

**THE
NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH
IN THE
PRESENT DAY**

*A Report of a Conference
held at
HIGH LEIGH, HODDESDON*

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not define worship as the heart's overflow. If the heart does not overflow with love to Christ, then we do not really worship.

The Conference then adjourned, and on re-assembling, after prayer, the Chairman asked *Mr. G. K. LOWTHER (Grimsby)* to read the following paper:—

“THE LOCAL CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT”

By F. F. Bruce.

I. THE CHURCH IN SCRIPTURE.

When the reader of the common English versions of the Bible first comes upon the word “church” in his reading of the New Testament, he naturally regards it as a new word — one which has not appeared in the Bible before. Naturally, also, he may conclude that the new word represents a completely new idea; he may therefore lend a ready ear to those who assure him that the doctrine of the Church is peculiar to the New Testament—that it was totally unrevealed in the Old Testament.

In this respect such a reader is at a disadvantage compared with a reader of one of the older English versions, such as Tyndale's. Where the versions which we commonly use introduce us to the new word “church,” Tyndale's version had the word “congregation” — a word already quite familiar in the Old Testament, where the nation of Israel viewed as a religious community is repeatedly described as “the congregation of Jehovah.” Similarly, when a reader of the Greek New Testament in early Christian days met the word *ekklesia*, it was a word with which he was well acquainted, not only as a term frequently used in secular life, but (more especially) as a term occurring in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, to denote Israel as the people of God.

The fact that a well-known Old Testament term was used in the New Testament to denote the people of Christ may suggest that in this respect, as in so many others, there is no such sharp break between the Testaments as is sometimes alleged. The church of the New Testament

is new, of course, just as the New Testament itself is new; but it is vitally and organically related to the Old Testament *ekklesia* just as the New Testament is to the Old—or, as we might say, using an analogy from nature, just as the butterfly is to the chrysalis. The New Testament church represents a development in the purpose of God to which Old Testament believers eagerly looked forward, a promise which was not fulfilled in their day “that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Heb. 11, 40). The heritage into which we have entered is theirs; they are the saints with whom we have become fellow-citizens. The church which our Lord said He would build was plainly something new as He spoke of its building in the future tense (Matt. 16, 18). It was new because of its relation and witness to Jesus as the Messiah and to the epoch-making events of His death and resurrection and outpouring of the Spirit. But it was at the same time the full flowering of the Old Testament “congregation of Jehovah” which had previously been restricted to one nation only but was now thrown open to all believers everywhere. And it is our Lord Himself Who constitutes the organic link between the two, and embodies their continuity. His first followers were the faithful remnant of the old *ekklesia* and the faithful nucleus of the new. The new Jerusalem has the names of the twelve apostles inscribed on the foundation-stones of its wall, but it also has the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on its gates (Rev. 21, 12, 14).

In the Hebrew Old Testament two principal words are used for the people of Israel as Jehovah’s community. One is *qahal* rendered “assembly” in R.V.; the other is *edah* rendered “congregation” in the Revised Version. In the Septuagint the latter word is constantly represented by Greek *synagoge*; the former word (*qahal*) is sometimes represented by *synagoge* and sometimes by *ekklesia*. In New Testament times these two Greek words, which are practically synonymous, became specialised in two divergent senses: *synagoge* was mainly reserved for the Jewish community and *ekklesia* for the Christian community.

In the Aramaic vernacular of Palestine a word com-

monly used as the equivalent of Hebrew *'edah* and *qahal* was *kenishta*. This Aramaic word was used in a double sense; it could denote the whole world-wide community of Israel, and also the individual community of Israelites in any one place, meeting in a particular synagogue. It may well be that on the two occasions when our Lord is said to have spoken of the church, this was the Aramaic word He employed. These two occasions, as we all know, are found in Matt. 16, 18, and 18, 17. The fact that Matthew is the only one of the four Gospels to contain our Lord's explicit references to the church is worthy of consideration. If, then, *kenishta* is the Aramaic term which He employed, it appears that on the former occasion He used it in its universal connotation and on the latter occasion to denote a particular community of His followers. But, whatever be the truth about the Aramaic words lying behind the Greek of our New Testament record, it is certain that the Christian use of the Greek word *ekklesia* in the New Testament is two-fold; it sometimes denotes the sum-total of the people of Christ and at other times the community of His people in any one place. It is with this latter sense that we are concerned in the present paper.

