

## Publishing Editor's column

WHEN we read the Law of Moses we come across the idea of dedication or consecration quite frequently, especially to do with the tabernacle, its furniture and the priests who ministered in that tabernacle. Exodus 40:1-15 recounts how God commanded Moses to assemble all the various parts of the tabernacle in their proper places, and then to consecrate them with the holy anointing oil, after which he was to perform a ceremony of consecration for Aaron and his sons to minister in that tabernacle. Likewise 2 Chronicles 5-7 records a long and moving ceremony of dedication for the newly built temple on Mount Moriah.

This kind of practice has been carried over into Christianity. Churches and churchyards are spoken of as being consecrated ground, because when the land was walled off and the church built it was solemnly consecrated by a bishop or priest. The bread and the wine used in the Communion Service are solemnly consecrated by the priest before being eaten and drunk, and, in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, it is believed that the priest turns them into the actual body and blood of Christ. The partaking of these consecrated items is then thought to convey some particular benefit upon the one partaking of it. This idea of dedication or consecration is sometimes extended to secular things; a church leader will bless a newly opened public building or monument, for example.

This idea of the dedication or consecration of things is not a New Testament one. The early believers met in houses, presumably in suitable rooms owned by the better off, and there is no hint of meeting places being specially consecrated or blessed. At the first Breaking of Bread, Jesus simply used the bread and the wine that were part of the meal they were enjoying together. It is true that the Matthew and Mark accounts say he "blessed" the bread, but they do not say this of the wine. Both Luke and Paul in their accounts refer only to the giving of thanks, though Paul does also speak of "the cup of blessing which we bless" (1 Cor. 10:16). Yet even in these passages which say 'bless', it seems that the idea of giving of thanks is what is really being conveyed, not an act of consecration, and this is how the NIV (though considered by some as being biased towards Catholicism) translates it.

This indicates the need for care in our choice of language in prayer. I once heard a brother criticising another brother because, when clearing the table after the Breaking of Bread, he drank the small amount of wine in the cup before he washed it up. This was alleged to be wrong because the wine had been blessed. But of course it had not. We should not be asking God to bless the bread or the wine or our daily food, as though it makes some difference to it. What matters is what thoughts the bread and wine provoke in us as emblems of our Lord's sacrifice, and what use we make of the strength we derive from our food. The New Testament teaching is that believers themselves should be consecrated or dedicated to God, and this is not something which others can do for us, but something we are motivated to do for ourselves.

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