

JESUS CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLDTHE CONVERSATION

"I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life". This is an extraordinary announcement. It asserts a unique place for Jesus Christ as the light. More than this, it asserts his power over the world, power to give life to men. Yet, however, extraordinary the claim, the living Christ continues to make it. The point is not that some people say this about him, but that he as living Lord still confronts men. People try to forget him but sooner or later the claim is renewed. Whatever the response, he invites men to continue the conversation with them.

Who are the people whom he addresses? Men as they are, going about their daily work, living from one day to the next. Men preoccupied with themselves and their families: content or distracted, bored or worried. Men of every kind, rich and poor, farmers and factory workers, students and soldiers, those who call themselves by his Name and those who do not. All of us, just as we are.

What is the conversation about? It is about Christ the Light. Light is a word that we all use daily. Light and energy are basic to the world in which we live; without the sun's light life would cease. But because light is such a basic thing we use the word "light" in all kinds of other senses as well as the literal one. We speak of getting light on a question which puzzles us, and of being in the dark when we do not know or see the path ahead. Light has become a symbol for health and freedom and all the things that people long for; and this is true in the Bible as in other books.

Is it these things that Jesus Christ is talking about when he claims to be the light of the world? Yes - and no. Yes, because he did quite literally heal blind men and desperately sick men; yes, because he did give many people what they longed for; and no, because not everyone found the light they wanted in him. Some people, who were reasonably contented with things as they were, were told that the light they thought they had was darkness. And this is still true today. The light of Christ does not always look like light to men and if we start by saying "I know what light is, and Jesus Christ isn't that light," we have missed the point of the conversation. We are not yet listening to him, but only to ourselves or to someone else. His claim is unlike other claims, and it needs careful attention.

Suppose then that we go deeper, and notice that the Bible often speaks of light when it refers to God himself. In this too it is like many other books. It is true of many religions that when they refer to what is divine they use the word "light". According to the Quran, Allah is the light of heaven and earth; through his revelation he guides men on the path

to his light. In India deities are often described in similar terms. Shiva, for example, is "light everywhere, so that one cannot say, it is here or it is there". The Absolute of Vedanta is defined as "light illumined, shining by itself". Buddhism declares that the teaching of the Buddha is the light which drives out darkness. Can we learn from the meanings of "light" in these other religions what it is that Jesus claims to be?

Here we must answer no. His claim to be the Light of the World is indeed a claim that he comes from God. But the God about whom he speaks is not simply to be understood as the Highest Being to whom other religions and philosophies aspire. He is not simply the source of illumination for our minds, nor does his light consist only in teaching about the way we should follow. No. He is the high and holy one who revealed his Name and gave his command to Abraham, Moses and the prophets. He chose a people, Israel, for his own special purposes, and led them out of slavery, guiding them through the wilderness towards the promised land by a pillar of fire and cloud. They met him at every turning of this road and although they frequently rebelled, they discovered that they could not ignore his commands. It was not so much that they knew him, but that he knew them, inside and out, and this sense of being known by him was something from which they could not escape. His word came to them, and they could not help listening. So they spoke of his presence as blinding light, awe-inspiring glory; something which would be unbearable were it not for the discovery that the only reason why he continued to keep his grip on them was that he cared about them, wherever they went and whatever they did. To them his light signified his glory and his power, his word and his faithfulness, his searing condemnation and his healing mercy.

We might suppose that this Biblical account of the God with whom we have to do is only one of many accounts, any of which might be true. But the Bible itself is far from content with this answer. Its prophets, law-givers and apostles witnessed to the God of Israel as the only God, beyond the reach of comparison. He alone rules the heavens and the earth. He it is who in the beginning said "Let there be light" and there was light. When he made a people out of a demoralized rabble in Egypt he was simply continuing - in his most unexpected way - the process which had been begun in the creation itself - a process which would lead in his good time to nothing less than a new creation.

Over and over again, the Biblical writers testify to the uniqueness of this people because of the uniqueness of its God. It is as a fulfilment of God's promise to his people, as an announcement of the dawn of the new creation, that the extraordinary declaration of Jesus must be understood. In claiming to be the light of the world, the Son of God asserts his power to show us the God whom he knows as Father: "He that has seen me has seen the Father". He too is an Israelite, his people the people of Israel, and their tongue his mother tongue. He is claiming that the light which came into the

world with him is the same light about which the Law and the Prophets had spoken. Moreover, this light according to his claim has the power to enable men to become children of God. Such power, not only to illumine the world around us but to penetrate and to transform our inmost being, is a very particular kind of light.

Therefore, we cannot describe the activity of Jesus simply by saying that he speaks to us or holds a conversation with us; whether we know it or not, he does things to us, and whether we like it or not, he knows us through and through. This sense of being known is perhaps the deepest awareness in all human experience; but not all can acknowledge who it is that knows them. So we must remind ourselves exactly who he is and what he does; then we shall be better able to accept - or reject - his claim upon us.

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The Apostles' Creed speaks of him as the son of God who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and descended into hell, who was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, who sits at the right hand of God and will come to judge the living and the dead.

How did the Church come to make such a confession? It was summarizing the apostolic message and tradition, which had been handed down by word of mouth as well as in the written Scriptures: "Though he was in the form of God he did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross. Therefore God highly exalted him ..." (Phil 2:6-10).

In the gospels the life of this Jesus is described in greater details: Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan ... He came preaching the good news of God ... He taught as one who had authority ... He ate with sinners and tax-collectors ... He declared all foods clean ... He said to them that the Son of Man must suffer ... "Take up your cross and follow me" He entered Jerusalem and the temple He ate the Passover with his disciples ... He said to them "You will all fall away" ... He was betrayed, arrested, tried, sentenced, mocked and spat upon, crucified, laid in a tomb ... And then on Easter morning: "Do you seek Jesus of Nazareth?... He is arisen"....

How do Christians acknowledge the light of the risen Christ? They do so by submitting themselves to his power. We can now see more clearly what this power is. People come to him and find healing when they are sick, comfort when they are sad, tired or lonely, and joy in simply being with him. But he can also be stern: he is uncompromising in condemning every kind of small-mindedness and selfishness and hypocrisy: this is the burning

light of his judgment on sin. Yet he never stops caring about everyone who needs his help: this is the light of his love. And when he dies this is the most drastic judgment of all upon other human beings: that he cares for them enough to die for them, while they are not willing to die for him. But this only goes to show his love for them: so that on the Cross the light of his judgment, showing us up for what we are, and the light of his love, showing us what he thinks we are worth in spite of everything, come together in one blaze of light which judges us and saves us at the same time. Light shows things up for what they are. In this light we see not only ourselves but other men and women as they really are, and know that they like us can be accepted and transformed by him. We become able to care about them as he did. The fact that we are able to do this at all surprises us, and often we fail, but at the least his new light is shed on the world round about us. We begin to see how he shares all human longings for the light, and yet transforms them all. He weeps for Jerusalem, but asks for no pity for himself. More surprising still, his light not only makes the world round about us something new; it makes us into something new too. Before we were blind; now we see. What we see is Him - in other people; and even, although this seems impossible, in ourselves.

