

There is a Witness  
I will Arise (Love Pines)  
(Colocate 1')

These days, in almost any field you care to think of, you have to have qualifications before you're accepted, or allowed to operate, or whatever. Sometimes the insistence on qualifications can become quite ridiculous, and counter-productive. In some places, you have to be a member of the ruling (or the only) party: in other, a trade union member, before you can even get a job in public service, for instance. Education, or at least a version of it, can become a straight-jacket rather than a liberating, maturing influence. What qualifications does one need to become or to be a Christian? There has been since the beginning of Christianity, a trend that would demand certain qualifications, intellectually — a secret knowledge, perhaps, a higher achievement than 'ordinary' people. There's been the opposite too: an anti-intellectual level of supposed 'qualification', stressing feeling, emotion, maybe. ] [For the second time in two months now, newspapers, magazines and "observers" are discussing the 'qualifications' needed for a new Pope: the 'classic' alternatives seem to have become 'Italian or non-Italian', 'administrator or pastor'. That's not to say that the cardinal-electors have or will work, necessarily, according to those categories or scheme of things. But that's the way people do think and speculate: is it maybe another example of what was claimed in a recent newspaper article here, that the church too is infected by the values, spirit and attitudes of the world? ] A pre-occupation with 'qualifications' (and of course certain unspoken disqualifications) is certainly a feature of the way of the world we live in: and in the community of Christians, too, there is

of course a legitimate concern about the qualities of those who are our pastor, our guides. Qualities, perhaps, rather more than qualifications: for they're not the same thing, and "quality" has become something of a bad word these days — 'qualification' can cover a multitude of missing qualities. So what are the qualities or qualifications for being a Christian? We have to keep on going back to the gospels, to the word of God, in prayer. And we go back to look at the life of the first Christians, as it's shown us in the Acts of the Apostles. And when we do consider the first Christians and their humble origin, there is an apparent casualness about the Lord's way of doing things that is (in the strict sense of the word), awful. Napoleon chose his marshals from those who were proven veterans of many battles. A modern expedition to the poles, Mount Everest or the moon, crossing the Atlantic in a balloon, gathers its members with great care, sifting out thousands of technical qualifications. But for the salvation of mankind, Jesus of Nazareth strolls a few miles from his own village and chooses his team from a group of peasants and fishermen, some apparently his own relatives. Had he not called them, they would have remained in their trivial anonymity — a village Peter, two or three rude, inglorious evangelists, a Judas guiltless of his master's blood. The Jewish & Roman authorities had no doubt about it, these followers of a small-town prophet were simply small-time stuff. In the weeks which followed the death of Jesus they made no attempt to round them up. Yet on the day of Pentecost these little people took over history: they began from that date to supersede

A song now, "What you hear in the dark"

Israel, to challenge the Roman Empire. They were involved in a new solidarity, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. || Now, "All Our Joy", a new song of praise & prayer

MUSIC - PRAYERS

Earth's Verily 24  
All Our Joy 12

Seeing the way

God dealt with the men and women of Cana and Capernaum, one might feel they might have been born in any country village, anywhere - like people of the 'small' places, of so many famous novels. But then we remember that this is precisely what God has been doing ever since - that it is out of such human material that he has built his church. There is truly something staggering about its simplicity, the smallness of the human pattern. It is there in the teaching of Jesus in its emphasis on being faithful in small things, and in the promise that one day the little things (like a cup of cold water) will be seen in their true, eternal significance. There is a clue here as to why men and women have again and again found inspiration in turning to the New Testament picture of the primitive church. It has meant many things in Christian history, from the Desert Fathers to the Franciscans, the Anabaptists to John Wesley or the Oxford Movement. All in one sense rediscovered a primitive church which never was. And yet they saw something, true enough to provide a cutting edge with which to criticise and to begin a practical programme of renewal.