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Creating Christian Fellowship

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visiting committee. In such ways can the pastoral work of the ministry be supplemented. Needless to say, all such visitors should have the assurance that their work is appreciated by the church, and that whenever they strike a snag or come across anything of special interest the minister is ready and eager to advise or to co-operate.

If further proof be required of the value and importance of a pastoral ministry, let it be given on the evidence of Dr. Latourette, who contends that it is only in Christianity, among all the religions of the world, that there has appeared the figure of the pastor. Other religions have produced prophets and priests, but pastors and shepherds of souls are characteristic only of the Christian religion. Surely we cannot afford to disparage or neglect that which is historically distinctive of the faith we hold and of the Master Whom it is our privilege to serve. D. GORDON WYLIE.

CREATING CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

"AND the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." This phrase from our most familiar benediction usually marks the end of a Protestant service of worship. It is possible that most worshippers and many ministers would interpret the words as being a prayer for the indwelling of the Spirit in each individual life. But it is clear that more than this was in Paul's mind when he used the phrase, and that his meaning is adequately expressed in Canon Streeter's paraphrase—" May the fellowhip which is created by the Holy Spirit be your fellowship." The " fellowship of the Holy Spirit " was a definite apostolic concept. The apostles spoke not only of " fellowship," but of " *the* fellowship," the " koinonia," and they were referring not to an organisation but to a corporate experience which came to the Christians at Pentecost, and which was the distinctive feature of the early Church.

It is the purpose of God that each local church should reproduce and demonstrate the " fellowship of the Holy Spirit." One of the deepest satisfactions of the Christian minister arises from the assurance that within his own church this distinctively Christian fellowship is being created. It must be admitted that evidence of the " koinonia " is not always obvious. " Name what parish you please, is Christian fellowship there ? Rather, are not the bulk of the parishioners a mere rope of sand ? What Christian connection is there between them ? What intercourse in spiritual things ? What watching over each other's souls ? " John Wesley's words are relevant to our present condition, and they suggest the following observations.

1. Since the members of any local church are found, at any given moment, standing on different levels of Christian development

and spiritual experience, we inevitably find different levels of fellowship within the one church. It is legitimate, for instance, that there should be associations of a purely recreational order. And the common argument that a church bazaar has value because it tends to "get the people together" must not be rejected as altogether invalid. It is, however, important that we should emphasise that such "getting together" has no specifically Christian significance or quality. It does not exemplify the essential nature of the Church.

2. As the Christian experience of individuals within the Church becomes deeper, as they apprehend Christ more clearly and make a fuller personal response to His claims, they will desire fellowship with one another on a deeper level. Those church organisations which merely facilitate their "getting together" will fail to satisfy them. They will seek a less formal and stereotyped meeting with others where, on the basis of a common surrender to Christ and a confidence in one another as fellow disciples, they can share their spiritual experiences and "edify one another . . . in the Lord." This is the normal process of developing Christian life. A closer walk with God always involves a closer walk with God's people. "When we are drowned in the overwhelming seas of the love of God," says T. R. Kelly in his "Testament of Devotion," "we find ourselves in a new and particular relation to a few of our fellows."

3. "To a few of our fellows." It is obvious that "koinonia" can be realised only in a small group. The small group makes possible that intimate give-and-take which is of the very essence of Christian fellowship. The more we consider the New Testament fellowship the more clearly we have to recognise the difficulties involved in the numerical size of our local churches. How is it possible, in a large church, for all the worshippers even to know one another's names? If "koinonia" is to be realised in our present circumstances, it can be realised only on the basis of a number of "cells" within the Church. This, in itself, is a test of the fellowship of the Church, for we know how the unbelieving mind obstinately insists on regarding all small groups as "cliques."

4. The deepest fellowship in the Church is to be found, I believe, in a small group of Church members who meet with the common purpose of equipping themselves for effective Christian witness and service. Ideally, such gatherings as the deacons' meeting, the teachers' preparation class, and the lay preachers' class would be centres of fellowship. If, in fact, they are not centres of fellowship the explanation is to be sought in the quality of the Christian experience of the individuals concerned. In practice, we find the nearest approximation to New Testament fellowship in those groups that meet for Bible study or theological discussion, so long as the purpose which animates the group is that of helping one another to become increasingly "meet for the Master's use."

5. This leads me to say that fellowship within the local church is not to be, and indeed cannot be, cultivated as an end in itself. It is the means to the accomplishment of the Church's purpose, which is to create fellowship among men and women by leading them into a saving and obedient relationship with Jesus Christ. If the Church, in its local manifestation, is to be regarded as the Body of Christ, the embodiment and expression of His mind and spirit, the "extension of the incarnation," then it must always be remembered that the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost. The love of Jesus, the "Friend of publicans and sinners," was always going out into other lives, making new friendships, building new bridges, creating new relationships. This is what we mean by "personal evangelism," and it is the final duty and highest privilege of every Church member. Christian leadership, for instance, must always be understood and interpreted in these terms, and not in terms of executive ability or official position.

6. There remains the challenge, which becomes very penetrating and urgent when we consider the misery and futility of so much of modern life, that the Church should exhibit and demonstrate to the world the kind of fellowship which, in the early days, evoked the wondering exclamation, "See how these Christians love one another!" Generous and practical interest in the welfare of members serving in the Forces, the "adoption" of a church in stricken Germany to which clothing and food parcels are sent, the provision of a common home for aged members, financial assistance to the needy, material support for any member who, losing his job on account of some conscientious objection to questionable practices, is unable for the time being to support an aged relative—such are some of the ways in which the expression of Christian fellowship can be a powerful and compelling act of witness. The ingenuity of love will discover many others. And all these practical demonstrations of fellowship are supplementary to the preaching of the Word when they are undertaken in the name of Him Who prayed for His disciples "that they may be one . . . that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me."

F. R. SCHOFIELD.

THE MINISTER'S PUBLIC INFLUENCE

"I AM among you as He that serveth," said our Lord; and His Church is sure that it is in harmony with its Master when it is serving men. The special point of this article is to remind us that most of the men we exist to serve are outside the church walls. The Church and the minister have a responsibility to the town or village in which they are found; and this responsibility can be met only by a deliberate attempt to influence the whole life of that locality.