

Fulness

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Editor Graham Perrins

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Editorial

What kind of Church is God after?

In this issue we deal with one of the most complex issues facing the people of God today—the subject of denominations. The matter is explosive and almost impossible to view apart from sometimes subtle and sometimes not so subtle personal prejudices. Yet we cannot avoid considering the place of denominations in God's plan if we are to arrive at an understanding of the true nature of the Church.

What kind of Church is God after?

A Church that has a pilgrim character. Secure in its own insecurity, powerful in its own human powerlessness. Seeking neither to be recognised by man nor to be protected by the State. Wanting no earthly power that it may demonstrate the kingdom of God. Shunning this world's pomp that it may serve Christ. Appreciating education and natural ability but building only upon that ministry born of the Spirit, recognising His qualifications as supreme. Concerned about social conditions but more concerned about that city whose builder and maker is God. Involved yet only passing through.

United not merely upon the basis of creed or council, organisation or structure, but out of deep personal relationship in life. Having the insight to distinguish between life and mere orthodoxy. Having the character to suffer misunderstanding and reproach. Where the Spirit constantly bears witness and the whole family moves steadily to one mind and one faith. Owning no name but that of Jesus, building nothing but the body of Christ.

A community who will hold fast to Biblical traditions yet refuse to be chained by man-made institutions and outward forms that have lost their meaning. Knowing that new wine demands new wineskins and appreciating that a new generation must find its own fresh expression of the Eternal. Prepared to pass on life and truth yet to see its own body going down into dust. Living a generation at a time, shutting itself in to God's purpose for its own age. Desiring to live in such a way that without the anointing it would die. Perpetuating nothing but a godly seed.

Is this the nature of the Church or but an idle dream?

Graham Perrins

Graham Perrins

Denominations AND Divisions

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul mentions various deeds of the flesh, which prevent one from inheriting the kingdom of God. Among them is the sin of heresies or factions, or as Barclay puts it 'the party spirit'.

Paul emphasised the seriousness of this sin: 'If a man is inclined to a sect, after warning him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him'. (Titus 3:10). Heresy may involve a doctrine or a personality but the heretic is one who uses that doctrine or personality to follow his own self-willed opinions and thus create a division in the Church.

In the Corinthian Church 'party spirit' was expressed through personalities. Some were saying 'I am of Paul' or 'I am of Apollos' others 'I am of Cephas'. The more spiritual heretics were saying 'I am of Christ'. There was a complete lack of unity at the Lord's Supper. One group was eating before another had arrived. Some were being greedy whilst others were going hungry. Each group was doing its own thing. (1 Cor 11:17-34, note the word heresy in v19). Paul commanded the Corinthians to put an end to such divisions.

He also had to resist on behalf of the Gentile Churches 'the circumcision party' which was also a real threat to the unity of the early Church.

Peter prophesies of false teachers and false prophets who would bring destructive heresies into the Church: 'Who will cunningly introduce fatal divisions . . . they will have many eager disciples'. 2 Peter 2:2 (Weymouth). Here doctrines and personalities are combined to create disunity.

The Church has been plagued with 'party spirit' ever since. It is currently seen in denominationalism, where most of the churches owe their very names and existence to distinctive doctrines or personalities. Lutherans, Episcopalians, Baptists, Pentecostals . . . the list seems without end. The tragedy is that notwithstanding the seriousness of their sin, many Christians are proud of their denominational allegiances.

The CAUSE of DIVISIONS

'Party spirit' can be produced by wrong attitudes.

Quarrelsomeness.

Many folk are never happier than when they are arguing. Contentiousness, strife, wrangling, are other words describing the same sin. Paul calls it 'part of a depraved mind', 'A deed of darkness', and 'A work of the flesh' (Ro 1:28,30; 13:12,13; Gal 5:20).

Some even manage to preach the gospel in this spirit! Their jaws jut out in defence of the truth, their dogmatism dares you to differ! (Phil 1:16).

Behind much quarelling lies self-centredness. The NASB replaces the AV words 'contentious' and 'strife' with 'selfishness' and 'selfish ambition'. (Ro 2:8; Phil 2:3; James 3:14). For some to believe that they could be wrong would be too damaging for the ego. Pride can effectively prevent us from backing out of an argument. The desire to

get one's own way at any cost will produce an atmosphere of strife. We are told to 'refuse foolish and ignorant speculation knowing that they produce quarrels, and the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome'. 2 Tim 2:23, 24 (NASB).

Jealousy

Paul links the 'I am of Paul' attitude to jealousy in 1 Cor 3:3. To be jealous is to walk as a mere man, to be fleshly. Strife and jealousy are linked together in Ro 13:13 and James 3:14-16, and we are told to withdraw from such. 1 Tim 6:3-5 (AV).

The jealous person cannot bear to see another being used, or getting the limelight. He will continually seek to emulate others and draw attention back to himself. He will bask in the reputation and ministry of another if it furthers his own ambitions. Jealousy prevents us enjoying another's blessing, we must cap it with a testimony of our own. Apprehensive of being displaced in position or affection the jealous person will constantly push himself and his personal views so creating tension and strife.

Rebelliousness.

Alongside 'party spirit' in his Galatian list Paul places dissensions (NASB) or seditions (AV). the word derives from a root meaning 'a standing', 'an uprising', hence 'a tumultuous assembly'. It describes the activity of Barabbas who during an insurrection committed murder. Mk 15:17.

The AV adds this word to the list in 1 Cor 3:3 translating it 'divisions'.

Certainly the rebellious, resisting nature depicted by this word would find great difficulty in submitting to authority and leadership. These men must go their own way. The Church is to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and must turn away from them. Ro 16:17.

The work that God is doing in our own day is threatened by the same problems. Each generation must guard its spirit against the attitudes of quarrelsomeness, jealousy and rebelliousness. While there is no guarantee that we can avoid division we have the hope that we will be the generation to see true unity. We *can* be the answer to the prayer of Christ in John 17.

Having accepted that such division is contrary to the will of God for his one body, and that this division is usually caused by the sin of man, we must now face the fact that sometimes division becomes necessary.

SOMetimes GOD divides

On occasions God himself brings division in order to confound the wisdom and efforts of man. The tower of Babel is one example. Babel nearly made it! Its inhabitants had ingenuity and initiative, using bricks and mortar for their building. They had ambition and incentive, a desire to reach to heaven. They had unity, being one people and one language. But it was all based upon man himself, upon his own energy and resources. God came down to divide. So he always does when a work for a movement becomes independent of the activity of his Holy Spirit.

The same principle is seen in the history of God's people. Solomon turned from wholly following God. He worshipped Astarte and offered sacrifice to false gods. Consequently the kingdom was torn from his hands. God divided it and destroyed ten tribes.

Paul, concerning divisions in the church at Corinth states, 'Divisions among you are necessary indeed, to make it clear which of your number have God's approval'. 1 Cor 11:18, 19. (Bruce)

Sometimes division becomes inevitable in order that purity of life and doctrine may be preserved

in the Church. 'Clear out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump . . . remove the wicked man from among yourselves'. Wickedness is here defined as immorality, covetousness, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness and swindling.

The apostle John deals with the doctrinal side in his second epistle. 'The man who is so "Advanced" that he is not content with what Christ taught, has in fact no God. The man who bases his life on Christ's teaching, however, has both the Father and the Son as his God. If any teacher comes to you who is disloyal to what Christ taught, don't have him inside your house. Don't even wish him "Godspeed" unless you want to share in the evil he is doing'. v9-11 (Phillips).

Division caused by 'party spirit' can never be right. On the other hand God himself sometimes causes division in order to confound man's efforts or to preserve the purity of his people. As we view the scarred battlefields of present day denominationalism we see a strange mixture of man's self-effort, God's judgments and the witness of the Holy Spirit.

Barriers to unity

What can be done with it all? What is to be our attitude to all this division? Let me first make some observations. The Church of Jesus Christ will never arrive at true unity as long as it is being identified with those who are not saved, who are not born of the Holy Spirit.