II. THE MARKS OF A LOCAL CHURCH.

It is no accident that the same word *ekklesia* is used for the local community of the people of Christ as is used for the sum-total of His people. The local *ekklesia* — the "particular kirk" as it used to be called in Scotland—is the local and visible manifestation of the Church Universal, the one holy catholic and apostolic church. Our membership in the Church Universal becomes actual in our membership of a local church.

What, then, is a local church? If we search the New Testament for guidance, we shall find several marks by which we may recognise one when we see it. The Reformers of the 16th century searched the New Testament thus, and they stated their findings in various documents from which there is still much of value to be learned. Here are two statements made by English Reformers. The first is the better known; it is the first paragraph of the Nineteenth Article of Religion (1553):

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

The other comes from the separatist Henry Barrow, who was hanged in 1593 for refusing to conform to the Elizabethan settlement:

A true-planted and rightly-established Church of Christ is a company of faithful people, separated from unbelievers, gathered in the name of Christ, whom they truly worship and readily obey. They are a brotherhood, a communion of saints, each one of them standing in and for their Christian liberty to practise whatsoever God has commanded and revealed unto them in his Holy Word.

These statements, like others to the same effect, point out a number of marks or "notes" by which a Christian church may be recognised, in accordance with the New Testament. Most of us will readily agree that a Christian church, in the local or visible sense, is (a) a community of believing men and women in which (b) Christ is acknowledged as Lord, (c) the Word of God has free course, (d) the gospel ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are duly observed, and (e) godly order is maintained by a Scripturally established church government.

When these features appear together, they mark off a local church from a voluntary association of Christians formed, it may be, on a limited basis for limited ends. I think, for example, of a Christian Union in a university, a factory, or any other place of business. Such a union may meet for fellowship in prayer and Bible study, for mutual encouragement, for gospel witness, and even for an occasional celebration of the Lord's Supper, but there is essentially a restrictive character about its membership and general basis which prevents it from being in the full sense a church.

On the other hand, the recognition of these distinctive features of a church does not mean that we deny church

status to companies of Christians which lack one or more of them. We do not, that is to say, deny church status to a Friends' Meeting or to a local unit of the Salvation Army because they do not observe Baptism and the Lord's Supper; nor do we deny it to those assemblies of Brethren which lack a Scriptural eldership. But such companies do represent deviations from the New Testament norm, and it is the New Testament norm that we wish to consider.

Let us, then, look at these five "notes" one by one.

(a) *A community of believing men and women.*

It should go without saying, of course, that membership in a Christian church is in itself a declaration of belief in Jesus Christ. According to the New Testament, none save believers in Christ can be members of a local church; but on the other hand, belief in Christ is the sole condition for membership. In the New Testament sense of the term, the church in any place mentioned is identical with the aggregate of believers in that particular place. Christians are directed to receive one another as Christ received them. There are, of course, considerations of discipline to be borne in mind (and something will be said on this score later) but in principle no local church has authority to debar from its membership or fellowship any one who makes a credible confession of faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord.

This, of course, was the fundamental principle of the Brethren movement in its early days, as a protest against the indiscriminate comprehensiveness of the Establishment and the exclusiveness of contemporary Dissent. That witness was necessary at the time and made its contribution to the happy conditions of intercommunion which exist between most evangelical communities in our day. It would be a bitter instance of the irony of history if, while others have learned the lesson of the unity of all believers, the heirs of those who then taught it should forget it!

"All that believed were together" we read of the first Christian church (Acts 2, 44). And in this as in other matters the primitive Jerusalem church has set a standard for all succeeding churches to aim at.

Normally in New Testament times a local church embraced the believers in a city. Only once do we read of the church in a province; that is in Acts 9, 31, where the best attested text (as in R.V.) speaks of "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria." Possibly the singular is used here because the writer is thinking of the Jerusalem church now scattered throughout those regions because of the persecution that followed Stephen's death. But the same believers are referred to corporately by Paul as "the churches of Judea which were in Christ" (Gal. 1, 22), and "the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess., 2, 14). This plural use is normal in the New Testament when the Christians of a province receive corporate mention: thus we read of "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1, 2) and "the churches of Asia" (1 Cor., 16, 19).

