

WATERSHEDS
Journey to a faith
by Betty Gray



GROSVENOR

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INTRODUCTION

DESPITE all the achievements, all the growth in know-how, of the post-war years, our world today is so beset with problems that many young people fear life holds little promise. Somewhere, many sense, there must be a missing element—something we could all recognise as ‘That’s it!’

My own search began as a teenager in the 1930s. It has been a road of experiment and discovery which continues to this day. This booklet tells its story.

1

GOD, Marx and the politicians of the day were constant subjects for heated debate in my childhood home. There, and indeed anywhere else, the unwary friend or stranger who encountered my father would inevitably find himself drawn into an argument.

Dad's atheism and Marxist convictions had roots which stretched back through the century to his boyhood in the small country village where his father kept the post office and ran a small-holding. As my grandfather was also a churchwarden, church attendance was a must for the whole family.

When Dad was nine years old he fell on some broken glass in one of the fields and cut his leg. Blood poisoning set in, and the leg had to be amputated in order to save his life. He left hospital determined to prove that although he was handicapped he was the equal of anyone else — and deliberately picked a fight with one of the village boys on his first day home. During the next years he made strenuous efforts to learn how to box, fence, swim and to ride a fixed-wheel bicycle. He became a ring-leader of the local lads, constantly in trouble.

Dad took it for granted that he would work on the land when he left school. He was devastated when his father insisted that in spite of his triumphs over his handicap he would need a sedentary job like tailoring. In great distress he seized his bicycle and set off to journey around Britain to see what alternatives he could find. He was fourteen years old.

Search as he might, Dad could not find any employment which appealed to him. The full consequences of his accident began to impinge on him. He was appalled. Characteristically he decided that if he must become a tailor, he would make sure he was a first-class one.

At the same time he turned in fury against his Christian background. What may have begun as a great bitterness, that God could have allowed an accident to happen that would blight his life, deepened into a denial that God could exist at all. His militant atheism, I believe, masked a deeply buried longing for a sense that there was a God who loved him and to whom he mattered. He turned to Marxism, which harnessed his

sense of personal injustice to his awareness of the need to fight the wider injustices in society as a whole.

There could be no greater contrast to my father than the girl he married. She was a teacher and came from a neighbouring village. To meet her was to like and respect her. She was gentle and kind and would always help anyone in need if she could possibly do so. She was a natural peacemaker, whose talent was often needed as a result both of Dad's sensitivity to the slightest hint of pity in anyone he met and of his aggressive airing of his views.

Dad's atheism cut no ice with Mum, for she had firm religious beliefs. Whether they argued about this in their early married life, I do not know, but, by the time I and my younger sister and brothers were born, she would keep silent whenever Dad launched into one of his tirades. Nevertheless we knew where she stood, especially as she had phases when she urged us to attend Sunday school. Any success in this field owed far more to earthly than religious enthusiasm on our part – the trip to one Sunday school, for instance, gave us a chance to scump apples from a small orchard en route. We had apples in our own garden, but that counted for little beside the thrill of entering forbidden territory!

Our attendance at Sunday school was not eased by the fact that the classes were held in the afternoons. Dad flatly refused to have Sunday dinner at an hour that would enable us to be there on time and so cut short his daily debates at the pub. What with this, and Dad's religious arguments, our Sunday school attendance was rare, and short-lived.

If my parents held diametrically opposed views on religion, they were united in their concern at the poverty in Britain in the Great Depression years of the 1930s, when we were growing up in a town in the South-East. Mum might not accept the atheist basis of Dad's political views, but she supported him fully in seeking the political changes which could bring about a more just society.

The inequalities of life must have made an impact on me at an early age. I can vividly remember a game my sister and I used to play when I was about eight, and she two years younger. On Sundays, when we were allowed to play in the sitting-room, I would sit at one end, preening myself as a 'rich lady'. My sister, a 'poor lady with a starving ragged child', would knock to be admitted. I would disdainfully offer her work in my 'garden', telling her that if she trod on a single flower of the sitting-room's patterned carpet, she could expect no wages. Or she could work in the house, with broken biscuits for her child as a bonus if she

did well. If she did badly, I would sack her forthwith, and the 'poor lady' would retreat crying all the way to our stairs!

I was about ten years old when I began to try to understand why there were such contrasts between the two ends of our street. At our end there were toes poking out of shoes; worn and ill-fitting clothing; children from large families sent on errands to buy tiny quantities of meat or large bags of broken biscuits; shabby curtains; candlelight in the windows where a family could not afford the money for the electricity meter; neglected front gardens but overflowing vegetable gardens.

Farther down, the street exuded an air of obvious prosperity. 'Better homes, better clothes, better opportunities – better everything!' was how I thought of it. Why did these things happen? When I grew up, I knew, I must do something about these injustices, but how? It was a question that was always near the forefront of my mind.

From time to time my mother's spirit sought escape from her drab surroundings. This often found expression in a wall-papering spree. Before school, we children would joyfully slosh water onto the offending walls and rip off the existing paper. By nightfall we would be invited to inspect the newly decorated room, resplendent with Chinese lanterns or other exotic patterns, in stark contrast to the plain furniture.

One day my mother returned from an auction with a smile of deep satisfaction lighting her face. 'Wait until you see what I've bought,' she told us at midday. 'A real bargain.' We raced home at the end of the afternoon, indulging in wild flights of imagination as to what had so excited her.

We stared dumbfounded when we reached the narrow hallway. There, playing a baby grand piano which almost filled our small sitting-room, blocked the door and intruded into the hall, was our ecstatic mother! Down-to-earth child that I was, I could only wonder if she had won some money.

Dad, who loved her greatly, tolerated the new treasure for a while. Then he suggested to her that he could make some attractive furniture from the better parts of the piano. By this time Mum must have realised that she had made a mistake, for she sighed but agreed.

Sundays often afforded the opportunity for me to hear Dad's views on how to change society. I would hover nearby as he trapped a caller or a neighbour. Afterwards I might ask a question, with studied casualness, as I wanted to be able to make an independent choice when I was older. Gradually I became familiar with the names of the national and international figures of the day.

When the Salvation Army decided to include our street in their regular Sunday itinerary, holding a service on the corner outside our house, it was like a red rag to a bull as far as Dad was concerned. Battle must be joined, he decided. He posted us at the front gate to listen for the first sounds of the band, while he assembled his own instruments – dustbin lids, old pots and pans, empty tin cans. After what seemed an interminable wait the Salvation Army would take up its position outside the house. The opening notes of a hymn would be answered at once by a resounding volley from Dad’s armoury. Sometimes – oh, joy! – a tin can would be thrust at one of us, so that we could join in the defence.

As the battle continued Dad would throw in his vocal weapons, singing his own raucous version of a hymn and contributing a loud selection of comments and texts during the testimony stage of the service. The Salvation Army would endure this for a short while and then move on, leaving Dad claiming the victory.

Over Sunday supper, Dad would harangue us. We would be dared to believe in the teaching of the Bible, in the face of his withering denunciation. All this made me wary of anything that had a religious implication. It was enough for me for the time being that Dad ridiculed Christian beliefs. His arguments complemented my own sense of social injustice.

It was at about this time that a new teacher was appointed to my school. She had been a missionary and was extremely earnest about God. Her general appearance was forbidding, with her hair drawn back severely into a tight bun, a pince-nez and ankle-length black dresses years out of date. Wild rumours about her spread among her pupils, ranging from those who claimed she slept on bare boards to others hinting she had been crossed in love as a young girl. Her old-fashioned appearance made her Scripture lessons seem old-hat too and any girl who displayed an interest risked a considerable loss of face with the rest of us.

One day she asked us all to bring Bibles to school. Incredulity and horror were written all over her face as I assured her there was none in my home. Next day she summoned me to her desk. She would be pleased to give a Bible to my family, she said, and showed me the texts she had written on the fly-leaf. My attention focused on one that suggested that scripture was for reproof and correction, and another that seemed to imply that if I did not agree with the Bible, God would kill me. ‘But Dad hasn’t been killed,’ I told myself. The Bible must be full of statements which took the joy out of life for believers, I thought.

To my horror, the teacher told me to take the Bible home. Fearing accusations of religious mania, I smuggled the book into my bedroom. As ours was not a home where things could be hidden for long, I decided my best course was to open the batting myself. I regaled the family with exaggerated stories of the teacher's peculiarities, among them the habit of giving out Bibles. To my great relief I was teased only a little, and most of the family's jokes were directed at the teacher.

Life at home was not all centred on God, social conditions and politics, of course. We children belonged to Cubs and Brownies and later to the Scouts and Guides and joined enthusiastically in all their activities. There were also high-spirited games with the neighbours' children; 'concerts' rehearsed for weeks in our garden shed and finally performed in our living room for our mothers and other children; beach games and swimming in the summer, for the sea was less than two miles away; card and board games on winter nights; library books to be pored over.

I often listened to Dad discussing employees' rights. One day when I was about nine, my astonished father was summoned to his employer's office. 'Your daughter has written to me, saying that I should recognise that children have rights,' said his boss. 'She thinks you should be home on fireworks' night in time for your family to enjoy the celebrations as early as other children do. You should leave here in time to catch a train at about five o'clock, she says.' Dad, acutely embarrassed, protested that he knew nothing of the letter. His employer grinned and said that he agreed with me, though he could make no promises for future years.

