

HALSALL PARISH MAGAZINE



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The Rectory,
Halsall.
23rd July, 1971

My Dear Friends,

So often we hear people say that the Church should speak out more than it does on public affairs. So often we hear people say "What a poor image the Church has." It is also said that people would flock into its fellowship if only it gave more leadership to a perplexed generation. Our Archbishops and Bishops are expected by many to pronounce on all sorts of topics—blood sports, transplant operations, Rhodesia, drugs, sex, race relations, abortion, communism and a host of other subjects.

Surely no sensible man could believe that his opinion on such a wide variety of subjects could really be of much significance or value. The Church has its own way of dealing with such subjects and many valuable and informed studies have from time to time been made and debated in the Church Assembly. They are, however, quickly forgotten and especially by those who press for answers but receive a reply which does not chime with their opinions.

These questions of the Church speaking out and the image of the Church have been aggravated of recent years by what are called the mass-media. Television and the Press are highly selective of their coverage of the news and not infrequently fasten upon some one item which they blow up out of all proportion, thus exacerbating a particular situation and giving it undue prominence in the public mind. It is time that those responsible in television and the Press gave some real thought to the principles upon which news should be selected, it is at the present time, I feel, left largely to intuition.

Be that as it may, the Christian Church, must guard itself from becoming a talking shop, pronouncing on this and that so as to ingratiate itself with the world and, in the current jargon, improve its public image. Its public image is of little importance. If we are asking ourselves all the time "What impression am I making?" we are unlikely to act either naturally or rightly. In the New Testament "the world" is used in two senses—a good sense and a bad sense. Today we very often forget the second. The Church is to be judged not by its esteem in the world's eyes, but in the eyes of Him who created it.

Our Lord in His ministry was asked many questions. "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" "Are we to pay tribute to Caesar or not?" He seldom gave a cut-and-dried answer, thrusting the question back to a personal decision and revealing the motive which lay behind.

Of course there are occasions when the Church should say clearly what it believes, but these occasions will be infrequent for its witness to the truth should be borne not in easy words but in costly actions. I believe that the Church justifies itself not by having a good public image, not by hitting the headlines, not by making what are called courageous pronouncements, but by the vigour and devotion of its ongoing hidden life—the amount of sympathy, love, patience, and understanding poured into this lost world of ours. This is happening in the work among children and young people, in the ministry to young married folk—how it delights me to see them bring their small ones to church even if they do crow in the middle of the sermon—in ministry to the aged, in hospitals, in prisons and wherever there is human need.

It is my belief that the day will come when this materialistic and mechanical age of ours will drive men and women to look afresh at the Christian Church in

the hope of finding there those values and insights, those personal relations, and that fellowship and sense of purpose which ultimately spring not from man but from God, and from Him alone. There are signs of this already happening and, as it does, I pray that the Church may not be found wanting.

God Bless you all.

Your sincere friend,

Herbert Bullough

WORTH CONSIDERING

"The Genius of the Church of England"

"The genius of the Church of England is parochial, not congregational"—Cyril Garbett, when he was Archbishop of York.

"The Church is the one institution in society which exists mainly for the sake of those who do not belong to it."—Bishop of Southwell.

LAMMAS

The first Sunday in August—anciently August 1st

Of the four agricultural festivals, Plough Sunday, Rogationtide, Lammas, and Harvest—Lammas alone is a purely sacred occasion, yet without it the cycle of growth would be incomplete.

The word is derived from the Anglo-Saxon, and is translated "leaf-mass" a festival at which loaves of bread were consecrated made from the first ripe corn.

"In the Middle Ages the harvest itself, the in-gathering, remained virtually a heathen festival, its primitive uses very lightly disguised or consecrated. Thomas Hardy would have us believe that even in the 19th century the countryman, or at any rate, the country woman, remained a pagan at heart. "Women," he says, "whose chief companions are the forms and faces of outdoor nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematised religion taught their race at a later date."

Nothing like the modern Harvest Festival seems to have existed in the middle ages. The Christian event of the season was Lammas, the first communion in the bread of the new corn. Lammas has a specially Anglo-Saxon origin. It may have begun decline in Norman England, but is vanished completely at the Reformation, "along with many another symbolic and beautiful practice supposed at that time to have become idolatry."

After a lapse of four or five centuries the Church of England, especially in the rural areas, has begun to observe the festival of the first fruits.

A quotation from "The Plough," published by the West Sussex Church and Countryside Association gives a good description of the festival.