Unsaved church members

'Christ's Living Body' is a stimulating book on church life, edited by John Baker. In it, Baker, who is an Anglican Rector, gives four definitions of the Church.

(a) 'The Church' can mean all truly saved believers of all ages and races. Eph 5:25-27.

(b) By contrast 'the visible "Church"' (spoken of in Article 19 of the Church of England's 39 Articles, for example) is all those who publicly profess faith in Christ and the Gospel. Ac 2:47, 1 Cor 12:28. This Church, the 'visible' or 'Catholic' (i.e. world-wide, universal) Church includes, besides all the elect, all who profess faith in Christ,

whether they are truly born again and have saving faith or not. (See the parable of the tares in Mt 13 for Christ's teaching on this.)

(c) The third use of the word 'Church' in the NT by far the commonest, bears most directly on the subject of this book. Here it designates the body of professing Christians in any one place or locality, in fellowship, and meeting together for the worship and service of the Lord.

(d) The NT also uses the word 'Church' to mean all the local churches or congregations in an area. Ac 9:31.

I have little difficulty in agreeing with three of these definitions. It is the second (b) that causes problems. The Bible knows nothing of such a church.

Baker quotes Acts 2:47 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 in support of his definition, but these verses clearly refer to those who have been born again and are truly part of the body of Christ. He also cites the parable of the tares. This is equally unrelated for in this very passage the field in which the tares grow is defined as the world and not the Church of Christ.

So much of what is called 'Church' is in fact nothing more than the world. The word 'Church' could never be applied to such institutions in the full biblical sense of the word.

If we are to reach true unity it must be on the basis of the one body and one Spirit of Ephesians 4. We have enough problems beginning here without making it any harder!

Denominational walls

Furthermore, the Church can never arrive at true unity whilst it is identified with denominational structures.

In a recent article Arthur Wallis drew attention to the fact that 'a denomination is an ecclesiastical grouping that is considerably less than the universal church, but is considerably more than the local church'.

There is biblical authority for the idea of both the local and the universal church, but the idea of a denominational church comes into neither category. Not only is the denominational church unbiblical it is perhaps one of the greatest hindrances to bringing God's people together.

Whilst I am grateful for the various expressions of truth represented in Baptist, Brethren, Pentecostals etc, I must also recognise that not only have they been 'custodians of truth' but they have also been 'keepers of the party spirit'.

Many people have dismissed the emergence of churches meeting in homes, with the damning phrase 'Oh, they'll soon become another denomination'. Be that as it may, the accusation implies that denominations must be wrong, yet most of the critics belong to such a structure themselves!

David Watson has written that 'the Christian landscape is polluted when another denomination is formed'. We must agree, but by definition the Anglican Church is part of the smog! I would rather be part of something that is not yet denominational, than be part of a denominational structure waiting for yet another move of the Spirit to go wrong.

To equate the Church of Jesus Christ with the denominational structure must lead to a further error of judgment, namely, that to leave such a denominational church is to leave Christ's local church, or to become divisive and disloyal. In fact the exact opposite may be the result. Such folk may well be furthering the cause of real unity.

The myth of renewal

This brings me to a further issue. We have stated that the true Church cannot be identified with the denominational structure, because the denominational concept is unbiblical. Sadly, however, many are seeking to renew their own particular denomination from within. Whilst I may justifiably seek to renew the people of God, I would need a lot more convincing before I could justify the renewal of an unbiblical monument to 'party spirit'.

The aim of renewal must be clearly established. If renewal is meant to bring about the removal of all that is unbiblical and divisive, then this would bring about the death of the denominational system as we know it.

Is this the goal of those who pursue renewal today? Certainly not of some. Many see renewal only in terms of bringing back life into a dead denominational structure.

It would appear that even the

tremendously successful developments at The Church of the Redeemer, Houston, fall into this category. A friend of Graham Pulkingham once said, 'Graham, you haven't been delivered out of the Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church has been delivered out of you'. That makes a nice phrase, but does it go far enough? Pulkingham stresses in his book, 'Gathered for Power', that he has a vision of a renewed Episcopal Church, that he was called by God to be an Episcopal priest, that his church is a 'bona fide' Episcopal Church.

It is significant that the major developments at Houston took place outside the Episcopalian Church structure. Then, when the community saw that the institutional structure was about to falter and die it stepped in to support it with finances and leadership. Ultimately the community was poured into the Episcopalian Church mould ('New Covenant' Sept. 74).

Are we really interested in seeing a 'souped up' version of Episcopalianism or the new 1975 model of Methodism? Is the baptism of the Spirit designed to produce 'charismatic Catholics' or 'de-luxe Anglicans'? Should it not be expressing the truth of one body, one Spirit. Party spirit must go and one body must emerge.

Renewal and the remnant

Some writers have drawn attention to the doctrine of the remnant as the agent of renewal. They maintain that God will work through the two's and three's to renew the whole. This misapplies an important principle.

In point of fact it was usually only the remnant that was preserved, not the whole! Its existence did not prevent God destroying the ten tribes, he preserved only Judah. Later, the remnant within Judah did not prevent the Babylonian captivity. It was rather God's means of making a fresh start.

In New Testament times the existence of a remnant in such people as Zacharias and Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, and the first disciples of Christ, did not serve to save the old nation of Israel. It enabled God to make a new beginning and to create a new Israel.

The principle is clearly expounded in Scripture that new wine cannot be put into old wine-skins, and new

patches cannot be out on to old garments. God could have changed Israel from within. Surely here was much that was good. The nation had been prepared by history and revelation for the coming of Christ. Jesus could have tried by a gradual process of change to transform Judaism with all its institutions and Temple worship into the New Testament community of God. In fact he did not. He let it all go down into death. Then he created a new thing. A new generation emerged.

God will DO a new THING

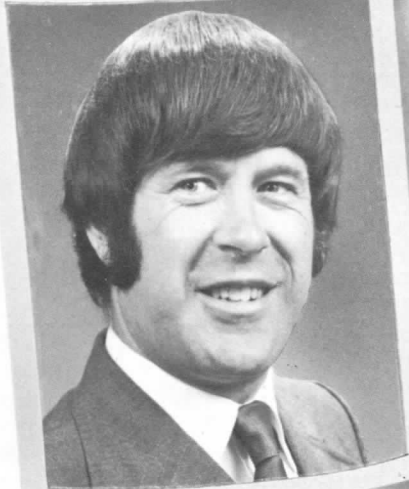
Surely here lies the answer. Each generation has got to begin anew in God, We must make it possible for them to do so. The old, with its monuments to failure and schism, must be allowed to die so that what is good and worthwhile might emerge by resurrection in a new form.

What about the future of denominations? Such organisations seem incapable of dying. As someone has well said, 'If God ceased to exist they would still go on'. The ultimate form may well be seen in the super world Church of the Ecumenical movement, a parody of truth, a man-made edition of the real thing.

I have stressed before that God may well call some to remain in their denominational churches for the time being. He calls some ministries to major in this realm as he uses them to give fresh light on his purposes. No move from a denominational church can prosper apart from God's calling and envisioning. On the other hand it would be disastrous to believe that Christ wants this chaotic situation to continue until his return. There will always be a practical response that we can make to the fresh light that he gives us.

The threat that every movement of the Spirit may in turn become denominational is very real. There can be no room for complacency. We must see that through it all God is calling his people to move on. One generation will pioneer new ground for the next. God will enable his people to put away false distinctions and man-made divisions, until 'we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature'.

A tale of two churches:



*Michael Pusey of
Farnborough Baptist Church*

'The Lord said to me, "I have appointed you to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" '.

It is so easy in a testimony to convey the impression that the Lord's dealings with you are a blueprint for his dealings with everyone else. At the outset let me make it clear that this is not my belief. There is one end; the fulness of Christ in us and his glory in the Church. The ways of the Lord to that end are many.