My sense of fun competed with the need to fulfil my father's expectations for me at school. This came to a head shortly before my tenth birthday. One day our teacher addressed the class with great seriousness. There was one girl amongst us, she said, who had been near the top of the class, but was now on a slippery slope towards the bottom. We all looked round, wondering who this girl might be. That girl's parents would be particularly shocked if that happened, the teacher went on, for she was one of six underage girls who had been promoted because of excellent examination results the previous year. And the reason for her poor showing now was not that the work in this class was too difficult, but was her inattention and general naughtiness.

In horrified dismay, I realised that the teacher could only be referring to myself. Whatever would my father say if he knew? Near the bottom of a class of 50? It did not bear thinking about. He had dinned into me that I must aim to win a scholarship to Grammar School when I was eleven. I began to work with an application and determination I did not

know I possessed, and was back in the top group again by the end of the term. The following year, I won one of the coveted scholarships.

During my first months at Grammar School I began to wish that I had not reformed with quite so much zeal. I discovered a formidable gulf between the other girls in my form and myself. The great majority came from the same kind of foreign land as the other end of our street, and talked constantly of ballet lessons, visits to the cinema and theatre, weekend outings and exciting holidays. This was inevitable in a school that was partly fee-paying, but even the other scholarship girls took part in some of these activities. No-one else had the financial difficulties I had, and as I could not afford to take part in the other girls' social activities, promising friendships dwindled. I began to feel isolated.

During my second year Dad lost his job. Now every penny mattered. The gulf widened into a veritable chasm. They were pleasant enough girls, but I had almost no common ground with them. Bitterly I noticed their carelessness with personal property; their unawareness of the conditions others endured; the smallness of their world. When I returned to school after going home for lunch, I would feel murderous about their criticisms of school dinners which other children would have tucked into with relish.

If I mentioned that someone I knew had contracted, or died of, TB after years of malnutrition, there would be murmurs of 'awful' or 'poor thing', followed by an ostrich-like resumption of discussions about the latest films, boyfriends and so on. Yet the same girls would express concern about distant Nazi Germany – from fear that their own cocooned lives would be affected some day, I thought cynically.

My brothers and sister, who attended other schools, did not experience the same daily conflicts of attitudes and life-styles. They were not interested in Dad's ideas, either, and were often bored by the political and religious talk at home. In my case, however, life at school acted as a spur. By the time I was fourteen, I had decided that the time had come to find the best way of changing society, and to commit myself to following that path.

2

TWO ASSETS played a part in my search. The first was a natural thoroughness. I wanted to be sure that I knew enough about any political party or grouping with which I might wish to align myself. The other was an understanding, gathered both at home and at school, that many twentieth century issues had their roots back in history and that it was in the perspective of these roots that they must be tackled. I was passionately interested in history and in the biographies of the 'Greats' of the past. Reading about famous people naturally included the ideas to which they had given their lives. Eventually I moved on to read about the ideas that were inspiring people currently.

I knew a certain amount about Fascism, Socialism and Communism from newspapers, the radio and discussions at home. Fascism did not appeal to me in the least as the means to a just society. But I found myself strongly drawn towards Communism. I felt that Marx understood the gross inequalities of life in a society like ours. Understanding his ideas was hard going, couched as they were in difficult language, but, having listened so often to my father, I found that I was able to get the gist.

Much of Marxist philosophy found echoes in the bitterness and hurts of my own spirit. The inevitability of class war in a capitalist society, for instance, and Marx's explanation of history seemed logical enough. But I felt uncertain about the materialist concept of the world which is so essential to Marxism. The niggling doubt surprised me, but I found it as difficult to say categorically that there was no God as I did to say that He existed. My mother's beliefs and example exerted an unconscious influence, of course, so did the stories I had heard about the self-sacrificing work undertaken by missionary doctors and teachers.

It was while I was pondering all this that the vicar of the church to which our Guide company was attached came to one of our meetings and suggested that some of us might like to attend confirmation classes. Impulsively, I put my name forward. The classes might give me a chance to find out more about God, I thought, and, anyway, how pleased Mum would be.

Very soon I regretted that decision. The course was long and assumed a background knowledge and acceptance of Christianity I had not expected. It all seemed very theoretical and hard to relate to the needs of our street. I completed the course and was confirmed, mentally inserting the words 'I hope' and 'I'll try' into the statements of belief we were required to make during the service. But within a few days I felt badly let down by the whole experience.

At the same time I was beset by a further doubt about Communism. 'The end justifies the means' would surely produce a world in chaos, where nobody could trust anyone else. Was there no idea that could work? My burning desire to have a part in changing the world had to be harnessed to something. But to what?

At this point, after weeks of inner turmoil, I went to a Guide camp with another company, whose Guider was in charge. I liked the look of their Guider and the way she coped with us all. As a group of us were savouring cups of smoky tea towards the end of our first afternoon, I remarked to one of the other company, 'Miss Freeman seems very nice.'

'Oh, she is,' came the reply, 'but she has a very strange custom.' The girl leaned forward for emphasis. 'She starts every day with a long quiet time.'

'Good heavens! Surely she's had enough of being quiet all night,' I exclaimed.

Another girl chimed in, 'And,' pausing for effect, 'she reads the Bible every day, too.'

The impact on me must have been most gratifying to the speaker. I was astounded. It had never occurred to me that anyone actually read the Bible. I had thought it was merely a reference book churchgoers kept on their bookshelves, like an encyclopaedia.

The next day was Sunday and Miss Freeman held a service in the corner of the field. While the hymn books were being distributed I sat clasping hunched knees and gazing at Miss Freeman with considerable curiosity. Had she really read some of the Bible already today? She seemed normal enough.

Then she began her talk, in place of the sermon. Within a few minutes I was listening intently, determined not to miss a single word. This was no run-of-the-mill religious talk.

The trouble with the world, Miss Freeman told us, was the people who lived in it. Strenuous efforts had been made over the years to secure peace and fight injustice, but they had failed because of the human element. If society was to change, then people themselves must change.

The place to start was with oneself, and it was helpful to have guidelines in doing this. Useful ones were absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love – a summary of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, but common to all faiths.

However, Miss Freeman went on, even this was not enough. It was often beyond even the most wise of people to know what to do in a particular situation. But mankind was not meant to face life’s difficulties alone. God was there, and if we heeded the promptings of the still small voice inside us, He could show us what to do, both in our personal lives and to help our nations and the world out of the present chaos. For the truth was that He had a plan for the world, with a part in it for each of us, she said, and indeed the most unexpected things could result when even the most humble person obeyed the thoughts He gave them.

Miss Freeman ended by saying that she had heard these ideas from people involved in something called the Oxford Group, had tried them out for herself and found they worked. Would we like to be quiet for a few minutes and see if God put any thoughts into our minds?

Silence fell. My mind was in a whirl. It seemed so obvious that it was people who must change, if society was to change, that I could not think why it had not occurred to me earlier. And God had been presented in a way I had never heard before. Was it really true that there was a God who was so involved in human affairs that He would tell us what to do if we listened to Him? I found it hard to believe, yet something deep inside me urged me to respond. I was torn between a wish to know more and a fear of disillusionment.

Over the next days my thoughts kept returning to all I had heard. Alone for a while in my patrol’s tent one day I thought, ‘No one is here to know. Shall I try listening now?’ I composed my face into what I imagined to be a holy expression, sat up very straight, and waited. Nothing happened for several minutes. Then a thought came into my mind – ‘Talk it over at home.’ Very disappointed, I said to myself, ‘Dad would ridicule me for even considering it. So it doesn’t work.’

3

‘**L**ISTENING for some sort of God to speak to you?’ exploded my father. ‘Why that’s even worse than you would hear in church!’ It was two weeks since my return from camp. Our own Guider, several fellow Guides and my sister had decided to try out the Oxford Group’s ideas. But I was still in a state of inner conflict. I felt ill at ease trying to discern the promptings of a God whose very existence I doubted. Every time I tried to listen, hoping for some great inspiration or novel initiative I could undertake, the only thought that came was to speak to my parents. I was not keen to incur Dad’s irritation and contempt by expounding an idea about which I was far from being convinced.

Then one day I had a clear, simple thought: ‘It will only work if people obey the thoughts which come.’ I summoned up my courage to take the plunge.

Predictably, Dad was withering in his contempt for the idea of seeking guidance from God. Unconvinced by my defence, he launched on a diatribe against religious belief and the idea that society would change if people changed, which he felt was hopelessly idealistic. ‘Mind you,’ he said mischievously, ‘I agree with the part that change must start with yourself. You need to learn how to get on with your sister, Betty.’ I was sorely tempted to point out that he was starting with me, not himself, but I thought better of it!

As Dad became more heated, I listened in dismay and embarrassment. So this was how telling my parents had worked out! I felt swayed by Dad’s arguments, ready to abandon my experiment. ‘But I wanted to come to my own conclusion, not his, on the best way to change society,’ I thought, suddenly. I decided to persevere.

A few days later my mother and I happened to be alone together. She told me how much it had meant to her to hear about the Oxford Group. ‘Let’s try their ideas together,’ she said. She asked me to introduce her to other people who were trying this way of life and I promised to speak to my Guider at our next meeting. I told her too that both

Guiders had dedicated their whole lives to God and wanted to find His will about everything – how to use their time and money, for instance.

‘I would like to do that too,’ said Mum.

Only hours after this Mum complained of feeling unwell. She stayed in bed all weekend, and when she was no better on Monday, Dad had to decide what to do. Since he had lost his job two years previously, he had spent the weekdays in London where he could find casual work. If he stayed at home to look after my mother, we would have no money. Reluctantly he decided to return to London. He gave us instructions not to allow Mum to get up before she was well enough and left an address where we could contact him if necessary.

