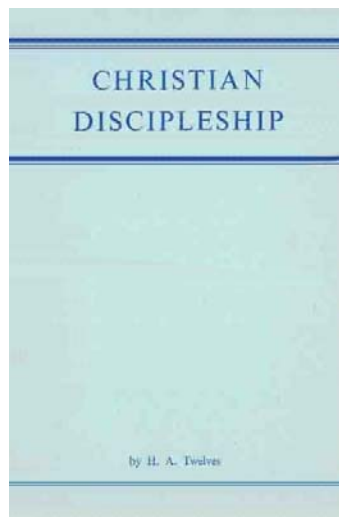


CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP



By H. A. Twelves

And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter; "Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?" He saith, "I am not".

And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself.

The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. Jesus answered him, "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and, in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said ..."

Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, "I am not."

One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, "Did not I see thee in the garden with him?"

Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew. (John 18:15-21, 24-27)

Peter the Disciple

Peter's denial of his discipleship has provoked some to condemn him; others, knowing that, with no danger threatening, they have done the same, are less ready to find fault. Indeed, whilst still most British people would call themselves 'Christians' not one in a thousand would call himself a 'disciple'. A disciple Peter emphatically was, the foremost of them, in his faith, his enthusiasm, his indignation when harm threatened his Lord, his protestation of loyalty; and therefore the most noticeable in his failure. Usually he vigorously claimed to be one: "We have forsaken all and have followed thee". (Matt. 19:27)

Here, however, mingling with his Teacher's foes, he fears and denies his discipleship. Some Christians are disciples and would have acted just so. Others are disciples and often fail, with less excuse, fearing for their reputation, unwilling to be considered odd. Many are not disciples and their shyness of calling themselves so is really their honesty. They realize that discipleship implies a closer, more positive relationship than they enjoy or even want. They treat with respect those who proclaim themselves disciples of Marx or Darwin or any other man, but prefer that discipleship of Christ should not be mentioned in their company. Their honesty is to their credit. What is rather to their discredit is the tenacity with which they cling to the title 'Christian'.

Disciples or Christians?

Some justify themselves with the fancy that only the Twelve were 'disciples', all the rest being 'Christians', as if there were some difference of degree in the meaning of the terms. There is in fact none. 'Disciple', indeed, is the normal word in the New Testament, being used 269 times: there were multitudes of them only a few years after Christ's resurrection. 'Christian', on the other hand, is a term found only three times, in passages which by no means encourage us to use the term loosely.

The first use is by townsfolk who thought it a suitable name for those who were constantly speaking of Christ: "After the persecution that arose about Stephen, the disciples were scattered abroad as far as to Antioch; and the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch", (Acts 11:19, 26).

No careful reader of the history can avoid asking himself the question suggested by this first occurrence of the word "Christian" in the Scriptures: Am I, who call myself the same, ready to belong to an unpopular sect or to suffer persecution? Do I often speak of Christ?

We meet the word a second time on the occasion of the Apostle Paul's defence before

Agrippa and Festus. The king interrupts him with the cryptic remark: “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

Again, Christians should not fail to ask the obvious questions: Can we imagine ourselves defending our Christian position before authorities, giving an account of the reasons for our faith and quoting from the Old Testament as Paul did, or even from the New? Have we even grasped as much as Agrippa, who, whatever his interruption was intended to convey —interest or sarcasm— realized at least that Christians were made by persuasion, not by the geographical accident of their birth?

Peter’s first epistle provides us with the word’s third and last occurrence. Disciples were not to suffer as murderers, thieves, evil-doers or busybodies: “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet. 4:16).

A “fiery trial” was to come upon them (1 Pet. 4:12). They could expect to suffer. Today for believers in the English-speaking world widespread toleration and religious indifference have robbed this warning of its urgency, but it should not be assumed that in this easy-going land the severe suffering of other minorities such as in Nazi Germany and Eastern Europe could never happen. However that may be, it can truly be said that without suffering one cannot be a Christian. “Even hereunto were ye called”, said Peter (1Pet 2:21). The tribulation may be inward, unseen of other men, entirely of the mind and heart; it is none the less suffering and essential to the Christian’s discipline. For Christians are disciples and disciples Christians; there is no soft option.

To some the title “Christian” seems to give the comfortable feeling of belonging to the crowd. It should give nothing of the kind. It is their difference from the majority that is always being stressed about the first Christian disciples. One sees it in the very words used of Christ’s relations with them. He “withdrew” with them, “went apart” with them, “called” them “unto him”, “spoke privately” to them. Whereas others would acknowledge that “never man spake like this man”, yet the masses would desert the wonder-worker because of his hard sayings. To the disciples, on the other hand, it was “given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God”, and to them “he expounded all things”. (Mark 3:7; Mark 6:31; Matt. 14:13; 17:1; 20:17, 24:3; John 7:46; Mark 1:22; Matt. 13:16).

This distinction is fundamental in the Sermon on the Mount. They are to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Their righteousness is to exceed the righteousness of the most righteous of the sects. They are to do more than others, in loving not only their friends and relatives, but their enemies also. In their almsgiving, prayer and fasting, they are not to be as “the hypocrites”, and in their seeking “first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” they are not to be like the nations in which they lived. (Matt. 5:13, 14, 20, 6:1-9, 16-18, 33).

The Teacher states the position as directly as possible in that passage which is the Holy of Holies of the New Testament – his parting prayer with his disciples before his

agony in Gethsemane: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world ... I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me ... I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." (John 17:9, 14, 15)

A fear of self-righteousness is a further cause of shyness about claiming to be disciples. The word has an angelic ring about it, some say, and they dare not claim to be angels. This apology is often sincere; but it is always without foundation. The twelve were not angelic; far from it. John and James began by being ambitious. All were so self-centred as to be able to quarrel among themselves, in Christ's presence, and just before he suffered, disputing as to which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24), not perceiving that his spiritual stature dwarfed them all.

