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EDITORIAL

Summer holidays are well behind us and most ministers have already started their autumn and winter programme for Bible studies and mid-week meetings. For the benefit of those who are still working on plans for the New Year, we use our Editorial to commend the Baptist Union's Report *Call to Obedience*¹ and a new booklet to be used alongside it entitled *Five Bible Studies*.² The Report is sub-titled "A Study in Evangelism" and is the fruit of a series of meetings of an Evangelism Working Group composed of representatives of various theological traditions within our own denomination. It is worthy of really careful study by our people, and its companion-booklet, *Five Bible Studies* will greatly enhance its worth as study-material for use by group Bible study sessions and mid-week services. It would be a happy thing if every Church Meeting within the denomination could give one or two sessions to these booklets during the coming winter, or the spring of next year. Ministers are all too well aware that Church Meetings can be a frightful problem. Many of our best people do not attend because they find them rather uninteresting, boring or unprofitable. They can easily degenerate into a monotonous 'rubber-stamping' process, merely giving approval to the more detailed discussions of earlier deacons' meetings. Something is necessary to lift the concept of the 'gathered community' and enrich it with a fresh sense of meaning and purpose for our own time. The merit of the *Five Bible Studies* booklet is that it provides the reader with a series of questions for group discussion and also suggests daily Bible readings to fit in with the main theme for each study. The subjects are: Jesus Christ is Lord, Being a Christian, The Purpose of the Church, Motives, and Obedience. Here are two reasonably priced booklets which may well be used to quicken the interest of our people in these important themes. Both are obtainable from the Church House Publications Department.

¹ Baptist Union 22pp price 1/6d.

² Baptist Union 14pp price 1/3d.

THE CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL SCENE II:

AN AGE OF THEOLOGICAL EXPERIMENTATION

In my first article (July issue, 1970) I commented on our cultural and theological background and said something about the issues raised by a scientifically orientated culture. Because of the contemporary pluralism, we live in a time when there are divers theological efforts to meet the secular challenge. We must look at these in some detail and seek to elaborate briefly the varying answers.

At the apologetic boundary, meeting the linguistic challenge, we must place I. T. Ramsey. Aware of the empirical emphasis of the Anglo-Saxon world, he has, in a series of small but stimulating monographs (*Religious Language, Models and Mystery, Freedom and Immortality, Religion and Science*), sought to find a way to understand what theological and religious language is seeking to communicate. Not satisfied with the suggestion of Braithwaite that it really has only ethical import and is concerned with the agapeistic way of life, he finds his key in personal experience at the level of personal disclosure. Since science and current secularism are tied to the empirical, he too begins at the empirical level but contends that in personal disclosure there takes place an increasing comprehension of the personal dimension which transcends the empirical. Such personal disclosure provides the key to the understanding of divine disclosure. Through man's awareness of his world, of nature, of history, of other persons, there comes a personal disclosure of God. Man seeks to communicate this disclosure to others, and religious language constitutes his attempt to point to this experience that others may share in it. In doing so, man uses odd language. He chooses models which provides analogues to describe his unique experience. Such models are borrowed from ordinary intramundane and intrapersonal experience, but lest they be taken literally, the religious thinker provides them with qualifiers to indicate that they are analogues. Thereby he seeks to point men and stab them awake until 'the penny falls' and the disclosure becomes theirs also. Such models are 'creator *ex nihilo*,' Almighty Father, First Cause, and so on. The oddness of theological language thus defines it as different from empirical language. Its function is to point to and communicate divine disclosure and make it intelligible.

Ramsey applies his understanding of religious language to a discussion of the relation of science to religion and to a defence of personal freedom and immortality. His thought, together with the work of Austen Farrer (*The Glass of Vision*), probably provide some of the most stimulating insights into the nature of theological discourse. One could mention many other names, but space forbids.

The same concern with the secular and empirical has spawned what is called 'secular Christianity'—R. Gregor Smith: *The New Man, Secular Christianity*; A. Th. van Leeuwen: *Christ-*

ianity in *World History, Prophecy in a Technocratic Era*; Harvey Cox: *The Secular City, On Leaving it to the Snake, The Feast of Fools*; ed. Alec Vidler: *Soundings*; J. A. T. Robinson: *Honest to God*; Hans Jürgen Schultz: *Conversion to the World*. All these thinkers in their own distinctive way are calling for a religionless Christianity and for a celebration of secularity. We shall discuss three of them for this brief survey. Harvey Cox and van Leeuwen both work out in some detail the development of secularity from Christian roots and call for a this-worldly concern. The same position is taken by Gregor Smith but with a more evident emphasis on the spiritual dimension. Cox sees a development in human history through three social groupings—the tribe, the town and technopolis. Believing that the model for divine-human relationship lies in the social structure of an era, he sees a corresponding movement from a horizontal, mystical union with the deity through a vertical, political model in which the authority of the deity is stressed and the relationship is one-sided to a relationship of along-sidedness. Today it is not a case of participation in or confrontation by the deity but mutual membership in a team of which God is a part. The model now is the Servant image manifested by Jesus of Nazareth. Religion is now past and piety has no place. God does not want us to be interested in him but in our fellow men. He calls us to be fellow members of his team reconstructing his world. There is now no place for experiencing God. Rather we need to be social activists.

Van Leeuwen is likewise captured by the technocratic nature of contemporary culture. He is convinced that religion is a cultural phenomenon and with Barthian zeal contends that it must now be abolished. Man has to be set free from religion, and Christianity and secularity need to be identified in essence. He seeks to show that this is the movement of history. He foresees the time when men will be freed from all the world-religions and celebrates the day when Christians and non-Christians can cooperate in building a new tower of Babel, each bringing his particular treasure, reinterpreting his past creatively, and making use of the wisdom and experience of many cultures. Religious forms impede the advances of Christian history for this is the development of technocratic culture.

The kind of attitude here portrayed makes much of our Lord's concern for the oppressed, the poor, the sick and the disinherited, but ignores his concern for sin and man's personal relation to the Father. It fails to take account of the basic alienation of the human spirit and the reality of the demonic. In consequence, it reduces the Gospel of divine grace to a message of social transformation. It misses the deeper point that such transformation depends for its motivation on the new creation in Christ and that without the presence of such divine leaven in the social structure the latter will itself disintegrate. In his later writings, Cox recognises the need for the renaissance of genuine piety but wants it expressed most truly in the celebration of secularity. We still miss the concern

with the reality of human estrangement and the demonic dimensions of man's life.

With Gregor Smith we have a parallel concern with the secular call for religious Christianity. Yet in the closing part of *Secular Christianity*, we hear a call for what Oman would term 'honest religion.' On the one hand, he dismisses religion as the attempt to use God to complete man's life. On the other, he calls for real prayer in the Spirit (*Secular Christianity*, p. 209). The truth is that his secularity is more balanced and that he retains a real sense of transcendence. Only with a relation to such a transcendent presence does man have the equipment to deal adequately with and transform the secular. That is what religion is all about. Immediately we are confronted with the issue of transcendence.

Before we move to the other theological strands of our time it is well to note that one significant figure has retained the influence of Heidegger and the approach of Tillich. John Macquarrie's *Principles of Christian Theology* stands out as a worthy attempt to deal with theological issues in this spirit.

Somewhat belatedly when we think of William Temple in *Nature, Man and God*, and yet significantly because of his Catholic stance, Teilhard de Chardin's posthumous works offer a very attractive evolutionary interpretation of Christian thought. The large collection of written commentaries upon his books testifies to the attractiveness of his insights, while a foreword by Julian Huxley to his first published volume, *The Phenomenon of Man*, shows that his interpretation has an attraction for those who adopt a naturalistic stance. Teilhard endeavours to build upon the scientific evidence for the evolutionary process, freely confessing that he goes beyond science and that he is really offering a metascience. Believing that any true science must include man as personal being, he finds, like Temple, a mental component in energy itself, at first nascent but becoming increasingly actualized as the evolutionary process proceeds. He justifies this by finding in the process a law of complexification/interiorization in which increased complexity at the physical level is accompanied by increased unification and interiorization in organisms. The latter is expressed in a movement from life through consciousness to self-consciousness. Teilhard thus postulates energy as having a physical or tangential component and a radial or mental component, the latter increasingly taking over as the evolutionary development moves on. In terms reminiscent of Lloyd Morgan's emergence, he sees the process reaching a super-saturation and folding back upon itself at the points where life and human self-consciousness appear.

The whole process appears to be a directed one, which in man has become self-conscious, so that the direction is placed in the hands of man himself. Man can return to the totalitarian anthill or express his mastery creatively and socially. In *The Future of Man* Teilhard affirms his faith that the latter possibility will prevail and that history is moving to another point of super-saturation. Then the hyperpersonal will emerge, a condition in which man will find his true being in a personal community of love. He substantiates his faith on the ground

of the over-all directiveness of the process and postulates a controlling point of final cause (very Thomistic!), the Omega Point, which attracts and moves the process forward. Such a point, to be effective, must be both loving and lovable, personal if it is to effect a personal union of beings in a higher whole, transcendent if it is not to succumb to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and present as well as future if it is to be truly effective. This Point Omega, Teilhard then identifies with God.

Here we have one attempt to think of the divine transcendence in terms of a temporal model as future. In Jesus Christ and the Incarnation, this divine future has become present, redirecting the process from within and initiating a process of Christification in which the whole universe will be incorporated in Christ. In the Church the hyperpersonal is already being realized proleptically (see especially *The Divine Milieu*). Thus Teilhard offers us a Christology in which the humanity of our Lord is an incorporating humanity; also a cosmic eschatology in which the redemption of the individual is seen within the setting of a social and cosmic redemption.

The system has its weak points. It is overtly immanentist. It does not take sufficient account of the radical nature of sin and evil. But it is exceedingly attractive to many modern minds.

Teilhard's emphasis on the Incarnation should remind us of the central concern with Christology in Anglican theology, going back through William Temple, Charles Gore, Westcott, Hort and F. D. Maurice, and expressed in a figure so often strangely neglected, Charles Raven. The latter in his own way had a theology which linked up the thought of the Creator Spirit and a concern with Christology with the evolutionary process. Today, one small but significant volume seeks to find a true understanding of man in an examination of the person of Christ and the classic formulations of Christological doctrine. The Bampton Lectures by David Jenkins, *The Glory of Man*, will prove rewarding reading.

