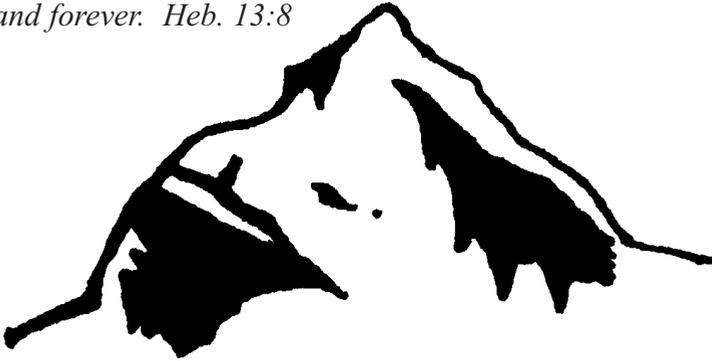


The Journal
of
**The Church of England
(Continuing)**

*Jesus Christ the same
yesterday, and today,
and forever. Heb. 13:8*



Issue No: 16
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The Association of the Continuing Church Trust. Registered Charity Number 1055010

CONSTITUTION

1 **Doctrine:** The doctrine of the Continuing Church shall be that of the 39 Articles
of Religion understood in their original, natural and intended sense.

2 **Worship:** The worship of the Continuing Church shall be generally according to
the Book of Common Prayer (1662).

The Authorised Version of the Bible shall be the only version used in the lectern
and the pulpit and in public readings and expositions at all meetings of the
Continuing Church.

3 **Ministry:** The consecration and ordination of ministers shall be according to the
Ordinal of the Book of Common Prayer (1662). The Continuing Church believes
in the ministry of women according to Scripture which does not permit them to
teach or exercise authority, particularly as bishops, priests, and deacons.

4 **Discipline:** The church shall be episcopally governed. A general assembly shall
be held not less than once a year consisting of the bishop and the ministers of the
church and representatives of the local congregations to transact the business of
the denomination and for mutual encouragement and edification.

5 **Membership:** New churches may apply for membership of the Continuing
Church on the basis of their agreement with the doctrine, worship and discipline
of that body.

Membership of the local church shall be on the basis of baptism and confirma-
tion and approval by the local presbyter.

Any matters incapable of resolution shall be referred to the Ordinary.

*Please note that the Continuing Church publishes a prayer let-
ter, Intercessions. It is available free of charge to those who
should like to receive news and to pray for the various needs.*

*Please write to
Rev. E. J. Malcolm, The Parsonage, 1, Downshire Square,
Reading, RG1 6NJ.*

*Would contributors please note that they can send their news via email, to
Journaleditor@fsmail.net*

Contributions toward postage costs are gratefully received.

From the Presiding Bishop David N. Samuel

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SN10 1EU

Dear Friends,

I am writing to you near to the Feast of St. John the Baptist, 24 June. The collect for that day is a prayer that we might “after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth’s sake.” John, you will remember, said to Herod, *It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife*, and suffered the consequences of “boldly rebuking vice”.

There is a poem by Tennyson in which a northern farmer gives some advice to his son, who is entering the Church of England ministry. He says to him, “you may preach against the sins of the world, but not the sins of the squire.” In other words, you may preach boldly against sin in general, which is likely to give offence to no one, but not against the sins of any individual. Generally the church seems to follow that advice. John, however, preached against “the sins of the squire”, and said to Herod, *It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife*.

Sometimes it is necessary to be particular in what we say, and the present time is just such an occasion. We have all seen in the press the campaign that is being mounted to gain acceptance of Mrs. Parker Bowles as the ‘partner’ and ‘consort’ of the Prince of Wales. There would be no reason to mention this here, except that it has far reaching consequences for us as a nation. The Prince of Wales is the heir to the throne, and hopes to succeed Queen Elizabeth. At the moment it is being put out that he does not think in terms of marrying Mrs. Parker Bowles. However, whether he marries her or not the whole enterprise is fraught with the most serious consequences for him and for us. At the moment the heir to the throne is living in sin, and therefore is not eligible to receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. If he intends to continue in that fashion he would be in no position to inherit the crown, for the Act of Settlement stipulates that the monarch must be “in communion with the Church of England”.

If, however, which seems likely, he proposes to marry Mrs. Parker Bowles, that too presents enormous problems. First, the Church of England does not permit the remarriage in church of divorced persons, though the law of the land does. The Church of England is in the process of drawing up new rules which may permit the remarriage in church of divorced persons, but one of the conditions in the proposed guidelines is that a partner, who has contributed to the break-up of the former marriage, may not be remarried in church. There is compelling evidence to show that Mrs. Parker Bowles is in that position.

But, if in spite of all this, the Prince of Wales were seriously to consider marrying Mrs. Parker Bowles, the only kind of remarriage that would seem possible would be a morganatic marriage, because Mrs. Parker Bowles is a commoner. However, such a marriage in the British Royal family is unprecedented and, since it raises again the spectre of the abdication of Edward VIII, is unlikely to be favourably received by politicians or by the country in general.

The position into which the Prince of Wales has got himself raises the question of his suitability to succeed to the throne. In addition to his liaison with Mrs. Parker Bowles he has shown himself to be unwise and unsound in many of his utterances, particularly in regard to his position (were he to succeed to the throne) as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. On many occasions he has put forward the idea that he would like to be regarded as the 'Defender of Faith' rather than the 'Defender of *the* Faith', meaning that he would be the champion of all faiths, be they Islam, Buddhism, Roman Catholicism, or whatever, rather than "the Protestant Reformed Religion, by law established". The Prince, in his naivety, does not seem to recognise that advancing such a proposal is the equivalent of planting a bomb under the whole British establishment, including the throne and the Royal family itself.

In view of the position into which the Prince of Wales has now manoeuvred himself, both by his liaison with Mrs. Parker Bowles and by his ill-considered utterances, it would seem to be in the best interests of the Crown and the British nation generally, that he should consider, in the near future, abdicating his claim to the succession in favour of his son William, who has now come of age. In that way there would be hope for a fresh start, free from the entanglements that now compromise the position of the Prince of Wales and, on any objective assessment, place insurmountable obstacles in the path of his succession to the throne.

It seems that the Archbishop of Canterbury has had six secret meetings with Mrs. Parker Bowles. We hope that he has taken the occasion to explain to her the serious problems we have mentioned, and that he will do the same for the Prince of Wales. All Christians should be making these matters the subject of prayer both privately and in the churches, in order, as the Apostle Paul says, *that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*, and also should not flinch from making their views known.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'David Samuel'.

David Samuel.

THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION

Its Importance and Relevance for the Church Today (Pt II)

By David Samuel

The Teaching of the Church of England

We have in the previous part of this article traced the doctrine of predestination and election through the Bible, Augustine and Wycliffe. I need not trace it through the Reformers, it is unquestionably there. It was present in them all in some form or other, simply because the cry of *Sola gratia* cannot be sustained without it. If salvation is of grace not of works, then the ground of distinguishing grace must be found outside man not within him. It is found in the secret and inscrutable purpose of God *who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will* (Ephesians 1: 11). As to the doctrine of the Church of England, we see that it preserves the same two-sidedness, the same double aspect of the church, that is, its visible and invisible sides that we have noticed before. The proper understanding of its visible and institutional character is found in Article XIX *Of the Church*.

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

Where is the Article on the invisible church? There are those who have contended that we have not got one, that our Articles speak only of the visible church, and do not mention the distinction that was universal amongst the Reformers. But this is not the case. The Article concerning the invisible church is found in Article XVII *Of Predestination and Election*.

Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) he hath constantly decreed by his counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour...