"The purpose of the Lammas Service is to offer the first of the crops to God: and to offer Him the first food made in the village from these early crops. It is not so much a thanksgiving, though obviously that element must be included. It is an offering, irrespective of what the results have been, or are to be. A sheaf of corn, and a loaf (made from the wheat that has just ripened) are brought to church by members of the village, and farming communities. Generally a farm labourer offers the sheaf, and a baker the loaf, and members of the Young Farmers' Club take other parts in the service. The next logical stage is for the bread to be used at the Holy Communion; only a few parishes reached this stage as yet, though it must always have been an integral part of the ancient service."

THE TRANSFIGURATION

On August 6th, the Church celebrates the Feast of Our Lord's Transfiguration when we think of three bewildered disciples, Peter, James and John, gazing and gazing in dumb astonishment as they saw their Master's Divinity shine through the vesture of His flesh and they saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. They were so enraptured by their experience that they wanted to make it permanent so that they could stay on the hill. Peter said to Jesus, 'Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses and one for Elijah.' But our Lord showed them that they must descend again to the plain to meet all the demands and duties which awaited them.

Our experience of the Holy Eucharist can be likened to that of the three disciples on the Hill of Transfiguration. In the Holy Eucharist as the Prayer of Consecration is said and the priest repeats those same actions which were performed by our Lord at the Last Supper, we turn our thoughts to the Upper room and try to see Jesus in all the fulness of His Humanity, at the time when that Humanity was about to experience its deepest humiliation. But the Holy Eucharist is not merely a sacrament of tragedy; for it is suffused with the glory of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, and we are brought into communion and fellowship with a living and glorified Lord.

God is present everywhere but He has appointed the Holy Eucharist as a special means of access to Him. If we approach this Sacrament worthily the conditions are then prepared for the outpouring of God's love and mercy towards us. We ourselves approach God and God approaches us. The love of God which sent our Blessed Lord into the world to die for our sins still ceaselessly operates, cleansing, redeeming, purifying, regenerating, strengthening and renewing us. The altar is our trusting-place with God, and in the Holy Eucharist, through His appointed means that stream of power, which is the new life in Christ, flows into our personalities.

The famous Curé D'Arès said: "Without the Holy Eucharist there would be no happiness in the world, and life wouldn't be bearable. When we receive Holy Communion we receive our joy and happiness. The man who communicates loses himself in God like a drop of water in the ocean; it's impossible to separate them any more."

The Holy Eucharist can be for us our Hill of Transfiguration, for the simple ceremony of the breaking of bread can become for us suffused with a Divine radiance. But like Peter, James and John we also have to descend our Hill of Transfiguration to meet the demands and duties which await us. We must leave the altar, but carrying away from it a new vision and a new strength, we must go forth to serve God and our fellows in the fellowship of His Church.

ST. CUTHBERT'S SCHOOL, HALSALL

It is difficult for us to imagine our school opening next term without Mr. Gaskell being there. The fact remains—he has left his school. We shall miss him very much and our thanks are due to God for a very faithful and very long period of wonderful service in our school. Mr. Gaskell will be long remembered for his good influences in both the school and the village and

the whole community joins in wishing both Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell a long and happy retirement. We rejoice that in their retirement we shall be fortunate to number them among our faithful worshippers at St. Cuthbert's Church.

May I as Chairman and Correspondence Manager thank all those who sent contributions towards the gifts made to Mr. and Mrs. Gaskell on Open Day 1971. H.B.

WELCOME

On behalf of the Managers, the Parochial Church Council, and the villagers I extend to Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong and their two small children a warm welcome to St. Cuthbert's. We all hope they will be very happy here. Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong have decided to live in the portion of School House formerly occupied by Miss Ballard. The Managers have now the responsibility of 'putting the house in order' and the estimated cost is around £3,500. It will be necessary for the Managers to borrow the money in order to carry out the modernisation and general repairs to the whole house. It will be a long hard pull to repay the loan but the Managers are confident that the people of Halsall will support them in their efforts to make School House a very comfortable and modern home for our new headmaster.

H.B.

ARE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE KILL-JOYS?

A common attitude of our time towards Christian people is that they are narrow minded kill-joys; people afraid to face the full pleasure of life, and people who would like also to stop other people from enjoying life to its full.