In 1960, as a backslidden Pentecostal, having drifted away from the practice and preaching of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I was called to the pastorate of the Baptist Church in Basingstoke. Soon afterwards, through the loving concern of a local married couple who had recently been baptised in the Holy Spirit, my wife Margaret and I were led back to the Lord and experienced a renewal in the Holy Spirit.

In my zeal, not I am afraid with a great deal of knowledge or fruit of the Spirit, I launched out in the church to present as much as I knew as quickly as possible. My earnest desire for overnight revival was not realised. Instead it appeared on the surface that I had achieved all that the critics spoke about — 'a split down the middle'. Praise God he over-ruled where he cannot rule.

I entered a time of great frustration. There were 'fightings without and

fears within'. Finally I told the Lord that I was finished. He spoke so clearly into my heart, 'Now son, I'll begin'. And he did.

At last I really believed that Jesus could and would build his Church, and all he wanted me to do was to love him, obey him and let his Spirit flow through me. What a blessed relief this brought. Things began to happen in depth from that time on.

One of the most dynamic revelations was that the Church is the body of Christ and that every member is meant to function in it.

The main guide line was that there should be a plurality of leadership in the local church. The one-man ministry so prevalent in the majority of Baptist Churches was not only unscriptural but was a severe limitation upon the life of the fellowship. I prayed about my own inabilities in certain areas and generally the Lord enabled me to 'get by'. But I knew that the real answer was to be complemented by those to whom the Lord had granted the appropriate gifts.

Basically we knew that we must get back to Jesus himself and acknowledge him as head of the Church. We needed to return to the pattern for life given to us in the New Testament. Our whole set-up needed the searchlight of the Word of God. We said we believed the scriptures but what were we prepared to let them do to us?

The great mistake I often made was that when the Lord made something plain about his way forward I would scheme how to put it into effect. I was not very patient with the Lord, with others or with myself. So often, because of my zeal, steps were taken prematurely and the way failed to be established. My lesson was to praise the Lord for his truth, give him permission to bring it into effect and then wait upon him to do it — and he did. Hallelujah!

God vindicated this new direction. Many of those filled with the Holy Spirit began to have a greater burden and impact on relatives, neighbours and those with whom they worked. During our last six months at Basingstoke we saw more people converted and baptised than we had seen in the previous 4½ years.

These lessons were to prove invaluable in a new but very similar situation at Farnborough Baptist Church where we moved in 1965.

I would have been happy then had the Lord led me out of a

denominationally structured church, and have often asked him to take me out of the system since. But in the past couple of years I have come to realise that the right prayer is 'take the system out of me'.

Denominationalism is an attitude of heart. It is more a matter of how we think and act than what is written on the notice board outside the buildings we meet in. The Lord has to deal with attitudes of superiority, deep-seated prejudices, and inferiority complexes, all of which I believe grow from the root of a denominational spirit.

I have found in my time at Farnborough that as leader in the church I must really take up my authority no matter how costly. Until recently this has meant a certain amount of loneliness. I have also found that regular fellowship with other local leaders is invaluable, and we have formed closer links with leaders of local churches inside and outside of denominations. In enjoying the Lord together we receive fresh direction for the church. To fellowship like this is both an encouragement and a challenge. Also the Lord has long since impressed on me the need for visiting ministries and a number of brothers have come to teach and lead people into the blessing of the Spirit.

Recently we have seen other men emerging to share the leadership. To date there are five brothers, one of them full time. We are learning to be committed and submitted to one another. Although this is not easy we are beginning to enjoy more security in the Lord and in each other than we have ever known before. Making room for one another's ministry really lifts the burden.

Currently, about 180 people make up the church that meets at Queens Road. Although there is room for more to attend the corporate gatherings of the church, we have begun to see that if we want depth and maturity, and to be an impact for God amongst people we must come together in our homes.

Margaret and I meet with five couples who live near us. When we began, our main emphasis was teaching but we have since progressed into a much broader experience. We enjoy simply being together and relaxing with each other. In fact Margaret is in the kitchen at the moment preparing a meal we shall all have this evening.

It is not just house meetings we need

but a flow of the life of God through communities of families. In this, the Lord has had to deal with me probably more than anyone else in the fellowship. We need to be on our guard against creating a meeting-complex in people. Jesus came to give us life in abundance, not meetings.

Homes of well-ordered families must be the future venue rather than further church buildings. And we need a purpose in coming together whether it be teaching, prayer or simply sharing.

Nothing has happened quickly. It has been 'here a little, there a little'. Sometimes there has been an unwillingness to let the Lord have his way. A great deal of time has been spent with individuals and married couples in considering these new things and in scrutinising our traditions. It is surprising how those who appeal so much to the scriptures can hold so firmly to practices which have no kind of scriptural foundation. But, praise the Lord, we are moving on to a place where we will bring full glory to Jesus in his Church.

Mike Rusey



*Barney Coombs of
Basingstoke Baptist Church*

'It's no good Mr. Coombs, we can't have this!'

Mrs. A had been a life long Baptist. Whilst this was the beginning of many a battle, I grew to really like her. At least what she had to say was said to my face. 'What's wrong my dear, what can't we have?' 'We're used to the meeting ending at nine' she replied, 'the last two weeks you've gone as much as ten minutes

past nine and my poodle expects me off the nine-twenty five bus else she's disturbed all night'. We had broken the time barrier of our mid-week prayer and Bible study meeting. Here was my first brush with tradition, and religious orthodoxy.

I wasn't particularly surprised with Mrs. A's reaction. I'd seen the 11.50 am breaking of bread in my early years in the Christian Brethren, and woe betide anyone suggesting a hymn at 11.49 am! Each denomination has its own particular ways and I was fully aware of the danger of breaking with such traditions only to unconsciously establish one's own, and be deceived in a more subtle form. On another occasion Mrs. A had said 'I'm a Baptist and proud of it'. Of course what she had really said was 'I'm carnal'.

A few weeks earlier I had vowed to the Lord I would stop being a diplomatic peace keeper trying to please everybody. It was time to get off the fence and start pulling down the unbiblical structures at Sarum Hill, to make way for the laying of new foundations. Then I could be a peacemaker. I understood it wouldn't be easy. Jesus had made peace only by the blood of his cross, but I was convinced it was God's way and was assured in my heart that if I obeyed God rather than men and honoured him, he would prosper my way, and he has.

God gave me a promise that for everyone who left, ten others would take their place. He promised that if I would trust him and not defend myself, he would be my vindication. I was accused of immorality, fiddling the election of deacons, and of preaching there was no hell. The Lord answered all these accusations by increasing numbers, offerings and baptisms. For instance, in 1967 offerings were averaging £19 per week, now they are nearly £400. Our missionaries and full-time workers increased from 7 to 30. God kept his word.

His Holy Spirit has led us step by step. First the baptism in the Holy Spirit, then body ministry or audience participation, followed by the gifts of the Spirit. I learned to be patient and not to bulldoze my way through with new revelation. I thoroughly prepared the hearts of the people, then when there was a little expectancy from them, I began to put it into action. The church that doesn't do what is preached produces hardened hearts.

About the same time one or two house fellowships came into being. Then came a major step, the ending of one-man pulpit ministry, there are presently five who share this responsibility. Sure we have made mistakes, I'm not proud of them, neither do I think it will bless you to enumerate them, 'Where there is no Ox the stall is clean'.

Our most recent development has been to end the mid-week service on the church premises. This has been replaced by house fellowships out on the estates and in the villages where the people are. Once a month these close down and together with other house fellowships. We join together for what we call an 'All Saints' night. The following evening all the house-fellowship leaders meet together over a meal. Gradually we are getting to know and trust each other, share our mutual problems and needs. It isn't possible to put a value on such fellowship, the comfort and joy of it all is sometimes unspeakable. I don't know how we existed before! I feel secure and yet gloriously unsettled.

During this period of continual transition we have opened a Christian bookshop called the Olive Tree, also a printing works for Eastern European literature.