This is how his light still shines; not, like the light of other great figures, through his teachings, but from himself, and because he gave himself for others and still gives himself in his Body, the Church. He has given to the Church his power, the Holy Spirit, and has entrusted it with his ministry of reconciliation (Acts 1 and 2). In the world of suffering and darkness, his victory is made available through the Church. To men self-deceived and self-despairing, the victorious news of the apostles and prophets comes through the Church. The Church's witness in every age, including our own, is the witness of all the saints and martyrs who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, break bread together at one table and are drawn out of darkness into his marvellous light. It is the witness of those who in every land join in the Church's shout of praise, "Light of light, Very God of Very God".

But it is easy to speak of these things and hard to live by them. Many human doubts and preoccupations and many forms of self-love make people blind. So Christians must admit that although they make these extraordinary claims they remain very ordinary folk, taking comfort only from this, that their Lord has laid his hand upon them and will always sustain them. To accept his claim is difficult because of its exclusiveness: only through him do men receive the light of life. But it is also difficult because of its inclusiveness: he died for all men. The circle of our love remains tiny in comparison with the range of his love. For those who do in fact trust his claim the world provides ample difficulties and abundant opportunities to walk in his light, wherever that light encounters darkness.

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Where in today's world do we see this darkness? It includes the sorrow and grief of those who suffer; children without homes, refugees without food, all those who are oppressed. Among us are millions whose hearts are poisoned by guilt, unforgiven, unreconciled. How many have seen the open door to the future shut against themselves! How many shudder at the catastrophes looming on the horizon! Different individuals, peoples, races and nations experience their own forms of darkness and are shaken by them. The light of God in Christ discloses the sharp truth that mankind as a whole suffers from the utter darkness of vanity, sin and death. But it does more than this: it creates solidarity with the suffering. Jesus Christ identifies himself with the poor, the oppressed, the outcasts, and the Church which is his Body must do the same. When it does so, the light is all the brighter because of the darkness round about it. In the moment of darkness the Christian sees hope; where the world sees only darkness he can see light.

A change also takes place in measurements of what the world calls light. For example we see about us advances in the attack upon disease, poverty and ignorance; the increasing interdependence of the world; the movement of emancipation; men everywhere stirred by visions of a better tomorrow. Millions of people receive a larger share in the fruits of the earth and in the values of civilization. The Creator continues to pour out unmerited gifts on his creatures and those who are truly concerned about man, those who stand on the side of the meek and the poor, can only be grateful for this fact. Such advances, however, cannot be simply hailed as the coming of the light of dawn. New knowledge creates new dangers. Closer relations between nations frequently bring new conflict. Movements of emancipation all too often lead to new forms of oppression. Prosperity can easily make men forget how often their wealth is derived from the exploitation of others, turn them into mere defenders of their selfish interests, and blind them to the deeper issues of life and to the sufferings of others. Thus historical developments which had been greeted as bringing light carry with them much darkness. It is hard to draw the boundary between light and darkness, and very great darkness indeed. But we do know that the living Lord stands on that boundary, transforming night into day. He makes it clear what it is to be a man because he alone has entered the human situation in all its confusions and has perfectly fulfilled, in the midst of it, the obedience which God demands.

The place where we dwell is the place where he now commands us to witness to the world and to serve the world. It is here that he says: "I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth". (Acts 13:47). Given this task in this day, we become blasphemers against the light, unless we allow ourselves to be taught by him before seeking to teach others (Rom 2:21-24). And this can only mean a renewed listening to his word in Scripture and a new response to his presence in the turbulent events of our day.

THE MESSAGE

Study One : The Glory of God

Ezekiel 1 : Genesis 1: 1-4

Read Ezekiel 1

This chapter is a vision of the manifestation of the glory of God, characterised by dazzling light.

First, the chapter has to do with the visitation of God - 'visitation' in the sense of direct approach, almost 'intervention', for always when God 'visits' man, it is for immediate action, either in judgement or to save. Thus God acts at the turning points of history - Moses at Sinai, Elijah at Horeb, Jesus transfigured on the Mount, the little company in the upper room at Pentecost (Ex 19, I Kings 19, Mark 9, Acts 2. Compare the ancient Jewish readings for Pentecost, Ex 19, Hab 3, Ps. 29, Ez 1).

Second, this visitation in blinding light is bound up with a revelation of the utmost importance - the whole world is God's sphere of action. Since the reformation under King Josiah it had been emphasised with exclusive vigour that only in Jerusalem could God be found. How were these exiles to find Him? They lived among a confusion of peoples, and everywhere the gods of Babylon (i.1). Jerusalem was hundreds of miles away, and a wide desert between. Moreover, the temple was destroyed. Ezekiel is given the message the people needed. He sees the throne of God as a chariot, completely mobile. He sees four living creatures in human form (v.5), each with four faces and four wings (v.6). Beside each living creature, there is a double wheel, a wheel within a wheel, the inner at right angles to the outer, and there are eyes round the rims. The living creatures support a solid platform. On this platform there is a sapphire throne and upon the throne, topmost of all, a figure of dazzling light. All this means that the chariot-throne is completely mobile. The wheels can run east or west, north and south. The living creatures can fly straight ahead in any direction over mountains and across deserts. If you cannot find God, God can find you even in the place least expected. Whenever God's people are in need of Him, He is there.

Third, there is the association of light. The prophet sees a tempest coming from the north, a vast cloud bursting with flame; brilliant light all about it (v.4) and within it a radiance glowing in the heart of fire, burning coals, torches darting to and fro (v.13). The wheels sparkle like chrysolite (v.16) and the hubs shine with brilliant light. (v.18: the Hebrew has, mistakenly, 'height' and 'fear'). The vision is all flashing with fire (v.27) and the encircling radiance is like a rainbow on a rainy day. Through this radiance, half seen and half too bright for seeing, a figure looms. Ezekiel does not say he saw God Himself: he inter-

Then He comes home. He reads a passage from Isaiah (61:1,2) which tells how God anoints His Servant with His Spirit to bring joy, freedom, good health to all who are in misery. These were the expected signs of the coming of Messiah (compare Luke 7: 19-23); they were what Jesus did, according to all the Gospels. This is what the coming of the light means.

But it also means more. Jesus does not only read from Isaiah 61; He claims that what the prophet spoke about He is actually doing. If you want to see the dawn you must not only accept the programme; you must accept him who carries it out (again compare Luke 7:23). And the people of Nazareth know that Jesus is not a wonderful King but simply one of themselves. He does not seem to correspond to their Messianic hopes: He is too ordinary. If people decide beforehand what the light must be like, they will miss the true light when it dawns.

This is illustrated in all the gospels but perhaps most clearly in the story told in John 9. Here the man born blind has his eyes opened - to see the world as it really is, and to see the truth, which is Jesus Himself. The Jews on the other hand, who think that they know all about the light, are shown to be blind. To those who believe in Him Jesus brings light and salvation, and in this He shows Himself to be one with the Father (compare Psalm 27:1). As for those who do not accept Him, His presence shows that the light they have is really darkness. This is what St. John means by judgment (John 9: 35-41 compare John 3: 16-21).

