their own gratification. If, for the better exercise of their gift, these Christians undergo training or instruction at a suitable Theological or Bible College, that is all to the good, but it is the divine endowment and not the academic training that constitutes their call to serve.

8. Membership of the universal Church involves recognition of the fact that, since all believers are members of Christ, they are by that union constituted members one of another, and have a very deep and real link with one another in Him—so much so that they are inter-dependent and cannot flourish either individually or corporately if they attempt to live in isolation or independence. All this is taught in chapter twelve under the figure of the human body where the head represents Christ and the various limbs and organs represent those who are united to Him by faith, and function rightly and fully only as they recognize their relationship to the Head and to all the other members of the body. The analogies are detailed and striking and teach very powerfully both the advantages and responsibilities of Church membership, both in mutual care and co-operation and in the conscientious exercise of individual gift. This latter is aptly summed up by Peter in his well-known words, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4. 10). When one considers the range and variety of these spiritual gifts and capacities in the Church, it is clear that the functions necessary to the development and activity of the Church are to be performed by all those possessing one or more of these. The gifts are not concentrated in the few but spread over the

many. If the Church is healthy and its members all making their due contribution, then each local church will be furnished with all the gifts and capacities necessary to its proper functioning. I am aware that a number of the gifts enumerated by Paul in the two lists in chapter 12 belong to the early formative period of the Church, and, having fulfilled their function, have been withdrawn, but the fact still remains that the ministries necessary to the maintenance and development of the life of the Church will all be performed in every local church, provided that all its members are where God wants them to be and are duly making the contribution for which they have been fitted by the Spirit of God.

9. The finance necessary to the Church's activities is to be provided by the free will offerings of its members: the principles governing this are enunciated and illustrated in the eighth and ninth chapters of the second epistle. The Apostle teaches that these offerings are to be the result of careful, regular, systematic, proportionate and ungrudging putting aside of "the Lord's portion" of His people's income for the purpose of:

(a) The relief of the poor saints, called by Paul "ministering to the saints". This is part of the mutual care spoken of in 1 Cor. 12.

(b) The support of those called by God to full-time evangelism or Bible ministry. This is fully dealt with in 1 Cor. 9. There is nothing to suggest that such brethren are expected to enjoy a lower standard of living than other Christians. Those who have reason to be thankful for their ministry should be ready to show it practically.

(c) The necessary expenses of the Church. The administration of these various funds is to be carried out with scrupulous care—it must not only be done honestly but must *appear* to be done honestly. It should never be in the hands of one brother, however trustworthy, and an account should be rendered of his stewardship, to those who have contributed the money (2 Cor. 8. 18-24).

Now if, as we believe, all this represents Christ's pattern and ideal for His Church, where on this earth shall we find it in existence and functioning according to this plan? If we search Christendom and examine the form and structure and operations of the various Christian communities, shall we

find any one of them approximating to this pattern? In particular, shall we find a Christian body in which :

1. The priesthood of the individual believer is fully recognized, requiring no human intermediary in any of his spiritual exercises.

2. There is no hierarchy, no orders of ordained priesthood, and no division into clergy and laity.

3. The various ministries of the Church are carried out by means of the spiritual gifts and capacities of those of its members whom the Spirit in sovereignty has endued with such gifts, avoiding alike a one-man ministry and an any-man ministry.

4. The above provisions operate in the celebration of Holy Communion, where there is no administration of the Sacrament by an ordained celebrant, but the priesthood of all believers has full expression under the immediate direction of the Holy Spirit.

5. Membership of the universal Church is recognized to consist of all who are personally united to Christ by faith—and only such—quite apart from the application of any external rite.

6. The government of the local church is in the hands of elders or overseers (sometimes in the New Testament called bishops) who are gifted by God for spiritual leadership and are responsible direct to the Lord of the Church. (This is not taught directly in the Epistles to the Corinthians, but being clearly taught in other parts of the New Testament is inserted for completeness.)

Even if all Christian communions could claim to exhibit *some* of these characteristics, is there any one of them that could rightly claim to take their stand on them *all*? Well, we should find that the people called “brethren”, while disclaiming that title in any denominational sense, would claim to believe that what has been set out in this paper does in fact constitute our Lord’s pattern for His Church, and that they are humbly seeking to follow that pattern without willingly adding to or taking from it. Two questions rise immediately to the lips of a thoughtful Christian hearing that claim :

1. When there are so many attractive alternatives to “brethrenism” and God is so obviously blessing and using

His people in other communions, how important is it to insist on the retention of all these principles, to the exclusion of changes that have been introduced in structure and practice, many of which have been proved by centuries of acceptance by important groups of Christians ?

2. If the Brethren have preserved the original apostolic pattern why have they not retained the original apostolic power and influence ?

As to the first, I think we should suspect our preferences : what we like is by no means an infallible indication of what is best. We are on safer ground when we enquire what is God's intention. Assuming that what we have stated represents, or approximately represents, our Lord's pattern for His Church, is there any reason to think that the changing centuries, and developments in social life and thought would require departures *in principle* from that pattern ? Since no detailed rules of practice, and no rubric, so to speak, have been laid down, these details cannot be of first importance and are capable of adaptation to changing conditions, but the *principles*, I submit, are of permanent validity. The minimum requirement for a Christian community to claim to conform to the divine pattern is, I suggest, the six points I have enumerated, namely :

1. The priesthood of all believers.
2. No division into clergy and laity.
3. The supply of the Church's ministries by the free exercise of individual gift.
4. The " open " meeting at the celebration of the Lord's Supper.
5. The one-ness of all believers.
6. The autonomy of the local church, with government by overseers.

In my view, we should continue to believe, teach and practise these things, while confessing with deep humiliation how largely we have lost the spirit while guarding the letter. Which brings me to my second question.

Why and in what way have we so largely lost the spirit and power of the apostolic church and the spiritual influence of the early Brethren ? In the first place we have largely succumbed to the spiritual weaknesses common to so many Christians in this day and because of which a revival is so

sorely needed—superficiality, lack of personal devotion and Bible study, loss of a sense of church responsibility, worldliness and pre-occupation with temporal things. But at the same time we, to our shame, remain complacent, and even at times tend to think ourselves superior to other Christians. There is a tendency to a dead orthodoxy, as though believing the right things and continuing the traditions were all that is required. We tend to stress non-essentials and show intolerance toward the honest exercise of individual conscience. We even at times, and in some places, tend to be rigid and exclusive in our attitude to other Christians, and so deny the very one-ness we profess to regard as supremely important.

None of these grievous failures on our part invalidates the principles for which we stand, but can we wonder that they beget the disloyalty that is so prevalent to-day and are causing a “drift” away from the Brethren assemblies? In the minds of some young people among us these failures are summed up in the colloquial expression “sticky”, which in their judgment is not merely a grievous but a fatal failure. By it they mean an unreasoning and indefensible adherence, in a purely negative way, to an attitude and outlook that has no relevance to the circumstances and conditions of to-day. Perhaps they sometimes go too far, but we should be foolish to ignore their criticism.

No doubt the Brethren assemblies do not in many cases to-day exhibit the New Testament pattern. Where, it is often asked, is the distribution of the necessary gift in so many weak and even dying assemblies to-day? Has the Holy Spirit discontinued His sovereign distribution? Why is it, they enquire, that in our desire to encourage and rely upon the exercise of individual gift we tolerate so much that is not only not Spirit-taught but is grievously inferior by any standard? If the Spirit is able and willing to supply the local church with all necessary gift, why do we very largely delegate to gifted brethren from other assemblies the ministries for our own assembly? If the financial needs of the church are met by the voluntary contributions of its members, why are we content to have so many buildings that are uninviting and ill-kept?

These and a score of other questions are exercising the minds of thinking people among us to-day, and to them seem

a denial of the principles we have laid down, rendering them either invalid or at least unimportant. Perhaps the answers to these questions may come out in the discussion, but meanwhile I reiterate my own conviction that, while we have lamentably failed in many ways, the principles for which we stand, and should still stand, remain unaltered.

DISCUSSION

Saturday, September 20th, 1958 (3 p.m.)

MR. ASHWELL : How gracious the Lord is that Paul should give these instructions to a church which was in the condition in which it was. It should give us abounding hope that if we honestly desire to bring into our assemblies the principles and the power which are so necessary, to be healthy assemblies, the Spirit of God will answer.

MR. D. B. LONG (Harpenden) : May I ask what is the instruction for repentance and acknowledgment of sin and confession of the individual in the church? Would that not play a part in the vitality of the church?

MR. MARTIN : Are you thinking of a sin which has become public?

MR. LONG : No, the unconfessed sins of the individual between him and God, through which the community becomes spiritually dead.

MR. MARTIN : The existence of sin in the life not dealt with before God is an inevitable source of weakness in that life, and consequently in the church, and that is what is meant by the illustrations in chapter 12 of the body and its members. If one member suffers, suffers spiritually, all members suffer with it : it brings down the vitality and tone of the whole body.

MR. N. HACKETT (Lincoln) : Is there any scriptural basis for the practice in some assemblies of making baptism a prerequisite to remembering the Lord Jesus Christ in the breaking of bread?

MR. MARTIN : In my judgment no one has any right to exclude from the Lord's table any true believer in the Lord

Jesus who is walking with Him. If his failure to be baptized is a matter of deliberate disobedience, he is not fit to be at the Lord's table, but if there are other reasons, if he has not seen the light, no one has any right to exclude him, in my judgment.

MR. J. C. AUKER (Liverpool) : Would Mr. Martin elaborate his statement that "some of the gifts, having served their purpose during the apostolic period, were withdrawn, and consequently we do not see them in operation to-day"? Perhaps we do not see them to-day because of lack of faith on the part of the Church.

MR. MARTIN : If the need arose, God would equip His Church with any gifts appropriate to the occasion. In the early days of the Church, all the Christians were Jews, and all in one place, in Jerusalem. They have a polyglot people around them ; thousands and thousands come to Jerusalem for the feast from all parts of the then world. How are they going to preach the Gospel to them ? The Spirit enables them miraculously so to do by the gift of tongues, and that continues so long as Jews, speaking Greek, or Aramaic, are addressing people whose languages they don't know and have not the opportunity to learn. The Spirit equips them with the wherewithal to do it, and in their churches the exercise of such gifts necessitates the existence of an interpreter, so interpreters are given, so long as they are needed.

When you speak of the gift of prophecy, I think we are on much more difficult ground. There are some, and there are some here, who believe that the gift of prophecy has ceased. There are some, I among them, who believe that there is a New Testament gift of prophecy : that the servants of God in this dispensation are, some of them, gifted by God to be forth-tellers of the mind of God, not by new revelation, direct from God, but as telling forth His word, and His way, and His will, from the Scriptures. But the Old Testament gift of prophecy, whereby God communicated direct to His servants, has ceased because we have the Holy Spirit among us and the Holy Scriptures in our hands.

As to the gift of miracles and healing, it does not please God in His sovereignty to accredit His word in these days by the use of miracles. If it did, it would persist, but it has pleased Him to withdraw it. One day He is going to restore

it, in part, at least. I think these gifts are within the control of God according to the need of the hour.

MR. GOODMAN : It may be interesting to point out a thing which I have only recently come to notice with regard to these gifts. There are three different statements of the gifts that have been given to the Church. The first of them is in Corinthians which, as we have heard, was one of the earliest of the epistles. The second of them was in Romans 12, and the third in Ephesians 4—both of them later epistles.

Now there are, in the Corinthian list, miraculous gifts, supernatural manifestations. There are three of them, as has just been mentioned. There is the gift of tongues, the gift of healing, and the gift of working miracles. Now, those three gifts are stated in that epistle, but it is very significant that in the later epistles there is no mention made, and nowhere else in the New Testament epistles is there any reference to the gifts of tongues, healing, or miracles, although on occasions there were possibly manifestations in those directions.

But, as with all gifts to the Church, these "sign gifts" were bestowed for a special purpose, which purpose having been fulfilled, they ceased in operation. Hence Paul makes no further reference to them. Then he gives the normal gifts to the Church and states them quite plainly and clearly, and they are in operation to-day. It does not mean that those sign gifts have necessarily permanently ceased, as we have heard. There is no reason why the gift of tongues should not manifest itself on certain special occasions should God in His sovereignty consider it necessary, nor why there should not be gifts of healing arise amongst us ; but those are not the normal gifts to the Church as indicated in the later epistles. In my judgment the "miracle gifts" were temporarily bestowed during the formation period of the Church and, having served their purpose, they ceased to function.

MR. H. C. GREEN (Stafford) : Mr. Martin, when talking about the gift of tongues, related it exclusively, I think, to recognizable languages. There are some who believe in some form of spiritual ecstasy.

MR. MARTIN : A very great deal has been written on this subject : frankly, I do not understand it. There have been ecstatic manifestations where people have given expression

to sounds, and even words, which neither they nor anyone else understood, but I do not know.

DR. HANTON : I do think that one has to be very careful about certain emotional states which are capable of being brought into action by satanic influence. I see no reason at all for the outward expression of ecstatic states. If we are in a state of spiritual ecstasy, it is likely that any expression will be very brief indeed, and be something not intended for other ears to hear. For example, Thomas suddenly recognized that the One whom he thought could not possibly have risen from the dead, actually was there before him. With the manifest evidence that He had heard his expressed doubt, the Lord said, "Reach hither thy finger." All Thomas could say, in a state of ecstasy, as he fell before Him, was, "My Lord and my God."

Perhaps as a medical man, more than for any other reason, I am suspicious of these voluble ecstatic states, and personally should advise most people to be most guarded. I see nothing in the New Testament to warrant placing them in the category of "manifestations of the power of God".

MR. J. R. CASSWELL : Would Mr. Martin elaborate on discipline being exercised by the assembly in dependence upon God. He associated that with Matthew 18, and one did wonder whether some caveat should be entered in view of what has happened amongst Brethren. If we were to follow what Mr. Martin said fully, if a brother was excluded at one Hall, he would automatically be excluded not only from every assembly, but from every other Christian community in the world. That has been the principle of grievous division among the people of God. Is it not necessary to add some kind of rider ?