We used to have saints in the morning and sinners at night, now it is saints on Sundays and sinners all the week. We don't have gospel services any more for we aim at life, it is the life which is the light of men. Preaching the gospel has got to be where we live and work, then our words can be tested alongside our action.

Finally, four principles that have helped us to steer a reasonably steady course:

1. Building up the work, is personal kingdom building. Building up the saints is God's kingdom building. It's the difference between Babylon and Heavenly Jerusalem.
2. Not by might nor by power but by the Spirit, is the only way the Church can be built. The other is wood, hay and stubble.
3. If you put new wine in old wineskins the skins will burst, you must change the wineskin.
4. It is an abomination to spread discord among brethren.

Barney Coombs

Leaders and their responsibilities

David Mansell

'Don't you think it will lead to a new denomination?' How often we hear this concern expressed over sincere attempts to recover the truth of God and bring his people together in a practical way. It is a question we cannot ignore. How often has renewal ended in schism despite the aims of the pioneers. But it is difficult to take such misgivings seriously when the fear of a new denomination is not matched with an equal abhorrence of the existing denominational structures. To merely relabel them euphemistically as 'historic churches' changes nothing, for which church can claim its history to be the history of God?

If at this stage of church renewal we do not recognise and repent of our wrong attitudes toward one another we shall fail utterly to realise God's ultimate purpose of one Church. We will fail to stop this new denomination emerging or to prevent the old denominationalism from strang-

ling the new life on every hand.

Denominationalism is allied to wrong relationships between leaders and led. Hence the cry of schism whenever definite leadership, authority or structure begins to emerge. How can we avoid the pitfall of rejecting emerging leadership for fear of creating a denomination, without falling into exclusivism?

The two epistles of Paul to the Corinthians show us two ways in which these wrong relationships come about and how they may be avoided. In 1 Corinthians we see the people having a wrong attitude towards their leaders: 'I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ'. Whereas in 2 Corinthians we see leaders exerting false authority over the people, claiming a higher standing than Paul and calling themselves 'super-apostles'. Let us look at these in turn.

People's attitude to leaders...

An uncrucified self life will always find something to feed on in the non-fundamental features of another's ministry. Can we imagine the disputes that were reported to Paul?

'But Chloe, you must agree, Paul gives such a deep word; nobody really feeds my spirit as he does; it's up there brother in the heavenlies! I must say too, that all that emphasis by Peter on suffering is far too introspective — we want objective truth here'. 'Yes, Stephanos, but I feel only Apollos really understands me; it's all right with your Paul and Peter preaching all that theory, but Apollos will sit down and listen to me while those other two go right over people's heads. Oh, he's so patient, such a lovely brother!' — 'But Chloe, you're not hearing me. What's the point of





doctrine or hours of counselling if nothing gets done. Now take Peter. . .

And so people feed their prejudices on the differences of personality and approach amongst God's servants. Thus while, in theory, each Corinthian submitted to the ministry of Paul, Apollos or Peter, in practice their submission was merely to the personality or style of a man and not to the Spirit of Christ.

Let such leaders move outside their acceptable image and their supporters will vanish in a moment to join the super-spiritual group whose leader is 'Jesus'. Their Jesus is quite different from the real one who operated through Paul, Apollos and Peter. This anaemic Jesus is merely a rubber stamp of infallibility with which they endorse their own self-centredness.

These Corinthians live on today: 'But I like a nice quiet service, it's so reverent'. Others consider a meeting in bondage unless they are rocking in the aisles in the opening hymn! Some adamantly refuse to listen to the radical thrust of prophetic ministry, the sweet cadences of the expository teacher soothes their souls. Have they forgotten that the heavenly composer uses trumpets as well as violins?

The attitudes of leaders...

I see three basic attitudes which leaders need in order to prevent these poisonous seeds growing to maturity and causing full-scale division.

... To their own ministry

I may find somebody telling me (in confidence of course), that my ministry is so much better than this or that brother. It is no use me saying, 'Oh it's all Jesus', if in my

heart my pride has been fed and I think that perhaps I am just that little bit more in the revelation. If I do feel this way it will feed back, all unconsciously, to my supporter and confirm his wrong relationship with me.

When I think, 'If only there were a few more ministries like me about the place then God's work would really take off', then I am encouraging the people into an unhealthy dependence upon me. If everybody had the same ministry the Church would be unbalanced and sick in spirit.

True 'body ministry' begins at leadership level, with the recognition that the saints in my care need to benefit from the other ministries as well as my own. Allowing anybody to speak is not body ministry. Body ministry is found when differing ministries flow together and depend on each other.

To the dissenting Corinthians, Paul could write, 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth'. Growth depends directly on this full corporate ministry.

'So then let no-one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you'. All these ministries were theirs, each making way for the other to fulfil his part 'as the Lord gave opportunity to each one'.

Are we as leaders opening the way for other approved ministries to come and build alongside us or are we keeping the ministry exclusive under the pretext of guarding the flock? If the people are looking up to me and men of exactly the same style as myself, I am fostering a denominational spirit. It is not merely different faces but differing ministries that build the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. God is calling us to recognise one

another's ministry and open doors so that we may be what Paul calls himself and Apollos, 'God's fellow workers'.

... To other leaders

No matter how closely related the people are within the local church, the whole thing will collapse if we attempt to bring them together without the leadership first having a real bond in heart and spirit.

Paul, Apollos and Peter could only react rightly over those that supported them because there was a genuine love between them and a practical submission to one another's ministry. For example Peter could write 'As also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort as they do also the rest of the Scriptures to their own destruction'.

I cannot believe that 'our beloved brother' was a threadbare cliché that Peter used of everyone whether he knew him or not. I believe it expressed a warm friendship between him and Paul that had grown from time spent together simply as brothers. Their relationship was not ministry-centred but brother-centred. From this flowed their complementary ministries to bless the churches.

How can leaders be one if they only meet to discuss issues? How can they know each other round a conference table? How can they love each other as brothers unless they allow time to get to know one another and open up the secret of their hearts? We are too busy putting up the walls and roof of God's Church to spend time building a sure foundation of related leaders. Then we wonder why we never seem able to do more



than talk about the Church coming together.

Alongside Peter's personal appreciation of Paul as a man flourished a recognition of his ministry. There was obvious peace about Paul's involvement in writing letters to the same people that Peter was also responsible for. Moreover, he acknowledged with no hint of hurt pride, that Paul had more wisdom in certain matters. He also gave an unstinted defence of Paul before those who misrepresented his writings.

Would to God that this was the case amongst us today! Often we seem more ready to believe and pass on gross misrepresentations of another's ministry than to believe the best about our brother and find out the truth.

This precious relationship was, however, no mere mutual admiration society. When Paul felt that Peter was missing the way over the issue of circumcision, their relationship bore without strain his 'Opposing him to the face'.

God would speak to us in these days of our priorities. Time spent in building relationships amongst leaders may appear to some a waste of precious Bible study or evangelising time. But without it we will merely continue the divisive history of the Church, and the world will never see our oneness in God and believe that God has sent his Son.

... To emerging leaders

The seeds of denominationalism usually reach the full-grown maturity of permanent schism when the existing leadership holds a position that prevents other men within the church developing into leaders themselves. It could be that they are even preaching about the need for leadership but by their very attitude and style of ministry they are standing in the way of growth.

Such a situation is most clearly evident where a great man of God has served the church well and then died without any leader of calibre emerging. The result is that the whole company stops moving on with God and begins to defend the position it has reached. Any future leadership is judged in the light of a perfectionist view of the deceased leader. Potential leaders are never credited with the same authority that 'the old man himself' had in the 'good old days'. So a fully fledged denomination is born, bent on self preservation and the gathering of converts to a stagnant pool of theological ideas.

It is instructive to see how men like Moses in the Old Testament and Paul in the New, gave priority to establishing contemporary leaders in everyday matters. For example in Numbers we see seventy elders who stood with Moses. They were not life sentence trainees with no opportunity to function in practice but recognised elders who shared the lead with him. These men received of Moses' spirit in order to help him bear the burden of the people.