This is 'the little flock' of which our Saviour speaks, to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom. There is the invisible church, which is related to, but not commensurable with, the visible, outward, institutional church. Moreover, as Article XVII *Of Predestination* comes before Article XIX *Of the Church* it is intended to be understood as having logical priority over it. The concept of election is, as in the Bible, Augustine, Wycliffe and the

Reformers, the controlling doctrine, which governs and presupposes our thinking about the visible church, its preaching, sacraments, and fellowship.

The Value of the Doctrine of Predestination for Today

We must turn now to the usefulness and relevance of the doctrine of election for the church today, and its importance too, for many of the ills we suffer are attributable to the neglect, or contempt of this doctrine by those who ought to know better.

First, it should if properly attended to preserve us from unworthy views of God. J.B. Phillips wrote a book a number of years ago with the intriguing title, 'Your God is too Small'. It epitomises the particular affliction of the church and its leaders today. We have partial, limited and unworthy views of God. Our thinking about God is anthropocentric. The categories we use are subjective rather than Biblical. It would come as just such a great surprise to many within the church today to discover that God is at the centre of things, as it came to the contemporaries of Galileo to learn that the earth revolved around the sun. We are in the age of 'flat earth' theology. God in the present church scene is reduced to a benevolent and interested spectator. We make our plans for the church and then ask God to bless them, We are now so confident that we can predict how many people will join the church in the next twelve months and have devised just the right teaching and marketing research. Where God fits into all this it is difficult to see, except in the role of an observer.

This is the consequence of the Arminian theology that has taken control of the church, though most would not be able to give it a name at all. What is happening in the church today is not happening by accident. It has causes, theological causes. The practice of the church today has been determined by the theology it adopted yesterday, and that theology was Arminian.

Arminianism is essentially man-centred, and it reduces God to the role of an observer or spectator in his own universe. This can be demonstrated. Arminianism makes a distinction between God's foreknowledge and his foreordination. It recognises that God must foreknow events, but denies that he ordains them to come to pass. But by the nature of the case, if God foreknows what will be done in the future, it follows that those events must be certain, otherwise he would have no knowledge of them. However, Arminianism has already denied that the certainty of events is attributable to God. He has not ordained them. Therefore their certainty must be attributed to some other course, or causes, outside God - to the working of blind fate or necessity. Thus God becomes a mere spectator in his own universe. He is made dependent for his knowledge upon the things known, instead of all things being dependent upon him. The only way of escape from this conclusion is to lapse into Socinianism or Unitarianism, and deny also that God even knows what will

come to pass.

Now the demoralising consequences of this theology must be apparent. They are all about us in the church today, in the way in which modern Christians set about, not only their own salvation, but the ordering of the church, its bureaucracy, planning and focus groups. God is brought in almost as an afterthought, when some ultimate justification is required for the system. Is the God of the General Synod of the Church of England less remote and passive than the God of eighteenth century Deism? I suggest that the doctrine of predestination and election and all that it means in terms of the power and sovereignty of God is the necessary corrective that is needed to these unworthy and limited views of God. The remedy lies close at hand in its very own Articles of Religion.

Secondly, it should serve to preserve the church from popery. Against the medieval system of the papacy, clad like Goliath in helmet and greaves of brass and bearing spear and shield, Wycliffe advanced with, as it were a stone and a sling, that is, with the Biblical doctrine of predestination. It was sufficient to break its power and write its doom, for this doctrine is, as we have said, fatal to all ecclesiastical pretensions. It strips every manifestation of priestcraft of its power, for it reveals the truth, that the grace of God is not tied to any order of men, be they in the so-called apostolic succession or not, but is dispensed by him who says, I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. (Exodus 33.19). Before the brilliance of that light the claims of Romanism and every other sacerdotal system melt as the shades of night before the rays of the sun.

Let us be under no illusion about the growing cult of the papacy and priestly religion in the popular mind today, in this so-called age of secularism. Hardly a day passes without the pope being featured in the newspapers. Wherever he goes he draws millions of people and the news media behind him in popular acclamation. They do not know what they are following. They have no real comprehension of the claims of the papacy. But the popular appeal and the potential power that goes with it are there. The essence of Roman Catholicism lies in the power of the priest who is regarded as mediator, the exclusive channel of God's grace to man. Without this claim the whole sacerdotal system loses its *raison d'être*. The influence of such teaching is growing in the Church of England. Once only esoteric groups of Anglo-catholic clergy used to visit Walsingham. Now the image of Our Lady of Walsingham is taken on tour of the dioceses. With the decay of Protestant principles and Reformation teaching in the national church, its clergy and people slide inexorably into unreformed concepts of ministry.

As the ecumenical movement gathers pace, the orientation of the churches is towards the papacy, and the goal towards which it aspires is the exaltation of the visible, institutional church with its consequent claim to exclusiveness and

authority over the souls of men. Many Protestants feel dispirited and defeated as this movement gathers momentum. With what can we oppose this Colossus. Let us remember the words of Paul: *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;* (2 Cor 10.4,5). The churches of the Reformation have in their armoury the weapon that can overthrow all such false claims and teaching. It is their disregard and neglect of it that has made them a prey to sacerdotalism and the growing influence of Rome. If we have the courage to proclaim the whole counsel of God we shall have nothing to fear.

Thirdly, it should preserve evangelicals from incipient sacramentalism. By incipient sacramentalism I mean the tendency to attribute to the sacraments a power to work of themselves, regardless of the spiritual condition of the recipient, whether he has faith or not. At the time of the Reformation all the Reformers opposed this *ex opere operato* doctrine of the sacraments. In more recent years some evangelicals have chosen to speak in exaggerated language about the efficacy of the sacraments, In a book called 'Growing into Union' written by two evangelical and two Anglo-catholic authors, the expression 'the sheer, unqualified efficacy of the sacrament' was used, and the claim made that 'the sacrament effect what it signifies', brushing aside the Biblical warning on the need for worthy reception. This tendency is a dangerous one. It has been justly, and to my mind, unanswerably criticised by Dr Scales in the 'Evangelical Succession' published by James Clark. All I want to say here is, that the teaching and the tendency to ascribe such power to the sacraments would not arise amongst evangelicals if they held the doctrine of election in due regard, and gave it its rightful place in their doctrinal system. It is, as we have seen the controlling doctrine regarding the church. It should govern our understanding of the visible, institutional church, its preaching, sacraments and fellowship. When this is recognised, the language of 'sheer, unqualified efficacy' in regard to the sacraments, as indeed to the preaching of the Word, is quite unjustifiable and inapposite. "The sacraments," wrote Calvin, "duly perform their office only when accompanied by the Spirit, the internal Master, whose energy alone penetrates the heart, stirs the affections, and procures access for the sacrament into our soul. If he is wanting, the sacraments can avail us no more than the sun shining upon the eyeballs of the blind, or sounds uttered in the ears of the deaf." This is the proper theological milieu in which the Reformers did all their thinking and writing about the sacraments. It follows that the sacraments can only be truly efficacious, or operative, in the elect, in those to whom the Holy Spirit is imparted.

Divorced from the doctrine of election the understanding of the sacraments

quickly degenerates into *ex opere operato* notions and the language of 'sheer, unqualified efficacy'.

The doctrine of the visible church must always have the teaching of the invisible church of God's elect to qualify and control it. Without this two-sidedness, the visible, institutional church assumes a dominant and oppressive role, and its rites and ceremonies are gradually invested with magical potency.

