

there will be daily converts who will grow in grace to eternity.<sup>7</sup> The former is a work of the flesh, but the latter the fruit of the Spirit.

The whole matter should also be considered from an entirely different angle, that of the minister. How can a church be run with only comets and no planets? Leaders of organizations are needed who are loyal members of their congregations. There is need too for a whole host of others: Sunday school teachers, district visitors, choir members, deacons, sidesmen, etc. Such routine jobs are not done in the limelight as are the come-and-go ones, but reach far deeper. The regular, steady, consistent witness counts most in the long run. It is most unsatisfactory to try to assist a church which one does not attend, for how can a district visitor, for instance, invite people to it? The same applies to the other duties too.

Departmental organizations, such as a Crusader Class or a Christian Union, have a great value in catering for the needs of special age groups, particularly where members are living away from home. They make a great and valuable appeal to those for whom they are designed. But they are no substitute for the church fellowship, which must cater for every age group. Naturally in the wider fellowship there is not the same appeal, for all sorts and conditions have to be considered. Yet only in this way can parents and children worship together, and provision be made for continuity.

What of the situation where there is no evangelical church to join? Can that be made an excuse for becoming a free lance? No, flitting from church to church will help no one. To associate with one church may bring mutual blessing. Patience and humility are needed—both very unpopular virtues! Where revival has come to a church, its origin can usually be traced to one or two members who have prayed faithfully for a number of years. Remember the perseverance of the importunate widow,<sup>8</sup> and the husbandman.<sup>9</sup> If we rightly divide the Word, we shall not wrongly divide ourselves.

## II. Does the Church Shackle our Witness?

By LEITH SAMUEL

IN THE 'MANCHESTER GUARDIAN' of August 23 the Free Churches' paragraph was devoted to an article entitled 'A doomed and dying cause.' These words were applied to organized religion, and here is what a friend of the writer had to say on the matter.

'All my life I've told critics of the Church to come inside and reform it. Now I think I'm wrong. I should have left it, and not worked to bolster it up. Oh, yes, I love it all right. That's the trouble. When you work for a thing you grow to love it. How often we've talked of the pathos of the situation when a few devoted souls toil and sacrifice to maintain a church which has ceased to minister to a surrounding population, which often indeed has no surrounding population to which to minister! And we're doing the same thing. As those people love the very stones of their building, so we love the committees and the assemblies, the paraphernalia and the personnel of organized religion, and both alike hinder the progress of the Kingdom of God.

'They write books asking "Has the Church failed?" when the failure shrieks at them the world over, and they ought to be repenting in dust and ashes. Two world wars, an acquisitive society, Christians just as active in the black market for food and petrol as non-Christians—should not the Church be on its knees? Why can't we get away from it and start again, as when the Church was very young? Because, of all the vested interests in the world, the clerical interest is the most powerful. Granted, the sacrifice and loyalty of many of the poorer clergy and ministers redeem the situation, but did you ever know anybody more money-ridden than the men at the top? Look at A. and B. and C. How they cling to office and pomp and power! And how little they do for the Kingdom! It is the old story over again. Once the Church could say "Rise up and walk," but that was in the days when it could also say "Silver and gold have I none."'

<sup>7</sup> Acts ii, 47.

<sup>8</sup> Lk. xviii, 1-8.

<sup>9</sup> Jas. v, 7.

Was the writer in the *Manchester Guardian* right? Is organized religion but a 'doomed cause' rallying at Amsterdam, but heading for relapse and death? Can we do more to advance the Saviour's claims by abandoning the buildings and endowments, and starting all over again with groups of true believers? There are many graduates for whom this is no academic problem, but one that presses upon mind and conscience every week-end.

As Bible-loving Christians, we have always been encouraged to consider the Word of God as our final authority in things pertaining to conduct as well as doctrine. What light does the Word throw on this problem? So far as New Testament history is concerned we find our Lord attending the synagogue 'as His custom was,' and calling the Temple 'My Father's House,' until there comes a turning point, after which it is 'your house—left unto you desolate.' Similarly the apostles frequent the Temple, and make for the synagogue on entering any town for the first time with the gospel. But three turning points are noted in the Acts: one in the findings of the Council of Jerusalem, another when Paul departed from the synagogue (where he had been speaking boldly for three months) and separated from the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus; and the third (perhaps ratifying the second, rather than being a separate crisis) when the Apostle concludes his remarks to the Jews of Rome with 'Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.' All seem to suggest that the programme for the future was no longer 'To the synagogue first,' but 'to any place where we shall be given a hearing.'