Also we see Joshua described as 'Moses attendant from his youth'. He also received the authority of Moses to lead the people. Thus it was with a trained, recognised and authoritative leadership that Israel was able to take the death of Moses. After a brief period of mourning they went on under Joshua to possess the land. They did not stay behind in the wilderness to form a Moses denomination built around the tabernacle and its service and the laws.

God's way is always forward, not into novelty, but into promises already given. Leaders in every generation must not only bring people into what they see, but prepare others to lead on still further. Most denominations are entombed in their history, once

alive but now a monument to their failure to move on with God into full inheritance.

Joshua failed in this very matter of establishing leadership. After his death there followed a period when leaders only appeared as a response to emergencies. It was a period of defeat, idolatry, immorality and oppression interspersed with great victories, and jubilation: one could epitomise it as alternate rebellion and revival.

David too made the same mistake. He promised Bathsheba that her son Solomon would sit on his throne, but with advancing years failed either to name Solomon publicly or to prepare him in joint authority with himself for sole rule. Consequently the nation was left with a king who despite his former victories in battle had to be kept warm with extra blankets and a human hot-water bottle! In this situation nobody knew who to look to for leadership, and the stage was set for Adonijah to usurp the throne. The nation was narrowly saved from division into the Adonijah and Solomon denominations when David stepped in and pronounced Solomon king at the twelfth hour!

Do we see the seriousness of this? If our ministry merely creates a further platform for our own authority then we will build a denomination. Our ministry is to establish other men in their ministry.

In his instructions to Titus, Paul sets this aim above evangelism. To Timothy he writes 'And the things that you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also'. Paul taught Timothy not only in word but in experience, taking him on missions and sending him back into local situations under his authority. He had similar relationships with many others who appear only as

names alongside him in the New Testament.

The above antidotes to denominationalism are not hastily sought methods of rescuing a crumbling situation but are principles that have guided relationships in church building over the past few years. Leaders have come together, not to establish a hierarchy, but simply to get to know one another. They have begun to appreciate one another's ministry and submit to one another's correction and counsel. There has been a growing recognition of the need of other types of gift. Many situations in local churches have been opened up. Never has there been a greater appreciation of the prior claim of leaders and potential leaders on our time and ministry. Deep commitment has evolved, based not on denominations but on love in Christ. God is building his Church!

... To the flock of God

Now let us turn to the other source of denominationalism.

The wrong attitude of leaders towards God's people

The situation in the Corinthian church is clear. Paul had come amongst them as a father and had laid a foundation in their lives. Upon this others had built. So far all was well, but then other men had come along who claimed an apostleship above Paul's. They maintained that the foundation he had laid was inadequate and proceeded to lay another.

They made non essentials foundational, effectively moving the people from a true foundation in Christ into doctrines of perfectionism. These, being essentially legalistic brought the church into total bondage.

Denominations commence when a leader moves the saints away from their true ground of fellowship in Christ. He may insist on one way of meeting or having a particular experience. He may hold dear a special doctrine or ceremony or initiatory course and make it compulsory. Even today fellowship is denied to those who will not get baptised the right way, see 'our' emphasis on holiness, have the 'right' hands laid on them or 'come out' from everybody else and join 'us'.

Such personal kingdom-builders find a ready response in the hearts of the insecure who want to do the right thing. There is identity and security in belonging to the 'in group'.

Only firm establishment on a real foundation will prevent the people of God being swept away by every teacher who would make his latest revelation the test of fellowship for the whole church. Only an understanding of what constitutes a true foundation will move the Establishment from its denominational basis on to a truly Biblical one. It is not novelty or antiquity that validates the foundation, but Scripture.

The true foundation is Jesus Christ himself, not what I believe about him or what I do for him. I am on the foundation when I am 'in Christ'. I did nothing to get there but receive the grace of God, so nothing can remove me — Hallelujah! This is a foundation where I can enjoy a relationship of 'simplicity and pure devotion to Christ'. From this springs all I do as a child of God.

However, the foundation goes a stage further, for the church is not a pile of bricks but a temple. People are made to relate together. What then is the ground of our

relating? Simply that we receive one another 'as Christ received us'. I receive you totally, with all my heart, without any conditions, simply because you are my brother. Any other ground is denominational however good it may seem or however long we have been doing it.

Let us beware of creating these false grounds of fellowship and let us open our eyes to see where they already exist. A 'Jesus plus' foundation embodies a different Jesus, a different Spirit, a different gospel and produces a different church from that which Jesus has died to redeem and present glorious to himself.



Malcolm Muggeridge:

Interviewed by Peter Hill, John Noble and George Tarleton at the Royal Albert Hall on 6 January 1975

PH Looking at the present state of the world do you think that it can ever be changed?

MM I don't think it could. But of course men can be changed and every Christian must believe that we can be reborn — that is the message that our Lord had. It's the most important single fact about our existence.

One of the great fallacies of our time is to imagine that men can change things. A very simple illustration of what I mean is the incessant use of the word problem. If you are old, as I am, people say you have an ageing problem. If you are a boozier they say you have a drink problem. The mis-use of the word is that it assumes that every single situation in which we find ourselves has an answer in men. It hasn't. In fact precisely what is wrong with the world is not an energy crisis, or an inflation crisis, or any of these things. What is wrong with the world is one very simple thing — men are trying to live without God, and they can't!

PH How do you see Israel as a determining factor in current world events?

MM As a journalist I have been to Israel a good many times. From the time of the British Mandates until now and I rejoiced over the return of the Jews to the Holy Land. I was in Jerusalem when for the first time for 2,000 years the Jews were 'in charge' of Jerusalem. It was a fantastic moment. But of course Israel is a place of tension and I think increasingly the tensions of our time are focusing there. Partly perhaps through the oil crisis. I have a terrible feeling that the Western people, or at any rate, their governments, have decided to abandon Israel for the sake of oil. That will create a tremendous crisis whose outcome it would be quite impossible to foresee. But I feel instinctively as a journalist, and as



a Christian that in that place where the Christian religion began there awaits an enormous crisis.

JN I don't want you to make any predictions, but do you feel that we are approaching a major crisis within the next few months, or the next couple of years?

MM I have absolutely no doubt about it. It is a crisis of what is called Western civilisation. Western civilisation is collapsing. The situation as I see it is rather as it was when the Roman Empire, which seemed so enormously strong, which was so fantastically rich, the centre of everything, collapsed.

I think of Augustine, in Carthage, when a messenger told him 'Rome has been burned'. To Augustine this meant the end of everything he believed in. And then he reacted as a Christian — as we must react — and said to his flock: 'Men build cities and build civilisations and men destroy cities and civilisations, but the word of God, the truth has been revealed to human beings and especially to us — that cannot be destroyed.'

In a sense it would be a terrible thing if this crisis was not upon us. The most appalling thing that could ever afflict mankind would be for it to be possible for men to live as they are now trying to live. They

cannot and hence the crisis. We know that these great upsets of the world cost dearly in human suffering, and that is a terrible thing, but we also know that God is not mocked. It would be a dreadful thing if Western man's life style was viable.

PH What do you think about the role that the Church has played in the past? Do you think it has had any impact?

JN You mean the Establishment?

PH Yes, the outward form of the Church as recognised by the State in this country.

MM I think it is like NATO or all these other different fantasies that human beings create. One of the strange things about men when their way of life is collapsing is that they create fantasies to believe in. They believe in NATO, they believe in something called a Social Contract. All these things are pure fantasy; they don't exist. I think the institutional church is of very negligible importance. If I thought that the survival of Christianity depended upon institutional churches, I would be in despair. Interestingly where the institutional church has been most rigorously persecuted, namely in Communist countries, the spirit of Christianity burns brightest. This is one of the

great miracles of history of which people are too little aware. If you had said to me when I was a young journalist in the USSR in 1932 that it would be possible for Christianity to thrive after all the attacks of the regime on every sort of transcendental view of life, attacks supported by the whole power of the State, I would have said this is madness. But this has happened.