The fact that local churches in New Testament times were mostly city churches is due to the fact that it was in cities that the gospel was first preached by the apostles and their colleagues; it has no theological significance. Therefore we should not necessarily try nowadays to make the limits of a local church coincide with the movable boundaries of a modern city. When this procedure is adopted as a point of principle, ecclesiastical relations have to be modified every time a city extends its area. Andrew Miller in his day pointed out the arbitrary nature of a system which required that the congregation in Woolwich be reckoned part of the same local church as the congregation in Islington, eight miles away, but not of the same local church as the congregation in the adjoining borough of Plumstead, because Plumstead lay just outside the administrative area of Greater London.

Whether there is one local church in a city or several is a matter of history and other circumstances, not of Scriptural principle.

Each city church in New Testament times appears to have been administratively independent of any other city church, and equally independent of any grouping of churches. To be sure, they were encouraged to practise the fullest fellowship with each other and all were bound

to submit to the authority of the Lord and His apostles. Some elements in the Jerusalem church would no doubt have liked to assert their authority over the Gentile churches of Antioch and elsewhere but no apostolic countenance was given to any such metropolitan jurisdiction and nothing of the sort is implied in the account of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. The churches of Galatia were evangelised from Antioch but it is nowhere suggested that Antioch exercised any authority over them. Whether the church of a city exercised any kind of control over the Christians in the surrounding countryside, or whether the "mother church" in a city like Corinth exercised any kind of control over the church in a suburb like Cenchreæ (Rom. 16, 1) cannot be determined from New Testament evidence.

This combination of the utmost Christian fellowship and mutual help with the administrative independence of the several local churches is not always easy to maintain, but it is a barrier against sectarianism (which is inevitably involved whenever a formal or even informal circle of local churches is recognised) and also against State control, which can be much more effectively exercised over a centrally organised federation of churches than over a multiplicity of independent congregations. (We need hardly say, of course, that the idea that the State as such has any voice in the affairs of the church is completely foreign to the New Testament.)

In addition to city churches, we have occasional mention in the New Testament of house churches. Priscilla and Aquila had a church in their house both in Ephesus (1 Cor., 16, 19) and later at Rome (Rom. 16, 5); there was a church in the house of Philemon at Colossæ (Philemon 2) and in the house of Nymphas (or Nympha) at Laodicea (Col. 4, 15). In some cases a baptised household may itself have constituted a church of this kind; in others, the reference may be to the fact that a group within the larger city church met in the home of one of its members. We may think in this connection of Mary's house in Jerusalem (Acts 12, 12); Gaius's in Corinth (Rom. 16, 23), and Lydia's in Philippi (Acts 16, 14 f., 40). The

recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews may have been members of such a house church, which was in danger of isolating itself from the wider city fellowship in which it was included. Such smaller fellowships, we may gather, were under the authority of the elders of the whole city church.

(b) *Christ acknowledged as Lord.*

In one sense, this second "note" adds nothing to the first, for there is no believer in Christ who does not acknowledge Him as Lord. The confession "Jesus is Lord" is the inseparable mark of a Christian; it is naturally a confession made in his life as well as by lips. But the point here is that the company, as a company, is subject to Christ as Lord. This is what is involved in being gathered together in His Name in the sense of Matt. 18, 20. Whether we are content to retain the rendering "in" for the preposition *eis* in the phrase *eis to onoma*, or insist on translating it "into," there is no doubt that the phrase itself connotes acknowledgment of the Lordship of Christ.

If that is so, it specially behoves those who make a point of their claim to be gathered together in terms of Matt. 18, 20 to see to it that their acknowledgment of Christ's Lordship is more than a merely verbal and formal acknowledgment, lest we incur His reproachful question, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6, 46).