By the following day, we children – I was fifteen, the others fourteen, thirteen and ten – were very troubled. All our mother wanted was to be left undisturbed. She did not want her bed to be made or her nightdress changed. After breakfast she reluctantly decided we must send for the doctor. The doctor said Mum had muscular rheumatism. By tea-time she had grown worse. I begged her to allow us to ask the doctor to come back. Mum was extremely upset. We already owed the doctor money for consultations earlier in the year, she said, and she did not want to add to the bill. (There was no National Health in those days.) She changed the subject and sent me out on an errand.

When I returned, I took one look at my mother, heard her laboured breathing and exclaimed, ‘I’m going to send for the doctor.’ Mum grew angry – most unusual for her – and insisted that I needed to live in the real world of our financial difficulties. I said no more, for she was becoming exhausted by arguing. Instead I prepared, on her request, to move into her bedroom for the night.

In bed, I worried. I had never defied either of my parents before on anything concerning money. Money was much too important for a schoolgirl like me to take risks with it. Yet now I had a strong urge to disobey my mother and get the doctor. In the end the habit of obedience was too powerful to resist and I decided to wait until morning. ‘She might be better by then,’ I told myself.

Early next day I became aware that Mum was delirious. I roused one of my brothers to run for the doctor and fetched a neighbour. As soon as the doctor arrived I rushed to open the garden gate, but he brushed me aside. ‘You’ve sent for me at seven in the morning and you haven’t paid your bill yet,’ he growled, striding past me and up the stairs.

Half an hour later he came into the kitchen. ‘I’m afraid your mother’s

dead,' he said quietly and left. I was too shocked to cry. I could not believe what he had said.

We sent for my father, who knew nothing of what had happened during the past 24 hours. When he reached home, he went straight upstairs with hardly a word to us, struggling to hide his deep shock and distress. Later he demanded to know what had happened. Very scared, I began to tell him, but before I could finish he interrupted. 'Why didn't you send for me?' he demanded. 'I would have fetched the doctor, no matter what we owed him.'

Fear of his blame made me reply too sharply that I had thought he might not have his train fare and that in any case I had underestimated the seriousness of my mother's illness.

'You should have taken the chance,' insisted my father. 'If you had sent for me, your mother might still be alive.' This confirmed my own desperate fears. I fled to the outside toilet, where I could cry in peace.

Saying little to one another, we went about the funeral preparations. Dad was devastated by the loss of one of the few people who really understood him. When the post-mortem examination showed that my mother had died of pneumonia, Dad was haunted by the possibility that the doctor had made a wrong diagnosis on his first visit. At the same time Dad realised that the pneumonia might have developed later and, as nothing could be proved, his threats to sue the doctor eventually died down. He was left with a deep distrust and dislike of doctors in general.

On the morning of the funeral, Dad gave the four of us our orders for the day. This included an instruction to hold up our heads at the graveside and on no account to shed a tear. Pride must keep our feelings in check. My special job was to look after my mother's family, who strongly disapproved of Dad and his ideas. If they asked me about her death, I was simply to say she had been ill, had become worse, pneumonia had developed and she had died. Under no circumstances was I to reveal our financial difficulties.

I began to dread my task. My mother's relatives were coming on a considerable journey. How could I go through an entire day fobbing them off?

Shortly before they left, Mum's family cornered me alone in the garden. They were not satisfied that they had been told the whole truth about Mum's death, they said. I insisted that they had been told all the important facts. Finally, one of them said, 'If none of you can trust us with all the facts, then this is the last you will see of us.'

We did not know my mother's family well, but it was with deep

unhappiness that I accompanied them to the station. How distressed my mother would have been, I thought, as their train disappeared from sight.

4

WE WERE a family that discussed everything except our deepest emotions or most painful experiences. I had never hinted at my unhappiness at school, for instance. Now, in sorrow, we could not communicate with each other at all. I never knew what my sister and brothers were feeling as we struggled to adjust to life without our mother, and I am certain that they had no idea of the turmoil that coursed through my spirit day after day.

Unconsciously, I built a wall around myself. No-one was going to know much about the chained emotions behind that wall. Grief; self-blame; inner loneliness; sadness about our relatives; bewilderment that my mother's resolve to give her life to God had been followed so immediately by her death; fears that every route that appeared to lead to a better future would simply lead to disillusionment; these were the torments of the prison behind the wall. On the other side of it was a great facade of normality, as life resumed its accustomed course.

I tried desperately to free myself of the tangle behind the wall, but for some time a move in one direction seemed only to increase the snares in another. My bitterness about money and the hurt that I had made mistakes during my mother's illness pushed me towards Communism again. What had happened in our family simply emphasised the need for a different social and economic structure, I told myself. I must do something about it. Yet as soon as I reached the point of decision, doubts about whether Communism was the best solution would rise unbidden. Struggle as I might, I was held back by the sound sense of the premise that change in society and change in people were linked.

My mother's enthusiastic response to the Oxford Group's ideas was an added clamp. Finally, weary of the conflict, I concluded that the only way to resolve my problems was to make a serious experiment with those ideas, in order to discover whether there was evidence of a supernatural being whose plan for the world had a part even for someone like myself.

Rather against my will, I soon found the experiment quite fascinating. There seemed to be a force operating in my life which knew me in

surprising detail. I had always had a great love of books, for instance, especially of those that were beautifully produced, and now I began to think about some books that I had borrowed from the school library for so long that I regarded them as my own. I had not questioned this before, but now I knew I must return them.

Often I had thoughts about the family and other relationships. I saw, for instance, how pride made me reluctant to apologise when something went wrong. I would defend myself to the bitter end. I had the thought that I must learn to be the first to say sorry. Whenever I remembered to do this, I found that the relationship could quickly be restored.

Much more difficult to swallow was the idea that I must care for particular girls at school. Eventually I decided to try.

As I continued the experiment, I became increasingly convinced that God did exist, and could guide me. This was, of course, a stupendous realisation. 'He really is there!' I would exclaim to myself. Too many surprising things happened when I obeyed the thoughts that came in my quiet times, for me to be able to dismiss them all as coincidences.

Often it was simple things. I would follow a prompting to see someone, for instance, and find they had a need with which I could help. Or, alternatively, I would feel I should wait before I visited someone – and when the thought came to go I would find they had just returned from being away.

There was one particularly dramatic example. I felt urged to call on a girl I knew only slightly. She was out, but her parents talked with me a little and then poured out their distress that their daughter had been so difficult in recent months. They felt she was reacting to the fact that she was adopted. I had known nothing about this. Thinking about it later, in a quiet time, I saw a number of ways I could be a friend to this girl. Next time I saw her, too, I gave a casual hint of how much her parents loved her. She was extremely reserved by nature, so I do not know how much my efforts helped her. But her relationship with her parents did improve. How glad I was about this, when I heard some two years later that she had died suddenly.

At the beginning of 1941, some of the girls at school were evacuated because of the war. The Head Girl was among them, and, to my amazement, I was appointed to replace her. I tried to find God's inspiration in my new responsibilities – prefects' meetings; dealing with rule-breakers; advising younger girls what to do if an air raid siren sounded on our way to school; accompanying the prefects for tea at the home of

the Chairman of the Governors. When the staff congratulated me at the end of term, I knew that much of the credit was not mine at all!

As I prepared for teachers' training college, financed by a County Education Authority grant, I reviewed my experiment. I now had a firm belief in God's existence and in His concern about human affairs. Experience had shown me that He could give clear direction to those who sought His plan. Yet I had a nagging fear that He might love some people very much and others considerably less. Life went remarkably smoothly for some, while for people like myself it was a decidedly rocky road. Blinkered by my own bitterness I wallowed in this new version of the class war. What if God simply wanted to manipulate my life to serve the interests of the 'favoured ones', and especially the capitalists?

And what about the premise that change in society would come from change in people? I had heard people associated with the Oxford Group talk of deep changes which had come in their personal lives when they faced up to the challenge of absolute moral standards. I could make no such claim. There was no doubt I had improved my ways, but only at a superficial level. Deep down I felt that I was the same as ever. I was too proud to discuss this perplexity with anyone. Meanwhile I concluded that the link between the individual and society was as yet unproven.

And so at college in Nottingham, somewhat inconsistently, I flirted with the ideas of Communism and the Oxford Group simultaneously. I was fascinated by the Extreme Left's dedication to their beliefs and the way their thinking reached out to the world. These students were certain that the collapse of capitalism was overdue and that after the war they would help to bring this about. Together we discussed how to win the peace when it came, and the infiltration, exploitation of legitimate grievances and breakdown of accepted authority this would entail. We considered market forces, the rights of oppressed peoples, the effects of history on today's world and the ideological situation in different countries. Yet, fascinated as I was, my earlier doubts about the end justifying the means rose and overshadowed all that was said.

At the same time, I continued to listen warily for God's guidance. The thoughts that came to me were very limited in scope – perhaps reflecting both my lack of trust in God and my general state of confusion. I met people in the town who had committed themselves completely to Moral Re-Armament (MRA), as the Oxford Group was now called. I knew they were right when they spoke of their efforts to bring about the spirit of unity and selflessness needed for the prosecution of the war and defeat of the enemy.

Occasionally, from a desire to understand more about God, I attended Student Christian Movement meetings, as well. The meetings were often quite interesting, but as with my confirmation classes assumed a faith which I did not possess. My questions invariably provoked the unsatisfactory reply, 'The Bible says so.' I would have liked to ask the students, and speakers, why they were so sure God loved them and what relevance Jesus had today, but I was too proud to reveal my ignorance when everyone else seemed so clear. So I continued to have only a nodding acquaintance with Christian beliefs.