We now turn to the process theology which occupies a large place in American theological thought. The impact of the British scientist and philosopher, A. N. Whitehead, has been greater on the American scene than on the British. He constructed a panpsychic philosophy in which the basic model was organismic. He thought of the universe as an organismic whole within which lesser organismic wholes were related to one another by a system of feeling or 'prehension' at various levels of consciousness. Such organisms received their directiveness or subjective aims from God, who selected such subjective aims from the eternal objects (akin to Plato's ideas) which he contemplated and dealt with aesthetically. In so doing, God both directed the process of the universe and himself was enriched by it. Thus Whitehead envisaged a process in deity too, seeing God moving from a primordial to a consequent nature as he enjoyed the movement of the universe and also suffered with it. He thought of God as the world's fellow traveller. His greatest difficulty lay in using an organismic model

rather than a personal as basic in his system, for he regarded the organisms as succeeding one another in time and able toprehend one another temporally as well as spatially. Thus persons became a succession of momentary organisms, and their enduring character depended upon prehensions in the form of memory and anticipation. The same mode should have applied to God too. Yet here Whitehead tried to return to some sense of enduring being and thereby revealed the weakness of his system.

However in the hands of Daniel Day Williams (*God's Grace and Man's Hope*, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*), John B. Cobb, Jr. (*A Christian Natural Theology*), Richard Overman (*Evolution and the Christian Doctrine of Creation*), Norman Pittenger (*God in Process; Process Thought and Christian Faith; The Word Incarnate*), and Charles Hartshorne (*The Divine Relativity; Reality as a Social Process; The Logic of Perfection; Man's Vision of God*) attempts have been made to give expression to a Christian theology. Such thinkers labour with the problem of the nature of the personal, especially where they lean too closely upon Whitehead. However, they offer many insights which should enrich our theological thought and which do not necessarily belong solely to their own approach. We can only here offer some of these basic insights, since to review each of the thinkers in turn would occupy too much space. Following Whitehead, the universe is pictured in panpsychic terms and held to be bound together by feeling which finds its supreme expression in love and which is brought to a focal point in the love of God. Finding place for complete individuality and freedom in the universe, these thinkers find in love the cement that holds it together and which gives it direction as a process.

Hartshorne talks about God's action on his creatures as 'persuasion' and allows for the fact that the universe is so created that limits are set to the freedom of the creatures. God sets an optimum of conditions to the freedom of all beings, so that there is a balance between undue risk and overmuch security, both of which would be too costly for freedom (*The Divine Relativity*, p. 136). Daniel Day Williams, in an able study of *The Spirit and the Forms of Love*, argues that the characteristics of human love must have "their analogues in the being of God" if God is love and "the ground of the structure of love." He defines the characteristic categories of love as "individuality and communion with the other, freedom, action and suffering, causality which leaves the other free to be moved by the other, and impartiality of judgment." Following his reasoning he then, as do all other process thinkers, attacks the idea of God as immutable. God is not "non-temporal in all respects," but rather the human characteristics of love are exemplified in his own being. This understanding of God as involved with his creatures characterizes all process thought. Hartshorne thinks of God in Whiteheadian terms as dipolar, both being and becoming, and argues that the divine perfection means that at every stage of the process God is the norm of perfection (but it is a norm in process).

This idea of God's relativity to his world takes account of the divine involvement in nature and history to which the Bible testifies. Above all it removes difficulties about the Incarnation and the Cross which the classic doctrines of divine immutability have raised. The writer learned long ago from his revered teacher, H. Wheeler Robinson, that divine passibility was an inevitable conclusion from the Biblical disclosure, and this scholar was himself influenced by the Hegelian thought which likewise emphasised a divine becoming.

Process thinkers have adopted the description 'pantheism' for their understanding of God. They attack, and very rightly, the kind of theism which verges on deism, and which thinks of an absentee God. It is this kind of philosophical background which produces the idea of 'the God of the gaps', and which regards the divine activity as an intrusion into the normal world processes. Such deistic tendencies have been very evident in Barth and his disciples, and many forms of the *Heilsgeschichte* school have interpreted 'salvation history' as a divine inbreak rather than a unique manifestation of God's continuing presence and activity in his world. Hence we find the process school of theologians speaking of the world as in God and speaking of God as pervading by his presence and activity every part of the universe. This might lead to an overemphasis on immanentism, and it does in some cases. But in these days when our concern is with this world and we are empirically oriented, it is a very necessary apologetic approach. Bonhoeffer, as we have seen, was very sure of this.

Pantheism can embrace theism, as properly understood. Process theologians speak of the world as in God and speak of God as present throughout his universe. Thus the universe is an integral part of the divine experience. God's involvement with and relativity to his world means that his reality as love is enriched, as that love is both operative in and responded to by his world. Furthermore, as the creatures relate to one another, that relationship is also integral to the divine experience or becoming. God enjoys his world and suffers with it, so that enrichment and suffering can both be predicated of him. Furthermore, the universe is open-ended in the sense that God gives freedom to his creatures, even though by his persuasion he guides the whole process ultimately to his goal.

For process theologians, Jesus Christ is the key to the understanding of faith. Here Daniel Day Williams makes a significant contribution, but Norman Pittenger has provided the fullest treatment of Christology (*The Word Incarnate*). The latter thinker emphasizes the humanity of Jesus and, because he holds to the divine presence and activity in the process, ascribes the uniqueness of our Lord to a unique divine energizing. God is not exhausted by his presence and operation in the created order. His transcendence is linked to our saying "that a man transcends and is not exhausted by his action". Thus the basic model for divine transcendence in this theology is our own personal self-transcendence. Some process thinkers liken the world to God's body, although those nearer to the Christian tradition would reject actual identification. The present writer would accept this as *one*

very viable model. The difficulty with process thought is that it often has an inadequate understanding of the personal because of its basic model of organism.

In the light of this view of God, in Christ we have a special divine energizing of a genuine man, in whom there was increasing moral and spiritual discernment, obedience to the divine will, and employment for the divine purpose as he responded "to the movement of the divine activity, the Word in him" (*God in Process*, pp. 25ff.). As man, his response is full and entire so that he becomes the unique instrument of God, the incarnation of the Word.

The Cross is thus lifted up into the divine life as the unique disclosure of that redemptive suffering with which God continually accompanies the process of his universe. Continually men are being called in that redemptive and suffering love to cooperate with God in the completion of his world process.

There is much in these insights to challenge us, and the this-worldly concern of such a theology is a reminder of how it speaks to our day. Perhaps its weakest point, besides its organic mode, is often over the issue of immortality. Many of its exponents follow a kind of Hegelian position (although not Pittenger and Williams), rejecting *creatio ex nihilo* and postulating the universe as created out of the divine 'stuff' and thus as ultimately being gathered back into his life. Then immortality becomes retention as a memory in the divine experience. Pittenger definitely rejects any idea that man is potentially divine and hence offers a challenging Christology.

We now turn to the theologians of hope—Jürgen Moltmann (*The Theology of Hope; Religion, Revolution, and the Future*); Wolfhart Pannenberg (*Jesus—God and Man; Theology and the Kingdom of God; Revelation as History*); Edward Schillebeeckx (*God and the Future of Man*); Johannes Metz (*Theology of the World*); Karl Rahner (*Theological Investigations*, Vol. 5); Carl Braaten (*The Future of God*). Behind them (Pannenberg less than the others) lie the philosophical insights of Ernst Bloch. Although a dialectical materialist, he views 'matter' as no inert, dead stuff that has to be viewed in mechanistic terms. It must be conceived as dynamic and qualitative rather than static and quantitative. It has in it the potential for a developing and open-ended process. As Bloch sees it, there is a forward moving tendency which is latent in the stuff of the universe. Man is on a dangerous pilgrimage towards the future, a child of time always lured on into the future. Hence Bloch employs the category of the 'not yet.' At the frontier of the present moment the whole world-process is reaching forward into a future where genuine novelty may appear. Reality is a process ever moving from unfinished past into a future where its genesis lies. Man is on the march to his 'homeland', his utopia. Bloch finds many parallels to his thought in Hebrew and Christian eschatology but rejects their theistic faith. Matter is the matrix from which all springs and the goal is already nascent within it. Man must therefore struggle in active hope. The future is the real meaning of time. Real newness lies ahead, and the present is a moment of creativity in which the really new may be produced.

Reality receives its true dimension from the future, and man must work so that the not yet may become real. The world process does not look back to creation but forward to salvation. It is dominated by the future, and the principle of hope is requisite to its understanding.

In Germany, this philosophy has stimulated much theological thought and provided a basis for the rediscovery of Christian eschatology. Aware of the need for dynamic categories in theological thought, that the emphasis on evolution and history calls for a view of the universe as a developing process, that the current this-worldly concern and the scientific empiricist preoccupation place their emphasis on this world and not on the next, and that the issue of transcendence has become critical because of the failure of spatial models to communicate, theologians have turned to the new Marxist humanism for philosophical inspiration. Bloch's critics point out that his stance is not so much atheistic, but that he has rejected Christian theism and replaced it by a kind of immanentist pantheism in which matter takes over the functions and activities of deity such as creativity, and that he has given transcendence a temporal model by his emphasis on the future. Each in his own way but with increasing unanimity, Moltmann and Pannenberg have sought to adapt the philosophy of hope to the insights of Christian theism. Their emphasis falls on history as revelation and on the future as a viable model for the divine transcendence. What they have done is to wed Christian eschatology to a philosophy of hope. Catholic thinkers like Metz, Schillebeeckx and Rahner have followed in their train, and Anglo-Saxon thinkers are also being captured by their insights.

In typical German style, the theologians of hope have roots in contemporary Biblical scholarship. Von Rad in *Old Testament Theology* Vol. II portrays the prophets as people who transferred their gaze from the past acts of God, confessed in the faith of the Exodus/Sinai tradition, to the future acts of God envisaged in their hope. Rendtorf in the *Old Testament* and Käsemann in the *New Testament* give support to the future emphasis, especially Käsemann with his concern with apocalypticism (essays by these scholars are contained in *Theology as History* and *The Journal of Theology and the Church* Vol. 6: *Apocalypticism*, also essays relating their thought to the Pannenberg circle).

This type of theology sees history (here Hegelian influence is to be noted) as the prime reality and declares that the revelation of God is in history. At times it seems to ignore the emphasis that it is through history. Here Pannenberg has been very emphatic, whereas Moltmann is much more aware of the revelation 'through' as well as 'in'. They here correct the error of Bultmann and Barth, and the tendency to separate *Geschichte* from *Historie* and to regard the former as not Historical in the historian's sense of the term. There is no docetism in their approach! Pannenberg rejects the idea of *Heilsgeschichte*, a special stream of salvation history, and, in typical Hegelian style, sees all history as the field of the divine activity. His emphasis falls on universal history, and he sees

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God as the transcendent presence hidden within it, only to be understood and fully revealed in the ultimate consummation. Both Pannenberg and Moltmann therefore emphasize the historical roots of their faith, and they lay great stress upon the Resurrection as historical actuality. Pannenberg especially spends time demonstrating the authenticity of the resurrection. For these thinkers it is the king pin of their structure, the point at which the *eschaton*, towards which all history is moving, has been operative in the midst of the process.

