



THE BRETHREN

JUSTUS SAMUEL

The Brethren

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40, Asparin Garden
Kilpauk
Madras - 10
- First Edition** : 1994
- Price** : 25/-
- Computerised
Typeset at** : **Classic Compugraphics**
Vellayambalam
Trivandrum - 10
- Published by** : **Arabha Publications**
IX / 761 K.R. Elankath Road
Trivandrum - 10
- Printed at** : **St. Joseph's Press**
Vazhuthacaud
Trivandrum.

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By

JUSTUS SAMUEL

An outline of the principles of church life and government enshrined in the New Testament and also its exemplification in India, and more especially in the Kerala State.

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INTRODUCTION

While serializing the chapters in the book, the writer had not thought seriously of publishing them in book form. But kind friends urged me to give them a more permanent form and I could not turn such requests down.

What follows is by no means a history of the “Brethren”. What I have jotted down are some of the deviations I have sensed among assemblies which call themselves “Brethren”. The observations are more slanted to India, especially, assemblies in Kerala region.

In exposing some of these defects, the writer has no intention of criticizing them. He himself is part of this persuasion. The object is to secure, if the Lord disposes hearts, to note them and bring about a change for the better. Since the following articles already appeared as a series in a magazine, there are a few repetitions, which the reader will kindly ignore.

The writer is not in favour of any denominational appellation for the “brethren”, nor in favour of “Open Brethren” or “Exclusives”, for such action will mar the unity he seeks His people to maintain. The Lord’s people are “brethren”, by virtue of what they are, not of their creation.

It was very gracious of Mr. Gordon Ritchie to write such a generous Preface as he did, greatly adding to the value of the book. He is one the author greatly esteems as a gifted servant of God, and one with whom he served the Lord, for many years in Bombay. At that time the writer was an executive in business.

The author is grateful also to Publisher Mrs. Grace John who has taken so much trouble and shown a great deal of patience in getting the job through, and that so elegantly.

The little volume is sent forth in the hope that the Lord of the Church will use its ministry for His own glory and for edification of His dear people.

Madras

December 1994

Justus Samuel

PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICES OF THE
CHURCHES OF GOD
AS OUTLINED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

reface to the book "THE BRETHREN"

“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches”.

“The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”

WHAT IS THE CHURCH? “Let us in a few words, consider what the church is. It is symbolized in scripture by a body, by a bride, and by a building. It is the mystical body of Christ (i.e, nearest to Him of all created intelligences); the bride of church (ie., dearest to Him among all the companies in the universe); and it is also the building of God (His habitation; His temple; His house). The church is heavenly in its concept, in its calling, in its character and in its consummation”. (excerpt from prophetic Profile, by G.B.Fyfe- a Precious Seed Publication).

In writing a brief foreword to the booklet ‘THE BRETHREN’ written and compiled by beloved brother in Christ, Dr. J.Samuel, I have been refreshed in my own soul by dwelling again on the clear teaching of the New Testament as to the guiding principle and clearly defined pattern for true churches of Christ. The authority of God is passing on to the companies of true believers in Christ met within the New Testament is clearly asserted by apostle Paul, to whom the revelation as to the church and the churches was particularly entrusted. In writing to the assembly in Ephesus, Paul magnanimously states that “the knowledge in the mystery of Christ”... “is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph.3:4,5). Thus including his fellow-apostles, but the

exposition and application of that revelation is manifestly the province of Paul himself. The charter of the Church, as given in the 1st epistle to Corinthians, (J.R. Caldwell's description) displays his method and intensions in plain language, as the following examples declare.

a. 1 Corinthians 4:17 – “As I teach everywhere in every church.”

b. 1 Corinthians 7:17 – “And so I ordain in all churches”- the N.I.V. has it, “This is the rule I lay down...”

c. 1 Corinthians 11:16 – “We have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” – N.I.V. – “We have no other practice nor do the churches of God.”

Such quotations surely indicate clearly that Paul, the great planter and teacher of the newly – established churches throughout the world of his day, insisted on conformity to common pattern of assembly life, practices and principles of action. Differences of language, culture or race made no difference whatever- essential features of a local church as to its composition, practices, manner of gathering, relative spheres and manner of behaving of brethren and sisters, essential doctrines and oversight of qualified elders and deacons were the same in all the assemblies, because Paul planted them, and received his guidance from God in such straightforward manner that he was able to write what we have already quoted above, plus the summary statement of 1 Corinthians 14:37. “The things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” It surely behoves us still to find and to follow the clear-cut pattern established at the beginning by Paul and his fellow-apostles, prophets and teachers. Certainly these principles and practices are not set out in such detail and definiteness as, for instance, the O.T. instructions as to the Tabernacle which was supervised by Moses,

or the sacrificial system which must be adhered to as in the early chapters of Leviticus. In N.T. times the Spirit of God, indwelling each believer, and the inspired Scriptures, which we in our day have in their complete form, are sufficient to ensure correctness of behavior, order and practice to the brother and sister who are subject to the Lord and desirous of pleasing Him.

Dr. Samuel has sought to emphasise these abiding principles in his detailed and practical chapters in the volume in our hands, and has emphasised the necessity of acting accordingly in all aspects of assembly life and witness in our day in India and throughout the world. We can humbly thank God that in India today there must be well over one thousand gatherings of Lord's people who are genuinely seeking to keep to the Scriptural order in their assembly life and service, and also there is cause for joy in that so many devoted brethren and their families are seeking to instruct converts they have won to the Lord in these vital and entirely appropriate teachings, based as they are on the Word of the Lord. The many practical issues dealt within the current volume should be of great help to elders and deacons and all who are called to teach the truth of God to the Lord's people in the assemblies of the saints. It is good that such a book is made available to a wider audience than those who read the "Steward News". Our brother must be congratulated for taking the time and making the effort to provide this material amassed over a long life of faithfully adhering to and practicing the principles enunciated in this volume. May the Lord of the churches be pleased to bless abundantly this labour of love accomplished for His glory.

New Zealand
November 1994

Gordon Ritchie

THE BRETHREN

Perhaps we are touching on a very delicate subject, so far as some Christians are concerned, especially in India. The remarks we make hereunder only seek to show the unscripturalness of taking the appellation “Brethren” to indicate a denomination or sect.

The writer recalls an incident that took place at the end of 1940’s. A dear friend of his, and a thoughtful Christian, had translated into the vernacular a booklet written by late Mr.W.E.Vine of Bath, England. This small publication carried the caption, “Brethren – a Misnomer”. The translated manuscript was submitted to the editor of a monthly journal which was popular among the Brethren in Kerala. To the dismay of the brother concerned (but causing no surprise to me), the article was rejected. To the present writer the message of that pamphlet represented, what the New Testament actually taught concerning the Lord’s people in the present age.

Since we have already made reference to the New Testament, we have to base our present thesis on what the scripture says. May we state it very simply, right in the beginning, that all Christians are brethren in Christ. Their main characteristic can be noted from the fact that the Greek word ADELPHOTES (plural of Adelfhos) indicates descendants of the same parents – they have a common origin. Thus brotherhood suggests a community based on identity of origin of life (W.E.V).

What we have said should make clear that Christians have a common divine origin. Only those who are “born again” or “born from above” – John Ch.3, or “born of God” Jn. 1:13 are Christians, We need hardly labour to point out in this paper that one becomes a

Christian through repentance towards God in regard to his (her) sins and personal acceptance of Jesus Christ who died to atone for sins and rose again for justification. A person does not become a part of the Christian brotherhood simply by accident of birth. That is why Jesus said emphatically in His memorable encounter with Nicodemus, a Doctor of Jewish law, that his prime necessity was to be “born again”. No religion, religious rite, however noble, or time – honoured as this might appear can give to fallen humanity the status of being the “children of God” (Jn. 1:12).

Jn. 1:12, read along with verse 13, makes self-evident that the personal salvation demands the “reception” of the Lord Jesus, which is the same as believing (placing total reliance) on the Lord Jesus. All this means in a very real sense that personal commitment of oneself to Christ, owning Him as Saviour and the Supreme Lord of life.

We must admit that we are against the disciples of the Lord Jesus being drawn into a false mould or sect. The Lord’s beloved people are ‘brethren’ in their mutual relationship, and the term significantly includes both brothers and sisters. The whole subject is invested, with a high and lofty character as we realize that the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead and glorified, was not ashamed to call them ‘brethren’ (Heb 2:11). This however, does not give any warrant to some Christians taking the liberty to refer to Him as ‘elder brother’. True, the Lord, in His mighty condescending grace calls His own ‘brethren’. But let us ever bear in mind that He is the Lord of glory, the ‘mighty God’ in Himself.

Approved Designations

Disciples

To begin with, the Lord Jesus called those who responded to His invitation, 'His disciples' (Matt 5:1) In Matt, chapter 4, verse 18 following, we can find a select few responding to His call and following Him. The Master had them in mind especially when He opened His mouth and taught the lofty and precious lessons occurring in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chs. 5-7). The disciple is a follower, a learner who came under His mastery. They had been changed inwardly, and had imbibed His Spirit for their mission of the reconstruction of a world broken and blasted by sin. Jesus became their Master, and they had surrendered themselves to Him as the Lord whose wishes they could carry out despite shame and loss which relations and the religious society would impose. They knew that discipleship meant their having to bear their 'cross' and travelling with Him.

Believers

As disciples, they had 'believed on His Name' (John 1:13). Belief is implicit in the very first step of response, as can be seen from that golden Gospel text in John 3:16. Christians are 'believers'. Simple as it may seem, that title involves not only the exercise of an initial faith in Christ, but of reposing faith in Him even in the darkest hour. It is this same simple child-like faith we should exercise in Him all along our pilgrim path. This idea is implicit in Paul's word to the Colossian Christians who were tempted to loose their grip on the 'Head', even Christ and go after the customs, traditions and thus, chase the shadows, The Apostle said, 'As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him' (2:6).

As believers we are expected to trust each other as mem-

bers of the same family, the children of the same Father. His people ought to be a love-mastered community in a world of suspicions and rivalry, so that 'the world might believe that Thou (Father) didst send Me' (John 17:21), words that occur in Christ's Intercessory Prayer (John 17). Further, John the Apostle unveiled that His people would overcome the Devil on the basis of their faith (1 John 5:4).

Christians

This more familiar appellation was a somewhat later revelation to believers. The believers in the first Gentile Church of Syrian Antioch were called 'Christian', a term minted by their neighbours and all who observed them keenly. They were different because they belonged to Christ. It was not a term of obloquy as some have supposed, but one of inward respect. Fellowship with Christ had transformed their character, and they were coming closer to God's purpose of their being 'conformed' to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). The world should note that we are 'different' through the honesty, truthfulness and the sanctity of our lives. To confess to our being Christians would involve suffering but for a while (1 Pet. 4:16).

Saints

This word has stumbled many. Many think that only our future life will reveal the character and the quality of our lives here. But according to the Apostle Paul, 'saints' are sanctified ones, set apart for God by virtue of Christ's redemption accomplished once for all on the cross (Heb 10:10,14). The Corinthians were, as we might reckon an unsatisfactory lot of Christians. However when Paul addressed them he used the words 'to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every

place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours, (1 Cor. 1:2). He called them so because they had been set apart for God's possession and the designation suggests a 'position'-- what they were in Christ. Someone has aptly said that if we are not saints on earth we shall never be saints in Heaven.

However it is very needful for us to note that appellation 'Saints' is used in a collective sense and no single Christian has the right to call himself a 'Saint' in the singular.

Faithful

Another manner in which spiritual believers are denominated in the Scripture is through the word, Faithful. Writing to the Ephesians where he did not have to deal with any polemics, he saluted them as to 'saints....., the faithful in Christ Jesus'. He did not use such a description concerning the Corinthians- they were 'saints'. If saints, the thought is they should be faithful, or in the ordinary parlance keep faith. It is interesting to notice that in the Greek, the same word is used for Faith and Faithful-PISTOS. In the passive voice, the word is used in the sense of being reliable, to be trusted. The Corinthians did not manifest this vital feature, but they were reminded that 'God is faithful' (1 Cor. 1:9).

Being faithful is not presented as an impossible virtue, for this quality is predicated of Abraham, Moses and other saints in the old Testament and in 1 Tim. 1:12, we read that the faithful God had counted Paul to be faithful. There is strong pressure from self, the world and the Devil which makes the believers swerve from the path of single-hearted devotion to the Lord and His word. Let us like Paul, be enabled to say, 'I have kept the faith' at the end of our earthly course.

At the fag end of the first quarter of the last century a movement began in Dublin (Ireland), then Plymouth (England). The leaders who were behind this had absolutely no intention of launching a new denomination. Most of the leaders were people associated with the Church of England whose number included ordained clerics, lawyers, medical doctors and others of high academic and professional attainment. The careful reading of the word of God, specially the New Testament epistles, made them realise that they were involved in religious systems which were contrary to the teaching of the word of God. Most of the churches in England and Ireland then had lost spiritual vision and the church members were apathetic towards spiritual truth or godly conduct. This situation had prevailed for quite sometime even previously and it is this malaise that constrained godly men like John Wesley and William Booth later to leave the mainline church and give themselves to ardent evangelistic activity wherever people assembled, including the outcast and derelict society of East London. Their action was naturally frowned upon by the hierarchy of the established church. It was in such circumstances men of the stamp of John Nelson Darby, J.G. Bellet and Edward Cronin took the bold step of separating themselves from the religious systems in which they were found, meeting frequently to study what the Scripture said as to true christian fellowship and service for Him. These men saw, as they reverently pondered the Scriptures, the need of remembering the Lord in Breaking of Bread each Lord's day in utter simplicity as is witnessed when the Lord Jesus instituted the Communion feast in the night of His betrayal, in the Upper room. They also recaptured, with the help of God, the truth relative to the priesthood of all believers. So their meeting did not have a priest to officiate or presiding Presbytery--each brother present, who had spiritual gift had the liberty of opening from the Scriptures, the insight the Lord had given him, of course in

subjection to the direction and control of the Holy Spirit. They refused to call themselves by any name--they were simply christians, loyal to the Lord and acting in obedience to God's precious word. And the Lord, in His sovereignty, was giving a like-conviction to many another christian still involved in denominational churches, and these were drawn into the aforesaid company and their numbers grew as in Jerusalem after the Pentecostal effusion (Acts 2:42 to 47).

This movement later flourished in Plymouth under the leadership of Benjamin Wills Newton and others and assumed the character of a sizeable church with hundreds of members. The leadership lay in the hands of some gifted men including those mentioned above but they were not known as pastors or by any other human title; they were servants of God giving themselves to the preaching of the gospel and establishing the believers in their most holy faith. It is on account of the flourishing work of God in Plymouth a new phenomenon--for the organised churches they called this group by the name of "Plymouth brethren", just because their main activity was based in Plymouth, England. There was thus no claim on their part to assume the name Brethren, much less the name "Plymouth Brethren". Others called them by such an appellation and it is strange that in the context of this historical development some people in subsequent generations have preferred to call themselves Brethren. This certainly was far from the conception of the founders of the movement. Later when, in less than 20 years, there was a division among the brethren created as to the basis of reception into fellowship, the tighter group gave the more flexible ones the appellation "open brethren" while the residual group was thence onward known as 'exclusives,' or in other words those who had excluded from their fellowship christians who did not agree with their principles of reception. The term 'open'

certainly carried with it a suggestion these assemblies did not deserve because that word might suggest indiscriminate reception into their companies anyone who sought their fellowship.

Nothing could have been farther from the truth because the open assemblies would only receive into their fellowship those who are born again, sound in the faith and godly in their walk. The open assemblies had in their ranks some of the most spiritual men the world has seen, such as Antony Norris Groves, George Muller & Henry Craik. Of course these brethren had a heart and attitude to look upon all true christians as their brethren in the Lord and this outlook of theirs not only helped their fellowship develop faster but also in their gaining a vision of a world 'white unto harvest'. These assemblies have been responsible in commending many hundreds if not thousands of missionaries into various parts of the world in the next one century. The expansion of the assembly work in India is also very largely the result of this vision of the open assemblies.

The exclusive brethren, on the other hand, put a lot of emphasis on their own conception of what christian fellowship ought to be, and rather than reaching out to a needy world, confined themselves to their home situations probing deep into the scriptures and publishing books about their views. Further, John Nelson Darby propounded the theory of the "church in ruins" and discarded the clear biblical teaching concerning elders (overseers) for each assembly. Darby, great scholarly and good man that he was yet built his teaching on reception also on the basis of Infant Baptism which he had practised as a curate of the Irish (Anglican) Church.

Through all we have written we want to emphasise that people who were originally called by others as 'Brethren' stood for

certain values and had no intention of forming themselves into a different denomination.

Christians who happened to have the appellation 'Brethren' attached to themselves, actually were against a denominational tag thus being fixed on them. Here we are thinking of a movement which commenced way back in 1827 in Dublin, Ireland, which spread into the British Isles a short time afterwards and developed into the pattern of local churches. Two of the larger churches of such persuasion were based in Plymouth and in Bristol. These cities were under no circumstances, or reason, the headquarters of the movement. Within half a century, similar-churches were established in many other cities of England, aside from those in U.S.A, Canada, West Indies, New Zealand and Australia. Here we are not thinking of those brethren who, although part of the movement originally, saw a different mode of church government, and whose members spread into some of the said lands and Europe under the leadership of that great Bible teacher, evangelist and leader in John Nelson Darby, since being known as 'Exclusive Brethren'. These latter assemblies practised infant baptism and adopted a different system of church government, under which their churches become part of a different entity, with a central oversight system affecting different geographical groups within a country or in countries themselves. We are here dealing with Christians who, against all their desire, incurred the name 'Open' brethren, given by others, mainly to distinguish their practices from 'Exclusive Brethren'. Lest any should misunderstand, let us make it clear that many in the Open assemblies recognize that among the Exclusives are many of God's choice saints with deep insights into the Scriptures of Truth.

The local assemblies who refuse to accept any denominational tag, but desire to be known as Christians merely hold, in the main, the following teaching:

1. The plenary inspiration of the whole Bible, and so authoritative, affecting all aspects of faith and practice.
2. Belief that the whole of humanity has sinned through the fall of Adam and so under eternal condemnation, but that through faith in the redemptive work of Christ all men and women can be saved eternally.
3. Belief that salvation is by grace through faith, (all human works excluded) and those who respond will give evidence of their loyalty to Christ through immersion baptism as a public testimony.
4. Recognition that all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and living clean life according to God's Word, have fellowship one with another.
5. Faith that believers should meet each Lord's Day to remember the Lord Jesus Christ in the breaking of bread, according to the Lord's dying command, at which meetings the male members could share with their brethren the insights they have received from the Scriptures, and also express their fellowship in various ways.
6. Faith that such believers (male and female) constitute before God a holy priesthood, with direct access to God for worship and prayer, and that without the mediation of any earthly priest.

7. Faith in the imminent and personal coming again of the Lord Jesus to unite His redeemed people unto Himself, which will lead to establishment by Him of the Judgment Seat to assess the work and motives of His people and reward them suitably.
8. All true Christians being members of the Body of Christ, through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, should associate with fellow-Christians as local churches, which churches are autonomous, self-supporting and self-propagating.
9. Belief that each such church is guided by a body of elders, whose spiritual work the church recognises, and not only provide for the spiritual health of the believers through sound teaching, but will concern themselves with the disciplining of erring members, according to the teaching of our Lord and His Apostles.