Every summer I meet young Christians from these countries. They have not got all the different fantasies that are liable to mislead us. They know that between Caesar and God there is no compromise — they know it.

GT Outside of Communist countries do you see any hope — in this country?

MM I know that everything in newspapers and on television is lies. Nobody could possibly know that better than I do! But still, you read them and you listen and you get a picture of a totally corrupted decadent world. And then one comes to a gathering like this and it is wonderfully heartening. The Holy Spirit is enormously active and I am quite sure that out of this great crisis will come a new great light. But exactly how, in exactly what circumstances, exactly what suffering is going to have to be undergone, that we cannot know.

The following prophecy was brought by Maurice Smith at the same gathering at the Royal Albert Hall

In the midst of your joy let there be a sense of his great majesty. For a wonderful thing is happening in all the earth. The people of God are waking from a long sleep. There is a hunger among young men and women that the Lord pledges to satisfy. There is a growing desire for reality, and a longing for the truth. Oh, do be still and let the Almighty come upon you with the sense of his presence. The King of Kings is returning to his home and you together are a part of that house. Lift up your eyes, come and see.

There is a great coming together; not just in large congregations, these are but an expression of our desire

to be done with all man-made divisions, but there is a great coming together at all levels to form relationships, to experience community, to share our common life. For he shall not return to a ramshackle abode in order to rescue it from collapse; but to a people compacted together by his love; to an overwhelmed nation, to a people so blessed they can hardly recover. They have been blessed with his grace, and dealt with by his truth.

Into this happy environment you shall expect the arrival of the King of Kings. As the glorious topstone he shall come with shouts of 'Grace! Grace!' For the Lord has built his house, and it is worthy of himself.

The way ahead

Gerald Coates

From the beginning of the Second World War, up until the time of the Battle of El Alamein, there had not been a decisive victory for the allied forces. At this stage of the war Montgomery gathered his officers together to explain his plans for an offensive. He then took the remarkable and unprecedented step of commanding his officers to explain his plans to the men under their charge. In this way, every man, from the highest ranks to the lowest received detailed plans of the coming battle from his commander-in-chief.

Many military men credit this first major victory of the war to this sense of involvement. In the light of this story and amid the current emphasis on commitment and discipleship we need to see that our Commander-in-Chief wants to share his overall strategy with us. God wants everyone to know what direction is on his heart.

We need to note that he will usually communicate through appointed leaders. Of course this is never to be a priesthood situation where leaders mediate between God and believers. (Each of us has the Scriptures and the witness of the Spirit within.)

But neither do we want to return to a situation where in the main the saints do merely what is right in their own eyes. How impossible victory would have been to Montgomery had the men under his charge argued that they could not fight alongside certain others because

they had come up under different leadership. How pathetic the whole situation would have been had they allowed battalion pride, inordinate loyalty to their own leaders, to grip their hearts.

Amidst the current denominational confusion we need to know how to become one effective, mighty, army under God. To this end I want to outline six principles which I believe will be helpful.

Before I do this let me tell you what I believe God's attitude to

must be explicit and declare that he is not renewing denominations. He is renewing men, families and communities.

The present movement of the Spirit will cause all that is purely cultural, traditional and historical to be discarded. God is shaking all things and if we will not allow our great Friend to shake us, and the prophetic and apostolic friends of our great Friend, then I fear that our enemies will

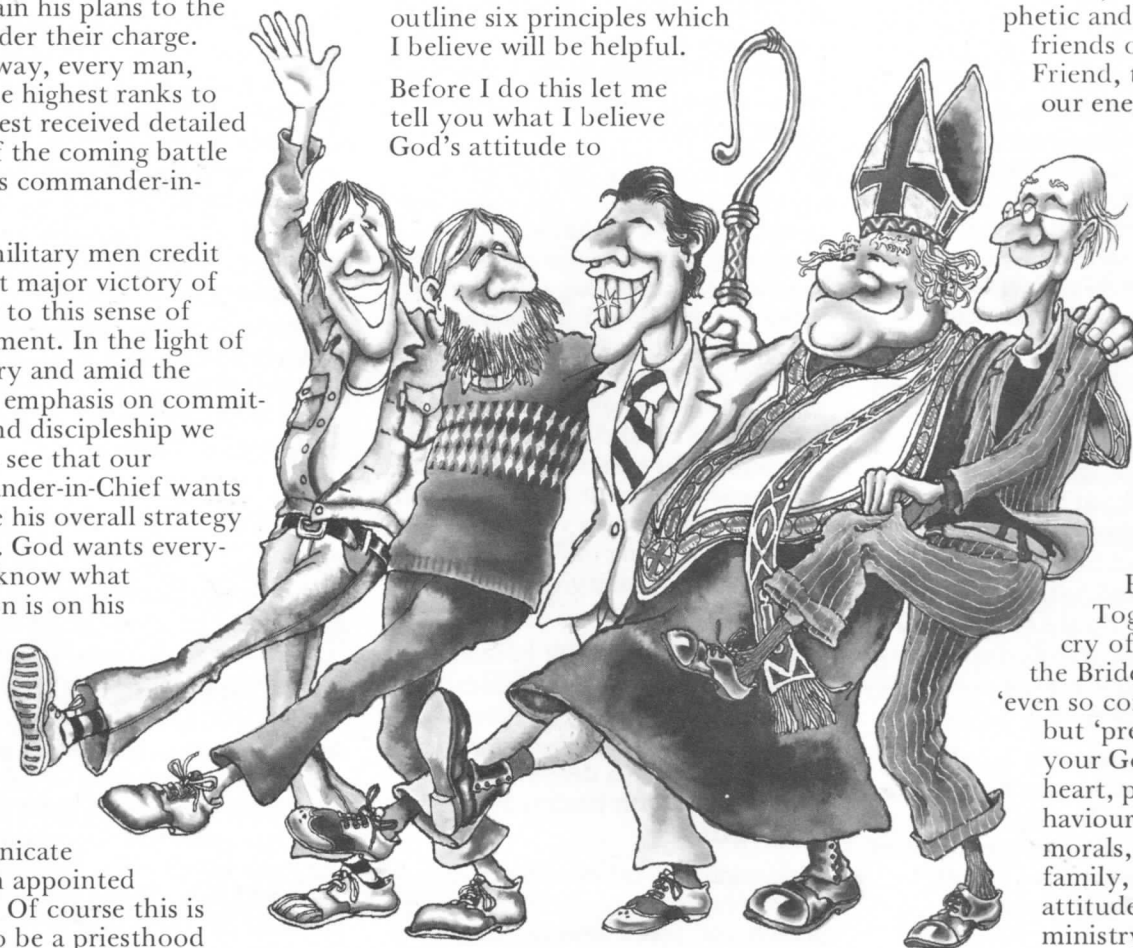
shake us instead. I would rather be shaken by my friends than by my enemies.

The prophetic voice is becoming louder and clearer. 'Jesus People Come Together'. The cry of the Spirit and the Bride is not yet, 'even so come Lord Jesus', but 'prepare to meet your God'. Prepare your heart, prepare your behaviour, prepare your morals, prepare your family, prepare your attitudes, prepare your ministry.

1. Turn from pride

This is one of the most deadly attitudes in the Church today. 'We have seen it, everyone in our town needs to see it'. Denominationalism is a heart attitude. It does not have a great deal to do with buildings, names and forms of church order. The Paul, Cephas and Apollos denominations might be wrong, but the Christ party, the non-named

be: He has no time for renewing denominationalism. Not evangelicalism, not fundamentalism, not house churchism. One shrewd speaker at Lausanne in '74 said that most 'isms' should be 'wasms'. I would go a stage further and say that all 'isms' should be 'wasms'! Certainly God is working in what are called 'historic' churches, and this is a good thing. Yet we



denomination can be more deadly I assure you. The former, because of their names, may be aware of the evils they are part of, whilst the latter could well hide them under a cloak of spirituality.