We shall now tend to concentrate on Moltmann as the more attractive of these theologians. He sees God as the power of the future, the God who promises that he will make all things new. In the Resurrection this promise appears more definitely in history. The Exodus of Israel out of Egypt reflects the promise, but the Exodus of Jesus Christ from the dead secures that promise in the historical process. The Cross shows what history is, but the Resurrection gives us the promise of that God who is the power of the future. These two opposing realities in the history of Jesus of Nazareth disclose the basic contradiction between present history and the future promise of God.

Thus these theologians would see everything proleptically from the perspective of the future already manifested in Jesus. Even their Christology must be understood in this way (see Pannenberg). So much do they concentrate on the future that they tend to minimize the past and the present of divine activity. To push the latter always into the future is to minimize the truth which realized eschatology and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit enshrine. To speak of God as coming often ignores that he has come and is present. Here both the theology of Teilhard and process theology offer a corrective.

The church is seen by Moltmann as the Exodus Church. It has been created within history through the Resurrection and it has a specific mission. Its task is to bear testimony to the future of God and to prepare the way for the coming Kingdom. Ritschl's emphasis on the Kingdom as present is now offset by a futurist eschatological viewpoint, but the latter does not do away with the mission of the church at the social level. Man is called to the discipleship which means "to join in working for the Kingdom of God that is to come" (*The Theology of Hope*, p. 333). The Christian sees in history the contradiction inherent in this unredeemed world, and the Cross is a reminder that his Christian mission and his Christian hope must be a way of suffering. Always in his mission he is beckoned on to Christ's future and the future of Christ's lordship. Hence at cost he must effect a reconciliation for man, and the dimensions of this 'obedience of faith' to which he is called to invite men involve social transformation. He is to institute community, set things right and put them in order, work for righteousness and peace, because he sees that these are involved in Christ's future, the future that is the power of God. Thus Moltmann speaks of the 'creative expectation,' hope which sets about criticizing and transforming the present because it is open to the universal future of the king-

dom" (*ibid.*, p. 335). Justice, socialization, humanization and peace are all in the mission of the Church.

All three of the theologies last outlined (Teilhard's, process theology, theology of hope) deal with the issue of evolution and history, taking time seriously, seeing the universe full of new possibilities as man cooperates with God. All are concerned to take a this-worldly stance, recognizing the issues before us in this 'space ship' of a world. All deal with the issue of the divine transcendence while majoring on an immanentist approach. The model of personal self-transcendence and the temporal model of God as the power of the future may well increasingly command our attention. There is a recovery of the eschatological dimension. There is a Christocentric concern. The present writer has found Teilhard and process thought more challenging as he has worked out his own position, but a doctoral student has recently written under him a dissertation on Bloch and Moltmann and he has found some significant insights in this latest theological school which may well be incorporated in a middle line Christocentric theology. The recovery of an emphasis on a historical resurrection as an eschatological act is a timely one.

ERIC RUST

THE RELEVANCE OF SOCIOLOGY

There has appeared in recent years a great deal of material on the subject of sociology of religion. All aspects of our faith and more particularly our practice have been put under the scientific microscope of the sociologists, who have sought to explain why we act as we do, how our religious lives are related to our status in society and to our economic standing. Complex answers have been given to apparently simple statements and questions, and sometimes there is the suggestion that religion is a by-product of pressures of society. On the other hand devout Christians have continued to explain their beliefs and actions, wholly in terms of God's revelation and have neglected even the obvious sociological arguments. It will be the contention of this article that Christians and perhaps especially ministers have a great deal to learn from the sociologists, and that no explanation of religious phenomena purely in sociological terms can be considered adequate.

On the unsophisticated level we are all apt to make sociological judgments. We observe that more women than men attend church and make some attempt to explain this, which involves looking at the structure of industry and the male ethos. We observe also that our churches are, with notable exceptions, havens of the middle classes, and as soon as we have noticed this, we are in sociological territory. We have accepted the existence of class-structures, and related them to church-going and to identification with the gospel. We notice the

drift of population away from urban centres, and on occasion our churches follow them. We become involved in town-planning, in going where the people are, and in so doing we are taking some notice of trends in society.

On an even less sophisticated level we are full of sociological explanations for uncomfortable happenings, such as the decline in attendance at evening worship. (I speak of Scotland, but I believe this is not unknown south of the border). We seek reasons in the ubiquity of the motor car, or in the popularity of the "Forsyte Saga", or some such thing that allows us to blame our people for their lack of zeal, forgetting that the very times of our services are socially determined and that the evening service has something to do with the provision of electric street lighting and the dining habits of the congregation. What has been sociologically determined can surely yield again to the changing patterns of society, or are we the first generation that insists on Christians swimming against the stream?

It is time that an attempt was made in this paper to define sociology of religion. The whole subject is more than a little slippery in this respect. The image of the sociologist is a curiously mixed one. To some the name suggests a cold manipulator of society, determined to remove from us what freedom we have left. To others he is a man interested in working with people, advising on careers, seeking out the truant schoolboy, a social worker with an academic name. Yet to others he is the detached and sardonic onlooker, ready with jargon-filled comments on all aspects of life. He can be seen as a statistician, spending a great deal of time and money to arrive at the obvious conclusion—a study of marriage registers proves that men marry women! Peter L. Berger defines him thus: "a sociologist is someone concerned with understanding society in a disciplined way . . . he is a person intensely, endlessly, shamelessly interested in the doings of men. His consuming interest lies in the world of men, their institutions, their history, their passions." He goes on in a vivid image to speak of the sociologist as a man who whenever he hears human voices behind a closed door or a drawn curtain is immediately seized with curiosity to know and explain.

This being so, we can now look at the sociology of religion. Here again there are various definitions, which together cover various aspects of the discipline. A parish survey, or indeed a Stewardship Campaign is on one level a sociological exercise. The historical study of denominations relating their growth to economic factors is another. The dispassionate ascribing of motives for action is yet another. So are certain aspects of the study of primitive religions. Indeed any study of church life which mentions the society in which the church finds itself or has found itself in the past may be dignified by the title sociology of religion. In certain specific areas a great deal of recent work has been done. Arising from the work of Max Weber⁷ and R. H. Tawney⁸ a new interpretation has been put on the Calvinist section of reformed Christendom, and the rise of industrial western society. The debate on how far capitalism and a certain kind of character have arisen

from and modified Calvinism still goes on. The whole question of the church's approach to and success with the working classes has been illuminated by detailed statistical studies such as Bishop Wickham's *Church and People in an industrial Society*, as well as by more recent work. Sociological studies of sectarian Christianity owe a good deal to Troeltsch⁴ and to H. Richard Niebuhr⁵, and the typology of sects has become a major subject. Bryan Wilson published in 1961 *Sects and Society*⁶, 'a detailed analysis of the history, beliefs and social structure of the Elim Church, the Christian Scientists and the Christadelphians' and in a more recent book which he edited, *Patterns of Sectarianism*, 1967⁷ there are studies of the Exclusive Brethren, the Quakers, the Salvation Army, and Independent Faith Mission and other distinctive religious groupings which are illuminating and which will continue as paradigms of this sort of work. In 1959 Paul Harrison, of the American Baptist Convention published *Power and Authority in the Free Church Tradition*⁸ a most enlightening study of the development of government amongst a large group of Baptist churches.⁹

Now let us turn to a test case, where I believe sociological analysis has contributed to historical understanding, and where theology has too often been undervalued by academic sociologists. The rise of Scottish Baptist Churches in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can be shown to have a close connection with industrial changes and population movements which were involved in the modernisation of Scottish society. In particular it seems that the weaving industry is intimately connected with religious dissent, not for the first time.

Sectarian dissent and the weaving trade have a long and close connection. It is not difficult to establish a typological succession of "weavers' heresies" in medieval and more modern times. The sects of the Middle Ages, the groups of men who revolted more or less consciously against the idea of Christendom centred on Rome, were often to be found in areas of textile industries. The Patari in Lombardy, the Cathari and the Waldenses seem to have been recruited, at least in their formative years from textile workers. Records show that a proportion of the followers of Munster in Zwickau were weavers, and the same is true of other Anabaptist areas. When we examine England in the heyday of the sects in the mid-seventeenth century the link is also apparent in East Anglia, centre of the "New Drapery" and in Bristol and the South West. The same results came from a survey of Wesley's converts who included stockingmakers in Nottingham and weavers in Dublin. So far as records exist, it appears that the early members of the Scottish Baptist groups, and of their near relatives, the Old Scots Independents and the Glasites, in the second half of the eighteenth century, were largely connected with the textile trade. What is reasonably certain is that these little churches were almost entirely confined to areas like Dundee, Paisley, Glasgow, and Perth, where there was some dependence on the textile trade, which was going through a period of prosperity and expansion.

The sociologically inclined history looks at these facts and posits a direct connection between a certain trade and independence of religious thought and practice. Sects, he tends to argue, are the products of economic and social conditions. He produces many theories to account for the phenomenon. Some have suggested that the very sound of the looms produced a mystic turn of thought. Others, more credibly, remind us that weavers worked in their own homes, and so, having their time at their own disposal to some extent are more free to converse and to read and study¹⁹. Political radicalism often accompanied religious dissent, and to take one example, Paisley, which had a strong dissenting interest about the turn of the eighteenth century, was also a home of the Scottish Friends of the People.

It is also shown that the weaver was a man displaced in society, insecure to a greater or less degree. He had lost the solid security of rural life and was alien to the parish system, but he had not moved to the other security, even if it was a form of bondage, of the factory. He was self-employed, yet utterly dependent on the merchants who sent him work. He did not quite fit in, therefore he was liable to assert his independence in a number of ways, including religious dissent.

