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THE RUSSIAN BAPTISTS

1944-64

THE FIRST CONFLICTS which arose between the Socialist government and the Christian Church in USSR after the October revolution did not do much harm to the Evangelical denominations, particularly because they were not considered dangerous to the State, and partly because they had been persecuted under the Tzarist regime. When new waves of terror rolled over Russia during 1929 and the following years, all churches suffered and very little corporate activity could be undertaken by the Russian Baptist Union. Conditions eased considerably in 1939. The political situation and, later, the situation on the war front made it necessary for the government to gain the support of the whole population, including the Christians. The churches on their side showed wholehearted loyalty to the government and contributed to the creation of a strong moral power of resistance. A typical expression of this spirit was the collection of money by the Russian Baptist Union in 1943 to buy an ambulance-aircraft to be put at the disposal of the Russian army.

I

The present constitution of the Russian Baptist Union was established twenty years ago. In 1944 the government organised two commissions to supervise the religious life in USSR, one for the Russian Orthodox Church and another for all religious bodies (Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, etc) not belonging to the Orthodox Church. The Evangelical Christians and the Baptist Union were merged into one Union the same year. Attempts to bring these two branches of Baptists together had been made several times with no more result than a limited co-operation in the fields of relief work and ministerial training during the 1920s. The Pentecostalists joined the Union in 1945; and recently the Mennonites, who have worked together with the Baptists in many places for several years, officially joined them in membership in the 'All Union Council of Evangelical Christians'.

The Evangelical Christians and the Baptists form the largest groups within this wider Union and provide the president and secretary of it. According to the statistics there are 5,600 churches with an approximate membership of 560,000. Small groups of believers are not included in this total, since the minimum number of people who can obtain the prescribed legal registration as a church must be not less than twenty. The pastor of the Baptist Church in Erivan, Armenia, said: 'We have only one Baptist Church in Armenia, but there are unorganised groups in many places'.

We hear sometimes of three to five million Baptists in USSR. In these figures are included the whole Baptist community and not only the baptised believers. The churches are spread all over the vast

territory of USSR. In the three districts where the Baptist revivals began during the nineteenth century, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Leningrad, strong churches are to be found, specially in Ukraine and Leningrad. The Balkan republics of Estonia and Latvia report more than a hundred churches. The Olivet church in Tallin, which dates from the middle ages and was given to the Baptists in 1950*, serves as the centre for 2,000 of them since the seven churches in Tallin united. Similar amalgamations have taken place in other towns and cities. In Central Asia we know of a good many churches of one thousand and more members. The western part of Siberia is another stronghold of Baptist work. The Moscow church has a membership of 5,000. The church building there has room for less than a third of that, and even then 700 to 800 people are content with standing-room through a two-hour service. Morning worship begins at 9 am but to secure a seat worshippers need to be there by 6 am.

The progress of the Baptist churches has been remarkable since the middle of the 1940s, and the three or four different groups among them have demonstrated their willingness to co-operate in one union. Approximately 10,000 to 15,000 believers are baptised each year and twenty per cent of the membership are young people in the early thirties or under. Different opinions about the leadership of the union and the forms of church activity cause tension from time to time, but this does not hinder the work from flourishing. As parents are permitted to teach their own children religion, a new slogan has been devised: 'Every Baptist an evangelist and every Baptist home a Sunday School'. The churches enjoy more freedom today than some years ago, although the government does not hide the fact that the 'USSR is an atheistic country', and puts great resources at the disposal of the Communist Party to fight religion.

In October, 1963, an assembly was held in Moscow at which all districts of the Baptist Union were represented. A like meeting had not been organised since the middle of the 1940s. The delegates adopted a new constitution for the Union according to which the council members were increased from ten to fifteen, and pastors and choirs were given more freedom of movement. On the other hand, however, only a few new church buildings have been erected, and there is no theological institution for the training of Baptist ministers. In some places the Baptists have been offered old Orthodox Church buildings. Such an agreement will be made in Tbilisi where the Baptist church is too small and will be pulled down.

Shortly after the second world war the Baptists of USSR began to renew their fellowship with their Christian brethren in other countries. It is true that no delegates attended the Baptist World Alliance Congress in Copenhagen in 1947, but already in 1946 two Russian pastors visited Stockholm and Uppsala at the invitation of the

*Before 1950 the Olivet Church belonged to a German-speaking community that dwindled to a tiny group in war-time. The magnificent building deteriorated, and a large-scale work of renovation was done by the members of the Baptist churches.

Swedish Baptist Union. Since then a profitable exchange of delegations and visitors has taken place. At the BWA Congresses in 1955 and 1960 Russian Baptists were enthusiastically greeted, and in 1962 the Russian Baptist Union joined the World Council of Churches.

A new relationship has been created between the Baptists and the Russian Orthodox Church, partly due to the Christian Peace movement. It was said shortly after the October revolution, when the Orthodox Church was hit by the first persecution, that 'the evangelical churches will flourish on the ruins of a destroyed Orthodox Church'. No thinking person in the camp of USSR nonconformity is likely to harbour such an illusion in our time. The Orthodox Church on its side surely finds it easier nowadays to tolerate and, to some extent, co-operate with the Baptists than was the case before the revolution.

II

The legal status of the churches is prescribed in the fundamental law, article 124, and reads as follows: 'In order to insure to citizens freedom of conscience the church in the USSR was separated from the state, and the school from the church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda are recognised for all citizens.' The anti-religious propaganda is carried out by the Communist party, while the state, in accordance with Marxist doctrine, is expected to observe neutrality in religious matters.

A new attack on religion was launched in 1959, this time directed mainly against the 'sects'. A few months ago it was considered necessary to intensify this drive. The campaign is being fought on the ideological basis, which means that the old brutal methods are not practised. An official at the Office of Religious Cults admitted that 'we are not so foolish as to believe that religion can be conquered by administrative measures'. Nobody is persecuted today because of his religious beliefs but only on the ground that he has violated the laws of the country. This touches one of the vital factors in the Christian vocation, since it raises the issue of social loyalty versus religious faith.

The anti-religious propaganda makes its greatest impact on the young. It was stated that lack of students forced the Orthodox Church to close down some of its seminaries, since the fight against religion decreased the number of candidates for the priesthood. Christian leaders, on their side, claim that atheistic propaganda and teaching make many people curious about Christianity. I have heard Orthodox priests say that church attendance is more or less the same today as previously, and the Baptists report an increasing number of visitors.

Through the years several laws against religion have been passed, the edict of 1929 being among the most important. It is still valid and its 68 paragraphs regulate the majority of issues that come up in relation to the church and to religious life in USSR. The activity of the churches is mainly limited to services of worship. It might be

anticipated that young people would find themselves too restricted, since they feel the need of a more extensive church programme. To participate in choir singing gives a limited number an outflow for their enthusiasm and energy. But after all it is amazing how well, in an informal way, the young folk keep together, a feature of church life to be observed in all Communist countries.