I left college in 1943 and returned home, having thoroughly enjoyed the mixture of lectures, work and leisure activities, but still uncertain about the direction my life should take. For a time, I concentrated on my career and on becoming a good primary school teacher. I greatly enjoyed my young pupils: the seven-year-old who gave me a sticky sweet saying, 'You'll like this, I've tasted it!'; the eight-year-old who exclaimed at a particularly large number of flowers in the classroom, 'Oh, isn't it lovely! Just like a funeral!' The men teachers were in the armed services, so I had to take groups of boys for football. I tried to persuade the Commandos who used the pitch before us to teach the boys, but they found it more amusing to watch my efforts. However one boy thought I was good enough to offer me his brother's outgrown football boots!

At the same time, I felt increasingly unhappy at drifting through no man's land in terms of my life commitment. As the war drew to its close, I struggled to resolve the issue. I knew that at the end of the war another battle for the world would intensify – the struggle for people's minds. This would cut through the old loyalties and ties, accepted attitudes and beliefs, and be fuelled by festering wounds and pride. Few people believed there could be a return to the old order. Various forces would make their bid in the great issue at stake – the creation of a Marxist world or of a viable, just alternative. Where should I throw in my lot?

And then everything fell into place. I received an invitation to a Moral Re-Armament meeting in Brighton Pavilion. I went reluctantly, still absorbed in my own private debate. A group of young men and women who were soon to be demobilised from the armed services took their places on the speakers' platform. As one after another spoke, I found my reluctance at being present evaporating. I was enthralled by the mixture of the personal and the national, the spiritual and the down-to-earth, the vision and the means to achieve it, that they presented. They were aware that self-interest might reassert itself in peacetime

among nations formed into a fragile alliance by war. Creating the real unity needed to tackle the vast problems of the peace called for a wisdom greater than that of man. They talked about the futures of many countries, including Germany and Japan. It was clear that the speakers had their feet firmly on the ground, yet they dared to dream of 'new men, new nations, a new society'. They were certain that, however long it might take, God would lead them steadily towards this target.

As the meeting closed, I was overwhelmed by the need to think. I went outside into the gardens and sat quietly for a while. 'They are right. They mean business. And you should be in up to the neck with them!' – the words kept flooding through my mind. 'But can I trust where God might lead me, an "unfavoured" person?' came the last resistance. Back came a 'reply' – that the only way to know whether to trust God was to experience Him.

A friend had joined me. I found myself telling her I had decided to commit myself to the same path as the speakers. As I did so a combination of relief, great satisfaction and enthusiasm surged through me. I had done with any other ideology. I knew where I was going. And I would certainly discover a lot about God along the road!

IN 1947, a Moral Re-Armament industrial play, *The Forgotten Factor*, was touring the British coalfields. Many miners recognised the soundness of the play's message, and 'not who's right, but what's right' became a familiar slogan wherever it was shown. As a result the attitudes of both miners and management changed, and in many areas productivity soared, an important boost to the country's post-war economic recovery.

I felt God wanted me to move back to Nottingham, where I had been at college, so as to be a friend to some of the mining families there who were interested in MRA. I did so and after work, night after night, I went with friends to visit miners' homes. Several of these families began to start each day with time to listen to God. Often family issues arose and I began to understand how vital a harmonious home life was for a man involved in negotiations at work.

One of those who came regularly on these visits was Rex Gray, a young civil servant, recently demobilised from the army. As the months flew by, I realised that I had fallen in love with him. I had no idea what his feelings might be for me, as we had only once been alone together. I knew that if I was completely committed to fulfilling God's plan for me, I had to let Him tell me whether it included marriage, and, if so, whether Rex was the right man.

For several weeks I wondered about this. Then one day, while I was at home for Christmas, all my uncertainties lifted. They were replaced by a strong feeling that Rex would propose marriage some day and that I should accept.

As my train drew into Nottingham station at the end of the holidays I was astonished to see Rex on the platform. He looked so serious and ill at ease that I thought, 'Oh dear, he's come to break some bad news!' As soon as he saw me, with scarcely a word of greeting, he grabbed my suitcase and tore off up the station steps. My fears seemed well-founded and, as I strove to keep pace, I kept begging him to tell me what was wrong. As he neared the top of the steps, he called over his shoulder, 'I'll tell you in the car.'

Streams of people milled round the car as I hastily climbed inside and looked at Rex expectantly. To my astonishment he took a deep breath and began to tell me how he too had fallen in love and, at Christmas, had felt that God wanted him to propose to me on my return to the city. I was so relieved that he was not the bearer of bad news, and so overjoyed at what God was giving us, that for a few moments I could say nothing. Poor Rex thought that I was searching for a kind way to say 'No'.

The early years of marriage required considerable adjustments! Rex and I discovered that by nature we were far from compatible. My lack of punctuality and total inability to retain any of the electrical or mechanical know-how Rex tried to teach me were constant sources of exasperation. My enthusiasm for experimenting with unusual recipes and flavourings was met by Rex's request for 'plain unadulterated food'. We had totally different views on tidiness and our tastes in furnishings and decorating were poles apart!

Our different backgrounds contributed too, for Rex had grown up in a small market town and later a village. His family were churchgoers. I did not care for church. When we discussed our religious beliefs, Rex would often exclaim, 'Why do you always want reasons? Why can't you simply accept?' I am essentially a night person and would further irritate Rex by initiating these and other controversial debates just as he was yawning and longing for sleep.

Both of us wanted God to be at the centre of our relationship, and we asked Him to show us how to build the successful marriage He must have intended in bringing together two such different people. We discovered the value of sharing our feelings with simple honesty, tempered by love, and of following this by trying to find out what was right in the particular disagreement of the moment. Whatever the issue, it could then be resolved. Our totally different attitudes to money were an example.

Years of financial difficulties had made me long for a comfortable bank balance. Rex did not come from an affluent background, but he tended to feel that money existed to be used, especially when his fast car was involved! One day he told me about a particularly large car bill and met such an explosion from me that we both knew we had to ask God to show us what we must learn about money.

It became clear to us that neither of us was completely right. Each must change. I needed to trust God to show us when to spend, while Rex had to learn only to spend when he was sure God intended it. Rex

even decided to sell his beloved car and buy one more appropriate to our income. I was astounded – but deeply appreciative of his willingness to obey God. As we put all this into practice we found it gradually became much easier to find a common mind on how to use our money, until it ceased to be a problem.

By now I was beginning to trust God. As our marriage began to grow into a very happy one, so my trust grew. We soon found that we could use what we were learning to help friends whose marriages were in difficulties.

As time went by we had a son, Philip, and two daughters, Margaret and Barbara. Through them we learned that God can guide and use even very young children – and that it is important for adults, if they want children to grow up believing in God's guidance, to help them to carry out the thoughts which come to them.

Sometimes this meant taking risks. When Philip was six, for instance, he came home in tears several times because an older boy was bullying him. When we had a quiet time together, Philip said he thought he should invite the bully to tea and let him play with his best toys. In spite of our qualms, it worked. The bullying ceased and they became good friends.

Soon after our second daughter was born we moved to Cambridge. We often had students from overseas visiting us. One day when Margaret was four she announced that God had told her that she should welcome alone an Indian couple who were coming to our home for the first time. Once again I had qualms – we knew the wife was very shy. But I agreed. When the doorbell rang I peeped through the kitchen doorway while Margaret trotted off to welcome our guests.

I could see that the lady was ill at ease, clutching her beautiful gold sari around her as Margaret led her in. Suddenly Margaret stopped, looked at the sari, and asked, 'Why have you come to see us in your nightie?'

The lady burst out laughing, swept Margaret into her arms and exclaimed, 'Oh, it's so lovely to hear the naturalness of a child!' It turned out that she had a daughter a little younger than Margaret whom she had left with a relative in India and was missing very much. She hardly left Margaret's side all evening and gradually relaxed and forgot her shyness.

On another occasion an African friend brought one of his fellow-countrymen to meet us, warning us that this man had encountered a lot of racism in Europe and would be on his guard. After the first half-

hour of the visit, I began to feel desperate. The man answered our questions as briefly as he could, sometimes just with 'yes' or 'no'. I sought what to do. Several times I rejected as completely inadequate a thought to ask Barbara, then aged three, to share her Easter egg with our guests. Eventually I decided to give it a try – at least it could make the situation no worse!

My heart swelled with motherly pride as I saw that Barbara had selected the biggest of her eggs. She proceeded to break it – into smaller and smaller pieces. When she had two pieces so minute she could hardly hold them, she offered them to our guests. Suddenly our visitor burst out laughing. He laughed and he laughed. The ice was broken and we talked freely of both trivial and more serious matters. He became a very good friend.

We had a letter one day from an English friend who had gone to teach in Sudan, and to work alongside people interested in MRA there. He said that he had had a strong prompting to visit a certain official. The moment he had mentioned Moral Re-Armament, the official had said, 'Moral Re-Armament? Would you know a Mr and Mrs Gray by any chance?' The official had befriended the Englishman and introduced him to a number of people in the city.

It was one of those extraordinary coincidences that convinces me that God exists. Some years before, in Nottingham, Rex and I had been at a public meeting and had both, separately, had a strong feeling that we should talk to the Sudanese who was standing at the back of the hall. He told us he was returning home in a few days and that, although he had been studying at the university for three years, he had never been in an English home. We had insisted that he come and spend an evening with us before he left. We had had a most enjoyable time together. Then we had forgotten all about it until our friend's letter arrived from Sudan, telling of the warm welcome this man had given him.