From this sort of data, much expanded to take in studies of sects in other lands and indeed in other religions, there has been developed a general theory of sect development, which suggests that their origins are almost wholly to be explained in terms of society and economics, with perhaps the stimulus of a charismatic leader to spark off dissent. Troeltsch taught us to see the Church as the eternal, unchanging, wealthy, respected upholder of national virtues and the establishment, and the sects as the repositories of asceticism, devotion and independent protest. Later writers have refined this to include a place for the denomination, which has its recognised place in society, and yet preserves certain unpopular virtues. It is a sort of tamed sect. The growth of sects into denominations, especially in the second generation, when zeal has given place to education, and the more bizarre beliefs and acts have been toned down, has been demonstrated in a number of case-studies. The sect and the downtrodden somehow go together. "Men get together to form sectarian groupings if they are unhappy in and revolt against a social system in which their position, and the position of their class is humilific . . . for instance because their livelihood is insecure or their wages low, or their status unsatisfactory."²¹

This theory has many attractions, and in their earlier years at least the Scottish Baptists show many of the characteristics of the sect. They were determined to restore primitive Christian life so far as was possible, both in belief and practice, and therefore they adopted weekly Lord's Suppers, love-feasts, foot washing, the kiss of charity, lay elders, and other customs which they well knew would set them apart from the mainstream of Scottish religious life. But this does not mean we can simply say that Scottish Baptists were the product of the industrialization of the society and of blind socio-economic forces. When we look at their writings, it is obvious that they

did not see themselves in this way. Few references can be found to social conditions in their writings, but many to believers' baptism, to holy living and to the intricate discipline of the community. There is an element of revolt, but it is against the nominalism of the national church rather than against society as such, and the rise of the churches is attributed, not to the drift from the country parishes, but to a moving of the Holy Spirit.

Where then does the truth lie in this test-case? Is it possible to disregard social history altogether, as religious historians have often done? Or is it right to leave out theology and concentrate on the status of converts and for example attribute an interest in eschatology to bad housing conditions? The truth is somewhere in between. In certain social conditions a specific form of church life arose among a small group of serious people who were probably quite unaware of outside pressures. God at the right moment produced if not the perfect sort of church, at least a church related to the men of its day. There is a lesson here, though it is not my business to spell it out. It has something to do with flexibility of church structure and awareness of what is happening in our society now. Perhaps in our new Industrial Revolution there must be a new form of the Church, which future sociologists will attribute to the electronic age and the consequent displacements in society, but which devout Christians will see as the response of a living church to an active and living God.

This subject, which must be of some interest to Baptists, descended as we are from sectarians who had the courage of their convictions, is only one on which the sociologist of religion sheds light. Closely related to it is the class structure of different churches and denominations. As I prepared material for a Centenary History of the Baptist Union of Scotland, I was struck by the wastage from our churches at both ends of the social spectrum. Except in areas of coal mining and fishing, our churches largely lost the ear, if they ever had it, of the urban working classes, and at the other extreme, many descendants of the pioneers are no longer Baptists, but are to be found in the National Church, or the Episcopal Church, often as the result of marriage, and increasing prosperity, or of moving to a better suburb where no Baptist church was. The tendency towards the lower middle class orientation of the churches with extra notable exceptions, was very marked. This may be a matter for lament, but it may also be an inescapable result of the image of our church life, which is very much a respectable Puritan ethos. The process has not been advanced as far here as in the U.S.A., where in some cases a close correlation between income and church has been established, but it should be a matter for concern.

Much has also been written on the status of ministers. Bryan Wilson²² has been especially active in this field, and has produced illuminating studies of ministers of the Pentecostal churches, which can be read by Baptists without making very many changes. The role of the minister vis-a-vis his members and the central church organization, and also his general place in society comes under scrutiny, and the professional-

ization of the clergy, as a sect becomes established, is made clear. In a day when there is a great deal of uncertainty about what a minister is, in sociological terms, and how he is to be regarded, this sort of study is both a comfort to those of us engaged in pastoral work, and a stimulus to consider our attitudes. Again, the sociologist seems to disregard the spiritual side of the minister's calling, and his scriptural warrant, but this is not a bad thing occasionally. It does us good to see ourselves as other see us.

This article seems in retrospect to raise questions and give few answers. If it serves to introduce a new and lively science to some reader, it will have served a purpose.

D. B. MURRAY

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- 2 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Allen and Unwin, 1930.
- 3 R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Penguin, 1938.
- 4 E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, Allen and Unwin, 1931.
- 5 H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, Holt, 1929.
- 6 Bryan Wilson, *Sects and Society*, Heinemann, 1961.
- 7 B. Wilson, ed. *Patterns of Sectarianism*, Heinemann, 1967.
- 8 Paul Harrison, *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition*, Princeton, 1959.
- 9 Two excellent anthologies are available, *Religion, Society and the Individual*, ed. J. M. Yinger, McMillan, New York, 1957, and *The Sociology of Religion*, ed. R. Robertson, Penguin modern sociology readings, 1969.
- 10 see for example, David Gilmour, "The Pen Folk." Douglas, Edinburgh, 1898.
- 11 Werner Stark, *The Sociology of Religion*, vol. 2. p. 6.
- 12 see "Sects and Society" and B. Wilson, "The Pentecostal Minister: role conflicts and status contradictions" *American Journal of Sociology*, 1959.

REFLECTIONS ON BRITISH BAPTIST LIFE

When an American attempts to write his evaluation on any aspect of British life, he feels acutely the need to avoid appearing as "the ugly American"—at least he should feel so. Thus as I set out to give my reflections on British Baptist church life, I do trust it shall be received as simply a brother in Christ speaking and that all I say shall be accepted constructively.

It is only for the past two years that I have had the privilege of ministering in Spurgeon's College and in the churches of Britain. Of course, this means that an understanding in depth of the spiritual life of the country is quite impossible for me. Yet, perhaps something of an objective view, if not a deeply penetrating one, can have some value. I would hope so at any rate. Thus I shall be brave and plunge in and attempt to present my evaluation in this way:

I *The Ministers of the Churches*

I must say at the very outset that I have been generally very positively impressed by the overall calibre of the men—and women, which is different and unusual for me—who are ministering as pastors in the churches. The depth of dedication, the sense of call, the degree of preparation and the general spirituality of those who lead the churches has struck me as highly favourable. The pleasant contacts I have had with fellow ministers have proved a delight and a genuine experience of brotherly fellowship. Perhaps the one salient feature of the ministry that has most deeply impressed me is the quest for knowledge and study exhibited by most. This discipline reflects itself in a quality of Biblical exposition in the pulpit that is most commendable. I find myself like-minded with many preachers I have met who genuinely accept the scriptures as the Word of God and faithfully attempt to declare its truth Sunday by Sunday.

There is one aspect of the ministry, however, where I should like to see a bit more emphasis laid, viz. in the more "practical" areas of the pastorate. Now I recognize that I may be somewhat biased in my evaluation of the ministry at this point. First, I suppose I am a pragmatic American—most Americans are. Secondly, I am teaching evangelism and practical theology at Spurgeon's College. Still, I feel that the so-called practical side of the ministry, i.e. pastoral counselling, visitation, evangelism, administration, etc., needs more consideration. For example, there is that vital aspect of pastoral ministry wherein a minister serves his people on a person-to-person basis as a pastoral counsellor, and there seems to be almost a dearth of knowledge concerning the principles of psychology and counselling. There is a growing field of need and no modern pastor can neglect his responsibility to become knowledgeable in this area of service if he is to minister adequately to his flock. I certainly do not advocate that one becomes a "junior psychiatrist", but certainly a minister should be able at least to discern the subtle difference between a spiritual problem

and an emotional one. The practical field cannot be minimized.

Further, I feel it wise for a pastor to project his personal ministry into the life and needs of the secular community. One of the most serious problems in church life today rests in the fact that the bulk of society virtually passes the church by as though it did not exist. Moreover, the average man in the street has an image of the Christian minister that is as far from reality as imaginable. Therefore, the minister is wise, in my opinion, to spend a proper amount of time working with people in the community and identifying with them in their needs and aspirations. This may mean working on some civic project, serving on a school board, joining the Rotary Club, etc. The secular world surely needs to see the pastor as a man and a man of service. The community needs to recognize that the church is there and there to serve.

This leads to the greatest need I find among ministers, viz. to come alive to the desperate plight of the church's evangelistic outreach. Again, I may be over-emphasizing because my basic subject at Spurgeon's is evangelism, but I see mission as the church's primary responsibility and I see too few churches making a solid impact in their areas to reach people for Christ. But wherever I do find a minister whose heart is aglow to win people to faith in Christ, I find a church that is effective in doing so. Having been a pastor for fifteen years myself, I have learned that the church one serves tends to reflect the outlook of its pastor. If the pastor is positively evangelistic, so is the church normally. And the converse is also true. Of course, this is a generalization and a generalization always has exceptions. Yet, it is basically valid. And my appeal to the young ministers I teach and to the churches where I preach is that the burden for the conversion of men takes precedence in their respective ministries. I am convinced that the only real hope for church advance in the next decade or two is that the church becomes definitely and aggressively evangelistic.

But we know that the pastor is only one—granted an important one—in the overall body of Christ. There is that marvellous group of God's people that share in the ministry called the laity.

II *The Laity of the Churches*

Again, I have been impressed by the sincerity and dedication of the church members as well as by the pastors. Most of the lay people I have come to know are obviously genuine in their devotion to our Lord. They seem to be willing to shoulder the work of the Kingdom and are truly concerned for the advance of Christ's mission. I am convinced they want to become the "servant church" that we hear so much about today.

Now it is right at this point that I fear we are overlooking a tremendous potential. Although we must grant that many of our fellowships are relatively small, not many congregations are being utilized to near their capacity. After all, it is patently clear that the ministry of the church has been com-

mitted to the entire body of Christ, and therefore, every Christian has a responsibility to serve in some fashion as directed by the Holy Spirit. The philosophy that prevails in some churches that the pastor is to do it all is far from the New Testament norm.

I am very aware of the fact that to change a prevailing philosophy and to implement a programme in the church that involves the bulk of its members is no easy chore. Yet it seems a great need and one that must be forthrightly attacked. In my thinking this will involve two basic principles; (1) a new structuring of the church programme that involves the people in significant service to others, and (2) an equipping of God's people for the task.

This now leads into the third area I wish to discuss, viz. the church's organizational life.

III *The Organizational Life of the Churches*

I hope I will not sound on this point too much like that critical, pragmatic American I referred to earlier, but I do wish to point out that which I sense as a paramount need in our churches here in Britain, i.e. a new appreciation for the place of administration and organization. It is on this issue that some churches are hopelessly outdated. I joke with the students at college and say that in many of the churches where I preach week by week I am sure that the entire church organization and worship programme are much the same as they were in C. H. Spurgeon's day itself. And though this is something of a hyperbole, it has a disturbing element of truth. For the Victorian era is long past, the industrial revolution is over. The forces of urbanization, secularism and technology have been let loose, and people just do not think, act or live as they once did.

Now we must come to grips with today's situation and begin to structure our church life in a fashion that truly communicates to modern urbanized man. This will mean change—sometimes drastic change. And I quite suppose it will be the pastors who must lead the laity in this "revolution". This implies that a minister must be more of an administrator and organizer than ever before. But we should realise, pastor and laity alike, that being a church administrator and organizer is not an unspiritual, unholy thing. After all, ministers *do* administrate, pastors *do* organize. The issue is not whether or not one does such a task, it is whether or not one does it well. Little time in prayer and preparation is given to church administration it would seem. So much in this area is apparently done rather half-heartedly. But isn't the more spiritual, Christ honouring course to administrate well? This seems very clear. Therefore, it appears the part of wisdom to devote a just portion of one's time to that aspect of church life that is all but crying out for prayerful attention.