Changes in religious policy in USSR occur from time to time. This is not necessarily due to the issuing of new laws, but simply to practical adaptation. Situations also differ because of the varying attitudes of different local authorities. Registration of new churches, for instance, is a local matter, but it can be reconsidered by the Central Administration. In fact, only a few of the changes that have occurred since 1944 have been caused by new regulations.

III

It appears, then, that Russian Baptists have many opportunities, but also face grave problems. There are too few church buildings. In Moscow, a city of more than five million, there is no indication that the government will permit the erection of a second chapel. Such a situation could be unbearable; but in fact it is nothing new in the history of religious life in Russia. Baptists have experimented with other means of fellowship besides worship in a church. In good and evil times alike Christian homes and fellowship in small groups are sources of religious power and vitality.

Legal registration of new churches presents another difficulty. Then the authorities admit that there are leaders they do not accept, such as quakers, pacifists and (during the war) Hitler-sympathisers. The lack of Bibles and hymn-books too has often been brought to the attention of the authorities. 'All of you want to ask about Bibles', said one of the officials. But editions that were printed years ago are only a drop in the ocean to the need of today. Hymn-books, written by hand, are no rarity at Russian services. Will the Russian Baptists be allowed to print new editions? Well, all that can be said is that officials have promised 'to take the matter into consideration'.

USSR is one of the few countries on the European continent where Baptists have no theological seminary, and this may create serious problems for the churches in the future. Can soundness of doctrine and church life be maintained without them? There are still many senior ministers who got their training in Moscow and Leningrad, where two Baptist theological institutions operated from 1924-29, or in other countries. Some young men have had the opportunity of studying in England, Canada and Sweden; and, it seems, similar doors will be opened elsewhere in the future. In Estonia, for example, correspondence courses were arranged for a short time. But the needs are far greater than are the present resources to meet them. We must not forget, however, that young men are encouraged to prepare and educate themselves for the ministry, and that the churches have at their command a fine group of qualified lay leaders. The preaching in Russia is expository and is based on the Christian fundamentals.

Let me now indicate why it has been possible, humanly speaking, for the Christian church to survive in the Soviet Union. The complete lack of hypocrisy, the sincerity and consecration of the church members is a tremendous power. The spirit of prayer and Christian joy dominates the services, and the Christians become personal witnesses who are eagerly seeking to win others for Christ. I have already referred to the influence of the Christian family. Orthodox Christianity makes a 'house church' of the members of a family, and Evangelical Christianity nourishes family devotion. A young deacon said: 'We usually get up at 6 am, at 6.30 we have breakfast, and half an hour later we kneel and pray. So did our parents. This we do and our children will follow our example.'

Compared with the anti-religious movement the churches are able to mobilise greater enthusiasm and willingness to make sacrifices. The attacks against the Baptists have often failed because these humble people prove themselves to be loyal Soviet citizens and very industrious workers. As admitted in the magazine *Kommunist*: 'Of course the majority of the rank and file of the sectarians are honest people, devoted to building Communism in our country'.

Will the Communist attitude towards religion change? The economic determinism of Marxism does not necessarily demand metaphysical materialism. Marx did not make himself clear on this particular point, and his atheism was not derived from his socialism. The Christians in USSR, as well as in other Communist countries, make a distinction between the atheistic theology of Communism and the Social revolutionary system of Communism. The theory of Communism as a philosophy of life in which there is no room for religion has, as a matter of fact, been contradicted, at least in practice, by many Communists. Our concern must be to make Christ known and trusted in countries of all political systems and philosophical ideologies. As long as Communism is confronted with a Christian church, which is the expression of love in action, the gospel will have a future in Communist countries.

It will be a great day when the blessings of the Baptists in the Slavic countries, and particularly in Russia, can be freely conveyed to the Western churches.

ERIK RUDÉN.

BAPTISTS IN GERMANY

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

IN GERMANY the first Baptist Church was organised by Johann Gerhard Oncken, who lived from 1800 to 1884. This servant of God was far more than the Father of German Baptists. We may call him a Father of Baptists of continental Europe. While the theological liberalism of the nineteenth century flourished and emptied the churches, many people in Germany were longing for the true Biblical message. Oncken, who was converted while still in business, travelled widely in England and Scotland.

His conversion took place in Great Queen Street Methodist Church in London in the year 1820, when a preacher delivered a sermon on Romans viii, 1. As a missionary of the 'Continental Society' he returned to Germany and preached his first sermon in 1824, before becoming a Baptist. He studied the New Testament intensively and came to genuine Baptist convictions. But whom could he ask to baptise him? While in Hamburg, Oncken made the acquaintance of a sea captain who returned to America and spoke of him to the American Baptist Mission Society of Boston. On the basis of this report Professor Sears from Hamilton College came to Europe in the year 1833; and the upshot was that Oncken and six others were baptised in the River Elbe by this professor, and thus the first Baptist Church in Germany was formally constituted in 1834.

Oncken became a powerful instrument in the hand of God. He preached the Gospel and emphasised the doctrine of the local church according to the Scriptures, and the church grew, though the authorities of Church and State persecuted him and tried to hinder his work. Several times he was imprisoned, yet the new Baptist movement could not be halted. Other churches were formed: 1837 in Berlin, Oldenburg and Stuttgart; 1840 in Middle Germany; 1841 in East Prussia; and later in the Baltic countries, in Denmark and Sweden, and even in Austria and Hungary. Oncken also travelled to Bulgaria, Rumania, and in 1864 to St Petersburg in Russia. He even went into Turkey and reaching the Persian border founded a church in Tiflis, now the capital of Georgia in Soviet Russia. All the Baptists of continental Europe, especially those in Germany, are indebted to this great servant of the Lord.

The first German Baptist Church was named 'Gemeinde gläubig getaufter Christen', which means 'Church of Christians, who were baptised as believers'. The senate of the city of Hamburg, however, gave public acknowledgement according to the laws of the State on one condition only, that this church called itself 'Baptistengemeinde'. By this name, which in German is a foreign word (Baptisten), the city government wanted to expose the sectarian, heretical character of such a 'church undertaking'. People should be warned by this name as by a scarecrow. Yet this name became a name of honour.

Baptists in Germany are a religious minority. The tradition of State churches is rooted deeply in the minds of nearly everybody. We have now about 65 million people in Germany, 17 million of whom live in the Eastern part. 53 per cent are Protestants, 43 per cent are Catholics. For a German to become a Baptist still costs a great deal, the most severe hindrance being the practice of believers' baptism by immersion. Such a price can only be paid by those with true spiritual conviction through the Word of God. In all Germany there are now some 550 churches with 1,800 places of assembly and around 100,000 members. In the last few years there have been approximately 2,500 converts baptised annually.

II. ORGANISATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

WITH BAPTISTS in all the world we believe in the authority of the local church and its independence of any clerical system of church government. Since 1849 the Baptist churches in Germany have been united in a Union to strengthen each other in their missionary efforts and their public witness. Under the Hitler government two church groups, one the product of Darbist teaching, the other with a Pentecostalist emphasis, requested union with us, being without State sanction to function as churches on their own. In order to have a common name which would be suitable to all three groups, the following was decided upon: 'Bund Evangelisch - Freikirchlicher Gemeinden'. This means 'Union of Evangelical Free-Churches'. Personally I think that such a name was not a happy solution; it can only be understood in the light of the tense political situation obtaining at the time, with its strong nationalistic tendencies. It is no secret that a great number of those churches which during critical years did unite with us, left the Union when the last war was over and the new democratic government granted full religious freedom to everybody. And when Germans were allowed again to have fellowship with the peoples of other countries after the war, somehow this new name made many of us within the BWA feel ashamed. Yet be assured, we are still Baptists in Germany and have full right to call the local churches 'Baptisten-gemeinde in Bund Evangelisch - Freikirchlicher Gemeinden'.

The German Baptist Union numbers ten Associations, mostly in accordance with the political States of Germany: three in East Germany (Berlin with Brandenburg and Mecklenburg, Sachsen, Thüringen), seven in West Germany (Hessen/Siegerland, Niedersachsen, North Germany, North-West Germany, Rhineland, South Germany, Westfalen). The Baptist headquarters, the Bundeshaus, is located at Bad Homburg. Our Executive Secretary-Treasurer, Brother Reichardt, and our Executive Secretary, Dr Rudolf Thaut, have their offices there. Within the responsibility of our Baptist Union the following are the main agencies and institutions:

1. The Publishing House with various weekly and monthly publications as well as a great assortment of good books, located at Kassel. Oncken's method of spreading the gospel by tracts is still followed.

2. Our Theological Seminary at Hamburg which has around eighty students who study for eight or ten semesters before entering the ministry as pastors or missionaries or field workers with special responsibilities. Some of these students participate also in the full theological study of the State universities, others have the opportunity of a further year's study at Rüschnikon. We are happy to report that in the last few years more young men have felt called to the ministry than could be used. Since 13th August, 1961, when the Soviet-occupied zone imposed restrictions on travelling from East to West, we have had to found another seminary for the Baptist churches behind the Iron Curtain. That seminary, located at Bukow, has now some twenty students. An exchange of preachers between East and

West Germany is impossible. But we try to keep contact as well as we can, especially through our Baptist Ministers' Fellowship.

3. At Hamburg, on the same campus as the Theological Seminary, there is a Bible School and a youth Seminary, especially for those workers within the field of religious education or evangelistic work among young people.

4. German Baptists recognised their vital responsibility in the common work of the Foreign Mission Board of European Baptists. Our old mission field, the Cameroons (former German colonies) in which German Baptist missionaries laboured decades ago was taken over by the French who permitted our workers to re-enter. The country is now independent.

5. Two orphanage homes are also our responsibility, one being located at Bensheim with around forty children, ranging in age from three to fourteen.

6. There are also three Deaconess-Houses. One of them, the Bethel-House, has more than four-hundred deaconesses in its service, who help local churches, or work as nurses in hospitals, or serve on foreign mission fields.

7. And, finally, there are at least four social homes, ministering to young workmen. They are located particularly in the industrial sections of Germany.

In addition to these seven major activities of our Baptist Union mention must be made of the constant missionary work among children, young people and students, and the special missionary programmes of our Baptist women. All our activities have an emphatic missionary character and exist to proclaim the 'good tidings'.

III. SPIRITUAL SITUATION

THOUGH WE LIVE in a country which has brought forth various streams of theology and philosophy, German Baptists have kept close to the Bible as the abiding authority. This dependence on the Word of God has protected us from any split within our Baptist Union. The fact of our having but one theological seminary has strengthened the unity of our witness. Within our 550 churches we try our best to realise the New Testament pattern of true church life. In the matter of membership the question stressed is 'Do you believe with all your heart'? We hesitate to baptise too quickly. We try to make sure of the genuineness of conversion. Our church discipline is practised along New Testament lines according to Matthew xviii and 1 Corinthians v, 13. If a member of the church stays away from the church, and, in spite of brotherly exhortation, fails to return and enter faithfully into its life, we take off such names from the church roll. Those who do not live in communion with the church hardly live in true fellowship with the Lord, and therefore have no right to be called members of the church.

In our missionary efforts we realise the weight of tradition. Almost all Germans call themselves Christians. They pay their church taxes,

and by this seem to have bought the right to have a church wedding, a burial by the minister, the baptism of their babies, etc. Only three to seven per cent of State Church members really seek the opportunity of hearing the true, saving Word of God: still less believe it. We are aware that our country is full of modern heathen, that it is indeed a mission field. Nobody should be deceived by the many church buildings, by the great theologians or by its grand evangelical history. The heads of our German people are full of religious and philosophical ideas, but their hearts and lives are mostly Christ-less!

In our country, where the great break between Catholic and Protestant had its beginnings, the ecumenical movement is making headway towards the healing of this breach. But German Baptists believe there is a tremendous spiritual danger in such efforts, which to them are signs of spiritual weakness in the Protestant churches. Though we want to live in Christian fellowship with those who, born again by the Spirit, are in Christ regardless of their church affiliation, we hesitate to enter the World Council of Churches. We fear that German Baptists would lose their unity if an attempt were made to bring them in.

Our years of prosperity and comfort have not been fruitful years for Church life. How different from the years that followed the first world war! The spiritual hunger has diminished. The statistics of church life show diminished numbers. Yet we are not discouraged. We still emphasise the old programme of Oncken: Every Baptist a Missionary! We trust our Lord. He will keep us in the power of His Word and Spirit, and will use as faithful servants those that are His, who live to do Him service, looking for the day of His glorious appearing.

THEOPHIL REHSE.

OPPORTUNITIES AT RÜSCHLIKON

THE BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, founded in a pleasant suburb of Zurich, Switzerland, fifteen years ago, has come to be a permanent part of the European Baptist picture. One can hardly imagine what it would be like without it. Although the Seminary provides opportunity for standard theological education primarily to students on the Continent, it has much to offer to students from other areas as well. Eight students from Africa, three from Asia, one from New Zealand, and three from the United States are in the current student body. Great Britain has also been represented in other years.

Theological students have the best opportunity in postgraduate courses. A course of one to two years leads to a ThM degree. A BD degree including Greek, Hebrew, and Latin is pre-requisite, and English is the language of instruction. A graduate from one of the British colleges and universities would have an opportunity to gain a first-hand acquaintance with scholarship and Baptist life on the Continent as well as a broader perspective of such study and life around the world.

Students who are thoroughly prepared in German may choose to spend two to three years working toward a Doctor of Theology degree at the University of Zurich. This course presupposes that one follows lectures both at the Seminary and in the University Faculty, but the academic requirements are completely determined by the University.