Fourthly, it gives the church a sense of purpose. Behind the flux and change of the world and its history in which the visible, institutional church is involved, there is the eternal and unchanging plan and purpose of God. Let us take an illustration from nature and experience. Our senses are continually bombarded by impressions of colour, sound and feeling from the world about us. What enables us to impose some order and coherence upon all this confusion? The mind; the human mind is so equipped that it is able to impose order upon all these random impressions and make sense of it all. If the mind did not perform this function, the world would be 'buzzing, booming confusion'. When we look out upon the world and its history, we are confronted with a multiplicity of events, with the flux and change and passage of history. What sense can we make of it all? One historian claims that he discerns a purpose, only to be debunked by another, and the modern approach seems to be one of skepticism regarding any purpose at all. It seems to me that we can make no sense of the empirical data of the world and history and life unless we have the categories of the Bible, of revelation, with which to do it. And especially important among them is doctrine of predestination and election. Across the tracts of time marches the unchanging, invincible purpose of God to call out a people for himself, to justify and glorify them.

Without this great plan I cannot make sense of the manifold facts of history and life. The history of the world often hangs literally by a thread. Think of the baby Moses adrift on the waters of the Nile. Think of Paul, before his great mission was properly begun, suspended from the walls of Damascus by a rope in a basket. Why was the Gospel first preached in the West rather than in the East? Why did Christ come into the world when he did rather than earlier or later? 'How odd of God,' says the cynic, 'to choose the Jews.' Why should this person believe the Gospel and not that person, when humanly speaking they have had the same opportunities and privileges? If we confine ourselves to the contingent facts and the secondary causes we can make no sense of it. The world becomes a 'big buzzing, booming confusion'. Indeed, the philosophy of chance and the absurd seems to be the only possible conclusion, which is where our generation has arrived.

We must view the facts of history and experience in relation to God and his purposes. This is what men of faith have always done, and it has brought order out of confusion. Joseph saw that what had fallen out for him was not acciden-

tal, but ordained by God to fulfil his purpose, not merely for himself but for the people of God. He said to his astonished brethren, when they met up with him in Egypt, where he had become the chief power in the land next to Pharaoh, *God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.* (Genesis 45:7, 8). The same thing is true when the foreordination of God is applied to the contingent, historical facts relating to the crucifixion of our Lord, as it was by Peter and the church in Acts 4:27, *For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together.* The same is true when the contingent facts of our own personal histories are brought into relation with the purposes of God in election. Truly, nothing happens by accident, *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son...* (Romans 8: 28, 29).

All this: has a practical application which I need hardly point out. I conclude with this observation. The trouble with the church and many Christians to day is that they look only at the contingent facts. They view the events of the world and of their own lives only superficially and not in the light of the Bible and the context of the overarching purpose of God in election and predestination. This does not minister to faith. If we do this we allow the world to set the agenda. But the truth is that the agenda has already been set. The purpose and goal of history have been determined by the counsel of Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said to his disciples, *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* When the church and the Christian grasp that truth by faith they will know that they are not the victims of events, but "more than conquerors".

DNS

Having taken on the editorship of 'The Gospel Magazine' the Rt. Rev. Edward Malcolm has handed over the editorship of this Journal. As of this issue the new Editor is the Rev. Edward J. Malcolm. Please send all material, both for the Journal and for Intercessions, to him. Contact details are to be found on the outside back cover.

It is a great help if material can be supplied electronically - either as by email, or on a floppy disk. Send to JournalEditor@fsmail.net

A SACRAMENTAL MEDITATION

Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices. (Song of Solomon 8:14)

by Augustus M. Toplady

Every serious and sensible Christian considers the book of Canticles as a storehouse of inward religion, and a treasury of holy experiences. In no part of the Scriptures is the work of the blessed Spirit on the souls of men more strikingly and exactly delineated. If some unhappy persons consider this sacred poem in any other view, it is because they are unacquainted with the power of godliness, and have not experienced that renewal in the spirit of their minds which can alone qualify lost sinners to contemplate, with advantage, the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven.

The Church addresses the passage quoted above to the Saviour, who has redeemed her by his blood. She styles him her Beloved, the object of her supreme affection, and the meritorious procurer of all her happiness. She prays for the manifestations of his spiritual presence; and that those manifestations may be speedy: "*Make haste, my beloved, and be thou, in the swiftness of thy approach, like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices!* Rapidly as those lively, expeditious animals spring from hill to hill; nimbly as they bound, instantaneously as they leap, on the fragrant mountains of the East; so swiftly do thou lift up the light of thy countenance on thy waiting people, and cheer them with such tokens of thy grace and favour as are more reviving to the soul than all the odours of the spicy mountains are to the fainting traveller." On the other hand, a formal professor does not look upon ordinances as a means of inward religion, and as steps to communion with God through the Spirit: but having skimmed the surface of outward duties, he sits down satisfied with externals, and aims at nothing higher.

Not so are the conduct and views of one whose heart God hath touched. The truly awakened soul considers all the exterior means of grace but as channels through which grace itself, and the comforts of it, are (in a way of sovereignty and freeness) communicated to them that hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Jesus Christ. And as it is not the mere channel of conveyance, but the water conveyed, which can satisfy thirst, so the Christian is sensible that not a bare attendance on outward duties is that which nourishes the believing soul, and renews the believer's strength. Hence his heart's desire and prayer are similar to the verse immediately preceding the text. "*Thou that dwellest in the gardens, thou who condescendest to be constantly present in the hearts and assemblies of thy people, the companions hearken to thy voice:* the Church above and the

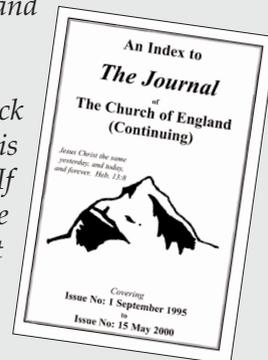
Church below, with whom thou hast vouchsafed to contract a gracious intimacy, are delighted with hearkening to thy voice of love: O *cause me to hear it!* make me also glad with the joy of thy salvation! give me to see the felicity of thy chosen, and to drink deep of that river, to experience much of that unspeakable fellowship with thyself, which makes glad the city of God, both in earth and heaven.” Then follows the supplication, *Make haste my Beloved*, with which we began; from all which it appears that Jesus is the object of his people’s love.

And whom should we love, if not him who loved us, and gave himself for us? If the bliss even of angels and glorified souls consists greatly in seeing and praising the Son of God, surely, to love, to trust, and to celebrate the friend of sinners, must be a principal ingredient in the happiness of saints not yet made perfect. Solomon, whose experience of grace was so lively and triumphant when he wrote this Song of Songs, declares in the fifth chapter, that Christ *is altogether lovely*. Other objects may be overrated, and too highly esteemed; but so transcendent, so infinite, is the excellency of Christ, that he is, and will be to all eternity, more lovely than beloved. Yet, though all love possible for saints and angels to show falls, and will always fall, infinitely short of the Saviour’s due, still it is a blessed privilege to love him at all, though in ever so faint a manner, and in ever so low a degree. They that love him at all wish to love him more; and more and more they shall love him, through the ages of endless duration in heaven, where they shall be like him, and see him as he is.

INDEX

Since its inception the *Journal of the Church of England (Continuing)* has published a range of articles, varying from reprints from past authors to new compositions. Over the years these grow into a library of theological and devotional writings.

To make it easier to find items in back issues an Index has been compiled. This is available free of charge to all subscribers. If you would like a copy please contact the Editor, and it will be posted with the next issue, in September.



YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

*A Sermon preached at St. Mary's Castle Street, Reading,
18th June 2000.*

by **Maurice Roberts**

Let us now hear the Word of God as we have it written in the Gospel according to John and in chapter 3:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. May the Lord add His blessing to this reading from His most holy Word.

I wish to draw your attention today to words which you will find in verses 3, 5 and 7 of this chapter. John 3 verse 3: *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.* At verse 5, *Jesus answered, Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* And

again at verse 7, *Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again.*

If I may, I should like to bring the greetings of my brethren in the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) and in a word express my deep gratitude for the privilege of being invited to address you on this occasion. We seek God's richest blessing upon the ministry of Mr. Richard Mortimer, now begun. May God anoint him and bless him in all time coming.