6

WHAT a powerful force in the world is reaction to hurt! The histories of nations, as well as the lives of individuals, have been twisted by it. Rex and I had each known deep hurt in adolescence and were unaware of how sensitive and vulnerable we were as a consequence of it remaining, unhealed, just below the surface.

One day a couple involved with MRA, who had recently come to live locally, told us about a plan which they felt was right. We listened in dismay, for it would affect us in a way which *we* felt was quite wrong! A lengthy discussion resulted only in deadlock.

Inexplicably, none of us thought of asking friends from outside the situation to help us sort things out. Had we done so, I am sure we would have found our way to genuine unity. As it was, Rex and I became more and more hurt as the plan was implemented, and this hurt so warped our judgement that we even blamed MRA for what was happening to us through just two people. The strength of our reaction blinded us totally to the fact that change was needed in all four of us. It was we, not the ideas of MRA, that were at fault.

As it was, Rex and I took refuge in our hurt and broke off our association with MRA. We tried to carry on alone in a dedication to obeying God, but the resentment in our spirits was a barrier in our relationship with Him and meant that our faith became a mainly personal affair. When after a few months Rex had the opportunity of transferring to a different Government Department in another town, we seized it gladly.

Some two years after our move there, the other couple surprised us by coming to see us. This must have taken great grace, for they could not fail to be aware of our reluctance to meet them again. They told us that they had realised where they had been wrong and wanted to apologise for the hurt they had caused. We listened gratefully and said that of course we must resume our friendship. However at that point we were still blind to where we had been wrong ourselves and so we fell for the temptation to 'play safe' and have nothing more to do with Moral Re-Armament.

Meanwhile my father had come to us on a short visit, been rushed to hospital with heart failure almost as soon as he arrived and had nearly died. He had recovered and we had undertaken to look after him. He lived with us for the next seven years.

Dad had mellowed and loved being with the children. He was still an atheist however, and enjoyed an argument as much as ever. Events in Hungary had shaken his political views but not his belief in a Marxist structure of society.

To our surprise he struck up a real friendship with our doctor, who had to visit him regularly. The doctor would take off his coat, sit down and say, 'Now what shall we argue about today before I examine you?'

From time to time Dad would suffer heart failure again. A pattern developed. We would be told he might not recover, but then his will would surface and he would survive.

Once, after a particularly severe attack, he had been moved back into the main ward of the hospital. When I went to visit him next day, the Sister came hurrying to meet me.

'In all my years of experience I have never met a man like your father!' she exclaimed angrily. 'And I hope I never do so again!'

I was dumbfounded. Whatever could such a sick man have done to upset her like this?

'What has he done?' echoed the Sister, bristling with fury. 'He's brought every man in the ward out on strike, that's what he's done! Not one man will take his pills.'

Dad was pretending to be asleep, but as I looked at him I caught him peeping at us from under his eyelids. I went over to him. 'Dad,' I said severely. 'What's all this about?'

'Well,' he drawled, savouring the moment, 'when I came into this ward, I looked round at the other men. I saw them opening their mouths, having the pills popped inside, never asking why. I thought they had given up and that I must put some life back into them. So I brought them out on strike.'

'They might have died,' I hissed. 'You're in trouble. Get them back on their pills. I'm ashamed to come here.'

'Oh, lovely!' exclaimed Dad in delight. Nevertheless, when I had gone, he persuaded his fellow patients that the strike had lasted long enough.

Then came the day when the doctor said to me that this time he felt Dad really was dying. For a week he lapsed in and out of a coma. He needed constant medical attention.

One day I went into Dad's bedroom. To my amazement, he was sitting up in bed, his old lively self. 'Dad, you've done it again!' I exclaimed. 'You're quite different today.'

'Yes,' replied Dad. 'And I'll tell you what I want you to do. Give me a blanket bath; change my clothes; change my sheets. Rex can shave me. I want a general clean-up in fact.'

Remembering that he had had nothing to eat and little to drink for a week, I protested that this should be spread over the next two or three days. He became very agitated and insisted it must be done that day, or it would be too late. 'I know that I am going to meet my Maker tonight,' he said. 'And I feel I want to be clean to go.'

I did not know what to say. I could hardly believe my ears. Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined Dad making such a statement. He had always said that even supposing we were right about God's existence, he could see no reason why he should respect Him, considering the way life had treated him. I felt as if I was dreaming.

I roused myself. 'Yesterday I certainly thought you might be dying,' I said, 'but not today.' He insisted he was right. Fearing he might have a relapse if he was upset, I gave in. His heart was so bad, we had to keep stopping while he got his breath and it took the whole morning before I had finished fulfilling his instructions.

He had only rested for a few minutes when he called me to his side. 'Now I should like my favourite lunch,' he said. My heart sank. His favourite lunch was cheese on toast and I could not imagine a more indigestible meal for a man who had not eaten for a week.

'You wouldn't refuse a dying man his last requests, would you?' Dad asked with a mischievous grin when I remonstrated with him. I thought I had better humour him.

Soon after lunch Dad became very thoughtful. It was clear there was something he wanted to say, but was uncertain how to begin. I decided to provide the opportunity by busying myself in his room.

'Look, I don't quite know what to say to you about the Resurrection,' he began, very hesitantly. With more confidence he went on to say that Christ's own Resurrection suggested that we were given a spiritual body which resembled the earthly one we had just left. However, he hoped to be given a resemblance to the whole body that would have been his had his leg not been amputated. Would I promise to have him cremated as soon as practical, so that there was no defective body left to resemble?

I was both deeply moved and extremely shaken to hear Dad talking like this. I tried to reassure him that we would be made whole in every

respect when we died, but he still demanded a promise of cremation. 'All right,' I said, 'but I don't think the necessity will arise for some time yet.'

The doctor came twice, once in the afternoon and once in the evening, and told us that he thought Dad had turned the corner yet again. On the second visit Dad thanked him for all the care and attention he had given him. 'You've been more than a doctor, you've been a friend,' he said. 'We've had some good arguments too! In fact, you've quite changed my views on doctors.' Then he said goodbye.

On the doctor's advice, Rex and I went to bed as usual. When we went into Dad's room next morning, we saw that he had died in his sleep.

We were deeply shaken by this extraordinary experience. Rex and I had tried all the time Dad was living with us to help him find a faith, but as far as we had known, we had not succeeded. Had something happened while he was in the coma that changed his mind about God? How had he known he was about to die and why was he so anxious to be clean? Had he made his peace with God? Certainly he had seemed remarkably peaceful about facing Him, after a far from saintly life!

Above all, why had he not simply died in a coma, instead of reviving for one day – a day spent in preparing to go? Maybe that last day was as important for us as it was for him? Certainly the experience had boosted our faith considerably. 'And who would have thought that of Dad?' I grinned to myself. 'I bet he's having quite a laugh too!'

‘**Y**OU ARE letting God down badly,’ I kept thinking, as I lay awake at night. Since the profound experience of my father’s death, I had felt increasingly perturbed about the way Rex and I had withdrawn from the struggle to create a new society, based on moral and spiritual values and the belief that people could change. I had a nagging feeling that we had been wrong to allow hurt to gain such a powerful hold over us.

Before I could see what to do about this, we heard that we were to be moved to Newcastle upon Tyne.

We drove up to Newcastle on a cold winter’s day, just before Christmas 1966, and were overwhelmed by the warmth of our neighbours’ welcome, a foretaste of Geordie friendliness. In no time at all we began to feel a remarkable sense of ‘belonging’ – a feeling which has never left us.

Only a day or two after term began, Margaret came back from her new school in some excitement. She had discovered that a teacher in Newcastle, who was involved in MRA and had been mentioned to us in a letter from a friend, actually taught at her school. Rather to our dismay, Margaret had brought home an invitation for Rex and me to spend an evening with the teacher.

When we arrived at the teacher’s home, we discovered that another couple had been invited, who worked full-time with MRA. Rex and I did our best to steer the conversation onto safer topics, but inevitably MRA came up. When we said how uncertain we felt about getting involved, the other man present just said, ‘That’s fine. Don’t worry.’ He went on to talk about what people committed to MRA were doing in many countries and as I listened my interest was caught and my conscience stirred.

Tentatively I joined in various occasions arranged by local people during the next weeks. Then one day I came home with the news that a group of young Asians touring Britain with a musical review, *India Arise*, were coming to Newcastle. The musical expressed the issues facing India, told true stories of what had happened there as people had

applied the ideas of MRA and expressed the convictions of the young people taking part. Accommodation was needed for the cast and we decided to offer a bed.

The young director of the show, who was allocated to us, was a dynamic character, very good company. By the end of the week, our lively discussions with him and the message of the review had convinced Rex and me that we must become involved with MRA again, wholeheartedly.

As we did this, God began to show us some uncomfortable truths. After we had been hurt, we had wanted to 'play safe'. We realised that when we allowed that desire to become a decision, it had represented a determination to have control over what happened to us. It had meant in fact that we had taken back from God the full dedication of our lives, leaving Him with only a percentage of them.

When we sought God's forgiveness and rededicated ourselves fully to Him, we saw that hurt, like sorrow or sickness, is a part of life which none of us can avoid altogether. How we face it can help us to grow towards our full potential, or can diminish us. The choice is ours, whether hurt has affected us as individuals, or as nations.

As our hearts stretched out to the world, our morning quiet times of prayer and listening became more interesting. We began to invite foreign students and graduates to our home again. Local people who had also seen *India Arise* became new friends too.

By August 1971, we were seeking ways of reaching a wider number of people in the city. One morning I had the idea that we should invite Conrad Hunte, a former Vice-Captain of the West Indies cricket team who was now working with MRA particularly in the field of race relations, to come to Newcastle for a week, with a group of 20 people. Our local friends agreed.