His Lordship must be acknowledged practically in every department of church-life—in the conduct of the members indoors and out of doors, in their gospel witness by word and deed, in their fellowship with each other, in the ministry of the Word, in the ordinances of the New Covenant, and in their public and private worship. And note well: it is the Lordship of Christ that is to be acknowledged thus, and not the "presidency of the Holy Spirit," to use a non-Biblical expression of late coinage and doubtful meaning. It is, in fact, derogatory to a Person of the Godhead to reduce Him to presidential rank. A president is a member of the company appointed by his fellow-members to "take the chair" and regulate those matters

which it is competent for such a person to regulate in accordance with Scripture. The presence of one such president, or even of a whole presidium of elders, is no bar to the acknowledgment of Christ as Lord or to the worship of the Father in His Name by the energy of the Spirit. On the contrary, the absence of such a presidency may often detract from the spontaneous outpouring of worship in spirit and truth because it affords an opportunity for the spirit of competition and confusion to rear its ugly head. What is often meant by the "presidency of the Holy Spirit" is a theory about the leading of the Spirit in worship and ministry which has no Scriptural warrant, and which we may mention again when we come to the ministry of the Word. But when all the congregation—leaders and led alike—unitedly sanctify Christ in their hearts as Lord, we may expect spiritual worship, profitable ministry, unmarred fellowship and effective witness.

(c) *The Word of God has free course.*

God the Holy Spirit, speaking in the Scriptures, has sovereign rights in such a company; this is infinitely more than the ascription to Him of mere "presidency."

There are some churches in which this acknowledgment of the supreme authority of the Word of God finds symbolical expression. In Presbyterian churches, for example, the first act in a session of public worship is the solemn carrying of the Bible into the pulpit; the Bible is followed at a reverent distance by the preacher, who is but the "minister" or "servant of the Word."

Whether there be any such symbolism or none, it remains true that a local church ought to be a company of people determined, as Henry Barrow put it, "to practise whatsoever God has commanded and revealed unto them in His Holy Word." This Holy Word of God, recorded in Holy Scripture, is nothing less than Christ Himself, as He is witnessed to by the prophets who went before Him and by His apostles whom He commissioned to preach and teach in His Name. The earliest Christian church is said to have "continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship" (Acts 2, 42), and the fellowship fol-

lows the teaching because it is dependent on it. The apostolic succession is most truly manifested where the apostolic teaching is most loyally maintained. The various attempts to give the apostolic succession external form and continuity in the course of church history, whether we approve of them or not, were primarily motivated by the desire to safeguard the purity of the faith once for all delivered to the saints in the apostles' teaching. It is our plain duty to continue to maintain that same teaching by those means which we find most consonant with the New Testament principles of faith and order. A company of Christians which makes this its aim is a truly apostolic church, holding the tradition of Christ and not the tradition of men.

For just as in our Lord's day there were some who made God's Word void by their own traditions, so in our time we must ever beware of the danger of nullifying the true tradition which has come down from Christ through the apostles, by setting alongside it or even putting in its place our own human traditions. Even traditions which are 1,800 years old have no right to usurp the authority which belongs to the apostolic tradition alone; and we need not think that there is any special sanctity about traditions which are hardly more than 100 years old, if that. The words of John Robinson to the Pilgrim Fathers in 1620 have a salutary message for the churches to which we belong to-day: "I am verily persuaded," he said, "the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word"—but he regretted that so many of his Christian friends were content to stay at the point to which their great leaders, Luther, Calvin and others, had brought them, instead of pressing on to receive the further light that the Scripture contained for those who were willing to seek it and profit by it.

It is, I believe, one of the signal blessings enjoyed by the churches of Christians called Open Brethren that in them the free study of Scripture is encouraged and no embargo is placed upon the proclamation or circulation of what we find there simply because it is not in accordance with what certain leaders have taught us. This, I think,

is generally true, although we are no more free than others from that conservatism which is an inevitable feature of all religion. But we have insisted on the sovereignty of the Word of God and those who honestly accept that sovereignty can never be mere "stick-in-the-muds." It is many years now (if I may be allowed a word of personal testimony) since my father advised me never to accept anything propounded as the mind of God unless I saw it clearly for myself in the Scriptures. His advice was excellent; I have tried to follow it consistently, and I am glad to say that I have found no difficulty in carrying it out among the people called Open Brethren. If we deny the liberty to study Scripture and to follow the further truth that it contains for our learning, we are false to our heritage. This does not mean, of course, that we must ignore what others have found in Scripture. On the contrary, it can never cease to be of moment to lovers of Scripture to consider what it has meant to others in all lands and ages. There is a wealthy written ministry of the Word, stretching back to the 1st century, which is one of our risen Lord's most precious gifts to His Church, but let us not elevate the ministry of Augustine or Aquinas or Calvin or Wesley or Darby or Karl Barth to the status of an authoritative tradition which must determine our interpretation of God's Word.

