

## DOES IT MAKE SENSE TO READ THE BIBLE?

This lecture, by Christopher Evans, retiring Professor of New Testament Studies at King's College, London, delivered as the third in the present series at Hampton Methodist Church on Wednesday March 9, was indeed a brilliant tour de force by a man of great intellectual power, knowledge, wisdom and Christian conviction and commitment, with great charm of manner and sympathy and understanding for those to whom insights which were second nature to him were new and strange. It was the kind of lecture which was bound to produce different reactions. Most of those to whom I talked afterwards had found it stimulating, helpful and inspiring, leading them further along a path which they were already treading and opening up enthralling new vistas ahead. Of those for whom the approach was new, some found it disturbing, others liberating, but it certainly made everybody think, and this should be followed up by study together in depth, as the lecturer urged. We should all bring the intelligence we bring to other things we are interested in, such as engineering, carpentry, computers, music, stamp-collecting or whatever it might be to our approach to the Bible, but so often Christians fail to do this, and so we remain at a childish level of which we would be ashamed in other spheres.

A lecture of such range and power as this, covering so many points, is very difficult to summarise at all adequately and in a balanced way, and even the best summary would do it far less than justice. So all that I can attempt to do here is to put down some of the thoughts which I recall, though some of them may well be mixed up with thoughts of my own.

This subject was given to the lecturer. The title was chosen for him: it was not one that he himself would have chosen. It is difficult to know what the question means. What do we mean by 'reading'? Does it make sense to read the Times? I may read the sporting pages, but never the business ones, because the former make sense to me but the latter do not. Does it make sense to read the Encyclopedia Britannica? No - encyclopedias are meant to be consulted, not read. Does it make sense to read Shakespeare? Yes - because only by reading a play right the way through can we make sense of it. But what is the Bible that we should read it? And what would reading the Bible be?

There are obvious ways in which it does not make sense to read the Bible. It would make sense to read the Bible in the same way as we read Shakespeare if the Bible were a single work with a beginning, middle and end. In English the word Bible is singular, but it translates a plural Greek word meaning 'the Books'. How do 'the Books' add up to a single whole? This is an age-old problem which is still one for us. For instance, the Christians of the second century had to face the problem of 'the Gospels'. 'Gospel' is a singular noun, and so it was always used in the first century. There is only one Gospel - the 'Gospel of God' - how could there possibly be four accounts of this? Attempts were made by Tatian and others to harmonise the four, and they have continued to be made until recent times, but they have failed, because the differences between them are too great. They simply won't go together. Origen, the first great Bible scholar, asked: How do these books go together? How do they add up? Does the first book of Kings talk about the same thing as Mark 14?

He tried to get to deeper levels below the surface meaning : so he considers the sacrifice of Isaac as a kind of prototype of Calvary, and those who followed him developed the allegorical approach. Luther found all this far too fanciful, and said that the key to the whole thing was the doctrine of 'justification by faith', and he graded and classified the various books according to the degree in which this doctrine could be discerned in them, rejecting the Epistle of James, which taught justification by works, as 'a right strawy epistle'.

There is no sense in trying to read the Bible right through - many try this, but usually get bogged down in Leviticus.

Is the Bible about one thing, or a multitude of things? Must I be impressed and informed by everything everywhere, or can I rightly suppress and ignore parts that have no appeal? Is the Bible equally inspired throughout, or are there 'higher' and 'lower' degrees of inspiration? Can the 'Word of God' be directly identified with the written words of the Bible? Is it right to end every liturgical reading with the words 'This is the word of the Lord'?

It has been found that most of the Bibles sold - and also the various notes that are issued as guides - are rarely or never read. There is a great deal of dishonesty about reading the Bible. This has always been a problem, but today it has been greatly increased by **criticism** - not just a finding fault or levelling down, but something more like literary and historical criticism, analysing the books into their component parts, throwing light on the historical background. All this - which has developed as never before in the last 100 years - can be a great help when used properly: it allows Jeremiah to speak for himself, and not just to be categorised as 'one of the Prophets'. It helps us to understand why a man spoke as he did in the situation he was in, why an author or editor selected his material as he did, why some things were emphasised at the expense of others. Criticism has high-lighted multiplicity, individuality. If as a result of all this analysis The Church's age-long attempt to find harmony is to succeed, it can now be only in the nature of a **symphony** - many individual instruments playing different parts, but one sound : but this has yet to be established. Two great factors have become integral parts of the modern human mind, and changed our whole manner of thinking - **evolution** and **historical consciousness**. So I am now further away in thought from my great-great-grandfather's world than he was from Abraham. He could feel far more readily that he was in the same kind of world as Abraham than I can feel that I am in the same kind of world as his. So the past becomes distanced. New translations of the Bible only accentuate this. These translations for instance make the thought of Paul - almost unintelligible in the Authorised Version - much clearer for us, but in so doing they show that we cannot now think as Paul did. He was a first-century man, and we are not.