Of course, the above statements do not mean that the pastor becomes a glorified public relations director. The laity rightly does not want its spiritual leader to have the image of a holy "wheeler-dealer." But an informed laity neither desires its minister to take refuge from administrative res-

possibilities by piously saying that he is called to serve in "spiritual matters" and that administrating is "serving tables". Any aspect of church life that is significant to the ministry of the church is spiritual and God-honouring. And this aspect of ministry is obviously becoming increasingly important. Of this fact the knowledgeable laity is becoming aware.

Now I have already implied the two phases of the restructuring that must be implemented. First, the church programme must be geared to utilize the whole membership (as much as possible) in the work of the ministry. After all, it is the personal ministry of the average Christian in society that the Scriptures present as the principle of effectively and relevantly communicating Christ to that society. This will clearly call for a serious evaluation of the present programme. And that in turn will call for a good bit of bravery to eliminate the superfluous. Moreover, it will call for imagination and courage to venture into new fields and tasks. In a word, it will call for a genuine dependence on the Spirit of God to challenge, lead and empower the church. Secondly such an enterprise immediately demands a fresh look at the educational ministry of the church. God's people must be equipped for the task of such a revolutionary outreach programme. Again, the minister must be relied upon as the one who will carry the burden of this educational ministry. But it is just here that he is uniquely qualified to perform the task. After all, didn't Paul say that "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry." (Eph. 4: 11-12).

Moreover, it is in the implementation of this approach to church life that the primary need of evangelism will be met.

Of course, I recognize that I am suggesting a large order. I am aware of the entrenchment of old traditional ways of doing things. I know every pastor can point to many of his lay members and say they would not respond. I suppose many would even rebel. The laity is not always on the edge of advance. Yet, a beginning must be made and time will not wait for everyone to catch up. I feel very strongly we must come alive to this need before we lose even more strength. The church always stands just one generation away from extinction. The whole church either effectively ministers and evangelizes or it will die institutionally. I believe it is that serious.

IV *The Future of the Churches*

I hope what I have said above is not interpreted in a spirit of despair and gloom. I have the greatest hope for and faith in the church. Thus may I end on a more positive note and share some great possibilities regarding the future. First, before leaving too far behind my last plea for a new organization geared to outreach, I feel the church is awakening to this need and a new day is dawning. Many are beginning to ask questions that relate to this aspect of church life—not the least of whom is the church members themselves.

The Baptist Insurance Company Limited 4 Southampton Row, London, WC1B 4AB

To the Members of the Baptist Ministers' Fraternal.

Dear Friends,

"Oh Mrs Corney, what a prospect this opens! What a opportunity for a jining of hearts and housekeepings".

Mr Bumble in *Oliver Twist*.

On Sundays, my work lies in the vestry but occasionally I am called to assist as a steward. Whenever I pass the collection plate into a pew, I make a point of studying reactions.

The gift-scheme member is securely casual in the anonymity of the envelope but those with a naked coin frequently are a little furtive in their approach to the open collection plate. The really youthful watch along the line with eager anticipation clutching a coin (sometimes dusty from the floor) in a hot little hand and anxious to get at the plate.

During a recent family service, in which the children at our Church sit scattered throughout the congregation, I was taking up the collection from a pew in which, among others, a quite small boy and his not much larger sister were sitting side by side.

The boy dropped in his coin, and the sister in the most relaxed way possible said to me "That is from both of us". In some circumstances this could mean that she was getting away with it but in this particular instance the girl had clearly allowed the slightly younger brother the privilege of sharing in the collection. I smiled an acknowledgment and between the little girl and I passed a glance of "adult to adult" understanding.

This action of the girl was a "jining of hearts and housekeepings".

Sometimes in our Insurance Company I feel tempted in sending a claim cheque to say "That is from both of us". By both I mean my organisation and those friends who insuring through us provide the funds from which claims are paid.

This "jining of hearts and housekeepings" in business life may sound rather like shooting a line but if you could listen in to discussions in our claims department I hope you would detect a sense of mutual concern and interest.

This is a partnership of Company and Denomination—this is **your** Insurance Office—use it and us.

Yours sincerely,

C. J. L. COLVIN
General Manager

PS—Don't tell me that Mrs Corney and Mr Bumble in *Oliver Twist* hardly allowed altruistic motives to govern their married life—I know, but this is Dickens Year and I thought the quotation could be bent to my purpose nor do I think I am alone in doing just that!

Secondly, one of the most heartening things I have seen in several congregations is a new effective outreach among young people. The coming generation is beginning to open up to the Gospel it would seem. It is a thrill to see the fine, growing group of teenagers that many churches have. And although there may be some problems related to a "generation gap", these young people often exhibit a spirit of genuine dedication to Christ. In this we can only rejoice, for these young people are obviously the church of tomorrow and I believe I can correctly say that I have yet to find a church that has seriously sought to reach young people that has failed to do so. Here is a challenge and an opportunity that the church has not had for several years. And I am so grateful to find so many churches rising to this challenge. This is most commendable and reassuring.

Finally, I must say a word about the future ministers that are in our theological colleges. I have been impressed profoundly by them. I find most of them committed to their call and eager to share Christ with the world. The vision that is theirs, their willingness to sacrifice and their grasp of current needs is tremendously encouraging. Even though there are predictions that fewer and fewer will be—or even need to be—entering the ministry, I am convinced God is still calling in increasing numbers those who will faithfully "preach the Word". As I look at the future of the church, therefore, I am quite content that God is yet raising up a group of young men who will stand in the tradition of the Apostles by giving themselves "to the ministry of the Word and prayer." And if this be the case the church can rest assured that God's blessings are upon it and that his Kingdom will be furthered through it.

LEWIS A. DRUMMOND

THE VOCATION OF THE DISSENTING MINISTER TODAY

It is the loss of a sense of vocation which lies at the heart of so much of our ministerial discontent today. It is not merely "pay and conditions" which have driven so many men from the pastoral ministry of the local church but a sense of there being something inadequate about the job as a full-time purpose for one's life. No doubt a sense of failure has something to do with it. If I am honest with myself, I am forced to admit that while I was (apparently) exercising a "successful" ministry I was not unduly worried about its long-term significance nor did I have the time for sitting still and thinking about it. But a sense of failure, leading to a feeling of frustration, soon brings a conviction that one has been mistaken in thinking that the full-time ministry in a local church is a satisfying and an adequate vocation.

Further, it becomes easy to believe that it is more difficult for the "dissenting" minister in this respect than for one who sees his ministry more in terms of the priestly functions associated with the "catholic" branch of the church, whether Anglican or Roman. Serving at an altar in an empty church can be seen as a legitimate and worthwhile offering of service to God by those who regard it as of supreme importance but preaching in an empty church is not a satisfactory substitute for those who see that function as being of most significance.

Perhaps the root of the trouble lies in the fact that the traditional ministry of the "non-conformist" church has become fragmented. Many will have read (and aspired to) the pattern of Richard Baxter's ministry:—

"I preached before the wars twice each Lord's day . . . and once every Thursday, besides occasional sermons. Every Thursday evening my neighbours . . . met at my house, and there one of them repeated the sermon . . . I caused sometimes one and sometimes another of them to pray . . . and sometimes I prayed with them myself . . . And once a week also some of the younger sort . . . spent three hours in prayer together . . . Two days every week my assistant and myself took fourteen families between us for private catechising . . . Besides all this I was forced five or six years, by the people's necessity to practise physic . . ."

(Richard Baxter's Autobiography Chapter VII)

All this with his writing, added up to a full, varied and satisfying ministry to men in their many-sided lives. But today most of these "employs" would be the separate work of a specialist. Baxter himself found that as soon as possible he must procure "a godly, diligent physician" and leave the physical side of the healing to him and so he "never meddled with it more". Today some of his remaining work would be done by the welfare worker, the marriage guidance counsellor, the evening institute teacher and the radio and television set. The minister would appear to be left with the preaching (which few people appear to need), the organising of the church (to which fewer people come) and the visiting of people who welcome him kindly enough as a friend but who too rarely feel that there is something that he can really do for them in the spiritual sense.

Obviously this being in an apparently redundant vocation is one shared by many people today in, for example, the world of industry and Tillich has described the sense of "loss of meaning" as being the predominant aspect of man's need today. So the dissenting minister shares this feeling of "loss of vocation" with many others and he is thereby often put in a position where he cannot really help them for this is just the point at which he is most aware of his own inadequacy.

But he must beware of seeing himself as of "all men the most miserable" and in any event a cool, clear look at his place in the scheme of things can help to restore some perspective.

The loss of a sense of vocation in the dissenting ministry can, in part at least, be due to omissions in our thinking about it.

(1) *The CONTEXT of our ministry is the CHURCH.* Too often the "Free Church Minister" has been seen as (and he has seen himself as) a free-lance, virtuoso performer. When success has come in his way, even if he has felt humbled, he has also often felt that it all depended on him, for better or for worse. In adversity he can become a lone-wolf, plodding doggedly on, an Amos in Samaria, a voice crying in the wilderness.

But we are called, trained and sustained through the medium of the church. We cannot divorce ourselves from it or stand over against it. We are "servants of the servants of Christ". John Henry Newman describes Protestants as really trying to stand on one leg. Their faith, he asserts, is based on the scriptures whereas it should be based on the scriptures and on the church. We do not need to accept this as bearing the full implications which it had for his thinking but we can see it as pointing the way to a fundamental weakness. We see ourselves as alone, with a Bible in our hand, rather than as a working member of the family of Christ with a special job to do, but within the context of the family. This does not mean that we need acquiesce in the faults and shortcomings of the church but it does avoid the sense of being cut off, separated from it. Our work, personally speaking may be restricted in its scope but the work of the complete family of God is not. It has its vital place within this total work. For if Teilhard de Chardin is at all right that the whole creation moves towards a fellowship of minds in Christ who is the "Omega Point" (and this after all is the basic message of the New Testament), then it is an essential task to be helping to build up open, local groups of minds integrated through the Spirit into a world fellowship and the communion of saints.

(2) *Our ministry can still be COMPREHENSIVE in its range.*

The minister, quite rightly, cannot attempt and should not attempt to do every job in the church himself but the range of his concern, while differently exercised, should still be as wide as that of Richard Baxter.