Judas was a traitor. All forsook him and fled from the Garden as he was arrested. Peter and John recovered, but Peter recovered only to then deny his Lord three times. Thomas was a doubter. Outside the twelve, the two on the way to Emmaus walked and were "sad" (Luke 24:17) at their Teacher's death and burial which they thought his end, and were reproved by him, now risen but unrecognized by them, for being "fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets" had spoken of the necessity for the Messiah to suffer before entering into his glory (Luke 24:25). In becoming a disciple one does not become an angel. In calling oneself a disciple one makes no such claim. One proclaims oneself simply a learner. That is the meaning of the word 'disciple'. That, clearly, is what the earliest disciples were.

This is not in any way to lower the high standards to which disciples are called or to make the experience more attractive by lessening its responsibilities or softening its demands. The mixture of the loftiest idealism and starkest realism that so often challenges us in Christ's words quite precludes any hope that vague religiosity plus mild benevolence can serve for Christian discipleship.

"Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt 5:48).

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matt 6:24)

"Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:13-14).

Those are only three of our Teacher's sayings on discipleship. They call to highest endeavour; they set the loftiest possible aim; they pierce to the springs of human action. They are uncompromising. Christ's definition does not include within the fold of discipleship any who feel that 'Christianity' ought to be the generic name for any religion professed by a man or woman born in the western world. Complacent lip-service to the moral code of Jesus of Nazareth is not discipleship. Christ is The Light. To him alone men must come.

The full fruit of their discipleship is such a complete unity with their Teacher as the Teacher himself enjoyed with his Father. The Teacher is to be in the disciples and they in him (see John 17:23). “The only begotten son is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), with the beloved disciple, John, (John 13:33); all true disciples are to be his. Those are the heights to be scaled. But the climb begins in the valley and they can quite rightly still be called ‘disciples’ who have only glimpsed the distant summit but are still toiling up the lowest slopes (if not then these pages should have been written by another author!).

To think of disciples as learners is not only etymologically sound: it is a practical help. For it suggests a number of simple questions, whose answers are sometimes obvious but always profound.

The Teacher

The first question may seem puerile and its answer self-evident, but its implications are tremendous: Who is the Teacher? All we need to know of disciples is most fully revealed in him, but his picture grows sharper the more closely we trace his influence upon his first disciples; and this reflected image of the Lord may suit our feeble eyesight better than the vision of his dazzling glory, as the untrained sense can learn from leaf, flower and fruit the warm and vitalizing radiance of the sun, whose distant place, giant size, burning heat and function in the universe, only a rigorous discipline can fit a man to measure.

And what a Sun was here! As we note the turning to him of such diverse human specimens and their growth in grace towards him, we marvel at the secret of his power. They themselves teach us, as they answer his call from Galilean fishing-boat, from tax-collector’s desk, from the depths of sin’s despair, from the murderous haste of the Damascus road, that no mere genius had dazzled their ignorance, flattered their smartness, encouraged their hopes or offered them worldly fame. Only a “teacher sent from God” (John 3:2) could command such a ready devotion from men whose only common quality was their simplicity of soul, their singleness of heart, their childlike trust in his sufficiency for all their need.

No Socrates was here, plying sharp wits with question and reply, with supposition and proposition, with logical definition and his ‘*reductio ad absurdum*’ – a mode of argumentation that seeks to prove an argument by deriving an absurdity from its denial.

It was not in complex rhetoric that he clothed his doctrine, but in direct statement or in the easy flow of tales a child could follow; his apothegm and paradox were never cold and clever with a surface shine, but deep and searching, big with spiritual truth. He and his subject were one: “grace and truth” he taught, and these “came by” him; nothing could sever the Word from “the Word made flesh” (John 1:17, 14).

Yet with all his towering greatness, his heavenly mission and his exalted destiny, he

was no remote dispenser of celestial wisdom. Up the mountain he would go, but not to thunder down upon his hearers below: “When he was set, his disciples came unto him, and he opened his mouth and taught them” the nature of true happiness (Matt. 5:1-2).

He, who himself was the Truth, “went in and out among them” (Acts 1:21) and was known by them in weariness and dejection, in hunger and thirst, in sadness and disappointment. He, whose matchless words of grace struck awe into the multitude, announcing himself with perfect poise the sole channel of the Father’s revelation, was seen of them in the daily intimacy of eating and drinking, walking and resting, in those unguarded moments that reveal a man’s true worth — and still they wondered and they loved him more. They saw a whole man in him, clear through and through, pure and without a flaw.

This it was that pulled them to him, half unknowing, as his stark, “hard sayings” (John 6:60) repelled the thronging mass of wonder-seekers. For this they continued with him in his temptations and, though scattered awhile like sheep when the shepherd was smitten, were found again beside him in his triumph. He had no honeyed words to keep them. Warned in grim terms against a light adventuring upon discipleship, rebuked for lack of faith, upbraided for petty jealousies, discouraged from vainglory in their “unprofitable” service, constantly disconcerted that he should talk on one plane whilst they were thinking on a lower, their obtuseness deplored, the dimness of their spiritual perception reproved, their vengeful spirit lamented—still they clung close by him. To whom else could they go? He offered them freedom; he brought them life.

They could go no-whither. Despite the gulf between them, they knew that their hearts were laid bare before him, what each of them was, what each might be through his grace. They sensed his sympathy as he adapted his method to their limited capacities and their changing needs, now speaking plainly, now painting them pictures, now acting in transfigured glory for their comfort and for their guidance in the humble servant’s washing of their feet, and all the time keeping some things from them which as yet they were not able to bear. They noticed how differently he answered their questions from those of the carping critics—no pennies to silence them, no countering with even subtler puzzles. “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1) and with simple, artless tenderness he provided for their need. They may even have observed with what patience and strength, ignoring irrelevance, he answered not their question, but the one they should have asked: “Are there few that be saved?” — “Strive to enter in by the strait gate.” (Luke 13:23-24).

Through all their bewildering, yet fascinating experience, they knew he never asked of them what he could not or would not do himself; but he did ask them to do that. “If I then, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.” (John 13:14).

He was indeed their Way. To come to the Father, was to be like him.

He summoned them to answer his call and, with almost brutal starkness, to “let the dead bury their dead” (Luke 9:60). But first he himself had answered his own Father’s call: “Mine ears hast Thou opened” (Psa. 40:6). This commandment — even the laying down of his life that he might take it again — he had received of his Father.