If we be so labelled because we hold sexual aberrations of various kinds are wrong; endless drinking and frivolity are wrong; concentration on a hoped for lucky gamble is wrong; dodging real work and responsibility is wrong; an endless concern with and for ourselves is wrong; dishonesty, slickness, smart practice are wrong, a complete unconcern for the needy and beaten here or in other countries is wrong, that meanness, greed, arrogance, bullying, double-talk and double-dealing are all wrong—then if it be for these reasons we are labelled narrow minded kill-joys, let us gladly and freely bear the reproach . . .

The last twenty years has brought an incredible change in most people's fortunes. Our "affluent society," as it is called has not only banished poverty and cringing need. It has brought undreamt of riches to countless thousands. It has brought comforts and pleasures and travel and freedom. To the vast majority, it has opened a new and enthralling and exciting way of life. That, we rejoice in. It is not surprising that it has brought heady enjoyment, "away with restraints, on with the fun and games. Make the most of it, it may not last for ever." Instead of breeding a largeness of spirit it has for the present produced in many a self-indulgent, pleasure-lusting, irreverent covetousness for more, flippant spirit. "Eat, drink, let's fly to Cairo or New York or Timbuctoo—and let those worry who want to.

Then let these people not complain if there are those who are not swept away with these coarsest results. Let them not complain if there are those who see and know that this is not glory but spiritual poverty: who see and know that this vast new thing which our generation has been fortunate to gain is being squandered and wasted, and which in far too many cases is not leading to nobler, finer lives, fuller and more contented lives, but a chattering silly hollowness. There is a very great need for discerning people to observe the travesty and by clean, honest responsible, unselfish, self-giving living witness to a finer way.

This surely is where Christian living can truly come into its own. We have found a balance, a richness and freedom and quality in following Christ. Let us go on and go forward manfully and gaily in it. For here is largeness of spirit.

To be critically negative, touched maybe with envy that others can enjoy triviality which our consciences won't allow us; to be full of reproaches about the sin and evil around us; to be censorious; to draw in on ourselves lest the gay world defile us or get us in its thrall can and does have both a narrowing effect on our lives and attitudes and makes us quite useless as a witness in our modern world. Truly we become kill-joys in ourselves and to others.

Rather let us rejoice in whatever in the world around us had wholeness and purposefulness and cleanness and dignity and freedom.

Let us also rejoice in the freedom which Christ has brought to us. Let us rejoice in our salvation. Let us be positive, discovering the riches which are there, the hope which is there; and delight in labouring well and conscientiously, in service to others, in giving ourselves, our time and money to those causes we know are for the true welfare of men and women.

Now, thank God, as I look round and try to reflect on the very many practising Christians I know. I am glad to be able to say that I find in the main this is their attitude. They are not negative or narrow minded or kill-joyish. But the one thing I think I notice—is a far too great timidity about being open and out with it; too much hiding of excellent lights.

"Now the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace . . ."

Odd, isn't it that the second "fruit of the spirit" is Joy! Yet Christians are supposed to be kill-joys, "miserable sinners", full of gloom and despondency . . . How come? How can we equate the "miserable sinner" with the joy of the saints?

Actually, we cannot dissociate them. The one is the result of the other. Joy is the grace given to those who have the courage to examine themselves, recognise their "miserable estate" and find the answer.

Essentially, I suppose, it depends on what you mean by "joy". People are apt to confuse it with "amusement", "hilarity", "boisterousness", "jocularity", and that frantic seeking after emotional titillation which creates a boom in the illicit sale of drugs today. There may be stimulation at times in any of these, but usually they are an ephemeral release from nervous tension which leave a feeling of flatness and depression behind . . . "the morning after the night before" sort of feeling.

Christian joy should be a permanent quality of character, a steady, quiet stream of gladness underlying the whole of life—even the bad, or difficult, bits. It springs from love—love of God first and foremost, shown outwardly in the world as love to man, since this is the best, and indeed only, expression we can give it in our human nature. It is the authentic mark of true holiness as opposed to the spurious kind.

Then how the "miserable sinner" bit?

Well, from a Christian point of view one is, or should be, "miserable" about sin and its consequences. For they are devastating, both here in this world and hereafter.

The common meaning of miserable is "wretchedly unhappy", and it comes from a Latin word meaning "pity". Hence its true meaning is "one who is in a state deserving of pity"—"in a pitiable plight". And this is exactly the state we are in before God, because of our sins. Therefore we come to Him to confess our condition, and ask His pity and mercy.