He still has a vital *pastoral* role to fulfil. A member of the congregation in hospital is handed over to the medical care of the staff there but still as a person he has needs which the church and minister can alone meet. The member cannot be "written off" once he is in the care of doctor or social worker as if the sole responsibility was now in their hands. Part of it may be, but not all. The visits, the enquiries, the prayers have an essential contribution to make to the patient's real recovery. Skilled psychiatric knowledge may be necessary to help with many personal problems, but not with all. Any minister can learn to listen and help people to feel that here in the church is a group to which they really "belong". Harry Emerson Fosdick in his autobiography, talking of the work at the

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great Riverside Church said: "In one staff meeting after another we reiterated the admonition: *keep your eyes on individuals*: nothing in the long run matters in the Church except what happens to them."

The truly "gathered" church fulfils the purpose of God not only on a large scale; it is also the original place of "group therapy".

The minister still has a function which can only be described as *priestly*. The primacy of the spiritual is something which still needs to be asserted and it remains true, as Dr. Leslie Weatherhead used often to say, that there is in every congregation at every service at least one person who is broken-hearted, if we interpret "broken-heartedness" in a wide sense, of deep spiritual need.

Preaching and Teaching remain an essential part of the church's witness. The dissenting minister may not be the only one in his congregation able to help with this work nor even, nowadays, the only one qualified or the best qualified. But it is his responsibility to see that the work is done.

(3) *Our approach must be CREATIVE.*

In her "The Mind of the Maker" Dorothy Sayers quotes L. P. Jacks:—

"I am informed by philologists that the "rise to power" of these two words, "problem" and "solution" as the dominating terms of public debate, is an affair of the last two centuries . . . Like "happiness", our two terms "problem" and "solution" are not to be found in the Bible . . . On the whole, the influence of these words is malign, and becomes increasingly so. They have deluded poor men with Messianic expectations . . ."

(Chapter XI)

She goes on to point out that the approach to life in terms of "problems" and "solutions" is never satisfactory, for real life (as distinct from that in detective stories) is not amenable to that kind of approach. It is the creative attitude which brings results for it is the creative mind which is "the very grain of the spiritual universe" and Dorothy Sayers makes this the theme of her play "The Zeal of Thy House" in which the master builder says:—

". . . A year ago
An idle mason let the chisel slip
Spoiling the saint he carved. I chid him for it,
Then took the tool and in that careless stroke
Saw a new vision, and so wrought it out
Into a hippogriff. But yet the mason
Was not the less to blame. So works with us
The cunning craftsman, God".

The dissenting ministry likewise cannot be discussed in terms of "problem" and "solution" for that way leads only to endless, fruitless discussion. The great "dissenting" ministers

like Richard Baxter, George Whitefield, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Leslie Weatherhead or W. E. Sangster (to choose only a very varied few) have been men who took the local church and its ministry as something with which to begin and from which through grace, skill, courage and patience they could make something which would prove not only an adequate vocation but also a really serviceable instrument in the service of God. This was the way of Jesus with His disciples—not rejection but renewal. If the dissenting minister can refrain from rejecting his inheritance outright and can see it as providing the raw material for a new, creative approach to the service of the Kingdom then still the way is open to something worthwhile in the service of God.

"My Son,
Will you not let God manage His own business?
He was a carpenter, and knows his trade
Better, perhaps, than we do, having had
Some centuries of experience; nor will He,
Like a bad workman, blame the tools wherewith
He builds His City of Zion here on earth.
For God founded His Church, not upon John,
The loved disciple, that lay so close to His heart
And knew his mind—not upon John, but Peter:
Peter the liar, Peter the coward, Peter
The rock, the common man. John was all gold,
And gold is rare: the work might wait while God
Ransacked the corners of the earth to find
Another John; but Peter is the stone
Whereof the world is made. So stands the Church,
Stone upon stone, and Christ the corner-stone
Carved of the same stuff, common flesh and blood,
With you, and me, and Peter . . ."

So says the Prior in "The Zeal of Thy House", and the same thought might well be the inspiration and strength of the dissenting minister as he goes about his daily work, beginning to see again that it is a true vocation.

H. A. JACQUET

TIME FOR GOD

A voluntary service scheme for young people

"Two months that opened my eyes!" That was how Barbara, an 18 year old shorthand typist from Birmingham, described her period of voluntary service in London. She had not visited a hospital before and was surprised to find them "bright and cheerful places". In making contact with old ladies in a nursing home, most of them too weak ever to walk again, she was distressed by their loneliness. When helping to deliver Christmas parcels to people living in miserable and cramped conditions in central London, she reacted against the Church's annual deed of charity: "It seems to me rather ineffectual," she said. "Surely more than a kindly gesture at Christmas is required." In two months attached to a central London church, she learned a new appreciation of other people's problems and gained an insight into the Church's real task.

Stephen was 19 and had just left school. He worked for two months in Southend under the supervision of a local minister and engaged in door-to-door visitation, gave practical help to old people at home or in hospital, shared in the youth club and assisted in the Church office. He wrote, "I have learnt more of human nature and the horror of loneliness which many old folk and some middle-aged folk suffer from. I have learnt too the importance of knowing how to put over what I believe".

Barbara and Stephen were two of more than fifty 'Time for God' volunteers who were employed in the first three years of the scheme. T.F.G. was launched in 1966 to enable Baptist young people to engage in full-time voluntary service for a limited period. It might be as short as a month or as long as a year. Aged between 16 and 30 years (most are between 18 and 23) they may volunteer for one of four different kinds of activity—manual, secretarial, pastoral and welfare, evangelistic, or a combination of these. Recommendations are required from the church and two referees. If satisfactory, they may be sent anywhere in the country to work on a suitable project supervised by the minister of the local church. Full board and lodging are provided free of charge to the volunteer and £1 per week pocket money is paid. In most cases it is necessary to pay an insurance stamp, in the non-employed category, but not selective employment tax.

Martin had just finished 'A' levels at 18 when he left his home in Lewes to spend three months in Moss Side, Manchester, a twilight area composed of closely packed blocks of decaying terraced houses. He was the third volunteer to share in the church's multi-racial youth club and service to the community. He visited elderly people, drove the church van, helped with secretarial work and generally assisted in the multifarious duties of a church ministering in a 'slum' area. The local authority recognised the value of his work and gave grant aid. Martin extended his stay to eight months and the minister wrote, "His presence is an invaluable ingredient in our youth work."

All volunteers are different and their abilities are carefully matched to projects at a small central committee appointed by the Baptist Youth Movement. Timothy, 19, came from a Bedfordshire village. Huw was a South Wales theological student. Anne was a 22 year old teacher who gave her summer vacation while Janet, 16, had just left school in Portsmouth. Lesley, from a London suburb, lived away from home for the first time in her life at the age of 19. She had been working in an estate agent's office. Some become T.F.G. volunteers between leaving school and starting a career, or between Sixth form and University. A few utilise a free period between leaving one job and starting another, or even obtain leave of absence. Those who have reached the end of university study, with several months to spare, have a great deal to offer.

The churches that use volunteers are as varied as the volunteers themselves. From city centre to new town, seaside to country village and residential suburb, all have shared in finding a place for T.F.G. Churches and organisations involved in social service have been specially suitable, among them West Ham Central Mission, Greenwoods—country home for deprived families, Vernon, King's Cross, The Haven home for unmarried mothers, a residential home for handicapped children and a day psychiatric centre. Some churches have used a volunteer in preparation for, administration of and follow-up to a children's Holiday Club. Linda spent two months assisting in a suburban 'Here to Help' office set up as part of the local church's outreach programme to new blocks of flats. She also shared in visitation of the area. A few have undertaken decorating and renovating, but usually this has been combined with other kinds of activity. In fact, volunteers may be used in as many and varied ways as the churches are serving.

An impressive aspect of T.F.G. is the effect on those who participate. "It has made the meaning of loving the unlovely very clear to me . . ." after 3 months at West Ham Central Mission. "It has helped me to talk to people . . ." from a naturally shy girl. "It has made me realise just how a church can reach out into the modern world . . ." said a shorthand typist on leave of absence. "It has helped me to further consider my service for God in the future . . ." wrote a 17 year old boy who got involved in a children's holiday club in Dorchester. "T.F.G. has led me to take up my present career . . ." said a 17 year old girl who turned to nursing after three months in an old people's home. Three young men, working in different situations, felt the call of God to the ministry confirmed through T.F.G. experience and subsequently took up theological training. "Through work with children in a holiday club I have decided definitely to go into the teaching profession . . ." said 20 year old Susan who spent three months on a new estate in Birmingham. Not all volunteers are deeply impressed by an experience of full-time service in a demanding situation but a sufficient large proportion are to warrant certain conclusions. Community service opens young people's eyes to areas of need previously unknown to them, strengthens their faith and dependence on God as new demands

WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

109 Barking Road, Plaistow, London, E.13 8AL

My dear Brother Minister,

ORCHARD HOUSE EXTENSION: By the time you read this letter we shall have opened the extension to the building at Orchard House and we shall be receiving the new members to our increased family into residence there. We are also taking more boys under our care, and we have appointed an Assistant Warden to help in this most important work.

We are glad to report that local authorities are increasingly turning to us for help for boys in need of care and protection, and we are grateful for this token of confidence on their part.

You will also be glad to learn that we reached our target of £12,000 for the cost of the extension and the extra furnishings, and we thank all our friends in the churches who made this splendid project possible.

THE WORK AT GREENWOODS: During the past few months we have been caring for a very large family of people in need at Greenwoods, under the leadership of the Reverend Ronald Messenger and his devoted staff. It is impossible to describe in a few lines the tremendous scope of the activity at Greenwoods. We have cared for unmarried mothers and their babies, for inadequate people who have needed rehabilitation, and for a large number of other people with very differing needs.

Would you please ask your Church prayer meeting occasionally to remember the resident staff at Greenwoods (and indeed at all of our Homes) as the pressure on the staff is tremendous at times, and they would all value your remembrance of them in prayer.

OUR COLOURED FILMSTRIP: Just a reminder to anybody who is looking for a good item for any meeting which needs a regular programme. Our current coloured filmstrip has received tremendous praise from all sorts of people, and if your Women's Meeting, or your Men's Meeting, or your Church Night, or any other group of people would like to be better informed about the Christian Social Welfare Work, sponsored by the Mission, then this is an excellent way of doing it. Please write to me, giving alternative dates if possible.

With warmest good wishes for God's blessing on you and your own ministry.

Yours very sincerely,

STANLEY TURL

Superintendent of the West Ham Central Mission

are made and crystallises their understanding of God's will for their lives.

Pastoral supervision is a vital factor in ensuring that volunteers are given adequate training and guidance throughout their service. They are encouraged to engage in study of Baptist principles, prayer and Bible study and helped to learn the art of right personal relationships as applied to their particular project.