Other students who lack either the academic requirements for one of the above degrees or the wish to be so rigidly bound to academic standards may apply for work toward an Advanced Diploma. This presupposes that one has completed a regular theological course somewhere and wishes to supplement this with additional work in one or more areas. It offers the opportunity of one year of study in the Seminary and is open to those who can use the English language. One English pastor is planning to come to Rüschtikon next year for a semester on a leave granted by his church after a number of years of service. Such continuation of theological study should prove very beneficial for both the pastor and the church.

Another possibility allows students to spend one year at Rüschtikon during their regular theological course. American students have found this particularly useful, although it sometimes means that one must lengthen the total time taken for the completion of a prescribed course. In all of this the primary work at Rüschtikon has not been mentioned: that of providing a full training for a BD degree. This requires a pre-requisite university entrance certificate and a full four years of study. It has usually been thought wiser for British students to do their basic course in Great Britain. For this reason the postgraduate courses have been given most prominent attention. However, the basic BD course offered at Rüschtikon should not be overlooked.

Opportunities in a completely different form are beginning to be offered at Rüschtikon. These particularly will interest persons training for special types of service. It should be noted that single women are also accepted, and there are living quarters in the Seminary for them. There are a limited number of small apartments for couples with not more than two children. Lectures and supervised research are offered in such specialised areas as Missions, Children's and Youth Work, and Christian Journalism. The presence on the campus of the officers for the European Baptist Press Service offers particular opportunities for the practice of journalism. The Recording Studio, sponsored by the European Baptist Federation for the preparation of radio programmes, offers unique possibilities for developing work shops and a training centre for radio work as well. Plans are under way for the beginning of a programme of church music. Persons interested in any of these areas should be sure that courses are being offered in the semester that they expect to attend before making their plans definite.

A very different kind of service is offered during the long summer vacation. Conferences are planned which draw together an international group of persons interested in particular issues. In 1964 these conferences included a Youth Leaders' Conference, and a conference

on Pastoral Counselling among others of even more specialised concern. In planning these the Seminary works very closely with the European Baptist Federation and its various commissions.

Rüschlikon has become a meeting place for Baptists. People with very different backgrounds, different languages, different cultures who have only one thing in common – their devotion to Christ and their common service of Him in Baptist churches – meet here to discuss their common concerns.

Rüschlikon has also become a concentrated centre for Baptist research study. Its carefully chosen 24,000-volume theological library and its small but specialised faculty for instruction in theological subjects form a focal point for Baptist thought, work, and life.

The number of those who have shared this fellowship and study-experience include men who now serve in almost every country of Western Europe, while others of their comrades serve in countries as far away as New Zealand and South Africa.

Opportunities offered at Rüschlikon are such as will allow a deepening of intellectual grasp and the broadening of sympathy and experience through contact with the broader range of scholarship from many countries as well as fellowship with students from even more countries. These are offered to theological students and to pastors at very modest costs in the hope that through them the work of Christ in our churches and through our churches for the world may become more relevant and strong.

JOHN D. W. WATTS.

THE CHRISTIAN SUNDAY

III. IN ENGLAND TODAY

WE OUGHT TO ASSESS for ourselves the value of the Sunday we have inherited and to fashion it for our generation according to the mind of Christ. To do this we must be aware of its origin and its history. That preparatory task having been attempted in previous articles, we must now think out how Sunday ought to be used today.

Much depends on how we relate the Christian Sunday to the Jewish Sabbath. Few would run to one extreme or the other. The strictest Sabbatarians hesitate over some Sabbatical regulations, and the most radical Christians admit some reference to the Sabbath. It is really an instance of the general relation between the two Testaments. Most of us would say that the Old immensely enriches our understanding of the New. Yet we are troubled by sects which retain elements from the Old that we think are superseded by the New. With regard to Sunday, our tradition may incline us to give rather too much than too little weight to the Sabbath.

Gordon Glover has reminded us that early Christians had to work on Sunday, and had no scruples about the fourth commandment. They treated Sunday as the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection and an expectation of the Second Advent. They used it for worship as much as they could, and made it dominate the rest of the week with

its message and spirit. It was later that the Jewish Sabbath exerted an increasing influence which sprang from popular opinion rather than from the theologians.

This impulse among Christians to make the Sunday approximate to the Sabbath was manifest also in the Protestant Reformation. William Bound's *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath* went back to the Sabbath, but it gave no more than definiteness and authority to the arguments already used for stricter observance; and many who disapproved in theory yielded in practice because of common Christian feeling.

Today, judging from such figures as are available, the trend among church-goers is in the opposite direction. The 'once-ers' outnumber the 'twice-ers', and many worship fortnightly or monthly rather than weekly. Commonly-felt restrictions on the Sunday are being relaxed rather than tightened. Outside the churches people range from those who vaguely respect Sunday as a religious institution to those who want it for their own purposes. The pressure today prompts us to retreat to an entrenched Sabbatical position which we imagine could be more easily held than one with fewer Sabbatical supports; but we cannot neglect our Lord's concern to be rid of niggling restrictions and to make the day more human. Moreover, we must recall that the revival of Sunday in the past has been due much less to legislation than to religious revival and the educational evangelism of Sunday Schools and other movements.

Our re-assessment must start with Sunday as the Day of Resurrection. It is the day for worshipping the Risen Christ, for returning to His victory and proclaiming His mighty evangel, and for pressing on to know and do His will. It is the day for the whole Christian community to come together before God to hear His liberating word and to be commissioned for His present task. It is the great day for the witness of the church to God in Christ.

The obligations of all Christians to worship God in the fellowship needs to be pressed home upon those who reckon it a privilege only for favourable moments. Where the choice has to be made between morning and evening, the morning is to be preferred for sanctifying the whole day. To this end the cult of the Sunday dinner needs to be challenged. In order to make men see the importance of Sunday worship for the whole week, there must be explicit reference backwards and forwards to the common life. Whatever happens in church or out of it, the day is misspent if no contact is made with the living God through the Risen Saviour.

In legislation the right of every man to worship in church on Sunday must be stubbornly claimed, whilst the church must be ready to adapt its times of worship to suit those who must work part of the day. Working-class solidarity must not be allowed to crush the individual Christian in this matter, just because the majority prefer to have Saturday afternoons free for sport and to work on Sunday's for double pay. Similarly the need to keep expensive plant working

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Rüschlikon has also become a concentrated centre for Baptist research study. Its carefully chosen 24,000-volume theological library and its small but specialised faculty for instruction in theological subjects form a focal point for Baptist thought, work, and life.

The number of those who have shared this fellowship and study-experience include men who now serve in almost every country of Western Europe, while others of their comrades serve in countries as far away as New Zealand and South Africa.

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JOHN D. W. WATTS.

THE CHRISTIAN SUNDAY

III. IN ENGLAND TODAY

WE OUGHT TO ASSESS for ourselves the value of the Sunday we have inherited and to fashion it for our generation according to the mind of Christ. To do this we must be aware of its origin and its history. That preparatory task having been attempted in previous articles, we must now think out how Sunday ought to be used today.