The question with which we are now dealing is related to the first two. It makes sense to read the Bible in the same way as it makes sense to believe in God and to follow Jesus. Doing something about the Bible has accompanied discipleship of Jesus down the centuries, though what discipleship means at any point in history has to be discovered. The things that Christians do don't stand still fixed in a first-century frame. Prayer and discipleship don't stand still either.

So then 'go and read the Bible'. But what does this mean? Down the ages, people have not so much read the Scriptures as heard them read - mainly in snippets, but snippets of a special kind, self-contained units. This would usually be in a setting of worship, in which the past experience of God could be linked with the present relationship with the One who is as much alive now as he was in the days of Abraham or Paul.

With regard to private reading, we have come to the end of the Protestant dream that individual Christians could be left with their Bibles to get on with it, in the belief that if opened anywhere it would speak to them.

But it has been shown that it does make sense today to read the Bible.

(1) when people get down to it in groups, reading whole books at a time, working hard at them, doing homework between meetings and bringing their insights back to share with the group. Part of the superstitious view of the Bible was that it encouraged people to think that hard thought and hard work were not necessary, you could get what you wanted with a minimum of effort. But Origen knew better. His celebrated school was thronged by both believers and un-believers. His lectures were grown-up stuff, and you grappled with them and the Biblical texts on which they were based, and brought to bear all the strength of your adult intelligence and experience of life. Something like this needs to happen again at a time when Christians are a small minority, thought by others to be engaging in things which don't make sense - and the only way of correcting this is by hard work together.

(2) when you realise that you need all the help you can get from Christian scholars. Leslie Houlden (the lecturer on February 9) is one of our outstanding ones who has a gift for passing on the insights gained by modern research in a way that ordinary people can grasp and use for their own enrichment and deeper understanding.

(to be concluded)

## REFLECTIONS FROM AFRICA.

On February 20. of every year the churches in Africa remember, honour and pray for the Martyrs of Africa; in Uganda, the martyred young men, 30 of them, burnt in a great pyre at Namugongo, near Kampala, in 1886, are remembered specially: they stood out for their Christian faith and belief against the persecutions of the cruel Kabaka Mwanga.

On February 16 of this year Archbishop Janani Luwum of Uganda was killed; and so a modern martyr was added to the list of Martyrs of Uganda; the churches there both Roman Catholic and Church of Uganda (Anglican) have expanded and increased in their witness in the face of persecution, and even now, though deeply wounded, are carrying on bravely.

Father John Cotgrove, our Rural Dean, arranged a lovely memorial Communion Service for Archbishop Luwum at St. Mary's Church, Hampton, on Saturday Feb 26. Friends who had had long associations with Uganda came from far away, and the service with its beauty, with its full choir, and with its calm dignity, was appreciated by all. All acknowledged that the Christians in Uganda were in the forefront of modern Christian witness.

On the weekend of March 11-13 there was another opportunity of bringing forward the values of Africa. Father Mark Tweedy CR and I arranged a Conference at the Royal Foundation of St. Katharine, in Stepney, and called it "The Emerging Continent. What the West can learn from Africa. Contributory strands to future thinking".

Many of us have learned much from African hospitality, from the African love, care and respect for young and old, for the African sense of community, from African spirituality. The conference helped us to learn more: there were vivid contributions from Africans from Nigeria, South Africa and Tanzania embodying sense, realism, the need for simpler ways of doing things, self-help. We also had a very apposite contribution on Intermediate Technology, backed up by slides showing building improvements in Zaire, and windmill irrigation projects (as in the Lasithi Plateau in Crete) in Ethiopia.