The Teacher required his disciples to hear and treasure his words, and by the indwelling of his words to bring forth fruit. But first He, perfect teacher that he was, had “hid” his Father’s words in his heart that he might not sin against Him (as Psalm 119:11).

He called the disciple, who would be a friend, to unquestioning obedience. But it was obedience to a Teacher who himself all the time was learning obedience by the things that he suffered and making it his meat to do his Father’s will.

Nor did he train them only in the days of his flesh when the prospect of his agony was still before him. Once beyond the cross, his care for them revived. After the resurrection, with the assurance of the victory gained, the Truth established, and the way of pain and self-denial behind him, his immortal lips now greeted them as brethren and resumed their gracious lessons. Again they heard their foolish heart of unbelief reproved; again they followed his cogent exposition of the God-breathed Word, but with kindled hearts and understanding opened; again they asked the unimportant questions but for answer received the promise of power from on high.

And finally he leaves them, not to ponder the record of his sayings but to write it — certain of his nearness in all they should endure, their memories refreshed, their darkness enlightened, with words put into their mouths and works within their compass by the Holy Spirit. He would come to them.

As we watch the long procession of disciples stretching from then to our own times, bowed down beneath the cross they bear, falling all, once or twice or many times, but rising up again, they teach us of their Lord in all that they accomplish of faith, prayer and sacrifice. May their examples help us, in our turn, so to learn Christ that we may take upon us his “light yoke” (Matt.11:30), “put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts”, and “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:22, 24), always looking forward to the coming of the Teacher of teachers:

“The time will come when Christ will appear, Teacher of teachers, the Lord of angels, to hear the lessons of all, that is to examine the consciences of each one.” (Thomas a Kempis, ‘The Imitation of Christ’)

Meanwhile, our Teacher and theirs is the greatest of all time, incomparable in word and deed, and who approves of our calling him so: “Ye call me Master (teacher) and Lord; and ye say well, for so I am.” (John13:13).

His Teaching

The subject of his lesson is righteousness and goodness. Our Teacher shows us his Father. He holds out to us a way of life which will issue in everlasting life for those who faithfully follow it.

The subject of his lesson is the Gospel, the good news of the Kingdom of God; of the coming day when God's glory will "cover the earth as the waters the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14), when God's will "shall be done on earth as in heaven" (Matt.6:10), and when true disciples shall "obtain salvation" (1Thess 5:9, 2 Tim 2:10, 1 Pet 1:9).

And all this he teaches us not in his own words, but in His words that sent him. "I speak that which I have seen with my Father." (John 8:38). "The Father loveth the son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth." (John 5:20).

The Learners

The invitation that came to the Twelve is thrown open to all. There is a glorious, potential inclusiveness about it: "whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17).

There is no fee: "freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8).

There is no exclusion on the ground of race or class or sex: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Col. 3:11).

There is no upper age limit, but the voluntary nature of the course sets a lower age limit, not reckonable in years but in maturity. To accept the invitation is to make a choice, and that is a sober act to be performed only after prayerful thought. Christ's loving words of appeal underline this limitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Very young children do not labour and are not-yet, consciously, heavy laden. Nor can they realize the issues involved in making the sober choice: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me" (Matt.11:29)

Even clearer are the words of a very serious passage, whose deepest meaning continues to search the disciple's heart even to his dying day, but whose least import precludes from active discipleship those of immature mind: "Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it ... Or what king, going to make war with another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26,33).

The scope of those words makes most disciples somewhat uncomfortable even into old age, despite all that can be said to show from New Testament practice that they did not demand in most cases the actual abandonment of all possessions, but rather of

trust in them. Their simple teaching is beyond dispute. If we would build our tower upon the rock of faith in Christ's unchanging word, or adventure upon a war with sin, with self, neither is an enterprise lightly to be undertaken. The young should be set upon the way that will lead to real discipleship, and only too rarely in these days does that happen, but their full response to its responsibilities and enjoyment of its privileges must await their maturer years.

What are the qualifications for learners?

They are few but indispensable. Intellectual distinction is not needed; it is a bar only if joined with pride, but in that case one of the most effective disqualifications. Judas was, perhaps, the cleverest of the twelve. "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty: and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Average human intelligence can grasp the elements of the Christian faith: their depths the profoundest mind can never plumb. Most of the twelve were fishermen; one was a civil servant. The prime necessity, so evident a need in learners, and yet how rarely found, is teachableness, 'docility' in the true sense of the word. "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 18:3).

And in some things we are to remain children: "In malice be children, but in understanding be men." (1 Cor. 14:20). With the child's docility there must go his trust: we must be able to say and to mean it more sincerely than they who once said it in the days of his flesh: "We know that thou art a teacher sent from God" (John 3:2).

How do we enter upon the course? With three very simple, unspectacular things: we believe, we repent, we are baptized.

Belief

There must be absolute agreement at the start between Teacher and taught on fundamentals. Quite clearly not everything will then be understood; else we were no more learners, and that growth "in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). For which Peter prays on our behalf could not happen. But serious divergence from the Teacher on major matters wrecks all hope of such growth and precludes fellowship with him.

Each word of the following summary of essentials could be almost indefinitely expanded and could lead down entrancing avenues of spiritual truth. We must believe at the beginning with our Teacher that man is sinful and mortal and in need of salvation from sin and death; that God alone is righteous and immortal and wills man's

salvation; that Jesus Christ is the obedient Son of God, overcoming sin and conquering death, winning salvation, made immortal, and waiting the time when he will bring salvation to those who are associated with him – associated by faith, by baptism, and by faithful discipleship. To them, when he returns to the earth, he will give everlasting life in his kingdom which he will set up on earth. We must believe that good news.

The belief must be an intellectual conviction; but it must be more than that. “That form of doctrine” which is “delivered” unto us, must be believed “from the heart” (Rom. 6:17). From the first, the Christian life was a life of confidence and assurance.