Position-seeking, pharisaism, respect of persons, and empty ceremonial left no room for the Son of God in the places carried on in His Father's name, purporting to represent His Father's interests. Is it not possible that the same evils can have such a stranglehold on the places carried on in the Son's name, purporting to represent His interests, that there is no room for those who would be true disciples of their Master? The 'world' in the Church is very similar to the 'world' in the synagogue. As our Lord said, 'Be-

cause ye are not of the world . . . they will persecute you . . . They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service.' Stephen and Paul, with countless others, experienced the fulfilment of this in the synagogues. Luther in Germany, Farel in Switzerland, Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley at one time in England, Wesley at another, have proved the truth of it at the hands of the organized churches. The persecuting body in each case has survived to this day. So have the spiritual descendants of those 'unchurched' whose activity was forced outside the pale by the refusal of those entrenched in the strongholds of organized religion to countenance reform.

Is it not significant that Christ Himself is left outside a section of the organized 'Christian Church' even before the New Testament canon is complete? 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him . . .' A dead, Christ-neglecting Church does not make it impossible for the individual to have communion with Him. But that individual communion does not necessarily revive the Church!

The living Christ Himself is our only fountain head and safe centre. He never fails. Nor do His promises to the individual, whatever fellowship or lack thereof there may be. Every pioneer missionary has proved this, and certain doctors and schoolmasters and others have the privilege of carrying on pioneer missionary work again in this land. To such the call comes again with urgency, 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' Too many of us blame the churches where we are given stones for bread, when our real trouble is that we are losing daily our own personal battle of supplies. And we shall go on losing this unless we discipline ourselves to go to bed earlier, with the prayer of Psalm cxliii, verse 8, in our hearts.

Some graduates are privileged to have fellowship in Christ-honouring churches, and can happily throw themselves into vital activities. But others have tried all the churches for miles around, and find no real food and no opportunity for effective service. One thing is true of us all. We have only a limited amount of time and energy. So the burning question is: may

we, with spiritual and moral integrity, bypass the churches that need resuscitating, and get on with the job these churches are failing to do?

If the organized Church is the divinely approved vehicle of truth, in spite of all its failure and divisions we can scarcely bypass it without ultimately frustrating the avowed purpose of our action, namely, to spread the truth—the truth that is in Jesus. But is the Church the divinely approved vehicle of truth? Was it not to men bound together by common loyalty to the Person of the Lord Jesus and by the same Spirit, rather than to cogs in an organization, that the spreading of the truth was committed? Does not the organized Church bear more likeness to a depository than a vehicle? The outsider is urged to come in. Only through a few of its keenest members is the Church in any sense a vehicle, effectually reaching the outsider.

It is quite true that the New Testament says nothing of groups of believers apart from churches. It is equally true that a church in New Testament terms was not a church building. There is no evidence in the Acts or the Epistles of any church owning a church building. The church met when the believers met. Then the church was in so and so's house, or Tyrannus's school, loaned or hired buildings. 'Going to church' did not make sense in apostolic days except as meaning meeting with the congregation! Each local church came together to worship, and went everywhere to witness through its members as they preached the Word. They won people to their Lord, not to their organization or way of meeting, time-honoured tradition or building with hallowed memories.

Graduates slip into ruts as easily as anybody else. Too often we are content with ineffective church-going and vague philanthropy, while conscious that we are cutting no ice. If we were asked point blank for a reason for the hope that stabilizes us in a shaking world, would we overwhelm the inquirer with technical language or defend our way of living instead of proclaiming our gospel in intelligible language and introducing the inquirer to the Saviour? No generation has had a more wonderful opportunity than

is set before us. Christian Unions are springing up in works, business houses, civil service offices, factories and schools. God is seeking ordinary men and women to do extraordinary things for Him these days. Many of the readers of the CHRISTIAN GRADUATE use their drawing-rooms regularly for discussions, evangelistic supper and Bible study circles. Do you? Will you? The response will be there, and your work will have eternal fruit. And what about your neighbour's children? Are they reached by a Sunday school? If not, why not invite them to join your own for religious instruction. While we may, let us write, think, lend our books, and use our time as well as lips. Let us act. Let us get on with the job! Away with temporizing about 'reformation in the Church!' Away with specious excuses for ineffective witness, such as 'everybody knows where I stand.'

Witness that is soaked in prayer, backed by consistent living, kept fresh by daily Bible reading, is bound to be fruitful, and sure to survive. Those who are born again as a result of such witness are *ipso facto* members of the Church which is Christ's Body. But our commission is not fulfilled when we 'go and preach the gospel.' The command continues: 'Make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' So that even though we may have to bypass the churches in our witness, those won will be brought through Bible study to face the implications of being a member of Christ's Church, for example, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The trouble with most of us is that we shy at the first hurdle before we reach it. We may find little fellowship in local churches and so reason pathetically, 'What is the good of seeking to win others?'

Yet our first step must be to win others to Christ. It may mean that we have to go outside the organized Church and away from close association with it, instead of accepting some more conventional time-absorbing position in it. The Lord God will most surely keep those whom He calls into the fellowship of His Son. He will open up, step by step, the way to full maturity for the believer.