SEPARATION-RIGHT, OVERTIGHT, OR LAX

That God's people should be separate unto Himself is His purpose whether viewed in the Old Testament age or the present New Testament. It was failure to apprehend this that caused the Jews to be banished to periods of captivity. Israel of old had departed from God's holy covenant and law, and had become idolatrous. It is strange to find that idolatry has such a strange fascination for the human heart. Way back 3000 years before Christ, it had a grip on the human race, and idolatry was forerunner of all the terrible vices listed in Romans chapter one. The essence of idolatry is the displacement of God who should command the supreme devotion of the heart, by other devotions starting with the

inventions of deities according to man's perverted genius. He makes, of course, the very best he can conjure up, but he is thereby only projecting into immensity his ignorance of the Supreme Governor of the Universe, his Creator and Sustainer and the One in whose hands his breath and ultimate destiny rest.

Coming to the church age, we notice that God's people of the New Covenant, Corinthians for example, living as they did amidst idolatrous people, lost their sense of being 'sanctified' actually meaning, being separated to Christ, which fact was to be demonstrated through holy living. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, First Epistle, there is reference to the 'table of Lord' and 'table of demons'. Idolatry was all around them, and the Corinthians worshipped Aphrodite, the goddess of lust (same as the Roman Venus). In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul put painfully a few rhetorical questions to these, otherwise 'wise' or sophisticated people: 'what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony hath Christ with belial (symbol of evil incarnate), or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?' (6:14, 15). God's people were not to be 'unequally yoked' either through marriage, business involvement or pastime.

And, the Bible shows that here is a true separation-that is from all sin and false religion. Some would go a step further and separate themselves from their own brethren in Christ for flimsy reasons, which is not right. But there should be separation from aught that dishonours Christ and any system that arrogates to itself the supreme role of our Lord as Redeemer-Mediator, Priest and Sovereign of His people. Many religious systems enter this area in a subtle way, and seek to denigrate His absolute uniqueness. In this

matter we find people interpreting the scriptures too tightly or with laxity. To many, religion becomes a matter of convenience. There could be orthodoxy in Ephesus to which church the Lord in glory directed a communication. But they had 'fallen from a great height' in that they had lost their "first love" to the Master. In the Lord's message to the subsequent six churches, we see the gold becoming dimmer, lapsing into cold-hearted indifference, keeping the Lord of glory outside His church!

BRETHREN AND ETHICAL STANDARDS

We need hardly labour to explain further what the true connotation of the word 'Brethren' is, God's people are kin one of another. They have a common origin, not in the sense of 'universal brotherhood', which only means that for all mankind God is the Creator; so all people are 'God's off spring', as the Apostle Paul tactfully and meaningfully referred to the race of humanity. But God's people are God's children, 'born of God' (John 1:12,13) through personal faith in the Christ who died to atone for sin, and rose again to assure them of their justification by a holy God. This means a closer bond than earthly ties, for this relationship lasts for eternity.

Forgive us if we are repeating another point. Love is the hall-mark of christian brotherhood. 'You should love one another just as I have loved you' (John 13.34) is our Lord's enunciation of the 'new commandment' enjoined on His family. It was by this inborn trait were all people to identify them-not by any other label.

To this agrees what John the Apostle, said in his epistle, 'we love, because He first loved us' (1 John 4.19). Our readers will note the omission of the pronoun Him, for it does not occur in the

original Greek, although that fact is true. John is emphasising the elemental fact of Love, which is infused into His people.

Love Unchanging

Some scholars and thinkers have sought to make a distinction between the concept of love in the Old Testament and the New; Love (Gk Agape) by its nature cannot change. Paul puts it emphatically, 'love never changes' (1 Cor. 13:8). There is of course an advanced revelation to, appreciation by us of love, which difference must be interpreted by the progress of God's redemptive revelation. The Hebrew word 'AHEB', a term indicating of intensive love of God for man, Occurs in the O.T as late as in Deut. 4:37-38, whereas AGAPE occurs in God's earlier epistolary revelation in the N.T. eg. Rom.5:5:5.8. And, when it comes to the Hebrew word 'HESED', namely man's love to God, we have to travel centuries to get it, say as in Jeremiah 2:2. The N.T establishes this sort of relationship much faster. We might ask the question, Do we love our brothers in Christ promptly and dearly? Or does our affection embrace only those of our doctrinal affinity? The 'unity of the Spirit' Paul reminded the Ephesian Christians is something His people must be 'zealous in love to preserve' (Moff.) But not at any cost! God has forged a basis for this in a seven-fold unity of doctrine which is the birthright of every christian. Some may argue on the 'one baptism' - what it means. We can only say, and that without dogmatizing, that since the list heads 'one body and one spirit' the reference must be sought elsewhere than in the 'baptism of the Spirit' (1 Cor. 12.13), and this natively induces to consider water baptism which is the symbol of our identification with our Lord in His death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6.3-4). Whatever our conception, the family bond is regeneration, also the 'one body' status. Any adherence to the admission of an infant through

'baptismal regeneration' must occur even to young believers and unbiased students of the Word as untenable.

Of equal importance is the truth about holiness which any true believer in Christ is under obligation to hold on to and maintain. God's nature is not only love, He is ineffably holy. Mark the repetitive command in Leviticus 'Be holy because I am holy' (11:44-45). The elemental and essential meaning of holiness is that of being 'separate' from every form of evil and be 'different' in aught that is ungodly-worldly religions, maxims, ideas, practices. This is where there is constant breakdown, especially on the part of people who assume a hifalutin posture-the 'holier than thou' profile. Our christian standard is not to be judged by our profession, preaching skill or long prayers couched in Scripture phraseology, but by our response to an inborn urge to refuse standards other than those God has laid down, either by precise word or easily deductible principle. And this is bound to query all to common penchant for money-grabbing in devious business dealing, land transaction, dowries and the like. The common excuse is, these are traditional, facetious plea that by indulging in these you don't hurt any is not tenable for supremely spiritual men. You often hurt your brethren also and the heart of God.

Social Inroads

Ethics must govern the marriage relationship and family norms. For the vast majority in societies, specially christian groups, the marriage bond loses its sanctity, and vows are inwardly broken. It is true that in a society that those who come under biblical christendom, divorces are far fewer than in free West. However, family estrangements are not infrequent. And this has a bearing on the family, specially the children who unconsciously go astray. The

sons assume innocence when it comes to dowries. All they might know is the size of the package, the actual transactions are done at the parents' or close relations' level. If only there were Phinehases And Nehemiahs today! It appears the virus affects people without exception, and so even the supposed spiritual ones condone. Statutes cannot correct these, nor social counseling. The counsellors need to be overboard!

Sin

The Apostle John wrote, 'sin is lawlessness' (1 John 3:4). The transgressor does not inwardly consent to any law, divine, moral or governmental. A little dose of spirituality may embolden him to sin with supposed impunity. The fall of man in Eden made our primal parental pair lose their theocentric (God-centred) integrity and vision. Blurring of vision, hardness of heart and humanistic will were the consequences, and these have been transmitted to the progeny with Adamic nature, perverting even superficial believers. John. The Apostle, carries the problem to those in God's family and takes them back to the garden. 'For all that is in the world, the desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eyes and the proud glory of life, belongs not to the Father' (1 Jn. 2:16). The Apostle added, 'the world is passing away with its desires, while he who does the will of God remains for ever' v. 17 (Moff).

Brethren and the Wane of Evangelical Zeal

We must all confess humbly that the passage of years and better knowledge of God's Word and greater opportunities found in fellowship with God's people in one or more places have not produced in us any deeper passion for the souls of the perishing. In

fact, the fountains of compassion have dried up. This can always be diagnosed as resulting from the fact we have lost 'our first love'.

The Macedonian Churches founded by Paul and his companions on his second missionary journey have a message of teaching. From the time they heard the Gospel and reposed faith in the Lord, they faced severe persecution, which was still raging when Paul sent them his two letters, probably within a year of his departure. Their little assembly and homes had become a springboard for the Lord to move Himself out to the whole of the populous city, aye, even to the whole of the province of Achaia and even further to Macedonia. Listen to the inspired record 'the word of the Lord has resounded from you', and these young Christians lately delivered from the clutches of idolatry and vice were providing themselves as 'imitators' (Gr. *Mimetes*), from which we get our English word, *Mimicry*; ensamples, which means *Models*; and trumpeters (this is the suggestion in the verb 'sounded' (V. 7)) you might say, they must have been wealthy people: quite the contrary; they were passing through 'deep poverty' and that to add to the 'severe ordeal of trouble' (2 Cor, 8:2 Moff.) And, the secret of it: first they gave their own selves to the Lord (V. 5). The Lord was supreme in their affections. They had known values of discipleship, although they did not have teaching from the Lord Himself (see Matt. 10:32-39).

The Priorities and the Potential

It is interesting, and heart-searching, to find that before the Lord spoke the aforesaid words to the disciples, He had reminded of His care for every need of their's and their families-food, raiment, shelter, which are the essential things of material life. Isn't it painfully strange that at the time like the present, when God's

people hate all these manifold than fifty years ago, they sail become anxious about these very things? In the Western world, amongst Christians in general, they have devised a method (may be unconsciously) of relegating the task of evangelisation to specialised groups who conduct crusades, camps, conferences, etc. These, of course, are good in themselves. In the process God's people do not mind parting with considerable finances. But let us remind ourselves that the Lord primarily wants us; then only is our money a proper value. This sort of thing is creeping into the activity of the fellowship - we mean personal involvement in ministry and shepherding. It is often relegated to specialised individuals, such as 'ministering elders' while gifted brethren take the back seat.

Coming to India, one's mind goes back to half a century in the Travancore segment of the present Kerala State. The brethren used to cover every market place, annual festivals of religion, sports and the native arts. Teams of gifted young men used to criss-cross the State, while activity in the home towns or villages were assiduously kept up. One's recent visit to the same region brought to the mind the obvious lacunae. The brethren are smugly content with year-end conventions and having speakers from overseas. There is no dearth for money, and organisation approaching modern business efficiency, but personal sacrifice is lacking. Of course, we are aware that the cream of the youth from Kerala assemblies is in overseas countries. Some of these have a heart for India and do manifest concern. O yes, quite a few go out in teams to the more needy North, and do what they can mainly through literature (as overseas personnel from OM did). But nothing can replace the individual output of men called and commissioned by the Lord to go to cities and towns of His choice, and doing a steady work of preaching and teaching. But this presupposes adequate heart preparation, equipment with God's word, and last, but by no means the least,

equipment with accurate knowledge of the language of the people we seek to win.

We are not pointing these things in a spirit of criticism. The Assemblies in the Andhra region (approaching 500), are still insular and mostly village-based. After the initiation of a missionary movement by Indian brethren to unevangelised areas, way back in the Forties, Andhra has contributed only two brethren to this cause. Among the reasons are their persisting economic backwardness and lack of education. The brethren are active in their local areas and, barring a very few, most young people and middle aged elders do not manifest independence and enterprise(they have been long under the tutelage of godly missionary brethren who left India following political changes). More of these young men can be helped through a 'good assembly-based bible training course' and getting exposed to brethren from other areas. These need sympathy and encouragement. Andhra has an excellent record of effective work in church-planting, specially in South Andhra, and the people have excellent potential.

All that we have said above applies to other regions, specially Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. These States are still far behind Kerala and Andhra, but have the potential. Anti-Christian forces are fairly strong in Karnataka, and workers are still few in the smaller towns which outskirt main city centres like Bangalore. While the Lord is at work in Bengal it is a matter of grief that in the metropolitan city of Calcutta (the largest city in India, together with the twin city of Howrah), there are only three assemblies accounting for a total membership of less than a hundred. Calcutta should normally have some 50 virile assemblies, taking into account its 11 million population. If this city had on going testimony, its influence would have percolated into the adjoining States of Mizoram,

Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh, where as of date, there are no assemblies after the N.T. pattern.

In the above paragraphs we have not attempted to give a survey of the need of India; these thoughts sprang up in the mind as we wrote something about Kerala, which State the writer visited very recently.

Hierarchy which is There!

Human nature being what it is (naturally of Adam's descent), the old nature persists even after one is born again of the Spirit. And the old nature is one that is self-seeking, given easily to empty-glorious (Phil. 2.3., where the Greek word is 'KENODOXIA', which our translators render as 'vainglory'). (KJV). It is 'passion for empty personal glory' in a situation which does not warrant it in the least. In this passage, Paul is seeking to bring out in a special manner the lowliness of Christ, His self-emptying condescension. Evidently the Apostle had in mind the reproachable altitude and conduct of 'some' who were preaching Christ 'from motives of rivalry' (Phil. 1.16, Wey), 'thinking to add to the pain' of Paul's imprisonment. Perhaps these were the men about whom Paul wrote with tears in his eyes (3.18).

The Truth of the Matter

One of the sad, inevitable, results of Christian liberty which the pioneers of the original Brethren Movement opened to us believers, was a hold, by quite a few, on the wrong end of the stick. 'Everybody could be preacher, pastor, teacher' they thought, and some even renounced scholarship and the necessity of any systematic study of God's Word. Of course, the gradual spread of

the Movement exposed the fallacy of human priesthood, for it emphasised the office Christ bore as the Priest, High Priest and Great High Priest of His people, to the exclusion of any other-a truth which needs to be under- scored by Christ's messengers in our day, even as the priesthood of all believers. But, in actual fact, a new brand of priests and pastors has emerged, seeking roles which are not their's by divine appointment. They, of course, would stoutly protest against their filling any hierarchical position (Hierarchy means, government by priests), and aver that they are seeking to minister to God's people. Outwardly, it all appeared sensible because they wore no vestments, but actually they were aiming at filling positions of priests and pastors from whose tentacles the believers had got themselves loose. In the Andhra region in India, such have proved that habits die hard, for, there are quite a few who hold the title 'pastor', just because circumstances have brought them to have 'charge' of groups of simple christians. The missionaries, until some 30 years ago, seem to have acquiesced with such assumption, perhaps without encouraging it. Now that the missionaries have left, they feel they are the real 'pastors' and the use of the title continues with a sense of spree. Some of these 'pastors' who are lucky in securing marriage licences, add as extra qualification, the title, 'Marriage Registrar', obviously to buttress their assumed role of pastor, and also use it after their names. They are virtually, 'reverends', only are they afraid of the more sensible brethren around. For ourselves, we are convinced there are some genuine 'pastors' among His people, not of the sorry order detailed in Jer. 23:1-2; Ez. 34:2; Acts 20:29-30; but then, a genuine pastor (same as shepherd) does not need self-promotion-his life and service will manifest the divine call and spirit of service. Sometimes it is curious to note the devisings of men in inventing what they think to be innocuous decorations!

The situation in Kerala is a little different. The region, specially the former Travancore State region, which was ridden with the dominance of Syrian hierarchy, the few gifted among the believers who were saved and came out of the age-old church system, quite naturally slipped into the hierarchical way. They had seen the Syrian priests in action, and the delivered believers were only too glad to have substitutes among them, although they were called 'Upadeshis' or 'Upadessiars', but not 'Achans'. The writer knew at least one Brethren pastor who, instinctively came out occasionally with parts of the Syrian liturgy for purposes of illustration.

Some, nine decades after the particular renaissance in Kerala (assembly testimony), the hierarchical system is still in evidence, although under a thick cloak. These leaders think they have automatic right over the people. They have a way of demanding and getting what they consider their 'dues' - liberal amounts of money at weddings, other family functions, even at funerals!

We are not sure how things are in other Third World countries where assemblies are at least reasonably strong. Thank God, these abuses are not prevalent in the West, which has about 80 per cent of the assemblies in operation on a world level. Here the problem is that of a growing penchant to appoint full-time, ministering elders who assume something like the role of 'Pastor' in Congregational church system. Such are paid a monthly remuneration often comparable with that of middle management in industry. One is afraid that church history is being ignored, which saw development of clericalism out of conferences of church delegates presided over by the most influential leader. The natural heart ever cries, 'Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the

nations' (1 Sa. 8:5). Think of all dreaded evil that came on Israel, with the eventual loss of their dignity as a 'royal priesthood', lapsing into exile. High time that we reviewed our stand and took corrective measures where we have failed, albeit unwittingly.

New Excursion in Doctrinal Integrity

Here we have sought to underscore the fact that believers of local assemblies stand to lose their scriptural integrity and character by sticking to the mere label 'Brethren'. All truly born again believers are brothers one to another by reason of their loyalty to Christ. Of course it is understood that they have commitment not only to the saving gospel but also to 'observe all things whatsoever... commanded' by the Lord Jesus (Matt. 28:20) which includes immersion baptism of true disciples and their gathering for fellowship in His name (Matt. 18:20 ie., read together with the verse quoted above). This total obedience to the Master inevitably will mean separation unto Himself and separation from aught that is contrary to holiness as presented in His word. This might also, in turn involve disassociating oneself from all systems evolved by men, religious, ecclesiastical or otherwise. We are afraid that in this latter aspect quite a section of those who boast themselves as 'Brethren' badly fail.

I have known 'Brethren' who separate themselves from their fellow believers on the basis of a wrong interpretation of 2 Tim. 2:21. The 'these' of this verse has evidently got to do with the false teachers described as men who indulge in 'vain babblings', of the characters of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who taught that the resurrection was past already (l. 18). It is not just a question of faulty exegesis, but deliberate attempt to overthrow the faith of some believers. Perhaps they repudiated the physical resurrection of

our Lord even as certain neo-theologian do. If Christ's resurrection be denied, a major plank in redemption's story will be violently removed (1 Cor. 15:3,4). Let us frankly admit there are quite a large number of evangelical bible teachers whose teaching on the whole is fundamentally sound. Such must be accepted as our brethren notwithstanding difference in some details. But purity of doctrine is essential for the maintenance of a 'house' that observes divine order. In this respect the believer has to seek the distinctive direction from God's word. A denomination wedded to a sacerdotal or ritualistic form of worship is obviously to be rejected by any Spirit-taught christian on the basis of 1 Pet. 2:5,9 and several other passages in the epistle to the Hebrews, while it may not be possible for a scripturally instructed believer to go along with christians who find themselves bound by such systems, it will not mean that they are to be despised. They are still the Lord's people even though we may not be able to maintain close fellowship with them. These, however are not to be considered "Publicans and sinners". There must ever be a humble realisation that God's grace is such as can bring true understanding of others and to restore the fallen and even a heretic back on the rails.

COMMENDATION SCRIPTURAL OR 'BRETHREN' TRADITION

In the G.F.T.I (as in its predecessor body, GSTF), since its inception in 1954, there has been, ever and anon, the query posed about the essentiality of a worker being commended by his local Assembly. Some have even ignorantly suggested that the whole conception is of GFTI making. Quite have thought of it as a method of gaining recognition for the sake of receiving financial help, and a few assemblies have only been glad in signing letters brought to

them by workers (even written in English by themselves), even before ascertaining the contents.