The subject before us, as you see, is that of the new birth. Nicodemus was a man of great religious knowledge and experience. He was, if you like, an expert and a scholar in the things concerning the Old Testament. But there was clearly one thing he did not know. He did not know the way into the spiritual experience which is known as the new birth. We are told here and indeed elsewhere in the Gospel of John, that he came to Jesus 'by night'. It is, as it were, a label which is attached to him all through this Gospel. He was the man who came to Jesus, we are told, 'by night'. Why should he come 'by night' and why should the Scriptures repeatedly draw attention to the fact that it was 'by night' that he came? I suppose that he came to Christ by night under cover of darkness as being ashamed to come by day. He was, after all, a religious expert and a ruler in Israel, as this portion of the Word of God informs us. But, in spite of that, there was something that he did not know and at this point in his experience had not understood. So our blessed Lord and Saviour brings to him this supremely important theme of the new birth.

Every minister beginning his work engages upon it with the overwhelming concern to be instrumental in the blessing of men, women and children. That's why God instituted the ministry at all. And of all the ways in which a minister might be a blessing to the people to whom he ministers in time to come, none is greater than that he should have the joy of seeing them come to this experience of new birth, whereby they become the sons and daughters of Almighty God. Allow me, therefore, on this occasion, if I may, to bring this theme before you and to look at it under three simple and brief headings.

I. Our Lord and Saviour first of all brings before us the *necessity for the new birth.*

He does this in the words, *ye must be born again.* Now there are many things that you and I can live in this world without. We do not need to have great riches, fame or popularity to live a happy and a fulfilled existence here in this world. There are many things we can do without and these things that I have listed come to few in this world. But our Saviour tells us all here in this passage, that there is one thing that we dare not live without. He calls it by this term, *the new birth.* He emphasises the necessity of it in these words, *ye must be born again.* Other things may be optional but the new birth is a matter of absolute necessity, he says.

Now let us raise the question, Why is it a matter of necessity? Why is this

new birth so much insisted on by the glorious, eternal Son of God in the days of his ministry upon earth? Why does he press so repeatedly the necessity for this experience of new birth?

Allow me to give you one or two reasons at this point. First of all because our first birth did not give us any spiritual life. He tells us in his own words, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. He clearly shows, therefore, that there are two kinds of life. There is natural life and there is spiritual life. By natural life, he means that as we are born from our mother's womb into this world, we enjoy a certain quality of life. That is so common-place that it hardly needs to be said. But what does need to be said is that our first birth from our mother's womb does not make us partakers of spiritual life. We are born spiritually dead according to the teaching of the Word of God. We are dead by nature in trespasses and sins. And the necessity of the new birth arises from this consideration, that if we are to have spiritual life, then there must be in our own experience this wonderful work of God whereby we are given a second birth, a new beginning in this life.

I come to a second reason why we need new birth. It is because we must all die and we must all face the judgement. The supreme question therefore in life is, Am I prepared for death, and am I prepared to face my Maker and my Judge in that awesome day in which every knee must bow before him and every tongue confess him? The only way in which we can prepare for death, judgement and eternity, according to the words of Christ here himself, is by having this new birth take place in this life and in our own experience here in this world.

Why then should our Lord make this point so strongly to Nicodemus? Did he not know these things? Was not all his religious learning sufficient to have taught him this already? And the answer is, No. My dearest friends, it is possible for us to spend many years under faithful preaching and many years under the influence of godly men and women and yet ourselves to remain without this experience. It is possible for *us* to be as ignorant of the new birth as Nicodemus was in his day.

Let me illustrate it briefly before I must move on. The famous John Wesley, two hundred and so many years ago, believed it was his calling to be a missionary to the Indians of America and he travelled the long sea voyage to the eastern seaboard of America to embark upon his life's work, as he supposed, of preaching the Gospel to the Indians. But he came back to England a disappointed man. And this is what he commented on himself. He said, "I went to America to convert the people to Christ, not realising that I was still unconverted myself." The great man he became was the result of his experience in Aldersgate Street, London. This famous experience was the outcome of the new birth and of it he said, "My heart is strangely warmed." May I ask you this question, Have you seriously faced the claims of Christ upon your life? Do you know that *we must be born again?*

II. The second thing we look at here briefly is this. *What happens in the new birth?*

What exactly is this experience? Well, it is a 'birth'. That is what our Lord intends by this figure of speech. A birth brings something into the world which was not there before. A young man and a young woman fall in love and marry and a year or two pass by and God then blesses them with a child. It is a very common-place experience and one that many of us have seen and witnessed and perhaps experienced for ourselves. If so, we all know that the coming of a child into this world changes everything. The pattern of the family's life immediately alters. Birth brings something into the world which changes everything. So, my dearly beloved, it is with the new birth. It brings spiritual life into the soul of a man, woman or child which was not there before and the consequence of this spiritual life is that a person who is the subject of it is changed in every way. I use this illustration as it may help the young. Imagine an old book such as, let us say, *Pilgrim's Progress*. You go into a shop selling old books and there you see a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*. The spine is torn, the pages are mildewed, and some of the pages are dog-eared. The whole book, though wonderful in itself, is old and unappealing. But, let us suppose that a printer comes along and issues a new edition of the old book, which now appears in new dress. The book has not changed but the appearance of the book has changed dramatically. So it is when the new birth occurs in the life of anyone.

You will know the name of the great C. H. Spurgeon who preached in London in the last century, perhaps the greatest preacher of his age, or of the world, indeed. You may know how he experienced new birth. It was a snowy morning and he came not to his usual church but the only one the family could conveniently reach in the snowy weather. The preacher was not there and did not come, no doubt snowed in. It was one of the office-bearers who stood in to preach the sermon at short notice. Spurgeon came in to the church and sat under the gallery and it was clear from his very face that he was miserable. He was miserable because he had a sense of sin. He was miserable because his conscience told him he was not right with God. The preacher was not eloquent but he did his best and God blessed his message. The young Spurgeon was so transformed in that service that when he went home, his family who saw him said, You have undergone a wonderful change. It was, of course, the 'new birth'. 'Old things had passed away.' 'All things had become new.'

Jesus tells us that this new birth is something which happens from above. When the Word of God here tells us that we need to be born 'again', it is equivalent to saying, we need to be born 'from above', from heaven. Our first birth, of course, is from earthly parents. Our second birth must be from God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And Christ describes it with a rather remarkable expression. He says, *Except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter God's Kingdom*. What can he mean by these expressions, water and spirit? It is very tempting to suppose that he means baptism. But I have to say to

you that although baptism has its place and is important, he cannot be referring to baptism on this occasion for one very obvious reason. There was no such thing at this time as Christian baptism. Our Lord had as yet not instituted Christian baptism. And so what, then, is this ‘water’? And what would Nicodemus understand by reference here to ‘water’? The answer, my dear friends, is that it refers to the washing of Old Testament rituals, and the inward cleansing which was symbolised by those ritual washings. Ezekiel puts it like this: *God says, I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you an heart of flesh. From all your idols and from all your filthiness will I cleanse you, a new heart also will I give you.*

We have all heard of the great Augustine of Hippo in North Africa in the 4th Century AD., one of the greatest geniuses the world has ever known, and one of the most outstanding theologians the church has ever known. There was a time in his life before he had had the new birth in which he was groping his way towards God. It is a very touching story. He was in a garden, I suppose we would call it a park or a public place today, and he was groaning in his spirit, saying, ‘O why always tomorrow? Why not today?’ He meant, ‘Lord, when shall I know the blessing in my own soul?’ Then he heard a child’s voice or something crying, ‘Take up and read, take up and read’. And reaching for his New Testament, he opened the book at random and found these words, *Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.* Casting the book aside, he cried out to his dear companion, Alepius, ‘I have found it, Alepius, I have found it!’ And Alepius, running to his side with great affection, asked what he had found? He had found the secret of life. He had found Christ for himself. And Alepius, looking at the same passage and seeing the very next verse, found the same experience. These two men were born again almost in an instant of time. Augustine indeed was born to change the current of the world.

