

the gospel. And that is what has kept the faith alive in Bekesbourne these 800 years." So may God bless you in your witness to that same gospel which planted the faith in this lovely place so many years ago. Amen.

Our request for a new flag of St. George for Bridge Church in last month's issue of *On the Nail* brought a quick result, and our sincere thanks are due to Mr. R. W. Fisher of Bridge Down who had the very thing and has made us a present of it. We are most grateful.

We record with regret the passing of two elderly parishioners of Bridge who lived quite near to one another. Mr. **Frank Lemar**, 41 Union Road, had lived in the former miller's cottage for almost sixty years. He died on Whit Sunday in the Kent & Canterbury Hospital, and cremation was preceded by a service in Bridge Church on 30th May. Our sympathy and prayers go out to his widow and family. Mr. **Alfred Roper**, 19 Dering Road, had been in failing health for a considerable time, but his death came very suddenly and leaves a devoted wife bereft. May the souls of the departed through the mercy of God rest in peace.

There will be a Coffee morning in aid of the *Church of England Children's Society* on Thursday July 31st at 33 High Street, Bridge, 10am to 12 noon. Bring and Buy Stall.

Mr. and Mrs. R. Beckett are holding a Coffee morning at 3 Riverside Cottages, Patribourne, on Wednesday 16th July from 10.30am to 12 noon in aid of *Bekesbourne Church Flower Festival*.

Patribourne with Bridge Church Summer Fête Accounts

Teas & Cakes		£76	
Groceries		84	
Produce Stall		31	
Ices & Soft Drinks		30	
Patribourne Store		47	
Children's Books		17	
Plant Stall		35	
Toiletries		28	
White Elephant Stall		75	
Bottle Stall		143	
Raffle	£158		
Less cost of tickets & 1st Prize	33	125	
Side Shows		64	
Donations		5	
			760
Less: Hire of School	10		
Canterbury City Band	35		
Sundry Expenses	4	49	
			£711
Net surplus			£711

ARCHBISHOP VISITS BEKESBOURNE



The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Robert Runcie approaches St. Peter's Church for the special Service of Thanksgiving, on Sunday June 1st.

Photograph: Kentish Gazette

Bekesbourne's Bonanza

Bekesbourne's Octocentary was celebrated in fine style, as those who participated in any or all of the events will readily agree. To have our Archbishop visit us was simply marvellous, and I think most at any rate of the congregation that filled St. Peter's Church to over-flowing had at least a brief word with him at the reception afterwards. We are most grateful to Mrs. Lois Whigham for so kindly opening her home and garden to us: what better setting could there have been? The Archbishop's excellent sermon is reproduced in this issue of *On the Nail* as it deserved wider publicity.

The Salvation Army Songsters kept up the pace of the festival on the Monday night with a concert-cum-act-of-worship that made the ancient rafters ring and the audience/congregation rejoice with them. David Flood's organ recital the following evening, though a very different experience was none the less well supported, and deservedly so, for he gave us a rare musical treat. The Parish Eucharist on the Thursday was extremely well attended, and the festivities ended on the Saturday with an unforgettable concert by the Finchley Children's Music Group that received a good write-up in the *Kentish Gazette* from the paper's chief music critic. All thanks to our many patrons, but an enormous 'thank you' to John Purchase whose brainchild it was and who spearheaded the entire enterprise. What's the next cause for celebration, John?

In the Name of God!

Archbishop Robert Runcie's sermon in Bekesbourne Church on 1st June, 1980.

"He gave gifts unto men . . . for the building up of the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4 vv. 8b & 12b)

There are two ways of looking at life. You can take it for granted or you can take it with gratitude. The second is the Christian way, and that's why we have met together to give thanks for 800 years of continuous worship in this beautiful and historic place. And all the thoughtful, yet very homely arrangements make me feel very welcome, and I am glad about that, because as you know this used to be one of the Archbishop's homes; and though I am not looking for any more, this is not the one I would have given up.

On this Sunday last year I was a long way from here. I was in the Soviet Union, and strangely enough at a village, and a rare one. There was a church festival for the local saint. As you know it is a country which, for over sixty years has had an atheist government. The children are taught to despise believers at school: no opportunity to talk about religion on radio or television or in the press. It is meant to be withering away, and is simply allowed in one or two churches, in one or two places. Yet on that Sunday there was a ceaseless flow of singing, praying pilgrims, which might have put some of our self-conscious flower festivals to shame. They were by no means all old women or tiny children. I believe that the miracle of the living Church in that country — nourishing the soul of a people, producing from time to time a Solzhenitsyn — is due to their sense of worship, a sense of belonging in a communion of saints which is greater than any political arrangements or social circumstances. So let nobody ever say that the keeping of festivals, the cherishing of sacred buildings, the sense of our unity with the saints of other ages — that these are simply the churchy side of Christianity. They are its very heart and its life.