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The Conference was a real joy, and most welcome were a number of student participants from the Silsoe National College of Agricultural Engineering. Bishop Trevor Huddleston was a most welcome participant and speaker, and the new Superior of the Community of the Resurrection, Father Eric Simmons, was with us from start to finish.

I returned from the Conference tremendously thrilled and uplifted by new ideas, and the conviction that Africa is going to make a major contribution in constructive, sensible calm thinking in the world of to-morrow.

H.M.S.

### VISITORS IN THE PARISH

During January and February three strangers were at work in the parish. Giuseppe from Rome, Claudia from Colombia and Father. Antonio from Northern Italy came to invite us all to re-affirm our faith in God and Christianity.

The way they offer is based on the practices in the Christian Church in the early years after the death of Jesus Christ. In those days baptism was preceded by a period of about three years during which the initiate was taught and gained experience of the Christian way of life. This preparation was called the CATECHUMENATE and the subsequent baptism led to rebirth as a fully conscious Christian man or woman.

The use of the Catechumenate died out soon after Christianity became respectable with the conversion of Constantine in 314, but this baptismal training was revived about eight years ago and has spread rapidly to Christian communities throughout the world (there are now 800 such communities in Italy alone). Incidentally, St. James's is the first parish in the Church of England, indeed in the whole Anglican communion, to receive this teaching.

Those of us who went along to listen and learn from the visitors were impressed by their love, gentleness, truth and spiritual power. It has been an experience which cannot adequately be conveyed in words. We know that many more people from the parish would have joined us had they known about it or been free from other commitments. Giuseppe, Claudia and Antonio have now gone, but we hope that they will return in about a year. This will provide another opportunity for those who missed out this time to listen to and to learn from them.

We have been shown how to continue the way of the Catechumenate in our parish and do so with the blessing of our Bishop. A meeting is held each Wednesday evening called a 'Celebration of the Word of God', and each Saturday evening there is a Eucharist 'celebration'. The purpose is to build up our community-life with a newal of faith by the direct experience of the Holy Spirit working through the Bible and our worship. We are resolved to try and follow this way in humility and love. We are not a closed community. Our meetings take place in church, and our greatest joy will be to welcome all those who feel called to take part.

The message we have been given is simply told in one of the songs we sing:-

If you feel a breeze from Heaven,  
A wind shaking the doors,  
Listen - its a voice that is calling you,  
Inviting you to travel afar . . . .

P.A.L.

## THE SOCIAL SCENE

Now that we've put our clocks on, summer really seems only just around the corner, doesn't it? It won't be long before we have lovely warm days and light evenings again, and we start to think about healthy times in the open air once more after the dark, cold days of winter. The Social Committee have been putting their two brains together, planning a summer programme, and here are the more immediate events for your diaries:

**RANMORE RAMBLE. Saturday 21 May.** We had to disappoint a lot of people last year when we cancelled our planned ramble in early September last year because of the fire-risk in the drought (remember!). On the day in question you may remember it rained for the first time for six months! This time we hope the freak weather will leave us alone to enjoy a healthy afternoon walk (just a few miles, shorter if you get too puffed) with a picnic and games. Details nearer the day.

**JUBILEE EVENT. Saturday 4 June.** As you already know, and will be reminded again by posters shortly, St. James's and the Hampton Hill Association are sponsoring a whole day's Silver Jubilee celebration on the Holly Road Ground. We are being helped by the Community Care Group, the Church of St. Francis de Sales and many other local groups to provide a wonderful day for the family, with a procession, fancy-dress competition, sideshows, displays sports and children's tea, barbecue and dancing. There's no need to tell you to come is there? After all, it will be another 25 years before we can do away with our semi-detached barriers again . . . (it shouldn't be like that, though, should it?)

**CHARCOAL HOE-DOWN. July.** A glorious summer evening is planned in an idyllic garden, steaks sizzling over a charcoal grill while guitars are strummed and angelic voices float across the aether. That's what we thought would be nice. What it will turn out like is any one's guess. Watch this space.

R.L.B.

## CHILDREN'S CORNER

Children, you are probably all going to do something special at school this year to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee. Somewhere else in this magazine you can read about our Church's plans for a big summer celebration for the whole family. We are wondering whether you have ever fancied what it would be like to spend a day with the Queen. If she invited you to join her for a day, any time of the year and anywhere in the world, what would you like to do? If you write a little article and let me have it by Saturday 16 April we will publish as many as we have room for.