"Time for God" is primarily a training scheme for young people and therefore the benefits that accrue to the volunteers themselves are of first importance, but it should not be forgotten that valuable help has been given to churches and organisations. A few quotations speak for the majority. "By the time he left the general relationship of church and club was closer and deeper than before . . ." of Michael who worked in Manchester. "He has done a tremendous job and we are grateful for all his service . . ." after five weeks mainly decorating church premises. "She has made a real and worthwhile contribution to the work and future prospects of the church . . ." said the deaconess who supervised Susan's two months in Birmingham. "We are grateful to the lads and grateful to T.F.G. for the tremendous help they have been . . ." from West Ham Central Mission. The superintendent goes on to say "The scheme is good as long as the church sees it as a training scheme and not a form of cheap labour." He is right. T.F.G. offers training for young people through full-time voluntary service as a result of which the local church also benefits.

Voluntary social service has boomed in Britain in recent years. It is a heart-warming feature of modern society that in spite of adverse publicity given to protesting students and long-haired drop-outs from society, there are enormous numbers of young people who, in idealistic enthusiasm, give themselves to the service of others. Christ would, I am sure, have commended them. T.F.G. has attempted to harness this widespread desire to serve and offers a scheme for young Baptists to work both in a church setting and in the wider community. There have, of course, been some failures and disappointments. It has not always been appreciated that volunteers are not experts. Sometimes they have fallen below expectations in the work accomplished or made mistakes in personal relationships. Some volunteers have been declined as unsuitable or because no suitable project could be found. Occasionally churches have been disappointed because no suitable volunteer could be provided. Nonetheless "Time for God" has been tested for long enough to prove that it can be of incalculable benefit both to the young people involved and to the work of the churches.

PETER TONGEMAN

(An explanatory booklet incorporating application forms for volunteers and churches seeking help is available, price 6d., from the Young People's Department, Baptist Union, 4 Southampton Row, London, W.C.1.)

THE VIOLENT UNIVERSE

Some months ago the BBC produced a highly ambitious and very impressive programme entitled "The Violent Universe". It represented a conspectus of views about the origins and nature of the universe as they are currently propounded by various schools of modern astronomy. It was a long programme and it would take a programme of more than normal interest to keep me in my seat in front of a television screen for two and a half hours, even with a break for coffee in the middle. The programme impressed me not so much for its technical expertise, which with my minimal knowledge of astronomy I am scarcely in a position to judge; it impressed me rather by its implications for Christian theology. The programme was called "The Violent Universe" and certainly the prevailing impression throughout was of powerful, dynamic, apparently uncontrollable, and largely haphazard violence amongst the great constellations which modern radio telescopes have provided for our study. There certainly seems to be everything in favour, on this viewing, of the "Big Bang" theory of the origin of the universe. But the programme could well have been entitled "The Mysterious Universe" and I must say that in retrospect I found the astronomers who appeared in this programme singularly impressive, not so much for their knowledge as for their candid admission of their lack of knowledge. Our techniques have indeed enabled us to penetrate into remoter and remoter areas of our universe but every new exploration only appals us with the sense of that which remains unexplored and unexplorable.

I could wish that some of our Christian theologians were as humble in the presence of their material as the astronomers were humble in the presence of theirs. The total impact of the programme I would have thought upon the casual viewer would have been a sense of total bewilderment, the sense that what we do and think here on earth can have no significance in a system so vast and impenetrable as even that part of the universe with which we are distantly connected. The first astronaut on the moon is recorded to have said "a little step for a man but a giant step for mankind". No one would minimise the extraordinary achievement represented in that first moon landing but in the light of this programme that little step for a man was a very little step also for mankind. No one viewing the programme could be under any illusions as to the physical insignificance of mankind in the unimaginable distances of the universe.

I say that I found this programme interesting not so much as a would-be astronomer but as a would-be theologian because the pattern revealed in it is bound to raise questions for a theology which has been used to operating on a much smaller time and distance scale. I see four different attitudes arising from modern conceptions of the universe as they press in upon us. The first is the obvious one and the one which has been much canvassed in the last few years on both sides of the Atlantic. I refer to the so-called "Death of God" theology, the

phrase has a wide variety of meanings and is used in an idiosyncratic way by various authors. What I think all of them have in common is that they would say that our received impression of God is dead. The God of the Bible whom we worship has two quite distinct attributes; He is personal and He is loving. Both these views are seriously challenged by our view of the universe. Can we really believe any more that God has a personal interest in the brief, unimportant lives of men here on earth, when it would appear from our studies of the universe that the whole creation is in the grip of immense, impersonal, irrational forces? We may continue to use the term "God" for these forces at work in the universe but if we do so we shall not be thinking of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They lived in a comparatively cosy world where the moon and the stars and the sun simply existed to minister to us here on earth. Now we know ourselves to be a tiny planet, in a tiny solar system, in a tiny corner of a mighty universe. It looks as if God is dead except as an empty term or as a linguistic necessity. His second attribute of love is equally difficult to credit. The programme was called "The Violent Universe" and that was an apt description of the phenomena which were thrown up for our examination. The impression was of violent, uncontrollable action without direction or objective. Need we be surprised, therefore, if we suffer from violence on earth; if excursion crowds break up trains; if boys rip out telephones; if skinheads set about hippies or soldiers massacre civilians. This is what we might expect in a violent universe. Last summer waves were washed up on our Pembrokeshire beaches as the result of a hurricane thousands of miles away on the other side of the Atlantic. The violence we experience here on earth is just the wave washed upon earth by violence elsewhere in the universe. The demons of the universe inhabit us as well, and we cannot cast them out.

If then we are without God, it is likely that we shall be without hope. This seems to me the second theological consequence of this programme—the despair of man. As human beings in the physical sense we are indescribably small; our much vaunted expertise and physical prowess is like a smear on a giant conservatory; the astronauts remarked on their way back from the moon they could not see evidence of a single artifact of man on the face of the earth and this was less than a quarter of a million miles away. Dust we are and to dust we shall return, even though it be cosmic or star dust. The fact is that looked at in the light of reason the physical achievements of man on a tiny planet, in a tiny corner of the universe are totally without significance in the on-going history of that universe. But of course we could tolerate this sense of physical insignificance because we are wise enough to know that very small things can achieve giant results. But what of those spiritual elements in human kind which we are pleased to call his aspirations, his visions, all that distinguishes him from the animal kingdom, from insensate matter? But if there is no God then it would seem that we are in the grip of an iron determinism. We are what we are, we think what we think, we write poetry as we write poetry, we produce music as we

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produce music, not because of our special origins or our splendid destiny, but simply as part of a chemical causation which has no significance beyond itself. Freedom is an illusion, achievement a mirage. I am not surprised that men are up in arms against a view of life which so reduces their status. And I believe that a great deal of our violence and protest are simply an attempt to recover some sense of significance and identity in a world which appears to deny both.

Perhaps in the end it is a mark of man's greatness that he refuses to accede to that sense of despair which such a view of the universe induces.

The third attitude is one which we might call "dissociation" which could be expressed in two ways. First, the humanist view, viz, that no long-term comprehensive explanation is possible of the world or the universe or our experience in it. We are, as T. S. Eliot said, like members of a giant orphanage where no one knows his origins and where no one ever comes to call for him, or as in Kafka's classic novel "The Castle" where man never gets a comprehensible message from the castle at all. The only thing, therefore, is to concentrate on the here and now, to give ourselves to "progress" and material comfort, and maybe academic distinction. But the humanist dream is wearing very thin. Much of what we sometimes call a reaction against religion is more a reaction against early twentieth century humanism. The blunt fact is that we cannot live by bread alone or by learning or by social progress, or by material comfort. Our modern protesters perhaps see this more clearly than philosophers are apt to do.

Second, the pietist view, which I use in no pejorative sense because it has a long and respectable history and has produced many rare and beautiful flowers in Christian spirituality. Its attitude could, I suppose, be described as a despair of any total apprehension of experience and a concentration upon religious experience valued for its own sake and for its effect upon those who practice it. The heavens are wrapped in mystery; all that matters in the end is that the individual man should save his soul, should keep himself unspotted from the world, that he should bear a faithful witness to his fellows, and rejoice in the experience of God which has been vouchsafed to him.

Now if I belong to any tradition in the church I suppose it is to this one. I am bound to say that it has served me well. But is it enough? On the evidence of the Bible I think we must give a categorical "no". Biblical writers on the whole are concerned with the whole sweep of human history and, more than that, they insist on comprehending the whole of physical reality within the orbit of God's action. "The heavens declare the glory of God"; "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera". The created universe is a word of God intended to reveal the creator to us. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the creator of the whole universe, not a private God to be worshipped in secret and to be enjoyed by individuals who happen to believe in Him. The individual may survive, and praise God does survive, on very inadequate and partial theological views, but the Church as a whole cannot be

content to survive in such ways. Theology must attempt, however far short it falls, a comprehensive view of God which makes sense of the universe and of human history, as well as of personal experience. Pietism is not enough.

Is it possible then, to find on the basis of Scripture, a more positive view of the universe and its destiny and our place in it? I refer now, fourthly, to an attitude which we might call "identification". It is undoubtedly true that we are chemically part of the universe. The same materials which make up the stars and the moon make up us too. Gauquelin in his recent book "The Cosmic Clocks" gives many interesting examples of the way in which the structures or men and animals are affected by movements, almost totally unrecognised, in the universe at large. However, we need not be intimidated by these facts because first if the author of Genesis is to be taken seriously, we believe that mankind is in fact the climax of creation, he is part and parcel of the universe, made of the dust of the earth, but at the same time occupies a quite peculiar place in the counsel and foreknowledge of God.

When God wished to express Himself in His final word, He expressed Himself in terms of a man, part of the human race, made of the same dust as we are, sharing our chemistry, propelled by the same forces, tempted as we are. Secondly, the author insists that God is a God of history. He describes an orderly universe in which everything moves in accordance with the will of God. It follows, therefore, that the universe has some objective deep hidden in the counsels of God which, with our tiny minds, we are not likely to be able to penetrate. The revealed word of God assures us however that there is an objective and that men have a vital part to play in it. More than that we are never likely to know. Thirdly, on the basis of Scripture, we would have to assert that the universe is all of a piece, and that love not violence is the prime characteristic of it. Indeed, violence is the most conspicuous element in its structure as we see it at the moment, both in the universe and in human kind, but it is not of the essence of the universe that it should be violent. Once more we take our Lord's words seriously and are bound to conclude that the God of the universe, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is love, and that that love is ultimately able to overcome the adverse forces of violence and confusion which exist in the world at present. Our Lord in the name of love cast out demons, healed disease, caused the rough sea to subside and induced harmony and fellowship amongst a group of disciples who were otherwise very uncongenial to each other. The astonishing conclusion is that mankind has been chosen to be God's instrument in the achieving of harmony and beauty in an otherwise chaotic universe.