Questions

1. Suppose that you have been asked to give a talk on Isaiah 9 in a country under foreign rule. Gather material from current newspapers, and relate to this chapter.
2. The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness (Luke 4:1) and back to the people (Luke 4:14). How does the Church experience the guidance of the Holy Spirit today?
3. What prevented the people of Nazareth from walking in the light of Christ? What compelled them to try to walk in His light? How do these apply to us?
4. What do you miss if you accept the "programme" which Jesus proclaims (Luke 4: 18-19) but not the truth that He is the Light? What is the difference between the proclamation made by Jesus and all human programmes of relief or reform?

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Study Three: The Servant King

Isaiah 49 : 1-7; Philippians 2: 1-18

Read Isaiah 49: 1-7

Israel was a suffering people. That such a people with such a history could ever have survived is an astonishing fact. Fundamentally, it was a miracle of divine grace which created in the people an unshakeable faith in God, an overriding sense of destiny as His chosen people, and a living hope for a promised Messiah.

Our passage was written when they were in exile in Babylon. Humanly speaking, their faith, hope and destiny seemed to have come to an end. And yet out of this terrible suffering their faith, hope and destiny were given new height and depth through prophets such as the writer of the Songs of the Servant (Is. 42: 1-4, 49: 1-7, 50: 4-9, 52: 13-53:12).

In our passage, the servant is speaking, but it is not a monologue. In fact, he is bidding the nations to listen in on an intimate dialogue between the Lord God and himself. Substitute if you will, for "you peoples from afar" the peoples of, say, communist China or Moslem Malaya and then ask yourself "Who is the Servant Israel?" Note the seeming absurdity of the message contained in this dialogue.

The substance of the conversation centres on four things.

1. Verses 1-4: The servant recounts his call, culminating in the express charge of the Lord "You are my Servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified". He has been destined by God for this ministry, even from his mother's womb (cf. Jer. 1:5; Ps. 22: 10-11, 139: 13-16; Gal. 1:15), solely to be a living witness to the Word of God - his mouth was made like "a sharp sword" with its cutting power, nay his whole being like "a polished arrow" for driving home to its mark. And yet he was mysteriously "hidden away" (twice_repeated) as if waiting for the appointed moment.
2. Verses 4 and 5a: The servant experienced a sense of futility reflecting perhaps the prophet's rejection by his own people in exile (see 50:6, and especially Ch. 53). But his sole confidence was in God.
3. Verses 5 abcd, 6: In the midst of his frustration and rejection, there comes from the Lord God the further amazing charge: "I will make you a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth".
4. Verse 7: Then to the speechless servant an astonishing vision appears: a Servant-King before whom Kings and princes stand up and then prostrate themselves. Through and in suffering, the Servant is the Chosen One of God, who fulfils His promise because He is the All-Faithful.

What an amazing dialogue! The prophet himself was well aware of

poses three veils - the semblance of the likeness of the glory of God.

The prophet falls prostrate in awe and worship before the dazzling light of God. Here is light beyond all human thought and sight, the uncreated light, transcendent, beyond description ('like', 'semblance', 'likeness', 'as it were'). Out of the light there comes the word, and the prophet is bidden to speak this word to the people. He witnesses to what he has seen and heard (2:3; cf. Isaiah 6:8-9). Note (Acts 4:31 f) that when men received the Holy Spirit, they immediately witnessed. This has always been so. Ever since Pentecost, whenever men have heard the Word, whenever the Light has shined into their hearts, they have boldly declared what God has done for them. The Church is wholly dependent upon this word and vision.

Read Genesis 1: 1-4

When we turn to Genesis 1, we find the same three motifs: God's visitation: the whole world is His sphere: Word and Light.

First: God's visitation resulted in the creation of the cosmos (the ordered world). God intervened and by His direct action He created order out of chaos. He separated day and night, earth and sky, land and sea. He made times and seasons. He made all living creatures; He made man. By direct action He 'visited' the patriarchs, brought Israel out of Egypt, raised up prophets and kings, sent His only Son into the World, and still He acts directly in men by the Holy Spirit.

Second: Since God created the world, there is no part of it where His power does not run. Isaiah saw God in His temple, but saw also that the whole earth was full of His glory (Isaiah 6: 3). The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him (I Kings 8:27), how much less any one place.

Third: God's first word was "Let there be light". The Word of God and the Light were active together, and so it is always. Indeed the Word is the Light of the World (John 1:1-9).

Questions:

1. How far does the awareness of the majesty of God have a place in (a) the worship of the Church, and (b) our personal experience? (Ezek 1,v.28).
2. God visited his prophets and his people in a direct challenging way. Does He approach us today (a) individually, (b) corporately, in the same way? How?
3. The vision of God's glory is always accompanied by the voice calling to obedience and witness. Where for us is the necessary relation between worship and the mission of the Church?

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Study Two : The Break of Day
Isaiah 9 : 1-7; Luke 4: 14-30

Read Isaiah 9: 1-7

We begin with a people in darkness, desperately longing for the morning to come (see 8: 21-22). The whole Old Testament is the story of a people who were continually going through hard times, but who never gave up hope of a peculiarly glorious future. There were always some who were honest enough to admit that their troubles were due to their own fault, and that they could not rely on themselves to put things right. Nor did they trust to luck or resign themselves to fate. They believed that God would bring a new dawn, and the longer it was delayed the more urgently they longed for it.

This passage goes back to the eighth century B.C. when the northern part of Palestine was conquered by the Assyrians, a time of darkness for the people. It should probably be divided into three parts:

- (1) Verses 1,2: (Afr. 1): A prophecy that the conquered area will be set free. This hope of freedom from invaders was never fulfilled. But in St. Matthew (4: 12-16) it is described as being fulfilled in an altogether unexpected way: the light dawned for these people in Galilee when Jesus went to live among them.
- (2) Verses 3-5: (Afr. 2-4): A thanksgiving to God for bringing victory and peace to His people. The meaning of this poem is not always clear. Verse 3 should probably read: "Thou hast increased the exultation: thou hast magnified the joy". Verse 4 recalls the victory described in Judges 6-8; verse 5 refers to the destruction of army boots and uniforms when peace comes.
- (3) Verses 6,7: (Afr. 5,6): A triumphant hymn of hope about the birth and coronation of a new King of the house of David, who will rule justly and bring perpetual peace and prosperity. The phrase "to us a son is given" is perhaps a description of the king's coronation (we know that this language was used at the coronation of the king: see Psalm 2:7, a coronation psalm). He has four titles: "wonderful counsellor", "mighty God" (perhaps we should translate "God-like hero"), "father forever", and "prince of peace". We might add a fifth, which was often used of the king in Israel and came to be used especially of the expected deliverer: the Lord's Anointed One, or Messiah.

Read Luke 4: 14-30

At last, after long waiting, the true dawn comes. Jesus of Nazareth is anointed by God with His Spirit as the King who will bring the longed-for day: (3:22, where Psalm 2:7 is quoted). He is God's Son (4:3); God's Spirit is in Him (4: 1-14). At first He meets with great success (4:15).

that. "Who has believed our report?" (53:1). That such a suffering servant might be the promised Messiah was, as it were, "hidden away" for centuries until Jesus came.