Hilde Bucknell  
75 St. James's Avenue,  
Hampton Hill.

**ANNUAL CHURCH MEETING**

**AND**

**MEETING OF PARISHIONERS**

**Wednesday  
27 April 1977  
7.45 pm  
(Doors Open 7.15 pm)  
Parish Hall**

Whatever the weather or what's on "the Box" please ensure you don't miss the one evening in the year when we review the needs of the Parish and the role of St. James's. We can promise you it won't be dull. This is your chance to ask a pertinent question, to elect the new Church Council, to take a Jubilee look-back to 1952, and to say what you'd like St. James's and Hampton Hill to be doing in the next 25 years. All with a cup of coffee and in friendly surround surroundings. Underline the date in your diary now - it's only two weeks away.

i) Nomination forms are available in church now.

**Make sure your name is on the Electoral Roll  
BEFORE Easter Tuesday otherwise you cannot vote  
OTHERWISE YOU CANNOT VOTE**

**Summary of Accounts - Year Ended 31st December 1976**  
**(Subject to Audit and Approved by Pcc)**

<b>1975</b>	<b>General Fund</b>	<b>Receipts</b>	<b>£</b>
3756	Pledged Giving		4448
422	Other Giving		587
992	Refund of tax on Deeds of Covenant		1127
675	Donations. Fees. Interest and other income		432
<b>£5845</b>			<b>£6594</b>
	<b>Payments</b>		
126	Repairs and Maintenance		410
612	Heating. Lighting and Insurance		615
871	Vicar. Asst Curate Organist. Choir. etc.		975
1387	Diocesan Contribution		2039
811	Donations to Charities		883
150	Parish Magazine Subsidy		150
817	Other Expenses		715
<b>£4774</b>			<b>£5787</b>
	<b>Parish Hall</b>		
2109	Income from letting and sundry receipts		1782
1662	Less running expenses		1352
<b>£447</b>	Nett income		<b>£430</b>
	<b>Wayside</b>		
487	Rental income and sundry receipts		523
537	Less running expenses		433
<b>£50</b>	Surplus		<b>£50</b>
	<b>Magazine</b>		
374	Income from advertisements		434
150	Subsidy from General Fund		150
524			584
517	Production Costs		620
<b>£7</b>			<b>£36</b>



## SOME DATES TO NOTE

April

- 11 MONDAY IN EASTER WEEK; 09.00 Holy Communion  
12 TUESDAY IN EASTER WEEK; 10.00 Editorial Board (75 St. James's Avenue); 19.15 Holy Communion  
14 20.00 Social Committee (19, St. James's Road)  
19 19.45 Wayside Monday Centre: Training Session (41, Wellington Road)  
20 20.00 Fourth Lecture in the series : Does it make sense to pray?  
Speaker : An Anglican Nun (Hampton Methodist Church, Percy Road)  
25 SAINT MARK'S DAY : 19.15 Holy Communion;  
26 20.00 Quarterly Meeting of Committee of Hampton & Sunbury Council of Churches ; Institution of Vicar of All Hallows, Twickenham  
27 19.45 ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETING (Hall)  
30 Annual Diocesan Conference on Stewardship  
May  
3 SAINT PHILIP & SAINT JAMES, APOSTLES: 19.15 Holy Communion  
9 Mothers' Union : Diocesan Festival Service in St. Paul's Cathedral.

## BAPTISMS

February

- 27 Lorraine Christine Ives, 34, Hanworth Road  
Steven Edward and Kevin John Rogers, 2, Vincent Row  
Natalie Heather Tizzard, 17, Browning Close

## BURIALS AND CREMATION

March

- 1 Grace Georgina Smith, 2a St. James's Road, aged 67 years  
(at Teddington Cemetery)  
7 Emily Agnes Cole, 69, Laurel Road, aged 91 years  
(at South-West Middlesex Crematorium)  
14 Elizabeth Alice Lee, 78, Park Road, aged 89 years  
(at Teddington Cemetery)

## YOUNG FAMILIES GROUP St. James Baby Mornings.

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APRIL

- 21 "Are Christian mums different?"  
Discussion with Mrs. Bollom, whose own children, are now grown up

MAY

- 5 "Children's character - inherited or acquired?"  
Talk by Dr. N. K. Macrae-Gibson, a child Psychiatrist and consultant to the magazine "Mother and Baby"