Until less than half a century ago, India did not have 'commended' workers within the country. There were quite a few foreign missionaries, nearly all of who were commended, including women. Very few of them encouraged gifted Indian workers, or if they encouraged at all, they did not think of them as workers who needed to be commended by the local assemblies. The independence of India and the consequent departure of the foreign workers resulted in a positive change. Local assemblies (at least a few of them), felt a responsibility to encourage young men. The more gifted among them just went out to new fields, but in the beginning with the blessing, concurrence and prayer-backing of the assemblies. This, for all intents and purposes, was considered by the responsible brethren in GFTI as 'virtual' commendation. A few among these workers sent to GFTI a sort of commendation letters.

In the present time, we see a number of 'free-lance' workers, and they have gone out hoping that eventually they will be recognized. The fault on the part of some workers and assemblies simply was they did not have adequate teaching on the subject. The last decade had seen a spurt of such movement, one of the results of spawning Bible Schools. After Bible school, what else can one do? The whole idea of training oneself for a earning or self-earning career gets stifled. We notice in some publications names included of those who have no gift or spiritual equipment-included among them are even undisciplined people. They also go as workers and the present tendency is, why disturb any little good they are doing. This is the result of lack of vision, the right consciousness of the utter holiness of God. The 'anything goes' concept is quite prevalent.

As in Isaiah's day, people depart from the Word, and there is no more dawn in them (Isa. 8:20), and people tend to lose even the small vision they once had.

In the book of the Acts, we have God's missionary ideals set, and it was by following its lead, the simple, Spirit-filled, chiefly peasants, were able to turn the world upside down.

Paul had his clear call from the risen Lord, as well his appointed spheres of service well marked out (Acts 9.15.16). Before he and Barnabas, the most gifted spiritual leaders in the Antiochian church were out on their pioneer foreign mission, the Assembly commended them to the grace of God. The church sensing the Spirit's clear direction, 'released' them (Acts 13:1- 4). Of course, this sort of thing can happen only in a spiritual assembly where there are dedicated ministers of the Word. We have no record of any letter of commendation being issued, but Antioch became their base of operation (Gilgal to them as to Joshua and his warriors). And it was to Antioch they returned after completing their first missionary journey to report God's doing and get replenished. A commendation whether supported by a letter or not, is valid only as long as the worker enjoys the church's full confidence-(see 14.25-28).

The same principle is seen in the commendation of Timothy, soundly saved, spiritual young man, 'well reported' by the brethren in his home assembly at Lystra, but also by the assembly at Iconium. Paul took Timothy as his fellow-worker because this happy situation was there (Acts 16.1-2). Once again, Apollos, great O. T. scholar and eloquent preacher that he was, sent by the believers in Ephesus to Corinth with a letter of commndation (Acts

18:24-27). What needless suspicions could be saved in a new place with such a current commendation in hand.

We are living in a far more complex world. A properly worded Commendation can go a long way for welcome and opportunity for service wherever a worker may go, even on a world level.

A commendation letter is not meant to get monetary support. Such a letter is not needed when a worker moves among christian friends, specially among those whom the worker has won for Christ (2 Cor. 3:1-3). Check the wording, date of letter, and who has signed.

THE COMPROMISE SYNDROME AND DOOR OF HOPE

Compromise is a very tricky matter. The word is derived from the Latin and holds the idea of concession and agreement, if necessary even at a price. Godwin said that all virtue is compromise between opposite motives and inducements. Macaulay on the other hand expressed the view the "the essence of politics is compromise". This latter definition seems to support the religious beliefs that many in these days hold like Frederick the great. The Prussian emperor advanced the view that each man must get to heaven in his own way. Genuine christianity will counter such opinions of men. The teaching of Jesus Christ was ever uncompromising as to sin and human philosophy; it admitted truth without diluting, honesty without a shadow. Christ's ethic exceeded by far the "righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees (legal experts of Christ's day and votaries of mere outward religion).

Where do the brethren come in all this? We are afraid that at least in the third world situations the false conceptions prevail quite easily. But, mind you, always when individuals or groups stand to gain an advantage for themselves. In the Kerala region christians compromised mainly when it came to landed wealth, finance, jobs, marriages etc. As to land and finance they follow the tradition and quite a few are not even conscious of the prescription of the Lord, "give back unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar" (see Matt. 22:21). To many, avoidance of dues is a mark of cleverness. There may not be any thought of deception but certain traditions followed in the society make one obtuse to relatives,

What we have mentioned above has a bearing on situations where we may use exaggeration in getting into a good job position one does not qualify for. But strangely people who indulge in this sort of thing make a grade for themselves. But do they finally in heaven's reckoning? In the age-old customs that blind people, values are lost. This applies when it comes to a question of finding a partner in life (or according to the Kerala customs where the parents are in search of a match for their children). One's beliefs are often given a clean holiday; only then everything is cut and dried and one party gains the smug sense of satisfaction for having gained easy wealth at the expense of another who might have sold a living house or begged or borrowed money. The so called full time workers are also caught in this net for they feel that they have to live respectably in the society. In fact their problems get compounded as a good many of them are involved in negotiations and a few in the conducting of the ceremony. The result of all these deviations can be seen in believing young people including some with real commitment to the Lord, getting tied up with unspiritual and even unbelieving spouses. When a well known evangelist-pastor has officiated the wedding, it is often taken as a palliative

and every wrong is viewed as corrected in such situations. We are afraid that all this might produce future generations which would answer to the description found in Nehemiah 13:24. Let those who claim to be part of the brethren movement refuse this sort of ecumenism- an unhappy coalition, of the saved and unsaved.

Why this slant on Kerala

The answer is simple. Here is one region in India, where, a mighty movement of the Spirit took place nearly a century ago when small but virile local churches sprang up in the Travancore-Cochin region. The region since the middle 40's, has sent forth 50 missionaries to the rest of India. No region has such a record and as things are at the moment there is no possibility of the emergence of such a happy trend.

Needless to say, greater the privilege, greater the responsibility and greater the loss when failure sets in. So it is high time that the present carnal currents are stemmed. The Laodicean spirit has already crept in. As we are right in this we are not unconscious of what God has done in that region in the past. For the positive good we have seen we cannot thank God enough.

Other areas in India are currently developing with many inbuilt weaknesses. We believe that Kerala can yet show spiritual recovery. On this soil God has demonstrated a movement, a century ago which has close resemblance to what was witnessed in the early church and described in Acts Ch. 2.42-44. We believe too that the Orient leads itself to such adoption than the movement (Brethren) which flourished in Ireland and England in the fag end of the 19th century and the first quarter of the 20th. The movement also witnessed a small, but potential missionary endeavour which has

lessons to teach us in our present day. Hundreds of very gifted and dedicated men and women from high society had stepped down into missionary work as a result of this movement and many lands including ours have reaped the benefit of their sacrificial service.

Philanthropy & Social Concerns

An area where the 'brethren' have manifested want of concern, generally speaking, is in caring for fellow-creatures, more especially the under-privileged. One might conjure up in the mind memories of George Muller of Bristol, who is regarded as the pioneer of the open fellowship among the brethren. A few may also think of an equally illustrious personality in Thomas John Barnado who, during his earthly course cared for nearly 60,000 needy children. What is not generally known is the fact that Dr. Barnado had his early roots with the Brethren in Ireland, whence he moved to England. Muller, in fellowship with his life-long Christian friend Henry Craik, developed from scratch the famous Ashley Down Homes in Bristol where thousands of needy children were succoured and countless virtual 'lame dogs' were ennobled and made members of civilized, spiritual society. We have seen something, albeit in a lesser scale in India in Belgaum area, Trichur and Irinjalakuda (Kerala), Malavalli (Mysore) and a few other places. George Muller's consuming passion was the salvation of people and the building up of churches patterned after the divine model presented in the New Testament. These men have further shown that God is still alive and can be trusted to feed thousands of mouths and provide shelter and, supremely, the eternal anchorage of redemption of the soul.

In the modern world also we hear a great deal about philanthropy. We revere the memories of people like Dale

Carnegie, John Davison Rockefeller, who had exposure to Christianity, and many hundreds more who sought to share their wealth with the world's deprived. But man being what he is, Ms noblest deeds are often tainted by the desire for greatness or self-esteem.

God's Philanthropy

Amidst all meaner love, there shines out as the meridian sun, God's tender solicitude to a rebellious, fallen race of men, who deserved nothing but eternal banishment from His holy presence. In Titus 3:4, Paul writing to Cretan Christians transformed from savagery and vile living, traced the origin of the gospel to God's philanthropia or love for man. In the cross of Christ is revealed the kindness, love and mercy of God which provides a bath from filth of sin - a virtual renewal of life by the Holy Spirit. All genuine motivations of life proceed from this one source. Calvary not only corrects the springs of life, but also constrains the heart to sacrificial service for the benefit of man. J.B. Phillips has an interesting translation of 2 Cor. 5:14. He says the very spring of our action is in the love of Christ. We look at it like this: if one died for all men, in a sense, they all died, and his purpose of dying for them is that their lives should now be no longer based on their outward lives but for Mm who died and rose again for them.

In Romans chapter 12, Paul outlines the characteristics of a life surrendered at the altar as a 'living sacrifice'. This consecration of life is hinged on God's full and free redemption through Christ. Such a life is expected as one 'never lag in zealbut aglow and burning with the Spirit, serving the Lord' (V. 11). It also manifests itself in contributing to the needs of the saints - pursuing the 'practice of hospitality'. Look at the cluster of action-verbs the

Apostle employs - serving...., teaching...., encouraging...., contributing.... showing mercy (vv. 7- 8). Also note that a haughty, 'snobbish' (ANT) attitude is excluded (v. 16). Also note that 'Helps' (GK. ANTILEPSIS) ie., to provide support by an act of exchange is a gift of the Spirit. You assume another's dereliction to impart blessing to him. Thus real, God-honouring philanthropy must mean sacrifice to the giver. The ultimate of this is found in Christ who 'emptied Himself' to lift and bless the fallen man.

False Thinking

In 'Brethren' circles there is a depreciation of the concept of social help. They are apt to think of service in terms of preaching, teaching and giving to God's people. We, of course, do not countenance the 'modernist' idea of putting social concern before human salvation. Sour S well-being must always come first, but we must not overlook that we are saved 'unto good works'; and this embraces the whole world which embraced in His love as we see in John 3.16.

The Ornaments Issue

Ornamentation is something which sensible, specially spiritually-minded women avoid. But the Bible imposes no legislation on the subject, nor does spirituality depend on whether a woman wears an ornament or not.

Let me begin with something I have seen in action. My mother had quite a collection of gold ornaments. She found Christ as a young, married woman while owing membership of a denomination. Her conversion saw a definite change in her whole outlook on life (as conversion must always do). Her training from

childhood upward having been godly, the new life did not mean she had to put away anything which people consider odiously sinful. But the life of the Spirit in her made her positively different-deeply prayerful, a lover of God's Word and a genuine lover of God's people, including the poorest and down-trodden. One's earliest memories of childhood take him to the feeling of resentment when mother would serve food to brethren who were saved from the scheduled communities in special china priced by us. She was a real Lydia.

As children we saw her ornaments going one by one, and her lifestyle turning to one of utmost simplicity. The only rather heavy gold jewellery she retained was a gold chain. When she felt within herself that she would soon depart for her Home as she was stricken with pneumonia, she spoke to one who was a confidante that, that piece should be passed on to a Canadian missionary whom she held in high honour, ignoring the possible claims of two growing daughters. That piece of jewellery was of great help a few years later when the missionary faced a really thin time in London, as he later acknowledged. And we children who came to trust their mother's God in later years never regretted her action.

My purpose in narrating the above is to show that when the Lord Jesus comes into the life, and the Spirit of God endues the soul with true adornment, earthly vanities fade into insignificance (see 1 Pet. 3:3-4).

No Imposing Legislation

Whereas in the Old Testament days Israelitish women wore a variety of jewellery of gold and silver, specially on the occasion of their betrothal and marriage, no such ornamentation is

evidenced in the apostolic age; there was no legislation from the Lord to His Apostles or church leaders to abstain from them. The teaching in 1 Peter is clearly negative, that is to say that true beauty and adornment lay not in the outward, but in the inward character, which God greatly prized.

We know of sects who insist on the total abandonment of jewels-gold, silver, precious stones or even glassware. Where is their law? one wonders! Quite a few concede against all their wish, or else, there would be no baptism or church fellowship. To us, it is all a matter between the individual soul and God, to be decided in the light of God's Word.

We hope our readers won't misunderstand us. If out of conviction, and one's own volition ornaments are discarded, well and good (there is at least safety against jewel thieves!). It is customary these days amongst the 'Brethren' and some Pentecostals not to have jewellery at the wedding, but quite often these outward pietists go home after the wedding and put on a golden ring or other jewellery, thus defeating and making a mockery of their profession. Nor does ornamentation affect merely women, it does also men - costly, flashing costume, etc. The outward has no validity, unless backed by the inward. Hannah of the O. T (Samuel's mother) was a woman of great spiritual discernment. In her thanks giving prayer she expressed something of the nature of deep spiritual insight. She said, 'by Him actions are weighed' (1 Sam 2.3).

We may also add that we know of some really godly women who wear modest jewellery and this has not in any way reduced the appreciation of their spirituality. On the other hand we have observed quite some women who totally avoid jewellery

altogether but who in their conduct and deportment are patently carnal.

It should, however, be borne in mind that the wearing of any symbols that are connected with heathenism or idol worship does not become of a Christian. Through all that we do, we have to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31).

We are aware we have stirred the hornet's nest, so far as some Christians are concerned. Do take this submission as made in the fear of the Lord, and based on God's Word beyond which there is no greater court of appeal.

A Common Feature

Tradition dies hard. We find that, people ask us about the denomination we represent. Folk everywhere seem to have a special liking for groupism, and they do not easily take us if we aver that we do not belong to the 'brethren denomination'.

I suppose the problem is prevalent more in situations where Christians have come out of an age-old tradition as in Kerala, India. Due to want of proper scriptural knowledge, believers who came out into a pathway of bible-oriented fellowship accepted the name 'Brethren'; some even 'Brethren Mission'; even as others went to the extent to referring them as belonging to 'Nagel Mission'. Or 'Noel Mission'. Actually, no such mission ever existed. Superficial observers from the denominations fixed such labels on certain groups. If they did this, what could these groups or individual Christians do? It is not a litigable issue; further, spiritually-minded Christians will not think that way. The fact is that individuals coming under these groups accepted the wrong title with

a sense of satisfaction, (a few even with glee), for they thought they would preserve some identity. There has been even greater confusion in the Andhra region which alone has over 500 assemblies. Having regard to the believers' general backwardness, the missionary brethren who labored there encouraged some sort of stratification providing a concession for their leanings toward the society they left. Thus we have 'Godavari Delta Mission' with its divisional bodies. We also witness confusion in a few of the Andhra meeting places. They combine 'Brethren' with 'Baptist', the argument apparently being that the christians practise baptism by immersion. Simple believers, they are confused. A delegate deputed by GFTI to ascertain details about cyclone havoc, found to his chagrin the symbol of a cross on a coconut tree in the church building's compound. His enquiries brought out the opinion held by some that the tree would yield more fruit! A group of Andhra Brethren met in Bombay years ago in a Methodist Church for worship and services, and took to themselves the appellation, 'Andhra Brethren Baptist Church'. We are glad that that is no longer the case; they meet as simple assembly groups, and the city has over 16 Telugu assemblies. We are not criticizing our brethren, but focusing on a problem many still confront.

Deliberate Choice

So far as our brethren in Kerala are concerned, they would appear to have a pride in calling themselves by a distinguishable name. if our information is right, one of the early leaders got his name entered officially in the Govt. Almanac they made church buildings, conventions, schools etc. after the Brethren – 'BRETHERN...' And, with the tremendous upswing of economic prosperity they had over the past four decades, I think they are inclined to associate their success with the identity. Most of the

younger generation would like to ensure that the Brethren own and maintain institutions which are no whit behind those of other major denominations.

However, our assessment is (we do trust we are not unfair) that their spirituality has not caught with their wealth and position. One hope that the Lord will bring His dear people back to their pristine spiritual power in His own way. This might mean economic strangulation; for if we read spiritual history aright, God is more concerned about His people's right relatedness to Himself than ephemeral prosperity. Being a Keralite myself, I wish my people's genuine welfare, and wish it were possible for one to contribute somewhat to that process. But having resided outside that State for just over half a century, such seems hardly attainable. But this I recognize, that God has a special dispensation for His people there, and despite many failings they have also played a significant role in India's evangelization and general prosperity.

Our main thesis has been this - - that Christianity is manifest by the quality of life, its adherents exude, rather than by name it bears and earthly fame or standing

Manifesting Genuine Sympathy

Sympathy, in its true sense, is a much forgotten word. It is an expression suggestive of deep feeling of compassion as though one has himself been personally affected. This idea occurs clearly in Paul's message to the Corinthians: 'And whether one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it' (1 Cor. 12.26), The word used by the Apostle is SUMPASCHO, meaning, together in pain. The thought is that of mutual Sympathy.

Edmund Burke came close to the biblical idea when he said, ‘Next to love, sympathy is the divinest passion of the human heart’. Darwin expressed the idea albeit in words of bouncing rhetoric when he poured his rhapsodic lines:

No radiant pearl which crested fortune wears,
No gem that twingling hangs from beauty’s ears;
Not the bright stars which night blue arch adorn;
Nor rising sun that guilds the vernal morn;
Shine with such luster as the tear that flows
Down virtue’s manly cheek for other’s woes.

These sentiments of ours have been vented in the context of deep distress into which many hundreds of our brothers and sisters have sunk in the last few days in Kuwait and the Iraq – Jordan crossing points. Worse than flight to distant points as refugees without food and water, and the loss of personal possessions, earnings etc., is the anxiety to which they, specially senior citizens, expectant mothers and children have been subject to. Our hearts go out to our brethren in affectionate prayer. We should not fail in our responsibility to remember before our God His dear people collectively, and as many as we can individually. Let us bear in mind what Samuel, Israel’s last Judge and first Prophet told the Israelites that he would be sinning against the Lord Himself if he did not pray for them (1.Sam. 12.23). Also, let us bear in mind the heavy guilt God laid at the door of the Edomites (descendants of Esau) for their attitude of gloating over the miseries of the children of Israel in their journey to Canaan. The prophecy of Obadiah reveals God’s strong displeasure against the Edomites for not granting Moses the permission to pass through their territory. They thought it was the right time to demonstrate their vengeance for former differences. But God took note of this. In the present case a good percentage of the brethren have manifested forwardness

in helping forward the work of the Lord done through Indian brethren, mainly through generous gifts.

In all this, we have to recognize that God is on the throne and He interferes in the affairs of the nations according to His sovereign will, all designed ultimately to the blessing of His people and His own glory. We are not in a position to predict how matters will develop, but we can trust our God whose power and wisdom are supreme.

Many nations have been involved in the present conflict in the Gulf. We have a responsibility to pray for the heads of all such that God will grant them guidance through constraints and restraints. Our desire should also be that the Lord's people who are sure to experience considerable dislocations and financial problems will learn not to put their confidence in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God 'who giveth all things to enjoy' (1 Tim.6.17).

Lack of Direction

It appears to us that one of the problems that beset the Assemblies being known or who call themselves 'Brethren' is want of adequate and godly direction. This ultimately hinges on the subject of leadership.

