

## CHARLES JEWSON : IN MEMORIAM\*

We are assembled today, a diverse congregation of all kinds and conditions of men, some representing the many public activities with which Charles Jewson's name has been connected: many more because they loved him. We are assembled not to do honour to the memory of Charles Jewson but to give thanks to God for his life. "What you are, that you are: neither can you by words be made greater than what you are in the sight of God". Those words, written five hundred years ago by Thomas à Kempis, my father noted down early in life and as a Christian and a man of letters he had reason to know the truth of them.

We are assembled in St Mary's Baptist Church: a most fitting place, for it was here that he worshipped God in the company of his fellow men throughout his entire life. St Mary's was the subject of the first chapter of his first published volume. It was here that he met my mother. Nor could the destruction of this house by enemy bombing drive him from this place, for as secretary to this congregation he was one of those most instrumental in raising this present edifice. All his life he questioned his own assumptions about the world's affairs but he never wavered from the truth that was revealed to him and he most happily expressed this truth in worship at this place. It is most fitting that it is in St Mary's Baptist Church that we are met to thank God for the life of Charles Jewson.

Charles Jewson, timber merchant. Thus modestly he liked to present himself. It sometimes seemed to us children a strange occupation for so scholarly and retiring a person but he was convinced that the honest merchant was a very necessary person in an ordered and flourishing society and he devoted much research to the activities of that class of men so prominent among the ranks of reformers and puritans. As to his choice of work, he wrote: "My calling was chosen for me by my father and by circumstances of birth ... As a boy I had pictured myself at different times as an architect, an archaeologist and a missionary. My father was right, for I should not have been artist enough to make an architect, nor scholar enough for an archaeologist, nor should I have had enough concentration of faith to have been an effective missionary. In the calling of a merchant I can serve my fellows better than I should have done in any of my own choice". He did, as a merchant, serve his fellows well through difficult times and when it became necessary to merge the family business with other corporations, he risked the wrath of the Stock Exchange Council and the expectation of some financial loss to himself and his family in a successful attempt to protect the working conditions of his employees who had served him so well.

\* Address by his son, William Jewson, at the Memorial Service in St Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich, 6th July 1981.

It was an accident of life that he earned his living and served his community as a tradesman. But, as with everything he did, he did it wholeheartedly, not merely uncomplainingly but with good cheer. Having committed himself to this calling, he set about employing his days to the full so that such time as need not be spent in business matters could be used in the pursuit of those other interests which he loved. Again he noted down Thomas à Kempis: "Never be entirely idle: but either be reading, or writing, or praying, or meditating, or endeavouring something for the public good".

My father loved to laugh. He laughed most readily and most infectiously. He loved humour and within the family he was noted and enjoyed for his horrendous punning at which we groaned unmercifully. He would not want us to be solemn. Because he had such a sense of humour, he had a keen ear for paradox. He knew that all the secrets of life are paradoxical and not least the doctrine which was so central to his life, namely that if we would find life we must be prepared to lose it. It is a paradox that Charles Jewson, who was the most private of men, should have led such a public life: Secretary of this church, Justice of the Peace, and in due course, Chairman of the Norwich Bench, Treasurer of the Baptist Missionary Society, member of the Baptist Union Council, Trustee of the Consolidated Charities of Norwich, Treasurer and Chairman of the Norfolk Record Society, Lord Mayor of this city (an honour which he deeply appreciated, both because it continued a mayoral tradition in the family and because he was the first person to be chosen from outside the ranks of the City Council).

How empty and inadequate is a list of his worldly attainments, even of his published works. For, as so many people have noted in the overwhelming tide of letters which has fallen upon my mother during the past week, Charles was a very special sort of person. People of many creeds and of no particular creed sensed something unusual, something which marked Charles off from the general run of men and women with whom he mixed daily and in whose company he found delight. For my father had seen things clearly which others of us perceive most dimly, if we perceive them at all.

My father was a most private person. He wrote copiously and it is a humbling experience to dig out the vast piles of manuscript which fill his dressing-room and to reflect that while writing he was at the same time filling all manner of arduous public commitments as well as attending his office during business hours. But almost nothing reveals a glimpse of his real inner life. His diaries contain no secrets, no judgments and this, I think, because he would do nothing that might hurt another person, even in retrospect, and he wished to leave nothing that might suggest that he was a better or more spiritual person than he knew himself to be. He noted from Thomas à Kempis: "It is great wisdom and perfection to esteem nothing of ourselves, and to think well and highly of others". Only his common-place books in which he noted passages that struck him in what he read give an intimation of the direction of his

thoughts, as well as revealing the vast quantity and range of his reading. He was deeply concerned about the problems of the modern world but believed fiercely that nothing good could be achieved in the world that was not instigated by a pure heart and so he worried always at the problem of how that purity of heart might be achieved.