At the centre of the Bible stands Jesus who identified Himself as that Servant and who though He was God's beloved Son (Mk. 1:11, Ps. 2:7 and Is. 42:1) "came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). In Him, the appointed time came and through His life, death and resurrection, the question "Who is the Servant?" was answered once for all - Jesus Christ, the Servant Lord. And the proclamation of this message by His servant-people constitutes the Church, the new Israel. The starting point of the new Israel lies in the fact that the faithfulness of God was vindicated once for all in Jesus Christ, even beyond the prophet's expectations.

Read Philippians 2: 1-18

Paul's letter to the Philippians is full of joy - all the more surprising as it was written in prison. But since he regarded himself as the servant of Jesus, the Servant-King, he even rejoiced in his imprisonment because it gave him the privilege of sharing the suffering of his Lord, and helped in the advancement of the Gospel (1:12f). So again and again he said "Rejoice in the Lord" (3:1; 4:4).

Only one thing mars his joy - the report of disharmony in the Philippian Church. Our passage begins with a passionate plea for unity: "Complete my joy", and then it moves into the highest court of appeal for Christians: the mind of Christ (v.5). What is this mind which we have in Jesus Christ? It is not "conceit" (v.3). Christ did not "count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (v.6), while Adam by contrast was tempted to become like God (Gen. 3:5) and grasped the forbidden fruit. He did not "look to his own interests" (v.4). He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a Servant" (v.7). He was not "self-centred" (v.3), but humbled Himself and became "obedient unto death" (v.8). Therefore He was "exalted" (v.9), so that every tongue should "confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (v.11).

This is a hymn (v. 6-11) of praise and adoration, used by the Church of Paul's time. It reveals what God is and what man is and should be. It dominated Paul's thinking about the Church and its mission. Paul follows the hymn immediately with an imperative: "Therefore work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God is at work in you.... as lights in the world" (v.12-18). The humble obedience of the Servant Jesus has broken the "No Exit" for fallen man once for all, to "the glory of God the Father" (v.11). In union with our exalted Lord we can, in the midst of suffering, fulfil our true human destiny.

Questions

1. How can the "mind which we have in Christ Jesus", which is willingness to suffer and to die, be the source of joy? (See e.g. Is. 49:5-6; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 12:2-3).
2. We are called to live by this mind and so to shine as lights in the world. Where are the shortcomings and the signs of victory in the life of your parish and in the organisation of the Church? Try to answer on the basis of Phil. 2:3-5, 14-15).
3. How does faith in the Servant-Lord change our conceptions of how power is to be used and freedom is to be gained?
4. Man wishes always and everywhere to get release from suffering. How does the message of the Servant-King answer this human desire?

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Study Four : The Light of Men

John 1 : 1-18

Read John 1: 1-18

The Gospel of St. John speaks about Jesus of Nazareth. The prologue also speaks about him. It leads us right back to "the beginning", as described in Genesis 1. Just as it is certain that the earthly life of Jesus began at a definite moment in history, so it is certain that in the beginning He was with God. This leads us to the mystery of God which no one can fully understand. Our passage speaks with reverence of this mystery. But God has not remained a dark mystery; it is precisely in Jesus Christ that He has revealed Himself and came to dwell among men. He has done so by speaking to man through the life and words of Jesus. His words become life for those who listen to him.

Verses 1-5: The Word - The Life - The Light

It was God's creative word which brought the world into existence (Genesis 1). Only through that Word does it exist. Without God's Word there is no life for man. The apostles came to realize this through their association with Jesus. They testify this to the world and ask us whether we have found Life through Him.

We would do well to pay close attention to the relationship between the Word, the Life and the Light. Life and Light are not vague concepts which express something different to each one of us. He who hears the voice of the living God in Jesus can say: Now I know for the first time what it means to be in the Light and to have the Life. It is

not by devout contemplation or by moral activism that we come to the Life and the Light. Contemplation and action are signs that we have received the Life, but its origin lies in the Word of God.

Much as people long for Light and Life, they are little inclined to receive it from Jesus. "The Light shines in the darkness". Blindness and hostility led to the crucifixion of Jesus. That is where the darkness of the world betrays itself. Much as the world long for the light, it was unable and unwilling to recognize the Light in the "Word of God".

Verses 9-13: For all men

As the true Light, Jesus exists for the sake of all men. This is not to say that all men recognize him; but none is excluded from his light. We all need him in order to escape from the darkness. He denies himself to none of us sinners. Differences of nationality, race or class disappear before him.

It is a puzzling fact that the world does not recognize the light by which it was created. More disturbing still, even when he comes to his own home he is rejected. In the crucifixion the rejection reaches its culminating point, and it continues throughout history. Certainly the opposite also happens: that men receive him. That is one of God's miracles which can only be compared to the miracle of human birth (John 3: 3-5).

At this point it becomes clear that the light of God does not call for dreamy contemplation but for a change in our lives. He who sees the light of God in faith, will not only come to a new understanding but he himself will become a new being: he will become a child of God. God's child clings to His Father in faith and love, and tries to conform his daily life to the Father's will. Effective witness to the light of the world can only be given where this change in our lives has taken place and is constantly taking place afresh.

Verses 14-18: "Full of Grace and Truth"

The greatest mystery lies in the fact that the Word has become flesh: God has become man. Certainly it is the word of His unfathomable grace that God's light has dawned in our midst and that we need not look for it at an inaccessible distance. Consider how completely our gaze is drawn to the Man Jesus. Nor can we turn away our eyes from the place where the Son of God undergoes the supreme humiliation - the Cross. It is there that God's glory is revealed. We acknowledge indeed His glory in the works of creation and in the government of the world, but the greatest thing than we can say about God is that the Eternal stoops down to seek the lost.

The appearance of the true God in the world shows up the hostility of the world to God. Yet this is the moment when God, far from abandoning this hostile world, redeems it. It is only because we men think of God as

a remote being that we are able to live our lives so securely. Because like Adam we think we can hide from God, life seems bearable. But what happens when we can deceive ourselves no longer? We are faced with despair. But now the true God stands in our midst - and he is the God of mercy!

Questions

1. Many people believe that all men are the children of God. What then does John mean by saying that to all who received him Jesus gave power to become the sons of God?
2. Jesus is described as the true light that enlightens every man. Is this light to be found anywhere else in the world?
3. "The Word became flesh". Why is this the centre of our message?

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Note: At this point, we request that two facing pages be devoted to Scripture passages without comment. On the lefthand page should be printed in a distinctive type Mark 15: 22-29. On the righthand page should be printed the following extracts from Luke and Acts. In both cases, R.S.V. should be carefully followed in the English edition.

"And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. And it was the third hour, when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews". And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes, saying "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe". Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah". And one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down". And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last. And the curtain of the

temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was a son of God!" (Mark 15: 22-39).

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But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel and as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise". And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. (Luke 24: 1-9).

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And Jesus himself stood among them Then he said to them, "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the land of Moses and the Prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24: 44-48).

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So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the Earth." (Acts 1: 6-8).

Study Five: The Victory of Light
John 12: 20-36; Colossians 1:9-20

The central message of these two sections of the New Testament is that the passing from darkness to light has been accomplished by Christ through his sacrifice on the cross. Such is the meaning of the Christian Passover; our Johannine text is definitely taken from a paschal context. Jesus is entering Jerusalem to participate in the Feast of the Jews and he explains the meaning of his participation in this Feast.