Much depends on how we relate the Christian Sunday to the Jewish Sabbath. Few would run to one extreme or the other. The strictest Sabbatarians hesitate over some Sabbatical regulations, and the most radical Christians admit some reference to the Sabbath. It is really an instance of the general relation between the two Testaments. Most of us would say that the Old immensely enriches our understanding of the New. Yet we are troubled by sects which retain elements from the Old that we think are superseded by the New. With regard to Sunday, our tradition may incline us to give rather too much than too little weight to the Sabbath.

Gordon Glover has reminded us that early Christians had to work on Sunday, and had no scruples about the fourth commandment. They treated Sunday as the celebration of the Lord's Resurrection and an expectation of the Second Advent. They used it for worship as much as they could, and made it dominate the rest of the week with

its message and spirit. It was later that the Jewish Sabbath exerted an increasing influence which sprang from popular opinion rather than from the theologians.

This impulse among Christians to make the Sunday approximate to the Sabbath was manifest also in the Protestant Reformation. William Bound's *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath* went back to the Sabbath, but it gave no more than definiteness and authority to the arguments already used for stricter observance; and many who disapproved in theory yielded in practice because of common Christian feeling.

Today, judging from such figures as are available, the trend among church-goers is in the opposite direction. The 'once-ers' outnumber the 'twice-ers', and many worship fortnightly or monthly rather than weekly. Commonly-felt restrictions on the Sunday are being relaxed rather than tightened. Outside the churches people range from those who vaguely respect Sunday as a religious institution to those who want it for their own purposes. The pressure today prompts us to retreat to an entrenched Sabbatical position which we imagine could be more easily held than one with fewer Sabbatical supports; but we cannot neglect our Lord's concern to be rid of niggling restrictions and to make the day more human. Moreover, we must recall that the revival of Sunday in the past has been due much less to legislation than to religious revival and the educational evangelism of Sunday Schools and other movements.

Our re-assessment must start with Sunday as the Day of Resurrection. It is the day for worshipping the Risen Christ, for returning to His victory and proclaiming His mighty evangel, and for pressing on to know and do His will. It is the day for the whole Christian community to come together before God to hear His liberating word and to be commissioned for His present task. It is the great day for the witness of the church to God in Christ.

The obligations of all Christians to worship God in the fellowship needs to be pressed home upon those who reckon it a privilege only for favourable moments. Where the choice has to be made between morning and evening, the morning is to be preferred for sanctifying the whole day. To this end the cult of the Sunday dinner needs to be challenged. In order to make men see the importance of Sunday worship for the whole week, there must be explicit reference backwards and forwards to the common life. Whatever happens in church or out of it, the day is misspent if no contact is made with the living God through the Risen Saviour.

In legislation the right of every man to worship in church on Sunday must be stubbornly claimed, whilst the church must be ready to adapt its times of worship to suit those who must work part of the day. Working-class solidarity must not be allowed to crush the individual Christian in this matter, just because the majority prefer to have Saturday afternoons free for sport and to work on Sundays for double pay. Similarly the need to keep expensive plant working

round the clock and the week must be watched, lest through the working of the shift system Sunday be treated the same as any other day of the week. There is no substitute for Sunday and its worship.

So far we may agree. Differences begin to arise when we ask what people can do for the rest of Sunday. Some would avoid the question by expecting people to be in church virtually the whole day, as our fathers were, but this is a doubtful ideal. Worship can be diluted by sheer prolixity, in which hymns and choruses sink to the level of popular songs and sermons become garrulous.

Some activities outside the church can be recommended without hesitation. Perhaps Sunday is not sufficiently used for visiting the sick and infirm, for books which challenge the mind and spirit, and for the strengthening of family life. All these tend to be crowded out of our hurried routines. Sunday ought certainly to be the day in which the family stays together in church, at home, and elsewhere. These are commonplaces.

But is anything else permissible on Sunday? At this point the Biblical idea of rest is often introduced. For most people Sunday is more for rest than for worship. But what is rest? The word can be used so variously as to be meaningless. A change is as good as a rest. The farm worker rests from the comparative quiet of the farm by hurtling down the road on a stentorian motor-cycle, just as the industrial worker finds rest in a wood mysteriously alive. Activity is a rest from monotony.

The fact is that in the Bible rest is a theological concept. It is something God eternally possesses, which He intended for man at creation, which man through rebellion lost; something which God makes available in Jesus Christ (Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest), and is to be perfectly received at the last day. Taken like this, rest is closely related to worship, which brings the peace of God.

Of course, legislation in Israel made certain that this included physical rest, and this was right, so long as it was not distorted by absurd literalism. Believing in the Incarnation, we expect everything to work on the level of body and mind, as well as of spirit. Why should not the whole man enter into the thrill of Sunday? It should be the day when we joyfully realise ourselves as the sons of God, delight in the world He has created, and explore the riches of human fellowship. Nothing should be withdrawn from its recreative ministry.

Our Lord said: 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath'; of which an old Sabbatarian in Skye said to Compton Mackenzie that 'no doubt He was after saying a lot of things for which He was sorry when He returned to His Heavenly Father'! Surely it meant that the Sabbath should not be a strait-jacket, or crush a man under its load (if it does, he will curse and not bless). It must be for man's true development, and nothing which sincerely ministers to that end can be debarred from it.

We are rightly opposed to commercialised sport on Sunday, to restless travel and increasing business, to anything denying God or

man. 'Let us behave with decency as befits the day: no revelling or drunkenness, no debauchery or vice, no quarrels or jealousies!' But we do not make our most Christlike contribution by being dour and inhuman about our principles. We do not convey the wholeness and bouyancy of our faith by restrictions which caricature it as something abstractly 'spiritual'. Are we not too much like the Pharisees when we solemnly question whether it is allowable to swim on Sundays as it is to walk, or to pull up weeds as it is to pluck flowers? Are we not contravening our Lord's teaching by being more intent on saving ourselves (the church) than on being human and understanding?

To think like this is not to surrender to our times, but rather to clear the way for a Sunday evangelical in purpose, deeply human as well as divine, presenting Christ as the Friend of publicans and sinners. He sat down with them where they were.

The modern way of life has made desperate the need for the truly Christian Sunday. Man is broken and unhealthy, awaiting the re-creation of the whole man. Random glances tell us this. For instance, stress diseases are on the increase, despite shorter working hours and better amenities. This suggests that our leisure is not effective, probably because it is too strained, too superficial, too commonplace. It is not reaching down to the roots of men's needs. Similarly our industrial society is producing the blatant extravert, the personality cult, the mock seriousness of phoney art, sick literature, and dis-integrating philosophy. Langmead Casserley wrote of the man with the 'industrialised consciousness': 'That he is really a person caught up in a great drama of existence and salvation in which he matters infinitely and is utterly irreplaceable is a fact which impinges on his consciousness rarely, if ever.' Our higher standard of living is not feeding the whole man.

We must see the vision of Sunday as the most potent remedy for modern man, quite apart from its worth as sheer adoration. It is God's own gift, taking man out of himself into the far horizons of worship, leading him regularly into satisfying rest, and ministering in its holiness to his wholeness.