Though there will come in the lives of perhaps all, moments and days, maybe weeks and months of doubt and perplexity through the frailty of our human nature—and though the faith that has known such trial will doubtless be a worthier, steadier faith because of it—the broad sweep of the Christian hope, founded as it is upon such sure evidence, does not produce any mere polite suggestion, hedged around with reservations and apologies.

The world was not turned upside down nor the whole course of history changed by a half-belief or by an interesting theory or by holders of one among many equally feasible world-views: it was the assertion of a certainty that did it: Jesus of Nazareth had been raised from the dead. And certainty was built upon certainty: the past gave promise of the future: “God will send Jesus Christ.” (Acts 3:20).

Our first examples “knew whom they had believed” (2 Tim.1:12) and “were persuaded” (Heb.11:13). What they had heard and seen and looked upon and handled “they declared” (Acts 15:4), and without sharing that certainty none could share their fellowship.

Peter, the eyewitness of the transfiguration, had not “believed cunningly devised fables” (2 Pet. 1:16).

Timothy continued in “the things he had learned and been assured of, knowing of whom” (2 Tim. 3:14) he had learned them.

Luke wrote his Gospel so that Theophilus and all other readers might know the certainty of those things which were most surely believed among them.

To the author of Hebrews the Christian hope was “as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast”, and would help disciples to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 6:19; 10:22).

This certainty can be ours too and our Teacher will approve it, for he did then: “they have known surely that I came out from Thee” (John 17:8). He will not approve a blasé indifference or a culture whose mark is a hesitant purposelessness, or even the delight in questing of those who are “ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7).

The assurance will grow from year to year as we feed on his word; but at the start we

must believe, with a belief which “is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen” (Heb.11:1). Only when we believe like that can the second important, but unspectacular change follow.

Repentance

We must repent. Such belief convicts us of sin and convinces us of our utter dependence upon God for our salvation. It provokes a change of mind and a reorientation of our desires. We “turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

“Repent”: the word rings out like a trumpet call. It is God’s own summons - made through John the Baptist – the herald of Christ, then through God’s only Son himself, then through the fisherman Peter, and through the cultured Paul. And if anyone feels disposed to object that there is no need for repentance being born in a ‘Christian’ country, or that the call is too crude in this sophisticated society or too old-fashioned in this modern world, then the answer is plain: the call to repent is urgently necessary, it is sober, and it is universal in its relevance.

The call to “repent” is universal in its relevance to all times, all races and every human type. From John the Baptist’s first heralding of the Lamb of God down to this mid-twentieth century, the call to repentance has gone forth, and except for those three days after the crucifixion, with no intermission. Even when John was cast into prison, “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14-15).

Jesus was put to death, but the third day he was raised; “begotten” (Acts 13:33), and we too are begotten “to a lively hope” (1 Pet.1:3) by that glorious fact, Peter on the day of Pentecost renewed the call: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38).

Then Paul blazoned this summons forth a few years later: “God ... now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

And in the pages of the New Testament the summons is enshrined for all succeeding centuries. The call to “repent” echoes from age to age and rings out with especial insistence now, when the apparent delay in the fulfilment of God’s word lulls many into a false sense of ease. The passing days and months and years take us not further and further from a cry that grows fainter and fainter, but nearer and nearer to those dread events that give that cry its sanction. Our own far-distant time is still summoned to repent.

The summons crosses all bounds of race in an ever-widening circle. Through John, the last of the prophets, Jerusalem, the capital of Judaism, had heard it, and all Judea and those about Jordan; through Christ cosmopolitan Galilee and the Decapolis; through Peter, Jews from every nation under heaven heard it and reported it in all the

lands around the Mediterranean; and through the apostle to the Gentiles, Athens and Rome, the capitals of pagan culture heard it. Nor are these far-off isles exempt; “all men everywhere” (Acts 17:30) are commanded to repent.

If we feel that our changed clothes and our different manners and our multifarious gadgets and our boasted enlightenment put us beyond its scope, we must learn that all types were represented in those earliest audiences.

If we today are civil-servants or soldiers then our fellows were the publicans or mercenaries of Christ’s day.

If we today are of those who are living on our ancestors’ cultural or spiritual capital; or if already we belong to the “straitest” of the sects (Acts 26:5), then our fellows in Christ’s day are those who trusted that they were “Abraham’s children”, or the Pharisees and Sadducees who received the Baptist’s early call.

If we today are devotees of the modern social Christianity, judging of a religion by its power to produce food and health and houses; if we are more interested in material results than in means, seeking first comfort, peace and security, and resorting only in Christianity as if it were some fairy-godmother to clear up an unholy mess: then our fellows in Christ’s day — let us face the ugly truth — were the multitudes who thronged Jesus for healing, who heard, and most often refused his summons to repent; or those Jews who wanted the kingdom to come but in their way and their time.

If we today are devout ritualists; or if Christ’s very, goodness stirs us almost to hate him (and it is not impossible that some such may read these words); or if we tend to be carried away on the tide of mass feeling and majority opinion, then our fellows in Christ’s day are the men of Israel who, one week, acclaimed his entry into Jerusalem, and the next week shouted “Crucify him”, but then were granted the merciful opportunity of answering Peter’s Pentecostal challenge to repent.

If we today are lovers of philosophy and art; if mere novelty-hunters; if believers in the panacea of democracy: then in Christ’s time we should have felt at home on Mars Hill among the Stoics and Epicureans, the Athenians and strangers “who spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21), and who at the very founding place of western democracy and before the greatest glories of pagan European art heard Paul brand as “ignorance” their superior, broad-minded folly, as he commended to them God’s “forbearance” in commanding them to repent (Acts 17:30, Rom.1:25).

Whoever we may be today, and wherever we may live in these far-off days, we are summoned to repent with a call that is not old-fashioned, but universal in its scope.

The call to repent is sober too.

It does not bring with it any nineteenth century revivalist atmosphere. It fires us with no mass hysteria. It encourages no showy glory in public conversion. It demands no immature decisions for Christ. Those answers to the call to repent are often crude, unbalanced and unscriptural, being founded upon no solid reasons.