The new birth, says Christ, is that work of the Spirit of God within our hearts whereby we become a new edition of our former self. What changes, then, are to be seen in the life of those who become a new edition of their former self? I give you one or two examples.

First, we come to see how sinful our own hearts are. We come to see how great is our need of the grace and mercy of God. We come to realise that this world, however attractive, is not our home. We are but pilgrims and strangers here and we discover we have a soul that needs to be fed with the word of God. It is for that reason that Jesus Christ speaks of the born again in this way, *blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness.* Am I speaking to someone to whom these things could be a strange story? Am I speaking to someone today who is fascinated as Nicodemus was by the subject but is still at this time a stranger to it?

III. Let me turn to my third and final point which is this: *How would I know if I had experienced this new birth?*

What good fruits would I expect to see within myself or others? The new birth makes a man a lover of God. The Ten Commandments require of you and me that we should 'love' God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. These same commandments show us the way in which we are to love our neighbour as ourself; honour thy father and thy mother; thou shalt not kill, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness or covet. O what a blessed country this would be if these things were taken seriously again! O what a happy town this would be if even a fraction of the people took these commandments of God seriously! Yet the Word of God informs us that we *cannot* keep these commandments until we are born again. Only when the grace of God brings a change into our innermost soul, so that we are washed and purified and renewed in righteousness in the image of God - only then have we a sincere wish to live to the glory of God and in obedience to his Word.

The good fruits of the new birth are obedience to God's Word. It is for this reason that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the course of his remarks to Nicodemus, brings before him, and before us, these most famous and wonderful words with which I close today. At verse 16, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* My very dear friends, if you would know what it means to be born again, then seek God. Consider how great is His love in not sparing His dear Son, Jesus Christ. Consider again that He gave Him for a sacrifice upon the cross. Repent of sin, believe in Christ crucified and live the life which he commands us to live, of holy obedience to his will in this world. If you do all will be well. When we come to the end of our brief life, as soon we shall all, we shall enter into that everlasting kingdom of which Our Lord has here spoken. So I bid you on this occasion of the ordination of our beloved friend, Mr. Mortimer, consider the words of Christ which are so vital to every true ministry, *Ye must be born again.*

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This sermon was preached on the occasion of the ordination of Mr. Richard Mortimer to the diaconate, Trinity Sunday (18 June), 2000.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

A paper delivered at the Day Conference, October 1999

By Edward Malcolm

The subject we shall look at together has been one I have long wrestled with. Having stepped out of the structures of the C of E, we find ourselves in a mission field situation.

THE AMAZING RESULTS ACHIEVED BY THE APOSTLE PAUL

Our problem is how to multiply. In 1912, a missionary in North China named Roland Allen, wrote a very influential book ‘Missionary Methods St. Paul’s or ours?’ His argument was simple: that in AD 47 there were no churches in four provinces of the Roman Empire, Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia. A little over ten years later in AD 57 St. Paul, and he alone, had established churches in all four provinces. And could pass on to extensive tours of the Far West without anxiety lest the churches which he had founded might perish in his absence for want of his guidance and support. It is perfectly clear that his work was complete, and whatever disasters befell those churches later, it was not because of any insufficiency or lack of care on his part. He left them because his work was fully accomplished.

“This is a truly astonishing fact. That churches should be founded so rapidly, so securely, seems to us today ... almost incredible.” If we are to found churches, we must employ the methods St. Paul used. Like the rest of the Holy Scriptures this is ‘for our learning,’ says Roland Allen. Yet some leaders seem to act on the assumption that all would collapse without them being there. In fact some if honest, might go so far as not really to want or trust anyone else in on ‘his patch.’

But, it is objected, he was a very remarkable man, and we are not. True, but he was not the only one in the early church who went about establishing churches, and not all the others using his same methods, were men of exceptional genius. Further, secular reformers outside the Church in every age, have employed the methods he used. It is only because he is set before us by the Holy Spirit as the example par excellence that we turn to him to copy. In fact he used the methods Christ used when on earth. He in turn copied. The acceptance by missionary societies of his method in the last say 75 years has led to the vast increase of Gospel churches world-wide. The older churches in Europe who refuse to follow this method are suffering catastrophic decline, whilst others who are only partly ‘sound’, but who in this are Biblical, prosper. Others copying certain features of his method bring it into disrepute.

Did he not possess other advantages over us? No, for we possess the whole Bible whilst he had only the Old Testament. We have medical and travel facilities which he never enjoyed, power to disseminate our ideas by many means, whilst he had to rely on hand-written letters sent by messengers.

The reason there is a prejudice against adopting his methods is that some are too content with the status quo, which they father upon the Apostle. Speaking more personally, we lack a seriousness of purpose. We are far too easily put-off. Again, we say, ‘but I’ve tried that part of what you say, and it didn’t work’. Incorporating parts of Paul’s methods into alien systems will never work. Others say, ‘but was not Roland Allen once challenged that the important matter was not the method, but being filled with love and the Holy Spirit, and he is reported to have replied with a sigh that he agreed? Yes, but to despise the method is the way to fail, even with faith and love. Acts lays before us a blueprint.

The greatest reason our methods do not work says Roland Allen is our outlook. We are accustomed to do things ourselves for ourselves, to find our own way, to rely upon our own exertions, and we naturally tend to be impatient with, even despise, others who are unlike us. Further, we tend to expect converts to adopt not only essentials, but also accidentals, not only the Gospel but law and customs. We do not have Paul’s spirit, which preferred persuasion to authority. Paul did not pass on elaborate systems of worship but grasped fundamental principles with an unhesitating faith in the power of the Holy Ghost to apply them to his hearers and to work out their appropriate external expressions in them. Inevitably these appeared dangerous to the Jewish mind of his day and to such minds today. “The mere fact that they can be made to bear a shallow resemblance to the methods of no method is sufficient to make the ‘apostles of order’ suspicious. In spite of the fact that the Catholic Church was founded by them, they appear uncatholic to those who live in daily terror of schism. Yet the facts are unquestionable. In a very few years, he built the Church on so firm a basis that it could live and grow in faith and in practice, that it could work out its own problems, and overcome all dangers and hindrances both from within and without.” We need to understand how he did this and to do it again.

Before we turn to examine the questions this raises, please do not expect a discussion of Paul’s doctrines. I take it we are agreed on these. Even suppose we were not, say on baptism, our purposes are answered for by the fact of baptism, not by what is meant by baptism. Our argument is unaffected. God keep us from anything against sound doctrine.

1. Questions the Apostle’s method raise.

First, should we deliberately aim at strategic places because of advantages they offer? Since the beginning of our enterprise this has been in my mind. Are we just taking the line of least resistance, or has the Holy Ghost put us in certain towns and villages? Our positions seem far from ideal.

It seems impossible to maintain that the Apostle first selected certain strategic points beforehand at which to plant churches, and then actually carried out his designs. Take the first missionary journey. When the Apostle afterwards wrote to the churches in south Galatia, he distinctly states in Galatians 4. 13 that he preached to them either because he was driven to them or detained amongst them by an infirmity of the flesh. He did not design to preach to them when he started out originally from Syria.