What ought to engage us is the quality of Sunday. At the moment it is generally a relaxed edition of the other days, without vision, zest, or purpose. We recognise this when we see a crowd assembled on a beach to read the Sunday gutter press which flings the filth of the week back into their faces. Cannot Christians get a firmer grip on the whole day, and by experiments in the churches as well as by personal example, make the day more healthy and enjoyable? Our fathers despite their limited schooling, were often well educated, because on Sundays they grasped real issues and took into their systems the mind and spirit of great men. If we cannot expect the average man to read the classics or to listen to the third programme, at least we can do our best to open windows and give him sincere insights. We can be positive instead of negative.

For careful answers to the usual questions about Sunday, there are available reports by the British Council of Churches and by the Church of Scotland. Matters of legislation needs sensitive attention so that a reasonable framework for the Christian use of Sunday should be provided. But the questions raised in this article need sustained discussion and purposeful prayer. The danger is that conservative feelings should take the place of informed conscience. We need to fasten our eyes on the Lord of the Sunday, to receive His help in fashioning it according to His image, so that it breathes with His divine life, glows with His humanity, and prepares men as He did for the eternal Sabbath.

J. CLIFFORD ASKEW.

FAMILY CHURCH AN APPRECIATION AND ASSESSMENT

FAMILY CHURCH – good and bad? An assessment like this is complicated by the existence of several different types of Family Church. What is said here will probably be inapplicable to some forms, but that is the risk run by any general consideration of this kind.

It is disturbing to hear some talk about Family Church in terms which would suggest that it is only 'another method' or even 'a gimmick'. Perhaps some expressions of it could be so described, but the basic concept ought to be understood as an expression of certain beliefs about the church rather than as another organisational experiment. In the Autumn Conference, 1962, Michael Walker defined Family Church as an 'attempt to realise more adequately in the on-going life and worship of the church the true nature and function of the church itself'. This establishes for us the proper ground upon which an assessment should be made and, at the same time, places the practical problems into a secondary category.

Any serious attempt to think ecclesiologically about church life and practice is to be warmly applauded, for our beliefs have to be reflected in practice. It is our conviction that Family Church succeeds in expressing a more adequate idea of the church than that implicit in the 'normal' pattern. The question therefore that has to be asked is whether the church-concept behind Family Church is sufficiently full, and so whether or not the practical expression should be developed further.

Some of the criticism that Family Church usually receives derives from a view which divides the world clearly into two: church and non-church, or believers and unbelievers. In contrast to this Family Church implies a three-fold structure: the church proper, those who are without Christian faith or definite church connection, an intermediate group between the two. The intermediate group we might designate by the term 'catechumenate'. It is made up of those who, by reason of some definite relationship to the church as a whole or to church members in particular, become the church's special concern. The church claims these especially for her Lord and He specifically

places them under her care and responsibility. The Family Church recognises this in the way that children are brought in to worship with the fellowship and 'lonely' children are linked to caring members. In this practice the church proper consists of church members, and the 'catechumenate' is made up only of children. But can the 'catechumenate' be confined to children? Surely not! It is not suggested that those who support Family Church imagine this to be the case, but from the practical expressions of Family Church this would often be the inference.

This may be seen in another way by considering some of the functions of the church. Most of us would agree that the church exists for worship, fellowship and mission. These may further be described in terms of care (*agape*), service (*diakonia*), witness (*marturia*), teaching (*didache*), mediation (*hierateia*), and proclamation (*kerugma*). Family Church does seek to express most of these, but in some churches the emphasis is more on the children. The idea of this link to the church was conceived for their sake; and the teaching of them is the more efficiently conducted thereby. It may be argued that adults receive other attention and on other occasions; but this would be a fragmentation of the very thing Family Church seeks to hold together. Family Church needs to be comprehensive in every respect if the aim is to encourage the whole family to come together and to stimulate family life.

When it comes to concentrating a like care upon the adults, then problems must be admitted. No one would suggest that a system can create care. Also many of us would feel that our efforts to serve probably tend to be over-organised and what we need is not more systems but more spontaneity and sensitivity, and to work to real needs. But as Family Church attempts to make the whole church aware of its responsibilities to children and to provide a milieu in which to exercise these, so we need to find some means of doing the same in connection with adults, those whom Family Church encourages to come with their children.

Our Christian teaching and training is one obvious sphere where some practical action should be possible. The pleas for teaching voiced in *The Pattern of the Church* show the current unsatisfactory condition. And this is reinforced by cries deploring midweek service attendances and the limited opportunities for concentrated instruction in our busy church week. Because of the continuing midweek congestion and the problems of fatigue experienced by commuters, the Sunday services would appear to provide the best occasion for teaching. The midweek meeting, of course, still has its place. But the problems are both when and how to teach. In connection with how to teach some recognise, without in any way denying the importance and value of preaching, that sermons are not the most effective method. Sermons can give only limited scope for visual aids and similar teaching techniques, which are as valuable often for adults as they are for children. Sermons do not allow for 'class-participation';

often the 'class' size and grouping would horrify educational experts, and there is further a certain psychological barrier to learning from sermons, as they often deal with very personal matters at sensitive points.

Now Family Church provides for family worship and a mixed quality of family teaching better for children than for adults. The children are taught with some care, attention being given to their age and to their stage of development, and class sizes and class-participation are matters of foremost importance. But the catechumenate also includes those of adult age, so it is not desirable that teaching efforts and care similar to those used for the children should be applied to the adult catechumenate?

Another point, regrettably little space can be given to it, is the matter of worship and Family Church. Questions need to be asked about whether it is possible for catechumens to worship or, perhaps better, about the extent that they can participate in our worship. To some of us it is a defect in Family Church practice that the children are not present in as complete a service of worship as possible. This could still be brief and contain the important elements, including a characteristic word of proclamation, which should be short and incisive. It is not perhaps so important that they understand all this proclamation as it is that they should gain some understanding that the faith is response to a call, an experience of confrontation by the word of the Gospel.

The main contention of this article could be expressed in this way. The confrontation of the Gospel makes considerable demands upon its hearers. They are called to rethink life extensively and to commit their whole existence to God. None of us would understand this as a step to be undertaken casually. And when such radical issues are put before a person we expect him to consider them carefully. It is also of great importance that those presenting these issues to an individual should have and convey genuine, full personal concern for that individual. This increases his confidence that the things he is being asked to do are really for the best. So it is obviously necessary that there should be as much special care, understanding, desire to encourage, and equipment of each 'contact' as possible. The efforts Family Church makes in this respect are very valuable indeed. There, attention is not diffuse or haphazard but concentrated, recognising that the church best can influence that limited community which God has given into its care. The point being urged here is that this system should be expanded to cover all stages and all ages.

This discussion has turned on the practice of principles. Something also has to be said about practical application. A programme which allows for the realisation of the concepts described above has been followed at the Chaplin Road Church, Dagenham, for nearly two years now.