Instead this call demands action for very good reasons, which are historical and still valid now as they were then. The kingdom of God is, indeed, now near. As certainly as Christ was killed, buried and raised again, so certainly, when the “time of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21) comes, God will “send Jesus Christ”, and those who have heeded the call will have their sins “blotted out” (Acts 3:19, 20). “The day” draws very near that: “God has appointed—when he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

We are called to an honest, sober, intelligent conviction of that past historical event, and to an equally sensible expectation of the sure future historical event it guarantees; and to that resolute change of mind which such an expectation must beget.

That the summons is necessary because our western world is only nominally Christian, as the early pages of this booklet proved, and the fact is being increasingly acknowledged by those who confess that the full Christian Gospel has not been preached here by those who claimed to do so. What was preached was a gospel which was partial only, which is not founded on God’s work in Jesus in the past, and which does not look to the completion of that work through Christ in his future coming to the earth.

We have insisted at some length on the necessity for repentance because it does not end at the threshold of the Christian life. The major crisis comes then in a man’s heart, but its work must continue from day to day, as he constantly seeks to be “transformed by the renewing of his mind” (Rom. 12:2), so that he may “approve the things that are excellent” (Phil. 1:10), and must still produce “Fruits meet for repentance” (Matt. 3:8).

Baptism

The first of those “fruits meet for repentance”, and the third mark of our entry upon the path, is baptism. Suffice it to say here — for the subject is given full and separate treatment elsewhere (e.g. the booklet by the same author) — that in the New Testament baptism is a complete immersion after a good confession of belief. The symbolism of this rite is variously explained: as a burial in water to associate us with the death and resurrection of Christ, so that we rise to a newness of life; as a clothing of ourselves with the garment of his righteousness, so that our sins are covered from God’s too pure sight when we have “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27); as a new birth, of water and of the spirit (John 3:5, Titus 3:5), to make us “new creatures” (2 Co.5:17, Gal.6:15), sons and daughters of God. Our past errors are forgiven. Our past exercises are acknowledged worthless. We ‘turn over a new leaf’, as the English idiom says. Becoming “as little children” (Matt 18:3), we draw near to be taught the ways of righteousness.

The aims

The first aim of the path is God's glory: "Herein is my father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples" (John 15:8).. Its second aim is our salvation—that of all that God has given Jesus, he should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

The Teacher's Method

In one sense the method employed by our Teacher has changed; but in another it is always the same. For the Twelve, as we have seen, it was by Christ's personal company and direct teaching for three and a half years. He taught them to pray, gave them warnings, answered their questions, acted parables for them, gave them object lessons.

"Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?" (John 14:9)

"Ye are they which have continued with me from the beginning." (Luke 22:28)

"I have manifested thy name unto them which thou hast given me." (John 17:6).

And so John, many years later, could begin his first letter by saying: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life ... declare we unto you" (1 John 1:1-3).

After the ascension it was the "Spirit of Truth" that taught them "all things" and brought to their remembrance "whatsoever" he had said unto them, guiding them "into all the Truth" (John 16:13), quickening their memory and stimulating their spiritual understanding, directing them to write the New Testament scriptures. Then from the end of the first century, the canon of the New Testament now being complete, those 27 books, together with their foundation, the 39 books of the Old Testament, became the text-book for all succeeding generations.

But throughout the apparent change the method remains the same for all:

Jesus had told the Jews: "If ye continue in my word, ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31)

Peter says that, being babes, we are to "desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:3).

Paul told the Colossians that we are to "let the word of Christ dwell in us richly in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16).

The author of Hebrews said that we are not to be content with "first principles" (Heb.5:12), but to "go on unto perfection" (Heb 6:1).

We are to treasure the whole counsel of God, both the New Testament and the Old, as

that which had been given to the Jews as their “tutor” (Gal. 3:24 – a paedagogus, a tutor slave) to lead them to their true teacher, Christ; as those things which “were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

Those Scriptures are able to make us, like Timothy, “wise unto salvation, through faith that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15), because they “came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21).

True learners of Christ know that they were “written for our learning” (Rom 15:4).

But for all that, it is not the method of cloistered, academic theory. It is a practical method. After washing the disciples’ feet the Teacher said: “If ye know these things, ... happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

The Ephesians had “so learned Christ” as to let it have a visible effect upon their lives: that they should “put off the old man” and “put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Eph. 4:20-24).

It is the way of love: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). It is the way of prayer: “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). It is a learning by doing.

His rules

There are few precise rules, because that would have been at once too easy and too difficult. Too easy, because we should have been tempted to tick them off as we kept them and feel that we were making grand progress. Too difficult, because we could never have kept them all, and our final failure would have discouraged and depressed us. There is the great, all embracing law, the law of liberty. It is the life of Christian love that we are to live, and the standard is that of our heavenly Father.

We can let the freedom deceive us and lapse into a benevolent, spineless lack of moral purpose, and “continue in sin, that grace may abound” (Rom. 6:1). While that would have a show of logic, it would not be sensible. “God forbid, how shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?” (Rom.6:2). “The love of Christ constraineth us.” (2 Cor. 5:14).

Our conviction of our own inability, unaided, to do “whatsoever” he has commanded us, and our grateful acknowledgment that it is “by grace” we shall be saved (Eph.2:5), do not, if we are true disciples, make us say: “What is the use?” but rather makes us say “I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).

We realize with James that though it is the “law of liberty”, it is a law by which nevertheless we shall be judged (Jas 1:25, 2:12). Our liberty is not licence. It is the liberty of the children of God, a liberty to do His will, a freedom to serve both Him

and our brethren.

There is one simple ordinance, after our baptism, we must keep. We must break bread and drink wine in remembrance of our absent Lord, to bring to mind his sacrifice for us and his triumphant resurrection, looking forward “until he come” (1 Co.11:26). If we would follow first century practice, we shall do it every first day of the week and shall allow no trivial hindrance to obstruct us. In that simple act, for which by reading, prayer and self-examination we shall prepare ourselves, our fellowship with other disciples will be focused, as we share the same gratitude, make the same confessions, utter the same prayers, and look with single eye to the fulfilment of God’s purposes in him at the end of the course.

The end of the journey

For it is the destination that matters, and the journey will last until the Teacher’s return or until our own earlier death, which, stilling us in sleep, will close our book until the day of account to which the returning Lord will raise us. There is no vacation. “He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved” (Matt. 10:22). We must take up the cross daily and follow him.