We do not have to depend entirely, however, on written ministry. The ascended Christ has, in every generation, given a living ministry to His people. Those who have been gifted as ministers of the Word are responsible to exercise that gift and their fellow-believers are responsible to give them due opportunity for exercising it, and to receive with grateful and responsive hearts the ministry thus given. If only one man in a local church has received that gift, then let him exercise it; if it be felt that his ministry alone is insufficient for the church's needs, let the church wait on God to grant a further supply. But let us beware of a spirit of egalitarianism which elevates to a principle the practice of "any man ministry" which can be a greater weariness to spirit and flesh than "one man ministry" could ever be when the one man concerned is one

whom God has called to this service.

Those who have received the gift of ministry and teaching are bound to give themselves to it, that when the church comes together, they may be able to edify it—build it up—by communicating to it what God has given them. This is a feature of the true leading of the Spirit in ministry, and it is a very different thing from the impulsive “ministry” which is sometimes thought to be the only form that a Spirit-led ministry can take. The leading of the Spirit in meetings of the church does not differ in kind from His leading of believers in daily life, and we may expect Him to lead those whom He has qualified to minister the Word. Only we must not limit Him to His normal workings; God is sovereign and will do an exceptional thing for an exceptional end. It was in the will of God that the humble man whose repetition of Isaiah 45, 22 was used to Spurgeon’s conversion should occupy the pulpit that morning when a more gifted preacher was prevented from coming, but it would probably not have been to the edification of the church had he occupied the pulpit week after week.

Appeal is sometimes made to 1 Cor. 14, in support of a certain interpretation of Spirit-led ministry. But we should observe that the Spirit of God is not explicitly mentioned in that chapter, and that the details of the chapter are mainly concerned with the gift of tongues and prophecy, which are not a practical issue in our churches. The chapter does, however, contain two principles of fundamental importance in this regard: “Let all things be done for edification” (verse 26) and “Let all things be done decently and in order” (v. 40). Attention to these principles will prevent the “sanctified disorder” deplored by the apostle elsewhere in the chapter.

How these principles were regarded in the early days of the Brethren movement may be seen from two quotations. One is from G. V. Wigram. When asked if he admitted a “regular ministry” he replied:

“If by a regular ministry you mean a *stated* ministry (that is, that in every assembly those who are gifted of God to speak to edification will be both limited in num-

ber and known to the rest) I do admit it, but if by a regular ministry you mean an *exclusive* ministry, I dissent. By an *exclusive* ministry I mean the recognising certain persons as so *exclusively* holding the place of teachers, as that the use of a real gift by anyone else would be irregular. I see that at Antioch (Acts 13, 1) there were but five whom the Holy Ghost recognised as teachers, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. Doubtless, at all the meetings it was only these five, one or more of them, as it pleased the Holy Ghost, who were expected by the saints to speak. This was a *stated* ministry. But it was not an *exclusive* ministry; for when Judas and Silas came (15, 32) they were pleased to take their places among the others and then the recognised teachers were more numerous."

This testimony, coming from J. N. Darby's chief lieutenant and belonging to the period about 1844, is illuminating. And to the same effect is the following quotation from S. P. Tregelles, with regard to the procedure in the Brethren's meeting at Plymouth:

"Mr. J. N. Darby requested Mr. Newton to sit where he could conveniently take the oversight of ministry, and that he would hinder that which was manifestly unprofitable and unedifying. . . . On one occasion Mr. Newton had in the assembly to stop ministry which was manifestly improper, with Mr. J. N. Darby and Mr. G. V. Wigram's presence and *full concurrence*: a plain proof that they *then* fully objected to unrestrained ministry."