Read John 12: 20-36

Three themes of this passage seem particularly relevant for our study:

1. The sacrifice of Christ offers salvation to all. Jesus speaks here when he is told that "certain Greeks" desire to see him. Although these Greeks appear to be Jewish proselytes (i.e. not actually pagans, cf. Acts 10:2; 8:27) their presence suggests that the glory of the Messiah is calling for the unity of all the nations. This was already in preparation through the world-embracing vision of Old Testament prophets and through the missionary word of the Jews then scattered around the world. This universal vision finds its fulfilment in the death of Christ:

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (v.24).

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (v.32).

2. We have here a description of the concept of glory, which is closely connected with that of light. The "hour" of glory is that of death (vss. 23-24) and the "lifting up" (v.32) contains an intentional ambiguity by referring both to the crucifixion and to the Messianic glorification. (cf. Is 52)13).

3. The final opposition between light and darkness suggests that the coming of the glory does not yet put a final end to the struggle with the "prince of this world." He himself does not yet recognise his failure although he has been "cast out" by the victory of Christ (v.31), and he still remains powerful. Every man is confronted with a choice to follow either light or darkness (vss. 35-36). It is still possible to reject the universal salvation offered by God. But he who has chosen the light knows where he is going and begins to discern the outlines of his path. Christ's way is the way of the cross and every disciple must follow him precisely there. (v.26).

Read Col. 1: 9-20

Here Paul also interprets the passing from the "power of darkness

into the "kingdom of the Son" (v.13), which again is achieved "through the blood of his cross" (v.20) and which is the foundation of all aspects of Christian conduct (vss. 9-11). In fact, Paul sums up his moral precepts to the Colossians by saying that they must "give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." (v.12).

Two aspects of the Apostle's thought appear as particularly relevant for our purpose.

1. The "light" is the very element in which the redeemed are called to "walk", giving thanks to the Father for the grace they have received. Christian behaviour therefore is based not upon laws and precepts given from outside, but upon the fact that they are "children of light" and, for them, it is no longer possible to obey the power of darkness. If they do so they reject the very purpose for which they were created.

2. As in the passage from St. John, the significance of the redemptive act for all is stressed very strongly. Not only the whole of humanity, but the entire creation, is reconciled to God in Christ. His victory over death, his becoming "the head of the body, the Church" (v.18) is the consequence of the fact that "in him all things consist" (v.17). In order to emphasise this idea, Paul uses the same word in both cases: Jesus is the "firstborn of all creation" (v.15) and the "first-born from the dead" (v.18). In other words, both our creation and our redemption have been accomplished through the same Son of God, but in two different ways (cf. I Cor. 8:6). The final destiny of creation is to acknowledge its true and legitimate Master. The "inheritance of the saints in light" is not restricted to those who now possess it, but should become the goal of every creature: this is the very foundation of the universality of the Christian message, unlimited by any cultural or geographical boundary. By being joined to Christ, man realizes the destiny for which he was created.

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We saw that the unity of these two passages lies in a common conception of the Cross as the way of the passing from darkness to glory and light. This is why since the beginning one of the most common terms to designate baptism has been "enlightenment", although the rite consisted in immersion, symbolizing death and resurrection with Christ. (cf. Rom 6:1-11; and probably Heb 6:4). In accepting, through baptism, the way of Christ to the very depth of his humiliation and sacrifice, every Christian inherits the dignity of a child of light.

Questions

1. What, in your own life and your local community, are the forms of opposition to Christ which are most similar to those described in John 12: 20-36? What does "losing our lives" mean in dealing with these oppositions?

2. How far does the Church in your local situation bear a full witness to the universal character of the Christian message?
3. What does it mean that "everything was created through him and for him" (Col. 1:6)? How does the claim that Christ is the Lord of all creation (nature, world, history) affect our proclamation of the Gospel and our attitudes towards society?
4. What is the real significance of baptism in the usage of your church? How far does it accord with what is implied about baptism in the message of these passages?

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Study Six : The Ministry of Reconciliation

II Corinthians 4: 1-6; 5: 14-21

In this whole section of his letter (3: 1-6:10) Paul sets forth his account of the ministry of the new covenant which God has made with men through Jesus Christ. That covenant is conveyed to men through the ministry of the Church: those who share in that ministry share in God's glory, and thus in his light.

Read II Cor. 4: 1-6

In verses 2-6 light is the connecting thought. Can the group work out for itself the way in which this theme is expressed in the various verses?

In verse 4 Paul suggests that some people are unable to see the light. Why do they not recognize the glory of God in the cross of Jesus Christ? Compare John 12:31 and Col. 1:13 and the comment in Study 2, 5.

In verse 5 the ministers of this new covenant of glory are described as "slaves". This is not mere politeness, but is closely connected with the meaning of "glory". God bestowed his glory on Christ because he humiliated himself and became a slave for our sakes (see Phil. 2:7 and comment in Study 3; see also Mark 10:45, where Jesus says he has come to "minister"). Thus the ministers of the new covenant are themselves servants and slaves, as Christ was.

In verse 6 Paul makes explicit the connection between the old creation and the new. He refers to Genesis 1:3 "And God said, let there be light". Just as in the beginning God commanded his light to shine in the darkness, so in Christ he has given his new light to shine in the darkness of men's hearts. Verse 6 therefore described the transformation of the whole personality through intimate fellowship with God in Christ. It is important to notice here that when Paul says "our hearts" he does not mean only "my heart". He is referring to the experience of all Christian

in the course of which what God effected through the life, death and resurrection of Christ is applied to each new individual, beginning with baptism and continuing in the life of faith in the Church. This new creation is possible because Christ is the "image of God" (v.4). Man was originally created in God's image (Gen. 1:26). Now that image is fully restored and revealed in Christ. In him we know what God intends men to be. (See Rom. 8:29 and I Cor. 15:47-49).

Read II Cor. 5: 14-21

Verses 14-21 deal with the ministry of reconciliation: it begins with God's act in Christ for the world, and this passage shows how this ministry comes to us today.

Verse 15 "one died for all": Christ's death affects the whole of humanity. We are all "dead" in Christ (compare Col. 3:3) - Christ took upon himself the whole of humanity. He took all that men are upon himself, including our sin (see below on verse 21).

Verse 16 "after the flesh": ("from a human point of view" R.S.V.) Paul maintains that an "objective", "purely historical" or "outsider's" view of Christ is totally insufficient. Only the eye of faith can see in the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth the supreme manifestation of God's wisdom and power (see I Cor. 1:25).

Throughout this epistle we must be careful not to interpret the first person plural "we" exclusively of Paul. The meaning varies in a remarkable way: sometimes it means "we ministers" (as in 4:1); sometimes "we Christians" (as in v.16); sometimes "we men" (as in v.18 - "who has reconciled us"). This reflects the fact that Paul is at one and the same time a minister of the new covenant, a member of the Church, and a man. The ministry of reconciliation affects all three classes. Similarly in Isaiah 49: 1-7 it is difficult to decide whether the Servant is an individual or a group.

Verse 20. Here God does not command, but entreats with the compulsion of love (see v.14). The ministers, therefore, who are carrying out God's word in Christ, do not command, but entreat. Notice how all human ideas of authority and power are revolutionised by the amazing work of God on the cross. God has not abdicated from the seat of authority, but he has completely reversed our conception of how authority is exercised.