Meanwhile the end influences all actions and emotions:

Is the disciple joyful? His joy springs from his anticipation of his Teacher’s return, and for some, as for the apostle Paul, their joy will be full and exquisite when they see their faithful converts accepted at his hands: “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” (1 Thess. 2:19).

Is the disciple constrained to preach? He does so in answer to the same kind of charge that Paul gave Timothy: “I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

Does he need patience? Like the husbandman waiting for the precious fruit of the earth, he too, says James, must “be patient unto the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7). Must he “purify his ways”? (as Psalm 119:9). The disciple’s care is that “when he shall appear he may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming (1 John 2:28). So too, each activity of his life has that certain future event as its goal and “Until” is always in his mind. “As often as” he breaks the bread and drinks the wine, he shows “the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Cor. 11:26).

The disciple judges “nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and will make manifest the counsels of the heart” (1 Cor. 4:5). His prayer is that he “may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Phil.1:10). He fights “the good fight of faith” in the endeavour to keep the “commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:14). He can be “confident.., that he which hath begun a good work

in” him “will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

The disciple in the world

Until that day dawns, the disciple is a stranger and pilgrim. He lives, in his Teacher’s phrase, “in the world” (John 13:1, 16:33, 17:11, 12, 13), but he is not of it (John 15:19, 17:14,16). “The world” for the true disciple, can be defined as society as it organizes itself apart from God. The disciple’s aims are not the world’s aims, nor his hopes its hopes.

Whilst the disciple will pray that he may avoid the irresponsible enthusiasm that made the Thessalonian believers give up their jobs and become idle busy-bodies until they were reproved by the Apostle (2 Thess 3:11), and will seek that his heart may be directed unto “the patient waiting for Christ” (2 Thess 3:5), he nevertheless knows deep within him that “here he has no continuing city” (Heb.13:14); he seeks one to come.

The knowledge that he is part of a colony of heaven “from whence also he looks for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” to come and change his “vile body” when by his power he subdues all things unto himself (Phil. 3:20-21), affects fundamentally the way in which he discharges all his functions in this present life.

As a citizen of his country he must seek to “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matt. 22:2). He must be subject to principalities and powers, obey magistrates, and submit himself “to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (1 Pet 2:13), rendering “to all their dues”, “tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Rom.13:7), being a good, inoffensive, peaceable, law-abiding citizen.

Where, on the other hand, human law conflicts with the divine, he will quietly but firmly follow Peter’s example and say: “We ought to obey God rather than man” (Acts 4:19) He will take no active part in helping to create the governments of this world nor in forming or carrying out their policies. Christ is his true King. It is for God’s kingdom to come that he daily prays. To that kingdom he trusts he already belongs, and to its King he owes supreme allegiance. Till the catastrophic end is brought to all human dominion and the “Kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ” (Rev. 11:15), he will pray, as he was enjoined, that things may be so ordered as to let him worship his God in peace and quietness, none daring to make him afraid.

Peace will be his great desire but he will seek it from the only source and on the right conditions. Not for him the wan hopes of peace-treaty or international pact. No trust for him “in princes or in the son of man in whom there is no help” (Psa. 146:3). No confidence for him in desperate, fear-begotten planning to save the nations from destruction. “So far as in him lies”, he himself will “live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18), and will teach them, if they will hear it, the message of the angels’ song:

that only when there is “glory to God in the highest” can there come “peace on earth” (Luke 2:14).

The disciple knows that “The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever ... a king shall reign in righteousness and princes shall rule in judgment.” (Isa. 32:17). His hope will be in the “Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6) who alone will teach the nations to “beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks” (Isa. 2:4).

Looking for the “glorious appearing” (Titus 2:13) of the Teacher, the disciple must be vigilant lest the Teacher “coming suddenly” he find him “sleeping” (as Mark 13:36). It encourages soberness inasmuch as we know the ground of our judgment: “The word that I have spoken unto him, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48)

More than that, Christ gives us a glimpse of that experience and in the parable of the servants (Luke 12:36-48) points to the danger that besets self-conscious virtue, the uselessness of last-minute, hurried preparation which is found too late, and the principle that greater gifts bring greater responsibilities (see Luke 12:47). Moreover, his whole teaching and behaviour when he was on earth assure us of the futility of attempting to hide anything from his searching eye: “All things are naked and opened before the face of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13).

And all his words should make us humble as we look to the end and know that none will deserve to pass his scrutiny, that even if we had done all we should still have to acknowledge ourselves unprofitable servants, that only by his mercy shall any of us be accounted worthy. In this spirit, true disciples “work out their salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13).

Our Teacher’s present mediation for us brings encouragement, for our High Priest was “tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin”, and “can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15).

His example leads us on, as we consider that “as he is, so are we in this world” (John 4:17), and we should strive like Christ himself to “endure the cross, despising the shame... for the joy set before” us (Heb.12:2). Our hopes, our life itself is in him, and he is “in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil.3:21).

The reward

And then we shall be learners no longer: we shall know with perfect knowledge. And our reward will consist chiefly in that: “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Then we shall know even as we have been known. Those things in our experience which we have

failed fully to understand will then be made clear to us. And not only shall we know, but we shall become teachers too, to teach the nations righteousness throughout the millennial reign of Christ.

That is how Christ spoke of discipleship. That is how the first disciples thought of themselves. So must we, if we would follow in their steps.

Hesitations

The way is clear and our duty not difficult to prove from Scripture, but it seems to be increasingly hard to step out upon the path of discipleship. It is not uncommon to find quite sincere people who by reading God's Word and hearing Bible talks have learned the truth of the Gospel and know what they ought to do, but hesitate for years to do it. In fact some read and listen for years, then die without having done it.

This is no new problem.