One other small point. He emphasized the words, "When ye are come together in one place." May that emphasis not have related to the practice which was common in the early Church of "breaking bread from house to house" ? It seems that often when Christians met together they also took the opportunity of remembering the Lord. The apostle's reference was possibly to draw a distinction "when they came together in one place" as a church.

MR. F. N. MARTIN : Perhaps this arose out of my use of

the word "excommunicate" which had an ecclesiastical significance which I did not intend.

In Matthew 18, I visualize a little local church bothered with a real spiritual problem. They have a personal matter, some difficult brother, somebody who has acted wrongly, something that they do not know how to deal with. And that church goes to God, the Lord of the Church, and they are on their knees in prayer. Christ said that, doing that, "if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done: for, when you have this difficulty, I am there to resolve it, and, if you trust Me and yield yourself to Me and to My word, I will resolve your difficulty and I will enable you to overcome it. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. What you decide to do I will back up; I will ratify your decision; I will give it solid spiritual validity."

That is how I see that operating in the question of difficulty in the local church.

MR. ATKINS: There have been cases where half an assembly has excommunicated the other half, and the other half, believing themselves to be the originals, have started another assembly near by, which is extremely shameful. From this I would ask: Ought we not to be quite clear about the condition "in My Name"? There must be some real conformity with the Person Whose authority is claimed; with His spirit and His character. It is not an ecclesiastical authority of any sort. The Lord will not give His name or His support to actions which do not arise from His spirit, and are inconsistent with it.

MR. MARTIN: Is not the answer what Mr. Brearey said this morning? "In the name of the Lord Jesus" means in conformity to all that He has revealed Himself to us to be. If we are acting with all our hearts in conformity with our Lord's name, with His reputation, with what He has shown Himself to be; if we can, with our hand on our heart, so to speak, say, "I am clear before Him: I am acting in His name: my will is at one with Him: I am not flouting His will or His way: I am not acting in pride or uncharity: I am acting in correspondence with the character of my Lord

Jesus," then I think we can claim a gathering "in the name of the Lord Jesus".

MR. F. T. WEST (Addiscombe) : The apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 1. 10 seems to make it clear what we should aim at. He asks us "to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment", and, having said in 1 Cor. 2. 16, "We have the mind of Christ," we should never move except in complete unity as the people of God and wait until He brings us into one mind. Then we shall not do something dishonouring to His name.

MR. MARTIN : Wherever there is a breach there should be humiliation, confession and prayer together until it is resolved. The unfortunate part, so often, is that it is not an honest difference of opinion but somebody who is definitely in the wrong, will not own it, is proud and separate, and will not come for humiliation and waiting upon God, will not believe that he could be shown that he is wrong.

MR. WATTAM : In a magazine recently the question was put in the form : "What should be done in a case where there is a small minority who object to the views of a majority?" The answer: "They should wait upon the Lord and seek His mind. This method has never been known to fail." In many years' experience I have never yet known a restrictive minority come back and say : "We are wrong and you are right." It would have to be real confession, humility and seeking of His mind for those who were in the wrong to admit it so that unity would be produced.

MR. MARTIN : The answer to this problem is a purely spiritual one, not procedural at all, and it is up to us to see that we are always in such a spiritual condition that these situations do not arise.

MR. O. C. HARTRIDGE : Would strife not be regulated readily if we followed what the Lord Jesus exhorted in Matthew 5. 23, 24—that if we know that our brother has anything against us we are to leave our offering and go and be reconciled to our brother? In Matthew 18. 15 if a brother trespass against another, the brother should go and see him ; if he will not hear him, he should take two other witnesses, and if he will not hear the witnesses, then turn to the judgment of

the Church ; but is that done amongst us ? If brethren will not straighten out matters on the ground of Matthew 5 or Matthew 18, the final judgment seems to lie with the whole assembly. If a dispute of this kind is brought before the church, then the Lord will give wisdom and guidance to the church so that it would receive a right sense, to know what to do. I feel certain that to follow the Lord's own word is the only safe path.

MR. MARTIN : The oversight may be usurping the prerogative of the church in dealing in a hush-hush way with cases which the scriptures show should be brought to the church. Can the oversight claim to be representatives and agents of the church and deal with things on their own responsibility without consulting the main body of the church ?

MR. ROBSON : Experience suggests that, where it is a matter of dispute, if the overseers cannot resolve it, and, in their failure, devolve their responsibility back upon the church, the only consequence is to divide the church.

MR. T. BARNADO (Wokingham) : How is an oversight to be formed in a young assembly ? Should it be of a somewhat secret nature ? Should there not be a body of overseers known by the assembly, and how should they be appointed ?

MR. HOWLEY : As to the meetings of local elder brethren, obviously they must confer privately : not that they wish to make anything hush-hush, but, to be able to work properly, to take oversight, they must have private meetings for prayer and conference. There may be matters of a confidential nature which cannot be put before the church, however occasional—some moral lapse the details of which may be known by the elders, but do not have to be publicized.

On the other hand, there must be many things which the elders will first discuss and then put to the assembly in order to maintain a spirit of fellowship. If they always keep behind closed doors, and people know nothing of what is going on, there will be a gulf between the elders and the rest that will choke the spirit of fellowship and may even cause spiritual decline in the assembly. But cannot we trust the men of outstanding discernment who may be the elders of the assembly, that they will be sufficiently spiritually alive and

intelligent to know when to bring matters before the church and when to keep them private ?

I do not believe that the New Testament procedure for the appointment of elders has fallen into disuse. I cannot myself follow the cliché that because there are no apostles you cannot have appointment of elders to-day, and nobody would have accepted such an idea save for the prestige of Mr. Darby who created it. You cannot pick and choose from circumstances attending a particular feature in the New Testament as to what you will retain. If you were to do so, you might go so far as to say that because there was drunkenness at the Lord's Supper, we ought not to have it. Because there were abuses then, or because there are no apostles now, is no ground for abandoning New Testament principles.

I believe that the appointment of elders is a very simple thing. The senior brethren, those in authority in the church, should be watching all the time for those who show signs of a shepherd heart, and caring for the saints, and when such brethren have proved their worthiness and their fitness for the task, should co-opt them to join in that ministry. So there is preserved a continuity of spiritual leadership.

MR. SPENCER THOMAS : What is meant by "receiving to the Lord's table" ?

MR. MARTIN : Everyone who is a true child of God, walking with God, is entitled to come to the Lord's table. There does not seem, as Mr. St. John pointed out a few years ago, to be any justification for those sentinels who demand credentials in a very fierce sort of way so that we have to justify ourselves to them before we can come : "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat."

On the other hand, the elders of the church have a responsibility to see, if possible, that there do not come to the Lord's table people who would be manifestly at variance with the Lord who presides there, but it is not a question of having a "pass", so to speak. You do not have to produce your season ticket. A letter of commendation is not a letter of admission in that sense at all, but a letter of introduction so that you may be known to the brethren there, so that they may look after, befriend and be kind to you—not to make you eligible. I think we are all clear that we dare not keep

any true believer away from the Lord's table unless he is walking in sin.

MR. GOODMAN : A well-loved brother rather turned the tables on one occasion. He found himself faced with one or two forbidding men at the door—to see if he were fit to sit with them. Said he : “ It is not quite that : I want to know what you people here are like. I am very particular. . . . ”

MR. PICKERING : Perhaps the true statement of fact is this—that in the New Testament, reception to, and exclusion from, is always in terms of the fellowship of the church as a whole and not merely to or from the Lord's table.

DISCUSSION (continued)

Saturday, September 20th, 1958 (4.45 p.m.)

DR. W. E. F. NAISMITH (Harrogate) : Is the Church, in its widest sense, composed of all believers since Pentecost, or of all believers living upon earth at any particular time ? If the former, is there any distinction between believers who belong to the New Testament church and the Old Testament saints ? In 1 Corinthians 15, in connection with the coming of the Lord, we read that all will be raised who are Christ's at His coming. Now we believe that all the Old Testament saints belong to Christ just as we belong to Him ; and, therefore, this verse in 1 Cor. 15 would include them : they will be raised at the coming of the Lord. When we reach heaven, will there be any distinction between the members of the New Testament church and those who lived in Old Testament times ? Will I, as a child of Abraham, occupy a position superior to my spiritual father ?

DR. HANTON : This is a matter upon which there is difference of viewpoint, not in principle but in detail. My own view is that the Church, as we are discussing it in this Conference, is that gathering together of individuals who have surrendered to Jesus Christ and have been baptized with the Holy Ghost. That conception of the Church began at Pentecost and the believers who will be raptured—as we speak of the rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4 and 1 Cor. 15)—are

those believers in Jesus Christ since the inception of the Church at Pentecost. There was a transition period in the gospels between the Old and the New, and those apostles or disciples took part in that transition period. It is true that the Old Testament saints foresaw Christ's coming, and by faith anticipated it, but I do not think that they will share in the blessings of the Church, as we speak of it, but will enter into the blessings of the Israel of God in a wider sense. There is a close relationship between the Church and the Israel of God : perhaps, in a nutshell, the Church is heavenly, whereas the Israel of God is earthly ; but let us not forget that in the eternal state there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and Christ will be the centre of the Church and of the Israel of God.

MR. HOWLEY : With regard to the first part of the question : When the Lord Jesus said, " I will build My Church," He was looking into the future, and that word must be an all-embracing word—it would embrace the members of the Church who compose the Church through all the Christian generations. When you read of the church of God at Corinth, or the church of God in any particular place, it is the local community as it exists at any particular time. When you read of the apostle Paul as " concerning zeal, persecuting the church ", that is not, as I understand it, the Church universal, because there were many he did not persecute, many who were not yet converted ; neither is it the local church, because he persecuted, far beyond the confines of the church in Jerusalem. The word must be used there, in an in-between sense, of the Christians who were on the earth at that particular moment, confined to Palestine and its environs.

As to the eternal destiny of the Church, if the Church, as we understand it to-day, commenced at Pentecost, we should remember that there is a continuity between the people of God in the Old Testament and New Testament which we sometimes ignore. While the Church as the body of Christ could only come into existence after the exaltation of our Lord, yet the Greek word is used in the Septuagint frequently of the congregation of the Lord, the people of God in the Old Testament, suggesting that there is some element of continuity, though there is an obvious development from Pentecost onward. The Scriptures which deal with the

eternal state of the Church are extremely limited in number. Some deal with the resurrection of the saints, and therefore not with their eternal status. Perhaps we are confined to the final chapters of the Book of the Revelation and, bearing in mind the high degree of symbolism in those chapters, we have to be careful against literalizing things put in symbolic language. I cannot quite see that we must make a hard and fast distinction between those now in the Church and enjoying all its blessings, with all that this means, and those who were the people of God in Old Testament times, when it comes to their *eternal* destiny. We shall all stand together in the glory, yet there no doubt will be degrees of glory ; there will be the unique place of the heavenly Jerusalem. But there are problems ; sufficient problems to prevent a categorical statement that the Church, as we know it, will have a superior place to the Old Testament saints.

MR. ASHWELL : Does not Hebrews 11. 39-40, give light on this? At the end of the record of all these wonderful men who stood for God by faith, at great cost to themselves, we read : “ These all having obtained witness through faith did not receive the promise ” (so there must be some promise for them) “ God having foreseen some better thing for us, that they should not be made perfect without us ” (J.N.D. translation).

MR. GOODMAN : It seems to me to indicate that their receiving fulfilment of the promise and their being made perfect depended on, and awaited the perfection of the Church, and that then they, with us together, will be made perfect.

MR. T. W. COOKE (North Walsham) : Scripture clearly states that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be in the Kingdom of God. When Paul was an old man, and years after the Church had been born at Pentecost, we find him in Acts 28. 30-31 “ preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ ”. Therefore, whilst the Church is unique in one aspect, it must be included in the Kingdom of God.

MR. MARTIN : One body we have not mentioned perhaps establishes the continuity between the Old and New—the

bride. The bride in Rev. 21 is the bride of Christ ; as we have been reminded, both the twelve apostles of the Lamb and the twelve tribes of Israel are represented within it ; and that bride is the new Jerusalem, the holy city. It obviously includes the Church and most probably includes the Old Testament saints.

MR. SPENCER THOMAS : The bride was the Lamb's wife. Might not all, from Adam down, who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, be included in that bride ?

DR. NAISMITH : I had been taught that the Church was the bride at the marriage supper and the Old Testament saints were the guests !

MR. G. H. WILSON (Sheffield) : May I ask if Eph. 3. 15 helps : " Of whom every family in heaven and on earth is named ". Does not the body of Christ always refer to the total number of believers on earth at any time ?

MR. HOWLEY : The reference to every family might suggest different groups of the Lord's people, except that you have to bear in mind that there are strong grounds for translating, as the R.V. margin, " from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named ". This would simply suggest that every form of fatherhood finds its source in the One Who is the Eternal Father of the Eternal Son. As to the body of Christ, the references in Eph. 4 seem to have in view the growth to the completion and fulness of the life of the body, and that would embrace all the saints of the dispensation. And yet for practical purposes the body of Christ is composed of those believers who are alive on earth.

MR. MARTIN : If the " Brethren " really represent the pattern of Christ's Church to which we should adhere sedulously, and if the local churches are supplied with adequate and appropriate gift by the sovereign Spirit, why are there poor assemblies in which there is apparently no gift and they appear dying or dead ? Is there any reason for their continuing if they have not the adequate supply of the gifts of the Spirit of God ?

MR. S. F. WARREN (Bradford) : Might part of the answer be that assemblies allow it to go elsewhere—the gift is not

appreciated in its own assembly? Again, take a large city : some assemblies are overcrowded with gift and some are not. If you were to get a map, and plot where people live and where they go, you might find that, if every brother went to his nearest assembly, every assembly would be well supplied with gift. It may be, in the light of Matthew 18, that some of the movement from one assembly to another is because we do not put things right but go to a place where we can avoid our difficulties.