Many inside and outside 'historic' churches think that they have got 'it'. Community, deliverance, submission, praise, commitment, the Baptism, positive praying, healing for all, holiness and re-baptism are but a few of the 'its' we all contend with. If people have not seen 'it', they are immediately relegated to being second-class Christians. The fact that we only saw our 'it' a short time back seems to have no effect on us whatever.

A while back I was the speaker at a meeting. Sitting in the building was one of those women who in meetings look very submissive. However, it was very much a matter of 'you hubby dear may be in charge of the meeting, but you just wait until I get home and get my hat off!' During the course of the evening, I mentioned that on one occasion I had suggested that a brother go and see his local doctor. This woman almost burst at the seams at such an unspiritual suggestion. The picture she painted of the local G.P. was that he was almost in league with the occult, and this it seems went for all doctors she knew.

Some weeks later I had cause to telephone the family in question. I discovered that she had a cold and was 'believing God', 'battling with the enemy', 'rejecting her sickness', etc, etc. She had been unwell for about a week and within another week would no doubt be giving God the glory for her wonderful healing. (I admit I granted myself the luxury of a little giggle.)

You see, I had not seen 'it' about healing. God knows my heart, how I long to see the Church, myself included, move into greater areas of faith in this matter, But I hadn't seen 'it' and I never got an invitation back.

We can offload the pressure of safeguarding the truth by closing the doors on men who do not see things as we see them. Such a unity of small-mindedness will make many churches feel secure but I prophesy that within a generation, many of these companies shall cease to exist in their present form. These groups shall find themselves losing all those who are prepared to exchange the good for the best.

2. Keep communicating

Amidst the structuring of our lives, families and ministries, we need to keep the lines of communication open. We mustn't become so busy that we have no time for other believers in the town who are not moving in the same direction as we are.

How precious it will be to invite believers from other congregations to our home for a meal. Not to give them *our* latest revelation, but to listen to *their* testimony, to find out *their* interests, to simply share each other's lives. I am sure we shall need patience but it is vital that we come together for friendship sake and are not continually sorting out issues.

My wife and I, over the last few years, have taken many ministers and leaders out for a meal. Many of them were surprised when we asked them to come. Some came with their fences up, but it wasn't long before they saw that we were quite normal and not a threat to them.

It's easy to feel at the end of the evening that nothing has come out of it but I believe that such situations will produce more unity than all the preaching on John 17. Your guest may not invite you to a meal in response. (Perhaps he dislikes a mutual-admiration society as much as we do.) But you have broken the ice and you will feel much more at ease relating to him over issues that arise in your locality. I believe this to be a very important way of expressing our desire for unity and our ability to appreciate others.

If you are in any realm of leadership, consider asking for the counsel of other leaders in your locality over problems in your company. In this way we shall see a deepening involvement with leaders and their congregations.

With regard to other ministries in your area, make room for them to preach and teach among you. Many men have a God-given emphasis, and with the right timing they would be a great blessing to any local congregation. Pray that the Lord will help you discover the ministries which he has given to the Church in your locality then, heeding his timing, make room for these men and their gifts among your people.

3. Pray for all saints

In this we must allow our hearts and

minds to be stretched a little. 'What a man is before God, that is what he will be before men, that much and no more'. It is not difficult to pray for believers under our care. We may weep at their stubbornness at times. We may be carried into ecstasies when we see what God is doing in the obedient ones. These times are precious, but let us beware of denominationalism in our prayers. It is here that our heart attitudes are cultivated. Before the throne all attitudes are seen to be what they are. Pray God's blessing on other congregations in your town.

Pray for a release of spiritual insight and direction to those congregations half blind. 'Move oh God in all your people in this place. Cause us to be joined together in love and loyalty'. Not 'Join *them* to *us*!' It isn't that in order to see the light they must meet with *us*, but that God should join *us together*.

If we find that we cannot share with people the way God is blessing us, for fear of making them feel inferior or insecure, we can certainly go to God about those people and pray blessing upon them. I have found after praying for someone that when I meet them there is usually a point of contact where there was none before.

We may find that on certain issues there is no fellowship, but God will show us other areas where we can enjoy fellowship without impairing one another's wills.

4. Don't build personal kingdoms

Here, I want to speak to the leaders and potential leaders in the Church. My prayer for three years has been 'Lord raise up a leadership who will be willing to lay down their lives for the sheep'.

In this present age *there is no room for personal ambition or the personality cult*. It is good that a man has ambition to serve and rule in God's house. God commanded Adam to have dominion. The clamour of leadership in politics at this time is a leftover from God's desire that man should rule. Sin has marred such a plan but in the new creation we shall see Godly ambition and government emerge in a world where most ambition is for personal gain, and to reign in government is in the main to satisfy one's desire to have power over people.

So if you feel destined to lead the people of God, seek out friendship

with your peers. Talking to Malcolm Muggeridge on one occasion, he told me about a time he was on a platform with a great array of evangelical leaders. Referring to the main speaker he said that upon entering the room he found the man 'Surrounded by a group of the most unimpressive people I have ever met'. Surround yourselves therefore with men of ability, wisdom and authority, men who may not see things as you see them, but have an undisputed walk with God.

These men may knock us off our personality perches when we get too big for our boots but they will also embrace and encourage us when we feel we stand alone in our ministry.

As a principle in our town, whenever we ask ministers to come and teach our people, we always seek to invite men of *greater stature and ability than ourselves*. Such a course may seem a threat to our own ministry and work, but we have found that it undergirds the local church with a security otherwise unattainable.

In adopting this principle God may bring you acclaim in your own ministry. Don't fight this off. Accept it in the same way Jesus accepted honour. Many feel that Jesus didn't have a reputation, but Scripture clearly tells us that his fame went far and wide. People travelled from all over the area to hear him.

The real issue is that Jesus lived *as though* he had no reputation. To him it was not the main issue whether it were 'Hosanna' or 'crucify'. His will was to do the will of his father. His father's approval meant more to him than the adulation or the hatred of an ignorant crowd.

We all have a reputation. One of our local Church leaders tells me that in some places I am looked upon as the greatest thing that has happened to the Church since national health teeth! In other places not far down the road, I am looked upon as the greatest disaster the Church has known since the Second World War!

These things will matter less and less as we stay within the limitations of our ministry and keep relating to men of stature who will both check and encourage us.

5. Audio nationalism

This issue is perhaps known only in small circles. It is one of the tragedies of the present day Church. The grounds for gathering are cultural rather than spiritual. There is a Chinese Church in this town and a Church for Hebrew Christians in this one and a Church over here for black Christians.

How sad in the liberating light of the Word of God. Our gospel has become word only when we preach, 'We are one in Christ', and cultivate such division in his Body.

You may feel insecure if you are found within this mould. It is true that you may have been looked upon as being odd because of your colour or customs. I can only suggest that if others exclude you in drawing a circle around those that they wish to fellowship with, that you draw a wider circle and include them.

6. Refuse labels

Christian communities and the unregenerate society want to label us. My final point is quite simply do not give room for this to happen.

'Any-town Christian Fellowship' may be just a bank account name

as far as you are concerned, yet it need not be very long before 'Any-town Christian Fellowship' becomes 'The Any-Town Christian Fellowship'. Soon our congregation is known as 'The Fellowship'. The first hint of exclusiveness has established itself.

Ideally it will be possible that people will have wonderful fellowship with us without necessarily knowing that *we* happen to exist as a company of people.

This is not a first-rate issue but I believe it is worth taking note of the great variety of ways in which the Bible describes a local company of God's people. The Church of God, the household of God, the company of the redeemed, my friends, the assembly, the temple of the Most High, the brethren, our brothers and sisters — these are but a few.

The writers are not over-anxious to pigeon hole an exclusive group but remain content to describe, often using albeit unconsciously, a particular aspect of the Church. The mundaneness of some of the references indicates the writer's freedom from our temptation towards labelling; 'my friends' or 'our brothers and sisters' can hardly be called names.