And the corollary of that admission of our true state is that He forgives us. That is, we receive a deep inner sense of forgiveness and release, and from this follows joy . . . joy to the heart . . . and from this joy stems the peace of God which passeth understanding.

If we really do not know Christian joy and peace, it may well be that we have some unconfessed or unsuspected block acting as a smoke-screen between God and us. Perhaps those "respectable" sins we so often won't recognise as "SIN" . . . we may well not be like that bold Mrs. "X" who lives openly in adultery, or Mr. "Y" who swears like a trooper and is rarely ever seen sober. Nothing like that, of course. Only the rather petty, shabby little sins like resentment or covetousness, or a tendency to gossip, or to be wittily cruel at the expense of others . . . nothing like the "dreadful things" other people do of course . . . but perhaps the very thing which prevents us knowing what true joy is.

As Christians we seek to keep the commandments, because these are fundamental laws of life. Whether or not the world thinks we are then kill-joys is unimportant. But there is more to Christian living than the keeping of rather negative laws. There should be the positive joyousness which attracts and strengthens others; there should be a gladness which ultimately draws all others in to its own "feast of love". When this is seen the world rarely mentions the word "kill-joy". More normally it uses the term "saint".

LORD,

Why should it be
So hard to see
Thy will for me?
This dream
This splendid thing,
That in my brain is singing
Night and day . . .
Cometh it from Thee?
Or is it
Just my vain imagining
Born of my own conceits blown high?
Lord, I want to know
I pray,
But still Thou dost not say.
WHY?
Long have I prayed, Lord
But still
Am in the dark.
Unless—
Unless this be Thy will:
That I should try
And if there follows
Some success.
Thine answer: Yes!
And if I fail . . . ?
Also Thine answer heard
This dream was not Thy word.

From "Out of the Depths",
by W. Burnet Gaston.

SERVERS' ROTA

Aug. 1	9.00 a.m.	Raymond Jaba
8	10.30 a.m.	Harold Grimshaw and Malcolm Serjeant.
15	8.00 a.m.	Michael Lewis
	6.30 p.m.	David Stopforth
22	8.00 a.m.	John Davies
	10.30 a.m.	Tony and Barry Gaskell
29	8.00 a.m.	Roger Dutton
	10.30 a.m.	Christopher Pimlott

SANCTUARY FLOWERS

Aug. 1	Mrs. Moorcroft and Mrs. Sephton
8	Mrs. Stopforth
15	Mrs. G. McCoy
22	Mrs. Crook
29	Mrs. E. Orritt
Sept. 5	Mrs. R. Brett

SIDESMEN'S ROTA

Aug. 1	E. Grimshaw, D. Sephton J.R. J. Cheetham, H. Dean.
8	T. Swift, T. Hunter H.S. P. Ainsley. R. Gaskell.
15	H. Grimshaw, M. Manners R.H. W. Pounds, J. Halsall.
22	E. Serjeant, D. Swift J.H. J. Heaton, J. Banks
29	P. Saunders, T. Grimshaw J.R. H. Huyton, A. Grimshaw
Sept. 5	E. Blackhurst, E. Orritt H.S. C. Shacklady, W. White.

THE RECTOR'S BAZAAR STALL

May I once again say thank you to those parishioners who have brought a "thank you" gift back from their holiday for my stall. Needless to say I brought one back myself from Ireland. I am sure when the time comes you will have provided me with a stall full of most attractive gifts. I am so thrilled with the gifts you have so far brought for me. H.B.

YEW TREES IN CHURCHYARDS

In many churchyards there are grand old yew trees — though not all of them are as old as they are said to be! (The oldest is believed to be at Darley Dale in Derbyshire and is reputed to be 900 years old). It is thought that these trees were first planted in churchyards because, owing to their length of life, they were regarded as an emblem of immortality. As they were the only type of evergreen tree growing in parts of England, they were also used for decorations in the church at Easter.

Some may have been used to provide wood for bows, but most of the wood for this purpose was imported from Spain.

Because they live for such a long time many yews have been associated at some time with famous people, but perhaps the most famous is the yew at Selborne in Hampshire which was known to the famous naturalist Gilbert White.

The beautifully trimmed yews in the churchyard at Painswick in Gloucestershire are very famous. According to the legend the number can never exceed 99 because the hundredth tree always dies—so many visitors try to count the trees and, like me, get lost and do not know which they have counted! When I was last in Painswick, however, the vicar assured me that there were 102 trees — so one more old legend is proved false.

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