MR. H. C. GREEN (Stafford) : In practice, sometimes the quickest way to drive our children out of the assemblies is to go to the nearest !

MR. MARTIN : The gift may be there but we may not recognize or use it. Brethren may themselves not be using it, because they are spiritually out of sorts or just are not obeying Christ. There may be another reason : these assemblies may not be assemblies at all ; may have no function having regard to general conditions in that locality. If there is no gift and if, after prayer, there is no gift sent, could it be deduced God does not intend such an assembly to exist in that place? There is, of course, the possibility that God intends certain Christians to go where that assembly is, but for business or domestic reasons they do not go.

MR. HYLAND : What are the minimum requirements by which a church can be seen to be constituted as a New Testament church ?

MR. MARTIN : Certain assemblies may not be flourishing because they were not born properly. An assembly born out of prayer and exercise of heart before God, is likely to grow to a fruitful assembly, well-pleasing unto the Lord. Then I think God will send the gifts. I do not think that for two or three people to say, " We will meet together and break bread," is the Church : it needs more than that to build an assembly.

MR. W. S. LOYNES (Woodford Green) : May there not be a very serious cause for the state of an assembly such as has been indicated? There came a day when the glory of the Lord had departed from the temple. May the glory of the Lord not have departed from such an assembly? Of whom Rev. 2. 5, has been written : " Remember, therefore, from

whence thou art fallen and repent and do thy first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick from its place except thou repent."

MR. GUYATT : Is there any reason to suppose that an assembly, even if it has been "well born" and has served a very useful purpose, is to be in its position in perpetuity? Is it not possible that it may have served its purpose and that, without suggesting in any sense a removal of the candlestick, the time has come when it has done its job? If that is so, how can we discover it, and what sort of courage do we need to say : "Well, this is finished and we close it down"?

MR. SPENCER THOMAS : The Lord has not promised adequate gifts to a little fragment of the Church. Possibly He has given to the church in a town adequate gifts to meet its every need, but we are only just a remnant, a fragment.

MR. HARTRIDGE : The gifts, according to 1 Corinthians, were given to the church at Corinth. The Church of God which is at such-and-such a town no doubt in the Lord's view comprehends all His saints in the town—not necessarily the "Brethren" but *all* the saints in that place. Now if the risen Lord has given gifts in a particular locality for the edification of His body, comprising *all* the saints in that place, may one of the reasons for the paucity of gift in some local assemblies be due to the fact that the gifts that the Lord Jesus has given are not functioning where He intends they should function? If the saints were together as He intends they should be, then there would be all the gifts for the edification of the body.

MR. SPENCER THOMAS : But if all Christians in one given place—take, for example, a little place—constitute the Church of God in the place ; if in this little place there is no gift in the assembly, and there is one other group and the gift is in the other group, should the brethren go to the other group because the gift is there?

MR. HARTRIDGE : If there is a weak local assembly which, in spite of its weakness maintains its basic principles, I feel sure that the Lord would have the gifts that He has given exercised on that Scriptural ground.

MR. CASSWELL : Recently I was at what I have reason to

believe is a thriving assembly, and the preacher announced for the following Sunday was a well-loved brother not from an assembly. I said to the brother responsible as I came away : " I see that you are becoming very scriptural : you are calling upon gift wherever God has given it and are judging by what a man brings and not where he comes from."

MR. A. J. CRAWLEY (Carshalton) : Through the retirement of certain brethren and their removal from the district one assembly became in a poor way. It was made a matter of prayer among several assemblies and one brother, who had a work for the Lord in the city, decided that, in the Lord's will, he should give up that work and act as a sort of pastor in this assembly. He did so for several years. That assembly fully recovered and the Lord in His goodness allowed him to nurture younger ones in the faith. They took up the work and, when he had to go because of personal commitments, the assembly continued to flourish. This may be a solution ; where, through no fault, weakness does occur, it may be that if it is made a matter of prayer among neighbouring assemblies God will show someone the need for stepping in by His grace.

MR. ROBSON : We speak of " one-man ministry " as a thing to be disowned, yet in many places God is signally owning companies of His people whose ministry is, as we would say, " one-man's ". Often that is a misnomer, for the one man has himself carefully nurtured many young, or older, men to work with him. That man's time is wholly given to that neighbourhood. There are five " gifts " in Ephesians 4. 11 : are we not often a company of men whose spare time is spent in trying to be all of those five things ? Can we expect to achieve as effective a work for God as a company of people who have provided for one man to be set apart to give himself wholly to the ministry ? We have full-time workers set apart wholly to the ministry ; but by what scripture is it necessary—have we really a scriptural pattern for it—that they should be constantly on the move and that their stay should average a fortnight ?

MR. A. C. W. DUNNETT (Watford) : Some years ago in a town where there had not been a scripturally gathered company, a group of brethren began to gather together, small in numbers and weak in ability, and after struggling along for a

few years, they decided it was time to close down. But there were one or two who had come from other groups (not because they were unhappy, but because they had received spiritual help and seen the way of the Lord more perfectly). They gathered together in a house, having decided that the Lord would have them maintain a scriptural way of gathering for the Lord's supper, but were bewildered as to what to do. A brother visited them from some distance away and ministered to them in the house for a year and a half, performing the much-reproached one-man ministry. They had not sent for the pastor or the minister whence they had come because they knew that those men could not give them more than they had in the past. As time went on it was noticeable that in one young man was a delightful gift of pastoring. He visited the dear children of God as he came to know them in that town, regardless of their connection. What a warm heart he had ! As time went on, that company became more and more established in the house, until there is a company of thirty to forty breaking bread scripturally in that town. Now they have among themselves promising gift, among young men who have seen the scriptural way of gathering, and it looks as though, if they still continue with the Lord as they have done, there is a great future for this little company that might have completely died out. Perhaps the failure is on the part of older ones who ought to look around and find some of these small, weakly companies and do something (even if it costs us a lot) to encourage and strengthen them.

MR. HOWLEY : Only a few weeks ago, I was in an area in the U.S.A. where seven assemblies have been established in the last twenty-five years. They are indigenous churches, commenced as a result of pioneer evangelism. But their spiritual prosperity has been achieved through continuity of care by somebody settled on the spot. Thirteen years ago a farmer was invited to settle in one city where the evangelist had done the pioneer work. This farmer was not a Bible teacher, though he can minister the Word and is an able Gospel preacher ; but he is an outstanding pastor. They have had occasional campaigns and visits from teachers, but the greater part of the work has been built up by the pastoral care of this brother. He is always on the spot to visit and

the way he gets into people's homes is remarkable. The works in this area, started by evangelism, have been maintained by some brother caring for the work, but in no sense being a monopolist. Far from the farmer being a monopolist, the work in that city has produced two overseas missionaries, a children's evangelist, an evangelist to adults, and a number who can give a good account of themselves in ministry. Remember that the Apostle Paul would stay eighteen months in one place, and three years in another. There is something to be said for a brother settling in an area and helping, possibly in a small group of assemblies; not governing their affairs, though sharing in the oversight of his own assembly. We support this kind of thing all over the world in the mission field and it is rather extraordinary that we should frown upon it at home.

MR. D. S. LEWIS (Manchester) : About the gift of visitation—Mr. and Mrs. Redwood told us how the poor assemblies in Bangalore had all been built up by constant, steady visitation, largely by the sisters. We were so impressed, and we so felt the need in our assembly, we decided we must do something about it.

MR. F. G. TIMMINS (Sanderstead) : Do we create a difficulty, the remedy for which lies in our own hands? It is the practice in many assemblies for the arrangements for the ministry and preaching to be left largely to the correspondent. Have we not been saying, at this and previous conferences, that it is the duty of the elders to plan (not in a rigid sense but in a spiritual and an intelligent sense) to feed the flock of God. They cannot do it haphazardly. Is it not their duty to be constantly exercised as to the provision for the teaching and instructing of the saints? If we leave this largely to one man, wise and capable and farseeing as he may well be, are the rest of the elders not in a manner abdicating from their duty? They are not feeding the flock; they are allowing one of their number to bring in deputies, and the deputies (able and competent as again so many of them would be) from other assemblies can never have the same pastoral, individual concern for the saints as those on the spot are charged before God with having. If we are going to make it possible for an able man to come and stay in the district, or

for series of addresses to be given over the months when the need is felt, the correspondent must co-operate with the elders and the elders must face their duty, and these things be planned. Then there will be less complaint that the ground and the truths that we have been speaking of are not dealt with and that the younger people are in ignorance of them.

MR. MARTIN : People have developed the feeling that God can only bless them through somebody they enjoy listening to, and they must have their favourites brought to them from outside—those favourites are rarely, if ever, within their own assembly. I think that is nonsense and the sooner we teach differently, the better. It is the duty of the elders of the church to instruct the church.

And may I just ask you not to misconstrue the expression “one-man ministry”. The “one-man” ministry we deprecate is where one man has the monopoly of ministry by reason of the fact that he has a special ordination or is of a special order of Christians. By all means let us have the ministry, not exclusively but largely, of one gifted brother in one assembly, but that is a vastly different thing from any man claiming the sole prerogative on the basis that he has a very special ordination by the laying on of somebody’s hands.

MR. HYLAND : It may be of interest that at Poole we have eight elders and five of them sit as a ministry sub-committee. They deal with the ministry for the second service on Sunday morning, the syllabus of study and the question of inviting speakers. The invited speakers normally are with us on Sunday evening, but the regular ministry of the meeting on Thursday is usually from among ourselves. We have found sitting together like that has been of real help.

MR. A. ADAMS (Reading) : I would like to ask what you think about joining in with interdenominational activities in the sphere of Gospel work. There are some grand works around, like “Youth for Christ”, which show great blessing. Many souls are being saved through these agencies. If the assemblies took a more active part surely they would bring souls into the assemblies who could be built up there ! The essential thing is that these works are telling forth the same Gospel as we. It is not the basic things upon which we are

not in agreement with them ; surely it is only details about church life.

MR. GOODMAN : I find as I go around that those assemblies that show a warm co-operative spirit in every evangelistic work that is in progress or that visits the town, receive themselves a very definite blessing. Take, for example, that wonderful Billy Graham visitation which came to us—those assemblies that threw themselves heart and soul into the work that God was doing through him, and the witness he was giving, reaped a great benefit.

I speak very particularly of an assembly in which I have been interested ever since its inception—Woodford Green. They threw themselves heart and soul into the work at Harringay—parties going every evening, counselling, helping, and even holding all-night prayer meetings, at which upwards of 200 believers gathered. Such a loving concern for souls cannot but have been pleasing to God and He has blessed that assembly abundantly.

There ought to be a loving, warm spirit—a brotherly co-operation as far as you can go with those who will go as far as you go. Let us go together, let us witness in this neighbourhood in which we live. We are surrounded by unsaved people, people quite indifferent to us, who think that we are indifferent to them. Let us show that we are not, not just by inviting them to come to our meeting, but by co-operating with every witness. If there is an open-air gathering—come together, give a corporate witness for Christ in your town, and God will bless you. And, incidentally, you will “ have a good report of them that are without ”.

MR. WATTAM : I have known it to be said, when the possibility of joining with a local church in Gospel testimony has been discussed, that we should not enter upon such work on account of “ principles ”. Ought we not to have some instruction as to what are “ divine principles ” so that, not only shall we not violate them, but we shall not be taught what is neither a “ divine principle ” nor anything else “ divinely ” authoritative? These may be apostolic precedents ; or they may be Brethren’s tradition ; but the notion that they are “ divine principles ” should be ventilated, so that our young people may be clear that, in joining others

in Gospel work, they are not violating any "divine principles".

MR. RUOFF : We are losing young Christians. This is one of the most serious matters which we have to face. Most people recognize it—you can enquire of any part of the country you like—you find the same answer. Why is it ?

The elders are exhorted to feed the flock. The impression in the minds of some elders seems to be this—we have to wait for some leading of the Spirit before we can do anything. I believe that is wrong. Do not misunderstand. I am not, and dare not, question that God, the Holy Spirit, gives understanding and perception, and the sense of what is right and fitting for the occasion, but could anybody—I ask you as men of experience and sense—feed the flock without diligent application to the Word of God. Do the elders do that ? In many cases they are waiting for some supposed divine inspiration on the spur of the moment which would give them what they think is authority to speak. If a man is an elder he ought to make it his business to feed the flock.

MR. P. GROSVENOR (Wallington) : In what ways can a young man expect to receive help within the assembly from the oversight to discover his gift and to develop it ? Most of what I have learned of assembly principles has been learned in the private homes of brethren rather than in the assembly itself.

DR. HANTON : One of the best ways of helping a young brother to discover and exercise his gift is to conduct conversational Bible readings—for a certain subject to be announced, and for a brother to be responsible for giving, for a quarter of an hour, considered instruction on that subject, then throwing it open for discussion by all who are present. There should be a brother, or brethren, of experience and spiritual sagacity who will keep the discussion within bounds. If more of that were done, and less of an hour's address, when only one man talks and nobody else can have a say, I feel that we would develop the gift ; and if I know anything about the word used for "preaching" in the Acts, it does suggest that it was colloquial discussion ; it was gossiping : they talked, and they talked to one another. Rather than scheduling an hour's address on a subject, condense what you have to say,

give the skeleton—direction as to the line of thought—and throw it open for others to give their contribution. You will then be able to distinguish brethren who are industrious and exercised in the study of the Scriptures for themselves : their expression of their views will disclose a gift which, when perceived, should be encouraged by asking them to take still further part.

MR. D. W. E. LONG (Sheringham) : I agree, but think it should be the other way round. In Bible readings ask the young man to give the quarter of an hour first, and then others who are able follow and help him further. If the elder teaching brethren speak first, they may take all the thoughts away from the young man instead of helping him.