These men enjoyed this freedom because they had a right heart attitude — they were life and not label-orientated. Fellowship is not confined to pigeon holes. It is to be found wherever the life of God is at work in his born again sons and daughters.

Our denominational church history is not something we can be very proud of. Unless we change our attitudes and behaviour in this area our history will also become our future.

Lord, prepare me...

Lord, I would prepare myself
for things that lie ahead:
for adversity and suffering,
for pain when hardships spread.
Lord, I would prepare myself
for unseen things to be,
that I might stand when all else falls
what ere the cost to me.

Child, would you prepare yourself,
why look so far ahead?
This is the moment to prepare,
to walk as you are led:
for the present I have given you
but the future still is mine,
and soon the present will be past
and gone, this needful time.

Yes, I would have you well prepared
to stand when all else falls,
and it would make me glad to see
you triumph through adversity.
But first, I ask of you to find
my purpose in today,
for in each moment that I send
a 'preparation' lay.

Rose Hopkins

My yoke is *easy*

Maurice Smith

As we face the practical implications of all that the Lord is saying to us in these momentous days, there is a vital matter so fundamental that I am a little shy even to mention it. Yet my observation urges me to venture on. It is this: as we press forward into greater commitment, clearer structure, and deeper submission, we must see everything within the context of the goodness of God.

To those who have seen him, and his intentions towards them, there is nothing irksome about facing the nitty-gritty of adjusting relationships, or hearing the truth about our attitudes or letting go some of our previous aspects of teaching – to quote but a few things that may need a touch in these days!

As we look back on our lives surely we can see his hand at work in everything that has come our way? Surely we can find it within us to trust him now without grudgingly moving forward into every new issue as though God had dreamt up the worst for us?

This is not an hour for stoicism, for tightening our belts and stiffening our upper lips. This is an hour for responding to the love of God who has only our best interests at heart. Although we do not yet see all things given into our hands Jesus still intends us to inherit the lot.

Response is all we need. Self-discipline will come in the form of fruit in due time. Fruit doesn't need forcing, it will come as the result of a relationship. But for a warm response we need a clear revelation of what God is really like. The master-stroke of the enemy has been to convince the saints that God is other than he is. His real nature is obscured so that we become convinced God is trying to withhold something from us. Really God is mean and demanding more of us than we can give. Of course we may never give vent to these

thoughts but underneath is a deepening conviction that we have been conned. Drawn in with the free-salvation bit, but now it's turned out to be quite different.

My dear friends, nothing could be further from the truth. God never drives us, is utterly patient, understands us completely, disciplines us only for our own good, and purposes to share himself with us for always! He never acts out of frustration with us, is never vindictive, and though we fail him again and again he will continually extend more and more grace to us. God has a disposition to forgive.

Which of us would not have taken the keys back from Peter after that shameful affair by the fireside? Yet the Lord completely understood him and, as ever, failed to accuse. He had not come to condemn Peter but to save him, and save him, and save him.

He knew what sort of nuisance I'd be in the church. He knew how slow I would be to move on, how impetuous and unbearable I'd be, madly waving my little torch of personal revelation as though it were the whole sweep of divine truth. Still he said, 'I want him – draw him in'. Can you wonder I want to respond to such love?

Only revelation of the true nature of God will carry us through each stage of the advance towards maturity. Looking back I can remember times of revelation, times of unveiling which have left their indelible mark and no doubt there are many more such times needed and coming. Right now I recall one such time which came whilst singing a simple hymn.

Hear the words that touched my inner chords and started me singing for the Lord. Do take time with them, read them slowly, ponder them and longingly ask God to speak in his way and in his time.

*What has stripped the seeming beauty
From the idols of the earth?
Not a sense of right or duty,
But the sight of peerless worth.*

*'Tis the look that melted Peter,
'Tis the face that Stephen saw,
'Tis the heart that wept with Mary
Can alone from idols draw.*

*Draw and win and fill completely,
Till the cup o'erflow the brim.
What have we to do with idols
Who have companied with him?*

Do you see? It's not having another go. It's not purposing to do better next time. If there is any success in those methods it will be accompanied by pride, which is probably worse in God's eyes than your previous failures.

When Peter failed, he looked across the fire and saw the face of Jesus, so utterly understanding, so utterly uncondemning, so full of grace towards him. 'Tis the look that melted Peter can alone from idols draw.'

How are we going to cope if the fires of persecution are lit again? Suppose we really get into God's kingdom message and the message provokes opposition? If they stone us as they stoned Stephen, how will we cope? Well be sure of one thing my brothers and my sisters, that if I know anything about myself I'll be first on the run. I have no grandiose ideas about my ability to walk through the fire, stand in the tar-barrel or carry my cross. If he doesn't meet my needs, if he doesn't make himself known to me then the end will be ignominious to say the least.

Oh hear me now! He alone is able to draw us from all that would cause our downfall. We must have no hope or confidence in ourselves.

And if we are not making it in the exact form of triumphant christianity that others seem to demand, if like Mary we are weeping over the greatness of our

unworthiness which has overcome us; if we can hardly believe that he will have us, let us look up and see his face.

Lift up your head and the King of Glory will come in. The King with the shepherd heart. Turn and see the eyes of the man of Galilee, hear the heartbeats of the love of God and find it easy to let go of the awful self-centredness which impedes our own progress and satisfaction.

Don't discard the garb of winter until the summer has begun, you'll be cold if you do. Don't extinguish your taper until you hail the rising sun, you'll be in the dark if you do. God is not calling for your self-sacrifice, your self-effort, your determination to go on.

He is wanting to make himself known to you, so you'll skip into your commitment, rejoice in your submission and welcome the re-structuring of your life and attitudes.

In an age when we get everything laid on for us from the cradle to the grave, in an age when we demand everything in 'instant' form, we are often beguiled into believing that Our Christianity can also be available on such push-button terms, but it is not so. The Lord is drawing us on to seek him out and to discover the riches of his grace and the extent of his love for us. Even when we cannot immediately find him, we need to realise he is hiding himself and drawing us yet further into his love.

Suppose we have hardly made contact at all — and we've all felt like that at times — for us God is the Omnipresent One who is not very present in our experience, the Omnipotent One who is not very potent on our behalf. Well, we have to start where we are and really cry out to the Lord — allow ourselves to be downright real for once. If it's not working, or it's hard going, we need to tell him so and no messing.

God is unimpressed by our pious praying under stress, praying which does not pass the ceiling. He is uninformed by our recital concerning things which he has known since before the foundation of the world.

'This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and delivered him' can become our own experience if we will humble ourselves as the psalmist did and speak to him just where we are and just how we are. Does it surprise you that God did not write David off completely after his awful sin especially in the light of his almost impertinent forthrightness. Read some of his praying in a modern version of the Psalms and you may get a shock. But God heard him, and answered him. God read his heart and did not make him an offender for a word.

Let's abandon our believism and start out on a real relationship. We shall not shock him, or dethrone him by our honesty. He is not mocked by our pretence of well-being when underneath there is deep dissatisfaction. Who wants a relationship like that? If we are real with God he will begin to bring us into the deep experience of my anonymous hymnwriter.

*Not the crushing of those idols
With it's bitter void and smart;
But the beaming of his beauty,
The unveiling of his heart.*

These words sound antiquated but the experience is as new and fresh as the day it was conceived in God's heart. If we seek him earnestly we shall find in him far more than ever we dreamed and our unsolicited testimony will be 'His yoke is easy, his burden is light'.

We'll be no longer staggering under the heavy burdens of submission, commitment, divine order etc, etc. It will all be a pleasure. Even through tears we'll be pressing on not because we have to but because

we want to. His way will have become for us the best way.

God is good. May we see this more and more as we head apace for home. We are not going to a mansion, nor to a cloud and a harp, nor to a golden street but to the heart of God himself. Let's go together to seek and find and seek again.

*Hast thou heard him, seen him,
known him?
Is not thine a captured heart?
Chief among ten thousand own him,
Joyful choose the better part.*