In the advanced countries, so far as some of the progressive assembly sectors are concerned, they have sought to over simplify the matter through a virtual near return to the denominational style of doing things. They seemed to think that the biblical concept of 'elders in every church' (Acts 14.23) did not work out well, and, while not discarding the system of oversight, they brought in the novelty of a paid 'full-time elder for each church'. They have made

some temporary gains in the process. Previously, owing to a faulty eldership conception, ministry suffered. The elders themselves, in many instances, did not possess the qualification of being 'competent to teach' (1 Tim.3.2). and the system of every elder having to take his turn in ministry, resulted in the quality of service suffering, evidently because some did not have the capacity of teaching in public. The 'Brethren' in a number of situations, manifested strong aversion to younger gifted men undergoing any systematic study in a Bible School or College. They maintained (and that rightly) that the young men should be trained in the Assemblies themselves. That this was not being achieved, they could not see. The ministry after the Breaking of bread is usually brief and on some practical aspect. Further, such ministry often is vested with a visiting speaker who not aware of the local situation, would 'fill the time' with a bit of learned speech. Some Assemblies have a Bible Study or Bible Study cum Prayer meeting in the week, which is so sparsely attended to benefit even a fraction of the Assembly's total membership. How, then, could a full-time ministering elder with Bible college background and systematic training and ability of communication, the change was welcomed. Now what becomes of the rest of the elders? At best, they are 'advisers', if not fulfill the role of deacons. Thus we would consider the recent spurt as temporary, aside from the fact that vital principles affecting dependence on the Lord for material support of the servant of God (trusting the Lord alone) are being vitiated.

On the other hand, we suspect that there are some, gifted preachers and teachers among the 'brethren' who want the old order to continue as they command the premiership. Apart from the fallacy of such thinking, how about the future generation? The few gifted men, as stated above, are in demand, and are mostly out of town. No, we dare not improve on the Apostolic pattern. There is

none other to take its place. Each Assembly must have a spiritual leadership of spiritual, gifted men who are properly ‘recognised’ by the Assembly in terms of 1 Cor.16.15 and 1 Thess.5.13. The inspired Word has laid down authoritative divine standards (1 Tim.3 and Titus 1) for the Assemblies to be guided by. The system of some leader picking up and announcing the names of a few of his favourites to be elders is a perilous course and is bound to take the testimony to a dangerous decline and eventually lose the church’s basic flavor altogether.

On the extreme side, it is easy in our Laodicean day to join the Exclusive Brethren view of the ‘Church in Ruins’; hence no possibility of the emergence of Oversight because there are no Apostles now to appoint elders. Where is the value of the Word to them? Isn’t the word authoritative even as the Apostles were present and acting? How dare we supplant their direction by our hotch-potch ideas? The whole hollowness becomes particularly evident when a circumstance that demand any serious discipline arises, carnal men will then have their say and will allow such phoney eldership to assert their authority. One will have to accept the ‘bramble rule’ (Jugdes.9:14,15).

Timeless Authority

The Lord of the Church has set His precepts in His Word, which should ever have the supreme say over hierarchy of any kind, church council, Mission board, pastorhoods or self-assumed church governments and their proteges.

Need of Objective Assessment

One of the factors which have plagued the thinking of Christians who call themselves 'Brethren' has been their pride in being the 'perfect' people – people who know the Bible more than others and their gatherings for worship and activities were strictly scriptural, they alone knew genuine separation and that there was little room for improvement. This attitude was true with atleast the majority of the 'Brethren' in India. But are they right?

To our mind, the thinking is more like, in the parable of our Lord, retaining a beam in one's eye and yet seeking to extract a mole from his brother's. It is so easy to answer in our conduct to the proverb of the blind guiding the blind man, or of one being in the land of the noseless and being proud of one's chubby nose. We are not blaming any – this is part of fallen humanity, a tendency we inherited from our age-old progenitor, Adam. Consequent upon and arising from the Adamic fall, 'their understanding became dark, because of their complete inner ignorance and the obstinacy of their hearts, they have grown estranged from the love divine' (Eph.4.18). Verse 19, describes a truly odious state of the natural man, so we have not quoted that. Or shall we say that the believer's distortion of mind springs from the nature of the 'old man' which co-exists with our new life. Even the most spiritual of us will do well to take note of this and recognize it. If we do so, it will keep us humble and help gain near normal spiritual vision.

Now, what is the fact of the matter? It is true that our God gave the early 'Brethren', leaders such as John Nelson Darby, J.G,Bellet, George Muller, Henry Craik and several others, including Antony Norris Groves, in a sense the father of modern biblical evangelical and church-planting missions. These men had made a deep and reverential study of God's word which impelled them to leave their organized denominations in which they were

either ministers or notables. They were bent on following the vision God gave them and that is how assemblies began in the third decade of the last century, which movement has spread over every country in the world, including the islands of the sea. Today, their number counts in the world's evangelical map and they are forced not to be ignored when it comes to generous giving for evangelistic and scripture-promoting ministries as witnessed by the Bible Societies, Bible-teaching institutions like London Bible College, Emmaus Bible College and the Scripture Gift Mission, to mention only a few. From their numbers have emerged men of scholarship who translated the whole Bible (JND's New Translation) and G.V.Wigram, the lexicographer, N.T.Greek Dictionary by W.E.Vine and the massive expository and biblical research productions of Prof.F.F.Bruce, lately called to higher service in heaven. The 'Brethren' of yester-century and earlier decades of the present century knew their Bible and its doctrines, but is that true any longer?

The present generation of 'Brethren' world over is, relatively-speaking, rather shallow, compromising and colourless as to impact. While in the Western world, opulence and the power of religious organizations have reduced the character and usefulness of the assemblies, in the third world countries, specially in India, the losing out was mainly on account of sudden material prosperity in regions like Kerala and continued backwardness as persisting in Andhra circles. While the hundreds of brethren who move out to work in Gulf countries have maintained a witness for the Lord (this is largely true of immigrants to USA), their outlook has been largely insular and congregations mainly Indian vernacular-oriented, leaving a major problem for their children who have been brought up in a different culture and who spoke correct idiomatic English.

What is the answer? We dare not offer any solution at the ethical or social levels. The spiritual answer i.e., back to the first degree of love to the Lord and secondly, love for His word. That will demand a radical consecration on their part causing.

the things of earth grow strangely dim
in the light of His glory and grace.

The impact of the Household

To the anguished cry of the Roman jailor, after the challenge of Christ was bought home to him in a few crytic words of Paul, along with Silas past the midnight encounter in the Roman prison in Philippi, has an abiding appeal. Paul called on him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, adding, ‘you will be saved- you and your household’ (Acts 16:31). It was first essential that the hand of faith must be laid on the Saviour for personal salvation, and then the happy corollary, ‘you and your household’. The ‘house’ or ‘household’ has been referred to in the Bible to denote the nation of Israel, Israelish tribe, the church and the family, but our context has to do with one’s family which, according to the Jewish concept, also included children, relations and household servants. Thus, we can understand easily that the Apostolic word ensures that, when one is committed fully to the Redeemer, the household also stood in the orbit of spiritual blessing – of being saved themselves.

We believe this has bearing on the spiritual community of the ‘Brethren’, and early years of this community have witnessed much blessing as children, by positive commitment of themselves to Christ, did follow the footsteps of the parents. This, we believe, has been specially true of Scotland than of England. Early ‘Brethren’ in Kerala have also found this to be true (although not

quite pronounced in Andhra where the majority of converts had a non-christian background). However, in the more recent times (past one half century), the pattern has been largely upset, and children have wandered away from their parental faith, some lapsing into denominations which parents forsook, some also to Christless societies. Jacob had an undesirable household, starting with polygamy and harbouring of idols by his beloved Rachel, and there were problems in the household of Abraham and David, the former resulting from polygamy and the latter from David's over-indulgence with his children, as was the case with Eli the priest. On the other hand the household of Rahab, the harlot, was blessed through her personal faith and in the infinite grace and providence of God, we find a line linked to the Redeemer Himself.

In the New Testament we read of the households of Chloe and Stephanos – the former as being the unbiased informer of Paul as to the problems in the Corinthian church, while the household of Stephanos which had 'devoted' itself to the service of the saints' (1 Cor.16:15). The KJV renders devoted as 'addicted' a word as we understand it today, gives the idea of habituation. They couldn't help being of service. It is significant to note that in the qualifications of the elders, Paul refers twice to the household. 1 Tim.3.4 mentions 'he that ruleth his own house well' (the NIV substitutes 'family' for house). In 1 Tim.3:5, we have a logical query: 'If anyone does not know how to manage his own family (house or household), how can he take care of God's church?' We know this is a problem confronted by quite a number of otherwise godly fathers. It may be that they had endeavoured to impart evangelical instruction to children, through family prayers etc., but the children resented a little over-doing. They keep on a kind of religion to please the parents, while rebelling inwardly. Such may even go through a kind of baptism to please the father or mother.

But once they are released from parental control they go their own way. Now, can such a father still seek to shepherd the flock? Quite a few preachers and leaders come under this category and in the context of the lax condition of many assemblies, no one really bothers. Of course, such fathers are entitled to be in fellowship if they are godly, but continuing as elders is another matter. We do not condemn them, but do feel sorry for them and the assemblies they seek to lead.

Ideally, the children should have a genuine experience of new birth, they should be godly in life and must have a reputation from fellow-believers and the neighbourhood about their godly status.

In certain 'Brethren' circles, the fences get broken due to another reason. Parents get the children married to denominationalists and even the unsaved for sake of money or prestige. If a girl is thus given in marriage, there is over 90% chance of her going her husband's way. These days even alliances with non Christians are not seriously questioned. Worse still, some parents, after committing such folly, try to bring them into assembly fellowship through back door encouraging the 'strangers' obeying the ritual of baptism, we are afraid some leaders also get involved in such business, on the plea that advancing youth have to get married to protect them from taking a radical, harmful course.

May we emphasise that our aim is not to criticize some parents in difficulty. Salvation, of course, is God's sovereign work in the soul. However parents have to strike a balance between affection and godly discipline as children grow up, setting a good example before them.

Varying Emphases in Worship

The early groups of Brethren who left denominational churches, had a clear conviction that God had constituted His redeemed people as a 'kingdom of priests' (Rev.1.6.), and they had access to God for worship and prayer without the mediation and the leading of an ordained priest or pastor. They met initially in homes and later in small or large halls, the ventral aspect of their fellowship being expressed through the Breaking of Bread. The Breaking of Bread service remains to most groups all over the world as the time for collective worship.

However, there are differences in regard to the place they give to Worship, and it depends on whether one forms part of the Exclusive or Open Fellowship. The exclusive companies give more attention to teaching ministry (they still have some very capable teachers among them), but their overtightness, amounting to narrowness, has caused serious inroads in the past three decades, resulting in broken homes and all that go along with such happenings. The Exclusives also do not observe the Lord's Supper regularly, and in some of the Western countries, they show considerable latitude in regard to the use of wine and alcoholic drinks. The Open assemblies which have had phenomenal growth in every continent and almost every island, have maintained the Breaking of Bread as sacred and important, although here, again, an observer can sense variations as to the details of its observance.

In the USA, Canada, U.K., Australia and New Zealand, while the outward observance of the feast is more or less preserved, deviation can be noticed in some groups when it comes to sisters covering their heads (in many sophisticated gatherings the wives of the elders set a bad example). In supposedly advanced circles, they

use cut loaves and individual cups, with the observance giving the impression to a casual visitor the semblance of what is done in the ritualistic churches. Decorum often takes the place of New Testament simplicity. Of course, there are devout souls who, despite the invasion of novelties, do offer genuine worship from the sanctuary of their souls.

When we think of India, there is quite a bit of primitivism in some of the Andhra Assemblies (such as there was in the Kerala region two decades ago or more). But in all the groups of kind of hierarchical system becomes quite apparent when it comes to passing round the loaf and cup, since certain elderly men (do not mistake them with Scriptural eldership, although a small percentage could be elders) insist on doing this. This sort of thing usually happens in Assemblies who have no recognized elders. They follow a so-called democratic pattern which avers, we are all brethren, and have equal rights and privileges. If a spiritually minded brother even if 30, 40 or 60 or more years old were to give thanks for the elements, that would be a signal to trouble. It is quite amusing to see the ones who give thanks and distribute the elements virtually conducting themselves as ‘clergy men’ do. While one should not attribute any motives, such traverse their way back to the table, kneel, and then partake themselves. To a visitor, such would be thought of as the ‘priest’ in charge. We have seen a few others oversteps the mark by toasting the plate of the divided loaf; also of lifting high the cups containing wine, muttering a few words. Such brethren, on examination, can be found to have exposure to denominations while maintaining attendance in an organized, often Episcopal church. It is not a question of who is more spiritual of the practitioners, but what the Scripture say or teach in terms of apostolic practice.

Oral Contribution in Worship

To be ‘offering of praise’ there must be the presentation of the ‘fruit of the lips’ –vocal expression of worship and thanksgiving. This is not met by some believers reading Scripture portion – that is not worship. The reading of an appropriate passage of Scripture by one or the other (maximum three on the principle of 1 Cor.12.29), briefly and to the point is quite in order. One may read a portion and offer a few comments also. What is important is that the portion and comment must have to do with the Person of the Lord, His suffering, death and triumph. It is hardly or profitable to give personal testimony as a requisite before partaking of the Supper. Who will take a stranger at his own words? He may be a backslider or ex-communicant. The ideal thing will be for a visitor to introduce himself, before the start of the meeting, to the elders, preferably by presenting a letter of commendation from his home assembly. Testimonies have their place and both sisters and brothers should be provided with opportunity from time to time, sisters’ in sisters’ meeting and brothers in a general meeting, convened periodically, as at the end of the year or beginning of the year. What we say is that testimony or reading of Scripture does not constitute Worship. Worship must be offered in the church by godly, gifted sex (1 Tim. 2.8). Godly sisters will prefer to fill a role of submission, but with the privilege of joining in singing and saying ‘Amen’ at the close of each brother’s presentation in worship. It is not a question of who has more Bible knowledge or mellifluity of tongue, it is divine order.

Nor should we fail in suggesting the duration of worship time. The longest of worship utterance on record (Solomon’s at the dedication of the Temple) can be reproduced in 5 or 7 minutes. But brethren go on for 10, 15, 20 minutes, losing all sense of time being

in a reverie. In that unique time of worship recorded in John 12, it was a silent worship on the part of all, to be broken by the words of Judas! One can read Psalm 100, known as the ‘One Hundredth’ Psalm of Universal praise in 15 seconds! Let us remember that brevity is the essence of life and a necessary exercise for mortal man confined to but a few thousand hours of existence at best.

Conduct Vs Creed

One common failing of the majority of God’s people, alas! Is their inability to live up to the high truths they profess. Recall what Sir Philip Junius, the British write said long ago: ‘The integrity of men is to be measured by their conduct, not by their professions’. If profession was the criterion, the Pharisees of the Lord’s time would have carried the crown, for the world has never seen such ostentatious professors as the Pharisees. But the ‘gentle Jesus’ saw through all the veneer of such showmanship and passed His verdict, ‘hypocrites’!

The votaries of the Pharisaic sect appear to have had a creditable beginning. Some scholars see its origin in the Maccabean Revolt and the emergence of a segment of Jews who wanted to recapture the faith of their fathers. They also separated themselves from all forms of heathenism around them. However, since there was no new revelation (this movement was during the 400 silent years between the two Testaments), they added tradition to the scriptures and started losing their way. Jesus spoke concerning the Sadducees, ‘Ye do err not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God’ (Matt. 22.29). Ye....err, Jesus said. The Greek word is PLANO, going round and round the space not finding the way, or in modern space terminology, getting into the orbit. If a spacecraft is caught in this situation, it is bound to crash and cause damage to

others. What Jesus told the Sadducees was true of the Pharisees. There was perhaps never in the history of religion a sect more tenacious than the Pharisees. But their kind of separation only resulted in their betraying their Messiah, despite the fact that He came with all the necessary tags of identification which Hebrew prophecy provided. Can we not see this sort of thing repeated in our lives and certain professing Christian communities? Very orthodox indeed, but as some one said long ago, their doxy is not any more for them, but for others, and so Heterodoxy. And, there fell from the lips of One grace ever poured forth (Psm. 45.2), some devastating condemnation, characterizing them as 'hypocrites' (Matt.23).

Mammon's Invasion

One main reason creating a wide gap between creed and conduct is the permeation of carnality through earthly affluence. In the western world this invasion has been gradual over about a century. Britain saw her days of spiritual opulence and contribution to Bible translation and production and also missionary outreach in those early days when the people gave of the widow's mite sacrificially. A British worker those days perhaps got a daily wage of 5 pounds as against 50-100 pounds now. Generally corresponding has been the situation in Europe, America and dominions in the South Sea. Coming to India, the turn of relative prosperity started only two generations ago and pronouncedly the last decade. Indian Assemblies have found the adjustment too difficult and have drawn hundreds down the incline of worldliness, following the philosophy, 'make the hay while the sun shines'. This has created an 'octopus' situation when they feel there is no way except giving in. The result is that false systems like evasion of taxes, black marketing and unequal yoking appear to be in the right direction.

Worldly Standards

Horatius Bonar, the Scottish saint spoke about the reciprocal invasion of the world and church. He said he looked for the world and found it in the church; he looked for the church and found it in the world. That exactly was the Corinthian malaise. In Corinth, at every corner or park, it was possible to find a group of people debating on some aspect of philosophy may be Socrates, Plato or Aristotle, hotly debating and arguing on points, although they had no knowledge of these systems. Later they dispersed with a hilarious air. So had a jolly good time! Same with the Gospel. The people in the church debated on Paul, Cephas, Apollos, formed cliques and dispersed. And other evils followed-immorality, litigation, conformity to idolatry, loss of conjugal sanctity and finally abuse of the Lord's supper. Now let us search our hearts as to where we stand.

WOMEN'S MINISTRY

The role of women is seen from the beginning of creation as one vitally linked with man. For Adam, another Adam could not be a partner; it had to be a women and even that not a woman created as Adam was, but one 'formed' out of Adam's body, of his flesh and bone, and sharing in God's likeness transmitted by man. In the Edenic scene, the relationship was as between Man and wife. This was primarily for the banishment of Adam's loneliness, but God had in mind the peopling of the earth He had created, and the well being of the race. The divine mind is seen in the Hebrew use of the word ISH for man, which was the word for the husband as well as the woman was ISAH, which is the word for the wife. This similarity is found also in the Greek word GUNE used both for woman and wife in the marital context. The word ANTHROPOS is

the generic name for man, which essentially included woman; thus the human pair is seen as man and wife.

However, woman has her separate identity – she is female (Gr.THELUS), which has reference to her distinctive physical appearance, as against man (Gr.ANER). we are not entering on the biological aspects of the sexes, but seeking to point out the basic oneness in which man and woman are seen together-a distinction which is to be recognized in the role they are to play in the church, service and human society.

The ‘Brethren’ had, for the most part, clear insight in this and the teaching of the word of God. Hence confusion was avoided. The women had a noble role in the Old Testament, although the Pharisees sought to virtually destroy it. Our Lord recognized the right place of women and women were part of the entourage of the Master as seen in Luke 8.2-3; the women mentioned there supported the Lord’s mission and they must have been responsible for preparing food, etc. Our Lord’s tender solicitude for woman is evident in his respectful addressing of His mother, albeit with a tender rebuke in area she erred. The Lord’s human feelings were also manifest when, at the cross, He entrusted her to the care of the beloved Apostle John, who was His kinsman after the flesh. And, it is significant it was Mary of Bethany who had an insight into the uniqueness of the Master’s coming death and resurrection when ‘before His burial’, she performed an act of anointing, and this story of love’s insight is being proclaimed the world over as a ‘memorial to her’.