MR. GOODMAN : It is a major fault with us that we do not really give our young men due opportunity. They do not feel happy to open their mouths on a Sunday morning in the presence of elder brethren all too prone to criticize them. It would take more courage than they can muster, however much they may feel they would like to help a little. Why should not a little warm encouragement be extended to these young men and perhaps special opportunities for simple ministry, say at the weeknight prayer meeting, be afforded to any who show promise ?

When I began, the first address I ever gave, in the reign of Queen Victoria, my good brother George, you know, my senior by ten years, said to me at some seaside services : “ Do you think you could give an address ? ” and I said I would like to. So I prepared most carefully and stood up as a boy of seventeen—went on splendidly for ten minutes, then I couldn’t think of anything else to say. I had got it all in my notes which I had written in shorthand, and could not read, of course ! So the only thing to do was to turn to my brother and say aloud—loud enough for everybody to hear—“ Now, George, you go on.” If I had not started then, who knows if I should ever have been preaching at my time of life !

It does not matter if the young fellow can only say a few words, for ten minutes : give him a chance. Make room for him. There may be gift there that he does not suspect and that you do not suspect. I am convinced that there is much

latent gift in our assemblies that only needs encouragement to manifest itself.

MR. A. G. RAZZELL (Mottingham) : It is very true that young people are often afraid of their elders. After years in the same assembly it may be that they are never invited into one of the elder brethren's homes. Young people I know in evangelical churches who at one time met with Brethren, have told me that they left, not on any doctrinal issue, but because they found no love or warmth. It was to the Corinthian church that Paul wrote that the greatest gift is the gift of love. In some assemblies there is a chilling draught and some long for a little affection—the arm round the shoulder.

MR. A. G. BAMFORD (Liverpool) : It would be lovely to see more Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy. Are there Pauls looking for the Timothys who can serve with them as a son with a father? It is a great need that many a young man should find a spiritual father to guide him, with whom he can serve as a son to a father, on whom his mantle can fall.

MR. H. BARR (Baldock) : Thirty years ago, when I first came to an assembly, I met W. W. Fereday. He invited ten to fifteen of us young men—not one night a week but four or five nights if he was not too busy preaching, and there for years I was built up in the faith by him.

I went to preach the Gospel one evening at a nearby place and in walked W. W. Fereday. Picture my feelings. Coming back in the car this is how he helped a young man. He put his hand on me and said : “ Do not use the mallet so much ” : too much law, too little grace. Would there were more men who invited young men into their homes and ministered to them and built them up in their most holy faith !

MR. STORDY : Have we some preconceived idea of what we recognize as gift? Do we mean in this general term “ gift ”, that, when a man speaks, he is very acceptable and his standard of presentation is good ; but would it not be possible for the Lord to do absolute wonders through very simple saints who were filled with the Holy Spirit and who would then exercise gifts which maybe are almost unknown to us now? Have we not manufactured and defined in our own

minds what we recognize as gift? And has the Lord something different?

I was brought up not in the assemblies at all and did not join them until I was twenty-six. I was brought up in a village, a long way from any town where there was any christian work. The christian work in that village was done by Quakers, godly people, and one or two people in the Congregational chapel, and they loved each other with an exceeding great love and they exercised a pastoral care which I have never seen exhibited since. As far as pastoral work was concerned, they exercised a tremendous gift, because they loved the Lord with all their hearts. I don't think we have put the Lord to the test at all: I think our idea of gift is our own idea and not His.

Secondly, I think young men are to blame and I am speaking from my own experience as a young man. Half a dozen get together, go out to some housing estate, and do a work for the Lord in evangelism, and somehow or another they get the idea that they have to start an assembly. Sometimes it is a bedraggled sort of thing. Would it not be better if we looked upon such works as mission efforts until it was clear from the Lord from the fruit that was born there and from the evidences that surround His blessing upon the work, that then, maybe, it could be a separate assembly? We seem to start the assembly upon a few enthusiastic people, and money is borrowed to build a hall which in proper circumstances could be proper but which is now looked upon as something which can be done fairly easily, and the assembly is set up, and then souls are, or are not, saved. It is not a self-growing thing. It would be better, perhaps, if it were looked upon as a mission effort from the main assembly, until the evidence of the Lord's hand was upon it and it was manifest that here was a place where God's blessing was and where His name would rest.

MR. GOODMAN: I am much impressed with what Mr. Stordy has said with regard to our rather limited vision of what "gift" is. I want to read to you the list given in Romans 12 so that we may distinguish between what one may call major gifts—those gifts that are prominent in the Body of Christ: just as there are major members in our physical

bodies, arms, eyes, ears and mouth—and the innumerable other members that make for the wellbeing of the body. “ Having, therefore, gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith, or ministry, let us wait on our ministry, or he that teacheth on teaching, or he that exhorteth, on exhortation.” There you have what one may call the major gifts, the platform gifts if you please. Now see how it goes on : “ He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity.” There is the gift of giving. God has endowed some of His saints with means that as good stewards they may be gifted givers—administering the fortune that God may have given them, small or great. That is their gift and they may be great helps in the church of God. “ He that ruleth, let him rule with diligence.” “ He that showeth mercy.” Here is a gracious gift, the ability quietly to minister in the church in the way of mercy, “ sisters of mercy,” if you please, caring for the wants of those who are in need of every kind. Then, if you turn to Corinthians, you find such gifts as “ helps ”. There are some who cannot do a great deal, who feel they have no gift at all. Yet they can help. This also is a gift of God, and in many a little assembly, that has so little outstanding gift, there are those who say : “ I can help a little as the Lord moves my heart ; I can just read a few words of scripture, and perhaps I can announce a hymn or pray ” ; and, if they are exercising their spiritual gift of helps, it is wonderful how the Lord’s presence will be in that little assembly apart from outstanding ministry. Moreover, from those simple beginnings, possibly there may develop gifts of perhaps a more prominent character. So while hidden to men, covet earnestly the best gifts, don’t let us wait till we are able to expound the scriptures or prophesy, but let us be content just to “ help ”. But I think the outstanding ministry at an “ open meeting ” at the Lord’s table should be that of the prophet—“ Let the prophets speak two or three ”. “ For he that prophesieth speaketh to edification and exhortation and comfort,” which is ministry to the heart. It is better than being able to expound all the meaning of the Old Testament symbols and all the offerings, wonderful as they are. Let us talk to people’s hearts “ that they may be comforted ” ; that’s what they have come for.

MR. ASHWELL : Oswald Chambers' book on the Holy Spirit gives the case of a church with a worldly vicar who retired, and a young vicar, full of zeal for the Lord's work, came and started preaching what he knew was right and stopping all the rubbish that they had been employing. They were up in arms and twelve of the leading men went to the Bishop to complain. The Bishop, being a wise man, sent his wife to see what was happening. She came and had a talk with this young vicar and they had prayer together, and, in the midst of the prayer, she touched his shoulder and said : " Don't pray any more, I see that you are right and I am wrong." That church came down to two—one Sunday morning, two people there. They did not have the usual service : he and these two prayed for an hour and a half, and from that point onward the tide turned, until it became a wonderful church. It was in days when men were only earning sixteen shillings a week, and yet they raised £150 in a special collection for the mission field. We do not know what God will do if we are really serious about prayer. That is our great need to-day—prayer.

One other thing : I do not think we are using our gift aright. Many brethren are out preaching all over the place who should be strengthening their assemblies. Peter said, " Feed the flock which is among you " ; and if we are going to grow into spiritual, successful, healthy assemblies we need to retain some of the gift that God has given to the particular church for that church, although I am not laying down any law that brethren should not exercise their gifts in various places.

Saturday, September 20th, 1958 (7.45 p.m.)

THE CHURCH IN EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS

IN HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST JESUS
A HABITATION OF GOD THROUGH THE SPIRIT
ITS SANCTIFYING AND CLEANSING BY CHRIST

Chairman : MR. J. J. STORDY

Address : MR. ARNOLD PICKERING

Reading : Ephesians 1. 15-18 ; 2. 18-22 ; 5. 25-27

“ **A** SPECTACLE which makes our boldest tempters uneasy.” How nicely calculated is that understatement in which Screwtape refers to the Christian Church ! Not—Prof. C. S. Lewis very properly hastens to assure us—the spectacle of the church consisting of “ the half-finished sham Gothic erection on the new building estate ”. In any case mere bricks and mortar never yet disturbed a demon. Screwtape and his infernal fellows derive their uneasiness from a spectacle invisible to mortal eyes : the spectacle of the Church “ spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners ”. They do well to feel uneasy. Not even the gates of hell shall prevail against this Church. It moves majestically down the ages to its God-appointed goal ; its progress is irresistible ; its ultimate triumph is divinely assured. Parallel to this objective progress, God has ordained that the Church shall triumph in another sphere : that it shall capture the minds and captivate the hearts of men and women everywhere, as they come to know Christ as Saviour and acknowledge Him as Lord. Moreover because God, in His mediation of truth, graciously condescends to the slowness of human understanding, there is still another realm in which the Church makes progress.

It is the realm of Holy Writ. The very theme of our Conference recognizes that, within the Word of God itself, there is a progressive revelation of the truth concerning the Church. With a growing sense of wonder, we have already traced something of the Church's progress in the Gospels, in the Acts, and in the Corinthian epistles. Now, with God's enabling, we are to think about the important contribution which Ephesians and Colossians make to our understanding of the nature and destiny of the Church.

Initially we are asked to consider the phrase : "*In heavenly places in Christ Jesus*". It has indeed a twofold claim to our present notice. Firstly, because it is peculiar to Paul ; and secondly, because it is peculiar to Ephesians. More literally it would be translated "In the heavenlies in Christ Jesus". Nevertheless it does appear that the word "heavenlies" is intended to convey a sense of locality representing a region outside the created heavens of this earth. This suggestion is supported if we are justified in assuming that the apostle Paul used the word consistently in the five verses in which it occurs. In ch. 1, v. 3 it denotes the sphere of our spiritual blessings, all of which are ours only in the Person of the ascended Christ. In ch. 1, v. 20 it denotes the sphere, embracing the right hand of the Father, to which God has been pleased to exalt His risen Son. In ch. 2, v. 6 it denotes the sphere to which we, too, have been raised in our spiritual union with Christ. In ch. 3, v. 10 it denotes the sphere in which, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God is made known to principalities and powers. Finally, in ch. 6, v. 12 it denotes the sphere of the hosts of spiritual wickedness against which we wrestle.

Is it possible that, in placing a particular emphasis upon the Saviour's promise in Matt. 18. 20, the companies of Christians with whom most of us gather, are in danger of losing this vision of the proper sphere of the Church? We delight frequently to remind ourselves that Christ is in our midst when, for example, we gather to partake of the Lord's Supper. Indeed it is right and proper that we should do so : always providing that we do not thereby imply that He is not equally in the midst of every other gathered company of His children. But, blessed as is the knowledge that Christ is with us, is there not the more blessed knowledge that we are with Christ? In sovereign grace God has quickened us from a state of spiritual

death by an exercise of the very same power which He demonstrated when He raised Christ from the dead. There is, for the Church, a spiritual counterpart of Christ's resurrection and ascension and a spiritual counterpart of Christ's session in the heavenlies. Let us not then say in our hearts, "Who shall ascend into heaven?"—that is to bring Christ down: whether it be to bring Him down to our failure and poverty and sin, or whether it be to bring Him down even to our thanksgiving and worship. Let us rather lift up our hearts to a glorified Saviour until, in the contemplation of Him enthroned at God's right hand, we are lost in wonder, love, and praise. Let us cry to God for a new and deeper understanding of the blessed fact that, in common with the whole Church, in common with every saint who loves His name, we are "united to Him *on the throne*, our life, our hope, our Lord the same". We are not in the heavenlies because we are identified with Christ, but because we are united to Christ: we are in the heavenlies "in Christ Jesus". It would require a whole conference session to touch the hem of the garment of this short but significant Pauline phrase. Totally inadequate is the thought that to be "in Christ Jesus" involves nothing more than a positional acceptance before God. To be "in Christ Jesus" means to be united to Him, by an indwelling Holy Spirit, in such a living vital union that, henceforth, the risen life of Christ informs the whole.

This conception of a union arising from an indwelling Holy Spirit leads us, by an easy transition, to the second aspect of our subject. We are now asked to consider the Church as an "*Habitation of God through the Spirit*". Despite God's evident longing to dwell among men, chapter after chapter in the Old Testament is a pathetic commentary on man's inability to provide for a holy God a temple made with hands. Shall God for ever be denied His purpose: and shall man forever be denied His presence? Even the enquiring minds of God's holy prophets could never have conceived that it was His eternal intention to provide Himself with a spiritual habitation. But we have hardly opened our New Testament before this purpose begins to unfold. As early as the Gospels, the Son of God is transferring the conception of God's house from a material to a spiritual structure. In John 2, "My Father's house" describes the material temple soon to be destroyed. In John 14,

“ My Father’s house ” describes a habitation which is spiritual in its nature and eternal in its duration. Ephesians and Colossians reveal a further significant development in this theme. Here the spiritual house is shown to be a community of living persons, each one of whom, Jew or Gentile, is separately a stone in the building. Again, because God indwells this house in the person of His Spirit, what might otherwise have been but a habitation has become a temple. A tent is occupied by a pilgrim ; a palace by a king ; but a temple is occupied by One Who is divine. Moreover, this spiritual temple is not prefabricated. It is built of separate stones, because the Church is not the aggregate of local churches but the aggregate of individual believers. What ecclesiastical peace has been forfeited, and what needless pain has been inflicted, as well as borne, because of a failure to recognize this basic principle in the structure of God’s house. Christ is to this temple a corner-stone, to which it owes its foundation and strength ; and also the Head of the corner, to which it owes its beauty and completeness. Our minds are humbled before this revelation of God’s eternal love and manifold wisdom. Here only, in any absolute sense, is fulfilled God’s gracious promise : “ I will dwell in them and walk in them, and I will be their God and they shall be My people.”