What a week it was. Between them the group met a complete cross-section of the city's life – students and teachers, people of various races, police, management and trades unionists, civic leaders and private citizens – and found considerable support for the ideas of MRA. They wanted to know more. As the week drew to a close I kept having the thought that I should give up my teaching job so to be more available to meet the people who had responded to the team's visit.

Rex and I mulled over this thought carefully. Was it what God wanted? Although our family were now in their late teens, they were still to a great extent financially dependent on us. Philip and Margaret were students and Barbara was still at school. We were finding it quite

a struggle to manage even on two salaries. Memories of my childhood kept flooding through my mind. Just to contemplate giving up my job raised all the old insecurity. Yet the thought persisted. We decided to tell the family and see what they thought.

We explained in detail why I felt I should be at home and what this would mean financially. Then we listened to God together. The decision was unanimous: that I should give up my job and that we should trust God about the future.

I gave up my job at Christmas 1971. I began 1972 feeling that we must now live so frugally that it would be extremely difficult to entertain all the people we wanted to welcome to our home. I was to learn, however, that where God guides He provides.

For several years we had a series of campaigns in Newcastle, based on our home. Often during these we would feed 30 people twice a day. Friends would help with the cooking and with the cost of the ingredients. There came a point, however, when our supply of sheets would no longer meet the demand. We could not afford to buy more.

What should we do? I had a simple thought, 'Pray for some sheets.' It seemed more logical to pray for the money, but, nevertheless, I prayed for sheets. Only five days later an elderly lady we had not seen for over ten years wrote to me out of the blue. She and her sister were moving into a small flat and were having to dispose of their belongings. Would we by any chance like some sheets? I was astounded. God had worked at both ends, giving me the thought to pray for sheets, while giving her the idea to offer them. A huge parcel of eight sheets arrived a week or so later and I saw that they were of a quality I would never have felt I should buy.

More recently, after Rex's retirement, we were invited to Canada and the United States to participate in an MRA campaign which would take us to twelve cities in three months. We felt it right to go. The travel costs alone would come to £1500 – a sum far beyond our means. We set aside the £500 we could produce towards them and began to pray for the rest. We never asked anyone for help, but, as the news of our trip began to spread amongst our friends, gifts, large and small, began to arrive. Two weeks before we left we had the exact sum we needed.

We have never had a sizeable bank balance, but our needs have always been met. Such blessings as unforeseen tax rebates, refunds for overestimated gas bills and unsought gifts from people wishing to have a part in what we undertake have come at exactly the right moments. Experiencing God's provision when we have obeyed Him has been an

added assurance that He has a plan and cares about our part in it. This has done as much to build my trust in God as any more inherently spiritual discoveries!

WITHIN weeks of my retirement, people started coming to our home in a steady stream. We began to build solid friendships. Hoping to give our guests a greater understanding of how MRA worked in practice, we told them stories of how social, political and sometimes international changes had resulted when people had committed themselves to obeying God. We told them of our own experiences too.

People listened carefully to all these stories, nodded approval or made some comment, but few showed any desire to experiment themselves. I was puzzled. Where were we missing out? Slowly I began to realise that we had been keen to tell our new friends about experiences which had meant a lot to us, but had not thought much about what would mean most to them. I argued that I did not always know what was on people's minds, so how could I know what they needed to hear? 'And what do you do when you *do* know their needs?' came the disturbing thought.

I recognised this as a key question. People had confided in me about difficult relationships or experiences which had made them bitter, but my efforts to help had often fallen flat. 'What about your own bitterness?' was the startling query that came one morning as I was reflecting on my ineffectiveness.

Amazingly, I had not thought of myself as a bitter person, although I knew that in the hidden recesses of my spirit were strong feelings about my early life. It was shaking to name these feelings as bitterness. My natural defences rose. 'But it's justified!' I protested. I remember well the shock of the inner reply: 'Is it? Isn't justifying their bitterness your friends' problem too?'

For days after that, no matter what I was doing, the argument as to whether bitterness could ever be justified went round and round in my mind. It was resolved by a final shocking realisation: because I had not let go of the past, at heart I was part of the class war. Yet I had often told stories of people in industry who had overcome class division and

so improved working conditions and output! I was appalled at my unconscious hypocrisy.

Now I longed to shed my bitterness. I told myself day after day that I would let go of it. Nothing happened. After several weeks I knew I was simply seeking to bury the bitterness a little deeper and that inevitably, sooner or later, it would surface. As my beliefs rested on the idea that people could change, the fact that I could not shed my bitterness was deeply disturbing.

Then Conrad Hunte came to Newcastle again. It was Eastertime and so it was natural for me to ask him, 'What does the Cross mean to you?' From pride I had never told anyone how little I understood about Christ. Now it seemed to me that I had found a way of gaining information without compromising my pride.

Conrad was silent for a few moments and then began to answer. First he assured me, with quotations from the New Testament, that Jesus's death on the Cross was always part of God's plan in sending Him into the world and that Jesus knew this. Jesus often foretold it, in fact, and His mental struggle in the garden of Gethsemane the night before He died was not born out of a sudden realisation of what would happen to Him, but of the need to accept it.

Christ's death on the Cross was essential, Conrad went on. Mankind was hopelessly estranged from God because of our failure to live up to God's laws. Only Christ's terrible death could change this, for it was the sole way in which God could reveal what He was really like and so bring people back to Him. Through the love that emanated from Jesus as He hung dying, God showed that absolutely nothing people could do would ever separate them from His love. This meant that we need never fear to approach God in genuine repentance, for we could be sure that God loved us enough to forgive us. Christians also believed that Christ offered His own blameless life in an atonement for our sins, taking the suffering that should have been ours, so that we might be forgiven for ever.

Christ had risen from the dead, had conquered death and evil. We too could share in that victory. For Jesus was alive today and if we asked Him to come into the centre of our lives, He would give us the power to change where otherwise we found it impossible. He could use our lives to show other people what He was like.

This was a lot to digest. My mind fastened particularly on the statement that Jesus could give me the power to change. Here at last was

hope that I could shed my bitterness. Had Conrad actually experienced that kind of power? He assured me that he had.

Only half-believing that this power could be given to me, I decided to ask for it. I wrote out a long list of all the things that had made me feel bitter. A few concerned difficult relationships. Many reflected my early background, others more recent experiences. Listing them all roused afresh the feelings involved. As I felt the power of my emotions, I realised all the more how much depended – both for nations and individuals – on whether deep bitterness really could be shed totally and healed. In very real penitence, I laid the list before Christ, and asked Him to come into my spirit and make me free.

I immersed myself in family affairs for the next weeks. Then, suddenly, one day I knew that the bitterness had been taken from me. ‘Is it true?’ I kept asking myself. Yet I knew in my heart that there was no doubt, for it was as if a great load had dropped off. I even found myself looking at people with a new warmth.

This firsthand experience of Christ proved to be a watershed. I noticed I could read the Bible with new understanding and I bought some commentaries so I could study it more deeply. I wanted to develop my new relationship with Christ and to help others find an experience like mine. When I told friends of what had happened to me it kindled hope in them concerning their own problems and they began to ask Christ to come into their lives too. This was a hope I had not been able to give them before.

Soon after this, I reflected on what a long time it had taken for me to come to this experience. I had had to reach the point where I desperately wanted to be different and yet felt utterly helpless to achieve this change myself. Only then was I ready to ask Christ into my life and to begin to know Him. Just when I had come to this place of total helplessness, Conrad had been there to help me. ‘How detailed is God’s care,’ I marvelled.

I was still in a state of euphoria when I was brought down to earth with a bump! One morning I felt God wanted me to understand that if my freedom from bitterness was to be rooted in the present as well as the past, I must make a friend of a titled lady I knew slightly. I insisted to God that although I had lost my bitterness towards people of privilege, I did not need to go out of my way to be friendly with them! As I thought more about it, I realised that my new freedom was slipping somewhat if I refused friendship on a class basis. This brought me up

short, for I recognised that if I had been told to make a friend of anyone else I would have obeyed.

My new friend and I started out with the advantage of a common purpose in our involvement with MRA. We began to see more of each other and to work together, organising conferences, helping each other with the people we were caring for, finding ways to interest more people in the city. Gradually we found each other's wavelength. I discovered she was very warm-hearted, with a deep concern both for national issues and individuals. As our friendship became rock solid, we began to see that our different backgrounds could be used by God to build bridges of understanding across Britain's class gulf.

9

AMONG THE people Rex and I got to know as a result of Conrad's visits were a group of West Indian teachers doing a year's Diploma course at Newcastle University. They enriched our lives greatly with their gaiety, love of music and their interest in world events, and we made deep friendships with many of them. As those from a particular year completed their courses and went home, they would tell next year's students to be sure to be in touch with us. In this way, we got to know more than 40 teachers from most of the islands which have historic links with Britain and have kept in touch ever since.

In 1976, some of these teachers invited Conrad, ourselves and three others to visit some of the islands to tell people there about MRA. As we flew from one island to the next, we invariably found that our arrival had been mentioned on the radio. Our friends arranged for us to meet people ranging from Government Ministers to members of youth groups. They gave us exceptionally generous hospitality and we greatly enjoyed staying in their homes.

We visited quite a number of the schools where they were teaching. As a primary school teacher I was particularly interested in the younger children. Classes were huge, often consisting of 60 children, and equipment, by English standards, was limited. In spite of this I found a general standard of academic achievement higher than would be expected of most children of comparable age and intelligence, and of any race, in British state schools. Yet, in Britain, statistics were beginning to emerge of the underachievement of West Indian children in our schools. Why?