Further, it was to Mary Magdalene the Lord revealed deity and the unique feature of the heavenly brotherhood, He forged through His death and resurrection (John 20.11-17). Mary

Magdalene became the first messenger of the resurrection, even to the Lord's disciples. Thus a unique honour was bequeathed on redeemed womanhood.

In the Church

When we turn to the N.T. epistles, we have clearer teaching on the subject. It is obvious that all leadership and public ministry has been reserved for the redeemed man. Let us look at the apparently simple and universal offering of devotion to God in prayer. Who is to lead in prayer? The Scriptures do not specify a clear role when it comes to the woman as mother and her younger children. The same deduction is that as in the case of Lois and Eunice in relation to Timothy, the godly mother has the responsibility of imparting Bible knowledge to the child. She will naturally pray with them too. However, in the church sphere, Paul gave to Timothy the divine order. He wrote to him; 'I desire therefore that the men (male sex) pray in every place lifting up holy hands without wrath and disputing' (1. Tim 2.8). the instruction is as clear as the day. From this he enlarges on the area of teaching when the apostle wrote: 'But I permit not a woman to teach or to have dominion over a man' (v.12) showing the reason why, namely the precedence of man in creation and the demonstrated weakness of the woman to withstand temptation. Her normal role was housekeeping and the nurturing of a family. Thus Susanna, the mother of John and Charles Wesley did in bringing up a family of 18 children, of whom John and youngest Charles turned out to be outstanding caliber, a lasting blessing to mankind. So prayer in the assembly and all assembly related gatherings must be led by spiritual and gifted brothers- not sisters. This is the generally accepted norm among the brethren, one may witness deviation but behind such departure can be traced a leadership struggle, often the

emergence of a new movement. This is evident in certain brethren circles in the West with modern ideas. It is also seen in some assemblies whose leaders chose a path of independence (Syrian Brethren in Kerala) from missionary brethren who had the right approach, in such assemblies in Kerala, sisters have also freedom to give testimonies, coupled with Scripture reading, which usually issues in a small sermon. All this is unscriptural regardless of the leaders who led His people that way.

Further, 1 Cor. 14.34 stands unassailable: 'let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak. The word, 'speak' (Gk. LALEO) occurs several times in this chapter, and no person respectful of the Scriptures will want to take as 'Chatter', an activity predicated of some of the Corinthian sisters. What about some who query, 'what about singing hymns and saying, Amen'. These are not an activity of leadership, by any means. Sisters must continue to practice this, as it is part of worship. She is permitted vocally, while she gets involved intelligently in the offering of worship by the brethren. Remember that the majority of brethren in a large assembly do not take part though for a different reason.

We frankly acknowledge that some women are equally, knowledgeable and some versatile with their tongue. But it all boils down to a divine order, and submission to the truth is the only option.

Institutions

We are fully aware that among God's people, including those who claim to follow strict New Testament principles, there are differences of opinion on a number of issues which are not vital

and fundamental. There is little value in arguing about them and spoil happy relations otherwise possible.

Of the many definitions the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary gives the one appropriate of our context appears to be an establishment, organization, or association instituted for the promotion of some object, especially one of public utility, religious, charitable, educational, etc. The main goal is to safeguard order, regularity and the interests of the people concerned. In our Lord's day there was the Synagogue system, very simply organized by Jewish leaders for the preservation of the holy scrolls and provision for the Scriptures to be read. Each Synagogue was managed by a body of elders, and there was no ritual attached to it. Our Lord went to the Synagogue at Nazareth, atleast we have record of His reading from the book of Isaiah chapter 61, being the day's portion. It is interesting to note that when the need arose, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, for the formation of local church, the Apostles and others, no doubt guided by the Spirit, adopted the Synagogue pattern for the frame-work of the Assemblies, giving the Scriptures and their exposition a place of prior importance. Even the church eldership pattern appears to have been an adoption of the Synagogue system as to arrangement.

Thus, every local church has a loose institutional character. This is further seen in that basic unit of human society – the family with its paternal ordering. We see this too in any local or state government management, as also in any industry or association, big or small. To argue against institutions from the absence of any in Apostolic days will not meet the case. Order and arrangement was part of the spiritual décor of each local assembly. Paul told the Corinthian church, 'But all things should be done with regard to Propriety and in an orderly fashion' (1 Cor14.40 ANT). Of course,

we cannot find any rigid system as the Sanhedrin or the Pharisaical sect imposed, it was all simple, just to meet the need of the situation.

Why, coming to the more recent centuries, we have the clear instance of the Bible being translated from the relatively unknown Hebrew and Greek into modern languages, ensuring its present success of penetration into all the world, and gaining for itself the distinction of being the world's best-seller. Behind the event, under the providence of God, is the emergence of Bible Societies. Even the publication of a reliable, but less popular J.N.Darby version needed societies like Kingston Bible Trust of England, and a few others to promote the venture.

We can think of George Muller's Homes in Bristol. Muller was a man of simple child-like trust in God. But when the Lord put a burden on his heart way back in the middle of the last century, he did not despise to meet the challenge of the social need. Its fulfillment and orderly growth has been a blessing to thousands of destitute children and aged people, and at the same time promoting, albeit, indirectly, the interest of the gospel world-wide and the local church of which Muller was a leader. Instances can be multiplied to show how God has blessed such bodies as long as simple trust in Him remained intact.

Brethren, generally speaking, have accepted this principle. There have been, and are, a number of institutions to assist missionaries whom the Lord has called for service in the four corners of the world. These bodies have assisted such missionaries, but their going forth is a matter between the commending assemblies and the Lord Himself. We, of course, do not stand for organizations where men are supreme and which do not respect the

norms of God's Holy Word, and indulge in methods of raising money from saved and unsaved, disregarding the clear precepts of His word.

In the GFTI and a few associated ministries, we follow the above-mentioned norms, fully believing that these are as they should be. We have many friends, and are not unmindful of a few who do not agree with us. We love the latter as our brothers in the Lord, and in the meanwhile with the Lord's help, are none the poorer for their denial. We only wish that their vision be clearer and objective.

Missions

For the apostolic church, their supreme passion was that of taking the Gospel of the cross and resurrection to the cosmos, even as the Lord Jesus had commanded (Mk.16.15). It had also the vision of making the responding people into disciples, and imparting to them the 'whole counsel' of God – this involved the need to baptize believers and to ensure that the believers had the full assurance of salvation, the necessity of maintaining a holy life amidst corrupt societies among whom the believers lived. Paul emphasized these aspects to the young believers in Thessalonica. Those responding to the urge of their new life, began sounding forth the message of life not only to the neighbours, but also in Macedonia and Achaia districts adjacent to them. They became imitators of their glorious Lord in outlook, and were awaiting the advent of the Master who had promised to translate them to where He had gone – the glory of heaven.

Two things characterized the early Brethren as they met in small companies in Dublin and later in Plymouth. They had come

out of nominal church backgrounds which did not give supremacy to what the Bible taught, and were ridden with traditions and rituals of hierarchy. These liberated Christians began to meet in simple fashion to remember their Lord at His table. They gave initially special importance to the doctrine concerning the Lord's second coming. This, again, was a teaching that was virtually ignored by the said denominational churches. The result was a new fervor in their fellowship gatherings which in a short time afterwards imparted a new impetus to proclaim the gospel.

As the testimony grew there was corresponding expansion of gospel preaching not only in Ireland but in Plymouth and other parts of England, and later in America where the movement spread.

The question is often asked, what should come first – worship or preaching. We are living in a day when evangelism is on the march in a highly organized way. We are thankful that the gospel is going out and people of all nations are exposed to the message. However one obvious lacuna is that this is done, to a large extent, at the expense of the vital, all important function of worship. We often come across young teams of Christians, some drawn also from what is claimed to be of “Brethren Background”, who are busy on the Lord's Day mornings and forenoons giving away gospel portions and perhaps attending nearby churches, regardless of denominational or heterodox grouping they might belong. We must also mention that we have come across many groups who seek to honour the Lord on the day of His appointing by first remembering Him at His table and thereafter giving themselves to the spread of the gospel. This undoubtedly was the Apostolic practice on the Lord's day. As for the first day in the week, for a spiritual and intelligent believer, worship, of course takes precedence in a private way and thereafter he has the whole day

wherein he might find opportunities of witnessing. Otherwise it will be a question of putting the cart before the horse.

Coming back to the brethren the focus of their missionary effort began to manifest when Anthony Norris Groves, a flourishing Dentist at Exeter responded to God's challenge, and with no mission board or association backing him, he with his family sailed to Baghdad to be a foreign missionary. There in a strange land he was subjected to many privations, and worse still the onslaught of plague which took away his voted wife. Groves still tuck on, and having put his hand to the plough he did not want to a coward looking back and dishonor his Divine Master. Later, at the inspiration of the late Col.Arthur Cotton (in later years the internationally known brilliant Civil Engineer, Gen Sir Arthur Cotton) he moved to India in 1833 serving the Lord in Andhra and many parts of the then Madras Presidency. He served the Lord with great devotion bringing cheer to many missionaries in isolated mission stations and working for periods as a dentist to pay for his expenses. Mr.Groves can be considered to have given lead to the modern missionary movement if we judge such from the New Testament angle. Since then hundreds of missionaries have come and served the Lord in India and gone to the uttermost parts of the earth. But the great thing to note is the fact that, like Groves, these went forth without the backing of any mission board and have accomplished a work of God which in many respects has been phenomenal. It may not be out of place to mention here, that some 30 years ago there were more Christian missionaries of this role on the mission field than any single body of men and women which mission boards or societies had sent out.

All this has value in the Indian set up also, where since the last 4 decades we are witnessing missionary activity within India by

Indians themselves seeking to reach out to their own unevangelised countrymen all over India.

Their Insularity

According to the Dictionary, Insularity is “the state or condition of being an island”. God’s people are, of course, expected to keep themselves pure from the defilements of the society around them which in the Apostle Paul’s language is, ‘evil-disposed and perverse’ (Phil.2.15). In this connection, we reflect on the Lord’s characterization of His people as salt of the earth’ (Mt.5:13).

It is essential that salt has to be brought into contact with that which may putrefy. By itself it cannot fulfill any corrective function. Salt must come into active contact: in fact, it should penetrate material that which might decay. The insular person or society is like an island as insularity suggests. That is never the purpose of the Lord for His own.

The supreme example is seen in the Master Himself. Why did the tax-collector and sinners draw near to Christ(Lk.15:1)? What did the religious leaders of His day say of Jesus? ‘He is a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners’. (Lk.7:34) The Pharisees were among the most religious people this world has ever witnessed, with their regular praying (mainly at the street corners) and fasting twice a week apart from tithing even the mint and cumin. But they manifested no spiritual wisdom which only the genuine children of God could manifest (Mark 7:35). The verse we have quoted is seen in close connection with the Lord Jesus receiving the adoration of a woman who carried the stigma on her – ‘the sinner’ (Luke 7:39). Simon, the Pharisee who had invited Jesus to dinner at his house was a stranger to heaven’s law and

ethic. The Lover of sinners received the homage of the sinful woman ('who owed 500 pence') because she had already been won over, possibly by her response to the Lord's gracious invitation found in Mat.II.28 (the contexts of the two incidents appear to be identical). If that be so, the woman, hearing about the invitation Simon had extended to Jesus, came in quietly and found her place at the feet of her reclining Lord. She anointed His feet and washed them with her hair. The value of the whole scene was to give her the assurance of salvation, for Jesus told her, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace' suggesting her going into a pathway of peace. The Pharisee's thinking was, 'O yes, we know this Master now – he could not discern between a deep-dyed sinner and a saint.'

We are afraid the Brethren in many instances manifest this sort of callousness and miss fulfillment of their mission.

Saved Sinners

In the writer's conservative home, one felt as a boy it was a grievous wrong to think of a believer as a sinner, even one 'saved by grace; the thinking was, believers were 'saints'. It did not take the writer a long time to sense, after his experience of personal salvation that, while 'the Lord had forgiven him all the past, he was still a 'sinner' with the 'plague' of sin in his nature, and was capable of falling unless 'kept by the power of God'. One's experience in later years has shown that most believers in the West who are known by the appellation 'Brethren' know the Word more accurately confess to the fact they are sinners, albeit forgiven through Christ's cross work. But we must emphasize that the believer must ever put on the 'helmet of salvation' and there should never be a moment in our life when, we doubt our salvation. Hold on to the Saviour's word, 'He who believes in the Son has

everlasting life’, so is the statement in Romans 8:1. ‘There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ’.

Unity of the Spirit

In Eph.4:1 we are told, ‘endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’, this word occurs in Paul’s teaching on the ethical conduct of the church in view of the riches of grace unfolded in Chs. 1-3. Mark that we are not asked to make unity ecumenical or otherwise. God has already made it through the Cross and the baptism of the Spirit (1 Cor.12:13). We are to try not to undo His work through lack of love and squabbling. Within the ‘brotherhood’ of the family of God, there are many saints who will be considered outside the pale of the Brethren, just because they have not conformed to some practice the latter stick on to, and that rightly. Think of God’s noble army of early martyrs and missionaries, past and the present-men like C.T.Studd, Hudson Taylor, Carey, Judson, Brainard and many more. The Brethren hold high respect for men like Finney and Moody. One young Brethren enthusiast told the writer that if Moody were to attend his meeting, his assembly would not receive him for fellowship at communion! What is wrong is the attitude – Not that many are likely to seek such fellowship. But we should hold in our affection all of God’s people, assuming they are truly born again and living godly lives. Manifest sympathy and there is every prospect of someone seeing the truth clearly as it is in Jesus. This is not possible through exclusivism or insularity.

Communion Anomalies

Sanctorum Communion is not only important as the second clause of the ninth article of the Apostle’s Creed, the people

known as 'Brethren' do attach much, and sometimes overly, importance to this aspect of christian profession. Actually, for the Brethren, their communion is expressed in the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, on the Lord's Day (Sunday). We believe they, in principle, are doing right, because the Lord Jesus instituted the Feast of Remembrance on the night of His betrayal. He told His 'own' on that memorable occasion, 'do this in remembrance of Me' (Lk.22:19).

The entire relevant rendering is worthy of being quoted, 'And he took bread and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them' with the words we have quoted, 'likewise, also the cup Saying, This cup is the New testament in my blood, which is shed for you'. 'While the synoptic writers (Mt.,Mk., And Luke) all record the institution of the feast of love (which the churchman delights to call, 'the Eucharist', it is Luke who shows the command as individualistic – 'given for you; shed for you'. Thus the observance has a deep personal appeal. Further, we should remember that the Lord's Supper was partaken of by the Lord's disciples who were 'clean'; Judas having already left the scene (John 13.30). this is where there is considerable difference between a worthy observance and a mere ritual observance, seen so commonly in denominational Christianity. The leaders of the 'Brethren' movement who had separated themselves from Anglican and other communions, were particularly punctilious in ensuring that the elements were partaken by born again people, clean in life, although they did not legislate the minimum qualification. It was the 'Lord's Supper' at which the Lord's dear people were privileged to eat, and so worship, and few, if any, were the misuse of the sacred feast in those pristine days, and as we read in Acts 5.13, 'none of the rest dared join them'; for there was a holy, salutary fear in handling sacred things lightly.

As we survey things as they are among the ‘Brethren’, we are afraid, there is much to be desired in the observance of the Lord’s Supper on the part of many; the sacred feast has become a ritual. Of course, in keeping with other denomination folk, they would not miss a Sunday if at all possible. What is lacking is a genuine heart-preparation before presenting oneself at the Table. Perhaps Mary of Magdala provides an illustration in that, on the day of Resurrection of the blessed Lord, she brought sweet spices and came to the sepulcher, at the rising of the sun. She had prepared these spices the late evening of the previous day. You will recall that on that momentous Friday she had witnessed her Lord and Master passing the crucible of Calvary. Further, she had traced her way to the sepulcher and stayed on even after the last of the devout spectators left the scene. Her heart was full and nothing satisfied her until she had made contact with the Lord in Resurrection life. Such preparation has a pre-requisite for Christ and glorifying worship. We are afraid that amongst the Brethren they give more importance to what they would listen to by way of some sort of hifalutin exposition; most brothers will have also conceived of some portion of scripture, relevant or otherwise, they expect to read in the assembly. In their meetings what is absent these days is the “sweet aroma” of adoration. Fortunately or otherwise we use hymn books which contain precious collection of beautiful hymns of worship and quite a few announce one or the other. One has often considered what our worship meetings would look like if these hymn books were not there. Even on the part of those who would announce a hymn or read a portion of scripture, there is the evident lack of spontaneous utterance of worship. This lack is partly due to the believers (we are thinking mainly of the younger believers), not being confident of expressing themselves in flawless, technical words. But is that excusable? What is important is the praise that wells up from the heart as a spurting from a fountain. If that be the

case one will attach no special value to the elegance of words. Words will automatically be formed on the redeemed lips. Please see Psm.45:1. Incidentally Psalm 45 I one that speaks of the super excellence of the Beloved of the soul, unique Warrior Lord in whose presence there is the natural outpouring of myrrh, aloes and cassia. In other words the Lord is supreme and the believer is entirely taken up with His beauty. More over the declaration.... ‘He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him’. We believe it is essential that there be a real revival of the spirit and of worship before there can be any true blessing in the lives of His people. If you can find a group of people lost in true adoration and there is the expression of genuine worship, you can be sure their hearts will also go out in compassion for the lost ones and they will do that they can in terms of physical effort or giving of their resources in achieving this goal.

Preaching Quality

The writer was discussing recently with a highly knowledgeable gentleman from a Western land on missionary matters. In the course of the talk, he posed a question which had engaged his thinking often – ‘where are the leaders?’ Look at any sphere of human activity today; whether in Politics, Economics and other Sciences, Religion, the giants are few, if any. We are confronted with a world of mediocrity, and this is bound to affect the future adversely. The standards are likely to go down the incline. And this despite the fact that we have today centres of high learning in every imaginable discipline, and men are, no doubt, cleverer than in the past half a century.

When it comes to preaching, there is no exception. The world saw some real ‘giants’ of the pulpit in the eighteenth and the past centuries-mew like John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, Charles Finney. We acknowledge there are masters of

the Platform in our day-men who can draw audiences in hundreds of thousands, and there is a good deal of emotional-potential or charismatic attraction. Many of the preachers are sincere, but they preach to a relatively superficial crowd. If Spurgeon developed a sermon on 10 points, the modern speaker dwells on two or three. The former's audiences were more serious, and gave of their time. Spiritual matters counted with them. We agree that days have changed and the length of preaching cannot be anywhere as long as in the last century. However, the 'meat' should still be there to be effective. This means that the preacher has to discipline himself and perhaps spend hours together to collate his material logically. Even in former days, some of the giants like Whitefield were short speakers, but men with tremendous appeal. He went to the extent of saying that if one spoke for more than half an hour he must be an angel or his audience angels. But remember, Whitefield's preaching was more to awaken people to spiritual realities, while Spurgeon's preaching was to people with a religious background drawn from the professions and the intelligent classes. Dr. Billy Graham does not speak for more than half an hour, but whatever he mentions – statistics or historical references, or Greek or Hebrew references will have been thoroughly pre-checked to avoid any possible error.