"The Violent Universe" was the name of the programme. I suggested earlier in this article that it might have been called "The Mysterious Universe". On the basis of Scripture I believe we are going to have to assert that it is a Loving Universe, that in the end all things shall be subject unto Him who wills to be all in all. Well, we may ask, this may all be very true but what difference does it make to the everyday

business of running our own lives, and maintaining the Church and winning men for Christ? I submit it makes a great deal of difference. The alienation from the Church which is everywhere acknowledged and the collapse of theism as a viable philosophy of life, both of them spring, I believe, from a suspicion largely unconscious in the minds of men, that the universe as we now conceive it makes belief in God impossible and membership of any Church totally irrelevant. I imagine that many whole time workers for the Gospel have times when underneath their public profession of faith and their show of enthusiasm, they wonder whether the whole thing has any basis in fact. A lot of our rather shrill propaganda is simply an extension of the old principle, that I am conscious of occasionally in my own sermons, "argument weak—shout louder". We need to be sure that we are followers not simply of a great religious leader, who lived two thousand years ago and makes Himself available in mysterious ways to us now, but the followers of One who is the maker and creator of all the universe, who holds the stars in the hollow of his hands and guides the destiny of all creation to its allotted end.

"For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

(Ephesians 1. 9-10 R.S.V.)

STUART LIVERPOOL

FRATERNALS NOW

In the spring of 1969 the committees of the BMF authorised the circulation amongst fraternalists of a brief questionnaire about fraternal life. The reason was simple: increasingly individual members of committees were becoming aware of their lack of knowledge of local fraternalists other than those in which they happened to be personally involved—and there were vague and half spoken fears about "the decline of fraternal life" or "the inroads into fraternal life made by exclusive theologies" which made some uneasy. It was agreed that the attempt should be made to get to know the real position as well as possible.

The questionnaire was a simple document: there was no special science in the devising of the questions, nor hidden traps into which respondents might be expected to tumble. It was simply trusted that straightforward queries would produce

straightforward replies. The nature of the questions was dictated by the interests that lay behind them: was there still a keenness amongst ministers for fraternal life? to what extent was fraternal life being hampered by local or general factors? what special features in individual localities might turn out to be to the benefit of all? was the financial demand of the local fraternal such that it prevented ministers from participation either in it or in the national membership of BMF? The questions were as follows:

1. How many members has your fraternal at present?
2. What proportion of the membership attends regularly?
3. How frequent are your meetings?
4. Briefly describe the nature of your meetings.
5. Over a period of 3 years past, what have been your most successful meetings and projects? where were they successful?
6. Has your fraternal any special difficulties which make fraternal life hard to foster and fellowship hard to maintain?
7. What is the amount of your local fraternal subscription?
8. Add other points which you think are of importance and not covered by your answers to the previous questions.

Completed questionnaire forms kept coming in for a period of a few months, and surely the results are of interest to the readership of this journal.

Some thought had to be given to the credibility and status of the replies before they could be evaluated. To what extent did the unconscious bias of the fraternal secretary affect the replies he gave (assuming that the questionnaire was not completed as a group fraternal effort—as a few evidently were)? It turned out that one fraternal returned two completed questionnaires, since the fraternal secretaryship changed hands and both brethren sent separate forms. The degree of compiler bias was apparent from the fact that respondent (1) answered question 6, by saying “2 brethren are x miles from Blitherwick (of course, real name suppressed) but otherwise no special difficulties” while respondent (2) replied to the same question “Distance. Indifference of some. Lack of fellowship between conservative evangelicals and those more ‘liberal’. Ecumenism.” Clearly, different viewpoints in these two brethren gave a different account of the atmosphere of this one group! Again, judicious enquiry led to the realization of a different kind of compiler bias, namely that concerned with numbers attending: just as none of us really enjoys estimating the size of a congregation accurately because it is usually smaller than we should like (“you know, brother, I’m so bad at estimating numbers”), so it appeared that here and there a self-conscious fraternal secretary had inflated the regular membership in answer to question 2. So clearly the replies cannot be considered quite as objective returns: but this does not imply that the replies are worthless as information. The general consistency in the answers, the clear and overall impression which they permit to be seen, suggests that there is an underlying

credibility in what is conveyed, and a fairly constant situation behind it. The work of bias, if it were altogether rife in the replies, would produce a far less consistent position.

So to the results themselves. Out of a total of 100 circulated, 59 questionnaires were returned completed (in England alone, the total sent was 81 and the return 55). All the fraternal in the West Midlands sent replies, while Wales, and Scotland produced a less than 50% return. Of the remaining areas, there was a return from roughly two thirds of all fraternal—though the league table did get a bit confused with vulgar fractions (did the Central area, with 5 out of 7, do better than the Metropolitan, with 9 out of 13?!). The results of the questionnaire are clearly less useful than they would have been if the other 41 fraternal had been able to reply. Supposedly the secretaries concerned are amongst the cultured despisers of polls, returns, forms and statistics—or did they fall to prayer that we (and they) might not suffer the dilemma of David following the numbering of the people? Well, we are sound in wind and limb, and for their intercessions we are grateful.

It appears that the level of desire for fraternal life is fairly constant. In the first place, attention was paid to the level of active membership (questions 1 and 2). The majority of fraternal secretaries report an attendance in the region of 60%—75%. I took 50% as the figure below which support could not be said to be good (a secretary admitting to a poor figure such as this could be assumed to be telling the truth), but there were only three fraternal which gave such a return. It is hard to assess, in regard to question 3., the extent to which frequency of meeting is an indication of keenness, because this factor is much affected by distance—for example, the considerable distances men have to cover to reach each other in, say rural Lincolnshire, obviously has an inhibiting effect in frequency of meeting. I took it that an urban group meeting quarterly or less could not be said to be really keen: there are five like this, in various cities. Thus, less than 10% of fraternal in England report upon either a level of regular attendance or upon frequency of meeting in such a way as to give cause for concern: and this result indicates that, on the whole, there is a level of regard for fraternal life which, if it doesn’t make us throw our caps in the air, at least need not make anyone unduly depressed.

Secondly, we wanted to know about hindrances to fraternal life. Some of these turned out to be practical matters which it is hard to see a solution for—distance is a real factor in rural areas, and clearly fellowship is a rare commodity when it is to be experienced over a 60 mile gap! By comparison with this kind of situation, it came as a bit hard to be told by two city fraternal that distance is a problem . . . is this really distance, or lack of effort? Another problem arising here and there is the fact that for whatever reason ministers find it necessary to take other forms of employment, and so are unavailable at fraternal meeting times: this question throws up wide issues about the current state of the ministry, and is being carefully

studied elsewhere, as we are aware. What we wanted to know especially was whether it was true, as some had surmised, that theological incompatibilities were making fraternal life difficult and its atmosphere contentious. The answers appeared against question 6. and can be summarised as follows:

- (a) 3 fraternal reported that strongly conservative men ignored the fraternal and supported separate fraternal organised by other bodies, e.g. the BRF, in preference.
- (b) 2 fraternal reported that theological incompatibility made fraternal life difficult to cope with.
- (c) 2 fraternal said that because everyone tended to be of a similar mind (what similarity was not described) things went well.
- (d) 4 fraternal reported that theological differences amongst members added spice to life and made everything more interesting than it would otherwise have been.

This is to say that roughly 20% of fraternal in England made mention of theological considerations, while the remainder either made no reference to this, or simply said that life was happy. The result does not establish the view that our men are falling out with each other on any wide scale.

It is worth noting at this point two practices which are having the effect of stimulating fraternal life not a little. Reference was often made to the practice of an annual quiet day (with or without members' wives) and a number of fraternal secretaries indicated that the meetings which were of greatest value were those in which consideration was given to pastoral questions immediately affecting the work of the ministry rather than, say, theological papers in the academic sense.

We wanted to know whether the cost of running a local fraternal was preventing some ministers from joining both their local grouping and the BMF itself. The returns under question 7. needed careful examination, since some fraternal charge an inclusive amount to cover costs together with meals and/or fares pool, whereas other fraternal make a separate charge for the last two items. Generally we found that fraternal either made an ad hoc levy when the secretary had run out of stamps and notepaper, or else, in the case of an annual subscription, it fell within the range 2/6—7/6 per annum. One fraternal in S*****D had adopted the practice of *fining* its members for every absence un-apologised for in advance—the sum in question was 2/-, the cost of unconsumed tea. In this case the fraternal secretary reported a constant 100% attendance.

Another fraternal secretary in the West reported that his group receives an annual grant of £5 from its churches—readers of this article please note! and there is permission not to regard the rubric about “private circulation” too strictly, in case you require copies for propaganda.

So lastly, to special ideas and suggestions. The meetings of fraternal have a fairly standard pattern and content: the answers to question 4. ranged from “food—fun—fellowship” on the one hand to accounts of strong and meaty reading syllabuses, for theological heroes only, on the other—but in between there is a standard pattern of informal fellowship, prayer and reflection upon papers brought by members or visitors. Some features seemed to be of special note, over and above the usual pattern of fraternal life. One fraternal makes a feature of “books read”, and conducts fraternal life in its district with the ministers of local Congregational and Churches of Christ churches. Two fraternal in the South report that their members, with the active support of churches, give time to the support and assistance, in evangelistic and pastoral matters, of pastorless causes within its district. Elsewhere, the report is that wives share all meetings, or have a wives' gathering always at the same time as the ministers themselves. In one northern city the ministers ensure that wives and families are included in occasional corporate social events—and again in the north, the ministers of one fraternal have engaged in united housing estate evangelism where local labour would not be sufficient to cope with the task. At the time of the making of the return another northern fraternal was considering a research project into the life and effectiveness of Baptist churches in the area for the benefit of the Christian Institute of Education. It did appear from the answered questionnaires that, if any one area more than others was the source of new ideas and suggestions, then the prize should go to the fraternal in the North Eastern area. A request came from the South Staffs fraternal: should not ministers in areas of highly specialised pastoral conditions (e.g. of high immigrant settlement) consider recording something of the nature of their work for the benefit of the wider constituency? amen to this, and maybe this journal might be a suitable forum for papers which resulted from such a recording of work.

It would seem in sum that the exercise of going to the fraternal roots to discover their present condition has been worth while. No one in Christian life and work should ever feel complacency about any situation, for affairs can alter rapidly: but the results of the questionnaire show no obvious cause for alarm about the present state of our life together.

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