If a change later came about in this respect, it was not due to fresh light from Scripture but to other reasons on which I might enlarge if this were a History of the Brethren (which, fortunately, it is not.)

It may be added that Scripture lays down no other principles for ministry at "The Lord's Table" than for ministry at other times.

(d) *The Gospel Ordinances are observed.*

By the gospel ordinances are meant, of course, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. I regret that so many good people are shy of designating these two ordinances by the useful

and distinctive term "sacraments." The fact that the term is derived from *sacramentum*, a Latin word for an oath, is neither here nor there; it is not the etymology of a word but its use that determines its meaning. And there is need for such a word to denote those two ordinances of our Lord which, as outward and visible signs, proclaim His work on our behalf and the benefits of the New Covenant which we appropriate as by faith we become incorporated in Him and feed upon Him.

This is no place for a treatise on the two sacraments, but it is evident to readers of the New Testament that believers in Christ were regularly baptised in token of their identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection to newness of life, and also that they regularly came together to break bread in fulfilment of His command: "This do in remembrance of Me." In both ordinances the truth of the gospel is set forth in act, as by the preaching of the Word it is set forth in speech, and both ordinances are for all believers—Baptism once for all, and the Lord's Supper repeatedly.

Nowhere is the simplicity of Christian liberty more clearly seen than in the lack of ritual legislation surrounding these ordinances in the New Testament, but what the New Testament has not provided has been more than amply supplied by ecclesiastical tradition of this or that school, especially with regard to the Lord's Supper, in attempts to regulate who may partake and who may celebrate, how often it should be done, and at which hour of the day, and what the successive details of the procedure should be. It is the believers themselves who are the ministrants and celebrants. The brother who gives vocal thanks and he who first breaks the bread or pours the cup do not perform these acts in any special priestly capacity. All the worshippers share one common priesthood, and the one who performs any of these acts does so on behalf of the others. By no means must we allow ourselves to suppose that he is taking the place which Christ Himself took when He instituted the Supper on the night of His betrayal. A sense of spiritual fitness will suggest that the brother who performs these acts will be one who is spirit-

ually fit to do so, but let us avoid any idea of sacerdotalism here. And this is no unnecessary warning; a spirit of sacerdotalism does manifest itself at times in quarters where it might be least expected.

Local tradition may also try to dictate whether the brother who gives thanks should also distribute the elements; whether the one who gives thanks for the bread must also give thanks for the cup; whether the bread should be leavened or unleavened; whether the wine should be fermented or unfermented; whether the Word should be ministered before or after the breaking of bread; whether such ministry should be given by a speaker previously announced or not, and so on. Local tradition is all very well, but let it be recognised for what it is, and then it is not so likely to be put in the seat of supreme authority. When the essence of the ordinance is most deeply appreciated, secondary matters will not become of primary consequence. I have read of a group of Christian Jews in one of Hitler's extermination camps who remembered the Lord with tea instead of wine; I can think of some rigorists who would pronounce their celebration irregular, if not invalid. But New Testament Christianity is characterised by a clear-sighted concentration on essential realities. There may be a place in the church for the gift of the legislator but Baptism and the Lord's Supper give no occasion for the exercise of that gift.

(e) *Godly Order is maintained.*

A New Testament church was regularly administered by brethren variously known as bishops (or superintendents), elders, pastors, rulers or guides. It was their business to set the other members of the church a good example in holy living and (an important part of an elder's duty in times of persecution) in holy dying as well. They maintained proper discipline in what might often be a naturally unruly flock by seeing to it that the right persons were received into the fellowship of the church, that the weak and timid were encouraged, that the self-willed were checked, that offenders against the Christian code were admonished, that those who by word or action showed that their Christian profession was quite empty were ex-

communicated. They must deserve the respect and obedience of the others; the others must respect and obey them. They must all to some degree be able to teach the others, although there were some among them who had a special gift in this regard, to "labour in the word and in teaching;" these were to be counted worthy of special honour (I Tim. 5, 17). Those who thus devoted time and strength to the spiritual welfare of the church should receive the church's help in material things, as labourers worthy of their hire.

Alongside the elders there were "deacons," those who discharged other forms of ministry in the church, without sharing in the chief pastoral responsibilities.