Divine indwelling, which, in some contexts, is associated with the idea of a building is, in other verses, associated with the idea of a body. That these ideas are not mutually exclusive we may infer from the fact that the characteristics of each are predicated of the other. In Eph. 2. 21, for example, the process of growing is attributed to the building and, conversely, in Eph. 4. 12 the process of building is attributed to the body. Again, it is worth noticing that, while the church as a building or temple is consistently related to God the Father or the Holy Spirit, the Church as a body is consistently related to Christ. The thought of a building, and especially of a temple, as a habitation for God, constantly recurs in the Old Testament, but there is no Old Testament background for the thought of the body. We must also remember that the Christians to whom Paul wrote about the body would not understand him to mean merely a group of persons. Our fiction of a corporate body, such as a limited liability company, having its own distinct entity and perpetual succession, was

quite unknown to the Ephesians and Colossians. To them a body meant essentially a living organism with many members. Why does Paul introduce the concept of the body, when he has already spoken of the church as a building? This new conception is introduced because there is a relationship, subsisting between Christ and His Church and between individuals in that Church, which the idea of a building is not adequate to convey. Peter partially overcomes the same difficulty with a characteristic boldness : he credits the stones, which form his spiritual house, with life. The stones retain their distinctness but become living stones. Taught by the same Holy Spirit, Paul prefers to change the emphasis ; and both in Eph. 1. 22-23 and Col. 1. 24 he presents the Church as the body of Christ.

What, then, is the particular relationship which only the thought of the body can properly express? Is it not the essential unity of Christ and the Church which is His fulness? But how far can we legitimately take this conception of the Church as a body? In what sense, for example, is the Church the fulness of Christ? Here we must proceed with caution and becoming reverence, carefully avoiding unscriptural extremes. How are we rightly to understand, or even translate, Eph. 1. 23, the last phrase of which has occasioned recurring controversy? Does Christ actively fill the Church with His PLEROMA, or is Christ passively filled by the Church? Must we not understand the Ephesian verse in the light of Col. 2. 9-10 : in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily and in Him ye are made full or complete? It is not so much that Christ is incomplete without His Church : rather the Church is nothing at all apart from Christ. Constantly she must acknowledge—"out of His fulness have all we received". Some would contend that the Church is necessary to a glorified Christ in the way that the temple of His body was necessary to His incarnation. Indeed many of us will recall the phrase, "the extension of the incarnation," in which the late Dr. Armitage Robinson spoke of the Church. Now it is true that Christ has no hands on earth but our hands ; that ours are the feet to run for Him ; and that ours is the voice to proclaim His saving Gospel to our fellowmen. But when we carefully examine the relevant scriptures we make a surprising discovery. It becomes apparent that the

conception of the body is not primarily used to demonstrate how a Christ enthroned in glory is made manifest to the world. On the contrary, it is used to show how Christ is united to those who are already regenerate and already members of His Church. It is not primarily to evangelize the world that the Church is Christ's body ; the body expresses relationships which are internal.

In the earlier epistles, the internal relationships of the members one to another are set forth by Paul's use of the body. Here, in Ephesians and Colossians, he is especially concerned to show the relationship between all the members and Christ Himself. It is in these two epistles that Paul speaks of Christ as the Head of the body. In Col. 2. 19 the failure envisaged is a failure to hold fast the Head. Perhaps this is intended to suggest the head as the one who leads and directs. But Christ is the Head in senses much more important to the body than this. He is the Head as the one blessed source from which the body derives its life and nourishment, and especially is He the source of its organic unity. As the joints and bands perform their proper function, the whole body increases with the increase of God. It increases numerically as Col. 1. 6 shows, but it also increases towards spiritual maturity as Col. 1. 10 shows equally clearly.

Now this maturity can never be measured by any intellectual assessment. Life for the Church began at the Cross, and her progress to maturity is measured by the extent to which she draws nearer to Calvary and never by the extent that she moves away from it. Spiritual progress is increasing conformity to Christ and increasing conformity to Christ means progress in holiness. Doubtless that is why, finally, we are asked to consider *the sanctifying and cleansing of the Church*. The significant verses are found towards the close of Ephesians 5, where Paul gives instruction to husbands and wives concerning their mutual responsibilities. Here, in a few short words, we glimpse the Church's present blessing and future glory. Let us not fail to notice that all her good has its beginnings in the love of Christ which took Him to the Cross. Christ did not love the Church because she was pure and holy : she has been cleansed and is being sanctified because Christ loves her. She is clean through the Word which was the means in her regeneration. It was in her interests that

Christ died. Not for the sake of her safety only but for the sake of her sanctity too. Christ gave Himself for the Church to make her sound as well as safe. We must not attempt to escape the implications of all this by imagining that the travail of His soul will be satisfied with a Church that is sound only in doctrine. While Ephesians 5. 27 tells us that the Church is to be holy and blameless, Ephesians 1. 4 tells us that *we* were chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world that *we* should be holy and blameless. Let us never forget that the Church has no abstract holiness : the holiness of the Church is your holiness and mine : and my holiness and yours is the holiness of the Lord Jesus Christ. We would be grateful to God, if, going from this Conference, not a few of our younger brethren set their hearts to seek God that they might receive from Him some spiritual gift. We would be more grateful still if, not only some of us who are younger, but some of us who are older, went away from this Conference with the deep yearning in our hearts that we might become holy men of God. Our greatest contribution to our own Church is not our spiritual gift : our greatest contribution is our personal holiness of heart and life. What, then, is the consummation to which the Church confidently and expectantly looks forward? Nothing less than this—one day Christ will present the Church to Himself not having spot, as of outward defilement, or wrinkle, as of inward corruption, or any such thing. Then she will be a glorious Church to the praise of the glory of His grace.

With vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blest
And the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest.

DISCUSSION

Saturday, September 20th, 1958 (8.30 p.m.)

MR. CASSWELL : The reason for the weakness among us is not lack of gift—there may be plenty—it is rather a lack of holiness and power, and Mr. Pickering has shown us where true power lies.

MR. ATKINS : We have been facing difficulties and deficiencies, which have something of discouragement about

them. I wonder if I might strike a note of encouragement. In Christendom at large, the conception of the church which our brother has given us, is called the Church Invisible, and we would not be unfair to say that it is remote in people's minds and hearts. Denominational and local interests in the real world tend to put this as an ideal. Is it not a matter for great thankfulness that the Lord has given us this conception, and enabled us, in some measure, in our faith and affections and service and worship, to relate our interests in the local assembly with this wonderful, glorious thing?

MR. STORDY : For myself, the idea of the Church Invisible is one of the grand foundations on which I have fellowship with other Christians. It gives me great joy to know that I have the authority of the Word of God that they are with me and that we belong to His Church ; we are members of His body.

MR. SPENCER THOMAS : Is not that emphasized in our breaking of bread? 1 Cor. 11. 29, R.V., gives the rendering : " For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself if he discern not the body." In our breaking the loaf we not only remember the Lord Jesus but are bound, on the authority of that verse, to remember that we are one with everyone who is one with Christ.

MR. HYLAND : " A temple is a shrine for deity " and in 1 Cor. 3. 16-17 we get a most strong warning against defiling the temple of God, " which temple ye," Paul says, " ye Corinthians," collectively, when ye come together, " are ". It is not only a solemn thing for us as individuals to allow that which is unholy in our personal lives, but it is the unholliness in our relationships with our fellow-believers—division of heart from another brother—that lead to the troubles of which we have been thinking.

DR. NAISMITH : I would like to refer to " the mystery " in Eph. 3. 9, where the apostle says. " that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel ". He says in v. 5 that " this mystery was in other ages not made known unto the sons of men ". Are there not, in the Old Testament, references to the fact that God would bring the Gentiles into the blessings which His earthly people then enjoyed?

MR. GOODMAN : I think that the promise right from the time of Abraham was that " in Him should all the nations of the earth be blessed " ; but that was a very different thing from the concept of this mystery that God had hidden all down the ages and revealed at last through the apostle Paul. That was that the blessing was coming by means of a spiritual union between Jews and Gentiles and the breaking-down of the wall of partition that had separated them all down the ages. The Jews had lived in consciousness that they were the chosen people of God. That separatedness grew in their minds. The Gentiles became more and more alien to the Jews' mind and thinking, until at last they were known as " dogs of the Gentiles " and the Jews would not have any fellowship with them at all. Whatever the promises might mean, that God was going to bless the whole Gentile world through the Jew, the Jew had no conception of it ; it was hidden from his eyes, it was a mystery. And they never conceived that the mystery would be solved in the astonishing way it was ; that, by the death of Christ on the cross, the veil would be rent and a way made to God, not only for the Jew, but for the Gentile. Even Peter never dreamed of it, until the vision came to him of the sheet let down from heaven. He said " Not so, Lord, I have never touched anything common or unclean ", until God said to him " What God has cleansed, don't you call unclean ". Then there came the knocking at the door and the Spirit said " Don't fear, don't hesitate, you go through " ; and Peter found himself actually entering into that mystery which had been hidden all down the ages ; found to his astonishment that, when he preached Christ to the first Gentile audience that ever heard the Gospel, the same thing took place with them as had taken place with the Jews. When the report came to Jerusalem they were indignant ; they could *not* understand what he meant, by what he had done, and they brought him to task. Then it was all unfolded and the mystery was explained. And that has been God's great mystery all down the ages, His darling thought, His greatest wonder, that, out of the cesspool of mankind, He was going to find a treasure for which He would think it worth while to sell all that He had and buy the whole field ; and the treasure He found was the holy Church of God made up of the blending together of Jew and Gentile.

That is the mystery.

Christ foreshadowed it though they never understood Him. He described Himself as going—in John 10—to the Jewish fold, and John the Baptist opening the door for Him, preparing His way ; His going into the Jewish fold and calling out individual Jews by name—His own sheep—and leading them out until they became, by following Him, the flock. And then He said “ and there are other sheep too ; and I am going to bring them ”, and He looked out into the Gentile wilderness, on sheep that had never been in the fold, sheep without a shepherd that moved His heart with compassion. He said : “ I must bring them, and, when I have brought them, this is what I am going to do ; they also will hear My voice and they will follow Me just as you Jews have, and as they follow Me they, too, will become a flock, only it will be the same flock—one flock, one Shepherd.”

DR. HANTON : In Acts 13 (R.V.), at Antioch in Pisidia, this very thing caused disturbance, when Paul preached first to the Jews, addressing them : “ Men of Israel and you that fear God, listen ! ” (v. 14). They turned against him and we read (v. 40-41) : “ Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you which is said in the prophets, ‘ Behold you scoffers, wonder and perish ’ ” ; and so to v. 45 : “ When the Jews saw the multitudes they were filled with jealousy and contradicted what was spoken by Paul,” and in v. 46, he said : “ It was necessary that the Word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold we turn to the Gentiles.” Then he makes a quotation from the Old Testament : “ For so the Lord has commanded us saying, ‘ I have sent you to be a light for the Gentiles that ye may bring salvation to the uttermost part of the earth ’.” Although it was mentioned in the Old Testament, it was not understood.

MR. STORDY : “ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad ”—and aren't we glad !

MR. ROBSON : The devil is not slow to know which way things are going, and to copy them, if he cannot suppress them. Denominational Christendom to-day is taken up with the ecumenical movement. The last time I heard Eph. 1. 15-23 read publicly, it was read by a church official with the full

intent of impressing that “ *belonging to the Church* ” was the thing that mattered. He went on to deplore “ our divisions, the sad divisions that came about at the Reformation ”. This is the common language of current thought in the ecclesiastical world and you might think to yourself : “ This is fine, this is just what we have been waiting for them to say ” ; and yet you have an uneasy feeling that, when such a man begins to deplore the divisions of the Reformation, it is really the Reformation he deplores ! There may be, in this aspect of the ecumenical movement, a measure of the enemy’s false copy of the very thing that we ourselves have sought and have failed to achieve. When you have been with Mr. Pickering through his address this evening, can you really say that the ground of our unity is the pattern of the things in which we are united ? Is it the processes of our church government ; is it the methods of our ministry ? Are any of these things, the things on which we are standing ? Sometimes I am sorry when we say : “ These are the *things* we stand for,” because, please God, in the Church that Mr. Pickering has described, nobody is standing for *things* ; we are standing *in Him*. We have dealt with the union of Jew and Gentile : but how quick the natural heart is to set up fences. Rome has deliberately built on the Vulgate mis-translation (reproduced in A.V.) : “ There shall be one fold,” which should read “ one flock ” : and sometimes we have a Roman heart that says “ If they are not in our fold. . . .” But it is *not* one fold, it is one flock ! We have referred to the blessing that has come through inter-denominational evangelism. Is that blessing because, in that work, those who are engaged stand solely on this ground : that they are one in Christ and they will bring others to Christ ? Is it, possibly, that not, sadly enough, in our breaking of bread, but only on the Gospel platform we have truly evidenced the real union of the people of God ? Is that why God blessed Dr. Graham, because Dr. Graham would not come as a representative of his own, or any denomination, but only in the name of all the Lord’s people ?

And I would like to add one word on that : We “ brethren ” here, and in our magazines, deplore our weakness and tell each other of weaknesses in our local church, but you know (some of you will know better than I), my experience is this,

that wherever there is an inter-denominational movement of God—in whatever industry or profession you are engaged, if it has a Christian association—you will find that somewhere or other the driving force, the inspiration, the movement will have a source in a group of men from assemblies. I do not say that boastingly : but others recognize it. You rejoice in C.S.S.M., C.M.V.C., Crusaders, I.V.F., and many other agencies. Go to any of them and you will find that much of the life force, the spring of it, is with men whose affiliations are ours. We may be weak locally but somehow God uses us when we step out into the sphere of the whole body of Christ.