Nicodemus knew that Jesus was "a teacher come from God". He had good reasons for believing so: "no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). He was even willing to appeal for justice on his behalf to the enemies of Jesus: "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" (John 7:51). Yet Nicodemus came to Jesus only by night. "A ruler of the Jews" and "a teacher in Israel" (John 3:10), he was honest, fair and courageous to a certain extent, but still had affinities with those leaders many of whom "believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God". (John 12:42-43)

Joseph of Arimathea also was a "good man and a just", "an honourable counsellor", who "waited for the kingdom of God" (Luke 23:50-51). He had taken no part in the decision of the Lord's enemies to conspire for his death. In front of the Roman government he showed courage, and after the crucifixion went in "boldly unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus" (Mark 15:43), which with loving care he buried in his own new tomb. He too, however, at one period at least, was "a disciple, but secretly for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38).

Nor were these the only cases recorded in the Gospels. In all ages the decision to follow Jesus has entailed for some a fierce conflict. Those for whom the choice has been easier or whose struggle is over should show sympathy and understanding towards those who are torn by divergent loyalties and should prayerfully help them to win through.

That sympathy can indeed be deeply felt in the hearts of many baptized believers who were themselves at one time attracted towards a less distinctive discipleship by certain features of the orthodox church, or repelled by some aspects of non-conformity.

Why not remain 'Orthodox'?

It can readily be understood that members of any community may find it far from easy to break strong ties of friendship and fellowship and leave one sphere of active service to join a smaller group and start afresh: it is especially difficult for the elderly. But when, in fact, one has ceased to believe as before, the former fellowship is already broken.

To continue as members of a denomination whose foundation principles we no longer accept is to live a lie. There are families which contrive to live in peace only by a tacit agreement to only talk of trivialities and never to discuss things that matter: their 'unity' is a sham and thoroughly unsatisfying.

In the same way it is only an outward show of religious 'communion', 'fellowship', which can survive after the end of agreement in belief.

The wrench is painful, but many faithful disciples have come to rejoice in a more satisfying fellowship and a happier life of service amongst those who sincerely shared their new-found faith. They have proved the truth of Jesus' promise: "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life." (Mark 10:29-30).

For certain minds 'orthodox' religion has other attractions, less personal but no less potent: the call to true discipleship demands that we see these for what they really are and "seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33).

To some the antiquity of 'orthodoxy' appeals. Respect for the appearance of historical stability will hardly survive a critical examination of the details of that history or an honest comparison of its tenets with the Word of God. Age is no criterion of truth: Judaism is older than Christian 'orthodoxy', and paganism is older still; a corrupt old man is more to be blamed than a corrupt youth. Only pure doctrine and the apostolic "form of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13) deserve to win the devotion of those who would be truly Christ's disciples.

Many have been attracted by the promise of 'peace' which complete submission to the authority of tradition holds out: an end to doubt, uncertainty and questionings. The critical intelligence is silent; the burden humbly transferred to the shoulders of those theologians, priests and vicars whose function it is to know. But what a deceptive calm this is! In the bosom of an authoritarian church one may find the outward semblance of 'peace'; but one certainly falls short of the praiseworthy example of the Berean Jews who "were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily, to see whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

For others 'orthodoxy' in name must be orthodoxy in fact: the religion of those who think aright: the majority cannot be wrong. The advantage of such an attitude is

evident: there is no longer any struggle between our responsibilities as Christians and those which we owe as members of a family or as citizens. We are ‘normal’: we do not ‘stick out’ in the crowd: there is nothing ‘odd’ about our religion; clearly, a comfortable situation to be in. Yet to seek it is to be blind to one of the clearest lessons of history, which teaches that the majority is usually wrong.

What is more important? To believe that the majority is always right is to ignore the words of Jesus himself who leaves us in no doubt on the matter: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matt. 7:21-23).

As for the aesthetic appeal of the ‘orthodox’ church — its architecture, ceremonies, music, and beautiful language — one can appreciate all that and even admire the devotion of those whose faith inspired them to create such magnificent works of art, without admitting that such beauties are a proof of the truth of the religion. Who would dare to deny that the pagan religion of Greece produced masterpieces of equal merit, though different in kind?

Such things cannot bring us redemption: art, architecture, music, does not hold the key to our salvation. Indeed, if we allow it to make us satisfied with what man has accomplished, it will lead us rather to humanism than to faith in Jesus Christ. It was in Athens, before its monuments and temples, that Paul announced the truth which alone can save men: “We ought not, to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:29-30).

Examples of non-conformity

All this is not to say that all minorities must necessarily be right. Far from it: the Bible holds no brief for non-conformity for its own sake. All sorts of motives may drive a man to separate himself from the orthodox church: pride, stubbornness, a rebellious spirit, the desire to be different at all costs, the hope of notoriety — more readily achieved in a small community by men of little worth — an unbalanced emphasis on one aspect of truth, or simply the love of his own cranky aberrations.

The existence of bad kinds of non-conformity does not, however, deny that there is a good kind; nor can such faults as we have listed be avoided merely by following the crowd. All the prophets, Jesus himself, and the Apostle Paul, resisted the claims of those who thought themselves the faithful heirs of the nation’s religious tradition. Similarly they all sought to recall their contemporaries to older beliefs which were, in fact, true beliefs.

A single example must suffice. Saul of Tarsus was orthodox by his birth and education

and by his own choice: “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews: as touching the law a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is by the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:5).

But once Saul, who became Paul, was enlightened by the truth, he saw that hitherto he had been blind and all his ‘orthodox’ religion fell from him in a moment with the “scales” that fell from his eyes at his baptism (Acts 9:18). “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Phil. 3:7).

Paul himself will tell us, before Agrippa, that sincerity is not enough: “After the most straitest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee ... I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” (Acts 26:5, 9)

That was how Paul had begun. He proceeds, however, to recount his conversion on the Damascus road, and insists that in fact it is he who is truly orthodox, understanding better than his enemies the real meaning of God’s plan: “Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers, unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope’s sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.” (Acts 26:5, 9, 6-7)

He seeks therefore to correct their faulty understanding, to fill in the gaps of their religious perception, to tear away the veils of tradition which had obscured the original light, to bring them back to right thought and belief: “I continue unto this day ... saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead and should shew light unto the people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23). Thus those who believed themselves orthodox were recalled to a true orthodoxy.