All these were men to whom the Holy Spirit had given the necessary qualifications for their service. Therefore some time had to elapse before a convert could be revealed as a man possessing the requisite gifts. For example, Paul and Barnabas planted churches in the cities of South Galatia as they traversed them from west to east in the course of their first missionary journey, but it was not until they began their return journey that they appointed elders in each (Acts 14, 23). The interval may not have been long, but it was long enough for the right men to approve themselves.

Sometimes the interval between the planting of a church and the appointment of elders was longer; it appears to have been specially long in Corinth, in view of the particular difficulties which arose in the church of that city. It is striking that in his directions in 1 Corinthians, Paul makes no reference to the elders of the church who would normally be responsible for seeing that his directions were carried out and that everything should be done in a decent and orderly manner. In some respects, then, his injunctions to the Corinthians have a period of transition in view, pending his purposed visit to Corinth to set in order matters not dealt with in his letter (1 Cor. 11, 34), but there were men in the Corinthian church who were manifesting the gifts of oversight—Stephenas and his family and others of the same calibre—and the Corinthian Christians were told to acknowledge such men and be in sub-

jection to them (1 Cor. 16, 15-18). The analogy of Paul's procedure elsewhere would suggest that in due course these men were explicitly appointed as elders in the church.

Elders were appointed in New Testament times by the missionaries who planted the respective churches or by other men acting as their deputies (as Titus acted for Paul in Crete). What should be done to perpetuate a succession of spiritual guides and pastors in the church? Much debate to little purpose has been devoted to this question, some maintaining that New Testament eldership lapsed with the passing of those appointed in apostolic times, and ought not to be revived. But it is surely one of the obvious duties of those responsible for the welfare of a church to see that the church does not suffer by failure to provide for a succession of elders. The principle of succession is plain in 2 Tim. 2, 2, and wise elders will from time to time associate with themselves others who manifest the necessary qualities, with the goodwill and confidence of the church. But those who exercise these functions of leadership should be publicly appointed and known; how can the church obey its leaders if it does not know who they are? With wise and able helmsmen to direct its faith and life a church will safely ride out many a storm in which it would otherwise founder.

III. THE PRESENT OPPORTUNITY.

The churches represented at this conference have still a wonderful opportunity for far-reaching service to the Christian good of our land.* We shall miss that opportunity if we hold fast to the traditions of men no matter

*The following extract from a book by a Glasgow minister published in July, 1954, will illustrate what has been said above without further comment of mine:

“At the turn of the century a considerable work was being done by the Presbytery in the lodging-houses of the city in the slum areas. Gradually through the years that work has been whittled down, not because it is any less urgent but simply because the Church is incapable

how good the men in question may have been. We can be good 1st century Christians and 20th century Christians at the same time, but we cannot afford to be 19th century Christians at this time of day. By turning afresh to the apostolic writings and finding our guidance there, we shall not only be true to our heritage, but we shall, under God, be a greater blessing to our fellows than ever we have been heretofore.

DISCUSSION

Mr. A. J. ASHWELL (Reading): Are we quite happy about Mr. Bruce's statement that the foundation of the Church on which it is built is the foundation, not only of the apostles, but of the prophets also and that the Church of the New Testament is vitally related to the Old Testament *ekklesia*?

Mr. M. GOODMAN: My own judgment has always been that Christ, being the chief corner-stone, the Church has been founded upon the apostles and prophets, and that the prophets are of the New Testament order whose foundation teaching we have in the Epistles.

Mr. A. J. ATKINS (Bromley): While any intelligent student will realise the principle of continuity, that the New Testament has grown out of the Old—is the Church, in one sense, not part of the new creation?

Mr. H. ST. JOHN: It is certainly a new movement of God: I do not know how far I could say that it was a new creation before it is, in some sense, complete.

Mr. A. J. ASHWELL: Would not the Epistle, from which the quotation is taken, help us in the matter? (Eph.

of producing laymen to undertake it now that the original group of volunteers has died out. It is easy enough to find well-meaning people in our churches who will provide tea or organise a concert for the lodging-houses, but if anyone is needed to give a ten-minute address or lead in prayer, we have to go to the mission halls or the Christian Brethren."

(Tom Allan, *The Face of my Parish*, p. 60).