It seemed to me that among all the causes, three elements might be particularly influential: white racial prejudice which was sensed by the children; overhearing adults speak of how 'hidden racism' operated against them in jobs or promotions; and the great and confusing contrast between the discipline of the children's homes and the easy-going atmosphere of English schools. Concern for West Indian youngsters began to be part of my growing concern for people of other races in Britain.

By now we had many friends from Commonwealth countries who

were resident in Britain as well as those who came only to study. Neighbours began to call our home 'the United Nations'! Through our friends we learned a great deal about other cultures and about the aspirations of people in many Third World countries. All too often we heard, too, of the emotional shock of racism encountered in Britain. I remember a university graduate from India crying bitterly as she exclaimed, 'I never thought about colour until I came to Britain!'

Some of these friends showed a remarkable capacity to forgive and to triumph over racism. A young Asian told us how, shortly after he had come to Britain from Uganda, he had boarded a London bus, sitting down next to an Englishwoman. At the next stop, she got up and moved to sit next to an English person. He was deeply distressed. Was life in Britain always going to be like this?

After some thought he decided he must not judge a whole nation by one bad experience and that he must make sure that he was friendly himself. He came to live in a town near Newcastle and, after losing his job in a factory, found work as a bus driver on a rural route. Because of his experience in London, he was apprehensive.

By now he had learned to take time regularly to listen to the 'inner voice' for guidance. He decided that he should show particular care to his passengers, no matter what their attitude towards him. He would wait for people hurrying to catch the bus, give old people and women with babies time to sit down before he moved off, and have a cheery word with everyone. The result of this was seen when his bus skidded on some ice and glass from the shattered windscreen flew into his eyes. Many of his passengers took the trouble to phone and ask how he was feeling and they gave him a great welcome on his return to work.

One day in 1974 a member of the city police arrived at our door with an Asian we had never met before. 'I want you to meet our new Community Relations Officer,' said the policeman. Then he left, telling his companion, Hari Shukla, that we would tell him all about the ideas of Moral Re-Armament, which could help him in his work. We arranged that Hari and his wife Ranju should come and spend an evening with us in a few days' time.

By the end of that evening we felt as if we had known one another all our lives. The Shuklas had a strong Hindu faith and appreciated the value of asking the inner voice what to do about the situations that confronted them in Hari's work and in their personal lives. We began to build a friendship which has come to mean so much to all four of us that we regard one another as 'family'.

A few weeks later, Hari and our police friend suggested we should apply to join the Community Relations Council. Through this we got to know many more people who were concerned to make Britain's multiracial society work. In 1976, when racial trouble broke out in Southall, London, many of the ethnic minorities in other cities set up vigilante groups against racism. After some discussion, community leaders on Tyneside decided that they would prefer to set up a 'watchdog committee' for racial harmony. To our amazement they voted unanimously to ask Rex to be its first chairman.

By now we were deeply distressed by the stories of racism that we were hearing from many parts of the country. Not only were we concerned for the individuals involved, but we also felt that a reaction was likely to erupt eventually on a national scale. We laid this concern before God and asked whether there was anything we could do.

We decided to talk to other concerned friends. Together we initiated a series of weekend conferences at the MRA centre in Cheshire to draw together people from different cities who were concerned about developing good community relations. The idea was to find ways of working together and to give each other support and encouragement. Britain's multiracial society, we believed, could become an instrument in creating a caring family of nations in the world. When real trouble broke out in 1981, several black and brown British who had attended these conferences told us how what they had learned in Cheshire had helped them in the difficult situations they had to face.

One morning in 1977 I was wondering what more we could do and asking God to show me how to use my deep concern constructively. To my astonishment, a detailed outline for a play came into my mind, with a list of characters, based on people I knew. I was alarmed – what did I know about writing plays? On the other hand, when I calmed down, the idea seemed worth pursuing. I decided to pray for inspiration and then begin to write.

The play showed the interaction of various elements in a neighbourhood of racial tension – racism, class war, family life, unemployment, political groups. It also showed the difference a relevant faith can make to the outcome.

We decided to try it out in play readings, with black and white friends from Newcastle and London taking the parts. We were invited to several cities and found a warm response to the play, particularly from students.

On one occasion half a dozen young English men came and sat in the back row. They put their feet up in front of them and pulled their

rather strange-looking hats over their eyes. 'They've come to cause trouble,' I thought.

They were restless for a quarter of an hour or so, but then settled down to listen intently. Afterwards one of them came up to me and announced that he was a member of a far Left group. We had a discussion on ways of changing society. Then, rather hesitantly, he said that as he had listened to the play an insistent thought had kept coming to him that he should go and see his sister whom he had not spoken to for two years. 'Is that how the inner voice works?' he asked. 'Yes,' I said. 'I should obey it, if I were you.' I called over somebody who lived locally and would help him, and they went off together.

On other occasions people of a more right-wing disposition would tell me that the play had opened their eyes to the depth of class and race feelings in our society – and the things that had caused them.

Riots erupted in the streets of Britain in 1981. The causes are well known: the failure of white British to accept black British; unemployment suffered by both white and black youth; discrimination over jobs and housing; dissatisfaction and anger over policing; lack of leisure facilities in deprived areas. At both extremes people took political advantage of these feelings.

Everywhere people were horrified at the violence which resulted from pent-up frustration and despair. Some reforms were introduced. But the question remained of how to produce the changes of heart without which a just and harmonious society could never come about.

These events increased my sense of urgency about getting the play's script right. It was clear that it needed improvements. A professional playwright, Nancy Ruthven, offered to work on it with me and eventually we felt *Clashpoint* was ready to be staged. A composer of music for TV plays wrote music to link the scenes.

The play toured Britain, playing mostly in inner cities. All sorts of people came to see it: school parties, local councillors, police officers, community leaders, as well as the general public. Many were moved by what the play had to say. A senior police officer commented, 'Anyone who sees this – whatever their background may be – surely must go home and look in the mirror.' And a councillor in another city said similarly, 'I recognised in that play all the things I lived through in my political career, including the family scenes. Its challenge got through to me.' Clifton Robinson, Deputy Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, wrote to us, 'The play has left a very vivid, deep and abiding impression on me . . . I have over the years seen several

attempts to utilise social drama as a means to influence change within this particular area of concern, but none better produced, presented or as compelling in the transmission of its message.'

Later the play was produced at the Westminster Theatre, London, as part of its *A Day of London Theatre* schools programme. Teachers wrote in to the theatre describing the shift in racial attitudes amongst pupils who had seen the play and requesting further performances. At the same time four police forces asked if a video could be made of the play so that it could be used to train recruits.

The video is now available. It is amazing to me how God's plan for the play has unfolded. As it tackles other issues as well as those of race, I believe it is meant to challenge people to let God reconcile, and remake, a world divided on so many levels.

10

THE 1970s had seen great changes in our family, as the three children grew up and left home.

Philip by now was six foot four and towered over us all. He had become a Chartered Building Surveyor and loved his job in London. In 1975, he had married Judith and they bought a home in Bedfordshire. Rex and I not only gained a gifted daughter-in-law whom we soon came to love, but also a warm friendship with her parents. And later we shared a common delight in our grandchildren, Tim and Lorna.

Margaret and Barbara were also based in London. Margaret had gained a degree in graphic design, and the skill and humour reflected in her work meant that we kept her very personal Christmas and birthday cards for months after the event. She and Barbara both went to Southern Africa in 1977 with an MRA musical *Time to Choose*, written by a group of young people from various countries.

Barbara in particular completely lost her heart to Zimbabwe and spent two years there just before the settlement, working with people of all races who believed that the ideas of MRA could help to bring the changes so badly needed. She now works with MRA as a secretary, having also qualified as a nurse.

In 1978 I came to a further personal watershed. The journey towards it had begun with a remark made by one of our West Indian friends, just before she returned to her own country. She had just been telling me about her family life, and it was clear that this lay behind a growing bitterness that I had observed in her.

‘What a pity I didn’t know sooner,’ I exclaimed. ‘We could have looked at your difficulties carefully together and asked God what you should do.’

‘Oh, I wanted to tell you long ago,’ she replied, ‘but you never gave me the right opening, until now.’

I thought and thought about this. How could I have known what she was feeling? The question that had led to her pouring out her bitterness had been asked by chance. Had I let her down by not asking the right

question early enough? She had clearly been longing for a chance to talk. I realised that there was something I needed to learn.

In 1978 I began to have a curiously powerful sense that I must find out more about the Holy Spirit. I began to read all the references to the Holy Spirit in the Bible and was amazed by what I discovered. The facts were so thought-provoking and so significant for the problems that beset society.

I found that the Holy Spirit's work is to reveal Christ to us as a friend, and to show us Truth; that He works to restore broken relationships and build unity; that the Spirit will often move in totally unexpected ways; that He may sometimes give us precise instructions to meet a need in somebody that we may know nothing about, as described in the Bible when He sent the Apostle Philip into the desert to meet the Ethiopian traveller who wanted to be baptised. I read too that God was ready to give the Holy Spirit to anyone who asked Him.

Perhaps if I had asked the Holy Spirit to come to me earlier, I thought, I would have been more sensitive to my West Indian friend. I was intrigued by the possibility. I told the Holy Spirit that He must be aware of how much I wanted people to know Christ in the way I had begun to know Him. Would He please come into my life to help me to do that better?

In the weeks that followed I found that, from time to time, I had a perception of people's needs that astonished me and that I would know just what to say to help them. It made an incredible difference in caring for our friends.