Verse 21. Here is the most extreme statement of God's identification of himself with men that we find anywhere in the Bible. God came in Christ as near as is conceivable to the position of sinners without himself being guilty of sin (see Romans 8:3-4).

Questions

1. In what sense has all mankind died in Christ? (see verses 14-15). Why should we view his coming as nothing less than a new creation? (see 4:6; 5:17).
2. Who exercises the ministry of reconciliation in the Church today, and how? What does reconciliation with God mean? 20/....

3. What is the relationship between evangelism and reconciliation (v.20)? Between reconciliation and social witness? At what points in your own locality is the ministry of reconciliation most needed?

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Study Seven: Justice and Love
Isaiah 58: 1-12; I John 1:5-2:11

In the previous study we have seen that those who come to the light of Jesus Christ enter into a new relationship with God and their fellow men. In this study we shall endeavour to see the fruits of this reconciliation.

In the Old Testament the great prophets of personal and social righteousness proclaimed the demands of a holy God who expected his people to be holy (compare also Leviticus 19; I Peter 1:16), and who required justice and mercy in human conduct (Micah 6:8).

In New Testament times, especially during the period when St. John wrote, great dangers to Christian truth had arisen not only from the outside but from those inside who, under the influence of certain prevailing ideas, had begun to put their trust in certain supposed divine secrets, rather than faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ, and who even deliberately practised evil as a means of enlarging their experience.

With these preliminary considerations let us now turn to our passages:

Read Isaiah 58:1-12

There are few passages in the Old Testament which bring out more clearly the implication of true worship. Here the prophet is told by the holy God to denounce the sins of his people who, after the exile, combined the formal practice of religion with social vices of greed, cruelty and hypocrisy. The passage is almost in the form of a dialogue in which a conversation takes place between God and his people, though the narrator of this controversy is God himself.

God himself rebukes the people for the mere formality of their religion. The people retort and accuse God of not taking notice of their fasting and self-mortification. Then God shows them how they have deceived themselves about their piety. The fast should consist in dealing bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, hospitality to the homeless. Then only will God hear their prayers and will a new dawn shine upon the people. True worship requires the practice of justice and mercy. This is a primary condition for the reconstruction and prosperity of the nation.

Read I John 1:5 - 2:11

Here the Apostle begins with a great affirmation: "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all." Communion with Him means a common participation in His light. The Church is thus a fellowship in the light of God. This does not mean, however, that we become incapable of committing sin, but living in communion with God and one another, we are driven to the acknowledgement of our sin in contrition with the full assurance that the blood of Jesus which was shed to take away our sins will cleanse us. Participation in the light of God produces sincere repentance, which consists not only in thoughts or feelings but also in reparation, restitution and acts of love.

In the second chapter the Apostle again stresses the seriousness of sin. But if we do sin, Christ the righteous has made an offering on our behalf and this the Father accepts. This forgiveness is available to all men because Christ died for the whole world. The recognition of this truth is the basis of Christian evangelism to all men, to the end of the earth.

The commandments to love God and our neighbour are found in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 6:4), but in Jesus we have their fulfilment. If love does not flow from our life to others, we are still in darkness, and have not appropriated the light of God, which is love. This love is not sentimental or limited human love, but the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ. Only in this sense can we say that where there is God there is love, and where there is love there is light. This is the light in which we are called to walk, and this is the basis of the unity of the Church and the source of its witness and service to the world.

Questions for discussion

1. What opportunities does your congregation have for obeying the teaching contained in Isaiah 58; 6,7? Does this include bringing the homeless into your own homes?
2. What does Isaiah 58: 1-12 teach us about true worship. What are the dangers in the Church's liturgical life today?
3. What is true Christian confession of sin (I John 1:19)? How real are the acts of confession which we continually use in Church services as well as in private devotions?
4. In the two passages we have studied Light and Fellowship are deeply connected. What has this connection to say about
 - a) Christian unity
 - b) The Church's evangelistic responsibility?

Study Eight : The Glorious City

Revelation 21: 1-5; 21:22-22:5 Matthew 5: 14-16

I. The new Jerusalem

Read Revelation 21: 1-5; 21: 22-22:5

1. On the tossing waves.

John is an exile on the island of Patmos for Christ's sake (Rev. 1: 9). The Churches of Asia are suffering persecution. Has the turmoil of history any ultimate meaning? It looks as if the powers of darkness were to win the day; is not the love of the Churches growing cold? (Rev. 2:4 cf. Mt. 24: 9-12). Will they not be driven to apostasy? Who controls history, God or Caesar? These are questions which haunt the faithful.

God answers. The Risen Lord appears to John in glorious array, - Christus Imperator (Rev. 1: 9-20). He, not Caesar, holds the key of death and Hades. There follows a stern message of both light and doom: the hardest struggles are still to come! The small vessel of the Church will go on being tossed on the wild waves of history. But the light of the resurrection shines on it, the Creator of Heaven and Earth and the Spirit in his sevenfold energies, watch over it (Rev. Ch.2-4), and the heavenly Jerusalem fills the horizon (Rev. Ch. 21)22), God is Lord. Therefore history has meaning. It is not an endless succession of ups and downs, not a cyclic process, a turning wheel. God is present in every congregation. He dominates the world's struggle through the power of the Cross.

2. The consummation.

The new heaven and the new earth for which the prophets of old have been waiting are of God's own making. Suffering and death are no more, all things are made new (Rev. 21: 1-6 cf. Is. 65: 17-25). The Holy City comes from above, adorned with sparkling life and beauty. (Rev. Ch. 21 cf. Is. Ch. 60). God's glory is its light and the Lamb its "lamp". Christ is the faithful witness through whom God's light has come to men and men have been drawn to him.

The "Lamb" is a key word in the terminology of John the Seer. (cf. Ch. 5; 7:9-17; 12:11; 14:1). The image is rooted in the Old Testament: the lamb "without blemish" is offered in sacrifice (Lev. 1:10; I Pet. 1:19); the blood of the paschal lamb saves Israel from destruction (Exod. Ch. 12; I Cor. 5:7), the suffering Servant of Isaiah dies as a lamb led to the slaughter. (Is. 53:7; Acts 8:30-32. John 1:29). In Revelation, the Lamb is no weak figure: he is "the Lion of Judah" (5:5); he bears the marks of his slaughter, but as one who has conquered; he is all powerful, all seeing worthy to be worshipped as God Himself (5: 6-14). He is the true

Shepherd (7: 13-17 cf. Ps 23, John 10: 14-18). He is the Lord who knocks at the door eager to break bread with his people (3.20), the Bridegroom celebrating the marriage feast with his Church (19: 9). He is the sovereign Judge of nations (cf. Mt 25: 31-32) who shares the throne of God. The cross is the sole power by which all the powers of this world will be overcome, - and it is the power of redeeming love. It is the slain Lamb who solves the riddle of history.

The City needs no temple - because it is flooded with God's holy presence. The Lord's high priestly prayer is fulfilled: all are one in the same adoration (John 17: 20-26). And from the Holy City light shines into the world: its gates are open and "the nations" walk into it, bringing in all the peculiar gifts and treasures God has bestowed on them. Access to the tree of life is free (cf. Gen. 3:22-24) and its leaves are "for the healing of the nations". This is the consummation.