'Brethren Preaching'

Speaking generally their preachers were not the specimen with evangelistic thrust-they were more of the order of teachers and expounders. They combined the gospel with teaching and this had considerable effect as evidenced in J.N.Darby's ministry in Europe. The U.S. and Canada have a few men of this general stamp, but more open than JND. However the movement produced some real gems, for instance, for instance, Henry Moorhouse of Manchester, who within a short life-span of 40 years, did tremendous work of

preaching. In his early youth, he invited himself to Chicago to preach at Moody's church and spoke for consecutive nights on John 3:16, with dramatic spiritual effect. His preaching altered the style of Moody himself and he gained the reputation as the one who inspired Moody to preach to countless multitudes. This young man was one of the Brethren.

Coming to the Indian scene, Andhra had two very effective preachers-Canada's Silas Fox who came to be known as the 'White Fox' and K.P.Agrippa the 'Black Fox'. Between the two of them mainly based in the Anantapur region their preaching resulted in the salvation of many hundreds and provided grounding for the nearly 150 virile assemblies in South Andhra. Although Silas Fox was originally a Baptist Pastor in Canada, he threw his weight with congregations known as 'Brethren' among whom he found satisfying fellowship and much fruit in service. The more vibrant assemblies in the region owe much to these servants, now in glory.

In the Kerala region, the most outstanding preacher was the late Mahakavi (noted poet) K.V. Simon. He addressed large companies, but although a great scholar, he was self effacing and spoke in simple, homely style. The ministry had a tremendous apologetic value vis-à-vis Hindu religion chauvinists and tradition bound Syrians. Most others who succeeded him were atleast for a time under his tutelage, but turned out to be popular preachers and teachers. The names of three stalwarts occur to us-unconnected with the Simon tradition, namely Fredrick Numby (ex-pastor of Basel Mission) and a trained theologian, P.V. George, famed author of 'The Unique Christ and the Mystic Gandhi' and E.P. Varghese of Angamaly. The last named was a business man who turned out to be a very eloquent preacher, original in his matter distilled out of the Word and sound, penetrating logic. There are promising

preachers even today, but not quite of the same stamp as those mentioned.

Kerala initially looked down upon any who was theologically qualified, and we still painfully remember a brother who took a degree from Serampore, largely ignored and suffered much financially. Things have changed, but those with the advantage of training do not manifest the same robust conviction in church truths as the early leaders possessed. Both Andhra and Kerala call for committed preachers and teachers, men of conviction and commitment, who could be comparable to the best of their counterpart in the West including Australia and New Zealand. South-East Asia, especially Singapore has produced some fine evangelists, of the stamp of Dr. G.D. James who have local and wider impact.

The Lord's arm is still mighty, and although the society is changing faster than in the older times, He can raise men with a message from the throne.

Pastoring Pattern

According to the New Testament, pasturing is shepherding. While a number of Christian workers, including some connected with the Assemblies called 'Brethren' delight to prefix their names with this appellation, few fancy that they are involved in a Shepherd work. This should cause no surprise because the name 'pastor' has gained a respectable, almost hierarchical overtone, while every shepherd is abomination in Egypt (Gen. 46:34).

Valuable Ministry

Pastoring brings to mind the flock. Peter the Apostle, uses a homely word when, in 1 Peter 5:2, he gave the exhortation to fellow-elders, ‘tend the flock of God’. The teaching of the New Testament suggests that each assembly of saints must have shepherds to take care of the spiritual needs there of. This aspect is specially brought out in the course of Paul’s farewell message to Ephesian elders whom he summoned at Miletus. The apostle told them: ‘take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made you bishops (overseers) to feed the church of God which he purchased with his own blood’ (Acts 20.28). Before an overseer (same as elder, see verse 17.), can truly appreciate his ministry, he must have an appreciation of the high cost paid for redemption. Our readers will please note that the N.T. always refers to overseers (same as bishops) and elders in the plural, when it comes to church service-never in the singular. Of course, their number comprises individuals, and the character of the individual will be seen reflected in the collective ministry.

Love for the Lord is the most essential element of his work. This can be seen in the queries Jesus raised when it came to restoring Peter in a public way, as recorded in John 21. The master asked Peter- ‘Do you love me?’. In the affirmative answer to this, rests the true role of a shepherd. Said Jesus, ‘feed My lambs; tend My sheep; feed My sheep’ (vv. 15,16 and 17). Of course, to start with he must be sheep (not wolf) – one who has experienced in his soul the value of redemption through the Cross, and spiritually equipped with an insight into the deeper truths of God’s word (1 Tim.ch.3). The Bible says nothing of theological qualification or ecclesiastical ordination. It may be that a genuine elder has some

academic qualifications, but cannot be an elder without the Lord's call and equipment to serve His people.

Not Part-time work

Mature thoughts over the years have made one realize that spiritual eldership is a matter of deep commitment to the Lord and His people. One has to find time for this-whole time, for one cannot foresee when the sheep will need help. Further more, to lead well, means "labour in the Word and teaching" (1. Tim.5:17). It is lack of this that impoverishes the Lord's sheep. For those who toil in this manner the Lord has His provision for their material needs (Matt 10:10; 1 Cor.9:9). It is a question of the Lord's people being trained to do this (in no assembly there will be lack if people have spiritual vision).

The 'Brethren' in recent years have tried to shortcut it by providing for a salaried overseer-minister system which is becoming 'popular in the West. But that is bound to break up the very fabric of collective eldership, and pave the way to some sort of hierarchical system. The history of the church will warn any student about this danger. One's intentions may be good, but human ideas have no place when it comes to spiritual pattern and order.

Nor can there be a chief elder controlling the rest of the elders or controlling those of smaller groups in the neighborhood. This is bound to pave the way to the creation of the 'parish' and in its fuller development the Diocese 'idea'. We have no alternative but to return from modernities prevailing today to the simplicity of church rule of the first century apostolic days.

The elders in the assemblies will need to impart the right vision to spiritually potential youth in the assemblies, and build up individuals showing promise about their future tasks.

We need hardly point out here that the New Testament knows nothing of church rule by women however gifted they might be. What travesty do we witness in our day of consecrating priestesses, elevating them even to bishoprics. The scriptures, however indicate a role of ministry for sisters, for Phoebe of Cenchrea is referred to us as a deaconess (Rom. 16:1). The Bible does not go beyond this sanction.

A Lacuna

We believe that it is time that eligible sisters take their position as 'commended workers'. As it is, there are quite a few engaged in the Lord's work, but they are workers only in the sense they are wives of commended workers. Cannot they have an identity of their own? With families to care for, such workers would need a large dose of discipline where by they will give to the Lord's interest a priority, although not at the expense of their normal obligations. The Western world has a large number of workers including spinsters, but then such have had a different upbringing which enables them to be independent. In fact, the present situation in India is that of the Assembly missionaries left, all but three are women. But most women are attached to some institution which provides for them female company. Problems are there, but we see scope for dedicated womanhood to assume such role.

Women's Role

We may be repeating some aspects of this subject, but this seems to be called for with our modern society clamouring for the liberation of the female sex, and for equal rights, wages and working conditions. This sort of thing can break the harmony of the home when it enters that sphere. Not infrequently women are in the race of competing in sports and athletics. They may be allowances to sports when people are young, in schools or colleges as long as reasonable modesty is practiced, but any competition between the sexes can have serious consequences. To some extent competition even among women when they are past a certain age can come within the ambit of impropriety. We should be thankful that Hindu and Muslim women show a greater sensitivity as to their conduct here.

The Christian faith stands for all permissible liberty for the sexes. In the 'new creation' such distinction is removed so far as personal worship is concerned. Both men and women as alike. However, when it comes to the church or public sphere, there is distinction proved for. There is no superiority for man, as barring Adam, the first man, every other man has his derivation through the woman, thus making for interdependence (1 Cor. 11:8,9). It was man who was created in the image and likeness of God, but she shares in that glory since she was fashioned out of Adam's side to be a 'helpmate'; so she is the 'glory of man', 1 Cor 11:7. Her glory is seen in relation to man (the concept is that of the husband and wife). She veils her head in the church, recognizing God's order in creation, and for this reason she wears a 'sign' of authority, in relation to man, to Christ and to God. The Corinthian women in the church appear to have wanted to demonstrate their freedom, and any argument that woman's natural hair would meet the need is

contrary to proper reasoning. Man was not to grow hair (quite opposite is seen in many parts and sections of modern society, and Paul calls this a matter of shame). On the other hand women were not to cut their hair short or be shaven; such a thing would be incongruous.

Nor were the sisters to take part in the assembly. Some would allow prayer, but God's word is categorically plain. According to 1 Timothy 2:8, the male sex (ANER) was to lead in prayer every time in the assembly, even as he insists on her abstaining from teaching. The apostle gives the reason, arguing from prior creation of man and the woman's greater liability for deception, as was seen in the case of the woman by Satan. We are aware that, female psychology being what it is, any extra freedom given to woman can result in a falling to a movement. This has been demonstrate when, as in Kerala, the Syrian Brethren forum was formed in earlier decade of the 1919's following a division between the Missionary brethren and the national believers. The national movement thrived, and it is still casting its shadows of indiscipline in the churches. Most one-man-based leadership has also encouraged this sort of thing, as in the Viyogithan revival under Mahakavi K.V. Simon, and later in the 1930's under the godly Bakht Singh. The latter movement has gone far ahead of the Syrian Brethren, since it not only allows women's ministry through prayer and testimonies, but also encourages. While citing these instances, we want to make it clear that these leaders were very godly men and the present writer himself was involved in appreciating the custom for years, until he saw clearly in the Word the clear prohibition.

We know of women who have been known for their evangelical oratory and apparent success. But that alone, to any instructed believer, is inadequate criterion. Moses disobeyed God

by striking the rock a second time. Although water gushed out, God was displeased and for the reason that provoked the action, the great man was debarred from entry into Canaan. God sets examples for the instruction of His people; and even without repeating the prohibition, His people have to follow the principle.

Now come to the witnesses of the Resurrection. In 1 Cor. 15, Paul cites the instances of the Lord being seen by the Twelve apostles and James after his passion and Victory to be seen last of all by himself (Paul), as 'born out of due time'. He also cited 500 brethren who had seen Him simultaneously. But, mind you, all men and they were to be the public witnesses not Mary of Magdala who was the first to see him and convey the wondrous news to the disciples. In the Lord's itinerant ministry, he was associated with wonderful women Joanna, Susanna, apart from the Magdelene, but they were not given the privilege of being public witnesses to the gospel. Paul had association with devoted specimens of redeemed womanhood in Euodia and Synteche. It is said, 'they labored with me in the gospel'.

So, in conclusion, we would say that the New Testament speaks in glowing terms of the ministry of sisters, a ministry they alone can do. Think of the role of the wife, mother and sister. What infinite music is in the very mention of them. The Old Testament instances of Miriam singing and dancing (Ex. 15) or Deborah acting as joint-judge with Barak will not hold water to support any theory. Apart from the dim light of the Old Covenant days, we find that Deborah is omitted in the list of heroes of faith and Barak fills the role of the Judge (Heb.11:32). Nor does the case of the four virgin daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8,9) lend any support as the prophetic activity of the four women had nothing to do with the church. They no doubt had prophetic gift, but exercised in the home or private

sphere. What opportunities for service await them among their own sex, in cloistered homes, among children and fellow sisters of their local assemblies. A godly, well-taught woman dare not cross the boundaries that God has set!

Self - glory

One of the attitudes which confronts those in 'brethren' fellowship in many parts of the world, is their sense of self sufficiency, more especially in the 'third world' and developing countries. Part of it issues from their ignorance of the world situation.

We have come across those in a region in India who think that they constitute the 'purest stock of Brethren'. We have also reason to think that such are not even aware that there are God's people of similar persuasion elsewhere. In fact, Brethren in Kerala are at least sixty years behind their brethren in Andhra as to historical development. The 'Brethren' groups in West Indies are older as to their history than their manifestation in some developed countries like Australia.

It is but a truism that it is in these regions where Brethren came much later that people have insisted on the appellation – 'Brethren' being attached to their names – Brethren halls, Brethren Schools, etc. Why,. Until a few years ago, we had in Kerala a journal known as 'Brethren Voice'.

Exclusives

It was exclusive ideas that were brought in by great men like John Nelson Darby and later by William Kelly that caused a

division, and that within a decade of the emergence of a movement which, in the judgment of some historians was one of the most powerful activities of the spirit since the Reformation. India saw the development of this cleavage in the early part of the present century, with small groups in emergence in Bangalore, Gujarat, Maharashtra and a few other places. This virtually was reduced to inactivity in the following decades. However, more recently we see rise of such companies in more selected pockets. They operate through literature and Bookshops. They get the collaboration of some of the leaders of Assemblies for translation work etc, which activity goes unsuspecting. However, more recently, attempts have been made to draw into its fold some of the workers through offer of financial support. God's people must needs be on their guard against such surreptitious incursion. If the endeavour succeeds, that is bound to blunt evangelistic activity. We admit that the Exclusives have produced some fine teachers and expositors in many parts of the world, but at the expense of evangelistic outgoing and openness.

While in the above paragraph we have spoken of mainline exclusives, the Assemblies have to guard themselves against 'lesser light' movements which these days get in with greater 'ease' into the Assemblies. There is apparently little difference between the two, but these gradually will draw believers away to new groups, and eventually to Exclusivism itself. Real Exclusives do not subscribe to the believers' baptism (they do not see the need of it, and quietly advocate household baptism, including infants). Again, ignorance of history is reason for quite a few being drawn to the old fold in new dress. The exclusives also have unscriptural teaching in the matter of church government. They believe in Central Oversight – a prominent assembly taking supervisory role over small satellite assemblies. They are one when it comes to a convention or camp.

They teach that the Church is in ruins beyond recovery; also there can be no overseers without the existence of the Apostles.

The above problem did not affect the assemblies in the Travancore Cochin region of Kerala, because, the Assemblies when they started did not begin on any historic links with the Brethren in the West. They represented the converging of certain Bible-based movements by gifted Christians who had come out of the Syrian Churches following their conversion. They went on initially without baptism rite being observed. Their assemblies were viewed as conglomerate of several churches of identical persuasion, which they nonchalantly christened as 'Brethren'. The advent of missionary brethren from New Zealand and England at the turn of the century made some of these groups 'open' in some respects. However a streak of the old is still evident specially in the concept of the 'Brethren Church' for the area and certain self-chosen, but gifted men recognized as ministers of these churches. Since some of these are 'separatist', in outlook, they unconsciously believe they are in some tradition of the Exclusives, and a few think they are Darbyians.

We all agree that prevention is better than cure. Even at this rather late stage it will be good for the Assemblies in that area to examine their stand in the light of God's word first and then history unfolded.

If the Exclusive tendency was something to which the Kerala brethren attached value, and are holding on to, quite different was the story in Andhra which, has nearly 500 assemblies. Andhra did not have indigenous movements to shape the course of church history there, and the missionary brethren from the West got settled there within a decade of the Brethren origin in Ireland and

England. So the assemblies have been largely missionary-controlled and mission-oriented. In the last 50 years, however, through the influence of the late Mr. Silas Fox, more open-type assemblies have been established, which have exerted a healthy role in South Andhra, with an evangelistic and church-planting thrust.

To the student of church history, the course of the so called Bakth Singh Assemblies which have completed 50 years of witnessing about six months ago, have unconsciously adopted the Exclusive overall shape. They have expanded with vigour with over 500 of them functioning all over India. In church government, women's ministry etc., they have much in common with the Travancore-Cochin churches if you deduct the changes that came through assembly missionaries.

The Extremes

We dealt with the 'Brethren' addicted to 'exclusivism', namely who would exclude those who do not agree with them, and so are 'open'. Although we have expressed our views, we should like to clarify again that among them have been and are many saintly souls, with deep scholarship and insight into the deeper truths of God's Word.

Among the 'open assemblies' there have been those who hold varying opinions on the extent of separation that should be maintained. The needed 'Truth movement' of the later 1th century advocated a sort of rigidity and legality, which is not consistent with the norms of New Testament teaching. Fortunately, this movement has fewer advocates in our day, although some legalistic minds, including those who have no idea of the said movement, are inclined that way and create difficulties in the assemblies. The

‘open assemblies’ are those which the Exclusive brethren have so termed, and which took place in Britain around the middle of the last century. This was a wrong, unscriptural step of seeking to excommunicate an assembly by another just because it received into fellowship those from the second, but were not involved in any doctrinal or moral error worthy of non-acceptance to fellowship. This sort of ‘exclusive’ circles have a world-wide attachment and each group knows uncannily who might come from an ‘open’ fellowship, so as to be sure not to receive such. Painful as such development be, we are not concerned with it.

Too open assemblies

Naming a church building as ‘evangelical Church’. ‘Gospel Hall’ or ‘Chapel’ is not of particular importance. Some who contribute to a conservatism they do not really possess, may call their group as ‘the Christian assembly’. What is paramount is the way the church concerned functions. Is the group worthy of being known as an assembly patterned after the teaching of the New Testament? A New Testament assembly, we need hardly remind, is one which ensures that it receives into its fellowship only true believers who, according to the pattern in Acts 2, have signified their profession by being baptized by immersion, and who ‘steadfastly’ continue in church fellowship (Acts 2:42), this involves regularity at meetings for the study of the Word, Breaking of Bread and prayers as well. It further includes the maintenance of a holy life and subjection of the disciplining of the elders, when necessity arises.

We have known assemblies which are too open, and it would be difficult on occasions to make out what they are. They receive into their communion people of questionable background,

even dissolute in conduct. There are those who aver, ‘Who is there to decide who should break the bread, seeing the participants are responsible to the Lord alone?’ Oftener than not one can discern that such assemblies have no spiritual, viable oversight. We have known assemblies where denominational ministers, even those who object to immersion of believers, are allowed to speak after the breaking of bread at which such may not be present. Such groups may permit dramas, magic shows, even dance sessions supposedly to promote evangelistic interest.

We know of an assembly which had sound assembly practice until a few years ago, which has more recently become ‘too open’. The present phase, which we hope is a passing one can be traced to the poverty of eldership in regard to their regular presence and responsibilities. They open the platform to all and sundry. On the other hand, we know of other assemblies who have become the ‘needed Truth’ type, tight, undiscerning but highly compromising when it suits them.

The Norm – The whole of God’s universe, as well as the church of Jesus Christ prospers on adhering to established principles either on the physical world or the written Word of God and we do well to understand these principles to avoid calamity.

Pressure for Conformity

Situation ethic affects us all, both in a personal capacity as well as collectively. The spiritual mind is conscious ever of the pressures being brought to bear upon the Lord’s people and testimony, seeking to divert us from the divinely set goals which the Word of God insists on. One such peril is compromise.