In his second missionary journey it is plain that the Apostle was not following any pre-determined route. His original aim, as far as it existed, was to go through Cilicia and south Galatia to Ephesus. It is stated that he tried to preach in Asia and was forbidden by the Holy Ghost (Acts 16. 6,7). Thus he found himself at Troas not knowing where to go and was directed by a vision to Macedonia. Later, expelled from Athens he went to Corinth, either because it was near Macedonia, or he was directed thither by the Spirit. There is little sign of deliberate design. The only other place where he established a church before his first imprisonment was Ephesus, and from Acts 18. 19 it would appear that he called whilst on his way to Jerusalem, and finding a willingness to listen, promised to return again.

On his third journey he appears to have laid his plans and carried them out as far as Ephesus, but after that he was so uncertain of his movements as to lay himself open to the charge of vacillation (2 Cor. 1. 15,18). Only during this journey do we find express plans for future work Acts 19. 21 *Paul purposed in the spirit when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia to go to Jerusalem saying: After I have been there, I must also see Rome.*

Roland Allen notes first, both Luke and Paul speak constantly of provinces rather than cities, suggesting that in Paul's view the unit was rather a province than a city.

Second, he confined his work to the limits of Roman administration. In going to south Galatia he is clearly evangelising the next Roman province to his own Cilicia wherein was Tarsus, and already- founded churches. He must have passed through Lycaonia Antiochi from Tarsus to reach Lystra and Iconium. Yet no record is preserved of any attempt to preach in that region. His strategy was to preach in Roman provinces.

Third, he never attempted to evangelise whole provinces, but confined himself to establishing centres of Christianity in two or three important places. That would be pointless unless the church possessed sufficient life to be a source of light to the region around. That meant in turn that the people who came and went learned the Gospel and in such a way that they could propagate it. The surrounding countryside was affected. The convert receiving the Gospel learned that it was entrusted to him for that purpose. So by establishing churches in two or three centres, Paul claimed to have evangelised the whole region. Thus ten years after setting out Paul told the Romans in 15. 19, 23 that he had *fully*

preached the Gospel of Christ from Jerusalem and round about Illyricum, and that he had *no more place in these parts*. This is of importance to us, with our severely limited resources.

Fourth, these towns were centres of Roman administration, of Greek civilisation, of Jewish influence and of some commercial importance, so he missed out many places lacking certain of these key features. It seems that he wanted Roman peace and protection under strong government, being himself a Roman citizen, thus benefiting from toleration and an open field for preaching. The world-wide nature of Rome, with many countries, races and cultures having in common that they were Roman subjects, broke down national exclusiveness and prepared hearts for the kingdom of Christ. Greek culture gave him a language for communicating the Gospel, and people educated enough to be taught.

Jewish centres gave him, as a Jew, a standing in that community, privileges under Roman government, and freedom from many disadvantages. His right to enter the Synagogue on the Sabbath Day gave him an audience possessed of the Scriptures, and able to follow his arguments. When he was ejected, that gave him acceptance with the rest of the town, and the advantage of not being expected to join in idolatry or immorality.

Centres of commerce gave him towns which were of importance, leaders of thought and policy, not merely narrowly provincial but outward looking to the wider world and its currents of thought. Its leaders felt it their duty to lead, to maintain unity, and to spread Roman civilisation. Their whole existence was bound up with the exchange of goods and of ideas. They were on the great sea and road routes. We know of one Phrygian who during his lifetime travelled to Rome at least 72 times.

All that said, the great reason Paul missed out some places and established churches in places which to us would appear very much the same, was that the Holy Ghost moved him to do so. And the reason was that God had in his hand a man capable of seizing the place and making it a centre of evangelistic life. A strategic centre may be a prison for the Gospel, or give liberty and impetus to the Gospel, either shut it up, or let it out. Fortifying strategic points may be our aim, or making them centres of Christian activity. St. Paul was less dependent on positions of natural advantage than we might suppose.

Second, should we aim to draw in outsiders, or dissatisfied C of E members as a class? It would appear that St. Paul did aim at a class, in the Jews and their proselytes, but is this actually so? In fact Judaism quickly rejected Christianity. Jews and God-fearers did not provide the Apostle with a class of men whose gifts and influence could be enrolled. Not very many Jews followed him. Any cursory reading of the story shows that the majority of his converts were Greeks, whose eagerness to accept his teaching is sharply contrasted with the attitude of the Jews in rejecting. St Paul refers to his converts as men who

knew idolatry by experience.

Further, many disadvantages arose from the Synagogue. Not only was the appeal largely unsuccessful there, but severe opposition and physical attacks on his person and a calling in question of his authority and teachings resulted in sudden suspension of his work. Entering as a Jew and teaching a form of Judaism, the moment the Jews heard his message, they rose up and expelled him and tried to kill him as a blasphemer. Rejected teachings are questioned on all sides. To both Paul and us, our own people and others find this a great stumblingblock, and a sufficient reason for rejecting our message.

However his converts from the Synagogue were of the greatest importance. They understood Gospel issues in a way which converted raw heathens did not, and lived in a way which did not bring disrepute on the Gospel.

He did not just appeal to the disadvantaged, as is so common in the C of E today, and there is little emphasis on street or open air preaching. There were open air occasions as in Lystra, but it seems Paul's settled practice when put out of the Synagogue was to move into the home of a man of good repute, and it is often carefully recorded in whose he taught and with whom he stayed. He took care to provide for things honest in the sight of all men. Neither did he spend his time appealing to intellectuals, philosophers and officials. Lightfoot holds it was from the middle classes the majority of his converts came. They had enough education and enlightenment to be open to new ideas. Converts were from the lower middle classes, commercial, labouring, freed-men, and slaves, for some slaves were educated. We therefore have as many good and capable converts as he had. He had no advantage over us there. And as for the illiterate, who are now said to be many in today's Britain, the Gospel soon opened their minds to progress. In a very few years an amazing change came over their mental and moral outlook. Plainly we are not yet trying St Paul's methods, if we use these things as arguments to bolster up our dread of loss of control of our work.

Third, do we face moral and spiritual conditions harder than those faced by St. Paul? When speaking of Roman civilisation we often think of great principles, high ideals and philosophies. In fact the Empire was home to a vast array of ideas and religions, from barbarians to the highly civilised. Idolatry was free from doubt and subtlety amongst the poor, but a philosophy amongst the better educated who claimed only to honour the gods behind the representations. Agnosticism also prevailed amongst the educated upper class, with Pilate's question 'What is truth?' Four elements of this apply to any comparison with today.

First, the prevalence of belief in magic, demons, and devil worship. They ruled life from the cradle to the grave. 'The whole world lieth in wickedness' (the Evil One) 1 John 5. 19. All, even the highly educated and the Jews believed in them. Pliny the Elder believed in foul magic. Human sacrifice was not unknown and witchcraft was universal. Plutarch was a good and a serious man, but

believed in horrid magic associated with lucky and unlucky days. The result was the same as always, physical and psychical disease, cruelty, bondage and vice. The magic books worth 50,000 pieces of silver publicly burned at Ephesus were probably filled with incantations, spells and rites to keep off demons. The operative religion of the masses was demon worship. These people were Paul's converts, and were delivered from their demons by the power of the Lord Jesus, not by a denial of the existence of demons.

Second, the moral character of the religious rites. There were mystery religions with moral interpretations, but to the vast majority all they saw in the temples were acted indecencies, quite unfit to be repeated. The temple at Ephesus was not a home of virtue, and Eph. 4. 17 - 19 exactly describes the background from which the converts came.