MR. McLEAN (Consett) : We hear a great deal about the failure of the Church. In reading in the Epistles, particularly that to the Ephesians, can we not perceive that God's highest and noblest purposes for the Church cannot begin to be fulfilled until we are gone from this sphere into the sphere to which we truly and really belong—that “ in the ages to come He might show ”, that there might be a visible demonstration, a visible expression, of “ the exceeding riches of His grace ” (Eph. 2. 7). Surely some of the highest and noblest purposes for which the Church has come into being lie in the future, in the Church complete and glorious.

MR. WATTAM : What is the difference between “ the church which is His body ” in Eph. 1, where you have the body separate from the Head, and “ the church which is His body ” in 1 Cor. 12, where the believers are the whole body, including the head. Is the latter just a simile and the other a great doctrinal truth ; or are both just similes ?

MR. PICKERING : I can only suggest, as we have already tried to do, that in the earlier epistles, in the presentation of the Church as the body, the emphasis is on the relationship subsisting between the different *members* of the body, whereas in Ephesians and Colossians it seems to be more the relationship between *all* the members, and Christ Who is now described as the Head.

MR. CASSWELL : The truth was put in a nutshell by Captain Wallis : “ People say ‘ Keep looking up ’ : but you should be looking down because you are up ; if you understand your position in Christ you could not be higher—you are in the heavenlies.”

MR. STORDY : It may be that that is the only safe place to be, because the idea at the end of Ephesians 1 is that the God Who raised Christ from the dead set Him in an absolutely unassailable position "far above all principalities and powers". It is our dwelling down below that exposes us and makes us weak. Paul says: "And what is His power to *usward* who believe?" Well, what is it?—the same power that raised Christ from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in that unassailable position. Maybe our defeat and weakness, with one another in assemblies, and in our own personal lives, is because we are not living by faith up there.

MR. LONG : Isaiah 51. 6 reads: "Lift up thine eyes to the heavens and look upon the earth beneath. . . ." So we have to lift up our eyes and live in the joy of being up there, and *then* look on the earth beneath.

MR. ATKINS : Eph. 3. 10 (R.V.) reads: "To the intent that *now* unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places might be known the manifold wisdom of God." The Church was not perfect in those days: it is not now. What is it that the principalities witness now?

MR. PICKERING : Is not Eph. 3 a continuity of the thought earlier in the chapter, the supreme thing of which Mr. Goodman reminded us: not merely the bringing together of Jew and Gentile into some association, but bringing them into union; not merely fellow-heirs and partakers of His promise, but actually of the same body? Is it not the fulfilment of *that*, which so exhibits the manifold wisdom of God to all spectators, whether human or principalities and powers in heavenly places?

MR. LONG : Am I right in thinking that in Ephesians we have the building, the body and the bride? In the building we have a foundation, and we recognize that only Foundation that God has given to us. In the body, we have a Head, and God has made Him Head over all things to the Church. In the bride we have a Lover, the Eternal Lover of our souls. The picture would not be complete as a building or a body: but it is complete when we see all three together. Am I right in believing that?

MR. PICKERING : It is a shame to spoil the alliteration, but, while husbands are directed in Eph. 5. 25 to love their wives as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, it would not seem strictly correct to infer, *from that verse*, that the Church is the bride of Christ.

MR. ATKINS : It is strange that the word "bride" does not appear here, but we may have had the explanation of that earlier, in that it is the bride of the Lamb, but is not the idea found in this verse most distinctly? Take the one phrase : "He might present it to Himself a glorious Church." Is there not an allusion to the first bride presented to Adam by God? And the Son of God will present His bride to Himself in the crowning day that is coming.

MR. GOODMAN : I think that is so, especially as the next verse says : "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies." It is a mixed metaphor. Christ loved the Church, "which is His body," that He might present it to Himself. He did not present His body, He presented His bride. The two are very intimately mingled. At the creation it was said of Eve : "And they two shall become one flesh"—much the same mingling of metaphor. A man ought to cherish his wife as his own body ; and so we have Christ cherishing the bride as His own body.

MR. SPENCER THOMAS : In Eph. 5 the peculiar duty of the wife is submission, and the special duty of the husband is love, and the measure of it should be analogous to the submission that the Church shows to Christ and the love which Christ shows to the Church.

Sunday, September 21st, 1958 (2 p.m.)

THE CHURCH IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

THE PERIL OF THE END TIME
THE GLORIOUS CONSUMMATION

Chairman : MR. MONTAGUE GOODMAN

Address : DR. STEPHEN S. SHORT

Reading : 2 Timothy 4. 1-8

IN this concluding session we are to examine our theme of "The Growth and Progress of the Church" on the basis of the so-called "Pastoral Epistles"—Paul's two epistles to Timothy and his epistle to Titus. The word "pastoral", of course, enshrines the metaphor of a shepherd (witness our English word "pasture"), and these three epistles are called "pastoral" no doubt because they display the apostle as caring for the Church as would a shepherd for his sheep. Not that they are termed pastoral in the Bible; the Bible accords them no such designation—but it is a suitable title for them and generally used and understood. Historically it seems to have been Thomas Aquinas, in the mid-thirteenth century, who first coined the term, but as used by him it denoted no more than the two epistles to Timothy, not that to Titus. The first, so far as I can ascertain, to include the epistle to Titus was Paul Anton in 1726; so that it has been for less than 250 years that the caption "the pastoral epistles" has been used to embrace the three letters that we associate with the term to-day.

These letters form a clearly demarcated group, as the last epistles from the apostle Paul's pen, and they each reflect Paul's concern for the future well-being of the Christian Church and to that extent are truly "pastoral". In their

historical order, Paul's First Epistle to Timothy and his Epistle to Titus were written on his travels between his two Roman imprisonments, and his Second Epistle to Timothy was written when reincarcerated in the Roman metropolis. There's much in these epistles relating to the Christian Church, but an aspect which is definitely to the fore is the Christian Church as she would come to be in the closing days of the present dispensation. Reading them through, we alight on such paragraphs as these : 1 Timothy 4. 1-3, 2 Timothy 3. 1-5, and 2 Timothy 4. 3-4 (and the reader should here read these paragraphs). Notice the following phrases, similar in import though different in wording : " In the latter times "—from the first paragraph, " in the last days "—from the second, " the time will come "—from the third. These show that the apostle was much preoccupied at the close of his life with the estate of Christ's Church at the termination of the Christian era—" in the latter times," " in the last days ". Nor was his interest herein merely subjective ; it was objective. It had been impressed on his mind by the Holy Spirit, Who Himself had acquainted Paul with what would transpire at the end of the epoch, so that he could write, " Now the Spirit speaketh *expressly*, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith." So the information is authoritative. " In the latter times," " the last days," " the time will come "—when the situation sketched in these verses we've read will materialize. Not a jot or a tittle shall fall to the ground, for all will be fulfilled. " And when these things come to pass," then, as the people of God, we may " look up and lift up our heads knowing that our redemption draweth nigh ". The question inevitably arises whether we ourselves are living in the days here spoken of. Have " the latter times " now dawned? Are we living now in the closing days of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit? We just don't know, nor do the angels, nor did the Son of God Himself during the days of His earthly ministry. " But of that day and that hour," the Saviour assured His disciples, " knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father " ; and again, " It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." There are, nevertheless, indications that the sands of time may be fast running out, not least of which is the fact that many of the

features listed here in these verses we have read are present actualities. The three paragraphs, indeed, seem an apt delineation of current trends and practices and I, for one, am encouraged by this to believe that the time may shortly arrive when "He that shall come will come and will not tarry". "Amen, even so come, Lord Jesus." What these verses teach concerning the growth and progress of the Church of God is the peril of the end time; and value could be obtained by examining these paragraphs clause by clause. Such a procedure, however, would require more time than lies at our disposal; so, instead, we'll consider one clause from each paragraph. The clauses I have selected have this in common—that each commences with the same word, the word "having". We choose from the first paragraph, therefore, this (in 1 Timothy 4. 2), "having their conscience seared". From the second we choose this (in 2 Timothy 3. 5), "having a form of godliness". And from the third, this (in 2 Tim. 4. 3), "having itching ears". Three characteristics of church members, then, at the end of this day of grace, would be their "having their conscience seared", their "having a form of godliness", and their "having itching ears". Let's analyse these in the order of their mention.

There will be those among them, says 1 Timothy 4. 2, "having their conscience seared," or, to use the fuller quotation, "having their conscience seared with a hot iron". Now, what does that mean—to "have one's conscience seared with a hot iron"? The surface meaning is that one's conscience has become insensible, anæsthetic, numb. It has ceased to work, ceased to register, ceased to record the difference between right and wrong. When a hot iron comes into contact with the skin, destruction occurs, not only of the skin itself, but of the nerve-endings within the skin, the result being that sensations and impressions made on the area concerned are no longer transmitted. The sensory cells in the brain cease to receive them. The part can be pricked with a pin, it can be scorched by the fireside, but no pain is felt, nothing is noticed; the part has been cauterized, "seared with a hot iron". And it might seem that to have one's conscience "seared with a hot iron" is to become incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong; and there are some such; and it was with reference to this, doubtless, that Isaiah

exclaimed in chapter 5. 20 of his prophecy, " Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter ! " But, in point of fact, such is not the meaning here, as is shown by any commentary of repute. The true meaning of the clause is that, in the case of the persons described, their conscience condemns them, it is " branded ", as the Revised Version expresses it ; they have a " branded " conscience. The second half of the verse has to line up with the first half which describes such people as " speaking lies in hypocrisy ". The people concerned, says the passage, are " hypocrites ", they are play-actors (which is what the word hypocrite means), they are playing a part. What they say is not what they believe ; what they do is no true expression of their real frame of mind ; they speak lies, and they know it, their conscience being branded in the process ; they make a great show of outward piety, setting themselves forward as models of self-denial, self-mortification, asceticism, " forbidding to marry " as it says in 1 Tim. 4. 3, " and commanding to abstain from meats," but not sincerely ; their consciences are branded ; the brand of guilt lies heavy on them. It is as with those mentioned in Titus 1. 15 (second half) of whom it says that, " unto them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure ; but even their mind and conscience is defiled " ; and as with the one mentioned in Titus 3. 11, " Knowing that he that is such is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself." That's it—they are condemned of themselves ; they have a defiled conscience, a branded conscience, seared with a hot iron. A good deal of emphasis in these pastoral epistles is laid on the " good " conscience. " The end of the commandment," taught the apostle, in 1 Tim. 1. 5, is " charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience ". He urged Timothy, 1 Tim. 1. 18-19, to " war a good warfare ; holding faith and a good conscience ". Deacons, he enjoined in 1 Tim. 3. 9, were to " hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience ". He exclaimed concerning Timothy in 2 Tim. 1. 3, " I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day." Now the " branded " conscience of 1 Tim. 4. 2, the conscience " seared with a hot iron ", is the opposite of that.

It is the accusing conscience, the protesting conscience, the conscience that won't be silenced, won't lie down, won't be still—the bad conscience. And the force of the clause we are considering is that in the close of the days of the present era, there will be those in the Church with a bad conscience who transgress its dictates, ignore its warnings and, trampling it underfoot, rush headlong into the paths of sin. They'll have *dispensed with righteousness*, that's the point—they'll have *dispensed with righteousness*.

Are there churches to-day that have dispensed with righteousness? Are there church members who have done so? Are there those who stifle their conscience? Are there those who, like Balaam on his ass, heed not the warnings of the divinely-given monitor, but press on regardless, lured by the wages of unrighteousness? Methinks there is much of this; the Church has lowered her standards, she is not the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" that she could or should be, or that she was once. She is defiled and knows it; her conscience is branded. In no small measure she has lost her integrity, soiled her garments and dispensed with righteousness.

The next point I want to make is that she has *dispensed with power*. And to substantiate this I call your attention to the second of the verses I listed just now—2 Tim. 3. 5—where Paul said that "in the last days there will be those having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof". The externals will be in order, but that's all. And one might compare a nut, the shell of which gives the impression that it is in perfectly good condition but which, when opened, is found to enclose a kernel which is shrivelled, dessicated—the form unimpeachable, but the heart dead. The word 'denying' ('the power thereof'), denotes not merely an intellectual negation but a practical one. It's not that the people concerned disbelieve in spiritual power, but they fail to exhibit it. They don't deny it in their sermons, but in their lives. It's analogous to the idea in 1 Tim. 5. 8 of "denying the faith". The person who "denies the faith" in this paragraph is not the person who preaches heresies and falsehoods from a pulpit, but the one who fails to "provide for his own, and especially for those of his own house". It's a practical denial rather than an intellectual one. And so here, in 2 Tim. 3. 5.

“ Denying the power thereof ” relates not to words but to deeds ; and what this verse teaches is that in the last days of the present dispensation there will be church members who will have dispensed with power.

Are there such at the present time ? There are indeed. Multitudes of twentieth century churches could be characterized as “ having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof ”. The organization is there, the machinery, the traditions, the orthodoxy, but not the power. The week’s programme can be carried through without a hitch, the month’s programme, the year’s programme, the five-year plan, but nothing of spiritual moment transpires. There is no “ adding to the church ” of those who are being saved ; there’s no raising up of gift, no launching forth into new fields, no sending out of full-time workers. There is no power—lots of talk, but nothing to show for it. Said the apostle in 1 Cor. 4. 20, “ the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power ”—that’s the ideal after which we need to aspire. Less prattle and more power ; less form and more force ; less of the traditions of men and more of the energy of the Spirit. God grant it for His glory’s sake !

But not only did Paul predict that the latter-day Church would dispense with righteousness and dispense with power, she would *dispense* also, he foretold, *with truth*. For, in addition to their ‘ having their conscience seared ’ and ‘ having a form of godliness ’, they are described in 2 Tim. 4. 3 as “ having itching ears ”. Read 2 Tim. 4. 3 and 4 : “ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine ; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears ; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” It is easily possible to misread that sentence, on account of the phrase “ having itching ears ” lying contiguous with the word “ teachers ”—“ teachers having itching ears ” ; and one might assume that the phrase “ having itching ears ” was governed by the word “ teachers ”. Actually, it is governed by the word “ they ”, fifteen or so words earlier ; (“ For the time will come when *they* will not endure sound doctrine ”). These are the ones, not their self-appointed teachers, who have the itching ears. The fault of the teachers lay with their tongues and with the thoughts to which their tongues gave expression.