Of this glorious city the faithful are already citizens; the Lord sustains His Church by his Spirit in her daily battle, he feeds her with Word and Sacrament. The songs of deliverance and praise of the saints of all ages are part of the heavenly liturgy that John in his exile was given to hear.

II. A City on the hill.

Read Matthew 5: 14-16

In Palestine, one finds little villages clustered on the top of a hill; they are seen from afar, the traveller cannot miss them. Jesus used this image: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hid." Jesus does not say "you should be" or "you shall be". He says "you are". It belongs to the very nature of the Church to radiate His light. Where Jesus is, there the Spirit is at work and there the light shines for the world to see. Works are done which bear the marks of their origin so that those who see them will "give glory to the Father". To whom does Jesus say this? (see Mt. 5:1-12; Luke 18:9-14).

Questions

1. Is your local Christian community that sort of "city on the hill" of which Jesus speaks? If not, what is lacking in your witness, your service and your common life?
2. How does the "lamp" shine in your home?
3. The prophet sees God as present in history, leading it to its goal. What does this mean for the Churches' interpretation of present events? How does the Christian view of history compare with others held in your own surroundings? (The Hindu's? The animist's? The marxist's? The scientist's? The journalist's?)
4. What does the image of the victorious Lamb suggest about our current reliance on other kinds of power? Is there a conflict between the power of the State, the power of money, the power of organization and the power of God? Does my Church, or I, use these powers of the World? Is it legitimate to do so? (cf. Study III).

"We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign"... (Rev. 11:17). In what ways have we heard echoes of this hymn all through our studies, discussions and prayers? (cf. also 5:13; 15: 3-4).

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THE WAY

Christianity throughout the world is facing a crisis as great as any which has come upon it in the course of its history. In the past hundred years every one of its traditional foundations has been exposed to the most searching criticism. Christians are being compelled to face challenges to their basic beliefs which seem greater even than those in the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation. Large numbers of people in both East and West are convinced that modern man has simply outgrown religion altogether. A new kind of secularism has developed, which considers the Christian faith as outdated and unintelligible. Any real concern with God is discarded as irrelevant. Many consider this attitude a kind of liberation. Some put their hope in science. Others simply accept what they call the absurdities of life, and many are lost in meaninglessness and despair.

We live in the midst of this situation, and are vulnerable to it, yet we repeat: Christ is the Light of the World. He reveals to us the true nature of God, the true nature and destiny of man, and also the stern realities of the world in which we live. What does this mean?

The world is God's creation. It is the object of his redeeming love. It is at the same time the place where this love is constantly denied. (See Bible Study 4). His light in Christ shines in and through the Church. This must surely mean that those who are members of the Church have access to a power they scarcely dream of. If this were not true, it would be absurd even to talk about the task of the Church, for the powers against it would be too great. The Church indeed is part of the Gospel, because God continues his work through it. He has decided to use us, and has taken us out of darkness into his marvellous light. No other light is strong enough to cope with the darkness. Only Christ has done so. He has overcome the darkness, and has elected us to do the same. (Bible Study 8).

The Christian, therefore, is a realist who, standing in Christ's

light, can face things as they are, for he knows of Christ's victory gained over the powers of darkness. To walk in the light implies a discernment of things and of spirits which enable the Christian to see his way through the intricacies of life. The presence of the light is an assurance that he belongs to a new creation, despite the power of sin (Bible Study 5).

This means that, as the Bible Studies have shown us, we must take seriously the sharpness of the contrast between light and darkness (See I Jn. 1:5 and Bible Study 7). If we look at Golgotha, that terribly public spot, we see this contrast in its sharpest form. Darkness is what blinds men to God's presence. It is the self-love which makes men think that they do not need his compassionate love. It is the drive for power and wealth which makes the Cross look like nothing but weakness and poverty. It is the coldness of men who represent the right ancestry, the elite class, the strongest nations, the holiest religion, and who think therefore that they should rule the world. Darkness is the fear which sees in death the end of hope. This kind of darkness surrounds us and is in us all, and it cannot tolerate the light of Christ. When we choose the light, we take a stand against this darkness. (Bible Study 3).

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It is not easy to do this. The Devil is clever, and makes these forms of darkness look like light. We must examine ourselves to see to what extent these forms of darkness exist in our own lives and in our own churches. We must ask ourselves whether our talk about unity and our present ways of witnessing to people and serving them are really worthy of the light we have seen in Christ. Is there not a good deal of concealed self-love and idleness and even pride about them? Is our faith something that we repose in too comfortably, something that we want for ourselves because it will give us peace of mind or security for our nation and for our incomes, something that will protect us from our enemies instead of reconciling us to them? (See Isaiah 58:2 and Bible Study 6).

Christ cuts through such self-deception, such darkness, with his absolute claim. This claim is of particular importance in our present world, where many ideologies and "isms" and many religions, compete with one another for the loyalty of men. Christ stands above these. Although the Christian attitude toward their adherents is one of attention and respect, Christ cannot be mixed up with other gods and loyalties, unless these loyalties are under him and serve him. This means that we cannot offer him as one of the many ingredients of a "world religion". It means that we cannot say, "One belief is as good as another". It means that Christ stands beyond all false or partial claims, whether these be of Western civilization, or European culture or Americanism, and that we cannot use him as a tribal god to support those things which are valuable to us.

At the same time, we approach the great world religions with genuine understanding, and strive to discover the sources of their power.

The absolute claim of Jesus therefore requires love toward those who are a part of the world scene and do not as yet put their faith in him. Many Christians are aware, and we should all be more aware than we are, that we have often shown intolerance in the past, both among ourselves and towards others. The love of Christ demands that we deal with fuller understanding as person to person with those who disagree with us, even on the deepest things. Moreover, loyalty to Christ does not justify us in withdrawing from the world in order to keep ourselves safe. There is no safety in retreating out of the world into a small community of the Church. Although it means danger and risk, life is to be found only by going out into the world and letting our light, which is Christ, shine before men. Our unity, our witness and service are for the world, in steadfast loyalty to our Lord.

We may, however, shrink back, because the world is so hostile. It has always been so. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not". Yet, it can well be argued that the modern, industrialised world, especially of the west, is particularly far from the world of the Bible, and that it is very difficult for us to make the Biblical faith understood. That is true. The minds of men steeped in the scientific and technological categories of this culture are so shaped as to make it very hard for them to come to terms with the Biblical message. There is a gap here, and it is one of the most urgent tasks of the Church in the present world to bridge it. Yet if this is true, it is also true that movements in modern history and life bring us very close to the Bible. Through persecution and war, through deliberate and massive rejection of God, through the social and scientific revolutions of our time, men are forced to face anew the unescapable question whether this life has any meaning. When this is true, the world which seems hostile is actually close to the Bible, for it is to these ultimate conditions of the soul that the Bible speaks. In whatever situation we may be, it is the mission of the Church to enter into its surrounding world. This will require listening afresh to God's word in Bible study and prayer, examining many long-cherished principles. It will require forms of action which will make the churches look very different from what they do now.