Sunday morning from 11 o'clock is the 'Family Hour', the first twenty-five minutes being given over to worship. This is not a

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King Henry IV - Part I.

October, when you will be reading this letter, means for most of us the end of the holiday period. It will be many months before we can speak of '... well apparell'd April, on the heel of limping winter treads' and look forward to another holiday season.

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Yet, as I look through our records there are far too many diaconates which do not maintain an *annual* consideration of their insurance plan. New buildings spring up and once the initial insurances have been arranged some deacons leave revision for several years. Sums insured remain static but building costs move upwards away from even the figures of last year.

Remember that too infrequent a revision can be a revision too late.

Some deacons may find insurance revision tedious (we don't) but a well revised plan of insurance is a great stand-by when a claim comes - and claims do come.

If you (personal plans need revising) or your deacons need help, please get in touch with me.

Yours sincerely,

C. J. L. COLVIN,
General Manager.

children's service though children are present throughout. It aims at being an adequate and complete act of worship, approaching God in praise and prayer, hearing His word read and expounded, responding to Him in offering, thanksgiving and intercession. To accomplish this in the given time involves a brevity in each part which calls for careful preparation, but gives rise to a healthy economy of words.

After this the assembled company divides into groups according to age for educational purposes. Ideally each group would be fairly small, containing no more than eight or ten people. This is in fact the case in the children's groups, but shortage of leaders in our small 'working class' church means we have to have one larger adult group led by the minister. The aim is to provide an informal atmosphere in which members of the group may share together in a relevant study of the Bible. As no one seems to be interested in providing English material for such an all-age educational programme we have adopted the American Southern Baptist Convention materials, though we would prefer something more characteristic of our English Baptist life. The mid-week meeting, incidentally, is then used to gain further understanding in social and denominational issues, for training in churchmanship, for encouraging missionary interest, etc. For this to be 'family' in more than name it is necessary that the leaders of each group be more than merely teachers, but also pastors. Their adequate preparation becomes vital.

An 'infant dedication' is seen as the welcoming of the child into this worshipping and learning family circle, and this takes place during the period of worship.

There are no astonishing statistics to report from our experience so far. It is our conviction that when Family Church is thus developed to include all-age education it provides the means of producing a fuller realisation of the meaning of 'Family Church', both in understanding and in practice, and will lead in time to a richer church life and more effective outreach.

Some will claim that we have been speaking about 'All-Age Sunday School'. This may be so, but for our part we would make certain comments on this. (i) The emphasis in All-Age Sunday School seems to be placed predominantly on teaching. To us Family Church has a healthier balance in a wider and more significant concern. (ii) We strongly object to the attitude which sees All-Age Sunday School as an expedient, a 'cure-all' technique with statistical emphasis; an attitude which appears to be all too prevalent. Nor are we happy to hear it spoken of as an alternative competing with Family Church. What we are anxious to achieve, and we hope we have shown that 'Family Church' requires it, is something akin to this all-age group care on ecclesiological grounds. (iii) Most important of all, our concern is not with a system except in so far as the system expresses in practice convictions concerning the nature and function of the church.

W. H. CAMPBELL.

L. B. KEEBLE.

DIG THIS!

THERE IS GOOD Biblical authority for pondering life in terms of digging. We are told by the prophet we should ever remember the pit from which we were digged. We think of this not only in terms of personal and national history. We think of it in terms of God's grace. He came in Christ to dig us out of the pit of our sin. He came to give new life to our souls, even if at times we feel the clay of the pit still clings to us. The wise man who built his house on the rock in Jesus' parable was the man who digged deep. We have to dig deep in order to get to the rock of eternal truth. In another of the parables our Lord refers to a fig tree which had not been producing fruit. The owner ordered its removal, but his servant asked that it be given a further chance, and in the meantime he would dig around it and fertilise it. Here, perhaps, is an indication of a parson's task when he finds individuals in his church who are not living fruitful lives. This softening up process can be very difficult, but this is an aspect of Christian service which we may call 'spiritual digging'. Incidentally, the parable doesn't say that the digging and manuring saved the fig-tree. If the effort didn't succeed at least it was honourable failure.

I want to apply this idea of digging in two ways. The first of these is in relation to our own spiritual lives and the second is in connection with the God-given task we have to undertake in the church and district where we work.

It will be agreed, I think, that, as ministers, our primary task is to cultivate our own souls, to keep nourishing our spiritual life. There is a wholesome kind of piety which we should strive to possess. Piety is a word which has come into disrepute in some circles and, perhaps, justifiably when it stands for something sickly and sentimental which appears to be a kind of escapism from the harsh realities of life on the earth. But piety which means a vigorous spiritual life, in which the sense of God's presence is real, and which presents an attractive kind of godliness in an ungodly age, is a *sine qua non* for the minister of Christ.

In our communion we do not believe that because a man has been ordained to the ministry he can successfully minister the sacraments and proclaim the Word of God irrespective of the kind of man he is. The moral character and spiritual life of the minister are of vital importance. Those who bear the vessels of the Lord must be clean and sincere. Let our interests range where they will, under God, (for we all have our particular aptitudes and activities) and let us be as academic as we can, but let us at the same time be warmhearted and devout. Let us be ecumenically minded, but bring to our inter-church relationships a spiritual vitality without which we shall never have effective Christian unity. We may have special social interests (and God save us from being blind to the needs of society) but we cannot really preach the social gospel unless our souls are alive to God. We may have special liturgical concerns, but we all know that worship, to

be effective, must be led by a man who has been cultivating his sense of God in the quietness and seclusion of his study.

If it is in God we live, move and have our being in the physical sense, it is also true that it is in Him we live spiritually. God communicates Himself to us through His word, and for our soul's sake we have to listen. Many of us have found inspiration in other books of spiritual depth and quality, but the Biblical Word of God must be our meat and drink if we really want to nourish our own souls and find living truth to communicate to others. It is a wholesome exercise to preach our sermons to ourselves before preaching them to others.

The Bishop of Woolwich said some challenging things about prayer in *Honest to God*. Like other things he wrote, it is a bit lopsided. The traditionalists have surely something to teach us. But I'm sure most of us would agree that prayer can become most vital when we are talking to God about some real and challenging situation. I believe it is true that, differing temperamentally as we do, some may find it easier to spend time in quiet contemplation than others, but I imagine it might be a shock to some of us if we took the trouble to calculate just how little time in a week or a month we spent in prayer. The life of God comes to us, wasted and weak as we so often feel, when we really pray.

I want to add a brief word here in connection with what we have come to know as Ministers' Retreats. Personally, I have always found them spiritually beneficial. The papers I have heard may have varied considerably in quality, but the sense of fellowship and worship has always been stimulating. In most of our Associations we get away for a couple of days per annum. I would plead for retreats which last four to five days. The extra cost would be well worth it, and if our diaries would seem to make this difficult I suggest it would be time well spent away from the weekly routine. For God communicates Himself through fellowship and prayer.