Our situation is different. We have freedom to influence the life of our country through preaching and teaching and criticism, through sharing in political action or social care. But this freedom is also a temptation: a temptation to think that talking and social action and political influence are in themselves the purpose of the church. So we can easily neglect the heart of prayer, a sense of God, a devotion to Jesus, the holy place, and pride in the company of the saints across every age and land. And if we do that we may call ourselves a Christian country, but the heart will have ceased to beat. For as someone said, "Nothing is real unless it is local." That is why the local church and the local festival should be signalling a message, the message of the gospel.

I have been reading a book recently, in which the author applies five tests, to see whether a church in its teaching and in its life is genuinely signalling the gospel. They are biblical tests: Cranmer would have approved of that! They are like chemicals being tipped one after another on a piece of metal, to test its claim to be pure gold.

First test, does your message come over as something old yet also fresh? The one who hears the gospel in the New Testament constantly responds with surprise. "I haven't thought of that before." There is a parallel here with the way beauty always comes as fresh disclosure. We don't say, when the leaves are golden in autumn, "Mm! Just like last year!" We are astonished each time it happens. Watch a superb performance of a famous play. We don't say, "Same old Hamlet!" So one essential test of our words and our witness to the faith, whether it is about Christian marriage or prayer or speaking about life after death; does it come over as something new, or are we trying to nourish people on something like curled-up sandwiches, stale cake, tired clichés or dreary worship? "They were all astonished when they heard Jesus speak saying, "What's this? He doesn't speak like the religious officials."'

Second test. Does it disturb? The gospel is an affront to the way we live, and upsets things we take for granted. Now if we are never offended, if a vicar is never a nuisance, and if what he says always seems commonsense, very good: it may be a case of the bland leading the bland!

When Jesus taught they were not only astonished, they took offence at him; and Paul preached Christ crucified, a stumbling-block. And remember, you should expect it not only to shake others, but constantly to break up our own assumptions as to who are righteous, who are blameable. Niceness is very agreeable, but niceness is not the gospel!

And then third, is it something of great expectations, greater than our hopes! — whether you are coping with a sick person or an evil regime or a broken marriage. And does this faith call out everything? Jesus never spoke of a *fraction* of our possessions, but 'sell all you have and give to the poor'. And in the same way his *promises* were excessive: to have the kingdom, to inherit the earth, to see God. Saints are extraordinary people, whether St. Francis or Mother Teresa, because the gospel they live by leads to excess. I like that passage in the gospels where Jesus is thought to be overdoing it, and his family go out to rescue him. We might imagine their conversation: "We're all for religion, we're all for his becoming a rabbi, but this extreme stuff . . . !" It is the kind of thing people still say when a girl decides to become a nun, or a graduate goes off to Campuchea. "If only she could meet a nice man" or "If only he'd settle down".

Fourth test. Does it bring joy? The gospel is not only fresh, disturbing and excessive, but *good* news, and if we believed it we should be set free from fear and dismal thoughts. The man in Jesus' parable sells all he has in joy, and the convert, typical in the Book of Acts, hears the gospel, is baptised and goes on his way rejoicing. There have been expressions of Christianity which have been solemn and miserable, but they are distortions and the way in which this church has sung with praises tonight should be an echo of the joyfulness that has radiated from this place over the centuries. I have a friend who says that joy is a word which is only used by parsons, and they put on a special tone of voice when they say it, and a kind of sagging jaw. Whether that is true I know not, but there is a quality which is in short supply, and it is quite different from breezy heartiness, and truculent resentment, of which there is a plenty around. It is a kind of serenity born of confidence, and the great saints and teachers of faith have always had that. Even someone like Martin Luther whom we think of as a rather serious person once said, "As I drink my glass of German beer the gospel runs its course." And someone of a rather more sentimental character once said, "Joy is the flag that is flown from the citadel of the heart when the King is in residence." And our King is the King of love: which brings me to the last test.

Does it promote love? The gospel brings release from the slavery of self-centredness and opens out the possibility of living for others. Anything that claims to be the gospel and produces bigotry, prejudice, blaming, is no good. 'He who loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment have we from him, that he who would love God must love his brother also.'

Now these five tests of a church witnessing to the gospel through the ages — they are all necessary. It is not like an examination: only two to be attempted! But someone said to me the other day, when I mentioned these five tests, "Oh, I can tell you, if there is a church that is doing something new, something disturbing, and is making excessive claims, it won't produce joy and love, it will produce tension, suspicion and division." But that is to miss the whole point of the Christian faith. We are given the unity of all these things by Christ. We don't contrive it, but we can receive it, for he has given these gifts unto men.

So if I hear news about the church here, in this parish, I hope that sometimes I will hear, "Mmm — they're doing new things there!" But that won't be everything. I hope I may hear, "They're not afraid to stick their neck out there, and make a stand; perhaps even be unpopular!" And that has been quite a tradition, that has kept the church going over the years in the past. Perhaps they may even say, "They're a bit mad, you know!" That is not a bad thing to be said of any group of Christians. I *know* it will be said "They're a cheerful lot at Bekesbourne, and they have good festivals" and let it always be said, "They are a loving, caring and sensitive church", but altogether. And then you can say, "Here is the body of Christ. Here is a partnership in