There are already, in fact, many signs of power and renewal, of the Holy Spirit working in new ways as well as old. Most of us ought to know more about them than we do.

These are a few of them: a rediscovery of the Bible, a movement towards unity, renewed power in evangelism, restored depth and meaning to worship and liturgy, and awakening among the laity concerning their place in the life and purpose of the Church. These evidences of renewal reach their greatest depth when they lead to solidarity with the suffering of

men, when they show that the Church takes upon itself the form of a servant. The motive for them all is God's love in Christ, his light which ought to be shining through us wherever we are. New missions to industry, for example, and new forms of service in the industrial world have all arisen because some men have cared about their neighbours in industry more than most Christians usually do. The same is true, to take another example, where Christians have gone to heal and to teach among the poverty of the villages of Asia and Africa. The light of Christ fails to shine in the world today as effectively as it might because all too many of the sinners whom he has chosen still remain unfaithful to him, unwilling to walk in his light. He suffered for me, and walking in his light means suffering too. Christ still suffers wherever men suffer; and we are called to enter into that suffering ourselves. Plain idleness and disobedience to the heavenly vision is still, as it always has been, the great enemy of light. (Bible Study 2).

But human suffering is always concrete, one thing in one place and another in another. The personal side of suffering is bound up with its social causes. What does Christian solidarity with suffering mean in the thousand difference ways and circumstances in which that suffering surrounds the churches? We need God's light illumining our intellects as well as our wills, giving us wisdom, as well as making us obedient. This does not mean that we can expect to find answers to all the great problems; but we can in some measure discern, as we tackle them, where the true light and the true darkness lie. In his light we shall see light.

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As we are led, in this period of renewal in the life of the churches, to ask again about the meaning of our decision for God in Christ, the One Light, and about our mission in the world of darkness and suffering, we are required to ask also what big issues in the modern world present the most urgent dilemmas for Christian life and conscience. We select three, not as an exhaustive analysis of the world in which we live, but as factors in the present scene which profoundly affect human life.

First is the rapid development and spread throughout the world of science and technology and the fact that while they give great blessings they call forth a false worship. They provide vast benefits for health, for well-being and for the achievement of basic human dignity. They are weapons in the battle for justice. They are surely the fulfilment in part of the Divine Command to be fruitful and replenish the earth. They are, however, the occasion among men of a widespread and destructive idolatry. In part because the benefits from science and technology are so large, men worship the very processes of science, saying that our human problems will

be solved by scientific advance. Men want possessions, and modern technology makes possessions available in unlimited supply and variety. Men are dazzled by the prospect, and become captive to the whole process, giving themselves to the religion of "more and better".

The result is a secular materialism, sometimes coated with religion, sometimes not. It is typical of the "post-Christian" era, especially in the West, that modern developments in the realms of education, psychology and the social sciences etc., which grew on Christian soil, tend now to become self-sufficient and to forget their roots. No single group is responsible for this result, the scientists perhaps least of all. We are all caught up in the deep ambiguity of the world, in a modern form of darkness by which men are blinded. The poignancy of the dilemma is illustrated by the attitude of many of the countries which are not technologically fully developed. They point to the highly developed countries and say, "We do not want that kind of materialism." Yet they also proceed as quickly as possible, in the name of justice and human dignity, to increase the productive capacity of their own countries through the most advanced technological means. Their dilemma is one example of many such dilemmas faced by men today. What help can Christians give in this dilemma, out of their knowledge of Biblical truth concerning light and darkness, Creation and Redemption, the Servant and his People? (Bible Studies 1, 6, 8).

Second, social change appears in the modern world as a means of securing freedom and justice and as a process which brings new tyrannies and injustices. This is always true, but the rapidity of social change in our time makes the dilemma an urgent one, for freedoms and un-freedoms, justices and injustices appear at the same time in the same processes of change. Rapid industrialisation in predominantly agricultural societies destroys old values and produces cities in which men are lost and in which their moral standards go to pieces. Rapid political independence produces vast problems for leadership and the electorate as well. It does no good to say that things should have been organised differently, that industrialisation should have come slowly, that independence should have been better prepared for. The dilemmas are here. Should the pace of social change be hastened? What of the human wreckage that will follow? Should the pace of social change be retarded? What of the urgent need for justice now? The acceleration of social change, in the West as well as in Asia, Africa and Latin America is one of the most far-reaching factors in the life of modern men. (Bible Studies 2, 7).

Third, there is the dilemma of the growth of unity and the growth of conflict at the same time in modern history. Every nation has its political and economic relationships with many other nations. There is thus a unity, in the sense of interdependence, in our present world scene. But this interdependence has not produced peace. Within it conflict has

risen to new proportions. Men create small, protective communities for their own security - nationalisms and alliances and blocs - but these harden the conflict. Moreover, the means of atomic war are of such dimensions that it is generally felt that old concepts of a "just war" and many would say even of a "limited war" with atomic weapons have been outgrown and are no longer applicable. What can Christians do? It is too easy an answer to say, "Support the United Nations". The question is, what policy shall my nation stand for in all its relationships including the United Nations?

That raises for the Christian the question how far a nation can follow a policy directed by moral principles, or whether it must always be guided by self-interest. Can Christians be satisfied with the argument that self-interest dictates now that nations sacrifice in order to have peace? Bible Study 6 deals with Reconciliation. In what sense is this Biblical understanding of reconciliation applicable to international conflict? Our faith demands loyalty to One Lord. Does that faith contribute to our understanding of unity among nations? It is said of the Servant that he shall bring forth justice. In what way does this justice contribute to the establishment of unity among the peoples and nations? Within this scene, Christians are asked to bear witness to light. This means that our customary ideas of the mission of the church are sharply challenged by the speed and complexity of social change. What forms of witness to Christ and service to Christ and unity in Christ are required in these new conditions? (Bible Studies 3, 8).

The churches are in a time of rediscovery of their message and of renewal of life. What must be done? We must witness as we are given grace and power to witness, whether or not we have the answers to the large and complex problems of our time. It is important that we help to increase the discussion in the Church concerning them, and this booklet is an invitation to enter this discussion more fully. We must continue our search of the Scriptures, for they contain wisdom that we have not yet attained. In particular, we must make every attempt - especially because we live at such a distance from the world of the Bible - to listen to what it says to us, and not to read into it what we want or hope to find there. If we listen, it will speak. Yet our witness and our search will not be fruitful, unless we come to terms with the first requirement of the Gospel, which is "Repent". It is to the repentant heart and the repentant community that the Spirit comes, to enlighten and to empower. For repentance itself is a gift of the Spirit.

We speak of "the churches". But we would not be taking part in the Ecumenical Movement at all if we did not believe that there is in a real sense only one Church, holy, catholic, apostolic. We do not have to create this Church - Christ has done that on the Cross and by his Resurrection - but we must manifest it and show it forth as clearly as we

can. We differ as to what we would say about that Church, but we know that it exists, and that we do find in it an assurance and a purpose that we find nowhere else. That is why we dare to bring that Church to those who do not have it. We would not dare to do so if we did not believe that the Church does not belong to us, but to its Lord, Jesus Christ (Bible Studies 4, 5).

And so we come back to where we began - with the claim and promise of Jesus Christ our Lord. "I am the Light of the World; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the Light of Life".

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