Think of this pressure on the individual and family life. Don't you often hear people saying, so and so are doing it –they are also 'Brethren'! This affects social conduct such as bribe-giving (on a less scale bride-taking), dowry demand and parting with enormous amounts of money, cinema-going, addiction to the T.V. etc. think of the society all around you, even decent people. Why, come closer, look at the people called Brethren. They are not immune to these customs including a 'must' position for T.V. We are not overlooking possibly 25% positive value in T.V. But actual experience will testify to the preponderant evil this electronic gadget is capable of. Think of many undesirable features which come on suddenly after the imagined 'sound' ones, and fancy the father and mother and the family together viewing them with glee. Informative? Of course. T.V. was not in vogue in the days of Isaac Newton, George Stephenson, G.M. Marconi, and even Einstein. Granted that in their day TV was not available but these are geniuses whose fertile and investigative minds evolved so much good to mankind. They were intellectual giants.

Don't mistake us; we are not saying that having a TV is a sin or wrong in itself, but it is the spirit of satisfaction, people who claim to delight their soul in God and His holy Word are deriving. They sing with rapturous feelings the compositions of mystic poets who made them from hearts captivated by things heavenly. We are only pointing out the contradictory dual ethic of people. Why, even in Kerala there is an increasing group of people who would popularize the compositions of saintly men of a little more than a generation ago. We are mainly thinking of the late K.V.Simon who, of all men we have come into contact with, was truly unworldly – he even disdained learning in Universities, availing of institutions for increasing wealth, such as banks, chit funds, lotteries, luxurious cuisine, pompous dressing etc etc. The fault is that they cannot

discern the total inconsistency of it all. He lived what he composed, sang and professed. Under this genre come some of the compositions of Frances Ridley Havergal, more specially her hymn 'Take my life..hands, voice, silver and gold, will, love'. How deeply challenging the lines. We hardly think these sentiments lend themselves to absolute literalisation. In Havergal, there was the needed consecration; and the Lord was everything to her.

In the early days of the Brethren in England, there lived Lord Congleton, an earl of the realm when Britian ruled the waves of the oceans. Somebody once suggested to this gentleman, 'You left all that'. He retorted, 'Left..I gained all'!

Recent developments

We are aware of over-strict Brethren who are against Bible schools or colleges, taking the impossible position that those desiring to study the Word should attend the Assembly gatherings. It might take full well a life time for some one to get a smattering of Bible knowledge. Amongst the votaries of the said school are some overseas missionaries who, over against the relatively small companies they minister to, find congregations of hundreds and thousands gathering to hear them, say in a country like India, at conventions. This might make them blind to realities in the home front.

Over against what we have said above, some of the brethren have lately emboldened themselves to offer 'degrees' to those completing Bible school courses available on certain conditions from denominational bodies who profess to be 'evangelical'. Why this move beats our thinking. Of course, if some young man sports a degree, he might get a job in a denomination as

an asst. pastor, or another job in a para-church body of which there are many existing, or mushrooming.

The present writer is not against Bible institutes. He, in fact, has much to do with the initiation and running of a Bible school, with the only aim of training born-again and gifted young men with a call from the Lord to His service; which call has been endorsed by a New testament church. There is no invitation for money in the running of the institution or temptation implicit in a testimonial or diploma given. The equipment of the student is all important even without such a document put in his hands.

The world has seen mighty men in the Bible teaching area and the pulpit, but pre-eminently men ‘anointed of the Lord’ as shown in a sub title of Br. H.A. Ironside life by Shuyler English. Charles Spurgeon still rules as the ‘prince of preachers’ – he never wore a degree. He even refused to be ‘ordained’ for he maintained that he had the ‘ordination of the Pierced Hands!’ Great masters of the pulpit like Joseph Parker, Campbell Morgan and William Scroggie were what they were by virtue of their spiritual worth and gift. They did not begin with degrees although after their talent was manifest in the blessing of souls, learned bodies conferred them with doctorates they did not seek.

Let us be careful in not yielding to the carnal philosophy which made the leaders of Israel clamour for a king in the days of their apostasy, and brought in untold sorrows on their posterity. Listen to their clamant cry to Samuel, ‘make for us a king like all the nations!’ ‘The whole thing can be reduced to a simple query. ‘God or a System?’

Too many Wandering Preachers

Itinerancy is of the very essence of evangelism. There is, on one hand, tendency for some evangelists to stay put in the local assembly (on the false apparent notion, ‘the field is the church’), there are quite some who ignore their local assemblies and constantly move into wider areas for preaching (often supposed teaching). If one were to scrutinize carefully, there will be precious little ministry being given to the churches by these wandering preachers. We can understand this happening to an extent so far as gifted evangelists are concerned. Basically, an evangelist should go into a fallow region, not formerly trodden.

But there is little profit in preachers going into the orbit of other assemblies, unless, of course, they are specifically invited. And such ministry is well supported in the Scriptures. The servants of God got involved with many assemblies in the founding of which they had some part, and they knew the specific needs of the saints. In this role, we see not only the apostle Paul but fellow-workers like Timothy and Titus. These workers would minister the Word and also preach the Gospel, seeking to win outsiders to the Lord and His church. Uninvited touring around not only is unhealthy in principle, but it creates quite a problem to the visiting church and specially to those who are expected to be their hosts, more particularly in the cities where accommodation is so scarce and servants of God live in tenements with a single Bedroom. Pouncing on believers, uninvited, sometimes with a wife and a number of children can create serious embarrassment. In Western countries, where they have a different ethical and social pattern, a thing like this will not take place. Even children will have to ascertain beforehand if parents would have accommodation. These variations on the social set up of people may not change, since they are related to be observed, taking into

account the conveniences of our brethren; in this also is the fulfillment of the law of love.

But don't mistake us. There is always room for gifted teachers of the word to move around. It is only a question of whether one is just barging in, or invited according to the conveniences of the Lord's people one is seeking to help. In the Indian context, the gifted teachers will not lack opportunity.

Welcoming Preachers

It is of the essence of Christian church life that hospitality is observed; not merely hospitality to those whom we like, but hospitality in the ministry of the word. In fact, the word used for hospitality in the Greek, *Philoxenia* means, love to strangers. It is not extending a loving concern to those whom we might like; but manifesting love to one in need, often a believer who might perchance appear at your door with a sense of great need. Bear in mind that in those early days of persecution of Christianity, believers were often driven out of their homes and were compelled to seek refuge of sympathetic friends. For the host, it was a question of taking some risk, but Christian love and consideration demanded it. Such reference as in Roman 12:13 and 3 John 5 would primarily refer to material hospitality. But welcoming visiting servants of God is certainly suggested by the latter verse, a ministry in which the godly Gaius of Ephesus excelled. That trait shows itself in a beautiful light over against the arrogant attitude of Diotrophes who sought preeminence for himself (3 John9.)

Need of one's own assembly

This will ever remain uppermost with a gifted brother, particularly one who has responsibility on the oversight. The story can be a little different if the assembly is large with a number of gifted elders and other brothers who are able to make healthy contribution. It is a matter to be faced alone with the Lord and having regard to one's local charge.

But, alas it is true that quite 'some' people are constantly on the move, with no regard to their own assemblies. Worse still, some go away when the assemblies concerned have no gifted men among them. Such may not have an acceptable ministry in the local church. Further, this might become a means of income, for most assemblies will show material fellowship with a visitor unless by too frequent appearance such weary their kind hosts. The idea of using such visits for material gain in itself is, to say the least, mean. Let us bear in mind what the inspired wiseman said in Proverbs 18:16 'a man's gift maketh room for him'. Actually, real spiritual talent is so rare these days all over the world. We are not referring to 'speakers' merely of what is known as 'gift of the gab'. There is an increasing species of such – men who have mastered a little elocution, not rarely some who come after experience in political speeches. God's people should increasingly develop the gift of discernment these days. There will always be demand for ministering brethren who have their swords edges sharp for the word, and it is only right that worthy ones be supported to the best of the ability of the host assembly. However, it is but right that we should judge the visitor for his evident motives. Sometimes even the financially well-to-do men are on this business. In such situations, both the visitor and the host assembly would need equal discernment. If you invite a preacher and he has to meet heavy

travelling expenses, these should be well covered when saying 'farewell' to him. These are not merely matters affecting the third world countries; even in the economically forward lands.

Stakes and Cords

Our thoughts are pegged to verses 2 and 3 of Isaiah 54, which tell us about the ultimate victory and blessing to Israel, consequent upon the redeeming work of the Messiah presented in chapter 53. The nation's barrenness is to be changed radically, and the note of song will be on their lips, as happened to Hannah when God heard her desolate prayer and gave her a son, Samuel. God has in store untold blessings for His people, Jew or Gentile, who confide their souls in the finished work of the Messiah, which was accomplished on the cross of Calvary. Any experience of infertility or spiritual stagnation is quite inconsistent.

The two verses in question were those which fired the mind of William Carey and constrained him, against many odds, to launch out into his pioneer missionary activity through preaching and literature. And the verses, likewise, have had a challenge to many of God's people.

However, we feel the verses, particularly the latter phrase of verse 2, demands our careful investigation. The order must be noted. First, there must be the strengthening of the stakes, an old English word suggestive of fairly long sticks with pointed end of one side, which could be driven into the sand to provide a firm foundation. Once this is done, the Bedouin can lengthen his tent by adding extra skin and find additional space. But in the wintry and sandy desert, the stakes are very important, and these will provide stability to the tent of dwelling or assemblage.

These thoughts occurred to us as we have been surveying the activity of the assemblies of the Brethren. It must be acknowledged that there has been vastly increased activity in many places by way of new ventures among the youth, exploring new areas, Bible camps, Bible Schools and literature agencies. All of this is good but the vital point is, are these the product of really strong Assembly bases? Our observation is that it is not. Strangely, there is a feeling at large that more varied and more intensive activity is in demonstration of what proceeds from spiritually strong assemblies. This often is not the case, the outward and material can easily be manufactured. It is mostly a matter of money and human effort.

Now, what is it that constitutes the spiritual strength of an Assembly? And bear in mind that the strength of an assembly consists of the quality of the units that make the chain. It is quite possible that personal and family life may be sadly sub-standard. Personal holiness and rectitude in every area of life constitute the true stability of life and endeavour. Another common mistake is that of the attempt to divide life between sacred and secular. The sacred is considered to be a Sunday or Convention conduct, while every other activity is controlled by earthly wisdom. In many parts of India, clever men are forging strong links with sources abroad whence funds can come in. Thus new buildings, enterprises etc. are a matter of simple planning. Even fulltime workers spend a good slice of their time in such activity and are developing an increasingly higher and higher life style.

In 1 Kings 14:27 we are reminded of the sheer folly of King Rehoboam, who, in face of the invasion of Jerusalem by Shishak of Egypt and consequent deprivation of the valuable treasures of the house of God which included the golden shields

installed by Solomon, of beaten gold (1 Kings 10:16), he ordered bronze shields. Whenever the king went into the house of God, the guards bore these bronze weapons naturally, all nicely polished up, and paraded them. What a travesty! Is there not a lot of bronze on display, instead of pure gold? One might ask, whom are they trying to kid? Let us ever remember Paul's warning to the Galatians (Gal.6:7).

May we stress again that our individual life counts before service. Where do we stand related to an infinitely holy God and the high standards of His unalterable word?

Brethren' and Formal Worship

We are conscious that the Brethren would protest against the very suggestion of 'formal worship'. The word recalls denominations; churches indulge in this sort of a thing, through the use of Liturgy – the Prayer Book and the observance of the required recitations. We grant that the 'Brethren' and a few other non-clerical groups avoid the traditional. But that does not mean they are following Scriptural and Spiritual principles.

Let us look at the apparent. On Sunday mornings, most of the members of the 'Brethren Groups' will attend the morning meeting of which the Lord's Supper holds prominence. There is commendable aspect to this and we wish that there will be less and less abstaining in this area of Christian endeavour. But, very often, so far as a large segment of these Christians are concerned, their attendance is formal. In the village and semi-urban situations, the sisters, bother about daily chores prior to worship sessions. Men also are involved with a number of activities. The result is that they do not take, or find time to prepare their hearts through prayer and

reading of the word. What is needed is discipline and giving the Lord the pre-eminent place. This just cannot happen on Sunday mornings; the spiritual believer is in a state of preparedness of worship all the time. If one is all together engrossed in mundane things such as speculative trading (shares, cotton or grain), he cannot switch over suddenly and put his soul on a spiritual wavelength. In the good old days the godly Presbyterians in Scotland, used to ensure that their Sunday food was already cooked by Saturday night. All avoidable shopping was done before Sunday. This may be one of the reasons why, although they have serious cracks in the British way of religion, Scotland still has a reverential attitude of Christian faith and its practice, speaking generally. In India, Kerala preserves to a large extent the tradition of s hymn and Bible reading, followed by prayer each morning, but the vita issues are ignored.

And observe a typical Brethren morning meeting. In the Western-oriented Assemblies, there is the sad, monotonous rhythmic order of a hymn, a prayer, a hymn, intercepted by a brother getting up to give a short message, miscalled 'exhortation'. Now who has prescribed this order, one might wonder. In some Indian Assemblies there is a kind of 'Warming up' by singing several hymns, announced by various ones, which constitute their part in worship. Some assemblies have ministry before breaking of bread; others after. It is difficult to say categorically which method is right. One may prefer ministry after giving the Lord's Supper the central place. It is difficult to deduce from the account of Lord's Supper and preaching in Troas (Acts 20) which is better. But it is important that the Lord must have the central place and the feast have the character of EUCHARIST, giving thanks.

As far as we judge, there is no place for exhortation in such a meeting. There could be a place for a brother or even two to read and comment on some passage bearing on His Person, dedication, death, resurrection and His coming glory, but not for preaching. Nor can we see any value in a brother coming from a new place giving a self-introduction. He must have brought a letter of commendation which the elders would read in the course of welcoming the brother. Each assembly must develop a practice of welcoming visitors; for this they should get to know them before the meeting begins. A visitor may be welcomed if previously known to responsible brethren.

We escape the blame of making the Lord's Supper a ritual by being present at every meeting of the Assembly, recognizing it is the Lord's assembly where according to Matt. 18:20, He is present, and this fact constitutes the glory of a church, "Christ in you the hope of Glory".

Lapse in Open-air Work

When the writer was in his teens (I am thinking of the 1930's) one special feature with the Kerala Brethren specially of the Central Travancore area, was their zeal for outdoor preaching. They would not miss any important event – whether it be the monthly cattle market or the more regular weekly bazaar. The brethren would be out in strength to take their stand to preaching, drawing crowds through the big drum, tambourine and cymbals, rather obsolete instruments today. And crowds were not lacking. The cattle fair brought together larger crowds, with oxen and cows. In a place near Kayamkulam (Ochira) there used to be a fair (we think the fair is still there) annually when there was a rehearsal of ancient martial arts. The latter used to bring in large crowds and I remember

brethren trekking scores of miles and taking part in such ventures. Our recent enquiries have revealed that while some form of witnessing is still maintained in some markets, there is hardly any presence at Kayamkulam fair. Not that crowds are altogether lacking, but the brethren are not available or are more sophisticated. Andhra is also in very much the same situation.

People these days want audience under a pandal. They want the people to go to them and not that they go to the people. The example of the Lord and His apostles would teach us that the Master expects His servants to go to people. There were no convention in our Lord's or apostle's time; but they saw to it that crowds hear the message and churches were formed. Why, the whole Roman world came under the impact of the Gospel in a life time.

In Britain and America too, open-air was popular. Wesley's platform was anywhere he could turn into a vantage point and draw the crowds, and so were Moody, Jonathan Edwards and more recent to our times, Harry Ironside, using an art he learned as a former officer of the Salvation Army.

Let us not forget the very commendable work Salvation Army did under William Booth and early generals in London's despised East End, the home of the despised and homeless. Multitudes were saved and paved the way for Protestant Evangelistic movement. The S.A. has largely lost the holy art, but retain the vestige of their former skill by retaining the band. Men today are ashamed of Jesus and the Gospel. They are evangelical in their belief and not evangelistic – what a shame. We believe that if there is resurgence of Open-air activity in our days, the assemblies will receive a fillip. What an effect it will produce with countless

numbers and varieties of Gospel literature that is available in our day. Ministries like the SGM can supply excellent booklets. While the SGM turnover is going higher and higher, we are afraid there are more stocks of literature stored up in the preacher's house, gathering cobwebs, than the numbers given out. We are not going to give illustrations and stories of how God has used the printed page in the salvation of men.

Ideally, open-air is the work of the younger folk. You need physical strength and stamina for this sort of work. The writer is no example for this specialized work; however he recalls with what enthusiasm he had gone in early days and preached for over one hour (pity the crowds who listened to an immature rambler!). However, he recalls the very real joy that was his, and fear of missing an event.

Generally speaking, the Brethren have lost the art. Few Assembly elders encourage the young. Many young open-air preachers have later developed into great gospel orators. Billy Graham for one is a classic example.

Assemblies and full-time Workers

It is real pity that there should ever be conflicts between full-time gospel workers and the assemblies they are in fellowship with.

In the first place, we should draw a distinction between assemblies planted by servants of God in the course of their work and others into which the workers happen to find themselves, initially as visitors and subsequently by their superior gifts to a more permanent situation. There may be virtual non-existence of

gifts amongst the believer in the assemblies concerned. As a result former are catapulted into a position they should not be holding. We grant that there is a close, although undefined link between the believer and the servant of God through whose instrumentality he has been blessed spiritually. In normal situations, this affinity will be recognized and the servant of God will naturally be regarded as planter of the vineyard and shepherd of the sheep. Barring exceptions, where the believer is over-assertive and given to worldly thinking, he will accept the servants of God with thankfulness and a sense of gratitude.

Thus, the relationship is mutual. On the part of the servant of God, there is the constant need of recognition that he is a minister (diakonos), in that situation to server and not to be served, as exemplified by Jesus (John 13), and by His apostles Peter (1 Peter 5:1-4) and by Paul (1 Cor.3:5-8). It will always be perilous for the servant to assume the role of Diotrephes (3 John 9). Human as we are, the flesh will ever seek to assert itself, and bring defeat and lack of harmony and blessing.

The Role of Church Members

In the first place, each believer must recognize that he/she is also in the ministry, speaking in general terms. Those who serve and minister the word, are doing a piece of service to achieve this very end. In Ephesians 4: 12-13, we are introduced into this purpose even when there is the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic and pastoral-teaching ministry, viewing the church's ministry as a whole. This ministry is for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, to enable them to reach spiritual maturity and conformity to the likeness of the Master. This is a misunderstood verse. In the first place, we believe

that we avail of the ministry of the apostles and prophets-not that these gifts are literally present today, but we avail of the written Word in the New Testament where we have such ministry. The ministry of the servants of God is not designed to sharpen their gifts, but to make each brother and sister realise his/her role as a witness for Christ. The local church is in the ministry rather than the preacher. He must encourage the process through a ministry of encouragement. It is not a question of encouraging every Tom, Dick and Harry to be up every meeting (they will not do it they are mature). Proverbs 18:16 tells us, 'a man's gift makes room for him'. This means a gradual development, not a monstrosity, an unnatural development. You should always be cautious of a stripling, of recent years (a recent convert in terms of 1 Tim.3:6). We sometimes observe a young man with the 'gift of the gab' seen addressing a major conference comprising believers of maturity. Such a thing is bound to harm the performer more than the listener. No, there must be the natural growth-infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth and manhood. You cannot shortcut the process. In the spiritual world, there are no prodigies. It has been said of poet Coleridge that the tragedy of his life was that he never was a child! Let's not encourage would be prodigies but by all means encourage the youth as they gradually and steadily grow up. The Kingdom of God never faces emergencies. The Lord has His plans, well prepared.