Many of us know that Charles was a very special sort of person. He would diffidently have brushed aside any such notion by claiming that in the eyes of God we are all very special sort of people. But he knew that that "specialness" grows and flowers to the extent that we come nearer to God and his life bears witness to that flowering which is the result of the most constant care and effort. He noted again from Thomas à Kempis: "One thing there is that draweth many back from a spiritual progress and the diligent amendment of their lives, namely Extreme Fear of the difficulty, or the labour of the combat". Whatever it cost, he knew that he had to pursue the labour, for just as his total lack of athletic prowess would not have allowed him to stand on his head, so his intellectual rigour and his real affection for truth would prevent him from shirking the demands of truth.

Nothing was truer to him than that Jesus Christ was the Son of the living God and that he died for our salvation. All else is subservient to this truth and all our actions must take it into account. My father quotes the great saint and mystic St Teresa of Avila: "Christ has no body now in earth but yours, no hands but yours: yours are the eyes through which is to look out Christ's compassion to the world, yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good, and yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now". This is an awesome realisation, but it is a realisation that can lead a man on to attempt the narrow path which leads to heaven.

Though the path is narrow, the life is full. When my father was once in hospital for a minor operation, he read Dostoevsky's profound and enthralling novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. From this he noted this injunction: "Love all God's creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light! Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything you will perceive the divine mystery in things". He loved deeply and he loved widely. He kept to the narrow way and experienced the divine mystery in all manner of things and thus his life was very rich and very full.

My father was a very shy man. His shyness together with his distaste for corporate games made school-life a painful experience. He wrote somewhere that "The troubles and anxieties which look trivial in retrospect were real and dreadful enough then". His shyness might have led him to seek a quieter, less exacting life but the narrow path which he had embraced allows no such ease and he set out to live fully that second great commandment: to love his neighbour as himself.

We all of us know something of the expression that this love of neighbour took. None of us knows all and most of us know very little for he followed the course which he advocated in a note made during the war: "There is no place for personal pride in the Christian life. Our 'good works' are to be done in gratitude to God for gifts which we can never hope to repay. The test of their value must never be the enhancement of our own reputation, but the glory they bring to God from the lips of men".

And he continued: "Christianity is a twofold relationship whose primary obligations are faith toward God and love toward man. Without the loving fellowship of other Christians faith grows dim: without faith in God love for man dwindles and dies".

One further haven he found to sustain him: the joy which he found in married life and in the awesome task of bringing up four wilful children. A few lines from a poem which he wrote in 1947, 'To Joyce, being gone to London'.

Ten short momentous gladsome years  
 Tragic with war and peace,  
 We two have shared in joy and woe  
 Our labours and our ease.  
 And though with envy, strife and hate  
 The world is sore amiss,  
 Ours is a colony of heaven  
 Wherein we find our bliss.  
 Around this home hangs poised in pain  
 A universe of ill,  
 And yet within our circle charmed  
 Dwells peace unbounded still.  
 O dearest love, I cannot tell  
 How such delight can be  
 In this so sad and stricken world,  
 You know it dwells with thee!

In his writing he was a modest man. Much study he devoted to the 17th century, to the age of the puritan revolution and the long parliament. But he left such subjects to professional historians and contented himself with what may seem historical byways. These he used skilfully and engagingly to show us how similar our own predicament is to that which has faced man throughout the ages. As he wrote in his preface to *People of Medieval Norwich*: "As we go back into the Middle Ages we find men of like passions with ourselves, sharing concerns which still command us".

It is not with sadness and solemnity that we remember the life of Charles Jewson, but with thankfulness at what he has shared with us and joy in his hope for the future. He wrote to me quite recently: "To see the image of God in others is perhaps the ultimate secret of life though very difficult of application. I know I often fail". And again, "I think I have had far more than my share of joy in life - in my family and in

all sorts of activities and in just looking out of the window and watching the lambs playing on the meadow".

Let us give thanks to God for that exemplary life, for that kind and gentle and lovable soul whom we knew as Charles Jewson, timber merchant, and whom we might better recognize as Charles Jewson, man of faith. And let us remember some words which my father loved, words dictated long ago by the Lady Julian, a lady who appealed to him as a saint, as a most lovable human being and as a citizen of Norwich: "(The Lord) said not: Thou shalt not be tempested, thou shalt not be travailed, thou shalt not be afflicted: but He said: Thou shalt not be overcome... All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well".

To God be the glory.

WILLIAM JEWSON

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