Now, let me come to my second point. God, we believe, has called us to work for Him and His Kingdom in a particular church or sphere, and our plain duty is to 'dig this' to the best of our ability. We are well aware that some churches are more difficult than others, that some districts are less spiritually productive than others. But if we are convinced we are in the place where God wishes us to be, then we must dig away. We must not be cast down if other churches appear to be progressing more than ours. By God's help we must do our utmost where we are until God sends us somewhere else. We may have an awkward diaconate, or some difficult members, or we may be in a new church on a housing estate where response from the householders is negligible; nevertheless, God has in effect said to us, 'Dig this'.

Two of the prophets, Jeremiah and Hosea, counsel us to break up the fallow ground. In their time there was a lot of digging to be done. Here is the hard, slogging work demanded of God's servants in our own day. If the seed of God's word is to be sown effectively, this fallow ground must be broken up. Many of our predecessors lived

and worked in times which were more favourable than ours for the gathering in of spiritual harvests. Ours is obviously an age of digging and sowing (though, thank God, some reaping); but if we do our job conscientiously others who follow us in the ministerial succession will reap greater harvests.

Apart from the problems affecting particular churches and particular districts, there is the spiritual climate of our time. Some of our predecessors preached and worked in more propitious times and obtained much greater response. This is our time, this atomic and space age, and we dare not opt out. Christopher Driver in his book about the future of the Free Churches paints a pretty grim picture of the Free Churches in our land. Their image is quite unattractive. From the human point of view we would appear to 'have had it'. And this will be so unless we are ready to dig, and keep on digging.

It was my privilege last year to pay a visit to the Holy Land. I was deeply impressed by the Israelis' efforts to make their land agriculturally productive. If ever there was stony ground it is in this land of Israel. Apart from the fair-sized fields, we saw many little plots of ground which had been laboriously cleared of stones and cultivated. Our Israeli guide assured us that the soil was rich and that a great variety of crops could be produced, provided that the ground was cleared, cultivated and irrigated. The climate, of course, is favourable, with long months of warmth and sunshine. Our prayer must be that God will change the moral and spiritual climate of our age; but at the same time we must give ourselves to the tasks of clearing, digging and irrigating the ground. The soil of human life is capable of producing wonderful harvests provided the seed of eternal truth is given its opportunity to take root and germinate and grow. These Israelis are working most zealously in their individual smallholdings and farms, and in the Kibbutzim, for the sake of their national economy. We must work with our eyes on the Kingdom of God.

Jesus said, 'No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom'. In the terms of the title of this paper I may be permitted to alter the word 'plough' to the word 'spade'. Can we see ourselves as diggers for God in the soil of our own lives and in the ground, often so hard and stony and weedy, of our church and the area where we have been called to serve?

J. MCGREGOR TOSH.

THEY TALK OF PRAYER

WHEN IN MY 'teens I used to go on Saturday mornings to Carr's Lane Congregational Church, Birmingham, for organ lessons from the organist there, Dr Cyril Christopher, and would often see the portrait of J. H. Jowett. He looked a spare, gentle man, and it was difficult to imagine that he was called to this great church at the age of 31 in 1895. 'While other ministers noisily debated the reconstruction of doctrine and the so-called "New Theology,"' Horton Davies has recently written, 'or the reconstruction of society according to the

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imperatives of the "Social Gospel", Jowett stressed the culture and discipline of the devotional life.' (*Varieties of English Preaching 1900-1960*, SCM.) One is reminded that although William Temple urged the claims of the social gospel, he never tired of stressing that 'the amelioration of the world's bitter condition is always to be found in worship'. Many preachers today, amid a barrage of distractions pray God, as did Jowett 'that Thou wilt keep the fire of my devotion burning.'

Whilst Jowett was in Birmingham, the saintly Forbes Robinson of Cambridge died, leaving intimate correspondence with his friends which was subsequently published. In a sermon on the Apostle Paul, Robinson once said, 'the story of a man's life is best told in his letters'. So it was of Robinson's own life. The secret of his extraordinary influence over undergraduates in the early years of this century is shown in his letters to stem from the quality of his devotional life. 'To influence you must love', he said; 'to love you must pray'. His letters say more about prayer than about anything else. 'If I have him here', he wrote to one of his many friends, 'he will spend half an hour with me. Instead I will spend that half-hour in prayer for him.'

Robinson's nephew, the present Bishop of Woolwich, questions the practical value of this method. He claims that he is able to pray for people precisely *as* he meets them and yields himself to them. 'It is *afterwards* that I find one needs to withdraw - as it were, to clarify on tablets and bring to obedience the revelation given on the mount' (*Harvest to God*, page 99).

Be that as it may. Many of Forbes Robinson's friends testified to the unseen power let loose in their lives that they recognised had been released through his spiritual vitality. 'One thing you must learn to do,' wrote Forbes, 'whatever you leave undone you must not leave this undone. Your work will be stunted and half developed unless you attend to it. You must force yourself to be alone and to pray. You may be eloquent and attractive in your life, but your real effectiveness depends on your communion with the eternal world. You will easily find excuses. Work is so pressing, and work is necessary. Other engagements take time. You are tired. You want to go to bed. So simple prayer and devotion are crowded out'. To another friend he wrote, 'You must at all costs *make* quiet time. Give up work if need be. It is worth your while to take practically a day off sometimes, and force yourself to pray. It will be the best day's work you have ever done in your life.'

Perhaps to most the name of Ronald Knox suggest a twentieth-century scholar rather than a saint. But his biographer tells how, when a girls' convent school from Kensington Square, London, was evacuated to Aldenham, Shropshire, in the first week of the last war, and Knox became their chaplain, it was as a devout man he most impressed them. One of the girls happened one morning to go through the school chapel whilst Knox knelt completely absorbed in prayer. She later told a nun that passing between him and the altar

was like 'cutting through the supernatural.' (Evelyn Waugh: *Ronald Knox* page 245, Fontana ed.) On the Coronation Day of King George VI, 12th May, 1937, Mgr Knox preached in Oxford. He asked why we naturally desire to do reverence to something higher than ourselves. It is because, he explained, we are made for God. 'Man is, I suppose', he said, 'the only species in creation to which kneeling is a native posture. We are built that way; built for worship.'

One of Knox's last broadcast sermons was on prayer. He likened praying to God to the occasional asides an actor is called upon to make to his audience from the stage. 'When, into that darkness', he pointed out, 'you speak your aside, you are for once talking to real people. And that is what prayer is; it means using your powers of speech and thought and will so as to put yourself in communication with that real world which looks all dark to us, the supernatural world, instead of wasting them on chattering to the other mummers in the show.'

This is to bring prayer sharply into perspective as part of man's real work. 'There is but one thing needful - to possess God.' This is the perhaps surprising opening of the first entry of Amiel's *Journal*. A century later John Baillie made an equal claim: 'Our spiritual life is the only precious thing we possess'.

JOHN HOUGH.