Similarly, see Isaiah 48:1-2, 58:2-3, for God’s view of the official religion; see 58:4-7 and 1:11-15 for the prophet’s non-conformity; see 66:5 for his encouragement to all who will follow in his steps; and 51:1-2 for his recall to true orthodoxy and the faith of their fathers.

Of course, in this respect, the apostle Paul and the prophet Isaiah behaved like Jesus himself. “Hypocrites”, “ye fools and blind”, “whited sepulchres”, were some of the terms he used of the religious leaders of his time, whom he reproached for their long, insincere prayers and their concern for external purity alone (Matt. 23:13, 17, 19, 27).

Christ never expected the conversion of all his people, still less of the whole human race. He knew that his disciples would always be “a little flock” (Luke 12:32), hated, persecuted or despised by the world, even by those who believed that in treating them so they were pleasing God.

If we for our part hesitate to obey him for reasons like those we have just examined we should do well to remember the explanation he gave of their lack of faith and ask ourselves whether it does not also accuse us: “How can ye believe, which receive

honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh from God only?" (John 5:44).

We Must Choose

These holy examples should teach us that to keep the truth pure one must be a 'heretic' in the eyes of those who, despite believing themselves 'orthodox' in the eyes of men, yet when judged by the teaching of the Bible are in fact themselves the real heretics.

Already in the First Century a severe struggle was waged within the church between truth and falsehood. It is not surprising that once the Apostles' influence had been removed by their death, the "living water" (John 4:10, 7:38) of the church's doctrine became less and less pure. Indeed, to find saving Truth it has always been necessary to go back to the source, and in all ages a small remnant of the faithful have endeavoured to rest content with nothing less.

Paul had given warning of the danger to the disciples in Ephesus: "After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30).

Peter, too, had predicted the same development: "There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies ... Many shall follow their pernicious ways" (2 Peter 2:1-2).

And this falling away was to become widespread before the Lord's return: "There shall come a falling away first, and that man of sin shall be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God ... whose coming shall be after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved" (2 Thess. 2:3-4, 9-10).

That is a very serious warning which we neglect at our peril. How important it is that we should have that love of the truth and that we should ask God for courage to do our duty, to "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

Why a Change of Communion?

Yet having found what is good, we often try to avoid the decision which our discovery clearly demands. "Why can we not stay in the same communion as before?" we ask. That is possible, if the error we have discovered there is moral and not doctrinal. In such a case, the Truth of God being accepted as the ground of communion and the original Christian teaching having remained pure, all the members have a common

rule to guide their conduct; there is no dispute about the pattern to be followed and its doctrinal foundation: there is only—as there must be, human nature being what it is—a failure to live up to the highest standards. The responsibility of such a church is clear:

“Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11)

“We command you, brethren in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us” (2 Thess. 3:6). — and that, in order, eventually, to be able, if at all possible, to receive him again into the fold.

But when it is a question of a fundamental disagreement in belief, in thought, the case is quite different. Without unity no enterprise can be successfully accomplished nor amid strife can the fruit of the spirit be brought forth. Naturally at the end of the first century the problem was different from today’s.

Then the bulk of each congregation still remained faithful to the form of doctrine they had received, so that their duty could be clearly defined. The counsel given to Titus who had been given the task of setting in order the Christian community in Crete was this: “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition, reject” (Titus 3:10):

Today the problem is often the opposite of that: the duty of the individual to separate himself from a church which has abandoned the Truth. The result, however, is similar: “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any with you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 9:11).

The Bases of Christian Fellowship

In other terms, Biblical teaching on the question of fellowship is clear, as concerns the principles to be followed; the right way to put them into practice in any given case is often less evident, in view of the weakness of all the members of the body without exception and the need to show humility and mercy. The call to discipleship is a call to separation. If we answer it, we become members of the church, the ‘ecclesia’ (in Greek), the community of those who are “called ... out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9)

This was the aim of the apostolic preaching, according to James: “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14).

Paul could give thanks to God that men and women heard the gospel and obeyed it in baptism: “Ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of

doctrine which was delivered you” (Rom. 6:17).

This act of obedience is first of all, an individual act, owed to God Himself; it is only secondarily that it associates us with all those scattered throughout the whole world and all times who have expressed their faith in the Lord Jesus in the same way.

Amongst all such there exists a bond of fellowship which in no way depends on nationality or any other human affinity. Its ground and condition are the same now as in the first century: “Then they that gladly received the word were baptized ... And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41-43).

To remain in that fellowship, we must be faithful to the apostolic teaching and must “walk in the light”: that is to say, we must submit all our thoughts, words and actions to the scrutiny of Christ. “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

There, doubtless, is the climax of Bible teaching on the fellowship of disciples; light is its indispensable condition; not moral perfection, but the light of divine commandment which searches all our conduct and brings us back constantly into the way of life. To attempt to broaden these conditions’ is to invite disaster: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:4-6).

For those who have answered Christ’s call and come to know such a fellowship there is always need for vigilance; lest the apostolic tradition be neglected or overgrown by human accretions or lest it should become an empty form, whose “power” (2 Tim. 3:5) we deny. Not only must fables be eschewed; divine truth must be treasured and devotedly preserved, with the conviction that right opinion is not of itself enough: not only must the disciple seek “rightly to divide the Word of Truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

He must pray also for grace that he may walk “uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel” (Gal.2:14).

The true aim of Christian non-conformity is transformation, so that we may be conformed to the image of God’s Son.

May it be that, if we should be asked, before Christ returns, as Peter was in the early hours of the first Good Friday, the same question “Art not thou also one of this man’s disciples?” we may all have triumphed over our hesitations, and enjoying such a fellowship, be able to reply with humility, with self accusation, but with overwhelming joy and gratitude: “Yes, by the grace of God I am”.

H.A. Twelves.

Note 1: The booklet concludes the following:

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Note 2: Footnote references in the original have been moved up into the text and extra references and quotation marks supplied to assist readers and translation. Some other minor changes in sentence order have also taken place.

Note 3: The French (and Romanian) booklet “Disciples de Christ au Vingtième Siecle” is substantially different from the English version. It is not known whether H.A. Twelves wrote the booklet in French first or in English.