The itching ears belong not to the teachers but to the hearers ; and that is why it is advantageous to reverse the order of the clauses, as in the Revised Version, so as to move the phrase " having itching ears " nearer the word " they ", and further from the word " teachers ". We read, therefore, " For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but, having itching ears, shall heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." The point is that the people concerned would want the type of preachers who entertain, amuse, divert ; not those who instruct the mind and challenge the conscience, but such as gratify the aesthetic taste. They would have itching ears, ears constantly needing to be tickled. They would have a craving for novelty—like the Athenians, of whom we are told that " they spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing ". They would be more attracted by what was new than by what was true ; and it could be said of them, as it was said of some in a former day ; " the prophets prophesy falsely, . . . and my people love to have it so ". Excitement, sensation, cleverness—these would be the great enticements, not truth. They have dispensed with truth.

Have we dispensed with truth ? Do we have itching ears ? Which do we prefer, the bread and butter of the Word of God or succulent frills and fancies ? Which would appeal to you most, an address about Russia, or an address about Romans ? to be told the timetable of the future or to be told the tasks of the present ? There are plenty of itching ears around, I contend, and a marked preference in many quarters for tantalization to truth.

Putting all this together, Paul said that, at the end of the age, there would be a tendency among Christians to dispense with righteousness, power and truth ; and just that is now occurring. And it is occurring, interestingly enough, in precisely this order. Firstly Christians have abandoned their high standards of ethical conduct, their righteousness has diminished. They've discovered next, that their testimony for God has become ineffectual, their power has vanished. That is the position of many of our churches at the present time. They still stand for the truth, but their ethical sublimity and their spiritual power have ceased to attract attention.

And it is at that stage that Christ addresses them, saying, "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works, or else" (notice) "I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of its place except thou repent." The third stage, that is to say, is that the candlestick is removed and truth itself is extinguished. Righteousness goes, power goes, truth goes. It is encouraging to contrast with this sad portrayal the example of the writer. Paul declared, in 2 Cor. 6. 7, that he approved himself as a minister of the Gospel, among other things, "by the word of truth, by the power of God, and by the armour of righteousness". So that, whereas Paul foresaw that in the last days, truth, power and righteousness would all be at a discount, he cultivated them for himself to an exemplary degree. He approved himself as a minister of the Gospel "by the word of truth, by the power of God and by the armour of righteousness". God help us to tread in his steps !

Now the teaching relative to the Church embodied in these pastoral epistles concerns not only the peril of the end time, but, additionally, the glorious consummation. And what a benediction it is to us to know of this glorious consummation. The time of the consummation will be that of the second advent of Christ, an event which is designated in these epistles, characteristically, by the term, "the appearing". The Greek word employed is *epiphaneia*, and it is used to denote the second coming of Christ four times in the pastoral epistles and only once elsewhere in the whole of Scripture. This is in 2 Thess. 2. 8, where it says that "the Lord will destroy Antichrist with the brightness of His coming", "brightness" here being the rendering of this Greek word *epiphaneia*. But it is not a very happy construction from a grammatical point of view and no English translation of it is really satisfactory. So we will leave that reference out of account and concentrate our attention on those in the pastoral epistles. There are four of them, not counting 2 Tim. 1. 10, where it is related to our Lord's *first* coming—the verse where it says that God's grace "is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ"—that apart, four of them. But, before examining them in turn, let us remind ourselves of the proper force of the word. In the Greek version of the Old Testament the word itself does not occur, but the cognate verb *epiphaino*

occurs and is used to describe the shining of God's face on His redeemed people. You have it, for instance, in Psalm 31. 16, where the Psalmist says, "Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant," and in Psalm 118. 27, where he says, "God is the Lord, who hath shewed us light." It is a blessed realization that the day will come when, in a new and unprecedented way, there will be a shining upon the Church of the Saviour's face. Ever since the ascension, it has been hidden, visible to faith indeed, but not to sight. But the face now hidden will shine forth, shine upon His Church, and "we shall see His lovely face, some bright golden morning". Isn't this the Church's hope? Don't we sing: "Our longing eyes would fain behold that bright and blessed brow"? Indeed; and the Spirit-taught believer exclaims: "My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning, I say, more than they that watch for the morning." It's not the glory of the sun that we long to see, so much as "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". And for this we wait, for the appearing, the shining forth, the effulgence, the *epiphaneia*. May God hasten it!

Let us look, now, at the four occurrences of this word relating to Christ's second coming in the pastoral epistles. 1 Tim. 6. 14 contains the first, and it reads: "Keep this commandment"—or, as the Revised Version has it: "Keep *the* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now how are we to understand the clause, "Keep the commandment"? Instinctively one would assume that it meant, obey a certain injunction; and one would look to see what injunction might be intended, only to find the answer by no means obvious. True, there are some injunctions in vs. 11 and 12. "But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life"; but the difficulty is that here are a plurality of commands rather than one in particular: "Flee, follow, fight, lay hold!" which makes it more than doubtful as to whether "*the* commandment" Timothy was to keep, according to v. 14, relates to the contents of vs. 11 and 12. What was it, then? Well, what is the chapter's theme? It is that Timothy should preserve intact the entire body of Christian teaching and it is summed up in the

twentieth verse : " O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust." The body of Christian teaching is denoted in this chapter by a variety of different terms : " The doctrine " in v. 1 : " That the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed " ; " Wholesome words " in v. 3 : " If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words . . . he is proud " ; " The faith " in v. 10 : some have " erred from the faith " ; " The deposit," v. 20 (R.V. margin) : " O Timothy, guard the deposit." There is a different emphasis in each case, but the body of Christian teaching is in each case denoted. That suggests that " the commandment " mentioned in v. 14 is one of the series, and denotes the body of Christian teaching, though with particular reference, doubtless, to its ethical outworking. Recall that the correct rendering is " *the* commandment " rather than " *this* commandment ". So the plea to " keep the commandment " was to preserve unadulterated the truth of God, the reiterated refrain of the chapter. At the end of v. 12, Paul reminded Timothy how he had " professed a good profession before many witnesses ", which probably occurred near the commencement of his Christian life. But that is not enough, Paul told him in effect ; you must follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ Whose witness to the truth was maintained to the very end, to His standing in judgment before Pontius Pilate. " I give thee charge before Christ Jesus Who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession ; that thou keep the commandment without spot, unrebukeable until the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ." " You have guarded the deposit thus far ; guard it to the end, to the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, even as when on earth He guarded it to the end." The same link between Timothy's duty to stand for the truth and the doctrine of Christ's coming again, is found in the second such occurrence of this word *epiphaneia* in the pastoral epistles. This is in 2 Tim. 4. 1-2 where Paul writes, " I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom ; Preach the Word." Because of Christ's appearing, Timothy was to " preach the Word ", the Word of which the Lord Jesus Himself said : " Thy Word is truth," and of which the psalmist said : " Thy Word is true from the beginning." The two scriptures taken together,

therefore, show that in the light of the second coming of Christ, the Church must adhere to the truth.

The next occurrence of the word *epiphaneia* is just a few verses further on, 2 Tim. 4. 8. "I have fought a good fight," wrote the apostle in verse 7, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only but unto all them also that love His appearing." And who are they who love Christ's appearing? Not those necessarily who are specialists in prophetic interpretation, but those who by fighting a good fight, finishing the course, keeping the faith, will, in company with the apostle, receive, at Christ's appearing, a crown of righteousness. And to do that needs power, stamina, reserves of energy. It is one thing to start a Marathon race, but another altogether to finish it, and only those with staying power can do it. It's the same with fighting: "Let not him that putteth on his armour," said Ahab to Benhadad, "boast himself as he that putteth it off." To enter the lists is child's play compared with enduring to the end, and for the latter is needed untold strength and vigour. And the message here is that, in the light of the second coming of Christ, the church must wield tremendous spiritual power.

The last occurrence of the word *epiphaneia* is in Titus 2. 13. Paul declared at Titus 2. 11-13, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." The force of this, manifestly, is that in view of the "blessed hope", defined here as "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ", the Church must exhibit righteousness; Christians must "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world", "soberly" in relation to ourselves, "righteously" in relation to our fellows, and "godly" in relation to the Lord. And well may they pray, in the words of the "General Confession" of the Book of Common Prayer: "Grant, oh most merciful Father, that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous and sober life to the glory of Thy holy name."

The sum of the matter may be expressed thus : that the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times the Church of Christ will tend to dispense with her threefold heritage of righteousness, power, and truth. Little by little they will be discarded, they will become a thing of the past, a memory, "a dream when one awaketh". But, in the second coming of Christ, a tremendous stimulus has been provided, whereby these very qualities which are being neglected may be quickened, revived, rekindled, so that, fortified by this hope, the Church might be impelled to adhere to the truth, display spiritual power and exhibit practical righteousness—approving herself as God's representative on earth, "by the word of truth, by the power of God and by the armour of righteousness". And my appeal this afternoon is for this to materialize. The hope of Christ's coming again is to be a practical hope, profoundly affecting the way we live our lives, and could it be so impressed on us as to re-establish us in truth, power and righteousness, it would be having its intended effect. May God give us a conscience about these things ; may He make us aware of the peril in which we now stand ; may He show us how the doctrine of Christ's return, rightly understood and apprehended, could emancipate us from such peril; and may He cause us so to love His appearing, that it shall be said in that day, "Lo, this is our God—we have waited for Him ; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

DISCUSSION

Sunday, September, 21st, 1958 (2.45 p.m.)

MR. RUOFF : We all believe that God has spoken through His servant. We ought to make it our resolve, depending upon God to implement it, to bring it to pass, to devote ourselves—having heard this word from God—to meditate upon these things, that, by God's grace, there may be the certain outcome in the accession of spiritual power. We ought to commune daily with God about this very matter, if we are convinced that we are living in the times which are described, or at least their beginning. If we go away and let the matter drift, it is just as though we had never heard the message.

MR. CASSWELL : I think the greatest service Dr. Short has

rendered, in presenting the matter as he has done, is to dispel the defeatism which often surrounds this question of the end days of the Church. So often we have said that we cannot expect things to be any different, and this is just what is foretold, and have folded our arms and sat down under it ! To a certain extent, that is responsible for the deadness we deplore. Dr. Short has presented a view of the end time which is not defeatism at all.

MR. LOYNES : We are back at the point at which we began. He would build His Church and the gates of hell would not prevail against her. This is not the day of defeat but the day to be up and doing. The gates of hell represent the defences of the enemy, not the aggression. The Church is moving forward, and it is our business, while we wait for the Lord, to be battering at the bastions of evil. We should think with delight upon that thousand or so missionary band of workers who are assaulting the very gates of hell overseas. It should be our high resolve to go forward with Gospel enterprise.

MR. ROBSON : The moral element in Dr. Short's address is such as to make questions, genuinely on the mind, almost at too low a level to raise. But from these pastoral epistles, and the peculiar circumstances surrounding the work of Timothy and Titus—the wider sphere of overseership which seemed to be in their hands, the "diocesan presidency"—have been deduced *scriptural* grounds for the development of episcopacy as we know it to-day. Also there is reference in connection with Timothy to ordination, the laying-on of hands. Now, I am satisfied that monarchical episcopacy, as it has developed through the centuries, has nothing to do with the New Testament. But it behoves us, when we are gathered as a company of "brethren", to clear the ground in our minds as to the true answer to the deductions from the references in Timothy and Titus.

DR. SHORT : The status of Timothy and Titus has often been misconstrued. This has been partly due to the use of technical terms with regard to them, over and above those employed in the Bible. They are referred to as "Apostolic Delegates"—as though such were a recognized ecclesiastical office. The laying of hands on the head of Timothy is called

his "ordination", and so on. But it is infinitely preferable to drop all these terms and regard these men simply as Paul's helpers, those whom Paul had trained and who loyally and obediently ran on his errands.

MR. HOWLEY : The laying-on of hands is referred to in 1 Tim. 4. 14, 5. 22, and 2. Tim. 1. 6. All fall into line with the general teaching associated with the laying-on of hands in the New Testament. The laying-on of hands is not a transmitting of anything by virtue of special powers conferred in the putting on of a person's hands, but rather a simple rite, a symbolic action which stood for something. What did it stand for? It stood for the complete support and identification of the people concerned with those upon whom their hands were laid. For example, have you noticed the use of the preposition in 1 Tim. 4. 14 : ". . . given thee by prophecy *with* the laying on of hands of the presbytery"? Timothy's vocation was indicated by a prophetic message in the church and associated with the public identification of the body of elders with this younger man.

1 Tim. 5. 22 (R.V.) reads : " Lay hands hastily on no man," and if I rightly understand the whole of the final paragraph in this instance to deal with eldership, the reference is to the identification of brethren with those called to the eldership : it is not to be done in a hurry. 2 Tim. 1. 6 : " That thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee through the laying on of my hands " comes back to Timothy and the circumstances associated with 1 Tim. 4. 14 that we have already looked at. All that was associated was part and parcel of Timothy's experience. But there is no suggestion in the New Testament that either something magical, or some special spiritual endowment is conferred upon a person by the laying-on of hands of another. It is simply an outward rite whereby the brethren stood solidly behind certain persons. It may be that it would be a good thing if on occasion, for example, at the farewell meeting of an outgoing missionary, the hands of the elders were laid upon a brother. Take away all the accumulated growth of Church history, read this passage as though for the first time, and you would never think of anything special, supernatural or magical transmitted by that action.

MR. WATTAM : In view of our present service and the possibility of our reward, is the "crown of righteousness" a reward which God's people will receive if they live righteously, something remotely given in the future : or is it the result of something wrought out in their lives? The fact that it is the flat crown "stephanos", and not the "diadem", suggests that it may be just the outcome of living the righteous life.