Third, Paul had even greater evils to contend with, slavery and the amphitheatre. The important thing is not to discuss what we all know went on in gladiatorial bouts and criminals thrown to the wild beasts, but the attitude of the best men towards the shows. Only about three ancient writers outright condemn these inhuman shows which were the delight of the populace. Most speak of them with utter indifference, whilst Pliny and Cicero defend them as 'splendid training for the eye'. Read the account of Augustine's friend Alypius as proof of the extraordinary fascination which they exercised over the minds of those who considered themselves to be superior to such temptation. Tertullian says 'No one partakes of such pleasures without their strong excitements, no one comes under their excitement without their natural lapses.' One result was that they made all other entertainments insipid, so theatre became sensuous, crudely indecent and violent in order to compete. Society became vile.

Slavery was connected with the amphitheatre, as gladiators were slaves. Slaves were of one race and colour with their masters, the vast majority being men, their numbers almost unimaginably great. They were educated, often well treated, but utterly without rights. Only their master's will stood between them and the lash. A normal convert would have grown up with slaves, as a toddler absorbing from them gross superstition and as a child pandered to by them. His education inculcated paganism, and not in the sense of a fairy story, but as the explanation of life. The better educated then attended rhetoric schools, where evil things were taught as matters of indifference. Growing up, attending the games, the theatre and the circus, visiting temples, attended to by slaves who answered their every wish, was bad enough in Greece. However at least marriage was the ideal. Not so in Asia Minor where it was held that marriage was an outrage to the free, unfettered divine nature reflected in the gods and wild animals. Roman and Greek law only accepted as citizens legitimate children of marriages. But in Phrygia marriage did not exist.

Today TV gratifies as much audience participation blood lust excitement as the circus did, and as much indecency as the temple and theatre together. The

clock has been turned back almost 2000 years as we approach the second millennium, but we face the same as the Apostle. He had no advantage over us.

2. How much of his success was due to his presentation?

Since he could do miracles and we cannot, it is held that his methods can have little or no bearing on our work today. In fact they show us some things of constant value in common with us today. Miracles took place we are told in five towns in the Four Provinces. In Iconium ‘the Lord bare witness unto the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.’ At Lystra a cripple was healed. At Philippi a spirit of divination was expelled, and at Ephesus ‘God wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul insomuch that to the sick were carried away from his body handkerchiefs or aprons and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out.’ At Troas, Eutyclus was taken up alive. At Antioch, Derbe, Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth, no mention is made in Acts of miracles in connection with the preaching of the Gospel. Only in Ephesus are we told that miracles led to a great increase of disciples, whilst at Philippi it stopped the work. In Acts miracles are shown as furthering the cause of the Gospel. Not all Paul’s miracles are recorded in the Acts (see 2 Cor. 12. 12).

Miracles were not used to convert people, or even to get a hearing from them. No one healed by St Paul is said to have believed, except the cripple at Lystra who in one sense was already a believer. He did not attract people to Christianity by offering inducements like healing. Yet they helped his mission by attracting hearers and attesting his preaching. All could see no man could do these miracles unless God was with him, and even the Council at Jerusalem accepted the attestation of miracles, *what signs and wonders God had wrought amongst the Gentiles by Barnabas and Paul*. Miracles showed that Christ’s name brought love, and saved the oppressed from the bondage of the devil and sin. Tertullian wrote two centuries later ‘It is mainly the deeds of love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us.’ Organised care for widows, orphans, the sick and disabled, gentle consideration for slaves, prisoners and those suffering calamities, led to the conversion of the world. As for salvation, Celsus the heathen intellectual who hated Christianity and mocked it, typified many pagans when he wrote ‘Every one, they say, who is a sinner, who is devoid of understanding, who is a child, and, to speak generally, whoever is unfortunate, him will the kingdom of heaven receive. Do you not call him a sinner, then, who is unjust, and a thief, and a housebreaker, and a poisoner, and a committer of sacrilege, and a robber of the dead? What others would a man invite, if he were issuing a proclamation for an assembly of robbers?’ All other religions by contrast invited the clean and pure, excluding the sick, ignorant and underprivileged.

There is no doubt of the value of miracles to Paul’s success, yet Paul does not give them the highest place amongst the gifts of the Spirit. It is the Spirit, not the

working of miracles which is of the greater importance in his eyes. He does not speak as if his best workers possessed powers to do miracles. The best gift is love. The miracle is of value as a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. And we possess the Spirit.

Did he have a financial advantage over us? The answer must be no, if we mean amount. However three rules guided his practice and helped him succeed, and will similarly help us if followed. First he sought no financial help for himself. Second, He took no financial help from those to whom he preached, and third, he did not administer local church funds.

He did receive unsolicited gifts from his converts, but not from those to whom he was preaching. He avoided giving the impression he was out to make money. In this he was in stark contrast to heathen teachers. He also gave no financial aid to his converts. Each church was financially independent, not subservient to some richer one. He collected for the distressed poor in Jerusalem, but though the collection had a serious and important place, he had nothing to do with ordinary church finance. What each church needed, its members provided.

Did he preach differently to us? The substance of his preaching is found in three examples given in the Acts. In Pisidian Antioch, Acts 13. 16 - 41; at Lystra, Acts 14. 15 - 17; and in Athens, Acts 17. 22 - 31. Also we have five incidental references to its substance. The description by the soothsaying girl at Philippi, Acts 16. 17. A summary of his teaching in the synagogue at Thessalonica, Acts 17. 2,3. A note of the points which struck the Athenians as strange on Mars Hill, Acts 17. 18. The characterisation of his teaching in Ephesus by the Town Clerk, Acts 19. 37. And the summary of the main points of his own teaching made by Paul to the Ephesian elders, Acts 20. 21. Finally his own summary of his preaching to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 2. 2. These divide naturally into what he preached in the Synagogue to the Jews and what he said when preaching to the Gentiles.

In the Synagogue. Luke gives us the account of the preaching in the synagogue at Thessalonica, and it agrees with that earlier in the synagogue at Antioch, so we may take it as typical. *The sermon*

1] deals with the Old Testament and shows how the Gospel is rooted there, and is not a denial of the Old Scripture, but rather shows that it prepares for Messiah.

2] He sets forth the Lord Jesus and his rejection and crucifixion. It is startling with what unhesitating directness Paul deals with the great question troubling all missionary work, not least ours. That is, the rejection of the missionary's message by his own people. He neither shrinks from it nor apologises for it or conceals its importance. He sets it out definitely, clearly, boldly, as part of the argument for the truth of his message. It is the fulfilment of prophecy. Then he produces conclusive proof, the Resurrection, witnessed by the apostles, foretold by the prophets. In section

3] he proclaims the message of pardon for all who will receive it, and

solemnly warns of the consequences of rejection.

The five elements making this up:

1] Appeal to the past to gain a sympathetic ear and approval and to prepare hearts to receive a new truth from it and in harmony with it. He does not contradict all the past.

2] Facts are stated in a homely way, as a story easily grasped about life and death. It is divine, but moves among the familiar things of earth, unjust rulers, crowd passions, the marvellous recovery and the divine act of God in raising the dead.

3] He answers the inevitable objection, that the elders of the Jews have decided against these things. So trustworthy witnesses and proof are carefully presented. Here is a new truth but in agreement with the old.

4] He appeals to the spiritual needs of his hearers, the craving for pardon, the need for peace and confidence.

5] He concludes with a grave warning.

The four characteristics are:

1] Sympathy and a readiness to recognise the good in his hearers, put over simply.

2] Courage in facing the objections and difficulties but directly asserting unpalatable truth. No attempt to keep the door open by pleasing men and compromise or concealment of the real issue to make difficult things appear easy.

3] Respect for his hearers.

4] An unhesitating confidence in the truth and power of his message to meet his hearers' needs.