The Role of the Servant

The perfect Servant is first adumbrated by Isaiah in Chapter 40 and then gradually developed beginning from Chapter 42. In Chapter 42, verse 1, we are, asked to 'behold' His servant. "My chosen in whom, My soul delighteth". "Concerning His tenderness, it is recorded, 'a bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench' V.3. This passage is applied

to our Saviour in Matt. 12:18, 20. In verse 20, we read ‘till he brings justice to victory’. His coming into the world would mean a ‘crisis’, but He would not stop until that crisis issues in victory. Such is the Lord’s dealings with Him own. Oh! The tender care of the Shepherd, specially when it comes to the weary and with young (Isa.40:11). So must be the tender care of the shepherd servant, represented by those who have the care of the flock. The staff in the hand of the marauding wolves. The shepherd has his gentle staff by which he leads and guides the sheep.

The servant has no rights, he is there to serve His people. If properly taught in the Word, the believers will regard their leaders, and take an interest also in their mundane needs. It is all a matter of outlook on his part.

Both the assembly and the servant-shepherd must imbibe the right outlook and attitude. Then the conflict ethos will cease and His way will prevail in the assembly.

Simple Norms for the Breaking of Bread Service

We are dealing with the observance of the Eucharist (Breaking of Bread) amongst various assemblies, all coming under the nomenclature “Brethren”.

In the rural and semi-urban situations, the meeting is too long. This partly is due to too many hymns being sung. As we have formerly noted, there is a ‘warming up’ session, when several hymns are sung, not necessarily having any connection with worship. Most have tunes with popular appeal, often borrowed from more recent films. And, in the period following, brothers announce hymns having no connection to worship, and sometimes a second

hymn and not too infrequently a third hymn is announced. In some assemblies, there is a period of collective worshipping where the whole congregation hums prayer, and often only the sound is heard. Then the relative silence is broken by a brother with a powerful voice jutting in and begins prayer which silences the multitude of voices.

We need not emphasise the fact that a proper worship meeting will be characterized by periods not too long of silence. A session of thirty minutes or a little more will not appear monotonous, if interspersed by audible worship, each of 2 or 3 minutes. What shall we say about brethren who go on for 5 or 10 minutes, covering some times a good deal of theology and quoting from several Bible passages? We have said this before and say it again, that some exceed the longest prayer in the Bible—that of Solomon at the dedication of the temple. Aside from the fact that, that was an Old Testament period scene, and the voice had to be carried to many thousands of people and that without amplification. The reader will note the obvious reduced length of N.T. prayers, the longest being the Lord's own prayer (John 17). Further, we believe that the acquired habit of some good brethren to have their eyes open and gesticulate is often distracting. This habit, of course, is specially taken note of by children who amuse themselves. The habit of sitting and praying when fellow-believers are seated, is again uncomely and prevents the voice of prayer being clearly heard by the congregation.

The ideal situation will be for people to kneel in prayer, but this should be determined by the general custom and seating arrangement in the hall.

Another oddity is that brethren sit in the meeting for nearly an hour and not taking part. However, one or two rise to give thanks, for the elements, when they indulge in long prayer. The believers have come to ‘break the bread’ (which of course includes giving thanks for the wine). This exercise should be shortest possible (a few simple sentences of thanksgiving for the elements), more especially taking into account that the real thanksgiving is done by the participating brother or sister. The brother who goes to the table may offer thanks and distribute the elements, but he is not doing a ministerial or representative work.

Some who were previously used to ritualistic worship sometimes hold up the cup or plate containing the bread. This habit gives the doer a feeling of ministership, which is false.

Others, meaning well, kneel and drink of the cup and eat of the bread, the last of all, kneeling behind the table in the view of all, in a vain show of ministerial role. The assemblies should learn to observe the Lord’s supper as simply as possible, without an appearance of ritualism yet with godly decorum.

The Brethren Medley

One particular characteristic of Brethren leaders these days, especially in India, is that it is difficult to distinguish the goose from gander. These is much mix-up and the trend is growing.

We are not that ultra-partisan type to discount any that does not contribute to the “Brethren” set of doctrinal values or practices. But even so, we are afraid that if the developing trend persists, there will be nothing much left by way of a distinctive testimony on the part of Christians who hold on to all that the Bible

enjoins, nothing more, nothing less. And we do believe that down the Apostolic times, the Lord had helped maintain a remnant testimony to Himself, down through the apostasy and ritualism and modernism that invaded the testimony. There has always been such a stream, sometimes discernible and at other times not so discernible, as has been very ably and authoritatively verified and articulated by the late saintly historian E.H.Broadbent.

The reason for the emerging confusion cannot be blamed on any single factor. There has been a great deal of compromise with the co-evangelical groups of many shades and opinions. This has been evident in the publishing arena. By looking at a journal, you cannot make out as to what the editors or publishers compose their faith. Of course, they have to do this to be able to get a wide spectrum of readership. Some writers take advantages of this latitude for self-publicity; others do so because they are inward supporters of the movement. They follow the Gamalielian philosophy – all of them could be in one way right.

Various institutions have made their contribution to fostering the above trend. For one reason, to run these, shekels are needed and these come from across the oceans – foreign lands where biblical separation had started receding a couple of Decades back. They are all in business and what was considered to be a ‘narrow policy’ will not help matters. Among these ‘institutions’ these are an ever-growing number of Bible schools and colleges which serve as in-built mechanism to propagate their one favourite and petty systems. In a third world country like India with a large number of uneducated or unemployed youth, many are drawn into these attractive moulds and fashioned as the promoters of the system desire.

For ourselves, we feel that the testimony people known as ‘Brethren’ have, has been secured at a great price to many devout and godly people in the course of the past one century and a half. Vast amounts of money have been spent in world evangelization and church-planting, not through mighty mission boards, but through the contributions of thousands of simple people who earned their living through hard work. In recent years, of course, considerable money has been siphoned into select pockets through ‘nationals’ who earn substantial salaries and incomes in the Gulf countries and other lands into which they have been scattered. Believers in the said locations are exposed to publicity such as described above, and they contribute very often without adequate discernment. The ‘Brethren’ in the world religious context have contributed perhaps ten times their quota taking into account their infinitesimal size and they cannot let things slip by – they have to remember their noble leaders, some of whom suffered much, including parents of some of the living ones. God has put quite a few believers in a position with capacity to support others in need.

Publicity

Our world has not known an age where the demon of publicity has made such a tremendous capital out of the news media. Going along with publicity is statistics which can create wonderment. Although we write in this way, we ourselves are conscious of the absorption of the publicity spirit, for we often have doubts about the many reports being received. If all of them are true, the assemblies concerned should be having memberships of hundreds of believers, for workers report dozens of scores of baptisms at frequent intervals. We are thankful to God for any work of His grace that takes place under unfriendly environment.

However, we are dealing with the God of Amen (TRUTH) and cannot get away long with that which is unreal or false.

If the reports referred to above were all true, we might come to another conclusion that there is a large scale falling away and only a fraction of the conversions does show continuanc. Another problem of which we are conscious is that of the proliferation of groups – multiplication by division in some cases, and in other the workers trying to establish groups which have little or no capacity for endurance. Now, who can question, they think, if a freelance worker started a new group with half a dozen half-baked professing Christians? What is the norm? in Apostolic times such deceptions would have been exposed. In a country like India with the population exploding at the rate of over 15 million annually, to get together a faction is not all that difficult, particularly if there is the attraction of money or other benefits such as schooling and humanitarian aids.

But God expects quality. Our God is ‘a consuming fire’ and that which is not real is sure to be burnt up. If any escape in this life, such will find themselves to be straw in the day of judgement (Mal. 4:1)

Conferences

This is an area where the spiritual mettle of the leaders will be tested. Think of the modern platform performers. What are the criteria applied in the selection of preachers? Gone are the times when spiritual standards were applied –when gifted men preached the Word, servants of God from India and abroad. Now. There is a crop of eloquent men, with little knowledge of the deeper things of doctrine – men who clamour for a place in the pulpit. Some of them

go to every denomination which might invite them. Their main forte is the gift of the gab and the ability to get the audience stunned by their outbursts or amused by their stories! Where is the inestimable quality of experience and spirituality? How disappointing that a conference speaker this year is not there next year! And quite a few of the supposed leaders think that their skill is to bring to their assemblies every bright neophyte about whom they hear or read about in some magazine. Only men of real spirituality, who are well-reputed in assembly life and doctrine (not wanderers) should be chosen in conferences where thousands may gather, many of whom with years of experience in Christian living and witnessing.

The above problem affects mostly Kerala which has a redundancy of preachers, a growing number in Tamil nadu and Karnataka and general paucity in Andhra at present. May God raise in the midst of the Assemblies leaders with the ‘understanding of the times’ (Chri.12:32).

GENERAL MORALITY

Time was, and that not in the distant past, when people associated with groups known as the ‘Brethren’ manifested a high standard as to morality. Now, what is morality? The common notion is that it has something to do with sexual behavior. The Random House Dictionary defines the word, among other things, as ‘conformity to the rules of right conduct’. The Indian society has always been and is, different to what prevails in the West. Social inhibitions did not mark the West. There was a large extent of freedom there for the people of different sexes to intermingle and move together. In India, more especially in Kerala, such a thought of intermingling was taboo. This aspect of society had its virtues and weaknesses. As to mere outward morality, the Indian people

generally maintained a fairly high standard whatever community one might belong to.

In Kerala, where the Syrian Christian community is somewhat strong, a general modesty was particularly evident. This was manifest in a marked measure among believers within that grouping. The 'Brethren' who represented a none-too-insignificant section of the Christian community revealed this virtue significantly, again as to man's outward assessment. The late Dr. Stanley Jones is reported to have said in public that in all his world-wide contacts, he had not come across womanhood as noble as he found in Kerala. So far as a foreigner could ascertain, his evaluation was correct. However, remember that a foreigner can photograph our people and landscape, but never do that when it comes to the inside. But Dr. Jones was largely correct. What we have in Kerala is an insulated society-quite the opposite of that found in the West. Parents guard their boys, particularly girls from exposure, and all looks well. In later life, after High School or College, when these same people have to move out into the cities or exposed to different cultures, the weakness caused by insulation becomes manifest. These children, growing into adolescence and young manhood or womanhood, reveal cracks in their conduct, and fall into temptation of various kinds. So, what was considered once to be reprehensive, is gradually tolerated, and this toleration gets into the standards of general conduct.

We have watched people professing 'Brethren Christianity' and have discerned that their standards are sometimes abominably low. And this is specially so when it comes to economic norms. Jesus said, 'a man's life consisted not in the abundance of things which he possesseth' (Luke 12:15). The context was that of a man who wanted the Master to mediate in the

division of wealth with his brother. This is a particular area where there is wrangling and conflict. The Master answered, “who made me a judge or divider over you?” We know of disputes that have continued for years unsolved, and whose authors have left the problem for the children to solve, with all the complexities the time-lag brings in.

The matter assumes a new dimension when some disputes are linked with the properties of Brethren assemblies. Heredity is claimed on properties acquired by fathers who, through the generosity of God’s people acquire a place of meeting for the church, and sometimes with a residential portion attached to the hall. The existence of societies to act as stewards of the properties has not solved problems or reduced litigation before earthly courts. This is one of the problems that has come on increasingly amongst the Brethren, and hindered spiritual progress.

And other moral standards are seen to be abysmally low. This specially so when people including leaders, use their tongues. 1 Cor.5:9 uses the word ‘reviler’, that is one who uses abusive language. The particular word is suggestive of a tongue organ with a fulcrum in the middle and swinging on either side without restraint. Although this sort of sin is worthy of excommunication, the consciences of people are so dull that no action is taken. James, the Lord’s half brother and bondsman devotes nearly half of the third chapter of his epistle on this evil, and terms its activity as ‘devouring fire’, and a ‘world of iniquity’, to be adjured specially by teachers of the Word (James 3:1) James was a very practical man and might have absorbed the qualities of the ‘Perfect Man’ watching our Lord as they lived under one roof. Watch men, even leaders, as they talk about assembly problems –take note of their belching and outburst of temper. All is done in the garb of safe-

guarding the truth, while actually the very foundation of sanctity is pulled down and violated.

We must all accept, they very best of us, that ‘in many things we offend’ (James 3:2). There is the need of judging ourselves each day, specially at the close of it to look back and reflect on the follies in this direction, and seek God’s forgiving mercy.

Needless to say that there is much for all of us to improve in our general ethos-interaction, the one with the other as members of the family of God, or as the apostle Paul said often, members of the ‘one body’. Our ethical conduct as ‘salt of the earth’ might set the norm for others to emulate and live by. May the sufficiency of His grace and the mighty influence of the Holy Spirit make it so in our lives.

Their Passivism

A good deal of ground has been covered, quite a spectrum of developments and features witnessed, but not all aspects. We would like to clarify that the purpose of the book was not to criticize. How can this be ever done, since the writer is a contributor to the true position the ‘Brethren’ are expected to take, on the basis of the Word of God and its unalterable principles.

Oversensitive

We are not unaware of the feelings of some brethren who feel we have washed a lot of dirty linen in public. If the matters we have opened up are objective and truthful, we have nothing to regret – the truth has to be said however unpleasant it be. Nor are we

unduly unfair to the Brethren in the Kerala region, who have occurred in the course of the treatment. Again, the writer is a Keralite, brought up in a conservative circle. Thus he was virtually judging himself. The fact is that he has been conscious of a remarkably significant part the assemblies in Kerala have played in the past, a dispensation which can by no means be ignored when it comes to missionary thrust, however small, there has been in India from that region.

Developing Trend

The recently-held Missionary Conference at Tiruvalla, Kerala, has much to commend itself. The very fact that some 500 young people converged on the spot and challenged as to missionary goals is great. However, how long will the euphoria last, and will the scores of people who responded be guided in the right course? If they fall into the set grove of working as several Keralite workers have done, namely establishing the Keralite type of congregations in the rest of India and follow a stereotyped pattern, the best will be missed. Our God is a God of renewal; He has declared, 'Behold I make all things new' (Rev. 21:5). In Isaiah 43:19, we have an expansion of this concept – 'Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth, I will make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert'. New frontiers' must be the vision of His servants. When we think of our dear land, it is a vast desert spiritually, and remember the Lord loves every single one of India, approximately 850 million people of every caste, creed, language and culture. The servant's love should not be any lower.

We are thankful that in a former day, when circumstances were very different, God did a mighty work in Kerala. But it was not for duplication, but for God's people to know Him, in His

operational method. God certainly raised a spring-board so that His servants might go into the whole of the land, and water the desert. The people, customs and manners, let alone the language, in the rest of the motherland are different. God seeks men of adaptability to enter in by the wide door.

There are values in a younger worker, called of the Lord, to work in association with an older worker with spiritual vision while, perhaps giving himself to a year or two of solid language study as the great pioneers from the West did. The time was not wasted time. It is important that a new language has to be learned, even its grammatical nuances to be able to communicate the message of the gospel in all its clarity. Over 60% of our people speak the Hindi language which is also the nation's lingua franca, and this must be mastered by the workers. The mere smattering of the language as studied in the primary and High school classes will not do. This, of course supplies a base for better grammatical study. Bear in mind that a language can be studied well by actual speaking, and that with people of the language group. Few of the workers from the South are aware that when they speak, the locals laugh themselves out and amuse themselves rather than listen to the preaching. It is sad commentary that so far as we know, less than a dozen South Indian workers in the North speak correct idiomatic Hindi. This is a defect to overcome.

Apostolic Strategy

Operation Mobilization, an interdenominational, but evangelistic group, has done excellent work in many parts of India. Its leaders, have over the years, learned valuable and positive lessons. With all their limited vision they have laid a substratum for more positive evangelism and church-planting ministry. Our

objective must not be to imitate that sort of work. That sort of work will need huge amounts of money and literature and equipments. The answer is to follow the Apostolic method of launching from pivotal centres of human concentration. The pivot becomes the main target as happened in Paul's case (Acts 19:10). Thus the hinterland should also be reached as a secondary goal. In fact, most of the churches in Asia sprang up through this method, that is still the strategy to be followed. Paul, of course, had no problem with the language. Apart from the native Aramic, he was efficient in Hebrew, the religious dialect, and Greek, the language of culture (Greek largely comparable to English in our context). Bible schools of our day must imbibe this vision. Otherwise they will develop workers who are likely to be parochial, totally unprepared to surrender their culture. Christian missions know only one culture, that is the culture of the cross.

Potential

As we see things, India has the potential; it can also find clean resources within the land and from the hundreds, God in His wisdom has seen fit to station in other countries – men with capacity and vision.

We are afraid that the Lord's people we are specially thinking about, have to develop the vision of the field, white unto harvest and sheep in their millions starved, scattered and fleeced through ignorance and superstition. The fields in Northern India are challenging mission fields, comparable to African countries, and the islands on the Pacific, which early missionaries from the West confronted. The only common nationality we have is Indian citizenship. The deeper North, North-West or North-East you go, the language is different, the culture as the South-Indian confronts

Aryan stock. But the South Indian has the gift of adaptability, adeptness and needed daring.

Another deficiency we have noticed is the reluctance of the assemblies to encourage potential worker. These assemblies to often do not know what 'Commendation' is, and it is a real pity when the worker-prospect has to tell the elders what it means and open the relevant Scriptures. Others are hesitant when it comes to money. When the Lord raises a new worker, he has material needs, and the prime agency of encouragement must be the local church, and not Funds. The ministry of funds run by men with a spacious vision may come to their help once they are in the field. We know of workers who have faced a situation of suspense in this matter which should not be.

Prayer

One wonders whether our assemblies give enough weightage to praying for workmen and that in a systematic manner. As William Carey said, 'the army of God marches on its knees'.

THE AUTHOR



The author was born on July 28, 1917, into the godly Samuel 'writer' family, Chemmanthoor, Punalur, Kerala. He married Grace, daughter of the late K.G. Thamas, Ranny, a Brethren leader and evangelist.

After completing studies in Kerala, and at the invitation of Mr. T. G. Samuel and the late N. T. Thomas, he went to Madras in October 1938. He found his first job in Oakley Bowden & Co. of which Mr. T. G. Samuel was a Manager. Those days the assembly at 17, Broadway was at the height of its spiritual power, and he greatly enjoyed fellowship with the saints, profiting particularly by the personal encouragement given by the late Mr. A.C. Rose and other elders. In January 1940, he moved to Bombay, later to work with a larger British firm and two Swiss companies including Sandoz India, whom he served for 27 years, rising gradually to become a senior Manager. However the main value of the Bombay sojourn was his vital involvement with the Fort Assembly and fellowship in service with the late Mr. W. S. Durham and other leaders there.

In 1954, following a vision to encourage young christians going out into unreached areas in India, and with the active co-operation of Mr. G. Ritchie, N.Z. Assembly Missionary, and brethren like the late Mr. B.P. Thomas of the Chartered Bank, he was involved in the launching of The Gospel Steward Missionary Magazine and Funds Committee, which later developed to be the present Gospel Steward Trust Funds Ministry. Enraptured by the same vision, he took early retirement from his company service in 1974, to commence, with other like-minded brethren, the ministry of Assembly Bible & Training Institute in Pune, with a view to impart a biblical grounding to young men going into the field, which ministry was transferred as to location, in 1977, to form the