DR. SHORT : True, no doubt, as it is that God rewards His servants in the present time in a variety of ways, "the crown of righteousness" mentioned in 2 Tim. 4. 8 is, surely, a future reward. It is "laid up" for them "henceforth", i.e. from the time of their departure from this world. It need not be envisaged as a literal crown, but rather as symbolic of some divine honour and recompense. But, whatever its nature, all crowns in heaven will be cast at the feet of Him Who alone is worthy (Rev. 4. 11).

MR. GOODMAN : The common idea that everybody is going to have a crown one day—that we are all going to rejoice together with lovely crowns on our heads—is a little misleading. I remember dear old F. B. Meyer saying : "They tell me that I am going to wave a palm in heaven. I wonder what I have done to wave a palm about!" Well, I think we should bear in mind : "Let no man take thy crown." It will be a very blessed thing when we look back at the end, whether it be the Lord's coming, or whether it be your looking back before the departure from this life, and you can say, like Paul said, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown." You'll say it with great diffidence, and yet great confidence, and you will say : "If He gives me a crown—I love His appearing—I am one of those He has promised to give a crown to—but, oh ! when I get it, I will lay it at His feet for He is worthy." And so, the day is approaching ; we need to gird our loins ; we need to put on the armour, for the day is drawing near.

MR. GREEN : Dr. Short has emphasized from the Scripture the very apparent lowering of moral standards and we are conscious within and without of that fact. Is there a lack in teaching on character training in our assemblies?

MR. WARREN : That may be vitally linked with an open

door and the use of our homes. If young people can watch us living righteously, they will seek to emulate us.

MR. CASSWELL : Mr. Goodman, I remember a book by your brother, Mr. George Goodman, about the danger among evangelical Christians of belittling the value of moral conduct. We perhaps fear that some young people may feel that salvation can be secured in that way. Mr. George Goodman emphasized the importance of inculcating moral standards from the very beginning of a child's training.

MR. HOWLEY : At a local meeting of elders a short while ago a suggestion was made that one of the great needs in that assembly was more specific ethical teaching. So much time was given to devotional ministry on Sunday morning, particularly in the earlier part of the meeting, that it was decided that special provision should be made for ministry of christian ethics, conduct and behaviour, at the conclusion. Certain brethren gave addresses, each man selecting his own topic ; not necessarily giving them on consecutive Sundays, but over a period of weeks. A series of talks was given on 1 Cor. 13 successively, separated by several Sundays. There is a splendid opportunity for practical systematic teaching to be given when all the assembly is together, including the young people.

DR. HANTON : A tremendous impact is being made on our young people from outside. The pornographic literature turned out is astounding ; and the influence of films, and such like, is undermining the moral calibre of everybody. Unless we combat it by a positive presentation of ethical standards demanded by our Lord, and taught so clearly in the scriptures, disaster must ensue. I would make a very strong plea for the arrangement of meetings with young men, and separately, with young women, associated with assemblies, that we might discuss these very practical and far-reaching matters. It has been my privilege on occasions as a medical man to present something of the facts of life to young people, in a scriptural way, and with the background of the claims of Christ on the life. I have been most encouraged by hearing from some how much these talks have been appreciated. It is our bounden duty, not only to the young people in our

assemblies, but as parents with children, to instruct them from earliest days in these matters. Psychiatrists tell us that it is the impressions of early days that last, and influence us in our later years. If that be so, then the more impressions of truth that we can make from the scriptures on the very tiny children who come under our care, by the grace of God, the better for them and for all concerned.

MR. GOODMAN : What has impressed me much, and grieved me a good deal, is the apparent fact that from our assemblies, and from our assembly Sunday Schools, there has almost been eliminated any reference to the one great ethical standard that God has given to His creature man. How many of our Sunday School children could tell us anything about the Ten Commandments? This appears to me a shocking thing—for God has not abrogated His commandments : they are His eternal standard of right and conduct and they should surely, therefore, be basic in the ethical education of our children. I have often said that children should be taken to Mount Sinai before they are taken to Mount Calvary, and that it is the vision of themselves that they will learn at Mount Sinai that will fit them to receive the message of Mount Calvary.

Sunday, September 21st, 1958 (3.30 p.m.)

CLOSING ADDRESS

MR. R. GUYATT

I AM deeply conscious of the privilege and responsibility of giving this short closing message, and am going to ask you to think not so much along the lines that we have been considering during this Conference, though not really away from them. I suppose nothing could be added to the marvellous addresses we have had on the Church and its progress through Scripture and the ages, and I feel every one of us here has realized the tremendous privilege to belong to such a body. Mr. Stordy reminded us last evening how grateful we should be as Gentiles to be brought in, and this is a time when, as the late Ronald Knox used to say, we “grovel” to think of God’s wonderful grace in bringing dogs of the Gentiles into His Church.

We have had a wonderful time and now we are going back—at the end of such conferences we are in danger of an anti-climax when we get home. Here the conditions are ideal. Charming people to be with, *we are*, enjoying one another’s company, with no element at all that has been irritating. There have been courtesy, and love, and understanding, and not a cross word anywhere.

But we are going back to the ordinary little humdrum church, where, perhaps, if I may misquote, we know “the long weariness of (Church) life”. What are we going to do there? Are we going to say, “It is all very well to talk about these things at Swanwick, but what can we do here in —?” The conditions are different somehow or other, because, after all, we do build up (thank God for it!) for a short time a wonderful atmosphere here where we can blossom out to our own benefit and to the glory of God.

We are going back—so I want to read verses 16 to 21 in the third chapter of Ephesians—part of that wonderful prayer of Paul’s. I believe in this prayer there is some help for us in—

forgive me if I am using the wrong term—the humdrum business of Church life. In face of difficulties, in face of ordinariness, we have here resources which can make our Church living profitable and successful. They are privileges which we may have if we pray for them. They belong to us, yet never become possessed by us, except under certain conditions. That is why Paul prays that we may have these benefits. I will call them secret things; not secret in the sense that they must not be told, but peculiar, private, and personal, working under the surface, behind the scenes, to make us what God wants us to be outwardly.

The first is, of course, a *Secret Power*: “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.” Paul is doubtless speaking here of the strengthening of a body of Christians—a church like the one at Ephesus, but we may apply it in an individual as well as a corporate sense. I want to think of it chiefly as applying to that little church to which you and I belong, our own local church, and to pray accordingly, and to realize that God will answer that prayer in giving us what we so sadly need. We have been reminded again and again—*We need power*. It is not that the power is not there. It is not that we have to plead with God to send us a second Pentecost, or whatever is the number of Pentecosts we want, but it does mean this that, unless our hearts are conditioned by a deep desire, shown in our prayers to God, we may not get, we may not use, the power that is there at our hand.

And again, the power is not according to our merit or indeed to our need. It is not that God is going to consider whether we are suitable people to have it. It is “according to the riches of His glory”. That is the measure by which this power is given. We may belong to a little church, which meets in a shabby building, and we may say we haven’t much gift, and we haven’t much influence anywhere, and we become rather weary and tired of it all. Listen! The power of God is there according to the riches of His glory. It is there to make that little company something that God may be delighted in, and something that contributes to the glory of God.

I am assuming that the church to which we belong is “rightly constructed”—is “rightly born”, as we heard

yesterday. We belong to that company. It may be weak, it may be strong, but God is willing to give us this great and secret power that we may serve Him acceptably and glorify His Name. I'm afraid we forget this secret so often. We look round for better ways of doing the work of God (and God make us more keen to find better ways); all this is tremendously important. If we talk and behave as if we belonged to a bygone day, we mustn't wonder that people do not understand us, and that our appeal to them is in fact no appeal at all. We need new methods, we need a new approach, we need a better hall, we need better conditions, and everything else, but we *must* have the power of God through His Holy Spirit. E. M. Bounds wrote: "Man is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men." These better men are men endued with the power of the Spirit of God, Who came through, at the birth of the Church, to make that Church, in this world, what God intends it to be.

There is a second secret blessing, a *Secret Presence*. We pray often that Christ might be "evident" amongst us. We want Christ to be seen by the people who come to our hall—we want them to say that "God is in you of a truth". But they can see that outward manifestation of Christ only if we know the secret presence of Christ in our heart, and in the heart of our church. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Surely He is here! Surely He is in our hearts! We said, "Come in, Lord Jesus, to abide in my heart," and He came; we are often telling one another of that wonderful experience. Here, however, is something more than that, something which He Himself told us about in John 14. That those who love Him and keep His words make a home for Him—in this world—where He comes with His Father to dwell. And this dwelling, this secret dwelling of Christ in our hearts by faith, is something we may each experience.

You will remember, back there in the Old Testament, the Shunamite woman watched the prophet pass through the town many times, and she wanted his company in her house, so, with her husband, she prepared a room, a little chamber on the wall, with a bed, and a table and a candlestick, and, when all was ready, she said to Elisha: "Come and dwell here when you pass through." And he came and dwelt, because she had a place for him. We cannot know the secret

presence of Christ in our hearts unless we make Him a place. We love our service, we love our ministry, we love our prayer meeting, and find help and joy therein, but we need more than anything else to cultivate the inner presence of Christ in our hearts, without which everything is dead. The operation of the Spirit is that "Christ may dwell in our hearts": do we give Him room? You know what goes on in your church, I know what goes on in mine—so full of so much. Is there really a place for Him? Remember the words of John Oxenham:

" Christ passes on His ceaseless quest,
Nor will He rest with any
Save as chiefest guest " ;

and that is true in your local church and in mine. If we say to Him: "Lord, I have made a chamber here for you—a bed, a table, a candlestick; I want you to come because I have made room in my heart and my life for you," He will be there, and the church to which we belong will be a church which has something, and people will know there is something there, something they may not understand, but a presence greater than anything else.

There is a *Secret Principle*: "that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints. . . ." Paul prays that we may have knowledge of that which is broad and deep and wide and high, and this knowledge comes as we are rooted and grounded in love. We have heard it said many times in conferences such as this, that we must have ministry, profitable ministry—that the people of God are not taught. May it not be that the secret of our lack lies here, that to gather the knowledge of the truth of God, to understand the Word of God, we must be rooted and grounded in love.

In our church life, unless our roots are deep in love, whatever we try to learn will be mis-learned; whatever we try to apply will be mis-applied. "This I command you," said our Lord, "that ye love one another." Not in theory, but constant care, and happy, useful service one to another, like His love for us. The putting of love into practice, making it real and effective, caring for other people—that is being rooted and grounded in love. Not that one member suffers

and goes hungry, while we have abundance ; not that we are comfortable and well, and forget those who suffer. Their need is our need, and their life is our life. There may be intelligence, insight, skill in teaching and preaching, but unless we are rooted down into the love of God, the message and the service may be meaningless and ineffective.

When a great film is produced, certain privileged people see it before the general public. There is a preview. You and I are having a wonderful *Secret Preview* of glory : to “ comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ”. This is what God is doing, what He is teaching us about His Church, its place in His programme for the world. All that He wants to do for that Church and through it—all that it means to Him, and His glory in it all. Paul prays that we may comprehend it. It is a corporate view, not an individual one. When the love of God works in us, and we work in the love of God, having fellowship with all the saints, we understand this truth, we see this glory, and our hearts are uplifted beyond the poverty of our lives, and the inadequacy of our service. I am convinced of this that much of the wrangling and disputes that go on between parties in the Church is caused by our unwillingness to see the whole picture of God’s purpose, and our maintenance of our own private views and teachings. God has given us a wonderful preview, and in love and fellowship we understand it.

Finally there is a *Secret Privilege* : “ And to know the Love of Christ, that passes knowledge, that ye might be filled in all the fulness of God.” Here again is something which belongs to *all* the Church. Not to me personally, but mine in company with all the saints of God. The love of *Christ* is a love directed towards the Church, not towards the individual, and Paul prays with all his intensity that they might know “ the love of Christ which passeth knowledge ”. I may go back home and know this love in company with God’s people—in that little company to which I belong—by stretching out my hands and opening my heart to all God’s people in the world. We heard about that love yesterday evening. This love is greater than any illustration of love in the Bible. Love of husband for wife, friend for friend, Saviour for enemies, God for man. This love passes knowledge, and in it we are “ filled in all the fulness of God ”. Our hearts not only filled, but

completely submerged in that which fills. As a glass of water, lowered into the spring which fills it, is filled in all its fulness. It is our privilege to know something which belongs to the heart of Christ Himself, to look deeply into that inner purpose of His, and see what He thinks about the Church. We may not think much of it ; He thought so much that He gave and gave, until He had nothing else to give but Himself. You remember the lines in the Song of Solomon : “ if a man would give all the substance of his house for love it would be utterly contemned ”. Our Lord gave in divine generosity everything He had, and our poor hearts were cold and unmoved, until He gave Himself. This morning we sat round Him and remembered :

“ Himself He gave our poor hearts to win,
Was ever love, Lord, like Thine ? ”

and there was not a heart of us that did not respond :

“ Love so amazing, so divine,
Shall have my heart, my soul, my all.”

The Doxology (vs. 20-21) gives us again the power and presence and privilege : “ He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” Not an external power, it works in us. It is not our power, it is not of our making ; it is the power of the Spirit of God, given out of the riches of His glory to work in us, not against us, and by that power God is able to do beyond our speech or thought.

We know what the Church has been in the world, and what the world thinks of it ; here is what God expects, and will do. There is “ glory in the Church by Jesus Christ ”. Because He is there, there is glory. Here is the grand panorama again. Not simply in the future, but in the past as well as the future, and in the present as well as in the past. “ In all ages ” there is glory to God in the Church by Christ Jesus. And you and I have the privilege to share in that wonderful glory.

We may well take away this doxology in our hearts. As we have sat here we have had great desires, great expectations. We have built our castles, and they have not been in the air. Let us go happily, but soberly, humbly yet confidently, for God is able to do exceeding abundantly.