Amongst the Gentiles there is much more similarity than is sometimes allowed, to synagogue preaching. The main differences are in obliging a clean break with their old religion, and a greater emphasis upon the imminence of judgement. The two examples given at some length are in Lystra and Athens, which are very different to his sermons to the Jews. However, these are not typical, but can compare to his 'sermon on the stairs' to the Jews, which is also untypical of his synagogue preaching. He answers the obvious objections and shows adaptability. Some today attempt to found on these two the idea that Paul gradually led Gentiles into the light. That is not so, for his emphasis is upon the Cross, or as the soothsaying girl put it, *the Most High God and the Way of Salvation*, or as Paul summarised it, *repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Summary. He does not attack the things venerated by his hearers. When Paul attacked idolatry, he was only taking a position commonly taken by

thoughtful men. He does not rail upon their religion. Thessalonians gives the elements of his Gentile preaching: God is One, idolatry is sinful and must be forsaken. God's wrath is ready to be revealed against the impure heathen and the rejecting, opposing Jews, and will come suddenly, unexpectedly. Jesus is the Son of God, appointed of God to die, raised from the dead, who saves from the wrath to come. The kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is now set up and all men are invited to enter it. Those who believe and turn to God now expect the return from heaven of the Saviour to receive them. So they must now live pure, useful, watchful lives, and for this purpose have received the Holy Spirit. He does not minimise the break with the past that obedience to the Gospel brings, the offence of the Cross, sudden, near and catastrophic judgement, and that the whole world is either saved or perishing. Paul expected the power of God to move his hearers, and always brought his hearers to this point. Roland Allen says, "It is a question which needs serious consideration whether we ought to plant ourselves in a town or village and continue for years teaching people who refuse to give us a moral hearing."

To be continued

A SWEET CONTEMPLATION

of heaven and heavenly things

by John Bradford

O my soul, lift up thyself above thyself; fly away in the contemplation of heaven and heavenly things; make not thy further abode in this inferior region, where is nothing but travail and trials, and sorrow, and woe, and wretchedness, and sin, and trouble, and fear, and all deceiving and destroying vanities. Bend all thine affections upward unto the superior places where thy Redeemer liveth and reigneth, and where thy joys are laid up in the treasury of his merits which shall be made thy merits, his perfection thy perfection, and his death thy life eternal, and his resurrection thy salvation. Esteem not the trifling pleasures of this life to be the way to this wealth, nor thy ignominious estate here to be any bar to prevent thee from the full use and joyful fruition of the glory there prepared for thee.

I am sure that though I want here, I have riches there; though I hunger here, I shall have fulness there; though I faint here, I shall be refreshed there; and though I be accounted here as a dead man, I shall there live in perpetual glory.

That is the city promised to the captives whom Christ shall make free; that is the kingdom assured to them whom Christ shall crown; there are the joys prepared for them that mourn; there is the light that shall never go out; there is the health that shall never be impaired; there is the glory that shall never be defaced; there is the life that shall taste no death; and there is the portion that passeth all the world's preferment. There is the world that never shall wax worse; there is every want supplied freely without money; there is no danger, but happiness, and honour, and singing, and praise, and thanksgiving unto the heavenly Jehovah, "to him that sitteth on the throne," "to the Lamb" that here was led to the slaughter, that now "reigneth;" with whom I "shall reign" after I have run this comfortless race through this miserable earthly vale.

The honour in this earth is baseness; the riches of this world is poverty; the fulness of this life is want; the joys of this world's kingdom are sorrow, and woe, and misery, and sadness, and grief. And yet "the fool saith in his heart," "There is no other heaven but this harmful deceiving world's happiness, no other hell but this world's bitterness, no better comfort than this world's cares, no further help than this world's wealth,"

Thus is man's wisdom made foolishness, and man's glory turned into shame, and man's power made of no force: and the faithful poor that are here despised, they are advanced, the sorrowful are comforted, and the castaways in this world are received to this blessed being, that cannot be expressed with the tongue of man, nor conceived with the heart of man.

"O that I had wings," saith heavenly-hearted David, that I might fly away from this world's vanities, and possess heaven's happiness! "O that I were dissolved," saith blessed Paul, "that I might be with Christ!" O that I were in this place of such wished happiness, where I might rest from those worldly labours, and earthly miseries, and transitory vanities!

But be not heavy, O my soul, though thou must yet wade under the burden of these earthly troubles; for these heavenly mysteries are not seen of carnal eyes, nor can be obtained by carnal means; but through troubles, and afflictions, and dangers, and persecutions, they must be achieved: and none that are God's elected shall be free from this world's hatred. For such difference is there between earth and heaven, and between earthly and heavenly things, that whoso delighteth in the first shall be deprived of the latter; for we cannot have this world's heaven and "the heaven of heavens," the heaven of saints and angels, and cherubim and seraphim, where are all unspotted and all glorious, and all "in white robes" of sanctity, and where Christ the sacrificed Lamb is unto them "All in all." Oh, blessed are all they that are thus assured; blessed are the poor that shall have this heaven's riches; blessed are the base that shall be thus advanced; blessed are the low that shall be thus raised; and blessed are the world's despised that shall have this heaven's happiness; yea, happy is this wretched world's unhappy man, for he shall be happy. I will daily meditate of the greatness and

majesty of this high heaven's blessed estate, where I shall one day bless my God with the company of his saints; and here I shall I one day sit secure and free from the dangers and perils, and crosses, and afflictions, that now do assail me on the right hand and on the left, within me and without me; and am never free from one calamity or another.

But it is good for me to be here humbled, that I may be there advanced where I wish speedily to come: it is good that I were in want here, that I might seek heavenly necessities: it is good that the world did discourage me, that I might fly to God that comforteth me: it is good that I am daily killed here, that I might live continually.

Now therefore, O my soul, stand up, fear not, faint not at this world's crosses; but give glory to this great God, praise this high and helping God, seek him "while it is day;" drive not off to pray to this God, notwithstanding any hope thou hast in mortal men, but reject not his gracious means, who, in favour infinite and mercy endless, moveth the hearts of men in this life to do good unto such as he seeth distressed. He can find out and afford infinite means to succour them that are his, and will not leave them forsaken in danger; for he even here giveth me his blessings as pledges of his never-failing love, that, being visited in his mercy with timely comforts here, I may assure me of greater blessings in heaven, where they are prepared beyond all that I can ask or think.

"O Lord God of hosts, who is like unto thee," who hast "established thy kingdom with truth and equity, with mercy and judgment?" "Thou hast a mighty arm, strong is thine hand, and high is thy right hand:" whoso is under thy protection, he is safe; and "he that trusteth in thee, mercy embraceth him on every side."

O, blessed art thou, O my soul, if thou canst "rejoice in the Lord." He is thy Father, he is thy helper: walk therefore "in the light of his countenance," and be patient; wait in hope till these storms be past: and then shalt thou have that quiet rest that he hath prepared in heaven. "Lord, increase my faith." "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, even the Lord Jesus." Col. iii. 1, 2 "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." "Set your affections on things which are above, and not on things which are on the earth."

John Bradford was martyred under Queen Mary in 1555. He had been chaplain and friend to Bishop Ridley, a fellow of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, and Prebendary of St. Paul's. Foxe said of him, "Sharply he opened and reprov'd sin; sweetly he preached Christ crucified; pithily he impugned heresies and errors; earnestly he persuaded to godly life."

Many of his writings came from his prison-cell, including this one reproduced here. While in prison he was allowed to conduct communion services, and his sacramental sermons teach his rejection of transubstantiation and all the errors

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We thank all those who sent the names and addresses of others requiring the Journal, or whose names needed deleting. We are very grateful to all who sent donations. Please note that all address details supplied to the Editor for mailing purposes are treated as confidential. We do not pass on addresses to anyone.

** We apologise to our readers for the word demon which we are obliged to use as it is the name of the internet provider (Demonstration), and has nothing to do with the occult.*

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