One of these was a college lecturer, a lively lady in her forties, who had served on a committee with Rex and me. For a whole year we had tried to help her find a faith. We could not feel we were succeeding.

One night she initiated a discussion on faith with me. Suddenly an extraordinary thought bore in on me: 'It's not good enough. You must ask her about her relationship with her parents.'

'I can't possibly ask that right out of the blue,' I protested inwardly. 'I've never heard her mention them. She is a mature woman with her own home. She doesn't live with them.' But the conviction became more and more persistent. 'Right,' I found myself saying to the Holy Spirit, whose prompting I believed this was. 'But I shall need your help in raising the subject.' Instantly, to my complete amazement, my friend began to talk about her parents and it was perfectly natural for me to ask how she got on with them.

That relationship turned out to be the cause of my friend's bitterness,

her antipathy to Christianity and her extreme politics. I encouraged her to seek how to put things right. 'I'll let you know tomorrow,' she said. Rex and I prayed for her that night as we had seldom prayed for anyone before.

Next day, she phoned with a plan of action. A week later she rang again, bursting with joy. She had talked to her parents and already their relationship had begun to be straightened out. Soon after that she moved to another part of the country. Three months later God revealed the reality of His presence to her and Christ healed the root of her bitterness completely. She was baptised and became a committed Christian.

This heightened perception extended to my own life as well. One day as I was busy with the housework, thinking about nothing more important than the day's meals, shopping and chores, a totally unexpected thought broke into my mind: 'When you wrote all those letters for your father, people thought he must be illiterate. That was why they did not reply.'

'What letters?' I wondered. Suddenly I saw myself as a thirteen-year-old, writing letters at my father's dictation. When he lost his job he was so distressed and accepted such poor living conditions when he had to be away from home seeking casual work that he developed rheumatism in his hands. He could not hold a pen properly, so I wrote his replies to the 'situations vacant' advertisements in the trade magazine. I wrote dozens of letters and the total absence of replies contributed to my bitterness as a teenager and young adult. I had forgotten all about this at the time I laid the rest of my bitterness before Christ, and indeed until this moment.

Now the truth of the revelation hit me forcibly. Of course my writing must have looked like that of a child. It would have been reasonable for employers to assume that I had written because Dad was illiterate. A warm relief passed through me and I knew that root of bitterness had gone.

Asking the Holy Spirit into my life has played a vital part in making me more aware of how to help people. It is a relationship I treasure – and I find it depends on how I am living, day by day. If I hold on to self-will or resentment, I find that I lose this deeper element in life. When I let go of these feelings and face change, I can start again.

My experience of the Holy Spirit is limited. But I can glimpse that His power in people's lives could bring the world into a new dimension of wholeness and care for each other. He could lead us to the answers to the problems which at present defeat us.

THROUGHOUT his adult life Philip had taken little noticeable interest in spiritual truths, so we listened in amazement when, on a visit in 1980, we discovered that he was developing a relationship with God that was extremely important to him. He now read the Bible every day. What had happened to bring about such a profound change? 'Oh, I just heard about Christian Science and it gelled,' was the rather vague reply.

At the same time we began to notice physical changes in Philip which alarmed us. We were afraid that his Christian Science convictions might be stopping him seeking medical advice. On our return from a three-month visit to North America in 1982, we saw such a marked deterioration in his physique that we pleaded with him to seek a diagnosis. He asked us to stop fussing.

On October 4th that year, in the middle of thinking about something quite different in my usual morning quiet time, a thought about Philip came out of the blue. 'You have prayed for his health, with an inner demand that it is his right as a young man. But people have no rights. They belong to God and it is for Him to decide whether to give physical healing. There is no automatic right to it. Give Philip back into God's keeping, in your spirit, now!' With a struggle, I obeyed.

Despite this experience and despite our long-standing concern for Philip's health, we were devastated next day when Judith phoned to tell us that Philip had died of leukemia that afternoon. 'But he's only 31,' I kept repeating to Rex, in horror and disbelief.

Philip had been such a lively member of the family. To know him well, was to realise his zest for life; his dry sense of humour and friendly teasing; his extraordinary gift for making up words that so exactly expressed what one wanted to say that they became family vocabulary; his other creative gifts, especially in abstract art and for building models; his fascination with the more unusual contemporary music; his flair for photography (some of his work had been published); his enthusiasm for steam engines which took him to Turkey, Portugal, South Africa and East Germany; his love for all living creatures, which had once made

him consider becoming a vet; his enjoyment of his work. However could I believe that someone so alive was dead?

As we struggled to accept what had happened, our thoughts went back to the day before. Surely God had shown us His presence in the situation and even given a hint of what was to happen? As we drove the six-hour journey to Philip's and Judith's home, we tried to hold on to the belief that God knew all about our son's death and there must be a purpose in it for Philip himself, with a spin-off for others.

This belief was strengthened when we met two of the Directors of Philip's firm at the funeral. They told us that they had discovered the nature of his illness a year earlier, when they had asked him to have a medical examination. They had then offered working conditions which took generous account of his illness, but Philip had insisted that he wanted to do a 'fair day's work for a fair day's pay'. They had marvelled at his valiant spirit and, as time had gone on, had recognised that something more than human courage had enabled him to be at work at all. 'There was another Power in his life,' they commented.

We learned that incurable leukemia had been diagnosed at a hospital some four years earlier. Philip's faith had in fact helped him to live a relatively normal life since then. We had been wrong to think he had not sought medical help because of his beliefs. He had not told us he was ill because as a Christian Scientist he believed he would be healed. I think too he wanted to spare us distress.

Back home again, we strove to accept Philip's illness and death at a deeper level. I find that I grasp profound truths with my head long before I feel them in my heart. Now therefore began a long struggle in which many peaceful weeks would pass only to be broken suddenly by my falling into a deep unhappiness, when my heart rebelled at what I knew in my head to be true. My distress was worse than if I had not known the truth at all.

I knew perfectly well, for instance, that God cannot spare people committed to Him from the pain or tragedy that other people experience. Faith has to grow out of normal human circumstances, and God can use these things to teach us more about Himself. Yet at these times I would demand, 'Why Philip? Why us? What did we do to deserve this?' I knew too that God had shown His presence in the situation and that we could trust Him. But there were days when I would cry from the heart, 'What about Judith and the children, God? Don't you care about them?' These times would be followed by a terrible sense of guilt at having denied the truths I knew so well.

Fortunately the Minister at our Methodist church understood. His support was a real lifeline. It is impossible to say how much I appreciated it. He gave me encouragement; helped with my fears and doubts; held me to my beliefs; prayed with me; talked things over.

We had nearly two hundred letters from friends who said they were praying for us. Friends of other faiths called to comfort and support us. We felt upheld by people's love and prayer.

Two of our friends passed through Newcastle about a month after Philip's death and came to call on us. They were mourning the loss of the wife's mother, whom they had greatly loved. The husband said something which helped me a great deal – that he had realised that one cannot pick and choose what to accept of all that Christ said about God. One either had to believe that everything Jesus said was true, or reject Him utterly.

I could not do the latter, having experienced His power in my life. So I knew, even in my moments of rebellion, that I had to accept that Jesus was telling the truth when He said: 'Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.' And, 'In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.' He had told the robber who died with Him at Calvary, 'Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.' Jesus, too, constantly referred to God as a loving Father.

As time went on we realised that some of our friends felt embarrassed to meet us. They did not know how to overcome the communication barrier that was presented to them by the death of someone so young as Philip. We understood their difficulty, but at the same time found it painful. We began to feel isolated.

Eventually we prayed earnestly to God to help us be part of other people's lives again. Within a week the prayer was answered more fully than ever I could have anticipated! A young couple in great trouble came to ask for our help; a friend who was ill needed practical assistance; someone else had suffered a bereavement and felt very lonely. We discovered at first hand the marvellous therapy it is to be asked to help with other people's problems.

Ultimately, finding lasting peace of mind came down to my relationship with God. I had to be able to mourn, but I also had to find peace of heart if I was to help other people. So I asked the Holy Spirit to help me to merge what I knew in my head with what I felt in my heart.

‘Well what *do* you know in your head?’ came the response. ‘How strange,’ I thought after a while, ‘Philip’s death has shown me, most of all, how greatly God loves us, however much I have doubted it at times. What an extraordinary thing to learn from the death of a much-loved son!’

There was the love God had shown to us when He manifested His presence in what was to happen, the day before Philip’s death. That had been a great source of trust.

There was the swift response when I had prayed so desperately about our sense of isolation. It had brought us out into involvement with people again – and had helped us to keep our own affairs in perspective.

So much of life is a jigsaw, I thought. The pieces fit together if one tries to obey God. How grateful we should be, for instance, that He had led us two years before Philip’s death to join a church. Our Minister’s care had made such a difference to us in our time of need.

And God certainly loved Philip, I went on to reflect. Because this life on earth is but a preparation for life in the next world, it is of supreme importance that each of us finds our own way to know God. Philip had been a very happy-go-lucky young man. His illness had been the spur to his finding a real relationship with God and had been turned to a purpose. As Philip’s health had failed, he had grown as a person. The great courage and steadfastness of spirit, which had always been part of his potential, had flowered.

An overwhelming sense of God’s equal love for all people enveloped me. Any lingering fear that God favoured some people and not others vanished. I felt a totally new level of trust over whatever might happen in the future. I knew too that just as God had been with us through this tragedy, and at so many other crucial times, He was present in all the crises facing the world.

I have had a great sense of peace about Philip’s death ever since and have genuinely released him in my spirit for whatever may be meant for him now, in the next world. For me, with a new and firm trust in God’s abiding love for each one of us, belief became faith at last.

